

GENERAL READING

"IF WE KNEW."

If we knew when walking thoughtless Through the noisy crowded way, That some pearl of wondrous whiteness Close beside our pathway lay, We would pause where now we hasten, We would often look around, Lest our careless feet should trample Some rare jewel to the ground.

If we knew what forms were fainting For the shade that we should fling; If we knew what lips were parching For the water we should bring, We would haste with eager footsteps, We would work with willing hands, Bearing cups of cooling water, Planting rows of shading palms.

If we knew when friends around us Closely press to say good-bye, Which among the lips that kissed us, First would 'neath the daisies lie, We would clasp our arms around them, Looking on them through our tears; Tender words of love eternal, We would whisper in their ears.

If we knew what lives were darkened By some thoughtless word of ours, Which had ever lain among them Like the frost among the flowers; Oh, with what sincere repentings, With what anguish of regret, While our eyes were overflowing, Would we cry—Forgive! forget!

If we knew? Alas! and do we Ever care or seek to know, Whether bitter herbs or roses In our neighbors garden grow? God forgive us! lest hereafter Our hearts break to hear him say, Careless child I never knew you, From my presence flee away.

ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD.

BY WM. S. PEUMER, D.D.

That was right. He ought to have believed God. Every one ought to credit all His word. Even fallen angels believe and tremble. Every word of God is sure. Not a jot or tittle of it can fail. If He speaks it will come to pass. Nothing can stay His hand. He believed God when appearances were all the other way; but God is not governed by appearances, and we should not be, if His word is on the other side. God can easily make foolish things to confound the wise, and weak things to confound the mighty, and base things, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are. He can save by few as well as by many. He is a glorious Lord. He, who makes the barren woman to keep house, can do anything he pleases. His perfection can accomplish all his word.

He believed God, when it was quite unfashionable to credit the divine testimony. The example of his neighbors was all the other way. The wicked generally cry, "Where is the promise of His coming? You are expecting great things, but where is the sign? We give no credence to the report. It is unreasonable. We advise you to cease from your vain expectations." Example has a great power to draw us down from any good plan or purpose.

He believed God, although he could not explain the divine conduct. There were many things that looked the other way. There were long delays, which seemed to contradict the promise. But with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

To sense and reason and public opinion and popular example, Abraham opposed the simple word of God. In so doing he acted wisely. Having the divine word, he knew the engagement could not be broken. We never act more wisely than when we simply believe God. If He is not worthy of credit who is? If He cannot be trusted, we must sink into despair. The promise of God cannot be broken.

We cannot trust ourselves. We never lean to our own understanding without committing folly. Our wisdom is nought. Our strength is weakness. Our righteousness is as filthy rags. We are crushed before the moth.

Nor can we rely on the angels. They are good servants of the Most High; but they are not almighty. Their wisdom is borrowed. Their dependence is entire. They are God's messengers, and as such they give us wonderful aid, that is all.

But we may and we must believe God. To whom else can we go? He is all sufficient. He is of wisdom to devise and power to execute the best plans. We never act so wisely as when we credit Him entirely, and ask no unbelieving questions. The issue proved this to be so in the case of Abraham, and of every true believer that ever lived. Such reliance on the divine testimony receives all that God has spoken.

Such a faith is holy—it is "most holy" (Jude xx). It proceeds from a principle of holiness. It leads to holiness. It never leads to sin. It is unbelief that corrupts and hinders the soul in all good things.

Of course it is not a natural, but a gracious endowment. It is of the operation of God, who raised Christ from the dead (Col. ii. 12). Flesh and blood do not enable us to believe. God's Holy Spirit is the author of every grace in the heart—of faith in particular. This

faith also unfeigned (1 Tim. i. 5). It believes what it professes, and it professes what it believes. Nothing is further removed from superstition or folly. Because it credits the divine testimony. It credits no conflicting testimony.

It is also implicit. It does not insist, like Thomas, on ocular demonstration, but it secures the blessings of those who have not yet seen and yet believed (John xx. 29). It demands no explanation of the means and methods of the Almighty Promiser. It leaves all such questions with Him.

Such faith is precious (1 Peter i. 1). It is of great price in the sight of God. It is worth more than all burnt offerings. It is better than rivers of oil. It restores the life of God to the soul. It secures full and free justification. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness."

So that this faith is a saving grace (Eph. ii. 8; Heb. x. 39). The end of it is eternal life. On this point the Word of God is very clear and full.

The faith of some grows exceedingly. Such have great consolation. They are strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. They are firm as a rock. They are not driven about by every wind and tossed. They are not like waves of the sea. They abound in hope.

But some real Christians have weak faith. They are easily alarmed. They seem to forget that the Almighty fainteth not, and so they are ready to halt. Their case calls for compassion. They also deserve reproof. "Oh, ye of little faith!" "Oh, fools and slow of heart to believe!" It is a sin to distrust God. Such should often pray, "Lord increase our faith."

Oh, believe God!—Interior.

EXECUTION OF MAXIMILIAN.

Carlotta's brief delirium of joy had begun to be clouded with other sorrows before she had found cause to suspect the loyalty of her new subjects to the empire. Almost at the beginning of the signs of coming troubles, news came from beyond the sea of the death of her loved and honored father, Leopold, King of Belgium. The emperor left alone, and beset on every hand by those whom he could not trust, while the whole country seemed to be going over to the enemy, felt, as never before, his loneliness, and the need of the support that the presence of the empress might have afforded him. But not only was she gone from him, but after a few months the sad news came to him that she had become demented, and her speedy death was expected. Then, it is said, for the first and only time in his sad experience the power of his nerves gave way; and with streaming eyes and trembling voice, he paced the floor, moaning continually, "Poor Carlotta! poor Carlotta!" It would be alike unpleasant and unedifying to follow him to the tribunal before which he was summoned; but to what summons he responded only by saying:

"If I am to be condemned, then my presence or absence will make no difference."

His condemnation ensued, as a matter of course; but that was followed by a reprieve, but soon the fatal sentence was pronounced and executed. It is said that Juarez would have been glad to spare his life, but for reasons of state, and out of regard to the voice of his chief supporters, he gave his sanction to the execution.

A little before this time might have been seen a way beyond the ocean another scarcely less tragical scene. It was the young and beautiful, but now almost demented, Empress of Mexico, prostrate before the Holy Father at Rome, interceding for the Pope's interference in behalf of her husband, betrayed and abandoned among his enemies. But the pope was powerless in this case, and he had indeed consented to the arrangements that now threatened to terminate so fatally. Then came upon her the sudden frenzy of fear that she would be poisoned if she left the protection of the Vatican; and this was followed by gradual sinking away of the noble and refined spirit into a quiet, morose madness; from which not even the sweet familiar scenes of her loved Miramar sufficed to arouse her. She saw nothing more of the dark cloud that was gathering around her husband, nor was she aroused to consciousness by the thunder crash that soon after resounded through the brilliant halls of the Tuilleries, and the more majestic palace of Schonbrunn, announcing that the stern decree of death had been executed upon the brave and accomplished young emperor. That sorrow was spared her, which, had she been capable of feeling it, must itself have driven her to frenzied madness.

How sadly dramatic was the scene of the execution of Maximilian, the more so because all was so entirely unstudied and sincere! He handed his marriage ring to Dr. Basseke, to be conveyed to his mother the archduchess, for he believed that Carlotta was already dead. He carefully prepared his toilet, in preparation for his death, dressing himself in a plain, single-breasted, black frock coat, closely buttoned; black neck-tie, and lower garment, and a broad-brimmed Mexican hat. He, the chief actor in the sad scene, was calm; while his attendants were so completely unnerved, that they were near fainting, as they witnessed the placid bearing of one so beloved and revered.

Slowly the cortège of three carriages with the escort of five mounted soldiers, and the battalion of infantry guarding the road, moved toward the "Hill of Bella," where Maximilian had been captured, and where he was to be shot. The three victims stood side by side; Maximilian placing General Miramar in the center, as the post of honour, himself taking the stand on the left, with General Mejia on the right. Then followed the distribution of the twenty dollar gold

pieces, containing the Emperor's effigy, which he left for his executioners. The picture grows more and more vivid, as placing his hand on his heart in a calm, clear voice, the imperial victim uttered the fatal command:

"Fire!" Then followed the discharge of three guns, the instant death of the two generals, the reeling of the chief victim with his life not yet extinct, when he was heard to murmur some indistinct words in Spanish. Some asserted them to have been, "O man! O man!" others thinking it, "Poor Carlotta!" A second shot through his heart, a convulsive shuddering, and Maximilian, Archduke of Austria, and Empress of Mexico, lay dead on foreign soil.

The wife, once so full of enthusiasm at her transfer from beautiful Miramar to an imperial palace in far off Mexico, had no intuition of the sailing from Vera Cruz, the arrival on the Austrian coast, of the ship "Navarra," with its bands of music waiting forth a funeral dirge; of mast and spar, pennon and flag, of the incoming vessel, and of all others lying moored in the harbour, draped in black, and the cannon from ships and fortress firing funeral volleys. Nor did she, in her wild dreams, behold the monarch, her husband, cold and stark within his zinc coffin, clad in his military costume of blue and gold; nor was she a witness of the last doleful scene, when they laid the body of the royal victim in the sepulchre of his fathers, amid the sighs and tears of thousands who loved him, and over whose dust now mouldering in decay, a never-dying memory is preserved by nations who never saw his face and have no part in his life or people.—National Rep. for Sept.

NATALIE NARISCHKIN, THE MOTHER OF PETER THE GREAT.

Natalie Narischkin, the mother of Peter the Great, was a lovely, highly-gifted woman, though of humble origin, Alexis, her husband, was a prince of unusual energy and intelligence. He encouraged agriculture, established silk and linen manufactures, reorganized the army, compiled a law code, which is in use at the present day, and did all which lay in his power to improve both the social and moral condition of his people. When he became a widower he resolved to marry a second time to please himself.

With this object in view he went through the country in various disguises, seeking to penetrate into the inner circle of homes blessed with daughters. Sometimes he would go dressed as an apothecary in search of healing plants, sometimes as a merchant or travelling professor.

In this way he became more thoroughly acquainted, too, with his country and its inhabitants, with their desires, cares, duties and trials than would have been possible otherwise.

As he was one day walking through the suburbs of Moscow he met one Matwerf, with whom he had often talked concerning the ignorance of the Russian poor and the best way of remedying it.

Matwerf invited the Czar to sup with him, and introduced him as a merchant from Kasan. The busy bustling housewife received her guest with true Russian hospitality; but the Czar's glance passed over her short, round figure to rest upon that of a tall, slender girl, who stood behind her. It was Natalie, a poor orphan whom the Matwerfs had taken to their home through pity.

She wore the simple national costume of the olden time. Upon her black hair was a black velvet cap; around her neck hung a triple row of pearls, from which was suspended an image of the holy St. Nicholas. The remainder of her outfit consisted of a short overskirt, a bright colored underskirt, blue stockings and low shoes.

Supper was served by the ladies; and though the kind hostess urged Alexis to do honor to her honey-cakes and meal, he ate but little, so absorbed was he in listening to the praises which she gave her adopted daughter.

"She reads and writes well enough to be the first secretary of the Czar (the holy St. Nicholas protect him), and yet no girl, far or near, can spin better or faster than she. From early till late she helps me, and then in the evening she reads to Matwerf, because the lamplight pains his eyes. She is indeed the blessing of our old age."

The Czar's eyes rested with pleasure on the blushing face of the lovely maiden, and with reluctance he took his leave, only to repeat his visit soon and often. Finally he declared his love and won her promise to be his bride.

And now an imperial proclamation was issued, ordering all the fair young girls in the empire to assemble in the Kremlin on a certain day, that following an ancient custom, the Czar might make his choice of a wife from among the daughters of the land.

Very unwillingly did Natalie prepare to obey the imperial summons. Her heart throbbled at the possibility of being the chosen one and the dread of being unfaithful to her plighted lover. Tremblingly she followed Matwerf into the salon, where several hundred other maidens awaited the coming of the Czar. The strange position, the unaccustomed splendor, the noise of the multitude confused her so much that she was not able to lift her eyes from the floor.

A clang of trumpets announced the Czar's approach. The doors were thrown open, and Alexis, in gold embroidered

dress, a diadem on his head, and jeweled scimitar by his side, entered. Laughing and chatting, he passed from one group to another of blooming girls.

When he came toward Natalie she raised her timid eyes, her glance met the Czar's, whom she recognized as the merchant from Kasan, and she fell unconscious to the floor. When she next opened her eyes it was to find herself in the arms of Alexis, and to hear her name called as that of his beloved bride.

Crowds of servants now brought fruits from Damascus, figs and confections from Turkey, cordials from Italy, and rich gifts to distribute among the disappointed girls, but to Natalie Narischkin was given the wedding robe.

The Emperor of all the Russias never regretted having taken to his heart and home the poor orphan girl. With her tender devotion and bright intelligence, she soothed and cheered he spent away from the affairs of state; she sympathized with him in all his efforts to elevate the tone of his people, and in every possible way she strove to implant in the hearts of the women of her realm the same virtue and wisdom which was in her own.—Lizzie P. Lewis in Home Journal.

FAMILY READING.

REPENTANCE.

IS IT A DIVINE GIFT, OR A HUMAN DUTY?

In answer to this double question we say, both. And here are the Scriptures which prove the correctness of this reply. "Him (Jesus) hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Acts v. 31. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." We are not surprised that the enquiry is often made, in view of these apparently conflicting statements, "How can they be harmonized?" We answer very easily, Reason and Scripture will make it clear. Common sense says, a gift cannot be a duty, nor can duty be a gift. Gifts (grace) belongs to God, duty is a word which belongs to man. The power to obey is one thing, obedience is another. If the power to obey is absent, and not within reach, obedience is not man's duty. Duty implies ability possessed, or attainable. If then man has not naturally ability to repent, he must receive it from God, or never perform the duty. To have power, and to use it are two distinct things. To assist is not to compel. We are accountable only for what we have, or may have, not for what we cannot have. In God's government of rational beings we clearly perceive that duty involves the requisite ability to perform. Otherwise he would be a hard Master, reaping where he had not sown.

But we cannot thus charge the Most High. He is righteous in all his ways. It is therefore in consequence of the fact, that the exalted Jesus, gives repentance, that God commands all men to repent.

The gift of Christ, the Holy Ghost, convicts the world of sin, not only by the word, but by his own mysterious influence on the soul. Those who yield to the convictions thus divinely wrought in them, and turn to God, obtain forgiveness. Those who refuse to obey the voice Divine remain un saved. I would but ye would not, says the Lord, thus throwing the responsibility upon the sinner. We fear that many who are living in sin, are excusing themselves, by indulging the thought that God is withholding from the grace of repentance, and therefore they would not come to Jesus. If such persons would act rationally they would immediately go to their knees, and ask God why he withhold the grace of repentance. They would seek until they found, not only the grace of repentance, but also the justifying grace of God. Repentance brings the sinner almost to Christ, but something else is necessary in order to an interview. Repentance changes not the sinners relation to God. He is still a guilty sinner, and must remain so until he is forgiven. It is not repentance, but faith that takes hold of Jesus. Faith, not repentance is the eye of the soul, that looks to the Saviour,—the feet of the soul that walk to Christ.

No man trusts in Christ for a present salvation, until he feels his need of salvation. It is not the presumptuous but the penitent believer that relies upon the atoning work of Jesus. Jesus Christ never said to those whom he healed in the days of his flesh, thy repentance hath saved thee. It was always, "Thy faith hath saved thee." The reason is plain. If our repentance procured pardon we would not need forgiveness; we would claim it as our merited right. But pardon is ours, not because we repent, but because we accept of Christ as our Saviour.

The soul of man may be exercised with penitent feelings for months, without obtaining peace with God. Not so, in reference to faith, the moment he believes with the heart unto righteousness, he realizes "the favour and the peace of God." Hence the promise given to faith in the Bible.

It is therefore worse than useless to exhort an impenitent sinner to believe in Christ. It is only to those who are earnestly asking, "What shall I do to be saved?" that such direction is appropriate.

On the whole it appears quite evident, that power to repent is graciously given us by Christ; but the use of that power is our own act. So that the divine sovereignty in the bestowment of grace does not interfere with human responsibility. As the Ambassadors of Christ we will fail in the great work of our embassy unless we preach repentance, as well as remission of sins. The truths of the Bible are beautifully dovetailed into each other; but only those who "read, learn, and inwardly digest," see the lines of intersection and

separation. One of the most important of ministerial functions is to "rightly divide the word of truth."

G. O. H.

ORIGIN OF TEXTS.

The selecting passages of Scripture as a text or basis of a sermon or discourse seems to have originated with Ezra, who, accompanied by several Levites, in a public congregation of men and women ascended the pulpit, opened the Book of the Law, and, after addressing a prayer to the Deity, to which the people responded "Amen," read in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the meaning." Previously to that time the patriarchs delivered, in public assemblies, either prophecies or moral instructions for the edification of the people. It was not until after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, during which period they had almost forgotten the language in which the Pentateuch was written, that it became necessary to explain as well as read Scripture to them—a practice adopted by Ezra, and since universally followed. In later times the Book of Moses was thus read in the synagogue every Sabbath day. To this custom the Saviour conformed, and at Nazareth read passages from the Prophet Isaiah; then closing the book, returned it to the priest, and preached from the text. The custom, which now prevails over the Christian world, was interrupted in the Dark Ages, when the ethics of Aristotle were read in many churches on Sunday instead of the Holy Scriptures.

THE GOSPEL AND THE BIBLE.

The gospel by the influence it exerts will shame sin out of countenance and gradually raise men to its own lofty standard until it will be true of the very nation in which it circulates—let me fairly apply the glowing language of inspiration—"That her walls are salvation, her gates praise, her officers peace, her executors righteousness. Righteousness shall run down her streets like a stream, and equity like a mighty river." It is read in every temple of Christendom, its voice is lifted week by week; the sun never sets on its gleaming page—it goes alike to the cottage of the plain man and the palace of the king; it is woven into the literature of the scholar, and it colors the talk of the streets. The barque of the merchant cannot go to sea without it; no ship of war enters the conflict but the Bible is there; it goes with the pedlar in his crowded pack, cheers him as he sits down at eventide fatigued, brightens and freshens his morning devotions; the sailor escaped from shipwreck clutches this best of treasures." All that a sceptic has said, and I thank him for the testimony. He might have said more. He might have told us that it was the one book you might find in the hut of the settler far away on the outskirts of civilization. He might have told us that on long winter evenings he has dwelt on the language of its pages; that it is read by the camp-fires of the soldier on the field of conflict and that amid the din of smoke and battle his heart is not less brave, nor his arm less strong, because of the courage it inspires; and when they go forth to minister to the wounded and bury the slain they find him lying there, still and cold, with the open Bible by his side, with marks on the page, where, when his eyes were growing dim, blood-stained fingers clasped the promise that soothed his dying agonies and lighted his soul into a better world.

And when you go into that sick room at home, what book is that by the bedside of the patient; and on the wall those large letters which the eye of the patient can easily catch whence come those stirring words? Do you not hear infaney lip it by its mother's knee? Do not you see age with its hoary locks and its streaming eyes bending reverently over the sacred story? Aye, and they whisper it in the dull, cold air, and it drops from the faltering lips of the dying, and they mutter it with their latest breath as the ground of their hopes and a passport to a glorious immortality! Jesus Christ conquered the hearts and subdued the wills, and is now enshrined in the affections of men. The simple story of his love is spreading the world over, permeating the hearts and transforming the lives of men wherever it comes, and lighting up the darkness of the earthly state with the hope of a glorious immortality.—Dr. Landels.

HAPPY will you be if you learn what it is to find love and occupation. It is no use to ask what those who love God do with Him. There is no difficulty in spending our time a friend we love: our heart is always ready to open to him; we do not study what we shall say to him; but it comes forth without premeditation; we can keep nothing back even if we have nothing special to say; we like to be with him. O, how much easier it is to love than to fear! Fear constrains, fetters perplex one; but love persuades, comforts, inspires, expands the soul, and makes one desire what is good for its own sake.—Fenelon.

Colton once said of Time—Wisdom walks before it, and repentance walks behind it.