

Pastor and People.

THE TOUCH OF THE DIVINE.

BY JOHN IMRIE, TORONTO.

Each grain of sand by sounding sea,
Each trembling leaf on quivering tree,
Each blade of grass on dewy lea,
Speaks volumes of God's love to me!

The pearls that deep in ocean lie,
The twinkling stars that gem the sky,
The sunbeam, caught from noontide's eye,
Direct my thoughts, oh God, to Thee!

The flowers that deck the fragrant dell,
And o'er me cast their beauty-spell,
I love them—for they seem to tell
The story of God's love to me!

No matter where I wander free,
By river, lake, or boundless sea,
The touch of God's dear hand I see
And know by these He loveth me!

Oh, God! Thou doest all things well,
Earth, sea, and sky Thy wisdom tell
In heaven what must it be to dwell
For ever, oh my God, with Thee!

THE WISE USE OF OPPORTUNITY.

BY REV. J. A. R. DICKSON, B.D.

In reading the old Puritan Divines whose books are so breezy with fulness of thought, and so suggestive with a rare wisdom, and so attractive with abundance of racy statements and original observation, we find strong emphasis laid on the unspeakable value of opportunity. One says "Opportunity is God's angel." Another "Opportunities of doing service for Christ, and souls, are worth more than a world." Another "Opportunities are the cream of time." To the man who looks for opportunity it is not difficult to find. It stands waiting for him, earnestly desiring to be embraced and used. Some are so blind that they cannot see it till it lies behind them, and so is gone out of their reach for ever. No amount of repentance and good resolution can possibly recover a lost opportunity. Herein is discovered to us the character of our life, it comes to us moment by moment, and hour by hour so that we may pack it full of beautiful deeds, blessed words and charitable and kind thoughts, and thus become behind us a rich garden of loveliness and not a waste, uncultivated desert. Happy is he who is able to use it well! Successful is he who does not suffer any of the precious space to go unemployed. Could we always remember that the best time is the present, always the present, in which to act, we would not suffer many priceless hours to slip by unimproved. We often marvel at the amount of work done by some men, it seems so large that there is hardly time for its accomplishment. But when we reckon up in order the working hours of each day, and what may be made of them, our surprise dies away, leaving us the deep conviction of our own idleness. We are not thrifty of our time. We do not set on it a value sufficiently high. We promise ourselves a limitless range. We forget that for us individually it is measured out to a day. We have only a certain number of days in which to act—an appointed time. We need this curb on our vagrant minds constantly to check our easy, careless thoughtlessness. How propitious to-morrow seems. No day could be more favourable, and yet when it comes into the realm of to-day it changes character. Its attraction is gone. Divine Wisdom insists strongly on the employment of the present moment, "Now is the accepted time," "Work to day," "Boast not thyself of the morrow for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Every wise man listens to their voice and obeys. Matthew Henry, in the beginning of 1705, dedicated himself afresh to the service and glory of God in words like the following, which are full of interest: "I know it is the will of God that I should be useful, and by his grace I will be so; Lord Thou knowest it is the top of my ambition in this world to do good, and to be serviceable to the honour of Christ and the welfare of precious souls; I would fain do good in the pulpit, and good with my pen, and which I earnestly desire to abound more in, to do good by my common converse. O, that the door of my opportunities may be still open, and that my heart may be enlarged by holy zeal and activity for God this year; and that I may be thoroughly garnished with knowledge, wisdom, and grace for every good word and work." This gives us the key to the fruitful life of this great man.

When Brownlow North was recognized as an Evangelist by the Free Church of Scotland (Dr. Candlish having told him the day previous that he would be asked to say a few words on the state of religion in Scotland) he said: "Dear friends, I have now an opportunity that I shall never forgive myself all my life if I neglect, and although I have a great opening to speak about myself, and to express much more than I have expressed, yet I would rather seize the chance, which I may never have again, of such an assembly as that I am now speaking to, of trying if God will give me power to say that which will do good. The time is short, and we know not what may be lost by a neglected opportunity." And thereupon he delivered a most powerful and impressive address. And truly as Whittier sings:

His few brief words were such as move
The hun- heart; the faith sown seeds,
Which ripen in the soil of love
To high heroic deeds.

Brownlow North had learned the value of opportunity years before this time, and that fitted him for improving this occasion, one, as he saw, that comes but seldom to most men even in the most favourable circumstances. Great opportunities are embraced only when small ones are not despised or neglected. When Mr. North was converted from his evil ways, he wrote this note to his aunt which tells us more by its suggestion than what it actually says. "I am, dear auntie, I trust, by the grace of God a changed man, and I have been writing some of my former companions, etc."

What a grand thing may be made of life if it be only faithfully used! What openings there are in it for the manifestation of a Christliness of character! It needs not a lofty position to make life "one grand, sweet song," that will charm the souls of all who come within the subtle touch of its influence. The lowliest lot may be made magnetic as the loftiest. George Herbert in his "Elixir" writes a truth which should never pass out of sight—speaking of the words "For thy sake," he says:

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine;
Who sweeps a room as by thy laws
Makes that and the action fine.

What a noble life was that of Harlan Page? How high shines the course Robert Annan of Dundee, ran? How heavenly is the spirit of Frances Ridley Havergal and Robert Murray McChesney and Adelaide Newton? How rich a treasure have Matthew Henry, Richard Baxter, and the old Scotch Divines and English Puritans left us in their pastoral activity and in their numerous writings that smell of myrrh and cassia out of the ivory palaces?

The footprints on the sands of time made by these and hundreds of others tell out in no uncertain tones the value of opportunity well employed. It makes life glorious. It builds a monument that will never perish. It lays a train of causes that send their effects into the depths of eternity.

It is quickening to read of the manner in which Philip Henry filled up every opportunity—often indeed making opportunities for himself. He was conscientiously diligent in his work as a gospel minister, but beyond this we are told. "Usually, when he paid his workmen their wages, he gave them some good counsel about their souls." And whenever he gave alms for the poor, he usually gave with them spiritual alms, some good word of counsel, reproof, instruction, or comfort as there was occasion; and in accommodating these to the persons to whom he spoke, he had a very great dexterity." Dr. John Brown, of Broughton Place U.P. Church, Edinburgh, on one occasion took refuge from a snow-storm in the office of a friend. "On laying aside his top-coat he took a copy of the 'Pilgrim's Progress' from a glass case, and enquired if it was quite convenient to go among the workpeople, which of course was hailed with delight. Placing himself in the midst of them, he said: 'It has always been thought that the first part of the 'Pilgrim's Progress' was the best, but I have been greatly struck with the excellences of the latter part also;' and opening the book at the encounter of Mr. Greatheart with the giant Slaygood, he read on. The power and beauty of his reading was impressive. No one present can forget his appearance when he came to that inimitable passage, 'As to the main, I thank Him that loves me; I am fixed.' Ever after that he was a great favourite with the men."

A story is told of John Wesley which shows how he could turn an untoward event to good account. Being stopped by a highwayman who demanded his purse or his life, a strange alternative, for if the money was not forthcoming what good would taking the life do the man? Wesley, after giving him his money, very little no doubt, for preachers never have much, he said to him, "Let me speak to you one word, the time may come when you may regret the course of life in which you are now engaged. Remember this, 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.'" No more was said and they parted. Many years after that at a church door the man discovered himself to Wesley and confessed the great and saving change these words had wrought in him. It was a word in season. So he returned to account an unexpected opportunity.

When the desire to be helpful to men is present in the soul the opportunity is not far off. There are always and everywhere openings for some kind of service in doing good. And it is in being satisfied to do the least and lowliest acts that our Christian spirit shines forth to most advantage.

Listen to the great Apostle's voice as he closes his argument on the resurrection of the saints, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

A BEAUTIFUL PICTURE.

The Rev. Mr. Somerville, reading the 71st Psalm during the services in Blackfriars parish church, Glasgow, recently, said: I have seen many beautiful pictures in the National Gallery, in the Louvre, the Luxemburg, and elsewhere, but never one to equal that in real life which I beheld in the hall of the Waterloo Street Church in 1877. It was shortly after the services of Mr. Moody, the evangelist, had drawn ministers and members of all denominations more closely together. Some of us were assembled as the Committee of the Evangelistic Association, and we had closed the ordinary business, when in there came hastily the Rev. Dr. Somerville, then minister of Anderston Free Church, my reverend friend, and bearing my own name, though no relative. We all gave him warm welcome, but little did we expect the announcement he made. He told us in his high, clear and affectionate tones

that he had been thinking over the matter, and he wished to free himself from the limited work of his pastorate, and to give himself as a missionary to the world under our authority and auspices.

It fairly took away our breath. This man, after forty years of honourable and successful labour, at an age when most men desire rest, proposing to himself and to us work that involved journeys, fatigue and sacrifices which the youngest would shrink from. Affectionately we remonstrated. But it was of no use. There he stood before us—the man that had a history before some of us were born—the early friend of McChesney, Burns and the Bonars, old in years, and yet young in enthusiasm. Nearly seventy, and his eye was not dimmed nor his natural strength abated; the beautiful hair falling upon his shoulders, and the light sparkling in that wonderful eye; strong in the bone and warm in his feelings like all his race, proclaiming that it was his desire to go forth to the regions beyond and preach the Gospel to them, who were ignorant and out of the way. No security for stipend or anything of that sort did he think of. He would cast himself upon God. It was the work he was wanting, and he desired to go forth with the sympathy and prayers of his brethren. He carried us away with his own enthusiasm. It was all settled in a marvellously short time. The Rev. Dr. Wallace was called upon to unite in prayer, and he was set apart as our missionary for the world, and then he addressed us, taking the 18th verse of this Psalm, "Now also, when I am old and grey-headed, oh God, forsake me not, until I have showed Thy strength unto this generation, and Thy power to every one that is to come."

I can't describe the impression made upon us. He was at times in tears, and we were also. What a wonderful commentary does his work of the last twelve years furnish! He has been in France, Spain, Italy and Turkey, in Egypt, New Zealand and Australia, and the blessed instrument of a great work in all. How wonderfully his prayer has been answered. No man has been privileged to show more the strength of God to this generation. As I have read of him and his work in these lands, my mind often reverts to the beautiful picture of that morning in Waterloo Street—I think the most beautiful in outward form and inward spiritual quality I ever beheld.

I cannot close without quoting his words to me once: "Had the Established Church been at the Disruption what it now is we would never have left it." And so, when our leaders invited him to speak at the last Assembly, he cordially responded. I was there, and I will never forget the spontaneous homage that was given to him, the whole Assembly rising upon his entrance; nor will I forget his words on the occasion. That place will ever be hallowed to me. I heard there the last address of Dr. Norman Macleod on the Indian Mission, and I heard there the address of Dr. Somerville on the Jewish Mission; and I don't expect ever to hear the like again. I am thankful that the name he bore has been dignified by his wearing it, and I can never forget his heroic work.

A LITTLE FUN AT HOME.

Do not be afraid of a little fun at home. Do not shut up your house lest the sun should fade your carpets; and your hearts, lest a laugh should shake down a few of the musty old cobwebs that are hanging there. If you want to ruin your sons, let them think that all mirth and social enjoyment must be left at the threshold without when they come home at night. When once a home is regarded as only a place to eat, drink and sleep in, the work is begun that ends in gambling houses and reckless degradation. Young people must have fun and relaxation; if they do not find it at their own hearthstones they will see it at less profitable places. Therefore, let the doors and windows be cheerfully thrown open in summer, and make the home delightful with all those little arts parents so well understand. Do not repress the buoyant spirits of your children. Half an hour of merriment within doors, and merriment of a home, blots out the remembrance of many a care and annoyance during the day; and the best safeguard they can take with them into the world is the influence of a bright home.

A HOME TEST OF RELIGION.

"Go home to thy friends" (Mark. v. 19). Home and friends—these are a true test of real conversion unto God. If the people at home don't see our conversion and hear of it, too, in vain do we sound abroad what the Lord hath done for souls.

The man who was cured was evidently not in a hurry to go home; but the Lord said to him, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them what great things the Lord hath done for thee."

Testimony for God begins there. The question was once asked, "Is So-and-so a Christian?" "I don't know," was the answer, "I have never lived with him."

That's the test—the fireside and the family circle. We may make a great noise in the world, and be great workers; but what do the folks at home think about us?

DR. ALEX. WHYTE, of Edinburgh, has promised to give a lecture this winter to the Young Men's Association of Dr. John Macleod's congregation in Govan.