

The Christian.

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EDITOR:

DONALD CRAWFORD, - - NEW GLASGOW, P. E. I.

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THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL.

Many look upon religion as a refuge for the heart-broken and the dying. They regard it as a last resort, and not as something to be embraced during the period of health and prosperity. They think of it very much as a mariner does of a safe harbor, as a capital place to run into for shelter when storms are raging, but which he does not need in good weather. To their minds duty is a noble but an irksome thing. Heaven is preferred to hell as an eternal home, but is not earnestly desired for its own sake. Looking at religion from this standpoint, it is not strange that they defer their acceptance of it as long as possible. They want to be happy while youth and strength last. It will be time enough to turn to the Lord when they lose their relish for the pleasures of this world. When the period of migration draws near, they will give due attention to this matter. When brought face to face with death they will repent.

But this view is essentially false. It is based on a misconception of the purpose of the gospel. The key-word of our religion is the word *bless*. This is the commonest of all Scripture words. *Blessed* are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. *Blessed* are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. *Blessed* are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. *Blessed* are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. The thought of blessing runs on through the Christian system. It pervades it like an atmosphere. It is its light and its glory. Christ came to bless us, in turning us away from our iniquities. He did not come to bind heavy burdens upon us, or to diminish our happiness, but to bless us with his wondrous grace. His gospel is for the sick and the unfortunate, but not for them only. It is for the aged, the dying, but for all others as well. It is for the young and the ambitious who enter upon their chosen career rejoicing like a strong man to run a race. It will thoroughly equip them for their life work. It will encourage and aid them in every laudable effort they put forth. It has quiet havens in which we can take refuge when tempest-tossed; but that is not all. It furnishes us with chart and compass by which we can navigate the sea of life and gain the port of peace securely. It is not an asylum into which we can retire when everything else fails, but secret invisible armor that will quench all the fiery darts of the enemy. It is not something to be used in great emergencies, as people use life-preservers, when the ship goes down, but something for every day and every hour. It is not for unusual and extreme occasions, but for all times and for all occasions. It is not simply medicine for us when sick, but meat and drink for us when we are well. In all that it requires and promises it serves our present and eternal good.

It is true that we are to *deny ourselves*. Our Lord said, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. We must deny our animal propensities. We must restrain those passions and lusts that war against the soul. But we are to do this not for the sake of the discomfort that follows, but for our own advantage. We are to curb one side of our nature that we may give larger liberty to the other. We are not to overtax some powers and neglect others, but to develop our characters symmetrically and perfectly. We are called upon to make the most of ourselves. We cannot do this without self-denial. The flesh wars against the spirit. The passions rebel against the conscience. This mutiny must be put down. Our lower nature must be kept in subjection. This cannot be done without a struggle. It costs us something to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. But we must do it if the soul would be free. The self-denial required of us is absolutely necessary. It is to us what judicious pruning is to an orchard, that results in more fruit and in fruit of a superior quality. The goodness of God is as apparent in what he prohibits as in what he bestows.

Again, we are to *observe certain laws*. But these laws are holy and just and good. They were given to us by infinite wisdom for our guidance. They are as essential to our welfare as the air we breathe. They are not the arbitrary edicts of an almighty and irresponsible despot, as many suppose, but the regulations of a loving Father. They are the declarations of eternal truths, that no one can transgress or ignore with impunity. They are to us what buoys are to a mariner, that tell him where there are dangerous rocks, and where there is deep water and safe sailing. A seaman might as well shut his eyes to these signs and steer blindly and stubbornly onward as for us to disregard the laws of God. We cannot do so and prosper. Or these laws may be compared to the rails on which a locomotive runs. As long as the engine keeps on the track it moves on smoothly and grandly. It carries the commerce of the world or its more precious freight of human lives. But let it jump the track, and it results in wreck and ruin. So with the laws of God. They mark out the boundaries of right and wrong, of safety and danger. They tell us where we may go, and where we must refrain from going. In keeping of them there is great reward. Blessed are they that do His commandments, for they shall have right to the tree of life, and shall enter in through the gates into the city. There is not a solitary command given us that is not beneficent in its effects. David spoke the simple truth when he said of the laws God, - More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter, also, than the honey, and the honey-comb. Once more: We are required to *do many things*. Not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of My Father who is in heaven. The man that is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. By patient continuance in well-doing we not only avoid suffering, but we obtain a positive good. We strengthen our faith. We build up our characters. We enter into the joy of our Lord. Tennyson says:

The path of duty is the way to glory;
He that walks it, only thirsting
For the right, and learns to deaden
Love of self, before his journey closes,
He shall find the stubborn thistle bursting
Into glossy purples, which far outred
All voluptuous garden-roses.

The path of duty is the way to glory;
He that ever following her commands
On with toil of heart and knees and hands,
Thro' the long gorge to the far light, has won
His path upward and prevailed,
Shall find the toppling crags of duty scaled
Are close upon the shining table-lands
To which our God Himself is moon and sun.

There is nothing to be gained by walking in our own way and following the counsels of our own

passions. Our welfare here as well as hereafter depends upon our loyalty to the will of God. He gives glory and honor and peace to every soul of man that doeth good.

Sin is the root of all evil. Sin is the parent of trouble and sorrow. Sin generates bitterness. Sin strikes the garlands of gladness from our brows. Sin debauches and destroys our souls. If we obey its mandates we shall die. Why stumble on the dark mountains when the Dayspring from on high has visited you to guide your feet into the way of peace? Why drink the bitter waters of Marah when you may drink from the wells of salvation? Why eat the bread of adversity when you may eat the hidden manna and have life for evermore? Why go on sowing to the flesh and reaping a harvest of corruption when you may sow to the spirit and reap life everlasting? Christ came to bless you by turning you away from your iniquities. He came to save you from your sins. You need the gospel more than you need anything else. Mr. Gladstone says, If I was asked what is the remedy for the deepest sorrows of the human heart—what a man should look to in his progress through life, or the power that is to sustain him under trials and enable him manfully to confront his afflictions—I must tell him of something which is called in a well-known hymn, the old, old, story, which is God's greatest gift to man. Such is the testimony of the greatest man living to-day. What you need is the gospel, which is the power of God to save the believer. It will show you how to be saved from sin. It will fill you with that peace that passeth all understanding. It will guide you and keep you in the slippery paths of youth and lead you up to manhood. It will cheer and comfort you in old age and give you glimpses of the King in His beauty. When you are in trouble, when the horror of great darkness gathers around you, it will sweep every cloud from your sky, and re-establish your cheerful faith that all that you behold is full of blessing. When you mourn over those who have been called from your side, when you journey on in sorrow and loneliness, sighing for the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still, it will give you solace and strength. And when you are called away, an escort of shining angels will conduct you to your eternal home.

The great purpose of the gospel is to do us good and not evil. It seeks to set us free and not to enslave us. It aims to give us joy and not sorrow. We must believe and obey it if we would claim any benefit from it. Obedience and blessedness are bound together in eternal wedlock. It is when we walk, as some one has said, by the starlight of Duty and the compass of Divine Truth that we receive the largest measure of good. Let us ever remember that godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

The Editorial of this issue willingly gives place to the above article by Bro. McLean, of Cincinnati, Ohio.

If, any of our subscribers have not received their papers, they would confer a favor by letting us know *at once*.

Bro. M. B. Ryan, whose article on "Religion" in this issue, is one of our boys across the border, from whom we feel pleased to hear.

Monies have been received for Missionary purposes, acknowledgement of which will appear in next issue.

Those knowing Bro. and Sister H. Murray will be pleased to learn how *profitably* they spent the Twentieth Anniversary of their wedding day, and will heartily join with us in sending their warmest congratulations. We sincerely desire that the coming twenty will not be marred as was the past, by the severe and protracted illness of Sister Murray, but will still find them steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as they know their labor has not been nor will be in vain in the Lord.