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THE GOOD MAN SERVING HIS GENERATION.

A SERMON BY THE REV. ROBERT DUNCAN, OF MONCTON, N. B.

"For David after he had served his own generation by the will of God fell on sleep," &c.—Acts xiii. 36.

Among the illustrious saints of the Old Testament few occupy a higher or more honorable position than the Royal Psalmist. His history is peculiarly interesting, instructive, and edifying. It is one of the most cheerful and striking contrasts. At one time we behold him the unsophisticated shepherd-boy watching his flocks on the plains of Bethlehem; at another, the indomitable conqueror receiving the adulations of adoring multitudes, the burden of whose praise is, "Nail his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." Here we see him the friend and favourite of a kingly king; there, his apparent enemy. Now we gaze upon him the loving monarch, swaying the sceptre over a broad and loyal people; and then the fugitive ruler fleeing from a wicked, a treasonable, and a disobedient son. Such scenes in the life of the man after God's own heart. But the end cometh and despite these vicissitudes, having maintained his integrity, as full of honours as of years, he passes the boundary of time in all the confidence of a blissful immortality, exclaiming, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."

Of this eventful life our text is a comprehensive summary: "For David after he had served his own generation, by the will, &c."

Our text suggests—

I. That the good man serves the age in which he lives.

All of the facts which we are familiar with, no one is more susceptible of proof than that God has created nothing solely for itself. The sun, as he touches with rosy tints the eastern sky, or marches with majestic step in his meridian altitude, or bathes in gorgeous splendour the western world, gives evidence of this. The moon, in silent grandeur sailing across the nocturnal skies; the twinkling star that cheers the path of the way-worn traveller; the gentle zephyr, as they press the cheek of beauty, or chase each other amid the foliage of the primeval forest; the songsters of the grove and the denizens of the deep, all furnish proof that they live not for themselves alone. Nor is this more true of the inferior orders of creation than of intelligent man. It is true indeed that "all men, or nearly all, apparently live to themselves. They form their plans of life and prosecute them with exclusive reference to personal ends. Self-love may be said to comprehend the love of influence, of distinction, and it is the chief motive that leads men out in quest of money, of reputation, and of knowledge. Every man is the centre of his own system. To this point everything is drawn."

In spite of himself every man is living to his species and to God.

Inscribed upon the coronet of the Prince of Wales are the heraldic words, "I serve." A motto they might truthfully be adopted by every member of the family of man. However much we may hesitate to acknowledge the fact—however reluctant we may be to recognize the principle, it is nevertheless true, that "None of us liveth unto himself." Such are the inter-relations of society—such the constitution of the civil and social states that all men, mediately or immediately, directly or indirectly, are serving their fellow-men.

In asserting, therefore, as we have done, that the good man serves his generation, we would not be understood to affirm that he is the only man who does this. To assert that would be to stultify all history—to array ourselves in the face of facts which almost all may be supposed to be familiar. The man, it has been said, who took up a lump of clay and shaped it into silvery cups and lamps and statures; the men who first took up a black rock and taught our northern hemisphere to warm itself by the heat locked up within the strata under foot, served their generation. The men who have taken the materials furnished to them by the Creator, and coaxing them into new combinations, have lessened the wear and tear of the worker, and increased the comforts of mankind, so that the peasant of one age occupies the place of the prince of the preceding, have all served their generation. Columbus, when he discovered the new continent; that German, as he chiselled his rude blocks by means of which the first printing was done in Europe; the inventors of the mariner's compass, of the steam-engine, and of the electric telegraph, have all served their own as well as subsequent generations. And what shall we more say? For the time would fail to tell of the untold who, by their labours in the fields of science, or by their efforts in the republic of letters, have benefitted their own and following generations. Our position, therefore, is simply this: that though men, without respect to their moral character, may serve their own and subsequent generations, yet that the good man does this more and more importantly than any other possibly can do. A foreign prince is said to have visited England some years ago, and after examining the dockyards, arsenals, and other places of note, presented himself to Her Majesty the Queen requesting her to make known to him the secret of England's greatness. Putting into his hand an open copy of the Scriptures, Her Majesty added the remark, "That is the secret of England's greatness." The sentiment may be true, but it is none the less true, that the Bible lies at the basis of British institutions. If, then, it is the Bible that has secured for England her present pre-eminence; if it is her Christianity that has caused her to realize the conception of the poet—

"First flower of the earth, first gem of the sea,"

then we claim that the man who carried her the first Bible, and who prayed for and wept over her first rude sons converted to Christ, have her first rule sons converted to Christ, have served England more than all considered as statesmen and poets, simply considered as such, which she has ever produced. "If in this world of ours there is nothing so precious as life and nothing so kingly as man;—if over the man who leads a mountain or chains the lightning's flash does a lesser thing than the man who wakes up a beggar's conscience or leads a weeping harlot to the feet of Christ," then we

claim that the good man whose work, under God, this emphatically is, serves his generation more than any other man possibly can do.

The means by which the good man serves his generation are numerous, but the time at our disposal will not admit of more than a passing glance at two or three.

1st. By his example. To imitate is natural to man. The principle, under the promptings of which we do this, is one of the most deeply implanted of our nature. Of the existence and strength of this we are furnished with proof from every period of human life. The existence of this propensity is recognized in Scripture. Nor is that all. Provision also is made for its exercise. We are called to be "followers (imitators) of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." We are taught that Christ suffered, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. By contemplating the lives of the pure and the good, therefore, by whom we have been preceded on the stage of life, and by weaving the principles which have actuated them into the web of our own existence, we cannot fail to be benefited by their example. The example may have been that of a pious father, a sainted mother, or a devoted Sabbath-school teacher; but in any case, as the example of a holy person, it will not fail to do good—it will be "a thing of beauty and a joy forever."

2nd. The good man serves his generation by his prayers. Of all the duties of a religious character in which we are called to engage, there are few more important or more important than that of prayer. Of this the Word of God furnishes us with numerous illustrations. Take the case of Abraham, as he pleads for Sodom and the cities of the Plain, urging his suit until, if ten righteous men can be found, God in answer to his prayer will avert the threatened doom. Look at Moses also, as he places himself in the gap between the incensed Jehovah and the offending Israelites, exclaiming, "O, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now if Thou wilt forgive their sins, and if not blot me, I pray thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written;" and, in answer to his prayer, the anger of God is stayed. Elijah on Mount Carmel is another example. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months, and he prayed again, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

3rd. The good man serves his generation by his presence. The service rendered by the good man, to the city or community in which he resides, in delaying or averting the threatened and merited judgments of God cannot always be represented by figures. It is none the less real on that account. Proof of the transcendent value of such service, in part at least, is furnished by history. Why, we may be permitted to ask, did the angels lay hold on the hand of Lot and of those of his wife and daughters and hasten them out of Sodom? Simply, as one of them stated, because they could do nothing else. It is this righteous man and his family had taken their departure.

Why, we ask again, did not Cestius Gallus continue before the walls of Jerusalem for hours longer, when he besieged that city, and when, as we know, "many of the principle men were about to open the gates to him?" The answer is furnished by the fact that God's people had not yet departed from it! And is it not so still? The presence of a good man may be of more value to many a community than the most stringent sanitary measures, than police forces, or than even war-begrimed soldiers.

"When it goeth well with the righteous the city rejoiceth."

If the good man is under the immediate guidance and control of Heaven, his presence will be a blessing to his generation. Writers with the remark that Mythology informs us that some Pagan nations believe in a Supreme First Cause, but that they regard Him as completely abstracted in his own essence so as to know and care nothing about his creatures. Somewhat similar appears to be the ideal of Divine Providence possessed by many, "wise above that which is written," in our own day. Destitute of sufficient tenacity to deny boldly the Divine existence, they try nevertheless to put God as far from them as possible. Without waiting to notice in detail the miserable expedients resorted to for this purpose we content ourselves with the remark that Scripture is not their guide in this direction. According to its teachings God is not far from any one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being. Jacob recognized God's connexion with individual history when he wove saying, "If God will with me and I will keep me in the way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God," &c. And David after serving his own generation "by the will of God fell on sleep," &c.

III. Death to the good man is disarmed of its terrors.

Considered in the abstract death is undoubtedly one of the most fearful of the fall. Its degradation, its separations makes it an object in itself, the most undesirable of mortals. The views of men respecting this event will be, as they have ever been, gloomy or otherwise in proportion to the extent to which they have become acquainted with and have been influenced by the principles of Revelation. Strangers to these principles the Pagan nations of the past, notwithstanding their wisdom, genius, and culture, were possessed of the gloomiest ideas of death. The epithets by which they designated it were not only numerous but at the same time indicative of gloom and dread. To the good man it is otherwise. Much as, in itself, death is considered, it may be invested with all that is appalling and repellent, yet, in view of its results, it is to him not an unwelcome visitant. As in the case of the toll-woman traveller, to whom at the close of the sultry summer's day, "Tired nature's sweet restorer" comes, welcome and with noiseless wing the good man, having served his generation "by the will of God, falls on sleep," and is laid out by his fathers. Death to such is the habitation of the room from which disembodied spirits pass into mortality, his enfranchised spirit passes into the "house not made with hands eternal in the

heavens. Truthfully therefore, and in some cases rapturously he sings—

"Thy stroke, O death,—terror of the world I hail, 'Twill snare the fetters of my captive soul."

And some free-free to wing the vast realms of being.

Inhale the fresh air of life divine, And bask me in the sunshine of eternal love.

Art thou, O friend, serving thy generation? And art thou doing this not merely as a man of science and literature, or in the business relationships of life, but in the higher and important sense of being a good man? May God grant grace that, as patriots and lovers of our species, we may seek and possess this indispensable qualification of highest usefulness to others. Amen.

Religious Miscellany.

NEITHER POVERTY NOR RICHES.

BY REV. JAS. BAUME.

Agur, son of the man of Jakah, strikes the golden mean, in his simple, manly prayer of three thousand years ago. He was, doubtless, a plain, unlettered man; a rustic, as one would say, with narrow and simple views of life. It is, however, the opinion of Dr. Clarke, that our translators do him a little injustice in making him say: "Surely, I am more brutish than man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom nor have the knowledge of the holy." Agur was not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, nor a graduate from the school of the prophets; nor had he derived his knowledge from communion with holy men, though those privileges would have been of great advantage and saved him a very humiliating confession. Some have held the opinion that Agur is identical with Solomon; but Dr. Clarke, differing from this view, says: "I incline to the opinion that Agur was a public teacher; that Ithiel and Ucal were his scholars, that what he delivers to them here, was through the spirit of prophecy; and what the prophets generally termed an oracle, something sent immediately from God for the instruction of man." In this case, the spirit of prophecy came upon Agur temporarily, and the wisdom which he spoke was derived, not from the schools, but from Heaven. He speaks in lofty terms of the character of God, his government and revelation to man. He affirms in substance that God is the way to himself, and that the divine nature, works and ways, are known only to God as pleased to give light, and that the true light of God shines in His word. "Every word of God is pure." Agur must have understood the doctrine of providence and the way of prayer. "Two things have I required of thee, deny me them not before I die." This is no proof that Agur was now near the end of life; such a fact would go far to render almost meaningless the petitions offered. He may have been a young man, or at most, a man of middle age; perhaps just assuming new duties and responsibilities.

How thoughtful and appropriate his prayer: "Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I should be poor and steal, and take the name of God in vain."

Here is the wisdom that cometh down from above. No human heart, not directed of the spirit of God, could have conceived and uttered this prayer.

What moderation of desire; what perfect equipoise of character; what harmony of reason and appetite; what satisfaction with the Lord's will and the Lord's ways; how rich in saving common sense?

The whole man in body, soul and spirit, and the whole life in its relations, circumstances and possible exigencies, adjusted to the sovereign will of God. A fine specimen of character for all time.

"The happy mean" as to health—how few are attracted by its charms—how few pause at the line of content! The feverish haste to be rich, still richer; a little more, and richer still; how powerful the fascinations to be called "a rich man;" a man of wealth; "a man of large income;" "the wealthiest man in the community." But how awful the peril. "He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent." "He that hasteth to be rich, hath an evil eye." "But they that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and in many foolish and hurtful things, which draw men into destruction and perdition." "Lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?" "Our wisdom and our might have gotten us this wealth." "Alas! the pride, the vanity, the weakness of man. He forgets the hand that blesses him; waxes fat and kicks against the sovereign claims of his Maker, Benefactor and Judge.

What mournful instances verify the Word of God. Wealth is their curse. God has given them the desire of their hearts, and sent leanness into their souls.

"What is it," said a brother to us the other day, "what is it in wealth that eats into a man's soul, and that is so fatal; that seems to gnaw the marrow from a man's bones and the love out of his heart, and leave him no longer himself but another man, a walking image, whose head is of gold; with heart and arms of silver; thighs of brass; legs of iron; feet part of iron, and part of clay? On, and on he tumbles in his daily road, with feet of iron, sticking deeper and deeper into the cold clay of earthliness. The image is there; the gold, the silver, the brass, the iron, the clay, but the man is gone, the noble, gentle, humble, God-fearing, heart-loving Christian man is fled." How sad the change. The father is not the same father; the husband is not the same husband; the friend is not the same friend; the Christian is not the same Christian.

Many have passed out of the lowly cottage, the cottage of content, into the elegant mansion; but what a loss in the transition! And how often the poor heart, parched and weary, sighs amid its gorgeous desert for the pure, simple, refreshing joys of the past; when there was little to love, human and divine; the heart was rich in truth and bright for the light of an angel's smile, and hushed in the day's toil as a mowing in June. Alas! what a fall is involved in this "rising in the world." Pride has taken the place of humility. A severe, exacting, and imperious independence stands

out where, aforesaid, tenderness, gentleness, and conciliation held sway.

The battle with the hard-fisted and the hard-hearted world, has told upon the higher and better nature. Wealth has increased; there is affluence to surfeit, but the royal nature of the former self has been impoverished in the contest.

The man ventured and won, but his conquests have exhausted and impoverished him. He did not intend it; he strove bravely against it, and he felt the current too strong for him, and made some noble efforts to win and be himself. But the battle has gone against him; he has made money, but he has lost that which no wealth can buy; that which constitutes the royal nature of a man's nature, and without which he is little more than the image just described.

Yet many of these sad cases are not hopeless. Some of these half-stranded ones still hope for final triumph, and a long twilight of ease, contentment, and reparation. Heaven grant they be not wholly disappointed.

But why linger? The tale is more than "thrice told."

How few can be men of wealth, and be themselves. Some we know; we should like to write their names. What royalty is theirs? They are the true princes among men.

We saw one in our busy city the other day; his name is a household word; not the same single-minded, devoted, earnest Christian man he was years ago. And, did we not feel that it would be taking a liberty with his good name, we would gladly write it in full, as an example of what the grace of God is able to do for a man of large and increasing wealth, and of national reputation as a Christian worker. Should his eye fall on the letters J. V. F. he will kindly pardon the liberty taken by an old friend.

The grace of God is sufficient to keep the heart from the hardening, corroding power of riches, and many are the examples thereof.

At the same time the increase of wealth involves a fearful peril; not the amount but the love of it—the devotion to it of the whole man. A pastoral visit developed a case, a few days ago, where the increase of a few thousand dollars had done all the bad work that hundreds of thousands could have done. "I cannot," says good Bishop Reynolds, "call riches better than the 'baggage' of virtue; the Roman word is better, 'impedimenta.' For as baggage is to an army, so are riches to virtue. It cannot be spared nor left behind, but it hinders the march; yea, and the care of it sometimes loseth or disturbeth the victory."

The subject, however, is not popular; the current sets the other way, and every man thinks himself able to manage it.

But while wealth has its perils, we never believed that poverty was favorable to a high state of grace. We have read and heard "homilies" on the virtues of poverty, that seemed to imply this, but we always found something within that refused to be convinced. Something that said "let me be excused the text."

"The happy mean" of Agur's prayer, is that which commands itself; "Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I should be poor and steal, and take the name of God in vain."

In such a prayer the heart, thank God, is at rest—the sweet and blessed rest of content.

IMPORTANT CHANGES AMONG THE JEWS.

Mr. Deutsche's article in the (English) Quarterly Review, on the Talmud, has excited new interest for the Jews. His late article—equally valuable if not equally interesting—on the Talmudic origin of Mohammedanism, has attracted additional attention to them. A very important paper in the November number of Blackwood, on "The Jewish Reformation and the Talmud," cannot fail to enhance this interest. It is probably from the same pen, the most accomplished one in Jewish learning now extant. It shows that Judaism is sharing in the characteristic tendencies of our age, is struggling to conform itself to "modern thought," and is, therefore, breaking up its old petrified formulae of both opinion and custom, is, in fact, reforming by eliminating its antiquated distinctive traits.

The Jews are ubiquitous among us, and yet how little we know of their actual religious condition! Our ignorance and indifference about their present status arises, chiefly from the fact that their importance is chiefly historical, not numerical or contemporary. Their aggregate force throughout the world is hardly more than six millions, and these few millions are so diffused through the world's population as to be of little significance in any one country. Their dispersion among the nations is general, and they are to be found in almost every corner of the globe. They are more numerous in European Russia than anywhere else, being about 1,300,000; France has 80,000; Great Britain and Austria, 36,000; Italy, about 83,000; Russia, 250,000; other German States, about 492,000; the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark, about 76,000; Sweden, Norway and Switzerland, about 4,000; Italy, 40,000; Greece, 8,000; European Turkey, 70,000; Syria and Asiatic Turkey, 52,000; North Africa, 610,000; Eastern Asia, about 500,000; America, 400,000. The remainder are scattered in almost every other section of the globe. They are more than seven times as numerous in America as in the Holy Land and all Syria. Everywhere they are an effective people in financial affairs; in Western Europe they are a real power in literary and political life, especially in the liberalistic movements and in journalism. In the latter respect their actual power is hardly suspected, but they are the leaders of the progressive or democratic journalism of the Teutonic States. Jewish pens are now leading public opinion in Russia and Austria. The long and intolerable oppression of the race in Europe have prepared them for this leadership in the ranks of political reform, of democratic liberty and ecclesiastical toleration. Providence has evidently yet an important mission for them in the development of the human race. Meanwhile they are an immense element in the commercial finance of the nations, and the exchequer of Europe are, to a large extent, in their hands. Marvellous people! Most marvellous in the primitive

history of humanity, most anomalous in its modes and aims!

Invincibly vigorous in their fidelity to their ancient faith and customs during the long period of their European persecutions, their mysterious people have at last entered upon a career of self-revolution and reform. The fact is most significant and curious, especially as illustrating the salutary influence of liberal policy on the part of governments, and the reformatory power of the modern doctrine of toleration. Down to our century no people adhered more steadfastly to their traditions in spite of the most appalling hostility. With general toleration, in our age they have spontaneously turned their own attention to the reform of those very peculiarities which the combined nations were unable, with the sword, torture, and every device of persecution, to change during more than eighteen centuries.

What must refer the inquisitive reader to the paper in Blackwood for the details of this voluntary reformation. They are too numerous for even an enumeration in a newspaper article. Suffice it to say that the Talmud, which has defined everything distinctively Jewish, in moral as well as religious life, has been questioned more obligatorily, less and more intelligently than the Hebrew Holy Scriptures themselves, has at last been effectively struck down by this Jewish revolution. In England, in America, and largely on the continent of Europe, its most sacred prescriptions have been repudiated. As in the Papal Church, and in the Protestant world, two parties are in the field, the orthodox, and the progressive or rationalistic, and the latter is everywhere advancing, and is evidently steeled to triumph. The reformatory ideas strike through the whole substance of traditional Judaism. Its legendary literature, its Rabbinical dogmatism, its synagogic formulae, its social and domestic habits, all are more or less overhauled and "conformed to modern thought."

In this country the spirit of innovation has gone so far that it is at last proposed to substitute the Christian in place of the Jewish Sabbath for public worship, on the ground of rational expediency or popular convenience. Preaching in the vernacular—once a rare thing—popular church music, the seating of the sexes together—heretofore an unknown thing in Judaism—the absence of nearly the whole system of Pharisaic punctilia, in costumes, washings, fastings, and synagogic ceremonies, are features in this remarkable reformation or revolution. It can hardly be doubted by an enlightened or philosophic observer that the medieval and ancient Judaism is expiring.

This extraordinary change is to be accounted for chiefly on two grounds: first, on that which we have already stated, the improved toleration of religious thought by governments. There is hardly to be found, in all modern history, a more striking and conclusive proof of the beneficent power of toleration. What not thrones, senates, inquisitions, armies could not do, "masterly inactivity" is doing for the reform of Jewish errors.

But, secondly, the modern "rationalistic spirit" has invaded the synagogue, and is leaving the whole Hebrew world, in civilized Europe and America—at least, this spirit is negative, destructive. Christian thinkers see in it much to deplore and fear; but it has, perhaps, its providential function. The materialism of action and modern materialism, as well as the physical world, are the most rapid and the most complete. The old superstitions and lies which have crushed the human race must be dispelled. Let them die; but when they are dispelled, we may expect a reformation of the intellectual world to true and eternal life. This seems to be the normal, the historical, the providential rationale. Let us not too much fear it. Some writer has predicted that by the end of this century we may look for a general reaction to a spiritualism, a catholic religious life of love, pure and intense, beyond anything yet known in history. Humanity cannot live without aspirations; hopes and destinies beyond its material sphere. The negative criticism and positive philosophy of our times may be the means of clearing away the debris of anterior times, in preparation for a purer history of humanity. Let us hope so; meanwhile, God reigns, and essential truth must prevail. Magna est veritas et prevalebit—Great is the truth and it must prevail. If the classic pagan could say so, the Christian philosopher may surely sing and shout the sublime maxim amid all the tumults and revolutions of modern times.—Western Advocate.

NO SALVATION OUT OF CHRIST.

My dear lord, I would seek most earnestly to guard you against the danger which arises from the very qualities which we most admire in you, and from the actions for which we are most grateful to you. The danger is, lest you contemplate these matters with too much satisfaction, lest you rest upon them as the grounds of your hope of final acceptance with God. O my dear lord, the best of the sons of men must be content, or rather must be most anxious to look out of themselves, and above themselves for any sure hope—I will not say of justification but of mercy. Consider the infinite holiness and purity of God, and then say whether any man was ever fit to appear at his tribunal. Consider the demands of His Law, extending to the motions of the heart, and wish and imagination of the most secret thought, and say whether you or any one, can stand before Him in your own strength, when He cometh to judgment. No; it is as sinners, grievous sinners, we shall be most appear; and the only plea which will be admitted for us is the righteousness and merits of our crucified Redeemer. If we place any reliance on our own poor doings or fancied virtues, those very virtues will be our snares, our downfall. Above all things, therefore, it is our duty, and pre-eminently the duty of the purest and best among us, to cast off all confidence in ourselves, and thankfully to embrace Christ's most precious offer on the terms on which He offers it. He will be our Saviour only if we know and feel and humbly acknowledge that we need His salvation. He will be more and more our Saviour in proportion as we more and more rely upon Him. But surely, the more we feel and deplore our own sinfulness, the more earnest will be our love, the firmer our reliance on Him who is mighty to save. Therefore it is, that, in preparing ourselves to appear before Him,

the less we think of what we deem our good deeds and good qualities, and the more rigidly we scrutinize our hearts, and detect and deplore our own sinfulness, the fitter shall we be, because the more deeply sensible, of the absolute necessity and of the incalculable value of His blessed undertaking and suffering for us. One word only more—of ourselves we cannot come to this due sense of our own unworthiness; and the devil is always ready to tempt our weak hearts with the bait which is most taking to many among us—confidence in ourselves. It is the Holy Spirit who alone can give us that knowledge of our own hearts, of their weakness, their wickedness—and of the way of God's salvation, pardon of the faithful and condoning penitent for His dear Son's sake. O my dear lord, may you and I be found the truly penitent, and then we shall have our perfect consumption and bliss among the truly blessed.—The late Bishop of Exeter to Lord Eldon.

"THIS YEAR THOU SHALT DIE."

The decree has gone forth, and thou shalt not escape it. Hope's brightest visions may gleam before thee, early's tenderest affections may entwine themselves about thee, but thou must turn from them all, silently and robustly away, and go down alone, unattended into the "dark valley of the shadow of death."

"Is thy house set in order?" thy lamp trimmed and burning? Hast thou examined thine hope and found thy feet secure upon the "Rock of Ages?" Hast thou no more deeds of charity to perform, no last words of sympathy or entreaty for thy fellow mortals? Above all, hast thou been so diligent a servant to thy Master's vineyard that thou canst say, "I have mission has been faithfully discharged. I have accomplished the work that thou gavest me to do?" It matters not then when the "Master shall call for thee." The eyes that close upon the scenes of earth, shall open at once upon the glories of heaven; the voice that is hushed in unbroken silence, shall swell the song of the Redeemer in the house of the blessed, and the hand that lies cold and motionless in death, shall strike the "golden harp" in the New Jerusalem, and cast its crown at the feet of the Lamb.

This year thou shalt live! Most solemn thought! The pestilence shall not harm thee! The destroyer shall pass thy dwelling! The blessings of a year are to fall on thine head, the responsibilities of a year are to be intrusted to thy care, the work of a year thy hand must perform, the sorrows of a year thy spirit endure.

This extraordinary change is to be accounted for chiefly on two grounds: first, on that which we have already stated, the improved toleration of religious thought by governments. There is hardly to be found, in all modern history, a more striking and conclusive proof of the beneficent power of toleration. What not thrones, senates, inquisitions, armies could not do, "masterly inactivity" is doing for the reform of Jewish errors.

But, secondly, the modern "rationalistic spirit" has invaded the synagogue, and is leaving the whole Hebrew world, in civilized Europe and America—at least, this spirit is negative, destructive. Christian thinkers see in it much to deplore and fear; but it has, perhaps, its providential function. The materialism of action and modern materialism, as well as the physical world, are the most rapid and the most complete. The old superstitions and lies which have crushed the human race must be dispelled. Let them die; but when they are dispelled, we may expect a reformation of the intellectual world to true and eternal life. This seems to be the normal, the historical, the providential rationale. Let us not too much fear it. Some writer has predicted that by the end of this century we may look for a general reaction to a spiritualism, a catholic religious life of love, pure and intense, beyond anything yet known in history. Humanity cannot live without aspirations; hopes and destinies beyond its material sphere. The negative criticism and positive philosophy of our times may be the means of clearing away the debris of anterior times, in preparation for a purer history of humanity. Let us hope so; meanwhile, God reigns, and essential truth must prevail. If the classic pagan could say so, the Christian philosopher may surely sing and shout the sublime maxim amid all the tumults and revolutions of modern times.—Western Advocate.

SHALL WE HAVE A GENERAL REVIVAL?

We stated in a former article, that there is little ground for hope for a general revival, and less the earnest co-operation of the membership of the Church can be gained. Nor can a general revival of the work of God be mainly expected, so long as the Church depends upon special and extraordinary means to bring it about. These, no doubt, have their place and their importance; there are times when they may be resorted to, not only with safety but with great advantage; the results which have been secured by their employment in our own church, leave reasonable ground of doubt on this point. But it is equally evident that if they are ever allowed to take the place in the confidence of the Church, which legitimately belongs to the stated and ordinary means of grace, they will not only become useless but disastrous in their results. We have probably gone quite as far in this direction already, as we can go without endangering the most vital interests of the Church. We are afraid there are places where periodical seasons of excitement are already regarded as the main dependence, both for maintaining and increasing the vitality of the Church, as well as for the increase of its members. There are many congregations in which if the question were asked, "How many conversions have taken place among you during the last month or last quarter?" the answer returned would probably be "O, we have no special services." So deeply rooted has the idea become, that the awakening and conversion of sinners is only to be looked for in connection with extraordinary means of some kind or another, they are scarcely expected as the result of the ordinary means.

Now what is the inevitable result of this state of things? It is impossible that we should either pray in faith or labor with confidence for anything, that we deem it unreasonable to expect. The very first condition of success in any undertaking is a firm persuasion of the possibility of the attainment of the end of our exertion. Even in respect to the ordinary affairs of life, our achievements are generally in proportion to our faith. He that loses his confidence is almost sure to lose his cause. And if this be true in respect to temporal matters, it is still more strikingly true in respect to the matters which are spiritual. The work of soul-saving is pre-eminently a work of faith. It is accomplished not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord. And we have no right to expect that divine energy to accompany our exertions, which is absolutely indispensable in order to their success, except in answer to earnest, believing prayer. But we cannot pray for that which we do not expect; we may go through the form, and use the language of prayer, but there will be the absence of that earnestness of faith, which give it its real value and importance. And whatever be the effect of restraining prayer will tend to cripple our energies, and prevent us from putting forth those efforts without which it is unreasonable to expect success.

It would be interesting to know, as a matter of fact, what proportion of the really Christian people in our congregations are in the habit of praying, earnestly, importunately, and believingly, every Sabbath morning, that the word of God preached to them that day might not only prove to be the means of instruction and edification to believers, but of the awakening and conversion of sinners.

It is not to be expected that any minister, though in the week-day preparation, and devoted to their sermons day to day directly at the result, and pray and expect that it may be accomplished. We are afraid that, in both instances, the proportion of the whole number is comparatively small. It may be that our own delinquencies in this respect will account in part for our fears; but they are not justified by the comparative fewness of the conversions which actually take place in connection with the ordinary means of grace? Can it be reasonably doubted, that if the thousands of our people who only pray habitually through the week, were to pray earnestly, importunately, and believingly, and at the very seat every Sabbath morning, with a definite purpose for the converting power to attend the ministrations of his servants on that day; and if the hundreds of those who occupy our pulpits came from their studies and their closets with the word like fire in their bones, and this grand end of preaching distinctly before their minds, that the signs and tokens of penitents and the rejoicing shout of new-born souls would be of far more common occurrence in our churches than they really are. But if these things are neglected, surely nothing more is necessary to account for a state of things which we all earnestly deplore.

Now surely there is enough in the history of Methodism—to go no farther—to rebuke this mistrust and restore our confidence in the ordinary means of grace. Camp-meetings and protracted meetings, however useful they have proved at a later period in the history of our Church, found no place in that "great religious movement of the eighteenth century," in which it had its birth, and at that time when it was unquestionably the most vital, vigorous and aggressive—when in the face of the most determined opposition it achieved its most splendid victories, they were neglected, surely nothing more is necessary to account for a state of things which we all earnestly deplore.

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