

## ABOVE ALL—THE HOLY SPIRIT.

By Rev. T. L. Cuyler, D. D.

There are times when God's people are fenced in, and cannot move a step without God's interposing power. The children of Israel reach the shore of the Red Sea, and cannot advance one rod until He parts the waves before them. The land of Israel is parched with drought and Elijah summons God by prayer to send the indispensable showers. Peter is locked up in a dungeon awaiting death on the morrow, and the praying band in John Mark's house realize that a divine army only can unloose the prison doors.

These cases illustrate the condition in which churches find themselves to-day. The conversions are few; the question that many pastors and people are asking is—What shall we do? For one, I can see no other deliverance except by a descent of the power from on high! Our churches are fenced right up to this fact—we must have the Holy Spirit, or all our machinery is at a standstill. The most powerful sermons cannot move a single sinner one inch towards the Cross without the agency of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament teaches us that the two agents that are to bring sin-smitten souls to Christ are the Christian Church and the Holy Spirit. The Church without the Spirit is as powerless to move itself, or to draw others Christ-ward, as a locomotive is to propel a railway train until a fire is kindled under its boiler. Here is the secret of the failure of a vast amount of elaborate sermonizing, and a vast amount of church-going, and a vast number of prayer-meetings. The Holy Spirit is not in the Sabbath assembly; the propelling and penetrating power of the Spirit is not behind the sermons, and the prayer-meetings are not converged to the vital point of pleading for the power from on high. Long, formal, stereotyped petitions are repeated in the meetings, and people go home well nigh as empty as they came. In a certain church in Philadelphia the pastor and his half-dozen church officers met together every evening for a week, confessed their sins and their weakness, and besought the gift of the Holy Spirit. A fire was kindled in that church—at resulted in the conversion of a large number of souls. That pastor and his staff did not send for any human aid; they went right up to heaven for help. And I do not believe that any Christian or body of Christians, ever undertook a good work for the glory of God and, having sent for the Holy Spirit, were turned empty away. The trouble in too many cases is that Christians are now resisting the Divine Spirit and grieving Him away! How can they expect any blessing?

Of all the promises in the Bible none is so explicit as the promise of the Holy Spirit. This is the gift of gifts. God is more ready to bestow this immeasurably precious gift than an earthly parent to feed a hungry child. But Christians have got to hunger for the Spirit, and be ready to work for the Spirit and with the Spirit or else He will not come. With Him everything; without Him nothing! Unless He descend with His enlightening, warming, melting, purifying, and life-giving power, all preaching, praying and working will be as useless as an attempt to light a lamp in a vacuum, or to heat up an ice-cold room without a fire. A blessing is held out by a loving God to every church in this land which is willing to confess its sins, and to co-operate with the Holy Spirit. Above all things—the Holy Spirit!

Presbyterian Witness: A lazy student, a thoughtless, careless student, is almost a contradiction in terms. Every day makes his folly greater who closes his eyes to this marvellous world around us. When a young man becomes a shepherd of souls his tasks multiply, and unless he is ever on the alert, he will surely become a melancholy failure.

## IT IS THE SAME NOW.

When we read the Scriptures we are again and again filled with surprise and sorrow to see that our Saviour had so few friends among all those that pressed about Him, to near His gracious words and see His divine power exercised in behalf of the suffering and the sorrowful, but had so many enemies. Pitiable indeed does it all seem. In all His life—so ready to do good, so ready to save from the power of sin and the grave and yet had so few to love and reverence Him, earnest and anxious to give life and immortality to all that would accept and, yet so few were willing to receive Him as "the way, the truth and the life." Could any one ever doubt the willingness of Jesus to save? And yet some pretended to do this very thing. Ah! the trouble was not with the blessed Saviour; no, not at all. Jesus was willing to save, but men were unwilling to be saved. Does He not say, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." This was his sad lament 1900 years ago as He stood and looked into the faces of the men and women that thronged Him to both hear and see. It is still the same. Circumstances have changed, but men never change; are the same to-day as they were then, and Jesus still laments their unwillingness to be saved. So earnestly and so powerfully does He set forth in the Scriptures this true condition, by reason of sin, and pleads with all His great loving heart that men should come to Him and live, "believe and live." Yet now, as then, He sorrowfully says, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." Is it not strange, passing strange? Shall a judge offer pardon to the condemned and he reject the gift? Shall a sovereign offer to a rebel guilty of treason against the State, a free pardon for his grave offense, and the rebel refuse? So it seems Jesus Christ says, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." Quaint old Matthew Henry says the only reason why men die is they will not come to Christ for life. Not because they can not, but because they will not. This puts the matter in an alarming light. "He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him." Man alone is the unwilling party.—Presbyterian Standard.

## TIME AND PLACE OF PRAYER.

The religion of Jesus Christ is a religion of freedom; and the New Testament is true to itself in making no prescriptions as to the time and place of prayer. It does not even prescribe family worship any more than it enjoins the abolition of slavery. But it is supremely practical, just because it prescribes so little. It creates a spirit, and the spirit must express itself: how and when and where will depend upon circumstances. But where the circumstances are normal and regular, the expression is likely also to be regular. Regularity, however, so easily degenerates into routine that, by the very regularity, the real object of prayer may be defeated, and its seriousness forgotten. In every possible way, therefore, it is necessary for those who lead the devotions of others, whether in church or home, to preserve the vitality of prayer, without which it is of no more value than the sounding of brass or the tinkling of cymbals.—John Edgar McFadyen, M.A., in "The Prayers of the Bible."

Paul's thorn was not pleasant to him. He prayed to be rid of it. But when he found it had come to stay, he made friends with it swiftly. It was no longer how to dismiss, but how to entertain. He stopped groaning, and began glorying. It was clear to him that it was God's will, and that meant new opportunity, new victory, new likeness to Christ. What God means is always too good to be lost, and is worth all it costs to learn. Let us learn as swiftly as we may. Time is short.—Maltbie D. Babcock, D.D.

## AN EASY LIFE VERSUS A HARD ONE.\*

At a time in his life when he felt deeply the difficulties and unfavorableness of external conditions, Mr. Gladstone wrote to a friend that he was sure nevertheless that such periods were good for men's characters, that it was the being educated in the midst of conflicts and contrary circumstances that gives strength to a man, and he cites a saying to Thucydides to the effect that men are very much alike, but that he turns out best who has been educated in the sharpest school. A hard discipline due to a hard lot is no hardship to the man who triumphs over it.

The soft and easy life is a positive disadvantage. "My son" said a wealthy man, "has a disadvantage from which I was free. He is handicapped with a rich father." When men have things provided for them they lack what other men who do not have things provided for them possess. They lack a right sense of values. They cannot know the worth of things. All things mean just so much life blood,—every ton of coal, every book, every dollar. The man who has not had to toil, to produce, to create or overcome, cannot know what things mean, how much man-blood or man-soul they signify. He who has taken lessons in the school of the hard life knows.

The easy life can never hold the joy to be found in the hard life—the fun of conquering obstacles and of doing the impossible, and of creating something out of nothing. The relish of big tasks courageously and successfully done surpasses any pleasures of soft idleness. "When I first came into the country," said a Prince Edward Island Irishman, who has a great farm, which he has extorted from the forest. "I earned my first money clearing five acres of timber land. I cut down trees, and dug up the stumps, and got the land ready, and I was paid forty dollars for it. It was a powerful tough job, but those were happy days." The toughness of the job the matching of the man against nature, and the man's triumph—these were what made the joy.

The hard life furnishes the best friendships, "A brother is born for adversity, and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Ease and comfort do often prove too much for some alleged "friendships" but they are a poor school in which to try out a true love. When men and women, or men or women, have faced together the great trials, and fought together the great battles, when they have sat together beside their dead they know what mutual confidence and understanding are. It is worth while trying the hard life for the sake of its friendships.

It is among the hard things that character is made. Where everything is soft, no lasting impressions are possible. If impressions are made, they are like words written on water, but character is the image struck on metal or carved in rock and that life is the best where the Sculptor with familiar and unimpeded hand effects his work of creation by destruction, of joy by pain, as in Michelangelo's sonnet:

"As when, O Lady mine, with chiselled touch

The stone unheven and cold,  
Becomes the living mould."

We may flee all that is evil, but nothing that is hard.

The harder our life the greater the evidences of God's confidence in our possibilities.

Herald and Presbyter: We can never decide who is the most useful member of a church until we can settle the question as to whether the eye, the ear, the hand or the foot is the most useful member of the body.

\*Y.P. Meeting, Topic, February 17, 1907. An Easy Life Versus a Hard One (2 Tim. 2:1-13).