

Christian Messenger.

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"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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Poetry.

THE POETRY OF CHRISTMAS.

The minstrels played their Christmas tune
To-night beneath my cottage eaves;
While smitten by a lofty moon,
The encircling laurels, thick with leaves,
Gave back a rich and dazzling sheen,
That overspread their natural green.

Through hill and valley every breeze
Had sunk to rest with folded wings;
Keen was the air but could not freeze
Nor check the music of the strings,
So stout and hardy was the band
That scraped the chords with strenuous hand.

And who but listened? till was paid
Respect to every inmate's claim;
The greeting given, the music played
In honor of each household name,
Duly pronounced with lusty call,
And "Merry Christmas" wished to all.

WORDSWORTH.

Wrapped in his swaddling bands,
And in his manner laid,
The Hope and Glory of all lands
Is come to the world's aid;
No peaceful home upon his cradle smil'd,
Guests rudely went and came where slept the royal child.

But where Thou dwellest Lord,
No other thought should be;
Once duly wote in'd and ador'd,
How should I part with Thee?
Bethlehers must loose Thee soon, but Thou wilt
grace,
The single heart to be Thy sure abiding place.

KEBLE.

Some say, that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Savior's birth is celebrated,
The birds of dawning singeth all night long;
And then, they say, no spirit can walk abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.

SHAKESPEARE.

It was the winter wild,
While the heaven-born child
All meanly wrapt, in the rude manger lies;
Nature in awe to him,
Had doff'd her gaudy trim,
With her great Master so to sympathize;
It was no season then for her
To wanton with the sun, her lusty paramour.

Only with speeches fair
She woos the gentle air,
To hide her guilty front with innocent snow;
And on her naked shame,
Pollute with sinful blame,
The saintly veil of maiden white to throw,
Confounded that her Maker's eyes
Should look so near upon her deformities.

No war or battle sound
Was heard the world around;
The idle spear and shield were high uphung;
The hooked chariot stood
Unstained with hostile blood;
The trumpet spoke not to the armed throng,
And kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovereign Lord was by.

MILTON.

A NEW YEAR'S DAY RESOLVE.

From the German.

In God's name I begin my task!
May God afford the help I ask!
Where He gives help, success is light!
Without His help nought can go right!
Therefore the best thing I can do,
Is, in God's name, my task pursue!

Religious.

THE FACE OF THE BELOVED.

BY C. H. SPURGEON.

There hangs in my sick room a print
from Caracci's famous picture of the four
Marys lamenting over the dead body of
our crucified Lord. I fix my eyes upon
the face of the well-beloved corpse, and
my thoughts, running as they will, leave
as their residuum that which follows:

A countenance is the especial throne-
room and pavilion of intelligence, the
parade-ground of thought, the material
mirror of mind, the papyrus whereon the
soul writes out her mystic lore, the pillar
on which she hangeth up her writing for the

world to read. There is something regal
in the face of every man; the aweless lion
blenches before that imperial eye, the pit-
iless wolf skulks from that commanding
look. If we would picture angels' faces
could we select a higher model than the
image of a man? Mysterious blending of
water and mind! The human visage is a
sea of mystery. As Sir Thomas Wyatt
says, it "Speaks without word such words
as none can tell."

The face before us is not that of the first
Adam. What a study might that have
been! Natural innocence and free-will
subdued in easy conflict by subtlety and
sin. Beautiful as the Apollo Belvidere,
but probably more hirsute and patriarchal,
the dead face of the great sire of men, was
the model of manhood at its best receiving
the wages of sin. Dear face of martyred
Abel! what footmarks of sweetness, tend-
erness, faith, and joy, did thy noble spirit
leave behind, when, first of all human in-
telligences, it entered within the gates of
pearl. One half wishes to see how Abra-
ham slept; how Isaac closed his eyes;
how Jacob composed his features; how
Joshua reposed; how Samuel "fell on
sleep." Into the face of Goliath, with his
brow all cavernous, where went the stone
of David, we peer with triumph; brute
strength is never so great but that mere
earth force can overthrow it. "The Egyp-
tians are men and not God; and their
horses flesh and not spirit." The head of
that other great decapitated—great in a
far nobler sense teaches widely different
lessons. Those thin crimson lips once cut
like scimitars into the hearts of sinners;
that emaciated visage was a living rebuke
to the luxury of the goddess; lying in the
charger of Herodias, set in a ruby collar of
its own gore, the head of the Baptist sum-
moned both Herod and his paramour to the
judgment-seat where every secret thing
shall be revealed; a token of the victory
of the faithful soul over all a tyrant's arts
and terrors.

But the face before us now in contempla-
tion, is of one nobler than all these—the
face of him whose "countenance is as the
sun shining in his strength." Believer,
behold the head of your Head, the face of
him through whom you see the face of God,
Start not aside because death is ghastly,
for in this case the wondrous warmth of
lingering love may make you forget the chill
which gathers round the corpse. There
was never such a dead countenance before
for there is not one line of decay in it. At
the very instant of death, the worm puts
in its writ of habeas upon this mortal body,
and, however little visible, corruption exer-
cises instantly a defiling influence over the
faces of all the departed; but our Lord's
case was not of this order. His holy body
could not see corruption; sorrow and death
might mar it, but decay could not pollute
it. The imperishable gopher wood might
be hewn and carved, but it could not rot;
the axe might fell the cedar, but the worm
could not devour it.

In every other human face, evil tempers
and rebellious desires have left, after death,
memorials of their power; but in the coun-
tenance of our Lord Jesus there was no
sign or trace of personal sin. The noblest
beauties of the material visage spring from
the light of goodness within the nature, and
the worst deformities of physiognomy are
those which are the result of ruling vices;
in the Redeemer's case, every exquisite touch
of the fair hand of virtue must have been
there, and not one solitary trace of the jag-
ged tool and maniac hand of passion. The
material which formed the groundwork of
the dear dead face, over which our love
now sheds her reverent tears, was perfect;
no original sin was mingled with the concep-
tion or birth of the Son of God; and
"that holy thing" remained after thirty
years of trial as perfect as when first
produced. No evil generated from within
and no evil was insinuated from without.
In all those furrows of pain, and scars of
anguish, there is not even a hair-line of
transgression, so much as in thought. Here
is a face indeed; dead, but alike free from
presence of corruption and vestigia of
sin.

That face must have been originally the

most lovely ever gazed upon by a mother's
eye. "A body hast thou prepared me"—
a body, then, suitable for such a one to as-
sume. Yet no face was ever more marred
by pain than our blessed Lord's; so that
the natural comeliness was overshadowed
with a cloud of grief. His sorrows were
so many that they must have worn his vi-
sage as constant dropping frets the stone.
See we not the gravings of that never ceas-
ing woe? Plagued all the day long, and
chastened every morning, the products of
such incessant workmanship are rich and
rare. Some of his sorrows were peculiar
to himself—great waves of misery unknown
to lesser souls; abysmal depressions, hells
of anguish. Against him were aimed spir-
itual and heart-penetrating arrows from the
black quiver, such as were never shot at hu-
man heart before. All those griefs, too were
unmixed with sin. The result of pure,
unmingled sorrow on a mortal countenance
is nowhere else to be discerned; the result
must have been as singular as the cause
was unique. The griefs of Jesus were none
of them his own: "Surely he hath borne
our griefs and carried our sorrows." Be-
nevolence, then, left its line side by side
with every pang, and the two great
artists of love and grief combined to pro-
duce that matchless countenance.

Gazing into that face, one remembers
that in the wilderness those eyes beheld the
tempter; at Jordan they saw heaven
opened; at Golgotha they looked on death,
and shot their glances into hell; yet now
incapable of one glance of love at his mo-
ther or at Magdalene; unable to utter one
consoling word, the hero sleeps. Never
such a history condensed into a face be-
fore.

"Thou noble countenance!
All earthly lights are pale
Before the brightness of that glance
At which a world shall quail;
How is it quenched and gone!
Those gracious eyes how dim!
Whence grew that cheek so pale and wan?
Who dared to scoff at him?"

All lovely hues of life,
That glow'd on lip and cheek,
Have vanished in that awful strife;
The mighty one is weak.
Pale Death has won the day,
He triumphs in this hour,
When strength and beauty fade away,
And yield them to his power."

Never had the grave such a captive, never
death such a victim. Well might earth
groan until her rocks were rent, for her
Lord, her King, her glory was dead. Sit
down, O soul, and bewail the dead Christ,
and add thy tears to the spices brought
to embalm him. But hush, the promise
speaks and bids thee refrain from weeping.
The battle is ended but not the victory. Is
the life of Jesus closed? No! Glory be
to God for ever—No!

The ghastly pallor which surrounds every
feature of the most noble countenance in
death cannot prevent our perceiving in the
present case the peace and joy, deep and
profound, which ruled our Lord's departing
moments. The joy of the cross must have
been as high as its agony was deep. "Lama
sabachthani" is equalled, measure for
measure, by "It is finished." An exultation
lingers in that eye, a glow of delight
gleams still in yon cheek, the lip is wreath-
ed even now with a smile divinely exul-
tant, and the brow is beetling with a majesty
of conscious victory. That dead face is
no relic of defeat, it is the epitome of the
battle and victory by which men's souls
were won. A spiritual Marathon, a men-
tal Salamis, are in that countenance.—
Love makes each feature to be as a bed
of spices; she reads over with delight the
volume of his lovely face and studies every
lineament; she lingers around the mouth
which is most sweet; and in heart she cries
with the spouse in the Canticles, "His
countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as
the cedars: yea, he is altogether love-
ly."

Never let us forget, as we perceive the
Saviour actually dead, that it was by yield-
ing himself so completely that he achieved
a perfect triumph. Carnal eyes beholding
the dead visage of the Son of Man would
have pronounced his cause hopeless, and

his kingdom a chimera. Yet at that moment
the Redeemer's throne was established never
to be moved. He conquered when he
fell. His death, like that of Samson, was
the ruin of all his foes. Never let this
lesson depart from us, for all truth must
be conformed to the experience of him who
is THE TRUTH. Every good and great cause
must be betrayed into the hands of sinners,
mocked, and despitefully used, and
what if it be crucified and put to death?
in that moment it shall consummate its
victory. Comfort one another with these
words, ye lonely champions of despised
truth, your honor shall come, and resurrec-
tion shall follow on the heels of crucifix-
ion.

Among those precious things in reserve
which are this day the expectation of our
hope, is the sight of the King in his beau-
ty. That very face which we veiled in the
gloom of the sepulchre shall be seen in the
glory of his appearing, and seen by me.
Oh, blissful anticipation, mine eyes shall
see him for myself, and not another! O for
the enjoyment of that manifestation! When
will the day dawn, and the shadows flee
away? Surely amid the royalties of our
exalted Lord, when every sign of humilia-
tion shall be exchanged for honour and
dominion, there will still remain in that
beloved face the memorials of his passion!
Not to diminish, but to enhance his glory!
Not to obscure a ray of beauty, but to re-
veal every unparalleled perfection. Let it
be as it may, it shall be joy enough to me
to behold the King's face in the day of the
gladness of his heart.

Adieu, ye lips, which once with sweetest
words did overflow,
Fresh from sharp vinegar, and bitterness of
gall!

Adieu, ye cheeks, so often turned to bear the
smiter's blow,
And spat upon in Pilate's judgment-hall.

Farewell, O mouth, so sweet and free from
guile,
And yet, alas! by traitorous kiss betrayed;
Farewell, dear face, still bearing for my heart
a smile;
I leave thee—thou art in the Garden laid.

But, O thou matchless face of God in human
clay,
I wait to see thee, flaming like the sun,
in glory bright;
Nor shall I wait in vain, for thou art on the
way,
And all thy saints are pining for the sight.

THE SORT OF SERMONS PEOPLE WANT.

—Fanny Fern, in an article on Sunday in
a New York paper, remarks:—"I want a
human sermon. I don't care what Melchis-
edeck, or Zerubbabel, or Kerenhappuk did,
ages ago; I want to know what I am to
do, and I want somebody besides a theo-
logical bookworm to tell me—somebody
who is sometimes tempted and tried, and
is not too dignified to own it; somebody
like me, who is always sinning and repent-
ing; somebody who is glad and sorry, and
cries and laughs, and eats and drinks, and
wants to fight when they are trodden on—
and don't! That's the minister for me. I
don't want a spiritual abstraction, with
stony eyes and pertified fingers, and no
blood to battle with. What credit is it to
him to be proper? How can he under-
stand me? Were there only such ministers
in the pulpit I wouldn't go to church
either, because my impatient feet would
only beat a tattoo on the pew floor till
service was over; but, thank God, there
are; and while they preach I shall go to
hear them, and come home better and hap-
pier for having done it."

THE PREMIER AND THE "DREARY HOURS."

—In addressing an audience in
Harrogate the other night, Mr. A. Illing-
worth, M. P., narrated the following anec-
dote of Mr. Gladstone:—"A Government
official, having to wait on Mr. Gladstone,
expressed his sympathy with the Premier
in having to sit out so many dreary hours'
debate in the House of Commons, and
inquired how he contrived to pass his time.
Mr. Gladstone replied; "I have not so
much time for religious exercises during
the Session as I used to have, and I will