

Pastor and People

VOICES OF THE SEA.

BY NICHOLAS IRELAND.

Song of the ocean waves,
Soft, as the softest staves,
Oratorios played by fingers unseen;
Keyboard of gold, or silver, or star rays
Zephyrs and detonating roundelays
Infinite accents out of gloom, and of gleam.

No words intonated,
But stanzas translated,
From zones and from seas, echoes out of the past,
Breezes, and storm clouds, wonderful cadences,
Blending sounds in matchless alliances;
Thrilling the music ever voiced in the blast.

Surprising symphonies;
Wonderful harmonies;
Azure dome of cathedral, lit with the sun,
Or the moon, or countless shimmering stars,
Else pall'd with stygian night, and black bars,
Floor with subtle designs, and fleckings of foam

Unceasingly beating,
Advancing, retreating,
Wedding bells ringing out their joyous refrain,
Ripples of home life, sunshine and showers,
Business so bright, then the sky lowers,
Restless experiences changing again.

Fell crime with its sorrow,
To-day and to morrow,
Tossed amidst surges of the pitiless storm;
Derelict, with rudder gone, and sails rent,
Helplessly hurled 'gainst rocky battlement,
Destitute, forsaken, vile subject for scorn!

Roll of the solemn waves,
Over all lonely graves;
Dirges for lost ones, in the treacherous sea;
Sad wailings of sprite forms, out of the swell,
Rising from rolling waves, tolling the knell,
Sad sobbing cadences, from under "the lee!"

Lost historic cities:
The bells of drowned cities;
Birth days of the ages, convulsions long past;
Upheavals, submerges, mountains o'erthrown;
Fierce fire, rain, sunk forests, ice and the storm,
All heard in the hurricane burst of the blast!

Redemption's mystery,
Glory of history!
Christ of God, assuming flesh, man of the race;
Subtlest whispers, out of the silences,
Roar of ocean waves, music, devices,
Pre-eminent service of marvellous grace

Songs of the rolling wave,
Oh the wide world they have:
Marvellous orchestra, sounding God's glory!
Signific zephyrs, stealing like odours,
Waves and sea roaring, subtilized wonders
Matchless salvation, grandest doxology!

ON PREACHERS AND PREACHING.

BY REV. J. A. R. DICKSON, B.D., PH.D., GALT, ONT.

NO. XXIII.—THE CULTIVATION OF A DEVOTIONAL HABIT.

The life of the minister is exposed to many evils, among which this one stands forth pre eminent—hardness—the hardness of mere officialism. He has duties to perform, and he has been set apart to that end, and so he slides into the doing of them as a matter of course. He does them in a perfunctory way, to get through with them. Because of the repetition of the act he loses his living interest in it, and it loses its attraction for him. A deadness steals in that makes it a purely mechanical act. This is a truly alarming position to be in, but it is born into existence of the necessary routine of a minister's life. The warm and tender spirit of sympathy is gone; the mellow sensitiveness of soul is absent; the keeping in touch with the truth as a fresh and new revelation thrilling with rich discovery is wanting—the man has got out of the ministerial spirit and become hard. As the clay is baked by the August sun so is the man of God hardened in the fierce heat of worldliness, whether of society or politics or business. Engrossed of any of these he cannot escape the contagion and the consequent loss of fine spiritual feeling.

Then, it is irksome to him to think of, or to do the real work that is his. He shrinks from dealing closely with souls. Eternity, in the power of which he should live, has fallen back out of sight, and time fills the scene. Worldly position and temporal advantage are thought of mainly, and the salvation of men from sin and death eternal have scant consideration. The hardened heart of a minister is a terrible evil. How can God use such an one? How can such an one be an example of godliness to the flock? This spirit neutralizes all good influences and is a positive evil agency. The value of a poem lies not alone in the lofty sentiment and profound thought that are in it, but also in the depth of true feeling it embodies; that is its principal power. The enduring interest of a story is not found so much in its ingenious plot or masterly treatment as in its human sympathy and tender touches that thrill the heart of the reader. The beauty of a biography is not in the skill of the writer in the use of the material at his disposal, but in the revelation he makes of the heart and soul of the individual he portrays. In every case the main thing is the living soul throbbing and pulsing through the work, whatever it may be. One who deals with men, is of no consequence if he have not a heart, a true, sensitive, sympath-

tic soul—that is touched by all that affects his fellows. A man such as Terence delineates in a sentence, "*Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto.*" Augustine tells us that on hearing these words of the poet, the theatre resounded with applause. No marvel. That is the key-note of all effective work among men and for men.

But the question arises, How may one rid himself of the incubus when it has settled down upon him? We answer, by the cultivation of a devotional habit. By exercising oneself unto godliness, by realizing the meaning of Christ's death, the value of souls, the peril in which men are, the possibility of saving them, and the need of a truly sympathetic spirit to accomplish this. Men are not rescued anyhow. There are definite lines along which the saving processes move. We must agree with these. Usually God employs men who are united in heart to Himself—men of integrity. Half-heartedness is a great sin in His eyes. The minister must keep free of that.

The Rev. Thomas Binney, of the Weigh House Chapel, London, delivered an address before the Congregational Union in 1845 on "The Closet and the Church" which is full of much needed counsel, suitable to every period of the Church's life. We call a few memorable sentences from this grand discourse. He says: "A minister cannot live on his own official acts—his public prayers, his public preaching, his meditation on the Scripture or preparatory to that—the impressions of truth and the gushes of emotion that he may obtain or enjoy in the discharge of his duties. These are not the things by which alone, or even principally, his personal religion can be upheld or grow. If confined to these and dependent upon them, it will languish and die. He must enter his closet, and shut the door, and be with his Father in secret, frequently and long; reading the Scriptures without thought of the people or the pulpit—praying for light, grace, strength—seeking instruction and exercising faith, as if he was alone in the world with God. It is one of the most trying and difficult things, for one constantly required to conduct worship and to preach to others, to pray in private with simplicity and freshness, or to meditate on the Bible without the intrusion of distracting thought meddling with the soul, by detecting in the portion of truth it should enjoy, texts for discourse and topics for discussion. But the spiritual life and prosperity of a minister depend very much on his being able to overcome his besetting temptation; and just, therefore, in proportion to the difficulty, is it requisite for him to make the attempt." He declares that the want of this devotional spirit poisons everything. And goes on in this incisive style:—

"They have great abilities, but they do not pray. They are ministers of Christ according to outward order, but they do not pray. They are good and, perhaps, even great, preachers, but they do not pray. They are fervent, pungent, persuasive, convincing, but they do not pray. They are zealous and enterprising—leaders in the movements of public activity—the first and foremost in popular excitement—frequent in their appeals—abundant in their labours—working zealously in various modes and divers places—but they do not pray. They are men of integrity, purity, benevolence—but they do not pray. And this ONE THING—their 'restraining prayer,' their 'not calling upon God,' their 'not seeking after' nor 'stirring up themselves to take hold of' Him—his, like the want of love in the Christian character, 'stains the glory' of every thing else—it renders worthless their genius, talents, and acquisitions; obstructs their own spiritual prosperity; impedes their usefulness and blasts their success. Though a minister were an apostle, and did not pray, his 'speech and his preaching' would not be with the demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

Thomas Binney touches the nerve of this matter. Prayerlessness leaves a man defenceless, and the heart hardens. And it is really according to what the apostle declares of it—the hardness is the outcome of the evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Heb. iii 12 13. He who has power with God has power with man. He whose heart is open to God, will not be closed against man.

Pains must be taken to keep oneself in the love of God so that the heart may be tender, sympathetic, gracious, then there will come a rich mellowness of spirit into the voice, the movements, the character. It will suffuse all.

The Rev. F. W. Robertson, of Brighton, in one of his letters indicates that he had been caught in the current of worldliness and was desirous of escaping. He says: "I will tell you of a want I am beginning to experience very distinctly. I perceive more than ever the necessity of devotional reading, I mean the works of eminently holy persons, whose tone was not merely uprightness of character and high-mindedness, but communion—a strong sense of personal and ever-living communion—with God, besides. I recollect how far more peaceful my mind used to be when I was in the regular habit of reading daily, with scrupulous adherence to a plan, works of this description. A strong shock threw me off the habit—partly the external circumstances of my life—partly the perception of a most important fact, that devotional feelings are very distinct from uprightness and purity of life. . . . Our affections must be nurtured in the highest, or else our whole life flags and droops."

This is an experience not at all uncommon, only the same care is not always taken to recover oneself out of it. The plan adopted by Mr. Robertson is one that is highly commended, it is communion with a holy man to quicken the appetite and prepare the way for fellowship with God.

The Rev. Josiah Bull speaks for many when he says: "I have always found the lives and experiences of great and good men to do me more good than any other books, except the Bible. The lives of learned and holy men are the most profitable of all books to a minister."

Robert Murray McCheyne was a man of saintly character. His words were armed with power. He touched men deeply and drew them to Christ. The secret of this lay in his devotional habit. When he was travelling in Palestine with Dr. A. A. Bonar he was as careful of the condition of his own soul as when he was at home among his people.

Dr. Bonar says: "I was often reproved by his unabated attention to personal holiness; for this care was never absent from his mind, whether he was at home in his quiet chamber, or on the sea, or in the desert. Holiness in him was manifested, not by efforts to perform duty, but in a way so natural, that you recognized therein the outflowing of the indwelling spirit. The fountain springing up into everlasting life (John iv. 14) in his soul, welled forth its living water alike in the familiar scenes of his native Scotland, and under the olive trees of Palestine. Prayer and meditation on the word were never forgotten; and a peace the world could not give kept his heart and mind."

What a testimony! Would that it could be truly given of all ministers of the Word of God! We so often forget the truths we preach to others. If ordinary Christians need to watch and pray, how much more do we? If each member of the Church is to "be filled with the Spirit," how much more do we who are the teachers in the Church need to be. If all the faithful are to keep themselves in the love of God, how much more should we? Paul's injunction to his "own son in the faith," Timothy, "Take heed to thyself," comes to us to-day emphasized a thousandfold by the experiences of nineteen centuries of ministerial life. It is through communion with God, through a sincerely devotional habit of heart that God makes known his secret to the soul. As Matthew Henry observes, "Devotion is a thing we ought to be constant in. Other duties are in season, now and then; but we must pray always." Ah, yes, prayer keeps the door open by which the Lord of glory enters into our mind-cottage, and unveils to us His glory, and breathes upon us His power, so that we are properly qualified to be His witnesses.

A HERO IN BABYLON.

Imagine public profession of Christianity to be suddenly made penal—suppose death to be the punishment of attendance at holy communion; I ask you, which of us would be found, like Daniel, shod with the sandals of preparation, ready without a moment's hesitation to make our stand, ready to defy the powers that be rather than prove ourselves ashamed of Christ, and afraid to obey His clearest commands?

Oh, what a sifting such a decree as I have imagined would prove? How many who to-day have no misgivings as to their state before God would discover that they had no root whatever in themselves, and that what they mistook for religion was only a respectable inherited habit of neutral tint, which fitted them comfortably and cost them nothing—to be put on and taken off with their Sunday clothes; in fact little else perhaps than the patronage, at one service per week, if as much as that, of a convenient church or an entertaining preacher? Ah! we are transported to an atmosphere very unlike that of our easy-going Christianity, our lazy patronage of religion, when we study the conduct of these old martyrs to the truth of God! Theirs was no superficial conformity; they were not mere creatures of religious habit; they were not living upon a venture, but upon a deeply felt reality for the sake of which they were ready to bear anything.

And this has been the attitude of God's true servants everywhere and always, and in our hearts we know it well. We know that the hold of truth is not to be measured by profession, but only by the sacrifices we are prepared to make for it. And so the revelation comes down to us, accredited and consecrated from the first by suffering and sacrifice. What was the death which redeemed the world? It was, above all else, a tribute to the eternal worth and dignity of truth; it was a defiance, for the sake of truth, of the powers of this world, and against these, through bloodshed and tribulation, it has had to win its way! It was fought for by men like Peter and John, who cried before the mightiest tribunal: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye;" or like Luther when brought to bay, "Here I stand, I can do naught else. God be my helper!" As their splendid example nerved many a Christian martyr to face without fear the wild beasts in the heathen arena, so there is not a soldier who has read his Bible amid the jeers of the barrack-room; there is not a young man who has dared to resent the utterance of filth and blasphemy in his presence, more holy than he would resent a personal insult; there is not a school-boy who in the evil days which, thank God, are gone, has knelt down amid bullying cowards and said his prayers openly at his bedside instead of smuggling them over in bed in the dark; there is not one of us who has ever torn to shreds the devilish sophistries which avail moral cowards, and singly defied some evil custom, or singly battled for the right—who had not had cause to thank God for the courage and deliverance of Daniel.—*Canon Duckworth.*