

Pastor and People.

SOMETIMES

Sometime when all life's lessons have been learned,
And sun and stars forever more have set,
The things which our weak judgment here had
spurned,

The things o'er which we grieve with lashes wet,
Will flash before us out of life's dark night,
As stars shine most in deeper tints of blue;
And we shall see how all God's plans are right,
And how what seemed reproof was love most
true.

And we shall see how, while we frown and sigh,
God's plans go on as best for you and me,
How, when we called, He heeded not our cry.
Because His wisdom to the end could see.
And even as prudent parents disallow,
Too much of sweet to craving babyhood,
So God, perhaps, is keeping from us now
Life's sweetest things, because it seemeth good

And if, sometimes, commingled with life's wine,
We find the wormwood, and rebel and shrink,
Be sure a wiser hand than yours or mine
Pours out this portion for our lips to drink.
And if some one we love is lying low,
Where human kisses cannot reach the face,
O, do not blame the loving Father so,
But wear your sorrow with obedient grace.

And you will shortly know that lengthened
breath

Is not the sweetest gift God gives His friend,
And that sometimes the sable pall of death
Conceals the fairest boon His love can send.
If we could push ajar the gates of life,
And stand within and all God's workings see,
We could interpret all this doubt and strife,
And for each mystery could find a key.

But not to-day. Then be content, poor heart!
God's plans, like lilies pure and white, unfold,
We must not tear the close shut leaves apart,
Time will reveal the calyxes of gold.
And if, through patient toil, we reach the land,
Where tired feet, with sandals loosed, may
rest,
When we shall clearly know and understand,
I think that we will say, "God knew the
best."

—Boston Journal.

WHICH FOR THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN

COVENANTING WITH GOD.

REV. J. A. E. DICKSON, B.D., PH.D., GALT, ONT.

It was a beautiful custom that obtained among godly people, not so long ago, but that has fallen, we fear, in our excessively busy times into disuse, namely, that of covenanting with God.

That was the rich blossom on the bush of a vigorous religious life. That was the ruddy glow of health on the cheek of a man whose spiritual health was good. That was the result of conditions that were devout and gracious and full of moral thoughtfulness and spiritual concern. That told out the genuineness of a Christian life in the homes of the people because it was a private affair, no one knew of it but the covenanter himself, or maybe the mother or father who assisted the young man or the young woman in the act.

It was an engagement between the individual and God. It was an act of the heart. An act too, of the concentrated mind and the living conscience. It was a supreme act of one's life. When one reached to that, he had come to the crisis of his earthly career. He had engaged to be the Lord's with such circumstance and seriousness, and solemnity that the act was memorable forever. And it gave colour and character to all the after-life. The sun that had risen shed his rich golden rays on the entire nature, sweetening, beautifying, glorifying it all; stamping it with a new character. Much thought and anxious reflection preceded the act, and it gave birth to a concern that above with the individual. It was a grand educative force and a prime source of stability in the life of godliness.

Would that we had the same kind of action to-day! Would that mothers and fathers and children were in this covenanting spirit! would that our religious teachers and leaders in every department of church-life and Christian activity were found insisting on such a decided stand for God, and with God!

There can be no doubt that it would do immense good. It would lay an arrest on the thoughtlessness of our time; the deadening indifference; the loose conceptions of a religious life; the dishonoring courses of some professors; the want of a definite object on the part of others, and keep the general tone of religious life and feeling from sinking down into the marshy quagmire of a baptized worldliness.

The covenants braced up Scotland to a noble and heroic daring and endurance that have crowned it with glory. But the covenants, though signed with blood, in the old Greyfriars Churchyard and elsewhere, would never have been so effective had it not been for the covenanting with God that kept alive the spirit of time, fear and love and worship in the homes of the people. There lay the mighty strength of the bond.

The family life of a nation is either its strength or its weakness. If a Christian spirit reigns there it will make itself felt in the national life. What we want our entire land to be, we must seek through our families. In them we have the key to the position.

When we look back into the heart of the covenanting times we observe that parents made engagements for themselves and their children with God. They were like those in the gospels who brought their sick sons and daughters, and their little ones to Christ that He might heal them and bless them. They made covenants comprehending them all. Dr. Cairns, in his memoir of John Brown, D.D., of Broughton Place U.P. Church, Edinburgh, tells us that a few days before Dr. Brown's mother died "she called for a short paper drawn up by her husband in the form of a covenant dedication of themselves and their children to God for time and for eternity, to be directed, managed and saved by Him."

To this covenant, after her husband's name, she attached her own, saying, "I do this cheerfully and with all my heart. The document is still extant, and the letters are traced with the trembling hand of death. It would have been exceedingly interesting to have had the whole document. Such things give us clear glimpses of the heart. They lay bare before us the real nature of the writer. Such engagements were common in religious families at this time. To read such documents fills the mind with warm and tender feeling such as an old and faded love-letter awakens. They carry us back into the midst of scenes that are hallowed by the felt presence of the Master himself. They bring us into touch with the best society of the time, men who fear God, and women who love the Saviour. In the life of the last Duchess of Gordon we find notices of this particular action that are very refreshing. Indeed, they are as pleasing to us as lovely and fragrant moss-roses on their tree. Here is one: "This day I did again enter into covenant solemnly, and gave in my name, consent, subscription and acceptance of the Lord Jesus to be my Head, Lord, Husband, Guide, my all in all. Being required by Mr. Andrew Gray, in the Lord's name, to declare if I would refuse Him or not, I said before the Lord I could not refuse, but with my heart gave over myself, poor, miserable, weak, sinful, ignorant as I am to God in Christ to be His. Little use can He make of me; but if He can, His I am, and shall be totally, perpetually, thoroughly if He will be at the charge to maintain, confirm, make good and perfect His work in me." At this time Lord Brodie was receiving many honors, but in the flood tide of the world's esteem he was a lowly and meek Christian man. So sweetly does grace work!

Another notice of a like kind is this; it is from the same Lord Brodie, the father of the Duchess of Gordon: "I spoke a word this night to the children, and enquired of them if they desired to serve a good Master, and were willing to give up themselves soul and body to God, to take Him to be their Father, their Master, their God, and to engage themselves to be His children, to do His will, that He may serve Himself of them whilst they lived in this world. They professed that they desired it and were willing. . . . This night I did before the Lord admonish, examine, reprove, and exhort my daughter; and that it may the more deeply sink in her heart I caused her to write down her confession and purpose and promise with her own hand;" and immediately thereafter follows her covenant in these terms: "This day I desire to give up myself again to God; it is my heart that I desire to give Him, and not my tongue only. I desire not only that the Lord would be witness, but that He would be cautioner and surety in this covenant, that by grace I may overcome. This Lord's day I have taken new

resolutions upon me to be the Lord's wholly, and not to live any more to sin. And in sign and token of my unfeigned desire and purpose, I have in the sight of God subscribed this confession and covenant with my heart and hand.—GRISSEL BRODIE." The life of the Duchess of Gordon is the best comment on this covenant. That was a life of exemplary Christian loveliness, and of marked decision for Christ, and of an uplifting holy influence. There was in it a large scriptural intelligence, a noble self-sacrifice, a wide activity and great diligence in Christian work, and a whole-souled devotion of all to the Lord. She recognized this fact "that position is stewardship," she wore her coronet for Christ. She would often say of her palace, in prayer: "Lord, thou art the Master in this house; I have given it all to Thee."

Covenanting was insisted upon also by the godly preachers of the times. We have Mr. John Willison, of Dundee, his "Sacramental Directory, or a Treatise concerning the Sanctification of a Communion Sabbath," in which the matter pressed strongly on the attention of those who would profess faith in Christ. He has statements of this character: "Enter into covenant with God, and next come to His table to get the transaction sealed and ratified, by getting the other seal of heaven appended to it." "O young people, and ye that never communicated before, set about this work of personal covenanting before you approach to the Lord's table." "O young folk, can you dispose of yourselves better in the days of your youth, than give up yourselves to the Lord? When you are ready to choose settlements and callings in the world, can ye take a wiser course, than first choose a settlement in Christ's family, which would make all other conditions and circumstances in life the more comfortable to you? Now the way to be made a member of this family is by covenanting with God. without this you have no right to the children's bread, nor the seals of the covenant. It is not enough that you were baptized, and are Christians by your parents' dedication, unless you be Christians by your own free choice and consent."

There is much to commend this practice. It makes the step taken a very definite one. It is a clear decision. It parts between the old life and the new. It places the professor on ground that is marked off from every other. It sets the Lord distinctly before him in right relations.

How much benefit the church to-day would gain by such a course! It could be introduced without interfering with any church order. It would only be a new form of treatment for the young; but one to awaken consideration, and to secure a better understanding and a fuller realization of what a Christian really is. It would gird up the loins of the mind. It would tighten many a screw that is loose, and correct many an abuse that lies just at the entrance to the church. It would be a useful moral tonic, and would tell mightily on the future life of the family of God.

WHICH FOR THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

SECRETS OF POWER IN WORK FOR GOD.

REV. A. T. PIERSON, D.D.

"Work for God" is hardly the proper phrase. It should be rather "Work with God;" or, still better, "God's Work," as it is not man's work at all. Man is not even an agent; he is only an instrument. God is doing the work, and doing it through man. Who is doing the work? If I am doing it, I am asking God to help me; then I am the workman, and God is but a helper. There is a great difference between an agent and an instrument. In the Bible, man is described as merely an instrument—a saw, a hammer, a vessel, etc. Such instruments are perfectly helpless of themselves. We are often thinking about ourselves when we speak of working in God's work,—of our grace, our opportunities, our abilities; and thus we worry about the work; but God says, "this is my work—my burden and care."

The secrets of power all resolve themselves into one.—that of being possessed, guided, filled, penetrated, permeated with the

Spirit of hope, which is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. If we abide in Christ, we abide in hope. We must be anointed with the same Spirit that permeated all His activity. The Holy Spirit, therefore, is the one secret of all possible working with God. In Jamesii. 6, we read that "body without the Spirit is dead." The difference between a *corpus* and a *corpore* is that of life, the former possessing it, and the latter devoid of it. A dead body may be made to stand up against a wall, but it lacks something within to enable it to stand alone. Life would make all the difference. Such a dead body would answer James' illustration of faith without works. The outside form may be complete, but the inside is dead. The illustration applies to—

1. A creed without true faith—without the spirit of faith—a dead orthodoxy. James says: "The Devils (the demons) believe and tremble." "Thou believest that God is one God; thou doest well," but no better than the devils. They tremble—they shudder, or stand erect, as the word implies. The devil is no sceptic; though he makes sceptics. He himself is perfectly orthodox. He knows that there is a hell, and he stands in awe of it. We must get better backing than a dead creed, if we are to have life.

2. A form of worship without adoration. That would be a conser without incense. It may be a beautiful censer; but if there be no incense in it, God does not care for it. There is a great deal of apparent worship without the spirit. It is the great evil of our day. Forms multiplied in the early church as soon as the spirit was lost. The church's gestures and gesticulations always multiply as the Spirit of God is lost. An excellent old gentleman died lately in England who was thoroughly orthodox, but he had a son who had gone into the extreme of ritualism. The son wanted the father to preach for him. The father at first declined, saying that he would not suit his congregation, as he did not believe in their ritualism; but on being pressed, he took for his text, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic." He declared such ritualism to be lunacy; and was he not right? It is a suspicious sign when churches, once remarkable for simplicity of worship, begin to increase their forms and rituals. What we want is to get the true spirit of adoring worship.

3. All external moralities not prompted by the spirit of obedience. These are "dead works," so-called in the New Testament; or "wild grapes" in the Old Testament. "When I looked that it should bring forth grapes wherefore brought it forth wild grapes?" (Isaiah v. 4.) There is also *bad* fruit, but that is different from *wild* fruit. Wild fruit has the form of good fruit, but it lacks the savor. The great danger at the present time is not so much bad works, as it is dead works. The epistle to the Hebrews (ix. 14) speaks of having the "conscience purged from dead works, to serve the living God." It does not say from "wicked works."

4. Sacrifice not dictated by love. In I Cor. xiii. 1, we read—"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." Notice that it is not "as a flute or a harp." These may be made to talk back to the player. A violin has been loved by its owner as a babe, its tones seeming to speak so intelligently. But sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal make empty sounds, so that, if like them, Paul says, "I am nothing." Whatever sacrifices we may make, therefore, amount to absolutely nothing without love. God cannot accept them.

So then, creed without faith, worship without adoration, morality without obedience, and sacrifice without love—these are four bodies without life. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit, therefore, is the secret of power in all Christian work.

I cannot pass by the importance of prayer in this connection. The great lack of the modern church is the lack of pleading, importunate prayer. Our Saviour has given us a series of progressive lessons on this subject. The first of these lessons is found in Mat. vi. 6, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy