

The Pastor and People.

The Golden Key.

Prayer is the key to unlock the day, and the bolt to shut in the night.

Prayer is the key For the bending knee. To open the morn's first hours, See the incense rise To the starry skies, Like perfume from the flowers.

Not a soul so sad, Nor a heart so glad, Crossing the portals of night, But the day-break song, Will the joy prolong, And ban some darkness to light.

Take the Golden Key In your hand, and see As the light this drifts away, How its blessed hold, Is a crown of gold, Through the weary hours of day.

When the shadows fall, And the vesper call, Is sobbing its low refrain, 'Tis a garland sweet, For the toil-wearied feet, 'nd an antidote for pain.

Soon the year's dark door, Shall be shut no more; Life's tears shall be wiped away, As the pearl gates swing, And the gold harp ring, And the sun unshades for aye.

-New York Observer.

Overcome Evil with Good.

From a recent sermon by Canon Liddon, of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, we make the following extracts:—

"Overcome evil with good." This was the motto of the early Christians—this the law by obedience to which the world is to be subdued to Christ. Our forefathers knew that if they had tried to conquer evil with evil, to beat the enemy with his own weapons, they must have failed altogether. The old heathen society was much too clever and much too strong to be 'discomfited by any rival in its own line of action. It had intellect, wealth, position, and the possession of untold social and political power at its disposal. It had its sophists and philosophers in the world of thought; its armies, its police, its statesmen in the world of public life. Against those the Church of Christ had nothing to produce—nothing, at least, of the same kind, and yet it conquered. It conquered through the simple might of goodness—goodness inspired and sustained by Christ. "The weapons of our warfare," remarks the apostle, "are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." The passive virtues of the Christian martyrs were stronger than the active energies of their heathen persecutors—stronger, that is, in the long run. For those martyrs had before their eyes the ideal and image of a meekly suffering One; one, though he was reviled, reviled not again, who, when he was suffered, threatened not; and the instrument of whose shame had already in their eyes become the symbol of His glory.

To conquer by suffering was a new thing in the world's history, but to conquer by the glory of God was to overcome evil by the power of goodness. It was to awe souls deeply conscious of their own inward restlessness and disorder by the spectacle of other souls, moving with a tranquil majesty, the secret of which they knew not, around the true centre of their being, the everlasting God. The apostles who understood this were sure of the event—sure of it from the very first, and in the long run of history they were not disappointed.

"Overcome evil with good." Oh what a motto is this for a young man who has been religiously brought up somewhere in the country, and who, on coming to London to begin the business of life, enters one of those vast establishments which are to be found not a hundred yards from this cathedral. He finds himself necessarily—it is an inevitable condition of our society; it cannot be set down to any individual or class of individuals now—he fits himself in an atmosphere of strangely intermingled elements, but it is upon the whole very unlike that which he left at home. He is invited, as the phrase runs, to see life; he is rated gently or coarsely on the score of his country prejudices. He is told that those who really know what is to be said about these things think very cheaply indeed about the church and the Bible, and laugh at the notion that prayer has any sort of power with God. And at first he shrinks back at hearing these things with an instinctive distress. But in time his ear becomes accustomed to them; and then he becomes more or less intimate with a particular section of his associates, and he is pressed more and more earnestly to be, as they term it, a man, and to break with the prejudices of his boyhood—to do as he likes, that is, to sin with a high hand; to say what he likes, that is, to probably to blaspheme the person and work of his Redeemer. Ah, it is hard to resist, for he has been going down the hill for some time past the course of his descent has already given him an onward impetus; it is a struggle for life. But there is one ready to hear him, ready to aid him, if he will only seek for aid, in the heavy task of overcoming the evil within himself first, and then then the evil in society around him "with good." Simple decisions—perfectly courteous, but unswervingly determined, will carry the day. Ev' may talk loudly, it may bluster, but at heart it is always a coward, and it skulks away at the show of a strong resistance. It may be hard work—that is, at first—but in the end purity, straightforwardness, charity and love will win the battle. Opposition will die gradually into silence, silence into respect, and respect into sympathy, if not into imitation. "Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey." "At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep—"at thy rebuke," in the mouth of the weakest of thy servants.

Overcome evil with evil." What a prospect this is to be taken to heart by any one of us who live with a person of irritable tem-

per—a husband, a wife, a parent. Hours, days, weeks, months, years pass by, and there is no change in them, but on continuous friction—nothing but a persevering bickering which fixes on any and every circumstance and keeps up a sense of unintermitted, almost regulated, soreness. This is not uncommon. Many Christians who keep great passions under restraint seem to compensate themselves by indulging in all kinds of faults of temper; and thus they become a very great trial indeed to those who live with them. These last may exclaim with the Psalmist, "Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesek, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar. My soul hath long dwelt with them that are enemies unto peace. I labor for peace; but when I speak to them thereof, they make them ready for battle."

Ah, there is something better than that exclamation. It is overcome these minor forms of domestic evil with good. To conquer this irritating irritability by an un-falling Christlike sweetness. Difficult, this, no doubt, brethren, for such as you or I—impossible to nature, but possible enough, thank God, through His wonderworking grace.

These are the prosaic realities, as we term them—these are the trivial incidents of our ordinary life; and we seem to be a long way, now, from those high thoughts amid which we were moving just now—about the nature of evil, and the mystery of its existence, and the tragic greatness of its place in history, and God's reason for permitting and his methods of dealing with it, but in truth the same subject is still before us, only in its common and everyday form. It is in the light of these great considerations that we perceive how little the very humblest life differs from that which we deem the highest. For each has proceeded from one Creator's hand; each may be washed in the same cleansing blood; each is offered the same heavenly food; each has before it the certainty of death, judgment, and eternity; and meanwhile each is the scene of that mighty contest between good and evil, between the absolute, self-existent good, and the evil which was generated in free, but perverse, created wills—the which existed when man as yet was not, but when already there was war in heaven, and Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. That great struggle goes on now. The air resounds with its battle-cries; the soil is strewn with its slain. And if we ask to see the conflict, we have but to look, each of us, steadily within ourselves, and each side is represented. We desire to do good after the inward man, but to see, forsooth, another law within our members, warring against the law of our minds, and bringing us into captivity, too often, to the law of sin which is in our members.

Compared with this great spiritual conflict the external affairs of life, some of them, are mean frivolities, since the issues of this struggle will have a permanent and awful meaning when all that meets the eye of sense shall have passed away. May our Lord teach us, each and all, first the reality and seriousness of this great struggle, and then the secret of victory! May he raise our eyes above the narrow horizons which too often bound all our waking thoughts up to those eternal hills from whence alone cometh our help. May he whisper to each of us here in time the grandeur as well as the perils of our destiny, and convince us by happy experience that weak as we are, "we can do all things through Christ strengthening us"—that we can conquer every possible form of internal evil, and, in our sphere, external evil, by the simple inherent strength of good.

Mr. Spurgeon and the Judgments of God.

Mr. Spurgeon, writing in the July number of his magazine, says:—"A clergyman writes to inform us that the gout is sent to us as a judgment from God for opposing the Church of England. If a swollen leg prove that a man is under God's displeasure, what would a broken neck prove? We ask the question with special reference to the late Bishop of Oxford. As for the information that, on account of our late speech at the Liberation Society's meeting, we shall soon have another attack, and in all probability will be carried off by it, we will wait and see if it be true. Despite the fact that the writer claims to be a clergyman, we are no more disturbed than if he had signed his name Zadkiel. The amount of bitterness which the poet has brought us during the last month has proved to our satisfaction that our blows have not missed the mark, but none write so furiously as our Evangelical friends, who are more uneasy in their consciences than others of the State Church clergy."

The Bible Triumphant.

Do not be afraid of the Bible. Its triumphs are certain. The owls may hoot at the rising sun, but the sunshine creeps on, notwithstanding. Tribes may perish, priests may die, stars may crumble into rain; but this blessed book advances at a pace that never ceases; and if it ever retreats, it is to cover its retreats with a greater glory than its advance. This book, inspired by the spirit of God, climbs steep hills, and crosses broad rivers; it is found under the sailor's pillow, in the soldier's knapsack; and it soars with a wing that is not numbed by polar snows, or relaxed under equatorial suns. It carries with it an earnest of its ultimate and everlasting victory. And this book tells what the real disease of man is; it lays its finger on the spot; and it tells us the blessed truth that there is no chance or accident—that all is settled and perfectly arranged; and that even that ripple of sorrow that sometimes comes to the sensitive heart, as you will find if you trace it backward, came from no earthly spring, to fret us, but from the fountain of living waters, to strengthen, cheer and encourage us.—Dr. John Cumming.

There are now ninety-eight Protestant churches in Mexico. Five years ago there were less than six.

The Presbyterians are talking of a new book house and newspaper organ in Indian-apolis.

The Average Prayer-Meeting.

The prayer-meeting constitutes so important a part of the Christian social life of this country, and is so much a thing of the people that it is legitimately a topic for the examination and discussion of laymen. We approach the subject with abundant reverence for the time-honored estimate of its usefulness, and only with a wish for the advancement of its efficiency as an agency for spiritual culture. That it is in any respect the boon that it should be, to the hundreds of thousands who attend upon and participate in its exercises, no one pretends. That it is the funnest and most nearly impotent of any of the agencies employed by the church, in perhaps two cases out of every three, is evident to all. Let us see if we can present a fair picture of the average prayer-meeting.

In a church of, say two hundred and fifty members, there is an average attendance of fifty persons. These are made up, so far as the men are concerned, of the principal church official—the deacons, elders, &c. The remainder are women—the best women of the church, and such of their families as they can induce to accompany them. The clergyman, overworked, and discouraged by the small number in attendance, is there to lead. He gives out his hymn, prays, reads the Scriptures, and, with a few remarks, "throws open the meeting" to the laymen for prayer or exhortation. There is a long period of silence. The deacons, who suspect that their voices have been heard too often, or that they may be in the way of others, remain silent. At last, either one of them is called upon by the pastor, or some poor man, under the spur of a sense of duty, rises and utters, as well as he can, the words of a prayer. Everybody sees that he is in a struggle, and that he is so little at home that he is only anxious to get through without breaking down. The audience is, of course, sympathetic, and, instead of being led in prayer, becomes as anxious for him as he is for himself. And so, with long patches of embarrassing and painful silence, interspersed with dreary platitudes of prayer and speech, unrefreshing and lacking spontaneity to a sad degree, the meeting goes on to the end, which comes when the chapel clock shows that an hour has been spent in the service. To suppose that any great good comes from the spending of an hour in this way, is to offer an insult to common sense.

It would be instructive, if the facts could be ascertained, to know how many of those who attend the average prayer-meeting do so because they truly delight in it, how many because they wish to stand by and encourage their pastor, and how many because they think it is, or may be, their duty. It would also be instructive, if the facts could be ascertained, to know how many men are kept away by fear of being called upon to engage actively in the exercises, and how many remain at home because they have learned by experience that the average prayer-meeting is a dreary place to weary men—one which bores without benefiting them. We fear that, if the facts were known as they relate to these two points, the average prayer-meeting would find itself in very sorry standing. When men go to a religious meeting, of any sort, they go to be reinforced, or refreshed, or instructed. How much of any one of these objects can be realized in such a meeting as we have described? How much of the still higher object of spontaneous, joyous worship can be secured, by listening to the painful blundering of some pious and conscientious layman? Is it not the truth that the average prayer-meeting is a sad mockery of both God and man?

Can it be possible that the Almighty Father of us all is pleased with an offering so little spontaneous, so far from joyous, so painful in its exercises, and so unprofitable in its counsels as this? If, once a week, a whole church would come together joyfully, and sing their songs, and pray their prayers, and speak their thoughts, and commune with one another on the great topic which absorbs them, that would be a meeting worth having. But how would such a meeting compare with the dead drag of the average prayer-meeting? It would compare as life compares with death, as beauty with deformity. So utterly valueless, to all human apprehension, are the prayer-meetings carried on by some churches, that it may well be questioned whether they are not rather a detriment than an advantage, a harm rather than a help, to the regular work of the pastors, and the spiritual prosperity of those whom they lead and teach.

There is something to be said for the layman in this connection, which will leave his piety unimpugned. In the first place he labors at an absorbing employment. He goes to the meeting utterly weary, and without the slightest preparation of heart or brain for any active participation in its exercises. He needs help, and does not feel capable of offering any. He is empty of his vitality, and needs to be refreshed, and diverted from the currents of thought in which his trade or profession holds him. Again, as a rule, he is unused to public speech of any sort. It is impossible for him to lose the consciousness that he is speaking, and, becoming critical upon himself, his spontaneity, and all the good that comes of it, are lost. He sinks to his seat at last humbled into the dust in the conviction that he has been engaged in a performance in regard to whose success or failure he feels either gratification or mortified pride. It does him no good, and what is thus fruitless to him is, by force of its nature, fruitless of good to others.

Shall the prayer-meeting be dropped when it ceases hopelessly to be the vivifying, spontaneous agency of worship and communion that it ought to be? Can any change be made in its methods that will work a reformation? Can it be modified so as to avoid the evils we have indicated? These are questions that we cannot answer but it is not hard to see that a meeting conducted entirely by the pastor is a thousand times better than a poor prayer-meeting. And that, if a prayer meeting must be had, it is better to conduct it after some liturgical form than to trust to the blind and blinding leadings of ignorant and half-distracted men. Spontaneous lay prayers in public are very nice in theory, but in practice, in the main, they are apoplexy that break into spasms on the tongue. The opinion

seems reasonable to us that any pastor, or body of pastors, who will present to the American churches a liturgy for social use, so general, so hearty, so full of the detail of common wants, and so appreciative of the people, as to be the best possible expression of social worship and common petitions, will do more to lift the average prayer-meeting out of decrepitude, not to say disgrace, than can be done by any other means. If non-Episcopal Protestants wish to learn why it is that the Episcopal Church makes converts with such comparative ease, they need not go outside of our suggestion for their information.—Dr. J. G. Holland, Scribner's for September.

A Northumbrian Sermon.

Two were Baptists, one a Swedenborgian, one an Irvingite, and one stood alone, calling himself a member of the Church of Christ. What was very remarkable, the society of these pious fishermen, who, divested of their religion, were nothing more than poor, ignorant men, was sought by some of the most eminent divines of the mother country, including Cummings of London, Lee of Edinburgh, Cairns of Berwick-on-Tweed, Murcell, the Manchester Spurgeon, and hosts of others. Ignorant of every other class of literature, these men were thoroughly conversant with the Holy Scriptures and the best theological works. So extensive was their knowledge, so vast their comprehension of truth, so subtle their reasoning, that the most learned divines were numbed before them, and listened to them in wonder. The Rev. John Cairns, D.D., a man as remarkable for his profundity as for his eloquence, had a handsome church built by his congregation. When it was finished, he invited one of his fishermen—ho who called himself a member of the Church of Christ—to examine it. Arm in arm the doctor of divinity and the North Sea fisherman walked through the richly carpeted aisles, examined the gorgeous pews, gazed upon the carved pulpit, the lofty ceiling, the stained glass windows.

"What do you think of it, brother?" asked the doctor.

The rugged North Sea fisherman raised his eyes to the ceiling, drew his rough fustian jacket closer around him, and following his arms upon his breast, said in reverential tones:

"Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands."

The divine gazed upon the fisherman, an expression of admiration on his face, and laying his hand affectionately on the latter's shoulder said:—

"Brother, you have preached the first and the grandest sermon that will ever be heard within these walls."—Atlantic Monthly.

Hearers of the Word.

Congregations are often very strangely made up of heterogeneous materials. It is a wonder that such mixed assemblages hold long together. Nothing but God's grace could ever keep a church alive, as many of them do live, year after year and generation after generation. No human institutions have such tenacity of life. And when we take the broad historical view, we do not wonder that the perpetual preservation of the Church in the world is the standing miracle of Christianity. Nor do we cease to admire the abundant grace given to those faithful ministers whose long pastorates are getting to be more and more remarkable in our age.

A glance at the variety of hearers is alone sufficient to sustain our assertions. All kinds of minds, tastes, prejudices, and educations are represented in every congregation. One man likes nothing but hard, logical argument; another, who is imaginative and emotional, must have these traits satisfied. Some are coldly critical; others are exacting in all matters of taste; and yet others delight only in something that is sensational, warming, and impulsive.

Then there are fair-weather Christians, and half-day hearers, and star-seekers, and the runaways who delight in vagrant itineracy from church to church, and whose vacant seats in their own place of worship are a poor offset to their odious comparisons with neighbouring churches, whose pews they help to fill. Every congregation has also its Athenian attendants, on the search for something new to hear and talk about. Next we find Mr. Love Ease and a large company of Nocturnal Christians, who like much to sing of harps and crowns, and the gates of pearl, but to whom the cross is yet an offence, and always will be until they are willing to take it up daily and follow Christ. Drowsy hearers are not uncommon, whether from habit or disease, or what other reason, we need not say. But it is very hard to wake them up. Alongside of them are some who may be called leaning Christians. They are always leaning on somebody human for encouragement, for consolation, and for strength. Others are never so happy as when they are weeping, and perhaps their next neighbour scorns to shed a tear. Indifference is the greatest bane of our congregations. It is like triple ice—a heavy, cold, freezing apathy, which kills the good seed of the Word. There are some such, of whom there is small hope until they really get angry with themselves, or the preacher and the truth. Better a tempest than stagnation in that wide circle.

We have said nothing of the Bereans—the attentive and glad receivers of the Gospel; nor of the classes named by our Lord in his parable of the Sower. In every church and congregation there is some good ground, as well as that which is stony and the hard wayside. But the solemn teaching for all classes is contained in the words of the great teacher—"Take heed what ye hear; take heed how ye hear." In these "times of refreshing" from the presence of the Lord "the destinies of myriads of souls may hang upon the way in which they hear and take the next sermon." Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

"An Ounce of Prevention"

"I cannot help being cross these hot mornings. I report, I wray. I try to make up for my irritability in every way I can; but I cannot help it; I have made up my mind to that."

This confessed Mrs. Grey to her intimate friend, Mrs. Carter, who was visiting her. "And," said Mrs. Carter, "you make discord, that you understand?"

"Perfectly well."

"You who should strike the key-note of harmony every morning, destroy harmony instead."

"I confess it, but what shall I do? I get worse instead of better, with my efforts to improve."

"Suppose you wanted to lead and accompany the family singing with your piano, what would you first desire in the instrument?"

"That it should be perfectly tuned."

"You should not use it for the purpose otherwise?"

"No."

"Very well; you are the leader and harmonizer of your servants and children, and it follows that you must be in tune, or you do the opposite from what you desire."

"That is it, exactly; but I cannot get in tune; I am miserably discordant."

"What you need is time and opportunity for your soul to tune itself, under the influence of the gentle, loving Spirit, who is always ready to harmonize our discordant souls. You are bearing too many burdens, and you say truly that you cannot help irritability; but you can help the state of affairs that produces irritability. You must watch constantly, prayerfully, against the temptation to overwork. To do great deal physically for your family seems a virtue, I grant; but if what you do results in spiritual neglect, then you are sinning against your family, and you cannot avoid the responsibility. For instance, your husband asked you to go to ride with him yesterday, and you refused."

"But I wanted to finish Ellen's dress. She needed it very much."

"I will grant that she needed it; but she needed more the loving, patient spirit that you are not able to give her to-day. You gave her a dress yesterday, and to-day you give her impatience and ill-nature as the price. She went to the picnic this morning, muttering that she should be glad when she was grown up, and away from home. If you had gently but firmly insisted that she should do without her new dress, and had gone to ride with your husband, you would have avoided all the morning's irritability." "You are right; I see it all very plainly, but I never saw it so before; it is a positive sin to do more than is compatible with serenity, if one can possibly avoid it."

"Yes; and the list of avoidable labours can be stretched out very long. Do anything, do without anything, rather than injure the spirit. Have harmony at any cost. Take care of the soul, of home, of patience and love and sweetness, at any cost to the body."—Mrs. M. F. Butts, in Christian at Work.

"Take Your Religion."

"Good-bye," said Uncle John to Will as he entered the cars for a week's vacation in the country. "Good-bye, Will. Got everything along?"

"Yes, Uncle, think I have. There's my trunk and satchel and gun and umbrella and—"

"There, boy. I didn't mean those traps. They're not everything."

"What then?"

"Oh, something more important."

"I guess I've got money enough to take me there."

"Not that, my child."

"Well, I believe you think I've forgotten my Bible, but I haven't."

"I hope you have not forgotten that, though, to be sure, it is an easy matter to take it along just for the respectability of the thing. Mind you use it. But how about your religion? Is that going into the country with you? Many professed Christians take a vacation from their religion just as they do from business. Don't do that, my boy. Take your religion with you. You need it. Others need it too."

"Thank you, Uncle."

"Take your religion along!" sounded in the young lad's ears as he took a seat in the cars. It made him feel more courteous to fellow-travelers. It helped him to speak a word to them. It led him to give a religious paper to one who had just laid down a dice novel.

"Take your religion along?" echoed a still, small voice, as he met old friends in the country village, and helped him to say a word for Christ. It sounded from the church bell and prompted him to speak for his Master in the little village prayer meeting. Here a new voice was a great encouragement. It urged him to take the place of an absent teacher and tell a class of laids how pleasant he found it serving Jesus.

Months have passed since then, but many still thankfully remember the young man who took his religion along.—S. S. Times.

A Statue of Oliver Cromwell is to be erected in Manchester, England. It will be almost the only public statue of that famous man in the country.

New York is the first State in the Union to adopt compulsory education. A law passed by the last Legislature requires parents and guardians of children between the ages of eight and fifteen years to give them, in a school or at home, at least fourteen weeks' instruction every year in reading, writing, arithmetic, English grammar and geography. It prohibits the employment of children within the ages named of any labor during the time when the common schools are opened, and school officers are given the authority to see that the law is enforced.