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Poetry.

Strayed from the Flock.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN."

"491.—'Strayed from the Flock.'—B. Riviere.

"I call the effects of Nature the works of God whose hand and instrument she only is. Nature is not at variance with Art, nor Art with Nature: they being both servants of His Providence."—SIR T. BROWNE'S *Religio Medici*.
Extract from the R. A. Catalogue for 1867, and motto of the same.

The wind goes sobbing
Over the moor;
Far is the fold, and shut its door;
White and still—beyond terror or shock,
Lies the foolish lamb that strayed from the flock:
While overhead, from his frozen branch,
With a tender pity, true and staunch,
Thus sings the robin:

"The wind howls heavy
With death and sorrow;
To day it is there—may be me to-morrow:
Yet I'll sing one tune o'er the silent world,
For the little lamb that never grew old;
Never lived long winters to see,
Chanting from empty boughs like me.
Boughs once so leafy.

"The snow flakes cover
The moorland dun;
My song trills feebly, but I sing on.
Why did God make me a brave bird soul,
Under warm feathers, red as a coal,
To keep my life thus cheery and bright,
To the very last twinkle of wintry light—
While thine is all over?"

"Why was I given
Bold strong wings,
To bear me away from hurtful things,
While thy poor feet were so tender and weakly,
And thy faint heart gave up all so meekly;
Till it yielded at length to a still, safe Hand,
That bade thee lie down, nor try to stand?
Was it Hand of Heaven?"

"The wind goes sobbing"—
(Thus sang the bird;
Or else in a dream his voice I heard:)
"Nothing I know, and nothing can;
Wisdom is not for me but man.
Yet some snow-pure, snow-soft—not snow cold,
May be singing o'er the lamb strayed from the fold,
Beside poor Robin." *Good Words.*

Religious.

For the Christian Messenger.

Thoughts on Theology.

No. II.

SYSTEMS—DISPENSATIONS—CAUTIONS.

My Dear Sir,—

Receiving the Bible as the holy book which contains the word of God, the manifestation of his mind, the announcements of his will, we naturally conclude that a system of truth, orderly, complete, and harmonious will be found in its pages. Doubtless it is there.—But the book is not constructed in a systematic way. A large portion of it consists of history. We find also poetry—hymns of devotion—proverbs—parables—letters—prophecies. Divine truths are scattered through them all, and must be culled out and arranged. Sometimes, too, the truth is not given in the form of set statements, but has to be sought for in allusions, or even to be drawn out by inferences. To borrow an illustration from mining operations;—in some of the books the nuggets are plentiful;—in others the precious metal is diffused through the substance, or appears under the form of specks or grains, and much labour has to be expended in separating them from common matter.

There is another consideration of weighty import. A large portion of the Bible is taken up with an account of God's dealings with his chosen people, the Israelites. Intermingled with the narrative are instructions of various kinds, and incidental representations of truth, which comprise the amount of religious knowledge that was then possessed.—It is evident that the process of communica-

tion was of the gradually advancing kind. God taught his people as they were able to bear his teachings. They were not prepared for abstract truths. They could not understand the philosophy of religion, and so, religion in those days was as a series of lessons and manifestations, and interferences, on God's part; and on man's part, of acts of implicit faith and obedience. Thus, "Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded him;" and Abraham "believed God."

There are two methods of theological inquiry, each of which has its advantages.—By one method, the student takes the book as a whole, extracts from it the divine utterances on all points of religion, and arranges them in such order as appears to him the most natural, and best adapted to unfold the mind and will of God. By another, he limits his attention successively, to the dispensations or modes of divine government, and seeks to ascertain how much of truth and duty was made known or enjoined upon men, and by what means, under each respectively. This last method appears to me to be preferable, and I shall adopt it in these letters. The object will be to review the Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Christian dispensations. When we come to the last, the statements will assume the systematic form and will constitute a body of Christian Divinity, strictly and technically so called.

One remark may be made before I proceed. It is necessary, in reading the Old Testament, to take care lest we fall into the mistake of supposing that the religious knowledge of ancient saints was more extensive than there is reason to believe there could have been in those times. Many words and phrases, such as we use in theological discussions are found in the Authorized Version of the Old Testament; but we are not to conclude that they conveyed to the men of those times the same ideas as we now connect with them. The language of the redemption-period could not be learned and employed till the redemption itself was accomplished.—Even the prophets did not, and could not, understand the full meaning of their own predictions. They "inquired and searched diligently"; but as they "died without the sight" so they failed, in this world, to apprehend the great truths which were not clearly revealed till "the fulness of time" had come. Then they shared with angels in the new manifestation, and to them, as well as to "the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" was made known "by the church," that is, in the salvation of the church, "the manifold wisdom of God." Therefore, in reading the Old Testament, especially the Psalms, it is necessary that we throw ourselves back, as it were, into those ages, forget, as far as may be, our present knowledge, and endeavour to realize the actual condition of the good man whose words are before us, and their then existing opportunities and attainments. We may accommodate many of their expressions to our own affairs and individual experiences, and lawfully use them for instruction or comfort; but we must beware of supposing that those expressions were understood by them to mean all that we choose to convey by them, for that was evidently impossible. Take an example:—The Psalmist says—(Psalm 143:3.) "The enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground: he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead." There can be no doubt as to the meaning. David (to whom the Psalm is ascribed, and perhaps rightly,) refers to the cruel usage he received from Saul, by which his life was endangered, and he could only obtain safety by hiding himself, as he often did, in dens and caves—places which were frequently used as repositories for the dead, and where, for a time, he "dwelt in darkness." But there are persons to be found, even to this day, who imagine that "the enemy" denotes Satan, and apply the whole to spiritual exercises and sore temptations, sympathising as they suppose with David, in the endurance of the like distresses. The absurdity of such interpretation is obvious.

And this endeavour to throw ourselves back into past times will be found particularly necessary and useful in the perusal of the historical records. Unless we make due allowance for the difference of customs and

manners, in the Eastern parts of the world and in remote ages, we shall be apt to pass an unfavourable and unjust verdict on many a good man, whose conduct, as recorded by the sacred historian, would not bear examination, if tried, and judged by Christian principles. The ferocity by which warlike operations were then distinguished, and the inhumanity of the judicial proceedings, would be universally condemned if they were reproduced in those times; but they were the ordinary usages of all nations, not only then but long after, and the writers of the Old Testament have shown their impartiality and truthfulness in describing things as they were not as, according to modern judgments, they ought to have been. We shudder at the tales of slaughter and punishment. There would be an indignant rising-up of the whole population, and neither police nor military would be able to carry into effect their cruel purpose, if they were in these days, and on British territory, to imitate Eastern fashions.—Then and there, however, there was no horror—no compunction. If David put the conquered Amorites "under saws and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln"—whatever those expressions may mean—he did what other conquerors were accustomed to do. If the Jewish poet pronounced the man happy who should "dash the little ones" of Babylon "against the stones," his countrymen were ready to applaud him for his patriotism. But the record of such deeds and sayings is, unconnected with any note of approval; while its occurrence in the divine book is one of the many marks of its genuineness.

I have referred especially to the Old Testament because we are about to enter into an inquiry into the theology taught in that portion of the Bible. Similar considerations require to be borne in mind when reading the life of our Lord, the narrative of the early planting of the gospel, and the apostolic letters. The writers were Jews: the social customs of that period differed greatly from our own; and the sudden transition from heathenism to Christianity placed the first Christians in circumstances of difficulty and danger which it is scarcely possible to realize in this nineteenth century. But we must make the attempt, if we would understand "the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Yours,
J. M. CRAMP

Acadia College, Jan. 6th, 1868.

A new Religious Denomination in England.

In June last a meeting was held in London of some prominent men who desired to promote "common action among those who rely for the religious improvement of human life on filial piety and brotherly charity, with or without more particular agreement in matters of doctrinal theology." At that meeting a committee was appointed to draw up a scheme for the foundation of "a new religious union." The report of this committee was presented at a meeting held on November 21st, and the new society was formed. It is called "The Free Christian Union." An attempt was made to expunge the word "Christian," because it was calculated to exclude many of the great thinkers and public instructors of the age; but the attempt was not successful. The report of the committee contained the following preamble and declaration of object:

"Whereas, For ages past, Christians have been taught that correct conceptions of divine things are necessary to acceptance with God, and to religious relations with each other, and in vain pursuit of orthodoxy, have parted into rival churches, and lost the bond of common work and love; and whereas, with the progressive changes of thought and feeling, uniformity in doctrinal opinion becomes ever more precarious, while moral and spiritual affinities grow and deepen; and whereas, the divine will is summed up by Jesus Christ himself in love to God and love to man; and the terms of pious union among men should be as broad as those of communion with God—this society, desiring a spiritual fellowship co-extensive with these terms, invites to communion action all who deem men responsible,

not for the attainment of divine truth, but only for the serious search of it, and who rely for the religious improvement of human life, on filial piety and brotherly charity, with or without more particular agreement in matters of doctrinal theology. Its object is, by relieving the Christian life from reliance on theological articles, or external rites to save it from conflict with the knowledge and conscience of mankind, and bring it back to the essential conditions of harmony between God and man."

An attempt was made to introduce after the word "charity," in the foregoing, the words, "according to the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, as the most perfect manifestation of human excellence and divine goodness;" but this attempt also failed. Among the leading persons taking part in this movement we find the names of Rev. James Martineau, Dr. Sadler, J. H. Thom, and H. Solly. It is proposed to commence the work of the society by establishing a central church in London. Our readers will perceive that it is a new development of Unitarianism. For ourselves, we think that to talk of a "Christian Union" without a Christian faith, is an absurdity.—*National Baptist.*

It never dries up.

I was staying at a village on the Welsh coast, where the people had to bring all their water from a well. No single house had a pump. At all hours of the day, but chiefly before breakfast and before tea-time, little feet and great, often unshod, but very active, might be seen passing along a narrow lane, with every kind of pitcher, kettle and can, to a fresh-water well. Not a very trustworthy friend, altar all, was this village well.

"Is this well ever dry?" I inquired.
"Dry? Yes, ma'am; very often in hot weather."

"And where do you go then for water?"
"To the spring, a little way out of town."

"And if the spring dries up?"
"Why, then we go to the well higher up—the best water of all."

"But if the well higher up fails?"
"Why ma'am, that well never dries up—never. It is always the same summer and winter."

I went to see this precious well which "never dries up." It was a clear sparkling rivulet, coming down from the high hills, not with torrent-leap and roar, but with the steady flow and soft murmur of fullness and freedom. It flowed down to the highway side. It was within reach of every child's little pitcher.—It was enough for every empty vessel. The small birds came down thither to drink. The ewes and lambs had trodden down a little path to its brink. The thirsty beasts of burden along the dusty road, knew the way (as I could see by their tracks) to the well that "never dries up."

It reminded me of the waters of life and salvation flowing from the "Rock of Ages," and brought within the reach of all men by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every other brook may grow dry in the days of drought and adversity, but this heavenly spring never ceases to flow.

Without waiting till earth's wayside brooks shall fail, let us all hasten at once, with hearts athirst, to the heavenly well "which never dries up."

"Died, Fifty years ago."

The church at Blackstone was destitute of a pastor.

The ways and means employed to bring about such a destitution, sometimes play sad havoc with the pastor's heart-strings, for which amends are generally made, so far as may be, by following him with a set of *commendatory resolutions*.

The church at Blackstone was left destitute of a pastor, and the people began to pray the Lord, trust in Providence, and to look abroad generally for an "under shepherd."

One good brother warmly engaged in the work, wrote to a clerical gentleman in New York thinking that a town of that size might possibly furnish the man. The needs and requirements of the church were carefully portrayed. The virtues, talents, requirements,