

Pastor and People.

A CHRISTMAS RIME.

BY FIDELIS.

What may a poet find to praise,
Or what the heart and soul to cheer,
What time the dark December days
Are whitening to the closing year?

When all the silent woods are bare
And all the streams in fetters laid,
When, from the bleak and biting air,
Each woodland hermit hides his head?

And, for the songs of birds and brooks,
For summer morn and sunset glow,
The wilderness of men and brooks
Piles up the tide of human woe;

And Spencer tells us that—behind
The song of birds, the opening flower,
Lies some—we may not call it mind,
But only blank and formless Power!

And still look down the unchanging stars
On bitter feud and deadly fray,
On clash of arms and dungeon bars,
And hate, that seems to live alway!

Yet, on the branches, brown and bare,
The buds grow, waiting for the spring,
With juice as sweet, and balmy air
To wake them into blossoming;

And o'er the bleak expanse of snow,
What silvery music gently swells?
The glad-toned chimes full well we know,
Once more ring out the Christmas bells!

They tell the story sweet and old,
Too oft it cannot greet our ears,
No mindless Power, but Love untold
Controls the atoms and the spheres;

Love that can stoop to low estate,
Or soar aloft in angel song;
Wise, tender Love, not cold, blind Fate;
And strong as Love alone is strong;

Love that, like air, enwraps us round,
Smiles on us here from human eyes,
Yet lifts our souls from earthly bound
To breathe the air of Paradise!

And in that mystic point, afar,
Towards which a myriad suns are led,
We see—in parable—the Star
That shone above the Manger-bed!

The wisdom of the East and West
Must humbly seek that lowly shrine,
And find the object of its quest
In human heart of Love Divine!

CHRIST AND MODERN LIFE.

The next series of International Lessons in our Sabbath schools will leave their mark upon multitudes of our youth and their teachers. This mark will be deep and abiding just in proportion as these lessons are studied, taught and learned. The course is unusually important, comprising a whole year with Christ and the Gospel of Luke. By the end of the year all should be familiar with the great life, its surroundings and teaching. Among the valuable helps furnished us are the Monday Chat Sermons.* The writers are among the foremost religious teachers and preachers of the day in the neighbouring Republic, and, as we might expect, their work not only abounds in rich presentations of the Gospel truth, but they are strikingly "up to the times" in their adaptation to the special dangers and needs of modern life. A few extracts may prove interesting and suggestive:

THE HOME OF ZACHARIAS.

"A home in which offspring are welcome." How beautiful are the Israelitish homes into which the Bible bids us look. The familiar vine, the fig-tree, the flower-planted courts, the water-pots filled for quenching thirst, the grinding of food in the handmill, the housetop, the roof-grass, the thousand little touches of real life which both the artist and the reader with imagination loves to dwell on are there. In addition to these outward signs, the good manners and propriety, the atmosphere of grave courtesy, the youth rising up before the hoary head, the child learning at the mother's knee, or inquiring of father or elder, the atmosphere of joyousness, are all there, in these Bible pictures which age cannot dim. Yet most striking are the proofs that in every house children were desired. Offspring was looked upon as the gift and blessing of God. Elizabeth and Zacharias were but types of thousands of the makers of Hebrew homes.

A timely lesson here to all American husbands and wives who do not know the blessings of Psalm cxxvii. Deliberately, and often with sinful intent, our native-born people leave to alien and inferior races the duty of furnishing population to our free country. Then they complain of these "foreigners," "Romanists," "outsiders," overturning the traditions and removing the landmarks of the fathers who achieved our liberties. For the social dry rot from which the American commonwealth suffers, and for the happy solution of impending problems, we need more loyalty to Bible truth. Of the right kind of parents and of good children born to them we cannot have too many.

THE CONSECRATION OF CHILDREN.

Here is another of the many Bible pictures in which the life of a child is prophetically outlined and consecrated before birth. Temperance, holiness and diligence in the Lord's work were foretold as the traits of the character to be developed. Hence even before birth his education was to begin by the full consecration of his parents, that his pro-natal, infantile and childhood days should surely produce the personality required for the work ordained of God.

Have we not here a matter of most vital importance to all fathers and mothers? The influence of the life, character and temperament of the mother upon the child is vastly greater before than after birth. A few weeks or months of special care may be neglected in the one epoch, but no right law of life should be ignored before the immortal life receives its full isolation and new environment. Rich indeed is the inheritance into which the child comes who is heir to a sound body and a sound mind consecrated by prayer-offering to God. Were these underlying lessons which the Scriptures teach so abundantly by example, as well as by precept, seriously pondered, a vast amount of physical, mental and moral misery would be saved in this life and in the life to come. The ranks of the army of soldiers would be kept ever full.

RICH RESULTS OF CHRIST'S COMING.

Among these is mentioned freedom to serve God. "To grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, should serve Him without fear."

Zacharias cherished a vivid remembrance of the cruel deeds of Antiochus Epiphanes, who had plundered the temple at Jerusalem, had prevented for a time all the rites of the Jewish religion, and had even set up in the temple "the abomination of desolation," as Daniel called it, that is, an idolatrous shrine. And now, under the hands of the Romans, the liberties of the Jews were abridged and endangered. At any time their heartless masters might interfere and forbid their rites.

In all ages past it has been man's disposition to interfere with the religious liberties of others. Men have been slow to learn the lesson of tolerance. But the Gospel teaches it. It is the Spirit of Christ that brings men to recognize the right of others to worship God in their own way. The triumph of religious liberty is certainly one of the glories of Christianity.

Another result of Christ's coming is holy character. "In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days." Christ develops the idea of manhood. Christ strengthens us to do right. Christ gives us knowledge of the right. Christ's influences produce a peculiarly lofty type of character, unselfish, pure, spiritual, not to be found under other circumstances. What finer characters are there recorded in history than the Puritans of England, the Huguenots of France, the sturdy Protestants of Holland, the Waldensians of Italy, the Friends, as we know them to-day in England and America, the Moravians of Bohemia and Germany? You may study the finest ideals of ancient history, as portrayed by Plutarch and Nepos, by Virgil and Xenophon, and you will find nothing to compare with the conception of humanity as developed under the training of Christ. There are none such elsewhere. Our Saviour developed in his followers a character absolutely unique.

W. M. R.

SALVATION BY CHRIST.

O, no man who has ever held the Cross, and found in it the refuge that he sought, can ever preach it down. If you are not a sinner, you can do without the Cross. But, as for me, when you have read out the roll of sunken ones, from Cain to Barabbas, and from Barabbas to the last wail who has drifted from the dock to the gallows, I write upon that list of fallen angels, in the crimson egoism of my shame, "Of which I am chief." Of all the wrecks which strew the sea since Adam struck upon the rocks, my barque is sorest torn. Such as have weathered every storm, such as have shot proudly past the farthest bubble of Charybdis, and gracefully rounded the jutting spurs of Scylla's crag, may talk of salvation by character; but I, gone by the board, battered by tempest of my own passion, bulwarks all splintered, sails rent, all lost, and nothing but my naked soul to save, I need a Saviour stronger than myself. When the drowning knits his raft of surf-washed spars together, and waits upon the surging acres of the sea for coming death, his last biscuit swallowed, his last drop of water drained away; he plants as his ensign of despair a sorry mast on his wet deck, and floats a signal of distress upon the breeze. Often no eyes but those of birds of prey behold it, as they wait for death to offer them their meal. But in the fluttering rag there is one strand of hope, and rescue sometimes comes. So, Lamb of Calvary! I rear my fluttering rag of blank appeal. I write one word, and one alone, upon it, Not "character," but "mercy!" And with my last "peccavi" on my lips, my blood-shot eye descries a sail upon the sea. It glides out of the sunlight of the East, and no dove-wings were silvered with so soft a light. It bears down upon me, and outruns the stride of stalking Death. A Cross is at the prow, golden with glory, and yet red with love. A Pilot leans over the bulwarks, and as He wraps His arms around me, I can see a wound upon His palm; and I can feel the hold is strong because the love is infinite. It is He who takes me into port. By His grace only am I saved. He takes His wanderer home—

To that dear home, safe in His wounded side,
Where only broken hearts their sin and shame may hide.

"By grace ye are saved; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."—Rev. Arthur Mursell.

Our Young Folks.

CHRISTMAS HYMN.

BY REV. J. DOUGLAS.

My Saviour's birth I gladly sing,
And all my powers I willing bring,
To magnify His name.

Before His feet my knees I bend,
My ever blest, adored Friend,
Whose love I must proclaim.

To shepherds in the fields at night
An angel came in robes of light,
And overawed the men.

Fear not, he said, good news I have,
The Christ is come, and come to save;
See Him in Bethlehem.

The air is filled with angels bright,
The shepherds see the enraptured sight,
And hear the heavenly lay.

The sky is vocal with their song,
As given by that angelic throng,
What favoured men were they!

The prophets spoke with glowing tongue,
While sacred bards in rapture sung
Of David's royal son.

Whose reign extends to every shore,
Whose sceptre sways for evermore,
As endless ages run.

Sages journey from afar,
Guided by a special star,
Through tracks of deserts wild.

They come to seek the new-born king,
While treasures rich they gladly bring,
To give the heavenly child.

The aged saint with willing feet,
Proceeds his blessed Lord to meet,
For whom he waited long.

In Mary's arms the Babe he saw,
His soul was filled with holy awe,
Then sang his swan-like song.

ONE CHRISTMAS!

The children were already counting their dear little fingers to see how many days it was to Christmas. The snapping cold weather was another indication that the season which made so many hearts glad was approaching.

It was about this time, one bitter cold night, that Aunt Nabby, as she was familiarly called, sat dozing over her meagre fire. The Book of all books lay on her lap, with her forefinger shut between its pages. She had been reading that wonderful parable where the lame, halt and blind were gathered from the by-ways and hedges to the wedding feast.

Nabby was too poor to own a stove; but the small sticks in the big fire-place gave forth a cheery blaze, though little heat. With her feet on the hearth and a thin old shawl around her shoulders, she leaned back in her old-fashioned rocker and blessed her kind Father in heaven for so many comforts.

The passage of Scripture just read had impressed the good old soul deeply. Her reverie in which she was indulging was soon merged into the dream which is the occasion of this simple story.

She seemed to be standing at one of heaven's beautiful gates, meekly seeking admittance.

"What hast thou done for the Master?" queried the angelic porter. "Bringest thou no trophies from thine earthly home?"

"Nay!" she replied, "I am but a poor, ignorant woman, who knows not what you mean by trophies."

"On what ground, then, do you claim admittance here?" continued her lonely catechiser.

"I love the blessed Jesus who died on the cruel cross for me," she tremblingly replied.

"To love the Lord Jesus is well, but that scarcely suffices," was gently said. "Hast thou not done at least some trifling thing for Jesus's sake in that sorrowful land from whence thou comest; not even given the 'cup of cold water' to one of His little ones?"

The angelic eyes gazed lovingly into the tearful face of the woman as she continued to murmur, "I love Him! I love Him," but was so humble that she dare not lay claim to service in the Master's vineyard.

Here the form of the anger seemed to slowly dissolve in a mist, and from out the distance another shining one approached, beckoning her to follow him. But his brilliancy so dazzled her that she could not move, when he gently placed his arm about her trembling form, strength seemed imparted to her; but her excitement became intense when he whispered: "Hast thou forgotten the Christmas dinner thou gavest from thy little store to the 'lame, halt and blind'? I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

Surely these words meant that her love and faith had not been without works. Just here her joy became so great that she awoke from her dream, and, half dazed, gazed about her humble abode for a moment, then, heaving a sigh, she exclaimed, "Alas! it is a dream!"