

GENERAL READING

OLD THOUGHTS ON AN OLD THEME.

A reader of the Christian Union, the pastor of a small country church, desires to know how to make good prayer-meetings. His problem and his complaint are both old; and our counsel must be as old as the question he asks.

The first condition of a good prayer-meeting is to have something to say, and then to say it. The underlying cause of poor prayer-meetings is that the pastor has nothing in his head and the people have nothing in their hearts.

The next thing is to get rid of formality. Pews and benches are murderers of prayer-meetings. Meet in a parlor if you can. How often do you see a dull prayer-meeting break up, and then after the meeting is all over, the people gather about the stove in one corner and spend half an hour over a subject of real live interest, and the best part of the prayer-meeting is after the prayer-meeting is dismissed.

In the third place, how can we expect to make good prayer-meetings when we cut off the help of the best religious element in the church, that of the women? That is as if you were to turn out the clarionets and flutes and instruments of melody from a band, and leave nothing but bassoons and bass violi to make music with.

And it is not impossible to get women to take a part in the meeting if they are wanted. But they are sensitive and shrinking, and they will not take part if they are not wanted. In morning prayer-meetings in times of revival we had no difficulty in getting women to take part.

We get letters from women continually that are full of a devoutly inquisitive spirit in regard to the most vital points in religious life; and women naturally search out those things, and feel the fine lines a great deal more than men do.

Another condition is promptness and vigor of movement. The minister must, at every hazard, keep the meeting going. It never ought to last more than three quarters of an hour, and ought to begin at the stroke of the clock, and end with equal promptness.

Do not make a strong prayer-meeting. Do you say, "I have no adaptation to any such work as that?" Well then, you have no adaptation to carry on a prayer-meeting. If a man can only drive a half-blind horse that is so lame that he cannot run away, he would better not drive any kind of horse.

One other thing: you can never make a good prayer-meeting by dragging or coaxing people to come out to a Barmecide feast. The hungry man may take the joke for a single night but he will not keep it up for a year.

"SWING OF CONQUEST."

From the rocks of Gibraltar comes another ringing sentence destined to live as long as the Anglo-Saxon race, or the English language. In reviewing the English soldiers at Gibraltar, Gen. Grant gave his opinion of the soldiers of Europe. He said he had seen most of the soldiers of the continent.

This is history condensed. There is also in it a prophecy. This swing of conquest imposes its duties as well as brings its glory. Swinging through the centuries, and over the continents, it must bear up and forward the religion of the Bible and the freedom of Protestantism.

THE LIGHT ON THE WAVES.

The following is the eloquent conclusion of Dean Stanley's sermon preached in New York and printed in the Tribune: "May I close these remarks by an illustration which I once heard from the lips of a rough seafaring man—one of few survivors of a great shipwreck which took place some ten years ago in the Bay of Biscay?"

"Mark that crest of phosphorescent light. On the top of those breaking billows is the light of Divine grace, the compensating force of Providence. In the darkness of this mortal life, and on the wave of this troublesome world our perplexities and dangers and griefs bring with them—or may bring with them their own remedy.

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back in youth from all intemperate gladness—that same good instinct forbids unprofitable sadness. We must persevere until the morning breaks. That speck on the distant horizon may be a vessel by which we will shape our course.

THE BRAVERY OF BRITISH SEAMEN.

Glorious proof of the gallantry and discipline of British seamen is furnished, says a writer in the Daily Telegraph, by the narratives which have reached us from her Majesty's ship "Thunderer."

We know at length how that huge ironclad was cleared for action at a signal from the admiral; how the water-tight compartments into which the vessel is divided were closed, the men at their stations, and the guns loaded. We learn how, following one broadside fired at an imaginary enemy, there came "a strong report, with a sound 'altogether different from that which a broadside makes,' and after what fashion the ship's company became aware that something was wrong.

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THE CASUISTRY OF THE CONFESSORIAL.

The mistress and the Irish cook are in colloquy. "Indade, missus, and what for should I stalle from ye? I must go and tell it all to the priest. I kneel down to confess me sins; and he asks me so many questions; there's nothing in me that he doesn't find out. I daren't tell him a lie. I must tell him just what I took from ye and all about it; the tay, the sugar, the coffee, and all unbeknownst to ye.

How a successful leader leads his class. I know a class-leader who has had for three years a class of about fifty members, ranging from ten years old to eighty. It includes various grades of society and intelligence. The average attendance is about thirty members weekly. The following are his rules, which he carries out systematically:—

as he tells me, wid his eyes looking at me so; or I go home wid a lie to the priest; and then what's the good of confessing, and what becomes of me sowl? So what's the good to me, if I stales your sugar?"

The above was a veritable occurrence in the city of Boston, not long ago. It carries internal evidence of truth, so far as this—that an Irish servant would not be likely to originate the adroit casuistry of giving to the poor the proceeds of her pilfering.

QUICKFOOT.

An Indian who had been out hunting had killed a deer, from which he cut off a joint of venison, and hung it up as high as he could in his wigwam. He then went off into the forest to look at his traps. He was not long gone; but when he came back, to his surprise and anger, he found that his fine joint had disappeared and no trace of the thief was to be found.

He had not gone far before he met a friendly white man, a trapper, who was fixing him going along with his eyes fixed upon the ground, asked him what trail he was pursuing.

"I seek," said Quickfoot. "A little old white man, with a small gun, who has got with him a little dog with a stumpy, bushy tail. He is a robber, for he has entered my wigwam and stolen my venison. I will kill both him and his dog."

"My brother, I saw not far from here just such a man. But how dost thou know him so well? For you have not yet seen him."

"I am in haste, but if thou wilt know, listen: 'I found a pile of stones under the place where my venison was hanging. Had the robber not been short he would not have required these to stand on. He was old, for his foot steps were close together. He was white, for his toes turned in, which an Indian's never do. If the gun had been long, it would not have left a mark on the bark of the tree, as it did when it leaned against it. So, thou seest it was easy, having eyes, to detect the thief."

"But how did you know the cur, even to his tail?"

"Of what use would the eyes of Quick-foot be, if they had not shown him the dog's feet were close together, as he walked on the sand; and that the short bushy tail measured itself as he sat wagging it, while his master was helping himself to my dinner? But farewell, I must hurry or I shall not get back my venison from that white thief."

With these words Quickfoot hurried away, and was lost amid the deep foliage of a Western forest.

FAMILY READING. HOW A SUCCESSFUL LEADER LEADS HIS CLASS.

I know a class-leader who has had for three years a class of about fifty members, ranging from ten years old to eighty. It includes various grades of society and intelligence. The average attendance is about thirty members weekly. The following are his rules, which he carries out systematically:—

1. He visits at their homes all the members of his class; knows them and their families; never fails to make the children of the family glad to see him. 2. He is careful to speak to his members on the street; chats sociably with them, and tries to leave a good religious impression on their minds. He never fails to let the "stay-aways" know they are missed. He opens class on the minute; after the prayer and second hymn, he reads a few verses with especial reference to some topic which he has previously selected for the evening, and all the members, when called, are expected to speak upon the topic, though they are at liberty to add to it anything else they may desire to talk about.

bright, active and cheerful business man, and endeavours to make his classroom a cheerful, social gathering, without in the least degree lowering the tone of its religious character. He calls his members more according to their Christian experience than by position in the class, so as to give variety, trying to alternate the disheartened with the bright, the young with the old. None are required to speak, and it is understood in the class—freedom in this as in other things. Reproof he leaves for private application. This is no fancy sketch, but a truthful description of every-day life.

He believes the topical plan to be a good one, as it breaks up uniformity in giving experience from week to week. By viewing a topic from all sides it impresses it very much on the memory. All his members like it. If it be communion week, he reads about it, impresses its importance upon the members, and then asks of each one, "Do you partake of it? If so, why do you? If not, why don't you?" If it be love-feast week, similar questions are asked.

Another night he read the incident of the ten lepers, and dwelt upon their unquestioning obedience, and drew the lesson for the class, in giving their experience, of the advantages of obedience to the commands of God and the church, and the results of disobedience, with such particular incidents as they deemed best.

And thus, week after week, varying the programme, frequently drawing a lesson from the Sabbath school lesson. The class look forward with desire for class night, expect to enjoy themselves and to be profited, and are not disappointed.

PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD IMMEDIATELY.

Roberts Annan, the Christian hero, put up an iron plate near his house in Dundee, with the words boldly painted on it, "Prepare to meet thy God." I frequently pass the place, and my attention was called to it by a friend as being much effaced. I went to the agent for the property on which it was fixed, and got permission from him to renew the plate and the inscription. I then employed a painter to have it done, but he was a long time in getting it finished. I went to his shop several times and spoke about it; but one day, as it was still unfinished, I requested him to enter it in his books to be done immediately. I looked over his shoulder afterward, and saw the words written, "Prepare to meet thy God—immediately." I called his attention to it, and said, "That is just what we have to do, for we know not the moment we must pass away into eternity. What awfully solemn examples we have had of tales of death coming to crowds of our fellow-creatures in a moment!" Then, reader, "be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh." (Matt. xxiv. 44.) And I desire that Christian friends would pray that this repainted board might be greatly blessed to souls by the Holy Spirit of God; and, also, that many readers of this sketch might seriously now obey the friendly warning: "Prepare to meet thy God—immediately."

COMPOUSE THE TEST OF STRENGTH.

(Observer.) We mistake strong feelings for strong character. A man who bears all before him—before whose frown domestics tremble, and whose bursts of fury make the children of the house quake because he has his will obeyed, and his own way in all things, we call him a strong man. The truth is, that is the weak man; it is his passions that are strong; he, mastered by them, is weak. You must measure the strength of a man by the power of the feelings he subdues, not by the power of those which subdue him. And hence, composure is very often the highest result of strength. Did we never see a man receive a flagrant insult, and only grow a little pale, and then reply quietly? That was a man spiritually strong. (O. P. did we never see a man in anguish stand as if carved out of solid rock, mastering himself? or one bearing a hopeless daily trial remain silent, and never tell the world what it was that cankered his home-peace? That is strength. He who, with strong passions, remains chaste—he who, keenly sensitive, with mainly power of indignation in him, can be provoked, yet can restrain himself and forgive—these are strong men, spiritual heroes.

CANON GAR... A man grows into his most familiar facts of and holds good in every ear, the poet, what is their shape and form, before the ideal exists in imagination? The man's own work never if not notorious that skill the more critical please, and sees def which, perhaps, year ed with complac When this sensiti Has he lost his ski his sense of beauty or harmony? Not has simply grown, a his conceptions hav one compare his wo his work as a child, at the difference, same with the con the intellect. The all our nature. T quired a sense of s He has lost nothing —has gained a ne ness. The facts c main what they w have soared into a he has breathed a

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