

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

VICTORY THROUGH RETREAT.

(By Rev. James Hastie.)

It is the last thing we would expect of Elijah—this retreat to Cherith—judging from the man, and from his opening attack on Ahab.

Sudden us a thunderbolt from a clear sky, and as unexpected, the prophet confronted the monarch and exclaimed, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." (1 Kings, xviii.1)

Good generalship, we would suppose, demands that the coup de main be persistently followed up till victory be complete, and rather than retreat the hero would fall. But, the campaign was of God's designing, and His strategy like himself puts to scorn the wisdom of men.

Elijah retreated because God sounded retreat. But, why order retreat at the present juncture?

(1) For Ahab's sake. Bad men are notoriously superstitious. Superstition is peculiarly affected by what is concealed and mysterious. Elijah's absence, therefore, would terrify Ahab vastly more than his presence would. Famine was devouring man and beast meantime. Ahab was at his wits end to know what to do. Fain would he hold a conference with the awful prophet, but he was ignorant. The presence of the famine and drought, the absence of the famine-producer were a double distraction to the monarch; while positive and present ills were still further augmented by the hallucinations of a guilty imagination as to what might yet take place. It was of great moment to paralyze Ahab's hand, and confuse his mind, and this could be done most effectively by keeping Elijah out of sight while the judgments were doing their terrible work. Hence one reason for Elijah's retreat to Cherith.

(2) But, the main reason was for Elijah's own sake.

(a) To protect him. Could Ahab only get his hand on the "Troubler's" throat how soon he would dispatch him. True, God could as easily work a miracle for Elijah's rescue as to stop rain by a miracle. But the divine method is not to employ miraculous agency so long as natural means will suffice. In this case concealment will accomplish for the prophet all that is needed; hence the order to retreat into the wilderness.

(b) Mainly, however, to train Elijah for those future exploits which he was destined to achieve later on. Three years hence and the pitched battle between truth and error shall be fought on Mount Carmel, and for that grand Waterloo Elijah must be specially fitted. To this end he is sent to college, shall I say, up yonder by the lonely brook Cherith. Twelve months of seclusion from society, twelve months of solitary life in a weird wilderness, followed by two years more of concealment up at Sidon with a poor widow—what a strange curriculum to pass through! Nay, more than strange, how trying, extremely trying to a man of Elijah's temperament an upbringing. He was a born man of war. Mountain bred, he was naturally in love with danger. Just in his element he was thundering the truth into Ahab's ear, or breaking to pieces false gods. Like Job's war-horse, he smelled the battle afar off, he mocked at fear, and was not affrighted, neither turned he back from the

sword. He said among the trumpets, Hal hal!

Fancy what a trial it was to be bidden retire into the wilderness, seemingly to do nothing. How irksome to sit there month after month, silent and idle, while idolatry and licentiousness ran riot over the land; while Ahab and Baal (seemingly at least) reign in undisputed sway. But, the first qualification of a great commander is to learn to obey. God peremptorily commands a retreat, and Elijah shews greater bravery in promptly obeying than in confronting Ahab at his own palace.

Now, here comes into prominence a great principle which claims a few moments' careful study—the principle of secret and unseen forces. Winter is a reign of death apparently, yet what is winter but nature's great laboratory wherein full preparation is made for all the beauties and bounties of next spring and summer, and for the fruitage of autumn. While asleep we seem to be losing time and money, yet nothing pays so well as sound sleep and plenty of it and never are we really accomplishing so much as then. Much the same in the moral sphere. In a fast and fussy age like ours how apt we are to fancy we are doing nothing for God or man unless we are performing some public labour, serving on committees, e.g., conducting meetings, teaching in the Sabbath school, preaching, writing for the press, giving large contributions, etc., while biding still awaiting God's orders, passing months in the sick chamber, only a tax and a trouble to others, shut up in prison, maybe for conscience' sake, this we count time lost and a calamity.

This incident in Elijah's life sets us right on this point. It reminds us that John Bunyan while in Bedford Gaol twelve years, was doing more to demolish Satan's kingdom than when abroad preaching the Word; Paul while a prisoner at Rome was doing much as when traversing sea and land proclaiming the blessed Gospel; Jesus, while forty days in the wilderness, enduring temptation, is as fully employed as when preaching the sermon on the mount, or casting out devils.

***** "God doth not need:
Either man's work or His own gifts:
who best Bear His mild yoke, they
serve Him Best, His state
Is kingly; thousands at His bidding
speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without
rest:
They also serve who only stand and
wait.

Brother, hold yourself ready to visit lonely Cherith. It is God's way with His own. If He has any special honour in store for you, any unusually important work for you to do, He will send you to school for a while in the valley of humiliation.

The gold must pass through the fire to remove the dross. The kingdom and the crown can be reached only through much tribulation. Only make sure that you understand your marching orders, then carry them out, cost what it may. This is Christian life. This is serving God.

THE FIRST TRUE GENTLEMAN, with a fore word by Edward Everett Hale, D.D. (The Musson Book Company, Toronto.) This pretty booklet is a study on the human nature of our Lord. It will make a suitable gift at this season of the year.

RELIGIOUS OPTIMISM OF THE
MODERN POETS.

By Rev. C. F. Wishart.

The business of the poet is to reveal the heart of humanity to itself. The scientist and philosopher may give us the "freezing reason's colder part." But when the human heart stands up in wrath to assert the things that it has felt, its desires, longings and instincts, the poet is its true interpreter.

It is an impressive fact that in an age when material science has been fast drifting toward religious negation and despair, the great poets have been steadfastly and consistently the poets of religious optimism. As teachers of religion we shall fall of a great inspiration for ourselves and for those to whom we preach, unless we perceive the true significance of this fact. It means, that, however the head may reason itself into the blackness of darkness, the heart has ever an instinct for the light. It is true that some of our poets have been pessimists. Matthew Arnold sang the dirge of a dead Christ. But Arnold was a singer of the family faultless and icily regular type. In him the intellect dominated and the Promethean fire was conspicuous for its absence. It is safe to say that wherever we have had real poets, they who, with the flash of genius, turn the searchlight on human motives, clothe our deepest thought in garb of language, grant speech to our dumb groping instincts, hold the mirror up to the human heart. In them have we found something of the hope.

"That all is well though faith and form,

Are sundered in the night of fear;" that some how "good will be the final goal of ill."

* * *

Prof. Browne has called the materialist Haeckel "the last of the Mohicans," and has intimated that materialism in philosophy has had its day and ceased to be. We may well take courage from the judgment of an authority so able and renowned. But twenty years ago it was not so. And it is profoundly noteworthy that in the very heyday of materialism, when Huxley and Spencer stood as prophets in the highways of thought calling men to religious despair, the great Victorian poets were singing the clearest and the most ringing religious optimism, the most valorous strains of trust in God, confidence in the spiritual order, hope for the world, and vision of the blessed country "where beyond these voices there is peace." It is true that the optimism of the poets has not always rested on the same basis—perhaps not always on a stable basis. For instance, there have been those in whom hope for humanity and the world and the future was merely instinctive, and perhaps blindly instinctive. Prof. James quotes Walt Whitman, who was an optimist simply because he was "built that way," and could not help himself:

"To breathe the air how delicious!
To speak, to walk, to seize something
by the hand!
To be this incredible God I am . . .
O amazement of things even the least
particle!
O spirituality of things!
I too carol the sun, ushered or at noon,
or at now, setting:
I too thro' to the brain and beauty of
the earth and of all the growths of
the earth . . .
For I do not see one imperfection in
the universe,