

which enriched the genius of Shakespeare, and inspired the song of Milton, and nerved the arm of Cromwell, and kindled the imagination of Bunyan, and breathed its apostolic ardours into the hearts of Wesley and Whitfield, that fire, that spirit, if for a time the white ashes of reaction fall thick upon it, will yet burst again out of its embers; and when all seems driest and deadest in the valley of the vision, the voice of God shall be heard, which says, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live." But you must every one of you make your choice. England must deliberately make her choice between two forms of religion: the sacerdotalism of Rome, and the individuality and freedom of the Reformation. Those who dislike the agony of independent thought; those who would go with the stream, those who would drift whithersoever their religious leaders take them; those who think assurance can be derived from outward observance, who look upon human reason as to be smitten back as with a bar of iron—those men, and those still more numerous women who yearn for a materialistic and an emotional religion which appeals to the senses and sensibilities, rather than to the intellect and the conscience; those who care to surrender into priestly guardianship the independent responsibility and individual accountability before God, which is the indefeasible privilege of humanity, let them cling, as the backsliding Galatians, to priests and traditions, and multiplied observances; to Levites and to legalism, to bodily exercise, to days and weeks and months and years—to all that constitutes the essence alike of the Pagan, the Jewish and the Roman priestly system! But ye who prefer to a slothful externalism, the voice of God on Sinai, and the eager air of the free wilderness, who laugh to scorn the impotent anathemas and petty interferences and tyrannous dictations of a usurped power—ye who know that no priesthood has, or ever had, an exclusive knowledge of theology or God's truth, or a special insight into Scripture, or any shadow of claim to speak in the tones of infallibility—ye who are assured of the forgiveness of sins, not through any priest's absolution, but through the answer of a good conscience before God, unconsummated by any ceremony, and unaided by any form of words—ye who look to no priest, but who rely solely on His merits, embraced by faith in works of love—ye, whether ye be men or women, whether ye be young or old—ye who have known God or, rather, are known of Him, how turn ye to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

### NOTHING BUT LEAVES.

A REVERIE FOR THE SEASON.

Jesus was on His way from Bethany to Jerusalem,—“hungry.” He espied a fig-tree afar off, well laden with leaves. As that tree puts forth its fruit in *advance* of its foliage, when a man should discover leaves on it he would, of course, expect to find figs. The successor having already appeared, he would look for the forerunner.

Jesus hastens to the tree which had telegraphed to Him already that it was in bearing condition; and lo! “He found *nothing but leaves.*” Forthwith He dooms it to perpetual barrenness. “No man eat fruit of thee hereafter forever.” The deceitful tree, thus cursed of its Owner, withered down to its very roots.

Here is a parable for the close of the year. It is full of tender and touching solemnity to thousands of our readers. This parable from history teaches us the worthlessness of religious promises that are never fulfilled, and the guilt of appearing to be fruit-bearers when the eye of God sees “nothing but leaves.”

There is no sin in promises. Cherry-trees must issue their white and fragrant “promissory notes” in May, or there would be no payment in delicious fruit at the end of the allotted sixty days. God makes precious promises to us; and a converted heart is only in the line of duty when it makes a solemn

promise, or covenant, to the Church and its Head, Christ Jesus. There is no sin in a church-covenant honestly made. The sin is in breaking it.

How full of leaves was the plausible fig-tree on the road to Bethany! How profuse of promises is many a young professor, as he stands up laden with the foilage on which the dew-drops of hope are glistening! How much his pastor expects from him! He makes no reserve when he covenants to “consecrate himself, all that he is and all that he has, to the service of his Redeemer.” As many a reader sees this solemn sentence, it sends a pang to their hearts. That was *their* promise. They once put forth just such “leaves” before their Master's eye, and before the eyes of men, and led them to expect an abundance of fruit. For a time the glossy leaves of profession made a fair show. But when the novelty of a new position had worn off, and that time of reaction came which always follows a strong mental excitement, then the yoke began to gall the conscience, and every religious duty became an irksome drudgery. The Cross lost its charm; prayer lost its power; the Word of God lost its attraction; the very name of Jesus lost its hold; and church-membership became a hateful mask, which its owner was ashamed to wear, and yet afraid to fling away. Before the world, the fig-tree still bore leaves; but beneath them was utter barrenness.

My backsliding friend, this tells the sad story of your past year's life. As you look back over the barren year now closing, you find *nothing but leaves.* Your name is still on a church-record, but this fruitless, wasted year had no “record on high.” Out of all the three hundred and sixty days that God has given you, not one has been passed with Christ, not one is marked with a “white stone” of fidelity. Instead of a sheaf, you have not gathered a single spear. Instead of leading others to Christ, you have not even followed Him yourself. Instead of growing in grace, you have lost even the self-respect which a false life always forfeits. The past is past. Fold up the pages of this dead, barren, wasted year, and write on it the bitter inscription, “Nothing but leaves.”

Will you bear with a few plain truths even though they have a sharp edge? You need them, and they are spoken in love. The simple fact is that you are “backsliders in heart.” The best evidence of this assertion is that you do not feel as you once felt, you do not do what you once did, you do not enjoy what you once enjoyed, you do not pray as you once prayed, and you do not live as you did in the days of your “first love.” You are off the track, and are *on* a track that leads away from heaven. You are more intent on making money, or in pleasure-hunting, or in pushing up into social promotions, than you are in serving God, or in trying to save sinners from hell. You would blush if you attempted to ask an impenitent sinner to become *what you profess to be?* Your worldly self-seekings have only been a climb-up to that dizzy “mast-head” from which you may be flung off the farther into the yawning sea. If you confess your sins to God, you still cling to them. And if you dealt as faithfully with your fellow-men as you deal with your Lord, your note or word would not be taken by a solitary person for a moment! While you live thus, you can have no peace of conscience. While you live thus, neither the Church nor the world fully trusts you; for you once left the world to join the Church, and then slipped away from the very fellowship which you still profess to hold. While you live so, you are nullifying your pastor's labours, and voting deliberately *against* a revival of religion in your church. Not only are you yielding “nothing but leaves,” but they are brown, withered, worthless leaves, such as the wintry winds are now whirling through the forests.

“Nothing but leaves: the Spirit grieves  
Over a wasted life;  
Sin committed while conscience slept,  
Promises made but never kept,  
Idle words for earnest deeds,—  
Nothing but leaves!

And shall we meet the Master so,  
Bearing our withered leaves?  
The Saviour looks for perfect fruit:  
We stand before Him ashamed and mute,  
Waiting that word He breathes,—  
*Nothing but leaves!*

Such are the sad thoughts and sorrowful self-reproaches that are troubling the spirits of many professed Christians as they review the year now closing. They admit that they have backslidden from their “first love,” and have borne no fruit to their Master's glory. But the best repentance for sin is to forsake it; and the only amends that can be made for neglected duties is to resume them, and perform them at once. Do not stop, then, my brother, with sighing and sorrowing over the lost year that is just going with its accounts to God. Lay hold of the incoming year by the forelock, and begin it with new consecration of yourself to Jesus. Go back to that deserted place of prayer. Put on the armour afresh,—humbled, yet hopeful. Seek such a reconversion as Peter had when he came out of Pilate's garden, weeping but forgiven. Make for yourself “a happy new year” by commencing a new life! “*That battle is lost,*” said one of his marshals to Napoleon: “but there is time enough before sundown to *fight another and win it.*” The opening year calls us to new resolutions, new hopes, and new consecrations. It has glorious revivals in store for us, if we will but resolve, with God's help, to cover with golden fruit the boughs that have been bearing *nothing but leaves!*—Cuyler.

### Missionary.

UGANDA.

(Continued)

We now get an account of the first converts baptized in March, 1882. This will be read with deep interest:—

March 12th.—Both Mr. O'Flaherty and myself terribly done up by the week's fatigue. Next Saturday is the anniversary of Mr. O'Flaherty's arrival here, when (D.V.) he will baptize several young men whose hearts we believe have received God's truth, and who we pray He will make to be numbered with His saints in glory everlasting.

All forenoon busy teaching, with the house full. I am much gratified at receiving from home this mail a copy of the Revised Version of the New Testament. It has a most peculiar interest for me. When Bernard Tauchnitz published in Leipzig his 1000th vol. British Authors, viz., the New Testament, with notes on the text by Tischendorf, my father put the book into my hands. I was attracted by the diverse readings and in my curiosity to catch preachers in mistranslated texts, I made myself acquainted with the whole. Sometime after that, I got Alford's edition. From criticism and curiosity, God led me to see the beauty of His own Word, and applied it to my heart. I would never be without my “Alford” ever since, and my first copy fell to pieces in my hands through constant perusal. Here I got another from Mr. Litchfield, and that has served me until now, when the Revised Version has reached my hands, and I hope to have much delight in examining it in every verse and line. This will be further of much service to me in translating into Rugunda.

18th.—The week is over, and I feel glad, not only because it is so, but also for the events transpired. Several days' hard work I had in cleaning out the house, and re-arranging the rooms, so as to receive our guests to-day; for not only would our house be full at dinner, but we expected some of the Frenchman also, while a suitable place had to be prepared for a sort of chapel in which the candidates should be baptized.

Five lads were to-day enrolled in the visible Church of Christ through baptism, by Mr. O'Flaherty:—

1. *Sembara Kumombo* (literally, come near the fire) who received the Christian name of *Mackay*. He is a slave of Munakulya.