

Christian Messenger.

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"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

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Poetry.

The Nights.

Oh! the Summer's night
Has a smile of light,
And she sits on a sapphire throne;
Whilst the sweet winds load her
With garlands of odour,
From the bud to the rose o'erblown.

But the Autumn night
Has a piercing sight,
And a step both strong and free!
And a voice for wonder,
Like the wrath of the thunder,
When he shouts to the stormy sea.

And the Winter night
Is all cold and white,
And she singeth a song of pain;
Till the wild bee hummeth,
And warm Spring cometh,
When she dies in a dream of rain.

Oh, the night, the night,
'Tis a lovely sight,
Whatever the clime or time:
For sorrow then soareth,
And the lover out-poureth
His soul in a star-bright rhyme.

It bringeth sleep
To the forest deep,
The forest bird to its nest;
To care, bright hours,
And dreams of flowers,
And that balm to the weary—rest.

Selections.

John baptizing in Jordan.*

The indications of the narrative point to a locality further north than the scene which the tradition of the Greek and Latin churches has selected, influenced, doubtless, in part, by the convenience of a spot near Jerusalem. "In the wilderness of Judea," in "all the country about Jordan," are the general expressions of the three first Evangelists, which would apply to the whole of the southern valley of the Jordan. St. John, however, with greater precision, adds, "in Beth-abara (the House of Passage) beyond Jordan," which seems to confine the wilderness generally to the eastern bank, and the special locality to the more northern fords near Succoth, the same by which Jacob had crossed from Mahanaim, by which the Midianites endeavoured to escape in their flight from Gideon, and where Jephthah slew the Ephraimites. That it was this more northern spot is also confirmed by the mention of the time that it took for the return from the Jordan to Nazareth, apparently not more than a day, which might be possible from Succoth, but would certainly not be possible from Jericho. And on a subsequent occasion John is described as baptizing in Enon ("the Springs") "near to Salem," which most probably was the same "Salem" as that near Shechem, close to the passage of the Jordan near Succoth, and far away from that near Jericho.

If this be so, the scenery of the exact spot of John's Baptism, though visited by two or three travellers, has never been described. This is, perhaps, of less importance, because the images, and even associations, of the whole valley are so similar, that what applies to one spot, must, more or less, apply to all. The "wilderness" or the desert plain, whether on the western or eastern side, is the most marked in the whole country, and never has been inhabited, except for the purposes of ascetic seclusion, as by the Essenes and the hermits of later times. Wide as was the moral and spiritual difference between the two great prophets of the Jordan wilderness, and the wild ascetics of later times, yet it is, for this very reason, important to bear in mind the outward likeness which sets off this inward contrast. Travellers know well the startling appearance of the savage figures who, whether as Bedouins or Dervishes, still haunt the solitary

places of the East, with a "cloak"—the usual striped Bedouin blanket—woven of camel's hair, thrown over the shoulders, and tied in front on the breast; naked, except at the waist, round which is a girdle of skins; the hair flowing loose about the head. This was precisely the description of Elijah, whose last appearance had been in this very wilderness, before he finally vanished from the eyes of his disciples. This, too, was the aspect of his great representative, when he came in the same place, dwelling, like the sons of the prophets, in a leafy covert woven of the branches of the Jordan forest, preaching, in "raiment of camel's hair," with a "leathern girdle round his loins," eating the "locusts and wild honey" of the desert, the "wild honey" or "manna," which drops from the tamarisks of the desert region, and ceases on reaching the cultivated districts of Jericho and Judea. To the same wilderness, probably that on the eastern side, Jesus is described as "led up" by the Spirit, up into the desert-hills whence Moses had seen the view of all the "kingdoms" of Palestine, "with the wild beasts" which lurked in the bed of the Jordan, or in the caves of the hills, "where John was baptizing beyond Jordan."

If from the general scene we turn to the special locality of the river banks, the reason of John's selection is at once explained. He came "baptizing," that is signifying to those who came to him, as he plunged them under the rapid torrent, the forgiveness and forsaking of their former sins. It was in itself no new ceremony. Ablutions, in the East, have always been more or less a part of religious worship—easily performed, and always welcome. Every synagogue, if possible, was by the side of a stream or spring; every mosque still requires a fountain or basin for lustrations in its court. But John needed more than this. He taught, not under roof or shelter of sacred things, but far from the natural haunts of men. He proclaimed repentance, not only to handfulls of men here and there, but to the whole nation. No common spring or tank would meet the necessities of the multitudes "who from Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, came to him confessing their sins." The Jordan, by the very peculiarity of its position (which, as before observed, renders its functions so unlike those of other Eastern streams), now seems to have met with its fit purpose. It was the one river of Palestine—sacred in its recollections—abundant in its waters; and yet, at the same time, the river, not of cities, but of the wilderness—the scene of the preaching of those who dwelt not in king's palaces, nor wore soft clothing. On the banks of the rushing stream the multitudes gathered—the priests and scribes from Jerusalem, down the pass of Adummim; the publicans from Jericho on the south; and the Lake of Gennesaret on the north; the soldiers on their way from Damascus to Petra, through the Ghor, in the war with the Arab chief, Hareth; the peasants from Galilee, with Oxen from Nazareth, through the opening of the plains of Esdrælon. The tall "reeds" or canes in the jungle waved, "shaken by the wind;" the pebbles of the bare clay hills lay around, to which the Baptist pointed as capable of being transformed into "the children of Abraham;" at their feet rushed the refreshing stream of the never-falling river. There began that sacred rite which has since spread throughout the world, through the vast baptistries of the Southern and Oriental Churches, gradually dwindling to the little fountains of the North and West; the plunges beneath the water diminishing to the few drops which, by a wise (?) exercise of Christian freedom, are now in most churches the sole representative of the full stream of the descending River.

"A sort of Spurgeonism."

The unparalleled success of the youthful minister of New Park-street Chapel, at Exeter Hall first, and of late at the Music Hall in the Surrey Gardens, has drawn the

attention of all who take any interest in religious and even in public movements. That spacious building is now the resort every Sunday both of a string of carriages such as is seen at no other place of worship, and of thousands of our operatives who have hitherto worshipped nowhere at all. From the duke and duchess to the wearer of the fustian jacket, an interest is awakened by a service which comes out of church and chapel walls, which throws off all formality both in the worship and the preaching, and which adapts itself with entire freedom to the wants of the promiscuous multitude—an interest which is not, and will not, be kindled by the less free and impassioned, the more regular and dignified, services of our ordinary places of worship.

Lord SHAFTESBURY and some excellent clergymen of the Church of England have nobly cast aside the prejudices of their class, and thrown themselves into the new movement. They are all of them, we believe, men of the piety to rejoice in the success of Mr. SPURGEON; and, not of contention and strife, but of love, to imitate a mode of preaching the gospel which he has proved to be successful. They have, "under the sanction of the Bishop of London, and of the Incumbent of the parish," hired Exeter Hall for a series of "Special Services" on Sunday evenings, to be conducted by some of the most popular evangelical preachers in the Church. The arrangements are very good. The names of the preachers are advertised in a very large placard for some time to come. The hymns to be sung, and the Litany, with a few other prayers, are supplied to all who enter, and tracts distributed to them as they leave the place.

Well this is the "Sort of Spurgeonism," which Lord DUNGANNON told the peers of the realm last Thursday he feared certain prelates and others were introducing into the Church of England. A little debate on "Spurgeonism in the Church," and worship in unconsecrated places, followed. The "Contents" on the noble lord's question had it all their own way. The Bishop of LONDON and Lord KINNARD adverted to the well-known and successful efforts of Mr. SPURGEON, and openly justified and commended the present attempt, amidst the cordial cheers of even the aristocratic and not easily moved peers. An attempt was made by a few to prevent, on a point of order, the Archbishop of CANTERBURY from speaking—but peer after peer insisted on his being heard. When he was heard, it was to enforce a briefly expressed sentiment which might be usefully remembered by some beyond the pale of the Establishment:—"He could not conceive anything more likely to injure the Church than the supposition that she would suffer from accommodating herself to the circumstances of the times, and he trusted the time might never come when the dignity of the Church of England was found incompatible with its utility." The legal question is, it seems, set at rest by Lord SHAFTESBURY'S Act of last year, protecting Christian worship in places not duly consecrated.

It will be, indeed, matter for the deepest thankfulness to God, on the part of Mr. SPURGEON, if it should please a gracious Providence, not only to have blessed so remarkably his personal efforts, but to make him the indirect instrument of arousing our impassive State Church, and prompting her best members in this vast metropolis to novel and unwonted efforts for the salvation of the masses who neglect or dislike our usual worship. Twice in his prayers last Sunday, Mr. SPURGEON earnestly invoked the Divine blessing on the new movement in the Church of England; and all Christians will surely join him in praying for its success. May we express our hope, that as "his zeal has provoked many" in the Church of England, it will not be without its influence on Dissenters. "A sort of Spurgeonism" needs to be introduced, in some quarters, into Dissent itself, as well as into the Church.—*Freeman.*

ANOTHER PLANET, the 43rd of the system between Mars and Jupiter, has been discovered by M. Pogson, at the Oxford Observatory.

Progress of Baptist Principles.

The Cincinnati *Journal and Messenger*, gives an account of the services attending the immersion of several persons by the Rev. H. W. Beecher, pastor of the Plymouth Congregational Church, Brooklyn. Mr. Beecher took occasion to express his views and feelings on the ordinance previous to its being administered. The writer says:

"Not a few were struck with astonishment that he should speak so unhesitatingly. While he seemed to be satisfied with his own baptism, he frankly expressed it as his settled opinion, that the Saviour was baptized by immersion, and that he could see in this mode of its administration a beauty and significance in the symbolism before that of any other; and he said that, in accordance with the wish of the candidates, he baptized them in this way, not as by compulsion, but heartily and lovingly; and in his closing remarks he used the symbolic imagery of the ordinance with a beauty, felicity, and power of expression, seldom heard from the lips of a Baptist minister; and his administration of the ordinance to the six candidates would have done no one any discredit. One of the most interested of the many spectators was the administrator's venerable father, Dr. Lyman Beecher. The old pilgrim's soul was filled with sacred joy, and we venture to say there were few in the audience that did not sympathize most deeply with his feelings, for it was indeed one of the most intensely interesting and solemn exercises we ever remember to have attended; and we learn, with great pleasure, that at the morning prayer-meeting of the next day, it was found that some seemed to have been seriously impressed by it.

"I may be permitted to add, in this connection, that Mr. Beecher is understood to reject entirely the doctrine of infant church membership, considering it one of the most serious and disastrous errors ever introduced into the Church, and he administers baptism to infants only as an expression of parental consecration; and in doing this he rests not on any authority found in the New Testament, but principally on the long-established usages of the Christian Church. What appears to us so flimsy and untenable a foundation for such a practice, and we must say one so unlike Henry Ward Beecher (for he, of all men, is the last to cling to old, worn-out, threadbare theological tenets), gives us great reason to hope that a man so independent in his views, and so honest in his positions, will some day find his way to the clear light of Gospel truth in this matter. It is very encouraging to Baptists to know that there are some independent, honest thinkers on this subject, in the pulpits of other churches, as we see abundant proof of their presence in the pews. The heaven is at work, and working already right briskly; the whole will soon be leavened. One of the most prominent and influential of the men of the Plymouth church remarked, at the close of the baptismal service, that he heartily approved of all this and that, had they to build another church, they would certainly have a baptistry in it; and we are not sure that they will not find the necessity so great as to compel them to have one in some way in their present edifice."

Help One Another.

A traveller, who was passing over the Alps, was overtaken by a snowstorm at the top of a high mountain. The cold became intense. The air was thick with sleet, and the piercing wind seemed to penetrate into his bones. Still the traveller for a time struggled on. But at last his limbs were quite benumbed, a heavy drowsiness began to creep over him, his feet almost refused to move, and he lay down on the snow to give way to that fatal sleep which is the last stage of extreme cold, and from which he would certainly never have waked up again in this world. Just at that moment he saw another poor traveller coming up along the road. The unhappy man seemed to be,

* From "Sinai and Palestine." By the Rev. A. P. Stanley, Canon of Canterbury and Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the University of Cambridge.