

Pastor and People.

MARY OF BETHANY.

Thou hallowed village on Mount Olive's height,
To which the Christ retired when day was o'er,
To spend in peaceful rest a quiet night,
Far from the noisy city's ceaseless roar,
And sage the sorrows which He calmly bore,
The home of Lazarus, and Martha true,
Where Mary also knelt, beloved of yore,
By One who all her inmost feelings knew,
A friend in trouble, ever kind and true.

For Mary, she had chosen the good part,
And humbly sat and listened at His feet
That which alone can satisfy the heart.
The one thing needful; she would meet
The Saviour on the way, and kindly greet,
Great was thy love, and fondly did'st thou
cling
To Him, and in that higher love complete
The costly box of spikenard thou did'st bring
To anoint for burial thy beloved King

Now poured the balm upon His aching head,
Which filled the house with richest odors rare;
Now bathed His feet with tears, in meekness
shed,

And dried them with thy long dark raven
hair;

O, what a world of loving faith was there.

"She hath done all she could," who could do
more?

"She hath anointed Me with tender care;"

Tidings of this shall spread the wide world
o'er

Where'er My name be heard from shore to shore.

W. S., in Belfast Witness.

Written for THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

A WEAK CONGREGATION.

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So many factors come into play in producing weakness in a congregation that it may be difficult to take them all up, but no doubt the mention of some will suggest others. And it may be worth while to turn attention to these that at least the danger signal may be raised, and fears awakened, and precautions taken in time. It may be presumed that some congregations like some children are born weak, and they never become strong, simply because the conditions in which they live are not favorable to strength. They have come into existence because of a zeal without knowledge, blindly yielded to by a presbytery, and to meet no real want—except a want of genuine Christian consideration, and they are a continual burden on other congregations. It is neither necessary nor wise, as an elder once expressed it "to put a kirk at every man's door." Doing that weakens some congregations, and does not make the congregation organized of sufficient strength to subsist in a respectable condition.

The case is totally different with congregations in sparsely peopled regions, such as Manitoba and the North West. There, if the few be not folded, and fed, no flock will ever be gathered. There, the weak beginnings must be nourished into strength. There, we must care for the few that we may in time secure the many. But it is not with either of these this paper deals; it is with congregations seemingly strong but in reality weak—weak in spiritual influence, weak in financial force, weak in loving service, weak in self-denial, weak in all in which a congregation ought to be strong. We shall simply give the factors and leave their application to every one as they see best, for some may work differently in unlike conditions.

There is first, a false generosity. A generosity so great that it thinks one church as good as another, and likes to patronize all alike. That even thinks more of a no-church body, than of its own church. And assists liberally the no-church body leaving its own church to great and grave deficits in times of great need. In matter of creed or living faith it is so liberal that it holds all creeds loosely as a matter of indifference. It seems to forget that a man's life flows necessarily out of his creed. His life is just the embodiment of his creed. Looseness in creed is looseness in life.

It is good to be generous, but no man ought to have a bigger heart than he can carry in his bosom. A true generosity fills the old proverb, "Charity begins at

home." It shows its liberality there first and specially. It does not play fast and loose with its faith. That is sacred as the fountain of life.

There is second, a spirit of disunion. A spirit that will have its own way let what will come. A spirit that has no consideration for others, and that cleaves asunder like the dead weight of a driven wedge. A spirit that cares not to conciliate, or to forgive, or to smooth rough places, or to make friends. It is what is called in the world a devil-may-care spirit. A truly satanic spirit in whomsoever it may reside. A spirit which each one ought to exorcise. And which all ought to unite against that it may be cast out.

The great adversary has learned the prime lesson in strategy: "Divide and Conquer." This leaven works disastrously. It steals in like a thief, and it breeds discord and leads to untold mischief.

A grumpy, grumbling individual, however distasteful to many, is apt to make some poor, weak souls like himself, and after a time they persuade themselves that there is a cause for their unholy spirit, which rests like a blight on the congregation to which they belong. Union is strength, and union is the fruit of love. Disunion is weakness, and disunion is the fruit of selfishness and sin. Usually it comes of the idolatry of self. Often mere nobodies seek prominence only by the disunion and discomfort they create. They would never be heard of but for that, poor souls. They may be pited, but they must be firmly dealt with if the leaven of their lives is to be destroyed.

There is third, a worldly spirit. That comes into the church (which is a spiritual institution, with spiritual ends) and discounts everything that is pronouncedly spiritual. It is the Delilah shearing off the locks of the mighty Samson. It is the rationalistic spirit contending with the spirit of faith. It says shrewdly, don't pitch things at too high a key. Don't drive man away from religion by being too strict. Accommodate your teaching to the times. These are very liberal times, you know. These are times when wise and great men speak with reserve of a great many things. This spirit resents the absoluteness and intolerance of divine truth. It loves smooth things. It tries to break down the clear lines of demarcation between Christian and un-Christian people. Its cry is, one is just as good as another, and sometimes a little better. It discredits a faithful preacher by the euphonic title of "Old foggy." One such, speaking to me once of the difficulty there was in presenting God's own Word to his congregation, said, "One of my chief men came to me, and said, 'Mark you, it's all right that you say; no one can take exception to it, but if you go on, you'll drive away our best support.'" When the minister asked what was to be done in the circumstances, the gentleman said: "Can't you give us a little Grecian or Roman history, something that won't press so hard." And so he would have the minister of Jehovah, bow at the knee of Baal!

The worldly spirit is the spirit of compromise, unnerving the whole spiritual body. It makes the church of God nothing but, and a very respectable society, a religious club, a pleasant salve for uneasy consciences. It makes it come down from "doing a great work" to meet with a heathen Sanballat and Geshem in "one of the villages in the plain of Ono." It robs it of its power by depriving it of its distinctive character.

There is fourth, an unbelieving heart. A heart that is not simple toward God. That does not take Him at His word. That puts its own construction upon the plain and easily understood statements of God. The teaching of the New Testament in reference to the believers walk and work in a congregation is written as with a pencil of light. He is not only to stand in close and loving relations to the Lord himself but he is to seek to bring others into the same joy. He is Christ's own witness. Christ says to each follower of His, "Go home to thy friends

and tell what great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your father who is in heaven." Each Christian is to be a witness, and so a worker, where he is. He is to be an evangelist among the unsaved, living the gospel where he is, speaking it on opportunity gotten or made, being a golden ray of light shining sweetly into the woe-stricken and weary hearts of men. Where a body of Christian people is living, as our Lord teaches, there will be no need of evangelists from abroad. They themselves will be the best evangelizing agency that could be had. And this is God's purpose. The living, believing church is to spread itself out upon the world, as the prophet spread himself on the body of the dead child, that it may instrumentally breathe into it the new life of God.

But this calls for cross-bearing, self-denial, prayer, holiness, and the unbelieving heart is not equal to the occasion, and it rolls its responsibility elsewhere. Let us call in an evangelist. Let us get help from without. And help comes, the unbelieving mass is galvanized for a little, and it falls back even into greater weakness and unbelief after the help is gone.

It discredits the ordinary means of grace and casts on them a daring contempt. Its hope of blessing rests only on a return of the evangelist. Now, what is the church saved for? if not to evangelize the world about it? There is the sphere for the development of its gifts and graces.

There is fifth, unsound doctrine. This is what dries up the marrow in the bones. It has many forms. There may be a serious lack, as is common to-day, of the severe aspects of God's character and of the truth expressing that. A fear to utter the very truth the Lord uttered. Who so unveils the end of evil men? There may be a leaving out of the sacrifice of the cross, and the cleansing blood. There may be an imperfect or perverted gospel preached. One without the need of repentance, or one patched up with legal additions. One that sets aside the grace of God. Salvation is of grace and so it is by faith.

Or there may be teaching along one line, or within an exceedingly narrow circle. The second coming may so overshadow the first coming of the Lord, as to deprive the second coming of its precious meaning. Sociological or political themes may so engross the attention that the hearers may forget that they are sinners needing salvation.

The work of the Holy Spirit may so bulk in the mind that He whom the Spirit, by the truth, reveals may be lost sight of. The lost ten tribes may be so preached that the poor sinners may not see that they themselves are lost. One precious morsel of truth may be so magnified out of all proportion to its importance, that spiritual dyspepsia and leanness may seize upon the church, and a strange, deathly weakness ensue. To be strong the church must have the whole counsel of God preached to it.

THE ACCEPTED TIME.

There is an old legend of a man who, day dreaming in his chair, beheld a vision which stood before him and beckoned him to follow her on to fortune. The man waited, heeded not her call, until at last she came and disappeared. Just as the vision faded, he sprang to his feet and cried, "Tell me who thou art!" and received the answer "I am Opportunity. Once neglected, I never return." Nothing is more trite and frequently heard in religious instruction and exhortation than this very thing we call opportunity. And this is alike wise and according to the Divine Word. The day will not always last. Your day, my day, the world's day, the day of opportunity, the day of grace, the day of salvation—all days are rapidly passing away, and the last day, that which we call the great day, the decisive day, will surely and speedily come. There is opportunity for us to work, by and by

the time will depart. While it is day we must work the works of Him that hath sent us, and do what He hath commanded us to do; but if we idle this present opportunity away, it will never return, and the neglect of to-day may never be repaired. To-morrow will bring the work for to-morrow, the duty of to-morrow, and likewise every day that succeeds to-morrow. Therefore let the work of to-day be done to-day, and then we may calmly await the coming of the morrow, if the morrow shall ever come. This trite and old-time truth, every one knows, but all do not heed. Nevertheless, it is such truth as men need to have persistently and repeatedly forced upon them, and always with religious sanctions. "The night cometh wherein no man can work."—*Herald and Presbyterian*.

HOW TO USE THE BIBLE.

1. Have for constant use a small portable Bible with complete marginal references.
 2. Carry a Bible or Testament with you.
 3. Mark freely with ink upon it: Promises such as Isa. xli. 13, to Christians; and invitations to unconverted, Rev. iii. 20 and xxii. 17. Brief notes may be written upon the margin.
 4. Do not be satisfied with simply reading a chapter thrice daily, but study out the full meaning of at least one verse a day.
 5. Study to know the whole truth contained in a single incident or a single miracle—when and why written, how it applied to self, and how to use it for others.
 6. Study to know what for and to whom each book of the Bible was written.
 7. Believe every word of the Bible.
 8. Learn one verse of Scripture each day. Verses from memory will be wonderfully useful in your work for the impenitent.
 9. Study how to use the Bible to lead a soul to Christ.
 10. Set apart fifteen minutes each for studying it; this little will be grand in result.
 11. Read the book as if it was written for yourself only.
 12. Always ask God to help you understand it and then expect he will.
- cares of life to this day as to wholly unfit the soul for these sacred duties. And not only so; the reading, social visiting, and unnecessary work may be of such a kind as to render religious exercises wholly unprofitable.

We may be fully absorbed in the work of the Sunday-school, the church and the community. Home may bring it urgent demands. Often times duties may seem foreign to the religious purposes of the day, but if its hours are commenced in a devotional spirit, and the soul retains a sense of union with the Lord of the Sabbath, the promise of rest in Him will be abundantly verified.—*New York Christian Advocate*.

"THE EVERLASTING ARMS."

One of the sweetest passages in the Bible is this one: "Underneath are the everlasting arms." It is not often preached from, because it is felt to be so much richer and more touching than anything we ministers can say about it. But what a vivid idea it gives of the divine support! The first idea of infancy is of resting in arms which maternal love never allows to become weary. Sick room experiences confirm the impression, when we have seen a feeble mother or sister lifted from the bed of pain by the stronger ones of the household. In the case of our Heavenly Father, the arms are felt, but not seen. The invisible secret support comes to the soul in its hours of weakness or trouble; for God knoweth our feebleness. He remembers that we are but dust.—*Dr. T. L. Cuyler*.

John Milton: There are no songs to be compared with the songs of Zion, no orations equal to those of the prophets, no politics like these which the scriptures teach.