

Christian Messenger.

A RELIGIOUS AND GENERAL FAMILY NEWSPAPER.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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WHOLE SERIES.
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Poetry.

For the Christian Messenger.

STANZA.

Suggested by reading a Letter from Miss Minnie DeWolf to her mother.

Where darkness reigns within the clouded soul,
Where sunshine glides the ever-beauteous land—
I see a fair and fragile worker stand,
One of that brave and heaven-inspiring band—
Workers for Christ—from Indus to the pole.

I see her 'mid a swarthy, joyous group,
The laughing glee of childhood in their eyes,
Nature's own voice in all their sportive cries,
And happier far than oft times are the wise,
Who would not to their pleasures artless stoop.

Far from her home—where care might never be,
Where all her hopes of highest good were bright,
Where kindly hands made simple labours light,
And 'mid no fears of Bromangian spite,
Her life spake Faith, and Hope, and Charity.

Whence now this heart of Amazonian night,
Clad in the armor of a heavenly sphere?
Why seeks she thus these walls as children dear,
And loving them through many a home-made tear,
Would stoop their souls to God's transforming light?

Ah! God hath sent his strength-ning Spirit down,
As erst there came our Christ's baptismal Dove,
And in this loving life, doth teach us love
That ever reigns the world's warm clasp above—
The Father's fondness, and the children's crown.

Halifax, 1869.

Religious.

THE MURDER OF THE HYMN.

The following from *The Advance* is a fine specimen of the personification of a hymn under the operation of its four artistic executioners. If, however, the quartette choir referred to, did all that the writer says they did, he has himself given a no less fine exhibition of the use of hyperbole by his treatment of the performers in suspending them to the public gaze:—

It was Sabbath morning. The weather was such as to insure a good attendance in Protestant houses of worship. As the solemn sounding bells were loitering on their last strokes, I took my seat in one of our "first" Christian Churches; first in name, and among the first in the matter of magnitude and influence. Everything and everybody around me bore the unmistakable marks of respectability. The interior of the edifice was pleasing to the eye, the pews were comfortable to the person. The house was full of people, whose attire, while to some extent costly, was not specially obnoxious to the charge of extravagance or parade. Indeed, I was rather gratified with both the dress and the address of the assembly, which were to a good degree of sobriety becoming the house and hour.

The preacher, too, was unexceptionable in demeanor, and conducted the services with excellent taste; while his sermon, which was one of noticeable simplicity, was delivered with admirable grace and force.—The worship, to my great satisfaction, combined the liturgical and extemporary elements with unusual skill, and with excellent effect. It was eminently congregational worship until the hymn which immediately preceded the discourse, the first line of which was

Rock of ages, cleft for me,

Glorious, precious, hallowed hymn! It was familiar to us all. We knew it by heart. It was delicious with the flavor of antiquity. It carried us back to "the sweet hour of prayer" when we were children. It reminded us of mother and home, the prayer meeting and the family altar. We had used it for praise and prayer both. Is there anything in the language like it for the combined uses of song and supplication? It touched the tenderest chord of memory.—Its words could not but move us deeply. They are profound words, surcharged with mysticism—getting hold of a man's deepest spiritual feelings.

And then these words came to us with a melody of their own, sacred as themselves. The old and the young of the assembly rose up with alacrity as the last line died away on the preacher's lips, and the lips of age and youth and childhood were impatient to go up on the wings of the fascinating and illustrious lyric to Him who was bending from his throne waiting for the praises of the great congregation. We all had the book, the place, and the dear old tune, when, after a few snatches of the organ, that snatched the bread of praise from the mouths of the saints, a quartette, perched in the little gallery behind us, surrounded by all the upholstery and appurtenances essential to that department of divine worship, pounced upon the grand old mystic hymn, and—murdered it in cold blood!

Oh, it was a distressing spectacle! The half-opened lips of the worshippers closed suddenly, and their books too. Disappointment took the place of expectation.—Countenances fell. Old saints sank sadly into their seats. The young looked quizzingly round upon the quartette. The frivolous snickered. The skeptics sneered.—The worldlings nudged one another and smiled, as if to say, "Gay, isn't it? The earnest-hearted were disgusted. The devout prayed, instead of praising; asked forgiveness, instead of giving thanks.

The quartette went on with the murder of the hymn, showing by merriness of face and tone, their relish of their triumph and the discomfiture of the congregation. The hallowed words struggled bravely, but ineffectually, with the horrid tune. The mystic sentiment writhed and moaned as the voice of the gross bass tore it and defiled it. Gentle memories flew shrieking through the edifice, as the frantic solo of the male tenor scratched and slit the face of the holy hymn, until its most intimate friends did not know it from the gaudy musical bag that captivates the groundlings in the sensuous uproar of the opera. Then the whole four of the "performers," as if exasperated at the vitality of the object of their musical hate, brandished their "artistic" clubs, and brought them down with terrific violence upon the head of the saintly song of praise. When the organist pulled out a stop, he pulled at the heart-strings of the dear old hymn, and when he pushed in a stop, he stabbed a dagger to his vitals. The furious flights of the tenor were the screech of triumph over the prostrate hymn; the surly growl of the bass was a defiant bravo flung by art into the face of adoration. The combined performance was a chorus-shout of glee over the substitution of frolicsome vanity for the beauty of holiness.

And so with organ, organist, and the blower, with bass and tenor, and treble and alto, with screech, and yell, and hoot, and trill, the choir was victorious. The venerable melody staggered to its last fall. After a most valiant struggle for life, it went down under the murderous hand, a martyr to the "spirit of the age." Another pull at the heart-strings, another stab in the vitals, another sit in the face, another grab at the throat, and all was over. The hymn was dead. The quartette rested from their murderous work with their mouths wet with the blood of this sublime old song of the saints. And, as if to enjoy their rest more privately, or to agree upon their next victim, they closed the cracks in the red curtain, and gathered down behind it; while all the rest of the assembly, as though under a sense of solemn obligation, gave heed to the words of the preacher while he expounded unto us the words of eternal life.

How different a spectacle is it when a whole congregation, led by a large, good choir, join with one heart and one voice to praise God in his sanctuary.

Lord how delightful 'tis to see

A whole assembly worship Thee.

At once they sing, at once they pray,

They hear of heaven and learn the way.

We are thankful to say that such choirs as that represented above are becoming less acceptable and are being discarded by the churches of the neighbouring States.—Here they have never received any favor. In the service of praise in some of our churches, there is still a wide field for improvement.

CAMPING OUT ON THE PRAIRIE.

A missionary of the American Sunday School Union in Minnesota relates this story for boys:

A few evenings ago I had prepared my camp for the night, under the protection of a little hill. Lying down, and looking up into the great vault above, I was thinking of the myriads of stars, so beautiful and so grand, and of God their Maker, when I heard childish voices not far distant. I was startled, for I did not know that I was within miles of a habitation. Going in the direction of the sounds, they became more and more distinct, until I heard the earnest conversation of two boys.

"Do you suppose that good people, when they die, go to live in those beautiful stars?"

"I don't know—but if they do, I should like to go and live where those four stars are with a handle."

"Do you think God lives there? Don't he live in yonder large bright star?"

"I don't know where God is; they say he is every where; but I know where Jesus is. He is in heaven; and I think heaven must be in one of those pretty stars."

So the conversation stopped. I stepped forward and saw their faces both upturned to the stars. They were startled at my approach, and would have run away, but for my kind words of inquiry if I was near a house. I found that like myself, they had become benighted on the way, and dared not go any further for fear of losing the way and so had concluded to wait for morning. I asked if they were not afraid to stay out all night? They said, "Yes, some; but when we looked up and saw the beautiful stars shining so brightly, we thought God might be watching us, as the little stars seemed to be, and then we didn't feel afraid." So they came to my camp.

As we sat down, that night, on the great wide prairie, and saw the horizon close in all around us, and narrower and narrower became the circle of our vision, while we strained our eyes to keep the track, or see a light from some friendly window—how like was our case to that of the lost sinner!

But no light came; and we stopped because we could go no further, and looked up to the heavens, and felt that Jesus was there, and we could trust him to take care of us—and so *He did*: and when the dim light in the east began to grow brighter, as the sun gilded the long line of clouds, we were happy as we tried to realize that such was the feeling in our hearts.

HENRY WARD BEECHER ON PRAYER-MEETINGS.

A Christian Convention was recently held in New York, attended by men from all the Protestant denominations. It extended over three days. Discussion on the first topic—"How to make the week-day meetings of churches effective for spiritual purposes"—was opened by the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, who said that many who can think prayers cannot say prayers. The best prayers in his congregation were women's prayers. They have more sentiment and thorough piety, and the more shame, he said, that our churches do not avail themselves of women. The churches gnaw the bones while they throw away the fat. In regard to singing he remarked that there was no such liturgy as the hymn-book and here he read several hymns from the Plymouth Collection, as illustrations of grandeur and beauty. If people at a prayer-meeting cannot say prayers let them sing prayers. Music is the highest expression of Christian devotion and experience, and a prayer-meeting can well be carried on by training the members to singing.—If a topic is started by any one, the pastor should aid in giving it impulse, and sometimes bring a hymn to bear upon it if he knows of one appropriate. The worst speakers in the world, he said, were often the best, and the best the worst. This might appear paradoxical, but it was a fact that when men stammered out genuine feeling and genuine experiences they were far more valuable than polished oratory and

pointed periods. New beginners must necessarily say many crude things. A seed cannot get out of the ground without lifting dirt. The power of a church is in its lay members, and they should be encouraged to develop themselves. People should not come to prayer-meetings to please themselves alone, by hearing good speaking, but should be glad to aid and encourage others. Sociability is a necessary element of prayer-meetings. Many think that the priest should teach, but it is also true that the brotherhood should teach. Taste in speaking is good, but sincerity and fervor are better. Grammar is good, but something for grammar to carry is better. Get men to think what they feel, and say it. The mistakes of a child's prattle are entertaining, and so should be those of a church brother. Prayer-meetings should be conducted in a conversational way, and the true prayer meeting takes place often when people gather round the stove, after the regular prayer-meeting breaks up. A church is a family, and should be conducted on the principle of household familiarity. Prayer-meetings should be held in small rooms, if the assemblage is small. A scattered audience is not receptive, and there is great power in contiguity. They should sit together. The speaker said he began his first meetings with but very few persons, and they now average 800, after twenty-one years of existence. During the first five years very few attended. Mr. Beecher did not believe in congregations that never dared smile; he did not believe that God ever gave a full faculty to a man and did not permit him to use it; a bad jest was a very reprehensible thing, but if he wanted to make his auditory cry he would make them laugh first. The conventional prayers were very staid and unaffected exhortations. The same prayers descended from minister to church-member, from class-leader to pupil for centuries. There is too much praying in general, too little in specifics—like verdure in winter, many trees in general, very few leaves in particular. Mr. Beecher listened to with great attention, and frequently the audience broke into storms of laughter and applause. He was solemnly rebuked by Rev. Mr. Blair (U. P.), who thought that it was very wicked to smile in church.

DEAN ALFORD ON RITUALISM AND THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

We of that Church (the Church of England) find ourselves in the presence of a great and skillfully organized conspiracy, whose object, is avowed to be, to take from her the character which she put on at the Reformation, and to bring her back to the "Roman obedience." The existence of such a conspiracy is hardly credited by thousands who have the distinctly expressed proofs of it lying on their tables. Many of her laity regard the whole matter with indifference. Many others look upon the factors of the new opinions as legitimately included within the ample shadow of the brooding wings of the Church of England, and disregard any consequences which may follow from their inclusion. But the great body of those laity who really love the Church, have, in consequence of the progress of the conspirators, become disgusted and alienated. There is very little now left among them of that hearty, intelligent loyalty to her faith and her ministers which those of us remember who can look back a quarter of a century. To see her helm for the most part deserted by those who ought to be holding it,—for there are very few of her present bishops in whom as leaders the laity have confidence,—and they see that helm usurped by bold unscrupulous men, in whose writings and in whose conduct the first principles of faithfulness and truth are daily violated. We use our epithets advisedly and sorrowfully. We have arrived at a time when the truest charity is manifested in calling things by their right names. It has been very much the fashion while impugning the system and objects of the Ritualistic party, to except from personal blame the leaders of it, and indeed to laud them as noble examples of devotedness and self-denial. Those who thus neutralize