

Pastor and People.

TRUST.

Amid earth's changes, Lord,
Its shadows and its fears,
Its broken pledges, shattered plans,
Its sorrows and its tears,
Thy children trust Thy own sure word,
And wait the eternal years.

There is no change in Thee,
Thyself art steadfast truth;
There is no room for grief and care,
No place for woe and ruth;
With Thee is every joy and love,
And blessedness and youth.

O dearest trust in God,
That lights our darkest days,
O sweetest calm that lifts a psalm
Forever to God's praise,
Glad are the pilgrims on the road
When He ordains their ways.

Written for THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

THE VIII. PSALM; A MEDITATION.

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There are two great subjects in the world of thought, God and man. There are sometimes said to be two sides of the same subject, and in a deep sense that is true. In the highest form God reveals Himself as man, and man comes to know himself in the light of God's glory. Philosophy teaches man to know himself. Religion calls upon him to know and serve God. It may be that in the present life we cannot know either ourselves or God perfectly, but that should not hinder us from turning our faces towards the eternal light. Any earnest endeavor after truth will teach us the close connection between the life of God and the experience of man.

Sometimes this question "what is man?" is asked in a sceptical or despondent tone by those who think that the life of man is a contradiction or a failure. There is nothing of that tone in this Psalm. The writer is not printing his question in a magazine or submitting it to a company of critics; he is uttering it at the throne of God. It is not so much a question as a devout exclamation, a thought that man is both small and great. Small in comparison with the infinite God, great because God is good to him. There is in our time much poetry of despair; men whine in elegant language over real or fancied wrongs and cry out madly against God or fate. It is refreshing to turn from this to a song which flows freely from a grateful heart, and the burden of which is "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth!"

This simple little song has exercised a cheering, helpful influence during many centuries. It is impossible to trace clearly through the ages the influence of any strong, noble word, but this has left three distinct marks on New Testament teaching, and these may both prove to us its living power and show us how to handle it in a broad, generous spirit.

To the scribes who were annoyed at the enthusiasm of little children, our Lord said, "Have ye never read, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise." He saw in this Psalm a principle that the scribes had forgotten. They thought they showed their wisdom in cultivating a critical and suspicious spirit towards all new forms of life. But He showed them that there is a deeper wisdom, the wisdom of the child which manifests itself in spontaneous wonder and unrestrained praise.

Paul in that well known discourse on the Resurrection, 1 Cor. xv., shows us in the 27th verse that a sentence from this Psalm is echoing through his mind, "For He hath put all things under His feet." He knows that in a sense this is true, and yet he feels that it is a prophecy. Sin, sorrow and death have all to be put under the feet of Christ, and of redeemed humanity and "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews uses our Psalm, "But one in a certain place testified, saying, 'what is man?'" etc., then he adds significantly, "But now we see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor that He, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man." In this way the writer shows us that he feels the

difference between God's view of man and man's present condition, and also his belief that Jesus Christ is the perfect man who fulfills the vision of the poet.

The Psalm has many lessons for to-day, and like all inspired poetry it has an ever-broadening meaning.

If we are to find a satisfactory solution of human life we must seek it in the spirit of praises to God. The beginning and end of the Psalm is the same, a joyful note of praise. "Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth." When this is the first and the last we are not surprised that the words which come between are words of hopeful gratitude. What is man and what is his life? When you come to that question you cannot conquer it by brute force or worldly cunning. The wicked man cannot answer it, his life is full of contradictions and disappointments. The careless man cannot deal with it until some rude shock awakes him; he has no interest in it. The sceptic cannot solve it; he confesses that he is in a fog and sees no path clearly before him. It is not every godly man who can handle it intelligently, though he may have found rest for himself. But this we know, that the man who is to shed light upon our path must see God above dwelling in righteousness and glory. He must say:

"God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world."

He who wishes to have every thing explained before he can praise God will find that he has begun at the wrong end. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" it is a beginning of things to know that the world is great and God is good.

This man is content to take his place beside the children. God's answer to the proud and scornful is the praise of little children. They have no reason for infidelity, the thought of a father's care is sweet to them. They have not learned the world's false and foolish ways. You would not have the audacity to tell them that the round earth sprang up of itself; that suns and stars made themselves or came into being by chance. You could not answer the child's question, "what is chance?" It is easy to tell a child about the great and good God. God has often shut the mouths of boastful men by the unconscious wisdom of a little child. Our Lord had looked deep into human life when He exclaimed, "Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." God could speak to us in the thunder, but He prefers to teach us through the simplicity of the child which clings to its mother, worships its father and finds in these the symbols of God.

The man who looks out upon life in this spirit is deeply impressed by the generosity of God. A few years ago, when the great discoveries of modern astronomy were startling the world, there were people who came forward to preach to Christians against presumption. They said, "When we consider the heavens what is man? When we think that this little earth is only a speck in the infinite universes, and that the great sun is only one of many such bodies, what is man but a tiny insect crawling in the dust? How absurd to think that God will take any notice of him or listen to his wandering cries and foolish prayers. Let him fret his little day and then go contentedly down to the dust." That seemed to some to be an utterance of wisdom and humility. It was answered by Chalmers and other men of brilliant intellect and childlike heart. It has gone, it does not trouble us now. But how different is this man's thought. When I consider the heavens, the sun filling all the day with his light, the moon, the queen of night, with her full reflected beams, the innumerable hosts of stars sparkling in the infinite azure, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, what claims had he upon Thee that Thou shouldst make him so great; with all his frailty thou hast made him a king, and almost a god? What he says is true now in a larger sense, that is, the enlarged life of the world enables us to see it more clearly. Man has the same weakness; he staggers under his burden of care, he chafes at the stern call of duty, he indulges in trifling gaiety, he passes through tragic hours, he has the same strength in fuller measure, he can cause the earth to yield him food, he can conquer the beasts of the field, he can harness to his chariot the giant forces

of nature. This great saying applies to humanity, the individual passes away and man becomes more and more, but we each share the common life, we can feel shame over its defeat and degradation, we can glory in its marvellous victories.

That which the poet here declares is now recognized as sober scientific fact, that man is the topmost round of nature's ladder, the crown of creation. God has made him a king and put the earth under his feet. He is linked to lower things, but in one sense he is above nature, he can use the forces of nature, he can do wonders through the powers of thought with which he is endowed. That is the fact. The sceptic and the man of faith, the man of science and the poet, stand here on common ground. However he came to this position, he stands proudly in it now. But the prophets go further. They say that this is so, because in a certain sense we are the sons of God. Luke speaks of the man as the son of Adam, which is the son of God. In the same spirit the Psalmist looks up and says, "O Lord, Thou hast trusted man as Thy child; Thou hast dowered him with strong gifts and sent him out into a wide world."

The thought here is not what is man in comparison with the unbounded heavens, what a mean thing he is, but what a wonder that the great God should share His greatness, His sovereignty with man. Man is great because God is generous. It is a sign of a small nature to want to monopolize greatness. A small, narrow-minded king wishes to have only puppets round him that he alone may appear great, but a truly great king desires to encourage strength and goodness in others. God is too great to know any small rivalry or petty jealousy. He has breathed into man His own life and endowed us with some of His peculiar powers. How God is misjudged and slandered by us; we think of His service as it were a thing to belittle us. We talk as if God took pleasure in making little crawling creatures. It is not true; God calls us to share His own life and to stand up as strong, free men in the strength He has given. Some may say, "What is that to me, all this talk about man's greatness and glory as the crown of nature. What have I to do with his kingliness or godliness? I know that the world is full of poor souls who have no inheritance. I know that selfishness causes much cruelty and meanness. I know that I am hungry and wretched; the greatest powers that I possess only make me restless and discontented." That also is true; we have felt the pressure of life's contradictions. It is good to feel that it may bring us on our knees before God. This song only puts before us one side of the truth, but we need to acknowledge that the poet's message is a Christian truth, because we are often charged with slandering and degrading human nature. We see the glory of real manhood as God conceived and created it. We thank God that He did not make us brutes, but He placed us at the head of His works with our faces looking to the sky. But there is another truth, "All we, like sheep, have gone astray, we have turned everyone to our own way." Our shame, our bitterness of soul comes from the fact that we who were made to dwell in the palace of the King are too often found serving among the swine. The prophets of Israel cherished the beautiful thought that if all men were pure and submissive to God's will the earth would be full of peace. The world would lay its treasures at the feet of man, and the beasts would own his sway. This is beautiful poetry, and at the heart of it there is a God-given truth that God created us to hold this high position as His children.

Our life is broken and marred because we wander from God; we seek to be gods in our own way, just as many a boy turns with discontent from a loving father because he is fascinated by a wild delusion of being independent. There is no such thing as independence for anyone but God. In our search for independence we manifest a waywardness of passion and thought which leads only to misery.

What, then, is the story of redemption? It is this, that one man has come to this earth to show us that the way of peace and strength is the way of submission to the Father. The son of God takes this same position, the position which God has assigned to us. He bor-

rows nothing from wealth or pomp, but lives the life of simple manhood. His life is sweet and attractive because He was in full communion with God. The wild beasts in the wilderness did not harm Him, children gladly came to His feet, the sick found healing in His presence, and the sorrowful were blessed by His smile. He stood strong amid the healthful forces of life. It was the sons of men that slew Him, the bigotry and hatred which comes from unbelief wreaked their vengeance upon Him. But God who speaks through the mouths of children had ordained that our salvation, our restoration should come through His humiliation. Of Christ it is true, "thou hast put all things under his feet, and of the man who comes into fellowship with Christ it shall be true, 'thou hast put all things under his feet.'" Sin, sorrow and death, these great enemies that science cannot touch, that laugh at human cunning and mock our boasted civilization, these shall be brought under the feet of every man who comes back like a little child to the feet of Christ, and he shall say, "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth."

COURSES OF SERMONS.

A clergyman was telling us the other day that on the Sunday evenings during the present holiday season he had been trying the experiment of a course of sermons on subjects which seem to be of popular interest at the moment. The result was that his congregation had nearly doubled itself. Doubtless this was largely due to the ability of the preacher, but he himself very much attributed it to the fact of his sermons being in the nature of a *course*, a more or less continuous and connected treatment of certain matters familiar and interesting to ordinary persons. It is probable that there is much truth in this view. We are sometimes told that the time for sermons is a good deal past, and that, now that people can and do read so much for themselves, the attraction of the pulpit is on the wane. We do not in the least believe this; we believe, on the contrary, that it might with much greater reasonableness be urged that the spread of education has increased men's interest in sermons, even if it makes them somewhat more exacting and critical; and a *course* of sermons stimulates and retains this interest, and meets the demand of this growing power of appreciation. Unquestionably it puts a severe tax on the preacher, and there are many excellent clergymen not by nature fitted to attempt such a method of preaching. On the other hand, where a man is fitted, there is a great opening for increased usefulness, if only he will take the necessary pains, and be on his guard to avoid the perhaps inevitable temptation to become merely smart and showy. — *Church Bells*.

THE PLEA OF NO TIME.

Nothing is more absurd than the plea of those men and women who insist that they have no time for the discharge of their higher duties. They have no time, forsooth, to read, to think, to pray; no time to spend in social intercourse with their friends, in quiet meditation with themselves, or in pleasant conversation with their children. With a persistency that knows no abatement, they drudge away in the spirit of the veriest slave, at tasks that wear out their nerves, narrow their minds, and deaden their hearts. And for what purpose? Simply to get a few dollars. In some cases the endless "grind" develops a habit which is as imperious as a natural law.

We are entering no protest against hard and steady work. Indolence is a great sin. The primal law, that we shall eat our bread in the sweat of our brow, has not been repealed. There are tasks for us all—tasks that we cannot shirk or shun, without deliberate unfaithfulness. But unless we voluntarily elect to dwarf our manhood by cutting ourselves off from the best things, we shall be careful to reserve some portions of our time for rational and religious uses. The highest claims are also the first claims. They hold a prior lien on us. Until we have given them undue attention, we have really no time for anything else. It is a pitiful sight when a creature made in the image of God compares the relative value of things, and allows those that are of less importance to usurp the highest place in his mind. — *Christian Advocate*.