

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

NEW SERIES.
VOL. V.....No. 37.

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 1860.

WHOLE SERIES.
Vol. XXIV.....No. 37.

Poetry.

The Tides.

The moon is at her full, and, riding high,
Floods the calm fields with light:
The airs that hover in the summer sky
Are all asleep to-night.

There comes no voice from the great woodlands round
That murmurs all the day;
Beneath the shadow of their boughs, the ground
Is not more still than they.

But ever heavens and moans the restless deep;
His rising tides I hear;
Afar I see the glimmering billows leap—
I see them breaking near.

Each wave springs upward, climbing toward the fair
Pure light that sits on high—
Springs early, and faintly sinks to where
The mother waters lie.

Upwards again it swells: the moonbeams show,
Again, its glimmering crest:
Again it feels the fatal weight below,
And sinks, but not to rest.

Again, and yet again; until the deep
Recalls his brood of waves;
And, with a sullen moan, abashed they creep,
Back to his inner caves.

Brief respite! they shall rush from that recess
With noise and tumult soon,
And fling themselves, with unavailing stress,
Up towards the placid moon.

Oh, restless sea, that in thy prison here
Dost struggle and complain;
Through the slow centuries yearning to be near
To that fair orb in vain.

The glorious source of light and heat must warm
Thy bosom with his glow,
And on those mounting waves a nobler form
And freer life bestow.

Then only may they leave the waste of brine
In which they welter here;
And rise above the hills of earth and shine
In a serene sphere. W. C. BRYANT.

Selections.

An old Clergyman's Story.

One afternoon I was startled in my study by hearing the sound of an axe in the rear of the house. I was wondering who could be there, disturbing the almost Sabbath stillness of the midsummer day, when Maria, the housemaid, came to inform me that there was a strange man at the woodpile, and to request that I should go and see who it was.

I looked from a window and discovered an ill-dressed fellow carelessly swinging the axe, and hacking here and there a stick in an undecided manner, with his head down, and his face shaded by the brim of a very bad hat.

There was something in his swaggering attitudes which I thought I recognized; but it was sometime before I could realize that in those beggarly habiliments I saw the son of one of our most worthy and respected citizens. I stepped to the door.

"Martin Lockwood," said I, "is it you?"

"I suppose it's me," he replied, giving the axe a reckless flourish with one hand, and striking it into the log. "I thought I'd cut a little wood for you, by way of amusement."

I made no answer, and he stood for a moment, looking at anything except me,—rolling a quid in his cheek, and wiping the sweat from beneath his hat-brim,—with an evident attempt to keep up the old swaggering manner, while conscious shame was fast mastering him.

"I guess you are a little astonished at seeing me," he said, after an awkward pause, resuming his hold of the axe-handle, and leaning on it.

"Yes, Martin; I am a good deal astonished!"

"I've a way of astonishing folks. I astonish myself a little. I hardly know how I came here, but here I am; if I am not welcome, I'll put off again,—the world is wide, I'm bound to live somewhere,—a man must live you know!"

He laughed at first, but his voice grew hard and bitter, and there was a look of wildness and desperation in his eyes, as he proceeded; and I could perceive that the shame

which covered him was being shaken and flung away by rising and swelling passions.

"You are welcome, Martin; come in."

He flung down the axe, which he had grasped again with savage recklessness; and followed me, swinging his hat, and taking long strides through the hall, with a haughtiness defiant of rags.

"If I had thought you came to see me, Martin, I should have welcomed you before. You have picked up new fashions in your travels; I am not used to visitors that go to chopping at the woodpile instead of knocking at the door. Sit down. I'll take your hat."

He sank slouchingly upon a chair; but instead of giving me his hat, he scaled it carelessly into a corner of the room.

I supposed I wouldn't be considered fit to enter a decent man's house," said he, crossing his legs with an arrogant bend of the neck. "I wouldn't knock and be refused. I've been something of a scamp and a good deal of a fool—I know it as well as anybody."

"And you are sorrier for it than you are willing any one should think," said I.

"There's no use in being sorry for what can't be helped."

"Yes, there is,—great use in it, Martin. Repentance is the water that helps wash us clean again, when we have been in the mire. To pass over our errors with a reckless and desperate air, as you are endeavoring to do now, is to add foolishness to folly."

"Well, you are right, there," said Martin, frankly, penetrated by the direct truthfulness with which I met him. "I don't know whether I am exactly sorry, but, I'll tell you, sir, I am furious when I think what a perfect fool I have been,—what a disgrace to myself,—what a shame to my folks, who I suppose wont own me again, fool that I am!"

He gnashed his teeth together, with an expression of remorse and convulsive pain which drew me nearer to him than I could get before. Hardened villainy repels us; but the moment the sinner softens, the moment penitence appears, our sympathies flow out to him all the deeper and more impulsive for the great barrier of guilt which has kept us from him hitherto, but which we now feel breaking away.

"O, Martin!" said I, "is this indeed you! the boy I used to watch with such interest as you grew up, hoping such great and good things of you! O, Martin, where have you been?"

Pity and tender affection gushed from my heart, and prevented him from taking offence at any thing I might say. And I went on, picturing to him the promise of his boyhood, the love and expectation of his friends, the noble and happy life he might have lived, and the darkly contrasting career of vice and wretchedness to which his youth had been abandoned.

His swaggering defiance was all gone, and tears of anguish and contrition ran down his sun-burnt face.

"I know it all! I know it all!" he said, with stifling sobs. "I have thought of my home until my heart yearns as if it would break. But I don't dare to go there. I can't bear to have my sisters see me so,—it would kill my mother! And my father will never forgive me!"

"Your father is an excellent, kind man," I said.

"I know that, but he is stern, and when his mind is made up, it is like melting granite to attempt to move him. I wrote him a few weeks ago, telling him I was willing to come back. Here is his answer."

Martin took a letter from a pocket of his tattered coat, and gave it me to read.

In a hand that trembled with emotion,—in words that seemed all alive with the grief of a broken-hearted father, yet stern as that father's iron will,—the old man had responded to his son's appeal.

Instead of money, he sent him reproaches for the past, and counsel for the future. Instead of inviting him home with a loving welcome, he reminded him of the many and earnest warnings with which he had endeavored to check his son's ruinous career.

"You have despised those warnings," he said. "You have reduced me almost to beggary in my old age. I have sent you to school in vain. I paid twelve hundred dollars to keep you out of jail, when in a fit of drunkenness you had set fire to Squire Ames's

house. I trusted two thousand dollars to you, to set you up in business, on your solemn pledges of fidelity and industry. You squandered every cent of it. I have paid for the carriages you have broken, and for the horses you have ruined by over-driving. How have I been rewarded for all this? What encouragement have I now to send you money in your distress? You have forfeited all claim upon me. Never send or come to me again for assistance. You have gone wilfully from my heart and home, and your follies have blocked up the way behind you."

A few words of solemn entreaty that Martin would by virtuous conduct redeem the past, concluded the inexorable father's letter.

"You see," said the young man, who had recovered himself, while I was reading, "there doesn't seem to be much chance for me there. But something has driven me back. It isn't my poverty alone, for I could have done something,—or I could have starved; I would rather have starved; but I was forced to come,—I have walked more than a hundred miles—I have begged by the way—and now what am I here for? I came through the woods and across the fields to your house,—for you are the only man I dared to see, and I scarcely dared to see you!"

"Have courage!" I said. "The hand of Providence is in it. You have been guided; it is for some wise purpose that you have been led here. All will be well, I think!"

I conducted him, humbled and weeping like a child, to a room where he could wash himself and change his dress. I gave him clothes of my own to put on. Then I sent a private message to his mother, who lost no time, but hastened to meet her son. I avoided being present at their interview, but I could not help overhearing the sobs of both behind the closed door.

When the sound of weeping had subsided, I knocked, and entered.

Mrs. Lockwood came forward to meet me with extended hands, her face full of hope and gratitude, and tearful entreaty.

"I thank you, I thank you, for restoring to me my child!" she exclaimed with a burst of emotion. "He is changed—don't you see he is changed? He was never so humble, so softened—his heart never opened to me so before—my Martin, my Martin, he is still my son!"

She turned from me to embrace once more the young man, who now sat with his head upon his breast, weary, crushed in spirit, heaving deep sighs from his overburdened heart.

"A true mother will never deny her son!" I answered. "And, indeed, Martin never needed love and sympathy—perhaps he never deserved them—as he does now. Will his father consent to see him?"

"I do not know! O, I do not know!" wept the poor, yet trembling mother. "He has loved him better than any child we have. But he will never hear his name mentioned now. Sometimes he lays groaning all night, and in his sleep I have heard him start, and cry out as if he was in pain. 'Martin! Martin! you kill me, you kill your father!' He isn't the same man now,—he is gloomy and silent,—he seems always brooding over some great sorrow, and we can guess what that sorrow is."

Without designing it, the mother sent daggers to the heart of her son. He burst forth into a deep cry of agony, and twisted his hands in his hair. I endeavored to soothe him, and prevent his doing violence to himself.

"Let me go!" said he. "Let me go. I had better have died than ever to have come back! Why didn't I drown myself in the river, as I was tempted?"

"No more of that!" I said, somewhat severely. "The errors of the past are to be retrieved, not sealed up with the black seal of despair. I promise you, Martin, that if you truly desire and will it, you shall be a man yet, restored to your home and friends, and to your own self-respect. Will you go and tell his father he is here?"

"O, I dare not!" said Mrs. Lockwood. "With all his kindness, he is so stern, he is so set against Martin now, it must be broken to him by degrees, and you must do it!"

"I shall send for him, then," I answered. "But I was saved that trouble by seeing Mr. Lockwood shortly afterwards pass by the

house. I hailed him from the door, and invited him to enter my study.

He came in,—a tall, iron-framed man, slightly bent, with thin, gray hair, and wan features that looked as if they had known affliction, and became greatly reconciled to it.

He sat down in the chair his son had sat in but a short time before. As I watched the expression of his stern, sorrowful face, I thought how strange it was that he could sit there, and think and speak of that son as distant and lost, unconscious that he was even then in the next room, with but a half-closed door between them!

Yet Mr. Lockwood must have felt the influence of the drama that was enacting so near him. He seemed to know that I wished to talk with him about Martin.

"I have been told," said I, "that your son has written you a letter. Is he coming back?"

"I had a presentiment when I came in, that I was to have my feelings wrung again!" he responded, uneasily moving, and knitting his brows. "I'd rather not talk on that subject. It causes useless pain."

"I have heard from your son," I said.

"Ah?" He started, and his gray eye flickered with emotion as he turned its questioning glance upon me. "He has written to you?"

"I have news of him, and I know that he is penitent. He would return to you, if you would receive him. A crisis in his life has arrived; his whole future—perhaps his soul's salvation—turns upon the event. Would we cast off a brother at such a time? How much less a son!"

"It is useless!" cried the old man, shaken by anger, or pain, or both. "I have tried him, he has failed me in everything; God forgive him—I can't!"

"Has he sinned against you seventy times seven?" I mildly inquired.

"Yes, and more! Yet—yet—'tis not that I don't forgive him—I wish him well—but he has no longer any claim, he is no longer my son; never mention his name to me again!"

He arose with violent emotion, his cane trembled in his grasp, and he was hurrying away, when I gently detained him.

"Hear one word, and I will never importune you again on this subject. I have seen your son.

Without speaking he looked at me strangely,—pale, and shaking more and more,—and suffered himself to be led back to a chair.

"I have seen him, and if I know anything of the human heart, Martin is a changed creature. Not poverty only, but a realization of his guilt toward you, and a yearning for forgiveness, for a better life, has brought him back. Have we not sinned—have I not, have you not—against our Father, brother Lockwood?"

"God only knows what a sinner I am!" exclaimed the old man, with his head bowed upon his cane.

"And does God stand out when you return to him, and remind you of your many offences which he refuses to forgive? or does He open His merciful arms, and tenderly receive you back?"

"No more! no more!" he groaned aloud. "I tell you it is useless. You only agonize me. My mind's made up. God's ways are not our ways. I have done all I can, he will require no more."

"And you will go home to-night and pray, 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us!' How will that prayer be answered? O, dear Saviour!" I said, "how long before we shall receive Thy Divine lessons, not in our understandings merely, but also in our hearts and lives! We preach charity, and live for selfishness. We pray for love, and nourish hatred. We hope to be forgiven, while our hearts are hard with stony vindictiveness. Are we utterly self-deceived? Is our religion all a vain show?"

I opened the Book, and read the page to which my hand instinctively turned. It was the parable of the Prodigal Son. All the simplicity, beauty and pathos of that divine story opened up to me with a power and freshness and vividness I had never felt before. My own soul was stirred to its depths; the spirit of all-forgiving love seemed to descend upon us there! I forgot all argument, in the absorbing interest of that sweetly convincing, overpowering narrative.