Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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Poetry.

For the Christian Messenger.

Wait on the Lord.

PSALM xxvii. 14.

Ye who from sin, and death are free:
Who sing "The Saviour died for me,"
Ye who the narrow path pursue,
"Wait on the Lord" who leadeth you.

With humble prayer, with joyful lays,
Employ your tongues, in songs of praise;
With faith, with hope, with glowing love,
"Wait on the Lord," who reigns above.

When dark forebodings cloud thy sky,
When faith is weak, and fears are high,
When hope is low, and dark thy way,
"Wait on the Lord," he *makes* thy day."

Because, for you, he groaned and bled,
Because he raised you from the dead,
Because he lives, and loves you still,
"Wait on the Lord;" *it is his will.*

H. J. G.

Cape Canso, Sept. 16, 1863.

Religious.

A Sermon

BY JOSEPH PARKER, D.D.,

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"And when He saw a fig-tree in the way, He came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig-tree withered away."—Matt. xxi. 19.

It has been customary to allege that this event presents a marked exception to the usual course of Christ's life. Every other display of His power has been immediately and obviously associated with the highest interests of humanity. Christ employed the miracle, so to speak, as a chariot of fire in which He rode forth to accomplish a mission of benevolence. Christ never used His power merely for the sake of using it. Power was an instrument, not an end. It was displayed rather in the service of man, than in attestation of His own personal Godhead. The quieted sea, the rent grave, the loosened tongue, the unsealed eyelid, all show that when Christ put forth His power it was to ameliorate, to redeem, to save mankind. Yet here is an apparent exception to His beneficent course. A fig-tree is blasted by the lightning of His disappointed eye! That fig-tree is transformed into a melancholy exception to all the surrounding vegetation. Spring is forbidden to awaken that branded root from its sleep of death. Winter is to sit on its desolated branches all through the shining, singing summer, and forever it is to be spoken of as the tree that disappointed the hungering Messiah!

We shall see how little we are fitted to determine what are really exceptions in a great life. We are not yet equal to the straightforward, unstumbling reading of this profoundest human history. We stand aghast before the scathed tree, and as the withered leaves crunch under our feet, we ignorantly exclaim, "This is an exception; this is not in harmony with the gentleness of Jesus; this must have been a mischievous prank of the demon-gods that loathe all beauty; this hideous patch does not suit the prevailing pattern of the Saviour's life; it is the interpolation of an enemy." This is how man talks when the reading is not all straightforward; when the ink is not all one colour; when the type is not all one size. What can we possibly know of what are essentially exceptions in a life so profound, so many-sided, so mysterious, so divine as Christ's? It is but a word here and there that we can bring within the circle of our twilight intelligence; and yet, as though we could read the stars, we hand in a blurred and self-stultifying bill of exceptions to that wondrous life! Can the less contain the greater? Can the primrose, a plaything of the joyous summer, interpret all the voices that ring out from the oak, or can it read the storied struggles with the storm that are treasured in the guarls of that king of trees? What can the butterfly tell of the landscape over which it flits for a moment? What can to-day hold of the ages that have built the history of creation? We mistake the seeming for the reality. We think there is nothing in the epistle but the address which brought it to our door. My object is to show that this is no exception to the Saviour's life. This note is in tune with the whole melody. It may be a variation indeed, but it rises out of the main current, and, after an expression strikingly peculiar to itself, rejoins the great line and swells it into sublimer bursts!

This little story is a great symbol. It is set up in the ages as a warning for ever. The story itself is written in fire, but the moral is penned with the immortal ink of tears.

1. What can be more decisive, for example, than its method of conveying Christ's view of *uselessness*? Christ is never found approving of uselessness; but contrariwise, altogether condemning and reprobating it. He shuts the door in the very face of sluggish virgins, and orders off into darkness the man who wrapped up his possibilities in a napkin. I ever find Him calling sloth wickedness, and declaring that the man who will not walk into heaven shall be thrown into hell.

Let us be clear about this matter of uselessness. Apart from definitions and distinctions, we shall flounder. Error in definition has set fire to nations, and roused idiot kings to arms! Deadlier still has been its result in moral considerations; it has flung brilliant minds off the pivotal centres, and sent them plunging through the darkness of despair. Let me suggest a definition of usefulness that may rid us of encumbering difficulties: that only is useful which fulfils the Divine idea of its creation; in other words, that only is useful which is what it was meant to be. I submit that all the issues of the case are more or less involved in this definition. You do not deem a watch useless because it will not give you your latitude and longitude at sea. You do not say that a rose is useless because you cannot cook it, and bring it to the test of your knife and fork. Everything must be judged by the idea it was intended to represent or fulfil. The purpose determines everything. A principle so simple as this, one would think could never be forgotten; yet hardly a sun sets without seeing it disregarded or miserably perverted. Every man carries his own favourite ideas of usefulness, and with that he makes short work of all the questions which engage human consideration. One of man's merriest pastimes is to determine the usefulness of his neighbours. It is no business of his to deal with varieties of temperament, to balance idiosyncrasies, and to interpret special purposes; but with the fool's philosophy, that huddles into indiscriminate masses all orders and conditions of things, he settles business in the bulk, and under one lock keeps families and even nations in charge. I protest against this blind judgment. Read everything, I repeat, in the light of the purpose it was intended to subserve. The most influential newspaper would make a poor breast-plate in the day of battle. A sermon orthodox as a Pauline epistle would make a singular Act of Parliament. The fleetest hound that ever sped across the mountains would present a very humble figure in attempting to soar with the eagle. You see, then, through such grotesque illustrations, how everything must be viewed with special reference to the purpose it was meant to realise; and how careful we should be in coming to conclusions respecting the usefulness of any man, any preacher, any author, any worker, or any object whatsoever.

Take the case in hand. This tree was meant to grow figs. It had a distinct and well-known object to realise. Its form might be faultless; its leaves might be abundant, healthy, and beautiful; but the ultimate purpose of the Creator was that it should grow figs; and whatever else it grew, was not to be valued in the absence of the fruit. The fruit! The fruit alone was the fruit. Christ did not say, "This tree is an ornament to the fig-yard or the landscape, a shelter for the wandering birds, or a shade for the worn traveller." Not so. Christ looked for figs. What is the great principle involved? Is it not clearly this, that *God seeks His own idea in every man?* In this fact we find the profoundest solemnity of human life. Every man is intended to subserve a special end in life; though part of a whole, he is a distinct part, and has a work to do with his own hand. "So, then, every one of us must give account of himself to God." As we look for figs on one tree, and grapes on another, and so on through all the fruits grown on earth, so God comes and searches every man to know how far each has realised the peculiar intent of the Creator. The arithmetician is not expected to formulate poetry any more than the poet is expected to dream arithmetic. Every man in his own order, and God the judge of all. I like to dwell upon the reflection that each man, each family, each nation, has a peculiar and special function to fulfil. Otherwise, I should be confounded by the world's mile on mile of brushwood; I should not know what to make of the den-population of leviathan cities; but I remember that there is one true Judge, whose smile is heaven, whose frown is hell. He will show by-and-by what the smallest as well as the greatest was meant for, and until then we must leave many a problem. It is not enough to be a man; the responsibilities of manhood must be discharged. The foot must do the foot's work, and leave the eye to look after its own business. A flower is useful, though it does not grow fruit. Gladly I proclaim the usefulness of beauty. A flower has many a time opened the very heavens to my aching heart. It has spoken to me of purity, and simplicity, and frailty, and mortality, and dependence. Was it useless because it gave me neither corn nor wine? Truly not. It did its work, and no angel could do more. Christ did not blast this tree because no music issued from its branches; a thousand birds might have shaken it with music of unequalled sweetness, or a silence blank as the dumbness of the grave might have reigned there. This was not the question; that tree had a distinct end to realise; it did not realise it, and therefore premature and everlasting winter settled upon it, and thus it was made to the ages a warning against appearances without reality, against pretence without usefulness.

Conclusion next week.

Margaret Mason's Prayer.

It seemed as if the whole village had turned out to attend Margaret Mason's funeral. Every one mourned as for a friend. Margaret, though a poor woman, was an important person in the village. Wherever there was a sick neighbor to nurse, or a mourner to be comforted, there this hard-working woman might be found. No wonder, therefore, that the tears which fell on the day of the burial were tears of true and abundant sorrow.

When the funeral had dispersed, a stranger still lingered near the grave. And when it was filled up, and the hillock smoothed, she took a young rose-tree from beneath her cloak, and planted it on the grave. With a quickened step she then passed down the village, stopped for an instant at the gate of Margaret's little garden, plucked a sprig of sweetbriar and a bit of the flower which our villagers call the "everlasting," and was about to walk away.

"Dear me!" exclaimed one of the old people, "if that isn't Mrs. Stainton, the pawnbroker's wife, who used to live at the end of the village. Why, it must be well nigh five and twenty years since she and her husband gave up business and left the place."

"Nay, nay," said another elderly person, "it isn't she. Sally Stainton was a hard, grinding woman, and never had a tear to spare for the living or the dead."

I heard no more, for I hastened to overtake the stranger.

"Are you a relation of Mrs. Mason's?"

"No, ma'am; at least not that sort of kin which you mean, though in heaven, I believe, it will come out that we are very nearly related;" and the woman wept like a child. "I believe," she continued, "that it is owing to the prayers of that dear saint, whose body has been put into the grave this afternoon, that my soul was ever snatched from the wrath to come, and brought to Christ."

"Margaret herself would have told you," said I, "that the praise is due, not to her prayers, but to the saving grace and living intercession of God's dear Son. However, I believe we mean the same thing."

After a few minutes the old woman entered into a fuller narrative. "Late one evening," she said, "long after the shop was closed, Frank Mason (Margaret's unworthy husband) came to our side-door, with a bundle of wearing apparel to put into pawn. At first I refused to have anything to say to him, out of business hours; but he said he must have money on any terms. So my greediness of gain prevailed, as usual. I advanced the money, and took the things. In those days my heart was as hard as flint. Yet when I turned over the carefully mended clothes, that cloak which had faced so many a storm, those shoes which had trodden so many a rough mile in duty's path, those coarse petticoats, always tidy, yet worn so threadbare, somehow my heart misgave me. I tried to fight it out with conscience, but it would not do. So I arose earlier than usual, tied up the clothes in a bundle, and hurried with them and some breakfast to the cottage.

"Hearing Margaret Mason's voice, I waited and listened for a minute at the window. I expected to hear reproaches and complainings; but the words I heard were these: 'Forgive him, Lord. Thou who clothest the lilies, wilt thou not much more clothe me also? Thou knowest I have need of these things. Yet, though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither fruit be on the vine, I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of salvation.' I heard no more; but after giving Margaret the things—I hardly knew how it was—something within prompted me to say, as I was turning away, 'Mrs. Mason, speak my name sometimes, will you in your prayers?' Till that hour I had never cared for prayer, and felt no reverence for it, and no need of it.

"'What is it,' said I to myself, 'that makes her to differ from me? She talks to the great God as to a friend, and calls him the God of her salvation. I know nothing about the God of this Christian woman.'

"When I came home, I went up stairs to an old lumber-room, and there I sat down by myself. There was a heavy weight upon my heart. I groaned aloud, though I hardly knew what I wanted. Presently I said to myself, 'I wonder if I can pray'; but no words would come. At last I fairly smote upon my breast, and cried, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' I knew afterwards, but not for a good while, that God, by his Holy Spirit, had put those words into my heart; though I believe I had not heard them since I was a child at a Sunday school. Well! I rummaged out the only Bible we held in pawn (for we scarcely ever took Bibles), and turned over its leaves. I was as ignorant as a baby where to find the places. You will hardly believe it, but I searched all through Genesis to try to find that story about the publican, from which I had drawn my first prayer.

"I knew our business was not good for a body to be in who wanted to be a Christian, and I urged Davie (that's my husband) to give up the pawn-shop, whatever it might cost us. At first he flew into a passion, and declared that he was not going to be 'hen-pecked out of a good business by any woman.' So, then, God showed me that my place was to wait a bit, and be patient, and to put the difficulty into Christ's hands.

"Well, to make a long story short, Davie soon felt much the same as I did. So we gave up the business, left the place, and settled in a neighborhood where my husband had relations who might help us, we thought, into some honest calling.

"There was due desire, one little prayer, which would always slip in, like a whisper, between my petitions, and this was that I might see Margaret Mason's face once again, and tell of the change. I could not afford the journey; so I put it off from year to year, always hoping that the time would come. Now and then I sent her a little token of love, some flower seeds, a silk kerchief, or a few yards of black 'love ribbon.' It was all I could afford; and she never knew from whence they came. I thought I would tell her all when we met. I had managed to save a few shillings, and had fixed to come this very summer. But Margaret's Lord had sent for her, you see, before I could see her. So she never knew, on earth, that her prayers for the pawn broker's wife had been heard and answered. And yet I think she knows all about it in that place where 'there is joy over one sinner that repenteth.'"

WHAT IS POVERTY?—Bulwer says that poverty is only an idea in nine cases out of ten. Some men with ten thousand dollars a year suffer more for want of means than others with three hundred. The reason is, the richer man has artificial wants; his income is ten thousand, and by habit he spends twelve or fifteen thousand, and he suffers enough, from being dunned for unpaid debts, to kill a sensitive man. A man who earns a dollar a day and does not run in debt, is the happier of the two. Very few people who have never been rich will not believe this, but it is true. There are people of course, who are wealthy and enjoy their wealth, but there are thousands upon thousands with princely incomes who never know a moment's peace, because they live above their means.

A QUAKER ON AN ARGUMENT.—"Ah," said a skeptical collegian to an old Quaker, "I suppose you are one of those fanatics who believe the Bible?"

Said the old man, "I do believe the Bible. Do you believe it?"

"No; I can have no proof of its truth."

"Then," inquired the old man, "dost thee believe in France?"

"Yes; for although I have not seen it, I have seen others who have. Besides, there is plenty of corroborative proof that such a country does exist."

"Then thee will not believe any thing thee or others has not seen?"

"No."

"Did thee ever see thy own brains?"

"No."

"Does thee believe thee has any?"

This last question put an end to the discussion.

VOCIFEROUS PERSUASION.—There can be no question, says *Fraser's Magazine*, that among the least intelligent classes of Scotland, a preacher's popularity is in proportion to the loudness of his roaring and the violence of his gesticulation.

"Our minister's a wonderful preacher," said a country bumpkin; "he comes out wi' a roar just like a bull."

"I didna' understand a word he said," was the remark of a maid servant to a friend of our own concerning a certain dissenting preacher; "but I would go twenty miles to hear him again; I thought he wad have banged the pulpit in bits; he was a' jumpin'!"

MR. JOEL BARLOW, of Hartford, Conn., meeting the Rev. Mr. Strong, of the above place one day, asked him why he did not publish the set of sermons he had promised the world so long? "There is one subject," replied Mr. Strong, "I cannot get master of." "What is that?" said Mr. Barlow. "To reconcile the profession of the christian religion," said Mr. Strong, "with non-attendance on public worship."