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Religious Miscellany.

For the Provincial Wesleyan.

JOY.

BY MARY E. HERBERT.

"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice."—Phil. iv. 4.

What an ecstatic emotion is joy! How it animates the heart; how it causes the pulse to throb, and the eye to sparkle, and the step to bound! Before it, difficulties that seemed "like giant walls to be," are laid prostrate, and the soul shaking off the burdens by which it had been encompassed, goes sweetly singing on its way.

A man afflicted with chronic dyspepsia, applied to a celebrated physician for a remedy. His prescription was this passage of Scripture: "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say, rejoice."

And no doubt, for many physical as well as moral evils, this would be a blessed panacea, for powerfully does the mind affect the frail body; sorrow and anxiety have sometimes so exhausting an effect that every limament betrays the inward emotion. The pallid cheek, the sunken, heavy eye, the nervous arm, the listless step—all broken their presence, causing observers who mark these manifestations to pity, though they may not be able to relieve.

We do not believe with the poet Young, that

"'Tis impious for a good man to be sad; for the path of life is sometimes thickly strewn with thorns; and, as bruised and bleeding, many of earth's helpless ones pursue their way, it is wonderful that they should become 'sore discouraged'."

Rather, perhaps, as a tender exhortation than a stern command was this text penned; yet, no doubt, it is one of the Christian's most blessed privileges. For here is an unfailing source of joy: earthly delights, however pure and refined, may become exhausted; the joy that springs from them is mixed and evanescent, but our God is the same, an ever-flowing fountain of happiness to His people. He is not only a sympathizing, but an Almighty Saviour. His resources are as infinite as His love, and that is unbounded.

Let us cultivate a more rejoicing frame of mind. Let us be more thankful for mercies given, and pray for a larger increase of faith; then, indeed, shall we "fear no evil," for God will be with us. "His rod and His staff they shall comfort us."

Dartmouth.

TRADITION AND PREJUDICE.

Isaac Taylor, in his notable book on Primitive Christianity—a work of exhaustive learning in patriotic literature—admits the importance of tradition. The Scriptures are, indeed, the standard of Protestant faith; but then how do we know what documents are the Scriptures except by tradition? The first day of the week is the recognized Christian Sabbath; but how, unless by tradition, do we know that the Apostolic Church substituted it for the Jewish seventh-day Sabbath? Holy Scripture occasionally alludes to the observance of the first day—the "Lord's day"—but nowhere specifically designates it as the Sabbath. And so with other facts. Tradition, then, has its function in the Church. We absolutely cannot do without it. But what can be more uncertain than tradition? What, in its passage through the vicissitudes of centuries, the mutabilities of opinion, the transitions from enlightenment to barbarism and from barbarism to enlightenment, is more liable to error? What demands more the calm, clear discrimination of reason? Assuredly man can commit no greater folly, no greater treason, to God's own order than by the abdication of his reason—in which, of course, we include his conscience or moral sense—that finer faculty by which he discerns the best moral probabilities in his complicated and contingent circumstances.

Human reason is indeed always fallible, but what is there in the condition or powers of man that is not equally so? Revelation itself deprecates not only its verification, but its interpretation also, on reason. All ancient truths depend, directly or indirectly, on tradition, as we have seen; yet nothing is more fallible, nothing has erred more flagrantly, than tradition. All the myths and legends of the world—nearly all the dire superstitions of religion and atrocities of ecclesiastical power and oppression—have been founded in tradition. Human reason is God's appointed umpire over all questions of truth; he that abdicates his reason reproaches himself; he becomes a drift on the tumultuous current of opinions and events. By surrendering himself to "an authority," so called, he abandons himself to the reason, or more frequently, to the caprice and ambition of others. Prelates, Popes, Councils, and men like himself; by their official positions, or associated interests and actions, they are more likely to be tempted into error, to be less conscientious, than his individual reason and moral sense. In deciding for himself, with the help of all possible exterior lights, he is most likely to be guided by his own supreme, eternal interests. He is, at least, most likely to be sincere; and sincerity is one of the highest guarantees of truth in this erring world. He that errs sincerely may, indeed, be said to be more truthful than he that, perchance, holds the literal truth in insincerity—holds it officially or traditionally, but not conscientiously or at the dictate of his reason. For if the former even err in the letter, he holds on to infinitely higher truth, the truth of his own nature—he is truthful in himself, though his honestly entertained opinions may not be so. And what is the importance of literal truth if it be not subservient to this higher personal truthfulness?

This is the theory of Protestantism. It is God's own rationale of the intellectual and moral world. Humanity is conditioned here in inevitable fallibility. Its noblest function here is search for truth, and this fact necessarily implies uncertainty, fallibility. Protestantism is right, then, in investing reason with supremacy over tradition and authority in questions of truth.

Tradition and prejudice—they have come almost to mean, morally, the same thing. They still bind nearly the whole world in fetters. The world is at this moment looking with bewildered interest on an example of their power—a grand mediæval spectacle in Rome, which is seen by all advanced minds to be anomalous in civilization. There is not one proposition before the Vatican Council that is not a fable or a fallacy of tradition—not one. And there sits Christendom (or by far the most of it) dreaming and gabbling over its *officæ foliæ*. The subject of apparent greatest interest there—the infallibility of the Pope—has for centuries been a disputed dream; not a word about it can be found in Holy Scripture. To human reason it is simply shocking by its absurdity and its possible evil consequences. The history of the Popes, through more than a decade of centuries, is a recorded confutation of the preposterous claim. And yet it is to-day a matter of the gravest consideration to the assembled chief of most of the Christian world. Tradition has whispered it, though doubtfully; Ultramontane ambition likes it; and Scripture and reason are thrown in abeyance, and the nineteenth century scandalized by its declaration; for declared it will be, indirectly, if not directly. The assumption of the Virgin, her ascension to heaven without natural death, has not a word of intimation in Holy Scripture. It was not dreamed of for centuries by the ancient Church; but later traditional Mariology has fancied it, as childhood fancies fables; and the Christian manhood of our century, its hoary-headed sages, sit to-day beneath the grandest roof of the Christian world, reverently discussing it in a dead language, and will demand that the reason of our age shall stultify itself by accepting it as a divine truth! The famous "Syllabus" will be endorsed doubtless by the Council; there is hardly a proposition in it that was not the utterance of the Dark Ages; not one of them can be found in the Christian Scriptures. European, and especially American society, have outgrown every one of them; they would upseize the civilization of the modern world, and defeat the most obvious destinies of the human race, were they effectually adopted by Christendom. They have no sanction whatever but in *officæ foliæ* traditional ecclesiasticalism. But tradition reigns in Rome, and the prelates, assembled from all the world, will degrade Christianity and insult humanity by their declaration as essential truths of God.

Such is the baneful power of tradition and ecclesiastical authority when reason is set aside and Scripture tortured into strange meanings, or supplemented by "traditions." Such is their destructive sway, in our century, throughout the Latin Church. Men who have not faith in God may well despair of the fate of humanity in the presence of such a dominant power of error. But the spell has been broken—history has sounded the knell of the dead past; and all, be they kings, pontiffs, or people, who kneel at its closed altars, gaily kneeling and praying for its restoration, are perishing there, while the race marches on; marches out of the sight of the senile traditionalists; marches to its final redemption.—*Christian Advocate.*

METHODISM AND REVIVALS.

BY REV. GEORGE G. LYON.

Methodism is the product of a revival of religion and embodiment of the spirit of revival, and it has been the producer of religious awakenings and conversions in almost every branch of the Christian Church to so great an extent that nearly all of Christendom is pervaded with its spirit. The style and manner of preaching, the method of conducting religious services, and the songs and other exercises peculiar to Methodism have been largely adopted by many bodies of Christians, and which were greatly to their prosperity. These facts are generally admitted, and cannot be successfully gainsaid. But we often hear it said, "While other denominations are availing themselves of these peculiarities which have aided so materially in spreading and establishing Methodism everywhere, and are improved in their adaptation, and invigorated with new life, and increased in numbers by them, Methodism is abandoning those inspiring agencies, and is adopting the formalities of less zealous Churches." This probably arises from the fact that many of the more demonstrative exercises that once adhered to Methodism, and which were witnessed in nearly all her societies, are becoming generally discontinued by her ministers; and more boisterous meetings, for example, in which sound is substituted for sense, are less prevalent than formerly; periodical protracted meetings and "gotten up revivals" are looked upon with less favor than in former days; and Evangelists without pastors, who are about the country to arouse and excite the people, to spasmodic efforts, are regarded with less consideration than in former years; and many of the more judicious pastors and people refuse to countenance their commission, and decline to co-operate in their labors; but nothing is more important or intelligent than to see that the earnest piety or intelligence of the Church members, pays appropriate respect to the ordinary personal activity in promoting the cause of Christ. And when the unconverted are induced to come to these social meetings, and are awakened under the prayers, experiences, and singing of the children of God, it seems to me that they would form juster views of religion, and become more reliable Christians, if, instead of inviting them to the altar or "the anxious seat," they were instructed that God was everywhere, and waiting to be gracious to such a turn out, and would hear and answer prayers in any part of the church, or anywhere else. There is much more to be said on these and other points, but not in a single newspaper article.

It is a striking thought that the pure and the beautiful which we love, are just as far from the kingdom as the openly vicious, in that they have not yet humbled themselves to the cry, "Lord, what must I do to be saved?"—have not yet sought and found a suffering, dying Saviour; such are often the most difficult to approach on the subject of their souls' salvation.

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