

## Pastor and People.

### THE PUREST PEARL.

Beside the church door, a weary and lone,  
A blind woman sat on the cold door stone;  
The wind was bitter, the snow fell fast,  
And a mocking voice in the fitful blast,  
Seemed ever to echo her moaning cry,  
As she begged her alms of the passers-by;  
"Have pity on me, have pity, I pray,  
My back is bent and my hair is gray."

The bells were ringing the hour of prayer,  
And many good people were gathering there,  
But covered with furs and mantles warm,  
They hurried past through the wintry storm.

Some were hoping their souls to save,  
And some were thinking of death and the grave,

And, alas! they had no time to heed  
The poor soul asking for charity's need;  
And some were blooming with beauty's grace,  
But closely muffled in veils of lace;  
They saw not the sorrow, nor heard not the moan,

Of her who sat on the cold door stone.

At last came one of a noble name,  
By the city counted the wealthiest dame,  
And the pearls that over her neck were strung  
She proudly there to the beggar flung.

Then followed a maiden young and fair,  
Adorned with charms of golden hair;  
But her dress was thin and scanty and worn,  
Not even the beggar seemed more forlorn,  
With a tearful look and a pitying sigh,  
She whispered softly, "No jewels have I—  
But I give you my prayers, good friend," said she,

"And surely I know God listens to me."

On the poor white hand, so shrunken and small,

The blind woman felt a tear drop fall,  
Then kissed it and said to the weeping girl,  
"It is you who have given the purest pearl."

### RESPECTING ELDERS.

"Do the work of an evangelist; fulfil thy ministry."

The housing, clothing, and feeding of the poor are the least difficult of the elder's duties. But these well performed open the way for his spiritual work and will make that the easier. For the elder is the elect messenger of the Church to his allotted district, and is there "the glory of Christ," the daily familiar example, that his flock imitate even as he imitates Christ. He cherishes and guides them, taking upon himself for love's sake, so far as in him lies, the burden of their sins and sorrows, of their redemption and sanctification.

"Fine words," we say in our hearts, "in a prayer or a Sunday sermon they sound very pretty, these cloudy sanctities; but they are surely not to be pressed upon us literally as a regular, practical, every-day thing? These 'counsels of perfection' are not for us." Of course none of us are so shocking as to *speck* in this way, any more than we would deny that Christ rose from the dead or that He will one day judge us. But I cannot be convinced that many of us believe the one or the other. Well, I do mean every word of that paragraph to be descriptive of each elder. One may be very far from that ideal and yet be a true elder, but not so if he do not hunger and thirst for it, and strain after it.

I shall now mention very briefly a few ways in which he may, I think, fulfil this part of his ministry. But all that I would urge is really stated in effect in Paul's pastoral letters to Titus and Timothy, the thoughtful and earnest study of which I respectfully recommend to all our nominal elders. To begin with, what need there is for the elder's influence and work in the homes of his flock. The neglect of the moral and spiritual training of children, and the children's consequent waywardness, disregard of authority, and lack of reverence, are matters of general comment. It is admitted that the Sunday school cannot do the work of parents, and that it is rendered less useful by reason of their apathy. It is one of the most extraordinary and appalling facts in connection with the Christian faith that men, even of high character and attainments professing it, will allow their children to grow to maturity without having spoken to them about the one reality, "our own soul and God who made it." When a father attends to the finances, and provides housing and clothing he seems to think his duty creditably performed; the education of his children, intellectual and spiritual, he "gives out." So it comes that a child hears in

h and Sunday school about an immortality of joy and an immortality of woe, and is told that the choice of his destiny lies with himself, the present choosing being the one vital thing; and then he hears not a whisper of all this for six days (nor during the whole seven days, except in church). He notices with wonder that his parents do not seem at all affected by the impending fate, nor, indeed, conscious of any momentous issues in life. Gradually the Christ story becomes unreal, and the child's religious impressions are, like his parents', felt only in church, and religion is a cloudy affair apart from the realities of life. Even family worship is disregarded. One would think that whatever else was neglected, a Christian would regard daily family worship as an imperative necessity both for himself and for his children, and the absence of it wholly inexcusable. Have we less to teach than the ancient Israelites? How precious to them were their "beggarly elements!"—"These words which I command thee this day shall be upon thy heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down and when thou risest up; and thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes, and thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thy house and upon thy gates." But we have changed all that. When our law deals with the matter it is prohibitive only—"Thou shalt not teach them in thy schools;" and as soon as we get from under the "shadow of the steeple we are shame-faced at the mention of religion, either, I suppose, because we have so little belief in it, or because we practise it so little. It has become in the highest degree improper for anyone except the minister to speak of religion unless at a meeting duly convened for that purpose.

Here then is the elder's first work: He should never cease his efforts until in every family of his district there is an altar set up, and daily, earnest reading and worship there. Every father can spare at least one-half hour every day for that purpose—if he cannot he will, doubtless, one day spare much else. For the illiterate, the diffident, or the dull, the elder should furnish, if necessary, proper forms of prayer, and himself occasionally, as an example, conduct the family meeting. The children should have their part in this by reading and reciting verses learned and repeating part of the prayer. It is the elder's business to maintain in all the homes the sincerity and power of these family meetings.

Then there is the Sabbath school and the Sabbath question generally to take hold of. Very little is made, I think, of the ten or twelve waking hours of Sabbath. Here is one-seventh of our life consecrated not to rest merely, but to the contemplation of heavenly things and to spiritual activity. Here is a time when we may quietly consider the issues of life, and realize, undisturbed by the pressure of this world's concerns, the great facts of our religion and teach them to our children. Certainly a part of every Sunday should be devoted by parents to the earnest teaching of their children, and the Sunday school lesson should be made as important as the week-day school lesson. It would be strange if an earnest elder could not work a reform here. We are not indifferent to our truest good when it is clearly and forcibly placed before us. It is a strange blindness and apathy that have to be removed, that is all. All we require are earnest leaders. Have we not all noticed the spirit of devotion one man of power can infuse into a multitude of commonplace people? I have confidence that out of every twenty families in a congregation there is at least one man capable of doing all I have pleaded for. Let him come forth to his work.

The elder would have a strong helper in the Sunday school teacher and the lady visitor of his district, and he should strive to establish the closest relations between the family, teacher, lady visitor, and himself. All four might form, as it were, a committee, to consider and decide all difficult questions with regard to troublesome children or good children, for that matter, but only, of course when the parents are disposed to seek such aid. I know of at least one case when the

practical help of the minister in the case of a troublesome boy was a great boon; and I cannot see why the elder, or minister should not be the person to turn to in such affairs. Of course it is not to be expected that the elder, merely by virtue of his office, will gain such a status. He must be a wise man, a "man of God," to use a good phrase. Then the elder should be a person given to hospitality. His home should be a pleasant place, the centre of helpfulness, where all his flock are sure of a welcome, and sure of sympathy and help. "The elder's house" would thus become benevolently conspicuous; and it would gradually gather about itself, and be sanctified by the associations and memories which endear and hallow to a faithful people the manse of a true minister, which endear and hallow to the people any home where the hearts of the dwellers know that "the wealth of a man is the number of things he loves and blesses, is loved and blessed by."

The elders would find it necessary to meet frequently in council to discuss ways and means, and for study and worship. An elders' district meeting held at different houses would be of great value; for at such small informal gatherings he would have opportunities to urge upon his flock their religious and moral duties, and, in a more friendly and personal way than can be done in church or general prayer-meeting, set forth what these duties are. We hear plenty of generalities: we know all the virtues and beatitudes by rote; but it is often very puzzling to the best men how to regard this and that act, this and that course of conduct in business or social life. Custom, or selfishness, and our dull moral sense hide from us the moral quality of many acts. Thus we have ordinarily good men defending and practising smuggling, bribery, under-payment of employees, the taking as much as possible in exchange for as little as possible, selling of adulterated goods, and innumerable trade deceits and injustices. It is precisely these specific matters that are left untouched. So these meetings, presided over by the "wisest man," who knows business life would be not only for worship, but for the interchange of ideas, and for instruction concerning the conduct of life in the family and in business. Had I time I should dwell upon the necessity for reform in business life even among church members; we are calling good evil and evil good. True honesty is hardly believed in by men who know the world. I was much laughed at the other day by some men because I spoke of trusting to a painter's honesty. "Where will you get an honest painter?" I was asked. I affirm that this looseness exists among church people in good repute as much as elsewhere, if we except a little group of faithful disciples. There is crying need for the elder's work and influence in connection with business ethics. Then, these meetings would be a means of getting the poor to church. A prominent minister of our town said the other day that one-third of our population, at a low estimate, attended no place of worship. Is it the churches or the people that are at fault? The best ways of conducting the family meetings could also be discussed; and it might be found a good plan to have the same lessons, etc., each day throughout the district. This would be a bond of union.

It would not much matter, I think, if the present weekly prayer-meeting, where we get the very, very dry crumbs from the Sunday table, dropped out altogether. If the people were organized in some such way as I have suggested, instead of the present prosy, heartless meeting of strangers, we would have a band of disciples, ardent and hopeful, met together as friends and comrades, for worship as now certainly, but also for the interchange of ideas and the consideration of ways and means of carrying on the common warfare against sin and suffering.

The intimate knowledge of the people and their wants that the elders would gain would be invaluable to the minister in the preparation of the weekly sermons, and in all his intercourse with his people.

I have only touched briefly on some of the many things that could be done, had we the spirit of Christ. With that spirit all things are possible. Do we not confess this over and over again? Is it all cant? I have given a few details not as matured plans, but

merely as suggestions, and to fill out the picture here and there. It is, of course, understood that the minister is throughout regarded as the chief elder, the promoter of all this activity, the colonel in the regiment, the first in the council chamber and the first in the field, the guide and inspirer of his men, and what the minister is to his elders, the elders are to their respective flocks. W. H. M.

### GET OUT OF THE RUTS.

The world has its tools, and they are sharp. She has introduced zeal and method into all her industries, and the diversified occupations, utilizing the labor of strong and weak alike, have doubled and redoubled the amount produced over old systems. The man who courts success in business to-day must work in harmony with the spirit and demands of the times.

One rut, into which the church is ever dropping, is its failure to perceive this law of development, which is so characteristic of the human race. The eternal principles of right may and do continue the same through every period; but the means of applying the one true gospel must undergo constant changes, and should lead the times rather than be led by them. There is no question to-day about the gospel. How to apply that gospel, in order to convert and christianize the people, is the one burning question of the day. Low sensational methods are unnecessary, for Messrs. Moody and Mills have proved that fact by overflow meetings, pervaded by the spirit of prayer, and directed by skillful leadership, where thousands are being brought to Christ. Each pastor must select for himself the means to get the people before him. He can be assured, however, that non-church-goers will not attend without personal invitations and without some other stimulus than sleepy echoes. Among other ruts into which the church has fallen, are: First, a lack of gospel preaching in city churches, and second, a lack of proper organization of Christian forces in village and country. You may plead that these ruts are due to natural circumstances, yet what rut is not? They have been allowed to grow deeper and more troublesome every year, and will continue so until a united effort is made to get out of them and keep out. Wherever the evangelists have gone in the city, and at the same time using the present Christian organizations, a great ingathering of souls has been the result. Too many churches forget that success is only attained when the two factors, gospel and organization, go hand in hand. Get more gospel into city churches with their present organization, and we shall hear of great revivals. Get more organization into village and country churches, and more church funds will be saved for foreign fields, and more working Christians will be the result. The last great rut is the failure of individual church members to live a Christian life. They are selfish or inhospitable, or dishonest. Nothing so disgusts the average outsider as a mean church-goer, and they, unreasonably, of course, cry out against the whole body of believers. With good reason, however, do they take a mean professing Christian to task. This rut breaks down and destroys the effect of more gospel preaching than anything else. If every man, when he joined the church, would keep a vow, that he would not be outdone in kind deeds by a non-church-man, what revivals we should soon have, and in what streams would the "milk of human kindness" flow to sweeten and invigorate every life.—Worldly Wiseman, in Interior.

Spurgeon: When Christians have two aims they are like two rivers which flow near the city of Geneva—the Arve and the Rhone. The Rhone comes flowing along, a beautiful blue. The Arve comes down from the glacier a chalky, dirty, white. I stood some time ago at the place where these rivers join. It was not long before the Arve quenched the Rhone; all the beautiful blue had fled away and nothing but white was seen. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." If your life be made up of two streams, worldliness running in like the Arve, and you hope to have spirituality running like the blue Rhone, you will be mistaken.