

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

ASSEMBLE YOURSELVES TOGETHER.

Loneliness has its perils in the religious life. You hear now and again of a man who says he is going to give up all religious associations of a public kind, and is going to remain at home. Some men amongst us are now boasting that they are Christians *unattached*; independent Christians. What is this religious independence as it is interpreted by these men? Not one of those little gas-lights shining there is independent; everyone of them is a blink of sunlight. If I saw it coming, I should get out of its road. Tell me that all the stars are caught in one great scheme, and that not a sparkle of the glory of the least of them can be lost, and I am proportionally at rest. Loneliness, I repeat, has its perils in the religious life. When the devil gets a man absolutely alone, who'll win? Not the man—in the vast proportion of cases. There was only one man that won in single fight, and that man was the Lord from Heaven. O, let us shelter one another, let us be mutual protections, let us have a commonwealth of interest and sympathy, let us live in one another's prayers and sympathy and love. Union is strength: two are better far than one—if the one fall, he can be lifted up again; but if he fall alone, who will assist him to his feet? Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is. God leaves His footsteps on the earth, and if we follow His footprints we shall find Himself. He has built His churches, raised His altars, and He says, "Where my name is recorded, there will I meet thee, there will I bless thee." He in the way of blessing—if you cannot find Himself, find His footprints; go to His altar and say, "He ought to be here, He has sworn to be here"—whilst thou art yet speaking, the apparently dead cold ashes will glow, and on that altar there shall rise up a living flame, and out of the fire thou shalt hear the voice of thy lost God.

We must speak to one another now and then, or the poor aching heart would die. They that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it. Christianity institutes a fellowship, a community of interest and spirit and purpose. We are the complement of one another. No one man is all men. You have something I want, I have something you want. In these higher meanings, let no man call aught that he has his own. Let us have all our highest thoughts and sympathies common, so that there shall be no poor man in the church—the poorest scholar having access to the richest thoughts, the deafest ear having the opportunity of listening to the sweetest music. You remember how the commander of the ship "Fox," when his crew rose almost in mutiny, and his passengers accorded him nothing but the coldest looks, when he reached land, said: "Thank God, there was one relief, and one only: I had a fiddler on board." That musical instrument brought the hearts together when nothing else could. A snatch of a song, a strain of some forgotten music, one touch of nature—and that did far more than all the captain's orders, exhortations and attempts to persuade his all but mutinous companions that all was right. Do not stray away from the music of the church: do not suppose you can hum tune enough for your own soul, or whisper yourself into victory and triumph: your mouth will dry and your tongue will cleave to the roof of your mouth. Sing with your Christian brethren. Read the Scriptures together, unite in holy prayer together—this is partial heaven. Thus I again repeat the exhortation, Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together; beware of loneliness, beware of the independence which is isolation, seek for communion, for music, for protection, for security, for all that comes of organized life, household delight and trust; and thus the enemy will never find you alone and at a disadvantage, but always surrounded by those who can recall the sweetest memories to your recollection, and enrich your hearts by reminders of the infinite promises of God, and thus a commonwealth shall be the basis of victory.—*Rev. Joseph Parker, D.D.*

TRY IT.

When S. T. Coleridge was asked, Can you prove the truth of Christianity? he answered, "Yes, try it." We do not underrate the other evidences of Christianity. To many, they are altogether convincing. But the evidence which is always convincing, is simple

experiment. Let a man honestly try the power of religion in his own life, and the result will always be satisfactory. Did any man ever live a truly religious life, and afterwards regret it, or doubt the power and truth of religion? There is no such case on record. Men often have doubts about the truth of religion because they do not fairly weigh the evidence. Bishop Butler well said, "If there are any persons who never set themselves heartily and in earnest to be informed in religion; if there are any who secretly wish it may not prove true; and are less attentive to evidence than to difficulties, and more to objections than to what is said in answer to them, these persons will scarce be thought in a likely way of seeing the evidence of religion though it were most certainly true and capable of being ever so fully proved." There is profound wisdom in these words. No man ever had a more correct knowledge of human nature than Joseph Butler. In the words we have quoted he gives the true explanation of much of the unbelief in the world, but he does not account for all. There are honest minded men, who are never satisfied about the truth of religion because they look for a kind of proof that it does not admit of, and overlook evidence which is quite satisfactory.

It may be just as true that a certain medicine will cure a certain disease, as that the three angles of a triangle are together equal to two right angles. But it cannot be proved in the same way. To know that the medicine will cure the disease, you must *try it*. So a man may satisfy himself of the power and truth of religion. Let him try it. Christianity is the cure for sin. The man that fairly tries it will be satisfied. The evidences of religion are many, and when taken together are conclusive; yet the truth of religion cannot be demonstrated by the mathematical process. The subject does not admit of this kind of proof, but it does admit of proof quite as satisfactory; proof as convincing as that food will satisfy hunger, and sustain strength and life. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

When a man has honestly and thoroughly tried religion and found it worthless, let him discard it. Such a man has nowhere been found.—*Exchange*

AT THE CHURCH DOOR.

The bell now rings for evensong,
Full toned and sweet;
And seems with angel voice to say,
"Come, come, ye sons of men, and pay
Your worship meet."

Here let me leave the world behind
With all its care;
Lay down a while my weary load,
E'en at the gate of this abode
Of peace and prayer.

Here let me keep my foot aright,
And pure my heart;
Put on Humility for near
Is One who reads my soul most clear
In every part.

Here let me ask of Him who said:
"I am the Door"
That I through Him may entrance find,
And e'er dispose my heart and mind
To love Him more.

—*Austin Griffin.*

POETIC RELIGION.

All truth is poetic. Whatever is improving and gives light, builds up mind and heart, beautifies and enlarges the spiritual forces, and gives a desirable and grander outlook on all realities and all possibilities of the seen and unseen. God's Word and Spirit are ever lifting men above the seen and tangible to the entrancing glories of the Spiritual and Eternal; to the enjoyment of what is practically realized by the finer and divinely-born powers of Faith and Hope, and an inward sense of the beauty and poetry of holy affections, a holy life, holy acts and a holy heaven. Imagination and fancy may be severely chastened and bounded, and still the unsearched sweep of azure sky arches around us with richer and more thrilling beauty and poetic teaching, than mere starry facts or golden light of a kingly sun. Our trembling boundary of light, as it mingles with the skirts of human darkness, will ever reveal to questioning souls twinkling rays of anticipated glories, and forerunning gleams of celestial beauties for the blood-washed and chosen ones. If truth fills the soul we may still revel in the jewelled paths of illumined imagination with Milton or Pollock; or may gather about us here expressive emblems of

purified hope, and all the healthful adornments created by a living faith in the true and the good, for the effective and expressive worship of Him who is the Author of truth and beauty.

But there is no life, true health or power in a mere realm of fancy; and no acceptable worship in a servous though gorgeous and poetic display of absorbing ceremonies. There is no ground for mingling creations of mere human tastes with God's clearly revealed facts and requirements. Worship of God is not the absorption of carnal sensibilities, or the exquisite gratification of cultivated tastes and poetic susceptibilities, though the wealth of Divine truth will feed and thrill all our capabilities of mind and heart. But there is always a tendency in religious affairs to reach after the unrevealed, and to add to the simplicity of holy doctrines and external worship. Ceremonies that flash and glitter and impress an excited fancy; formal that soothe a disturbed conscience by their show, anything that kindles the sensuous nature, and feeds vague graspings after helps outside of God's doctrines, mortifying to the flesh—these attract and bind poor, unpardoned sinners. The beauty of a ceremony, or the blessings of a period of bodily modification, or satisfaction from some kindly works, lifted into higher light as a churchly performance, give a poetic beauty and satisfactory lustre to church arrangements, that please the taste and ease the conscience burdened by troublesome suggestions and convictions, but do not appeal to unpalatable principles or demand appalling self-sacrifices.

Alas! many thus rejoice in times and seasons, of whom we may be afraid. They wear a placid aspect in the dim religious light of stained glass and ariasong—moving, yet imprisoned amid groined arches and deep-shadowed recesses—and in the superficial statements of saving truths. Hallowing influences must flow from external graces, that may and generally do live and exhaust themselves in the form, and have no fruit of sanctified love or beautiful and holy affections. Blushing fruits and fragrant flowers, multiplied genuflections and artistic offertories, with many self-congratulations and lofty pride of supercilious superiority, delight an ignorant mind and gild a carnal worship. Such is truly only a false poetic religion, a travesty of the true, and not a life hid with Christ in God.

Taste and beauty are never out of place in God's worship, so that they conform to revealed truth, and are not mere human additions thereto. No more poetic religion and worship can we need than such as satisfied David, and Stephen, and Paul, and John. Humble rites of God's Church, authorized by His Word, grow instinct and luminous with Divine light and teachings. On the wings of heaven-born Faith and Love we can soar into the empyrean of Divine communion, and through tangible, saintly symbols of worship, we can drink in the augmenting lessons of a Saviour's love in the spiritual enthusiasm of a soul baptized into the power and beauty of holiness, and thus join the poetic members of heaven in ceaseless song. Real heart-worship is the poetry of worship.—*North Carolina Presbyterian.*

HOLY LIVING.

The prevalent ambition to number converts and accessions to the Church, we fear, is operating largely to induce indifference to the character of these accessions. It is considered the criterion of success, the only sure seal of ministerial fidelity and ability, the chief mark of superiority in a church. This produces a rivalry which is almost sure to disregard the tests of piety and the credibility of professions. It is a sad confession that many a church and its minister look too much to its growth in numbers compared with surrounding churches. Members are received on the most slender evidence of conversion. We do not demand to be assuaged on this point, cannot read its heart, and are bound to accept a credible profession. But then all professions are not credible; and the painful fact is that we hear of very, very few instances of rejection or postponement for further trial. This is thought to risk too seriously the entire loss of such applicants to the church which ventures to hesitate or postpone. The result is the admission of very many unfit members. Thus the church is weakened. Its very character is changed. Its moral beauty is marred, and it ceases to that extent, to honour God.

We do not accept the theory that the church is the place intended and suited to acquire the first exper-