

PRESBYTERIAN NIGHT THOUGHTS.

The writer is by no means sensitive whether the "thoughts" about to be presented are called night or day thoughts; the plain truth being that most of the thoughts he wishes to present came to him in the daytime. However, night is supposed to be the time for reflection and meditation, and so it seems appropriate to use the above title.

Special emphasis should be placed upon the fact that the "thoughts" of this article are for Presbyterians; for while all our great denominations have much in this age about which to think, we as Presbyterians should give earnest heed to the things which especially concern us as individuals and as a church.

The first "thought" which I would present to my Presbyterian brethren is respecting the custom of grace at meals or, as it is generally called, "asking a blessing."

It is somewhat difficult for ministers to know just what the practice of Christian families is in regard to this matter, for many worldly people, from a sense of courtesy, invite ministers to ask God's blessing at their tables. The question for us to consider is, Do many of our people, or most of our people, regularly ask the blessing of God upon their daily food?

We are not just certain where the custom of asking a blessing at the table originated. Charles Lamb is of the opinion that it was at a time when a meal was considered a special gift of God; when food was scarce and the hunter felt that when his table was provided with a meal he was especially indebted to God for it. No difference what the genesis of the custom, it is a good custom and should be practised.

A blessing at the table shows our recognition of God and our sense of dependence upon Him. It is quite true that we may be more grateful at a time when food is scarce and living precious, but even when food is abundant we should not fail to remember that it is God who opens his hand and supplies all our wants.

This custom has been a common one in Presbyterian families in the past, and it is the duty of ministers to press home upon the people the privilege of seeking God's blessing upon their daily food.

There is another thought along the same line. I refer to family prayers or Christian worship. Those who were trained in Christian and praying families know that the family altar is a place of spiritual education. In after years how vivid in recollection are the forms of our parents as they bowed in prayer morning and evening. The very remembrance is a benediction!

It is difficult to ascertain the facts, but there are indications that family prayer is to some extent dying out among many Christian people. It is said that in many families connected with our churches family prayer is neglected. If such be the case, it is a sad thing for the Christian church. There are some things, however, that lead us to believe that the practice is by no means general.

Here is one thing; a straw which shows the way the wind is blowing. A sermon having been preached upon this subject, a college professor approached the minister at the close and informed him that in his family was a companion who had been in many Christian families and who gave it as her experience that family prayer was rare. Her words were: "I have lived in many Christian families, and in the families of several ministers, and your home is the first one where they ever had family prayers."

It would be easy to dwell upon the advantage of prayer in the family. What an influence it has upon the children and upon the home life when day is begun and ended with God! How easy a thing it is for men to pray in public who habitually pray at home with their families. Possibly it is because many of our heads of families fail to pray in their homes that they find it difficult to pray in public meetings. May the Cotter's Saturday Night be the model of our Christian American homes.

We turn our thoughts for a moment in another direction. How many Presbyterian parents give their children regular and systematic instruction at home in religious matters? Formerly it was the custom of parents to require their children to commit the catechism and the Bible in the home, but most parents are too lax in these matters at the present time. It is a fact that very few instruct their children regularly in religious things. A teacher of large experience, especially with children, in a recent conversation gave it as her opinion that it is the exception rather than the rule for

children to be instructed by their parents in the home systematically in religious matters.

There is a dangerous custom growing up among many Christian people. This is the tendency to pass the religious instruction of children over into the hands of the teachers in the Sabbath-school. What a mistake! No teacher can ever take the place of a parent. The parent who neglects his child and fails to train him in the nurture and admonition of God in the home is guilty of great folly. Such parents often imperil the souls of their children.

Another subject upon which we should reflect is the failure of many Presbyterian parents to take their children to church on the Sabbath.

There is a dangerous heresy abroad that the Sabbath-school is the children's church, that if the little ones attend the Sabbath-school in the morning or in the afternoon that is sufficient. The Sabbath-school can never take the place of the church, it is a dangerous error to suppose it can. The services in the public sanctuary have an educational value that cannot easily be overrated. Indeed, the ordinary work of the Sabbath-school is often greatly over-estimated so far as the training of children in the fundamental principles of Christianity is concerned.

It is a sad fact that comparatively few children attend church, and it is impossible for some pastors to preach sermons to children for the simple reason that there are few children to hear them. The writer was recently informed by a certain gentleman that he attended a church where it is the custom of the minister to preach to children at stated periods. He was anxious to learn the effect of the sermon upon the children, and leaning over the gallery rail was astonished to see but one child present! This probably is an exceptional case, but there are too few children in our churches, and this is a subject about which Presbyterians should think earnestly and prayerfully. Our children should be graduated from the home and the Sabbath-school into the church and not into the world.

Presbyterians have always given great attention to preaching. Indeed, in the Presbyterian church the sermon is the central part of the service. Perhaps no denomination has succeeded better in training a race of preachers than the Presbyterian, if, indeed, so well. Is there a tendency to revolt from too much preaching?

This question is asked in order to bring forward the problem of the second service on the Sabbath, for it is a great question in many parts of the land what to do with the second service. Shall we abandon it or change its nature? If the service has lost its hold upon the affections of the people would it not be better to abandon it altogether and permit ministers to be free to conduct evangelistic meetings? Makeshifts cannot last long. Special services may help on for awhile, but if it be a fact that the people want less preaching and more music and praying, why not look the matter squarely in the face?

Whatever be the difficulty, it is a fact that in many of our churches the second service is not so well attended as it ought to be. This may be the fault of the minister, but we rather judge that the conditions of life have much to do with it. The world has too strong a hold upon many of our people. They love their ease too well and take too much pleasure in secular things, in semi-religious books, and in secular papers to enjoy with relish the Sabbath evening service. All of us are aware of the growing tendency to make the Sabbath a day of pleasure and an occasion for social gatherings; and all these things have a direct bearing upon the matter before us. These thoughts are presented to Presbyterians with the hope that they may become not only better Presbyterians, but more faithful Christian people. *New York Observer.*

THE POWER OF UNITED PRAYER.

As we read the Book of Inspiration and as we observe God's providential dealings with men, we find two things emphasized: First, there is individual duty and responsibility; and, second, men are largely dependent on each other. There is a sense in which every man must stand alone before God. His own acts determine his destiny. "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son, the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." No man need expect to plead successfully either the virtues or vices of his ancestors, relatives or associates as an excuse for his wrong-doing. Adams'