

Church Observer.

A Journal advocating the interests of the United Church of England and Ireland in the Dominion of Canada.

"THIS PROTESTANT KINGDOM."—BILL OF RIGHTS, 1688.

VOL. I.—No. 43.

MONTREAL, THURSDAY, 3RD DECEMBER, 1868.

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Doctry.
ADVENT.

And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.—St. Luke, xxi. 28.

Nor till the freezing blast is still,
Till freely leaps the sparkling rill,
And gales sweep soft from summer skies,
As o'er a sleeping infant's eyes
A mother's kiss; ere calls like these,
No sunny gleam awakes the trees,
Nor dare the tender flowrets show
Their bosoms to 'th' uncertain glow.

When then, in sad and wintry time,
Her heavens all dark with doubt and crime,
Why lifts the church her drooping head,
As though her evil hour were fled?
Is she less wise than leaves of spring,
Or birds that cover with folded wing?
What sees she in this lowering sky
To tempt her meditative eye?

She has a charm, a word of grace,
A pledge of love that cannot tire;
By tempests, earthquakes, and by wars,
By rushing waves and falling stars,
By every sign her Lord foretold,
He sees the world is waxing old,
And through that last and direst storm,
Descries by faith her Saviour's form.

No surer does each tender gem,
Set in the fig tree's polished stem,
Foreshow the summer season bland,
Than these dread signs the mighty hand:
But Oh! frail hearts, and spirits dark!
The season's flight unwarmed we mark,
But miss the Judge behind the door,
For all the light of sacred lore:

Yet is He there: beneath our eaves
Each sound his wakeful ear receives:
Hush idle words, and thoughts of ill,
Your Lord is listening; peace, be still,
Christ watches by a Christian's hearth,
Be silent, "vain deluding words."
Till in things altered voices be known
Some what of registration's tone.

But chiefly ye should lift your gaze
Above the world's unceasing haze,
I look with calm, unwavering eye,
On the bright fields beyond the sky,
Who your Lord's commission bear,
His way of mercy to prepare:
Angels he calls ye; be your strife
To lead on earth an angel's life.

Think not of rest; though dreams be sweet,
Start up, and ply your heavenly feet.
Is not God's oath upon your head,
Never again your toils to shed?
Nor let your torches waste and die,
Till, when the shadows thickest fall,
Ye hear your Master's midnight call?

THE SUNDAY MORNING'S DREAM.
The following impressive tract is re-published by a member of the United Church of England and Ireland, with the fervent hope that, under God, it may be the instrument of promoting greater seriousness in public worship.
Montreal, Dec, 1868.

My first days of returning health, after many weeks of severe illness, was a bright Sunday in June. I was well enough to sit at an open window in my easy-chair; and, as our house stood in a pleasant garden in the suburbs of London, the first roses of the year scented the soft breeze that fanned my pale cheek and revived my languid frame. The bells of our parish church were just beginning their chimes, and the familiar sound awakened in me an intense longing to be with my family once more a worshipper in the house of God. I took up my Bible and prayer-book, which had been placed ready on a table beside me, intending to begin to read when the hour of the eleven-o'clock service should be announced by the ceasing of the bells, and, in the meantime, closed my eyes, and soothed my impatient wishes by picturing to myself the shady avenues of blossoming limes that led to our church, and the throngs that would now be entering it for the public worship of the day.

All at once I seemed to be walking in the beautiful churchyard, yet prevented from gratifying my eager wish to enter the church, by some irresistible though unseen hand. One by one the congregation, in their gay Sunday dresses, passed me by, and went in where I vainly strove to follow. The parish children in two long and orderly trains defiled up the straggling hurrying in, as feeling themselves late, I was left alone.

Suddenly I was conscious of some awful presence, and felt myself addressed by a voice of most sweet solemnity in words to this effect:—"Mortal, who by divine mercy has just been permitted to return from the gates of the grave, pause before thou enterest God's holy house again; reflect how often thou hast profaned his solemn public worship by irreverence, or by inattention, which is in His sight irreverence; consider well the great privilege, the unspeakable benefit and blessing, of united prayer, lest by again abusing it thou tire the patience of thy long-suffering God, and tempt him for ever to deprive thee of that which hitherto thou hast so little valued." Seeing me cast down my eyes and blush with conscious guilt, the gracious being continued in a milder tone:—"Enter thou with me, and thou shalt, for thy warning, be able to discern those among the devotions about to be offered which are acceptable to Him, and to see how few in number, how weak and unworthy, they are."

As I ceased speaking I found myself by the side of the angel still, but within the church, and so placed that I could distinctly see every part of the building.

"Observe," said the angel, "that those prayers which come from the heart, and which alone ascend on high, will seem to be uttered aloud. They will be more or less audible in proportion to their earnestness; when the thoughts wander, the sounds will grow faint and even cease altogether."

This explained to me why the organist, though apparently playing with all his might; produced no sound, and why, presently after when the service began, though the lips of many moved, and all appeared attentive, only a few faint murmurings were heard.

How strange and awful it was to note the sort of deathlike silence which prevailed in whole pews, in which, as was thus evident, no heart was raised in gratitude to heaven! Even in the Te Deum and Jubilate, the voices sometimes sunk into total silence. After the Creed there was a low murmuring of the verses, and then, distinct and clear above all other sounds, a sweet childish voice softly and repeatedly repeated the Lord's Prayer. I turned in the direction of the sound, and distinguished among the parish children a very little boy. His hands were clasped together as he knelt, his eyes were closed, his gentle face composed in reverence; and, as the angel wrote, on his tablets the words that fell from those infant lips, his smile, like a sunbeam, illuminated the church for a moment, and I remembered the words of holy David, where he says, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise."

Presently I was again reminded of a Scripture passage, the prayer of the publican. A wretched-looking man, who swept the crossing near the church, lounged into the centre aisle during the reading of the lessons, his occupation being for the hour suspended. The second lesson was the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew. Some verses attracted his attention; he listened with more and more seriousness, until at length he put his hand over his face and exclaimed aloud, "What will become of me at the day of judgment! Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." That prayer was inserted on the angel's tablets. Oh, may it not stand alone, but be an awakening of better things! May God indeed have mercy on such poor neglected ones as he, and raise up some to teach them and care for their immortal souls!

After this, growing accustomed to the broken murmurs, and interrupted sounds, I followed many an humble Christian through large portions of the Litany; though often, while I was listening with hopeful attention, a sudden and total pause showed but too plainly that the thoughts of the kneeling suppliant had wandered far away, and that he who had appeared so earnest in his devotions had become languid and silent like the rest of the congregation.

"Thou art shocked at what thou hast observed," said the angel: "I will show thee greater abominations than these. God is strong and patient; he is provoked every day. Listen now, and thou shalt hear the thoughts of all these people; so shalt thou have some faint idea of the forbearance God continually exercises towards those who draw near to him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him."

As the angels spoke, my ears were deafened with a clamour which would have been shocking in a public meeting, but which here, in God's holy house, was awfully profane. The countenances remained indeed as composed and serious as before, the lips moved with the words of prayer, but the phrases they uttered were of the world and its occupations.

"How shamefully late Mrs. Slack always comes!" said one woman, who, looking over the edge of her Prayer-Book, saw her neighbour and a train of daughters bustle into the next pew. "What an example to set to her family! Thank goodness, no one can accuse me of that sin!" New bonnets again already!" exclaimed the last corner, returning the neighbourly glance from the other seat, ere she composed herself to the semblance of devotion.

"How they can afford it, Heaven only knows, and their father owing all his Christmas bills yet. If my girls look shabby, at least we pay our debts."

"Ah! there's Tom Scott," nodded a young man to his friend in the opposite gallery: "he is growing quite religious and respectable, I declare. He has been at church two Sundays running. How much longer will the devout fit last?"

These were shocking and striking examples of irreverence. There were happily not many such; the involuntary wanderings of thought were more common.

I was much interested in a young couple near me, whose attention for a considerable part of the service had been remarkable. From the dress of the young man, I judged him to be a clergyman; the lady wore deep mourning. They were evidently betrothed; they read out of one book. Gradually he forgot the awful presence in which he stood; his eyes wandered from the Bible to her gentle face, and, fixing there, called off his thoughts from heaven "How good she is!" he began to say; "how attentive to her prayers, as to all other duties! What a sweet wife she will make! How happy I am to have won her love!" By this time the countenance of the young girl wore an expression which showed that she felt the earnestness of his gaze; her eyelids trembled, her attention wavered; and, though she looked at the book some moments longer, she too began to murmur of earthly things, and I heard her say, "Oh, how he loves me! even here he cannot forget that I am beside him." It was many minutes before either of them returned in spirit to their devotions.

As the service proceeded, the attention of the congregation flagged more and more; the hubbub of worldly talk increased. One man composed a letter he intended to send, and even altered whole passages, and rounded elegant periods, without one check or recollection of the holy place where he stood. Another repeated a long dialogue which had passed between himself and a friend the night before, and considered how he might have spoken more to the purpose. Some young girls rehearsed scenes with their lovers; some recalled the incidents of the last ball. Careful housewives planned schemes of economy, gazed warning to their servants, arranged the turning of a gown, or decided on the most becoming of worldly talk or bonnet.

To me, conscious of the recording angel's presence, all this solemn mockery of worship was frightful. I would have given words to rouse this congregation to a sense of what they were doing; and, to my comfort, I saw that for the involuntary offenders a gentle warning was provided.

A frown from the angel, or the waving of his impatient wings, as if about to quit a place