

# Northern Messenger

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'No paper so well fitted for the general needs of Canadian Sabbath Schools.'—Wm. Millar, McDonald's Corners, Ont.

## 'This Year Also.'

One of Christ's parables tells us of a fruit-tree that was carefully looked after for years, and year after year bore no fruit. At last the owner passed upon it the just sentence—'Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?'

In reply, the gardener begged that it might have one more chance. If it were spared

the return He most desires—the thanks of a life given up to His service. He made us; He redeemed us; He cares for us. And we reward Him by withholding from Him that which belongs to Him—ourselves.

### 2. God's patience.

There is no one who reads this who cannot look back on at least some years of life.



### 'CUT IT DOWN; WHY CUMBERETH IT THE GROUND?'

'this year also,' he would make another, a supreme effort, in the hope that at last the tree might respond to the care bestowed, and bear fruit.

Three thoughts strike us in reading the story:

#### 1. Man's ingratitude to God.

Sunday by Sunday those of us who go to church bless God 'for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life.' Week by week mercies, the greatness of which we can never estimate, are showered upon us all. How little gratitude we feel! How accustomed we are to take them as a matter of course. How easily we forget the mercies in worrying over the trials of life! How persistently some of us refuse to give to God

Every year that we have lived has brought to some forty or fifty millions of people the summons of God's last messenger—the angel whom we call Death. Past our very doors he has walked. Into some of our houses he has come. But not yet has he beckoned us, not yet has his voice said to us, 'Come.'

It is not that our lives have been so good that we deserve to be spared; that they have been so fruitful in blessing to others, so rich in glory to God, that we might look to have them prolonged. Why then are we given another chance?

Only one answer is possible. God is wonderfully patient. Long ago might the sentence have been pronounced: 'Cut it down.' But 'it is of the Lord's mercies that we are

not consumed, because His compassions fail not.'

3. What shall we do with this fresh chance?

Shall we treat it as though we were sure to have another?

This would be a base return for the love that cares for us, for the mercy that spares us! Nothing is meaner than to deliberately turn away from the God who loves us, intending as we do so to turn back to Him at the last: to give the best of one's years to the devil, and the dregs of one's life to God.

Besides, one of our fresh chances will be the last, and there will probably be nothing to tell us it is so till the chance is gone. Some day we shall begin a new year, the end of which we shall never see. It may be this one. For some of our neighbors it will be this one.—R. G. Hunt, in 'Friendly Greetings.'

## A Pattern From Japan.

(A. J. T., in 'Light in the Home.')

'Throughout the province of Echigo,' writes a lady traveller in Japan, 'I have frequently seen a square piece of cotton cloth hung by the four corners to four bamboo sticks standing upright in the bed of a stream. Close by is seen a long narrow tablet inscribed with characters. Within the cloth is a wooden dipper. As I passed one of these erections close to the road, I saw a Buddhist priest pour a dipper of water into it which strained slowly through.'

He told me that the tablet bears the Raimiyō, or posthumous name of a woman. The pouring of water into the cloth is a prayer. The custom is called the "flowing invocation." It is very affecting, for it denotes that a mother, at the birth of a child, has passed away to suffer in the "lake of blood" (the Buddhist hell), for some sin committed in a former state of being, and that her soul must remain in anguish till the cloth is so worn out that the water poured upon it by the compassionate passers-by falls through at once.

'I have never passed this "flowing invocation" without seeing some wayfarer fill and empty the dipper. Rich people can buy cloth manufactured on purpose, which, because it is scraped thin in the middle, lets the water through in a few days; but the poor man has to content himself with a closely-woven cotton cloth, which wears out with painful slowness. Both these materials must be purchased at a Buddhist temple. No wonder the saying is current among these heathen people, "The judgments of Hades depend upon money."'

How brightly, in contrast with such gloomy superstitions, shines out our privilege of Christian prayer! How thankfully one remembers the gracious words, 'Ye people, pour out your hearts before Him. God is a refuge for us.' 'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him.' Yet may not professing Christians learn something from this practice in heathen Japan? Are we as earnest and persevering in intercession for those living ones we love as these benighted heathen are for dead strangers?