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"Not slothful in business : fervent in spirit."

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Poetry.

A Psalm for New Year's Eve.

A friend stands at the door ;
In either tight-closed hand
Hiding rich gifts, three hundred and three-score ;
Waiting to strew them dally o'er the land
Even as seed the sower,
Each drop he treads it in as passes by :
It cannot be made fruitful if it die.

O, good New Year, we clasp
This warm shut hand of thine !
Loosing forever, with half sigh half-grasp,
That which from ours falls the dead finger twine,
Ay, whether fierce its grasp,
Has been, or gentle, having seen we know
That it was blessed ; let the old year go.

O, New Year, teach us faith !
The road of life is hard ;
When our feet bleed, and scourging winds us scathe
Point thou to Him whose visage was once marred
Than any man's ; who saith,
" Make straight paths for your feet—" and to the
oppress—
" Come ye to Me, and I will give you rest."

Yet hang some lamp like hope
Above this unknown way,
Kind Year, to give our spirits freer scope
And our hands strength to work while it is day.
But if that way must slope
Tombward, O, bring before our fading eyes
The lamp of life, the Hope that never dies !

Comfort our souls with love—
Love of all human kind ;
Love special, close—in which like sheltered dove
Each weary heart its own safeness may find :
And love that turns above
Adoringly : contented to resign
All loves, if need be, for the Love Divine.

Friend, come thou like a friend,
And whether bright thy face,
Or dim with clouds we cannot comprehend—
We'll hold our patient hands, each in his place,
And trust thee to the end ;
Knowing thou leadest onwards to those spheres,
Where there are neither days, nor months, nor
years.

—D. M. Mulock.

Religious.

For the Christian Messenger.

Thoughts on Theology.

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A STUDENT.

LETTER I.

Introductory Observations.

My Dear Sir,—

I propose to send you, in a series of letters an abstract of those "Thoughts on Theology" which have been communicated from time to time to the students under my care.

In this first letter I shall confine myself to some general observations of an introductory kind.

1. Personal piety is an indispensable prerequisite to a right understanding of the bible and a due appreciation of its contents. The critic develops the bare meaning of the words but the christian can discern spiritual beauties and excellencies ; and truths which may be hidden from the former will be clearly apparent to the latter. Any educated man may understand the general statements of a work on astronomy ; but a full comprehension of the book is peculiar to the astronomer. A father's letter may be unintelligible to an indifferent person ; but his son will read it with emotions all his own ; and will not passages in that letter, totally uninteresting to others, affect his inmost soul ? See Psalm 36, 9 ; 119, 18.

2. The perusal of the scriptures, whether for purely religious purposes or with a view to exegetical inquiry, should be always engaged in with deep seriousness and reverence and accompanied by prayer. We should never forget that we are reading God's book ; and recollecting that our depraved hearts are predisposed to error, and disinclined to the purity of divine truth, we should ever implore that teaching of the Holy Spirit which is the special promise of the new Covenant. Luther certainly uttered a paradox when he said that "to pray well is to study well," but we may

accept his saying as intended to teach us that if prayer without study is fanaticism, study without prayer is presumption.

3. It is always to be borne in mind that we are learners, not judges. When we read other books we are at liberty to agree or disagree with the authors, or to select from their opinions and statements such as appear to us to be consonant with truth. But all the statements which God has made, as reported by his servants, are true, and all are to be received. Our only object is to find out the meaning. Nor is this an unreasonable demand ; the words of the God of truth ought to be unhesitatingly regarded as claiming obedient reception. Belief in the inspiration of the bible necessarily implies submission to its authority.

4. We should watch against the influences of party-prejudice. The bible is to be read not for the purpose of being confirmed in opinions already entertained by ourselves and those with whom we are associated, but in order to discover heavenly truth. And this remark may be applied to the explanation of texts which are usually adduced in support of theological systems. We must beware of binding ourselves to the modes of interpretation ordinarily adopted, as though it would be wrong or perilous to reject them. There is no such thing as Protestant infallibility.—We may be firmly persuaded that the views generally held by our own denomination, for instance, or such as are held by us in common with other denominations, are scriptural ; but we must be allowed to select our methods of support and defence, and to judge for ourselves whether particular passages are or are not wisely quoted.

5. The analogy of faith is to be remembered. All the truths of the bible agree with one another, and form a harmonious system. Interpretations which are inconsistent with any inspired statements, or with the spirit and tenor of revelation, must be rejected. However plausible they may be, they must be cast aside, for the words of God cannot contradict each other.

Here it may be proper to observe that it is unwise to found theories on insulated texts. If a supposed doctrine is only to be found in a single passage of scripture, it is much more likely that our interpretation is incorrect than that the doctrine in question forms part of the divine system.

6. Much time has been lost by those who indulge in speculations and conjectures. The great object we have in view should be to deduce from the scriptures a spiritual and practical theology, that is, to ascertain what is God's revelation of himself, what is his will concerning us, and how it ought to be regarded. We may avail ourselves of the labours of the learned, and thankfully receive help from any quarter ; but it is necessary to be on our guard against "foolish questions" and perverse disputings," because they "increase unto more ungodliness." 1 Tim. 6, 3-5 ; 2 Tim. 2, 16, 23.

7. Though we must not expect to discover any new truth, additional light may be thrown on various parts of the system, and fresh and interesting illustrations obtained. Therefore the scripture student should beware of being satisfied with generalities and vague notions. He should study sentences—phrases—words—always carefully noting individual peculiarities of style, and the circumstances of those to whom the portion of scripture was addressed. In this connection, minute criticism may be of great service, and the works of modern translators and commentators may be advantageously consulted. Dean Alford, Bishop Ellicott, Conybeare and Howson, Drs Alexander, Eadie, and Fairburn, and the authors of the "Revised version," deserve particular mention.

8. Those views of truth which have been mainly held by evangelical christians of all ages, and which have uniformly produced christian purity and benevolent effort, may be safely regarded as fundamental. The Holy Spirit guides into "all truth." True piety is the effect of truth, received and enjoyed. Where we see true piety we may be assured that fundamental truth is cherished, however the parties may differ in modes of expression, and however their opinions may be coloured by prejudice or educational bias.—Still it is to be considered that the full development of christian character and the full

enjoyment of christian happiness must depend on comprehensiveness of view and simplicity of faith. The student must learn and the preacher must declare "all the counsel of God." Acts 20, 27.

9. We must conscientiously endeavour to assign to each truth its proper position in the system and to give to it its due proportion of regard.—The evils arising from partiality and one-sidedness are great. We should watch and pray continually that we may not fall into them.

10. If, now and then, satisfactory interpretations fail to be elicited, and any portions of truth seem to be less clearly revealed, or even veiled in obscurity, it must not be considered surprising, having in view the antiquity of the sacred volume, and the heavenly nature of the themes treated of. At present we know but "in part";—in the next world the servants of God will know "even as they are known."

Yours truly,

J. M. CRAMP.

Acadia College, Dec. 24, 1867.

Pulpit Fire.

BY REV. THEO. L. CUYLER.

We lately witnessed a striking illustration of the truth that if a minister deprecates his own sermon by delivering it with indifference, the people will receive it with indifference. If he is intensely interested in his message, the people will be also. Nothing is more surely fatal to a discourse than for the preacher himself to put contempt upon it by a listless stupid delivery.

The late discourse to which we refer was delivered by a man of remarkable power and originality. It had most of the essentials of a grand sermon—sound exposition, lively illustration, boldness and pungency, and genuine evangelical unction. It was delivered with much earnestness, and heard with delight by discriminating judges of preaching. On the next sabbath the same course was repeated, by request, to another congregation, and to the great majority of those who kept awake during its delivery pronounced it "insufferably tedious!" And the simple reason was that the speaker displayed no interest in his own utterance. The sermon was precisely the same ; the vital difference was in the delivery.

Here is a lesson for young clergymen. Especially is it a warning to those who expend all their strength in preparing a discourse, and none at all in pronouncing it. What boots it to a minister of Christ to elaborate an excellent sermon, and then go to the pulpit, and deliberately smother it by a tame and tedious delivery ? For after all, the audience are apt to take a minister's utterances at his own "valuation" of them. If they see him so thoroughly electrified by the great truth he brings that it flashes from his very eyes, and spins off from his fingertips like the currents from a galvanic battery they are compelled to hear him. It is utterly impossible to refuse our attention to the roughest backwoodsman at a camp-meeting if his manner indicates that he is under a genuine inspiration of the theme that he is presenting. Bible-orthodoxy being given as the prime essential of a sermon ; then after that "half the battle"—yea two-thirds of it lies in the delivery. And the vital merit in delivery is an honest downright, direct, full-souled earnestness that drives the auditor, as it were, into the corner of his pew and pins him there until the last syllable is uttered.—Even doctrinal argumentation should be conducted with intense passion. The man who so feels for the souls of his auditors as to weep over them on his knees or in his pulpit, will make them weep. A minister should write in a glow, and preach in a glow, and keep his hearers in a glow. Too many young preachers are bug-bearred by the name of "ranter," and are afraid of vehemence ; but where one man is too vehement ten men are too soporific. Profound essays may have sometimes exuded from listless theological lecturers ; but the great preachers of the world have been men who like Whitefield, Grafters, Lyman Beecher, and Spurgeon have "made the rafters roar."

We have often been struck with the fact

that the most cultivated, quite as much as the illiterate, are impressed and enchained by pulpit-earnestness.—During our apprenticeship-days in the ministry, we were not a little alarmed to find one of the most eminent American lawyers in our congregation for three months in the year. That big head in the front pew was a terror to us. But one day the great lawyer said to us, "My young friend! the two main essentials in a gospel-sermon are simplicity and fire. If I had a law-student with me who did not show more earnestness in gaining a five-dollar suit in a police-court than many ministers do in dealing with immortal souls on the Sabbath, I would kick that young man out of my office!" We have never ceased to thank that venerable lawyer for his homely hints ; and we commend them to our brethren everywhere. We would also beg leave to suggest effective animated delivery will depend very much on having studied and prayed well over the sermon during the week, on sleeping well during the Saturday night, and eating a digestible breakfast on the Sabbath morning. In closing these brief lucubrations we return our thanks to the brilliant and excellent brother alluded to in the opening sentences. For he has given us a new proof that the most admirable sermon may be spoiled by a dull and stupid delivery.

Brother Offside.—A Sketch.

Brother Offside is a member of the church, and a man who has a great many good qualities. He is prompt and punctual at meetings, and liberal in support of the gospel. He is a very useful man, too. It is not for one habit—it has now become fixed and inveterate as a habit, I fear—he would be a very useful man both in the church and in society. The truth is he is on the opposite side from almost everybody, in almost everything.

"The masses are always wrong," says brother Offside, "and majorities usually err.—People who wish to be right, and to do right must act for themselves, and not go with the multitude."

And this rule he carries to such an extent, that if others take the affirmative, he is sure to take the negative, for no other reason. He seems to think he must. It is not because he is obstinate, or really contrary in spirit ; though it must be confessed this course, so long pursued, has affected the whole man, and he is much less genial and kind-hearted to appearance than formerly. Habits will change the entire nature of people sometimes.

So much has our brother become subject to the control of this habit, that he does not seem aware of its influence over him. Nor does he stop to consider whether others may not be right and he wrong, but almost instinctively, when an opinion is expressed of a course proposed, he turns the other way like a ship obeying its helm, but always turning in the contrary direction.

If any one proposes a change in the services, or any new order of procedure, likely to be beneficial, at once brother Offside says,

"I shall be opposed to that ; it will have a very injurious effect, I am satisfied. I don't see, for my part, how any one can seriously think of such a thing."

And to make it all the worse he will usually add,

"I am conscientious in this thing. It don't make any difference to me, but I do it for the good of the cause."

And yet, though he certainly means to be an honest man, it is hardly to be supposed he had really thought of the cause, but took his ground merely from the force of an evil habit. The church generally yields to brother Offside not because they are convinced that he is right, nor out of any personal respect for him but to avoid contention. Men who suppose themselves conscientious do not readily yield their position, and are seldom convinced by reasoning.

Even the darker phases of life have their amusing side. The unhappy trait of the good brother is so well understood that advantage is taken of it occasionally, and the brethren sometimes carry their points by means of his very perversity. Not long since the deacons thought the church ought to make a collection for a certain special object, not provided for in the usual order of benevolent efforts. It