

# Christian Messenger.

A RELIGIOUS AND GENERAL FAMILY NEWSPAPER.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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## Religious.

### MISCELLANEA.

No. V.

REV. HENRY WARD BEECHER.—The following passages are specimens of his style and manner:

*A New England Sunday.*—It is worth all the inconveniences arising from the occasional over-action of New England Sabbath observance to obtain the full flavour of a New England Sunday. But for this one should have been born there, should have found Sunday already waiting for him, and accepted it with implicit and absolute conviction as if it were a law of nature, in the same way that night and day, summer and winter, are parts of nature. He should have been brought up by parents who had done the same thing, as they were by parents even more strict, if that were possible; until not religious persons peculiarly, but everybody—not churches alone, but society itself and all its population, those who broke it as much as those who kept it—were stained through with the colour of Sunday. Nay, until nature had adopted it, and laid its commands on all birds and beasts, on the sun and winds, and upon the whole atmosphere, so that, without much imagination one might imagine, in a genuine New England Sunday of the Connecticut river valley stamp, that God was still on that day resting from all the work which He had created and made, and that all His work rested with Him.

Over all the town rested the Lord's peace. The saw was ripping away yesterday in the carpenter's shop, and the hammer was noisy enough. To-day there is not a sign of life there. The anvil makes no music to-day.—The Mill is silent—only the brook continues noisy. Listen! in yonder pine woods what a cawing of crows! Like an echo, in a wood still more remote other crows are answering. But even a crow's throat to-day is musical. Do they think, because they have black coats on, that they are parsons, and have a right to play pulpit with all the pine trees? Nay.—The birds will not have any such monopoly,—they are all singing, and singing all together, and no one cares whether his song rushes across another's or not. Larks and robins, blackbirds and orioles, sparrows and blue-birds, mocking cat-birds and wrens were furling the air with such mixtures as no other day but Sunday, when all artificial and human sounds cease, could ever hear. Every now and then a bobolink seemed impressed with the duty of bringing these jangling birds into more regularity; and, like a country singing-master, he flew down the ranks, singing all the parts himself in snatches, as if to stimulate and help the laggards. In vain. Sunday is the bird's day, and they will have their own democratic worship.

There was no sound in the village street. Look either way—no, a vehicle, not a human being! The smoke rose up soberly and quietly, as if it said, it is Sunday! The leaves on the great elms hung motionless, glittering in dew, as if they too, like the people who dwelt under their shadow, were waiting for the bell to ring for meeting. Bees sung and flew as usual, but honey-bees have a Sunday way with them all the week, and could scarcely change for the better on the seventh day!

But oh, the sun! It had sent before and cleared every stain out of the sky. The blue heaven was not dim and low, as on secular days, but curved and deep, as if on Sunday it shook off all encumbrance which during the week had lowered and flattened it, and sprang back to the arch and symmetry of a dome. All ordinary sounds caught the spirit of the day. The shutting of a door sounded twice as far as usual. The rattle of a bucket in a neighbour's yard, no longer mixed with heterogeneous noises seemed a new sound. The hens went slyly about, and roosters crowed in psalm-tunes. And when the first bell rung nature seemed overjoyed to find something that it might do without breaking Sunday, and rolled the sound over and over, and pushed it through the air, and raced with it over field and hill, twice as far as on week days. There were no less than seven steeples in sight from the belfry, and the sexton said: "On still Sundays I've heard the bell, at one time and another, when the day was fair, and the

air moving in the right way, from every one of them steeples, and I guess likely they've all heard our'n."

*Prose and Poetry.* Prose is the work-day dress in which truths do secular duty. Poetry is the robe, the royal apparel in which truth asserts its Divine origin. Prose is truth looking up to heaven. Poetry is truth flying upward toward God.

Common prose is the language of the intellectual faculties, acting with ideality. When you add the fire and figures which the imagination inspires, it is eloquence. If now you give it musical qualities, in time, flow, and rhyme, it is poetry. Or, again, when human truths are spoken as they exist in their physical relations, that is prose, science, or whatever you choose to call it. Add now the element of inspiration, raise the same truths into the light of those faculties which are distinctively spiritual, and Divine, and you have poetry, and this is the highest form of good sense, or reason in its nobler sphere.

*Yankee Curiosity.*—Barton, I am no Yankee. I am not troubled with that intolerable curiosity which puts your people upon prying into everything in creation. If the good Lord wants to keep anything secret, I can't imagine what he created Yankees for! They are the most restlessly inquisitive creatures—always fretting themselves to find out something that was hidden away on purpose. If nature has a secret, a Yankee, I'll be bound, will pick the lock where it is kept, or be caved-dropping till he gets hold of it. The fact is there is too much brain here in New England. Everybody is racing and chasing after causes. I believe your people think they have the responsibility of the universe on their shoulders. When the Bible said, 'Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?' there were no Yankees about. Since then, five hundred ministers in this very New England think they have done it! They have found God out—all that He has done, why He did it, what He has not done, and why He could not do it! Did you hear that young sprout preach last Sunday afternoon, fresh from New Haven? He was amazingly precocious. He went on glibly unfolding moral government. 'God must do this,' and 'God, from the nature of things, cannot do that.' There was not a think about the infinite and eternal which he did not fancy himself familiar with! Pah! I hate so much disturbance. A gentleman wants a decorous faith, a good plain, sensible worship, and then with a good conscience, he turns to the enjoyment of life, leaving to the deity and—excuse me!—to the Yankees the management of untathomable mysteries.

*Work.*—All hail Work! Man lost Paradise by the temptations that beset indolence. He will regain it again by those wholesome qualities which are the fruit of intelligent work! The curse, "thou shalt earn thy bread in the sweat of thy brow," was not a curse on work but on *drudgery*. It is time that the curse on the ground should be worked out. There has been sweat enough to wash it clean. There have been tears enough fallen down to make the earth sweet. Work shall drive out drudgery and bring in leisure and then men shall eat their bread under cool shadows with unsweated brows!

*Revivals.*—In every department of life men are moved in masses, and, as it were, with social contagions. Few men in anything act alone. They kindle themselves in the simplest employments by social contact. Social enthusiasms have characterised the progress of the race in every department of society.

All nations pretending to moral life have been subject to those outbursts of feeling.—It is all very well to declare that a gradual and constant progress would be better. Such is not the law of development. Nations advance by paroxysms. The race has gone up not by steady improvement, but by leaps with long rests between. At a later period, when society has reached a higher plane than at present, progress may become even, uniform, and constant. At present that seems impossible. And we are to regard these moral freshets as admirable, relatively to the wants of the whole community.

The indirect effects of these moral experiences called revivals, in vivifying the moral sense, elevating the sentiments are giving to daily life a larger moral element—inbringing over secular things the shadow of the Infinite,

are so important that they should be accounted great benefits, quite independently of the special personal reformations which they work.

*The born Minister.*—A man should be born to the pulpit. A musician is one whose brain naturally secretes musical ideas; a poet thinks in blossoms just as naturally as honey-suckles do; an inventor's head is made to work out mechanical combinations. Men are like trees, each one must put forth the leaf that is created in him. Education is only like good culture—it changes the size, but not the sort. Thus men that ought to preach should be ordained in birth. The laying on of hands can't make an empty head full, nor a cold heart warm, nor a silent nature vocal. A minister is a genius in moral ideas, a poet is in beautiful ideas, and an inventor in physical ideas.

*Advice to a Youth entering College.*—Remember that much of knowledge is growth, not accumulation. The life that one is living in, is the book that men more need to know than any other. Never outrun health. A broken down scholar is like a razor without a handle. The finest edge on the best steel is beholden to the services of homely horn for ability to be useful. Keep an account with your brain. Sleep, food, air, and exercise are your best friends. Don't cheat them or cut their company. Don't fall into the vulgar idea that the mind is a warehouse, and education a process of stuffing it full of goods. Don't think a student delves like an Irishman digging for ore. If you must have a figure call it a sensitive plate, on which nature forms pictures. The more fine the surface and sensitive the quality, the truer and better will be the knowledge. Do not study for ideas alone, but train for condition. Get and keep a healthy brain. Keep it fine. Train it to sharp and accurate impressions. Give it lungs and vigor. Make it like a mirror, before nature, or a dagguerrean plate! Barton don't mope. Be a boy as long as you live. Laugh a good deal. Frolic every day. Keep up high spirits. A low tone of mind is unhealthy. There's food and medicine in nerve. Quantity and quality of nerve mark the distinction between animals and between men, from the bottom of creation to the top. Now Barton if you come home with your cheeks sunken, and your eyes staring out of a hollow pit, I will disown you. Good-by, my dear fellow.

*New England Metaphysics and Theology.*—New England metaphysics have been a powerful agent against materialism. It may be that at any given time, a high doctrinal sermon is not so edifying as a simple practical one would be. But a community brought up, through a hundred years, to task their thought upon themes remote, difficult, and infinite, will be far nobler than if they had been fed upon easy thought. Something is always to be considered in such discussions, not only as to the effect of preaching on the immediate conduct, but also as to a slower, though even more important effect, upon that whole moral constitution and mental habit which is the grand fountain and source of conduct.

Either extreme becomes unfruitful. High philosophic thought may, and should, lead to broad practical applications.

True doctrinal preaching, though it lies high, should, like clouds, before it gets through come down to the ground in rain.

Look at the history of New England mind in a large way. I think we owe everything to her theologians, and most to the most doctrinal. They were shut out from the world—in danger of becoming provincial and narrow. The outlet was found—not in cosmopolitan social customs, nor in art or literature, but in theology. Such men as Edwards, Hopkins, Smalley, West, Bellamy, Backus, Burton, Emmons lifted up the New England mind into a range of speculation and conviction that ennobled and strengthened it as art never could have done.

*Wearing Mourning for the Dead.*—It is not the custom of our people to symbolise their feelings by a change of dress, with this solitary exception. If a man becomes bankrupt or has his house burned down, or loses heavily in commercial operations, or has a son in disgrace, or a child misled by evil company, or any other sad experience, he does not change his garb. The one solitary and excep-

tional case is bereavement! But there is in domestic sorrow a delicacy, or ought to be, which should shrink from an ostentatiousness such as mourning apparel cannot fail to have. No one has a right so to express his sorrows as to intrude them upon every eye wherever he goes. Custom has long justified it; otherwise, it would be esteemed an indelicacy for one to be a walking advertisement of one's own private griefs. But, even if one were permitted to announce this one side of domestic experience change of garb, the question still remains, whether expression should be giving to the weakness of natural feeling, or the triumph of Christian faith? Whether we should symbolise the darkness of the grave as unlightened nature shows it, or the grave made luminous by the triumph of our Saviour and the glories of immortality beyond it? We may be sure there is something wrong in a Christian community where death is surrounded with associations of terror, where the young are reared to a horror of the sepulchre, where present grief rises up like a dark cloud and shuts out the heaven, where—in sermon, service, conversation, and dress—everything conspires to shroud death and the grave with darkness. Has sorrow a right to be selfish? May it bear false witness against immortality? Has a Christian, under bereavement, a right to declare by his conduct, 'There is no light in the grave, none beyond it, and no comfort for the bereaved, but only black, black, black sorrow!' I never meet one muffled in black from head to foot, without a certain horror. The smell of crape is to me like the smell of a charnel-house!

Did it ever occur to mourners to ask, what, if those for whom I grieve were to speak to me out of their blissful rest in heaven, would be their choice—that I should be shrouded like one in despair, or robed as one who mourns, but with Christian hope?

### Are you happy?

A correspondent of the *British Workman* says:—Rothschild, who was supposed to be the richest man in the world, was once asked this simple question: "Are you happy?" "Happy!" he answered, "when just as you are going to dinner, you have a letter placed in your hand, saying, 'If you don't lend me five hundred pounds, I will blow your brains out.' Happy, when you have to sleep with pistols under your pillow? No, indeed! I am not happy."

Astor, another very rich man, was once asked the same question. "Ah!" he answered, "I must leave it all when I die. It won't put off sickness; it won't buy off sorrow; it won't buy off death." And so it was plain to see he was not happy.

But I went once to see a poor lame, and aged woman who lived in one small room, and earned a part of her scanty living by knitting; for the rest she had to depend on the kindness of others. I asked her this same question: "Lydia, are you happy?" "Happy!" she answered, with a beaming face; "I am just as full as I can be. I don't believe I could hold another drop of joy." "But why?" I asked; "you are sick and alone, and have almost nothing to live upon." "But have you never read, said she, pointing to the Bible, 'All things are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's?' And again, 'Ask, and receive, that your joy may be full.'"

### "I am guilty of a Great Wrong."

So writes a man sixty-four years old, on reading the December Messenger, closing the twenty-fourth volume. "I have never joined any church or religious society, though I have attended public worship and desired to be ranked on the side of God's people. Were I to live my life over, I would join some praying religious society as soon as I could, and devote my powers to the good I could do. As it is, I consider myself only of the world, without God or a Saviour, and too old to begin anew. If I suffer, or die, there is no one to care for me. I have always been stiff-necked and rebellious, and no one trusts me. I am truly miserable. My children are so; and what can I do? I make an open confession: I am guilty of a great wrong."