

## The Christian.

ST. JOHN, N. B., - DECEMBER, 1899.

## GOD'S SILENCES TO US.

This essay on "God's Silence to Us" clipped from *Gospel News*, is so good and so timely, we give it to our readers instead of the usual editorial:

One of the most remarkable incidents in the Gospel is that in which to a poor woman's cries for help Jesus answered not a word. He kept his face turned away, and seemed to treat the supplicant with cold indifference. Yet he was not indifferent. In his heart was warm compassion for her, and in the end he gave her far more than she had asked.

There are times when God seems to be silent to us. To our earnest supplications he answers not a word. We are told to ask and we shall receive, to seek and we shall find, to knock and it shall be opened unto us. Yet there come times when though we ask imploringly, we seem not to receive; when though we seek with intense earnestness, we seem not to find; when though we knock until our hands are bruised and bleeding there seems to be no opening of the door. Sometimes the heavens appear to be brass above us as we cry. "Is there anywhere an ear to hear, or a heart to feel sympathy with us in our need?"

Nothing else is so awful as the silence of God. It is a pathetic prayer in which a psalm writer pleads, "Be not silent to me; lest I become like them that go down into the pit." Anything from God is better than that he be silent to us. It would be a sad, dreary, lonely world if the atheist's creed were true, that there is no God, that there is no ear to hear prayer, that no voice of answering love or comfort or help ever comes out of the Heavens to us.

Do prayers ever remain really unanswered? There are prayers which are answered, although we do not know it, thinking them still unanswered. The answer is not recognized when it comes, the blessing comes and is not perceived.

This is true especially of many spiritual favors which we seek. We ask for holiness, yet it does not seem to us that we are growing in holiness. But, perhaps, all the while our spirit is imperceptibly, unconsciously, imbibing more and more of the mind of Christ, and we are being changed into His image. We expect the answer in the marked way—in a manifestation which we cannot mistake, while it comes silently as the dew comes upon the drooping flowers and the withering leaves. But like the flowers and the leaves our soul is refreshed and our life is renewed.

We put our cares into God's hands, with a prayer that He free us from the load. But the cares do not seem to become any less. We think there has been no answer to our prayer. But all the while an unseen hand has been shaping, adjusting, disentangling

the complex affairs of our life, and preparing a blessing for us out of them all. We are not conscious of it, but our prayer has been receiving continual answer. Like the tapestry weavers, we have not seen the working out of the patterns as we have wrought, and yet on the other side, where God's eye sees, it has been coming out in beauty. Some day we shall know that many prayers we now think unanswered have really been graciously answered.

We find ourselves in the midst of circumstances which appear adverse. We seem about to be crushed by sorrows, by disappointments, by trials, by opposition. We pray to be saved from these distressful conditions. But no answer seems to come. The shadow deepens, the blow falls. We sit in darkness, and say that God did not answer our prayer. We are unaware of the blessing that really came to us in the pain or the loss. The cup was not taken away, but we were secretly strengthened, so that we were able to drink it. Then, in the experience of suffering, our life was purified and enriched, and we learned new lessons.

We are very ignorant, and we know not how to pray as we ought. The thing we ask for is not just what we need, although we think it is. Then the thing we really need comes to us in the place of what we thought we needed. The prayer seems to be unanswered, while in fact it is answered in a far better way than if what we sought had come instead. We think it is more of God's gifts we need, and these do not come; but God Himself comes into our life anew, revealing and imparting to us more of His love and grace. The giver is better than His best gifts.

But there are prayers which are not answered. For example, we ask God to lift away our burden. To do this, however, would be to rob us of blessings which can come to us only through the bearing of the burden. There are mistaken notions current among good people about the way God promises to help us. Some think that when ever they have a little trouble, a bit of hard path to walk over, a load to carry, a sorrow to meet, a trial of any kind, all they have to do is to call upon God and He will take away that which is hard, or prevent that which impends, freeing them altogether from the trial. But this is not the usual manner of God's love. His purpose concerning us is not to make things easy for us, but rather to make something of us. So when we ask Him to save us from our care, to take the struggle out of our life, to make the path mossy for our feet, to lift off the heavy load, He simply does not do it. It would be most unkind and unloving in Him to do so. Therefore, prayers of this kind go unanswered. We must carry the burden ourselves. God wants us to learn life's lessons, and to do this we must be left to work out the problems for ourselves.

There are rich blessings that we can get only through sorrow. It would be a short-

sighted love, therefore, that would heed our cries for deliverance, and spare us from sorrow because we desired it, thus depriving us of wonderful blessings which God has sent to us in the sorrow, and which can come to us in no other way.

The child may indolently shrink from the study, the regular hours, the routine, the drudgery and discipline of the school, and beg the parent to let him stay at home and have an easy time. But what would you think of the father who should weakly grant the child's request, releasing him from the tasks that irks him so? And is God less wisely kind than our human fathers? He will not answer prayers which ask that we may be freed from duty, from work, since it is by these very things alone we can grow. The only true answer to such prayers is the withholding of what we ask.

There are also selfish prayers which go unanswered. Human lives are tied up together. It is not enough that any of us shall think only of himself and his own things. Thoughts of others must qualify all our requests for ourselves. Something which might be good for us, if we were the only person, it may not be wise to grant because it might not be for the comfort and good of others. It is possible to overlook this in our prayers, and to press our interests and desires to the harming of our neighbor, God's eye takes in all His children, and he plans for the truest and best good of each one of them. Our selfish prayers, which would work to the injury of others. He will not answer. This limitation applies specially to prayers for earthly things.

There is yet another class of prayers which appear to be unanswered, but whose answer is only delayed for wise reasons. Perhaps we are not able at the time to receive the things we ask for. A child in one of the lower grades in the school may go to a teacher of higher studies and asked to be taught this or that branch. The teacher may be willing to impart to the pupil this knowledge of higher studies, but the pupil cannot receive it until he has gone through certain other studies to prepare himself for it. The higher music cannot be taught until the rudiments have been mastered. There are qualities for which we may pray, but which can be received only after certain discipline. A ripened character cannot be attained by a young Christian merely in answer to prayer—it can be reached only through long experience.—*J. R. Miller, D.D. in Gospel News.*

One of the commercial papers of Cincinnati says of our Jubilee Convention, in speaking of the communion service: "From some comes the word that the religion of the lowly Nazarene is waning, but if they could have seen that mighty host that gathered on Elm street, filled every inch of space in Music Hall, crowded the Odeon and overflowed the Central church, and then packed the Richmond street church, they would have been compelled to admit that the old faith is still vital with life."