

THE HOME MISSION JOURNAL.

VOLUME III, No. 7

ST. JOHN, N. B., APRIL 9, 1901.

WHOLE No. 57

Fishers of Men.

W. W. FARR.

A FISH was the earliest symbol of Christ and Christianity. It is found throughout the Roman catacombs and figures largely in early Christian art. The Greek word for "fish" is an acrostic. The letters of which it is composed, stand respectively for the words which express the central fact of the Christian faith, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour."

A fish is enveloped in scales which exclude the water and provided with fins to enable it to move easily through that element.

A Christian has spiritual power to preserve him from the influence of an unfriendly world and spiritual energy to move safely and successfully through it.

The Lord prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. From a fish's mouth, was the sinner taken that paid the tax of Christ and Peter. From the depths of the Galilean lake, a great draught of fishes was twice taken by Divine command. It was a fish that Jesus ate after His resurrection to convince His skeptical disciples that he was no imponderable ghost.

Fishing is both a science and an art. Izaak Walton is the patron saint of fishermen, as high authority in angling as Blackstone in law.

There are curious and striking analogies between catching fish and saving souls.

I. If you would catch fish you must go where they are. Fishing is like hunting in this respect. An amateur sportsman asked a country boy if there was good hunting to be had in a certain piece of woods. The boy replied that there was none better in the country. The sportsman tramped all day seeing neither fur nor feather, and meeting the boy again as he returned, reproached him for his counsel. "I thought you said that was the best piece of woods for hunting in the country." "And so it is, sir, if that is what you want," the boy replied. "You may hunt to your heart's content, but you will never find anything, for there isn't anything there."

It is one thing to fish, it is another thing to catch fish. Jesus did not promise Peter that he should have an opportunity for fishing. He said, "Thou shalt catch men." It is not enough to open the church and ring the bell and then sit down and wait for the people to come. We must resolve ourselves into a highway-and-hedge committee and compel them to come in. If they will not come to the church, we must carry the church to them and preach the Gospel to them in the streets, docks, parks and places of employment.

II. To be a successful fisherman, one must know the haunts and habits of the fish, what kind of bait to use and what kind of apparatus is best adapted for each particular kind. One would not use a cod-line to land a cunner, nor expect to hook a minnow on a three-pronged spoon.

Paul was a skilled fisher of men. "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some; to the Jews I became a Jew that I might gain the Jews, to them that are without law, as without law; to the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; and this I do for the Gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you."

Men are to be persuaded, not antagonized. Common sense, patient waiting and perfect trust will usually secure the desired results.

Scientific technique is needless. Peter once fished all night and caught nothing. The Master encouraged him to launch out into the deep and try once more.

Some critic might have said, "Peter, you need new methods. You should try some different bait. You can't lure any fish into those old patched nets."

There are those who are saying the old Gospel is played out. Men must have something highly-spiced and gilt-edged. The preacher must

give them philosophy, poetry, science and sociology or he can not hold his congregation. Not so. The plain old-fashioned Gospel is the best drawing card yet in any church on earth. There was some virtue left in Peter's old nets, for when he obeyed the Master's command, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes.

People are cold and hungry. The Gospel warms and fills them and they will go where they can get it undiluted and unadulterated.

Many a city sportsman with a head full of theories about fishing, goes out with a hundred dollar outfit, rod and split bamboo and books of fancy flies, and whips the trout streams all day long without getting a single rise, while a bare-foot farmer's boy with nothing but a bean-pole, a piece of twine, a bent pin and a pocket full of worms goes home at night with a string of fish that he can scarcely carry. Success is to be measured by results rather than methods. Give us apostolic success and let who will have apostolic succession. Better pound the bass drum of the Salvation Army through the streets and catch men, than preach in the biggest city pulpit and catch nothing at all.

III. To catch fish successfully, the fisherman must be out of sight himself.

No one can go splashing through the brook, thrashing the water with his line and get so much as a nibble. The fisherman must steal through the shrubbery like a shadow and hiding behind the trunk of some great beech tree, deftly cast his fly so that it falls as gently as the dip of an autumn leaf upon the bosom of the pool.

The crackle of a twig may be enough to reveal his presence, or the shadow of an arm protruding from his hiding place, may convey to the watchful trout the idea of danger and keep him under the over-hanging rock, resisting all temptations to draw him forth.

It is equally necessary in fishing for men, that the personality of the preacher should be concealed. The people must see no man save Jesus only. The cross must be exalted, but held up in such a way that even the tips of the fingers of the hand that grasps it, shall be out of sight.

Clear Shining after Rain.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUVLER, D. D.

ONE of the numberless touches of exquisite poetry in the Old Testament is that which describes the "tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain." The verdant grass plot which gladdens the eye is the result of a double process—shower and sunshine. Both are indispensable. We find in this beautiful expression a type of our deepest and richest spiritual experiences. It is a type of the most thorough work of conversion by the Holy Spirit. Over every impenitent soul hangs the dark cloud of God's righteous displeasure; His Holy Word thunders against sin, and His threatenings beat like a storm of hail. Repentance and faith in Christ sweep away this cloud; the thunders cease; the face of the atoning, pardoning Saviour looks forth like a clear blue sky after a storm; for there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. No two cases of conversion are exactly similar, yet in every thorough work of grace the darkness and dread which belong to a state of guilt give place to the smile and peace of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

What is true in the beginnings of the most thorough Christian life is often realized in the subsequent experiences of the believer. Rain and sunshine both play their part in developing godly character. It ought to be a comfort to such of my readers as are under the heavy down-pour of trials to open their Bibles and read how it fared with some of God's most faithful children.

Abraham toiled on his sorrowful way to Mount Moriah under a dark cloud of apprehension; but the clear shining came when God approved his faith and spared the beloved son Isaac to the father's heart. The successive strokes of trial that burst on the head of Joseph only made his exaltation the more signal when he became prime minister of Egypt.

In our days God often employs stormy providences for the discipline and perfecting of His own people. He knows when we need the drenchings. Every raindrop has its mission to perform. It goes right down to the roots of the heart, and creeps into every crevice. Not one drop of sorrow, not one tear, but may have some beneficent purpose. The process is not joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness and purity and strength. Christ's countenance never beams with such brightness and beauty as when it breaks forth after a deluge of sorrow; and many a Christian has become a braver, stronger, and holier man or woman for terrible afflictions; there has been a clear shining after rain.

This principle has manifold applications. Sometimes a cloud of unjust calumny gathers over a good man's name; lies darken the air, and it pours falsehoods, forty days and forty nights. But when the shower of slander has spent itself, the truth creeps out slowly but surely from behind the clouds of defamation, and the slandered character shines with more lustre than ever.

Saved By A Song.

WHEN the English steamer "Stella" was wrecked on the Casquet rocks, twelve women were put into a boat, which the storm whirled away into the waters without a man to steer it, and without an oar which the women could use. All they could do was to sit still in the boat, and let the winds and waves carry them whither they would.

They passed a terrible night, not knowing to what fate destiny was conducting them. Very cold and wet, they must have been quite over-comed but for the courage, presence of mind, and musical gifts of one of their number. This one was Miss Marguerite Williams, a contralto singer of much ability, well known as a singer in oratorios.

At the risk of ruining her voice, Miss Williams began to sing to her companions. Through the greater part of the night her voice rang out over the waters. She sang as much of certain well-known oratorios as she could, particularly the contralto songs of "The Messiah" and "Elijah," and several hymns. Her voice and the sacred words inspired the women in the boat to endure their sufferings.

At about four o'clock in the morning, while it was still dark, a small steam craft which had been sent out to try to rescue some of the floating victims of the wreck, coming to a pause in the waters, heard a woman's strong voice some distance away. It seemed to be lifted in song. The men on the little steam craft listened, and to their astonishment heard the words, "Oh, rest in the Lord," borne through the darkness. They steered in its direction, and before long came in sight of the boat containing the twelve women, and they were taken aboard.

If it had not been for Miss Williams' singing they would not have been observed, and very likely would have drifted on to death, as so many other victims of the wreck did.

Moses copied from the pattern seen in the Mount. We have to build, not a tabernacle, but a life and a character. For our convenience, pattern has become person. Our model is the perfect man, Jesus.—C. H. Parkhurst.