

Pastor and People.

FOR THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

A JOYFUL LITTLE PARAPHRASE.

BY WILLIAM MURRAY, HAMILTON.

The Lord so loved the world that He
Spared not His own dear Son,
But gave Him freely up, that we,
Unworthy and undone,
From Satan, sin and self set free,
By faith with Him made one,
Might never perish, but endure
Forever glorious, glad and pure.

THE PERIL OF THE SOUL FROM ABSORPTION.

Perhaps there never was a time when so many things absorbed the attention and interest of so many people, to the exclusion of Christ and salvation. The sources of diversion are numerous, and many of them have the grip of a giant. The age is intensely active, restless, aggressive. Every power of body and mind is taxed to its utmost. Invention, business, enterprise, are all great captains, whose tread is heard in every direction. There is not only great ambition to do, but a burning, consuming lust to acquire. Money is a noble servant; properly used it is an instrument of great good; but when the love of it becomes master, it is as merciless as the grave. When a man's heart and eyes and hands and brain are all absorbed in the accumulation of money, the stones on the street have as much ear for the Gospel as he. As easily might you hope to arrest the winds that blow, or the dashing streams of a mountain flood, as this man. He has no time to think, nor to care about his soul. Why should he be thus concerned, as long as business is prosperous and dividends are good? He is absorbed, sucked up into the sponge of the money greed, until there is nothing of him to appeal to. Poor, wilted, lost soul! Unless something out of the usual order overtakes and brings this man to a halt, leads him to awake and come to himself, he will go on content in his delusion until the sudden burst of eternal things opens his eyes, just when death is closing them, and eternity parts its portals to reveal a rejected Saviour.

The greatest evil that can befall a man who suffers himself to be wholly absorbed with money-getting is success. When a man is making money and loves it, he has no sense of dependence. He is satisfied. Others may be in danger, but he is safe. That is the time of his peril. On that hidden rock in life's sea many a one has run his bark and gone down. It is a mercy when God shatters the bubble and turns the poor soul from the boast that it has need of nothing, to the humble confession that it has need of everything. To the love of money and its power to absorb the whole man may be attributed the useless life and final loss of many souls in this day of ours.

But this money seeking is not the only source of absorption in our day. Society, with all its train of follies, is another. The parade and sham and exactions of society, what a tyranny it is! How its enchanted victims step to its bidding! They are as verily captured as prisoners in war. They are as verily in chains as were slaves when sold to the highest bidder. Take the superficial, fussy, pretentious thing out of many lives, and what will be left? Think of the waste of time, of money, of gifts and opportunities, for which fashionable society is responsible. It is kin to money-love. You cannot join its bannered ranks without money, and when your money is gone it strikes your name from the roll. Preach the Gospel to these with hope of success! They seldom hear and when they do, there is no beauty in it that they should desire it. It is a dreadful destroyer of mothers and daughters, of young men, of not a few husbands and wives. As long as society, with its tribute to pride, and its occasion for indulgence, commands and absorbs a soul, that soul will not be concerned about so trifling a thing as salvation, nor inclined to listen to so dry a tale as the Gospel. The flesh is master, and while its poor, frail pulses throb, society will be sought and adored. Sometimes we must leave the poor creature in the burning dwelling to his dreadful fate; all approaches are cut off. What can we do with the large class who are wholly absorbed with money-getting, and with the equally great number whose God is society? The approaches are all cut off. To them Christ's tears and blood are empty sentiment. Their thoughtless march is to death. Other things absorb. These lead. We can only look on sadly and say: "God have mercy!" Reader, is it you?—*Dr. Rhodes, in St. Mark's Messenger.*

LIVE PRAYERS.

After a prayer-meeting, at which a female had been among those who spoke aloud in prayer, a person slightly observed: "As for that woman, she could pray all night."

"Yes," replied a devout friend, "and I do not doubt that she has often done so."

This was a first-rate reply. Of how few could it have been spoken? Yet those who are so much in prayer alone are those who pray to the purpose in the assembly. You can tell the other sort, however ready their utterance. It is as per usual. It is parrot; too glib to be earnest, too professional to be deep. This kind of praying is a mist which does not wet you, a fire which does not warm you. You could

sleep from "Our Father" to "Amen" under such a performance. Yet it is very good and proper. There is nothing the matter with it except that it is dead—dead as the woman's child, which neither of the two mothers cared to own in Solomon's court. O, for more living children! We mean true, crying, struggling prayers. These can only come from those who in private wrestle and weep and prevail.

An occasional breakdown is very refreshing. To observe a heart too full to express itself with the tongue is most arousing to the soul. O, that some of our brethren would or could break down! They are too far gone in routine to be able to rise into the natural, much less into the spiritual. While such machines press like a nightmare on our prayer-meetings, things cannot much improve. O, for a deliverance!—*Rev. C. H. Spurgeon.*

THE BEST APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION.

Every minister ought to endeavour to find his own successor in the sacred office. There are always bright boys full of promise and hope and blessed with piety in a congregation whom a pastor could inspire with the noble purpose of consecrating their lives to the work of preaching the truth. It only needs the word in season pressing upon these young and susceptible minds the duty, nay, the exceeding privilege of using these powers in proclaiming the glad tidings to start them on a course of study preparatory to the ministry. Here is a field of usefulness into which, strange to say, some pastors, rarely, if ever, enter; while on the other hand, some are always tilling this field and with the most prolific and far-reaching results. The writer of these lines has a certain pastor in mind who never fails to have at least one student, and often more than one, from his congregation in college or in the seminary on his way to the pulpit.

Here is the true idea of Apostolic succession. Now if this idea were only adopted and acted upon with vigour, the number of candidates for sacred orders might be doubled at any time. There is in the Church enough of piety, enough of talent, enough of aspiration, if only it were early enough directed, to crowd our theological seminaries with choice young men.—*Christian-at-Work.*

HOW TO LOVE GOD.

A woman once said to her pastor: "I do love God very much, but want to love more. How can I?"

"You must become better acquainted with Him," was the reply. "We love those who are worthy of our love in proportion as we become acquainted with them."

"How can I get better acquainted?" she asked.

"Study the Bible more," he said. "God speaks to you, reveals Himself to you in the Bible. Read in the New Testament the life of Jesus, and imagine you had been with Him, as John and Peter and Mary were."

"And pray more. Tell Him all your joys and troubles and needs. He will answer you, and every answer will draw you closer and closer to Him."

"Then try to please Him in everything you do and say. We always love those whom we try to please. Love makes us wish to please the Lord, and love rewards us when we have done it."

The woman followed these rules, simple as they were, and her love to God grew and spread all through her heart.—*Word and Work.*

HOW TO MAKE LIFE HAPPY.

Take time; it is no use to foam or fret, or do as the angry housekeeper who has got hold of the wrong key, and pushes, shakes and rattles it about the lock until both are broken and the door remains unopened.

The chief secret of comfort lies in not suffering trifles to vex us, and in cultivating our undergrowth of small pleasures.

Try to regard present vexations as you will a month hence.

Since we cannot get what we like, let us like what we can get.

It is not riches, it is not poverty, it is human nature that is the trouble.

The world is like a looking-glass. Laugh at it and it laughs back; frown at it and it frowns back.

Angry thoughts canker the mind and dispose it to the worst temper in the world—that of fixed malice and revenge. It is while in this temper that most men become criminals.

THE FOURTEEN MISTAKES OF LIFE.

What have been termed "the fourteen mistakes of life" are given as follows: It is a great mistake to set up our own standard of right and wrong, and judge people accordingly; to measure the enjoyment of others by our own; to expect uniformity of opinion in this world; to look for judgment and experience in youth; to endeavour to mould all dispositions alike; not to yield to immaterial trifles; to look for perfection in our own actions; to worry ourselves and others with what cannot be remedied; not to alleviate all that needs alleviation as far as lies in our power; not to make allowances for the infirmities of others; to consider everything impossible that we cannot perform; to believe only what our finite minds can grasp; to expect to be able to understand everything. The greatest of mistakes is to live for time alone, when any moment may launch us into eternity.

Sabbath School Teacher.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

March 22,
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ELISHA'S DEFENDERS.

2 Kings 6:
8-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.—2 Kings vi. 16.

INTRODUCTORY.

Elisha exercised the prophetic office with singular elevation of character. Like a true servant of God he was benevolent and unselfish. Through his agency God wrought many miracles and all of them were for the good of others. They were signs as well as wonders. These miracles were evidences to the people that God was with His prophet, and were a confirmation of the truths he taught.

I. The Syrian Invasion of Israel.—It was Benhadad who wrote the letter which was sent by Naaman to the King of Israel. It is not ascertained whether this war took place before or after the healing of Naaman. The people of Israel were harassed by the attacks of the Syrians in the time of Elisha. They made frequent exasperating raids across the frontier, and no doubt on account of the bad feeling engendered and the cupidity of the Syrians, this invasion was undertaken. The king of Syria, with his military advisers, mapped out their plan of campaign, and indicated the places where he would pitch his camp. "The man of God" is the designation by which Elisha was known. It is descriptive of his character and the nature of his service. He knew of all the movements of the enemies of his country and at once informs the king of Israel of his danger. He either warns him to avoid places where the Syrian king expected to surprise him, or to take possession of and strengthen those places before the king of Syria could reach them. The king of Israel verified the truth of Elisha's warnings by actual experiment. He sent to the places indicated, "and saved himself there, not once nor twice" that is, several times. So secretly had the king of Syria laid his plans that he could not understand why it was they all had failed, "his heart was sore troubled for this thing." He was greatly vexed and disappointed; and suspected treachery on the part of some of those in his confidence and asked "Will ye not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?" One of them, whom some have supposed might have been Naaman, answered the king's question by saying: "None my lord, O king: but Elisha the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bed-chamber." Whether it was Naaman, who had a vivid recollection of the prophet's power, or some other who had heard of Elisha's marvellous character, that thus informed the king, he was correct in his impression as to how the king's purposes had been divulged. His answer made it plain to the king that his most profound secrets could not be kept. The question suggests itself, by what means did Elisha come to know the most secret designs of the king of Syria? To this it can be answered there were only two ways possible by which he could come into possession of such knowledge. He was not present at the secret conferences of Benhadad and the leaders of his army. It is clear from the narrative that none of these leaders betrayed the king's confidence. It was therefore by divine inspiration that the prophet obtained the knowledge that saved the king of Israel's life, and the integrity of his kingdom. The accuracy of that information was tested by the officers sent by the king of Israel. Thus the prophet's claims to be God's messenger were confirmed, and his word would have still greater weight with the people.

II. The Prophet's Defence.—Benhadad did not doubt the information given him that Elisha was the revealer of his plans, but he had no idea of the means by which the prophet was able to do this. He also made the great mistake that he could be able to prevent him exercising his prophetic office. Those who are in a position to exercise worldly power frequently fall into the same mistake and imagine that by material means they can silence God's messengers and suppress His truth. Benhadad resolved to capture Elisha. A spy was sent to find out where he was. This knowledge was soon obtained. It was learned that the prophet was in Dothan. Dothan means the double fountain. It was on the south of the plain of Jezreel, about twelve miles north of Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel. It was the same place where Joseph was placed in a pit by his brethren and then sold by them to the Midianitish merchants on their way to Egypt. Having learned where the prophet was, the Syrian king sent a great company of men, horses and chariots to capture the prophet. This large company was not needed to take one man, but to effect their purpose they had to penetrate far into the interior of their enemies' country. They reached Dothan in the night time and surprised the place, which they at once surrounded. Gehazi's place had been taken by a new servant, who had not seen personally so much of the prophet. This may account for the consternation to which his discovery in the early morning gave rise. He had risen up early and saw that the place was besieged by a great force, and said to Elisha: "Alas, my master, how shall we do?" The servant was disturbed and terror-stricken; the master was calm, self-possessed and fearless. The faith of the one was weak; the trust in God of the other was undisturbed. To the despairing cry of the servant the prophet answers "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." It needs a sublime faith to confront a danger like that which threatened Elisha, but his was equal to the occasion. He had unshaken confidence in God, and submission to His will, so that he could calmly await the result whatever it might be. The hosts of no earthly king could subdue him. They might capture but they could never conquer him. The best way to see spiritual realities is to see them in God's light. So the prophet prays that his servant's eyes may be opened, that is, his soul's eyes, to enable him to behold the unseen spiritual hosts by which they were encompassed. The Lord heard and answered Elisha's prayer. The young man's eyes were opened. The hill on which Dothan was built presented to his spiritual gaze a great array of "horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." These were symbolic of the divine protection that kept the prophet in perfect safety in spite of all the material forces that could be brought against him. Again the prophet prayed. It was not for vengeance upon his foes, he did not desire their destruction, he only sought their discomfiture. He prayed that they might for a time be stricken with blindness. This petition was also granted. The prophet afterwards led them to Samaria where they were overpowered by numbers, but at the intercession of the prophet their lives were spared and they were dismissed to their own land. The faithful servant of God did not harbour vindictive or vengeful feelings for the injury of his adversaries. It was not a personal triumph he sought but the vindication of the truth he taught.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

A man of God, a true servant of His, is a great power in a land.

God knows the secret purposes of all hearts and He can frustrate the hidden designs of His people's enemies.

God can preserve his faithful servants in the midst of the greatest dangers.

The powers of God's spiritual kingdom are nearer and vaster than we can have any idea of.

To see spiritual things aright we must have the eyes of the soul opened by the Holy Spirit.