

The Christian Messenger.

A RELIGIOUS AND GENERAL FAMILY NEWSPAPER.

NEW SERIES.
Vol. XVIII., No. 41.

Halifax, Nova Scotia, Wednesday, October 8, 1873.

WHOLE SERIES.
Vol. XXXVII., No. 41.

Poetry.

JOHN HODGE'S SERMON.

The minister said last night, says he,
"Don't be afraid of givin';
If your life ain't nothin' to other folks,
Why, what's the use o' livin'?"
And that's what I say to wife, says I;
There's Briggs, the mis'erable sinner,
He'd sooner a beggar should starve than give
A penny towards buyin' a dinner.

I tell you our minister's grand, he is;
But I couldn't quite determine,
When I heard him a-givin' it right and left,
Just who was hit by his sermon.
Of course there couldn't be no mistake
When he talked of long-winded prayin'
For Peters and Johnson they sat and scowled
At every word he was sayin'.

And the minister he went on to say,
"There's various kinds o' cheatin',
And religion's as good for every day
As it is to bring to meetin'."
I don't think much of a man that gives
The Lord Amens at my preachin',
And spends his time the followin' week
In cheatin' and over-reachin'."

I spects that dose was bitter enough
For a man like Jones to swallow;
But I noticed he didn't open his mouth,
Not once, after that to holler.
Hurrah, says I, for the minister—
Of course I said it quiet—
Give us some more of this open talk;
It's quite refreshing diet.

The minister hit 'em every time:
And when he spoke of fashion,
And a-riggin' 'em in bows and things,
As woman's rulin' passion,
And a-comin' to church to see the styles,
I couldn't help a-winkin'.
And a-nudgin' my wife, and, says I, "That's
you";
And I guess it sat her thinking.

Says I to myself, that sermon's pat;
But man is a queer creation;
And I'm much afraid that most of the folks
Won't take the application.
Now if he had said a word about
My personal mode o' sinnin',
I'd have gone to work to right myself,
And not set here a-grinnin'.

Just then the minister says, says he,
"And now I've come to the fellers
Who've lost this shower by usin' their friends
As sort o' moral umbrellas.
Go home," says he, "and your faults,
Instead of huntin' your brothers';
Go home," he says, "and wear the coats
You've tried to fit for others."

My wife she nudged, and Brown he winked,
And there was lots o' smilin',
And lots o' lookin' at our pew;
It sat my blood a-bilin'.

Says I to myself, our minister
Is gittin' a little bitter;
I'll tell him when meetin's out, that I
Ain't at all that kind of a critter.

Religious.

SINGING AN ACT OF WORSHIP.

It is difficult to make Sunday School worship earnest and devout; restless children are not disposed to prayers, and hymns are too often sung with the lips only. How careful, then, should teachers be to impress on the children that a hymn addressed to God is an act of worship. But superintendents, librarians and teachers may be seen sitting still, or talking, or walking about after the hymn has begun, as if the children were practicing an exercise. We have seen a class putting up their books, and taking the papers for distribution during the singing of the last verse of "Rock of Ages."

This practice is not uncommon even in the church, and persons may be seen replacing their own or their children's gloves, fans, etc., as if the doors would be closed if they were not out at a given time. We never could understand why this was admissible during the closing verse, any more than during the singing of the first. We would ask all who possess a reverence for holy things, to take heed that their practice agrees with their profession.—*Church Journal.*

Never open the door to a little vice, lest a great one should enter.

ON THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF GOLD AND FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH.

BY BURNTHORN MUSGRAVE.

(3.) We now approach the consideration of the precise meaning of Myrrh as a symbol.

Myrrh is bitter, aromatic, and preservative. What could more perfectly represent Christian self-denial?

For there is a third offering, which is neither the heart's obedience nor the spirit's worship, which is yet required by our Redeemer's own words, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." "For even Christ pleased not himself," says St. Paul; and bases upon that truth this inference, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and NOT TO PLEASE OURSELVES." Self-denial plainly begins with repentance—with that change of mind in regard to ourselves and to God, which is the very commencement of Christian life. Thus we read that the earliest Church, of Jewish converts, admitted, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Thus, our Lord's preaching was, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the Gospel?" (Mark i. 15) or still more literally, "Change your minds and trust in the good news."

The absolute need, in all, of a change of mind as the basis of self-abnegation, was impressed by the Saviour on those who were prone to think that remarkable judgments implied unusual guilt. To those he twice repeated, "I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

It needs no argument to prove that self-denial, incipient in repentance and continuous in self-restraint, is bitter or unpalatable to the flesh. The conflict often sharp is rarely discontinued. It was plainly not unknown to St. Paul, with all his consciousness of "grace."

And the same Apostle who said "I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me," said also "so fight I not as one that beatech the air; but I keep under my body and bring it into subjection lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

Myrrh, like repentance, bitter, was still preservative. Myrrh was used in embalming; and repentance is "unto life." Myrrh is aromatic and fragrant; and Christian self-denial cannot be unacceptable to that Saviour who said, "whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

If, like Froude, we translate the passage "he that will save his soul shall lose it," we have a total self-renunciation still more strongly inculcated.

We notice a corroboration of the view that myrrh represents repentance acted out. Repentance is received directly from the God-man. "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." And in consistency with this express teaching of Peter and the Apostles, the Saviour of the Church in Solomon's Song, (v. 1) says "I have gathered my myrrh." Correspondingly the church herself (when touched by the grace of Christ she yields her heart to Him) says "I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh; upon the handles of the lock."

When revived by Christ to willing and ready obedience, the action of the church will be accompanied by overflowing contrition; and her conduct will manifest the deepest repentance, as it will be actuated by a holy but outgushing self-denial. Whether "the lock" which excluded Christ be the sloth or the covetousness, or the selfishness, or the unbelief, or the formalism of the church, its "handles" are

to be bedewed with godly sorrow and self-reproach.

We have established a responsiveness of the symbol gold, to the sovereignty of the King—of the symbol frankincense, to the dignity of the Priest: we might infer by differentiation that the myrrh relates to the excellence of the Prophet. But we can also prove the connexion between myrrh and the teaching of Christ. We learn from Peter's preaching in the Acts that Moses had "said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people."

Our Lord's own preaching, as we have already had occasion to remark was "repent ye and believe the Gospel," or "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And Peter's conclusion from his own important reference to the prediction of Moses was urged on the Jews in these terms, "Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

Practical repentance was announced then by the Apostle as the prominent blessing conferred by Christ's efficacious teaching—in the fulfilment of his function as the Prophet of his people.

It is an error to regard repentance merely as a thing done and done with; instead of regarding it as a changed condition of the mind effected and produced by Christ's own grace.

If "the goodness of God leadeth to repentance"—unless the goodness of God cease, repentance is not likely to cease, although it may be deepened by an increased sense of God's goodness. We forget that discipleship to Christ is a continuous devotion to his word. We forget that his training is progressive. We forget that He said "to those Jews which believed on Him," "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." His word produces and augments contrition. His lips convey self-denial; and therefore in Solomon's Song "his lips" are said to be "like lilies dropping sweet smelling myrrh."

False notions of repentance have obstructed Christianity and stifled the life of the Church. It is not merely the papistical substitution of penance for repentance—of an outward act for an inward state—that has done harm. This is evidently mischievous. But many protestant Christians have most inadequate ideas of the principle of repentance. That "conviction" of the mind, which is the dawning of repentance, carried further into the soul becomes "conversion"; and borne down deeper still into the heart where it abides is "contrition." The sacrifices of God, are a broken spirit a broken and a contrite heart. Repentance (Metanoia) begins with self-renunciation, and goes on with deepening self-dissatisfaction—of which self-denial is only the honest outcome.

Scripture teaches us to little purpose if we do not see that the old Testament saints were trained in self-loathing.

God condescends to call Himself "the God of Jacob," of whom He had said "as a Prince hast Thou power with God and with men and hast prevailed"; and yet Jacob's testimony, to Pharaoh afterwards, was "few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." We cannot doubt that Job must have had a measure of Myrrh, when God first termed him "a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil"; and yet long afterwards he confesses to God, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

And St. Paul evidently does not consider the needful change of mind

to have been completed in Christians the moment they attach themselves to Christ; for he charges the Phillippians, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death—even the death of the cross." To think as Christ thought is an attainment which may be begun by penitents when they first turn to God in Christ on the strength of his Word, but which is surely not finished then. The myrrh which Christ imparts is not once only dropped from his lips then caught by his people, and then at once thrown away as valueless. On the contrary the church is continually presenting fresh myrrh with fresh frankincense and fresh gold to the Lord and Giver of all.

If these God-guided offerings of the Magi represent the perfect tribute of the Church—where is faith? Everywhere. It underlies and sustains loving obedience—"the obedience of faith"; "the sacrifice and service of your faith"; "your work of faith and labour of love." "For he that cometh to God must believe that He is and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

Nothing can be plainer than that the faith of the Magi sought the Saviour and then offered—all the gifts. Again—as faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen—faith dictates all true petition and is essential to prayer—"the prayer of faith." Faith is the very soul of all true spiritual worship, and transpires likewise in praise: "O Lord, open Thou my lips and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise."

Our Saviour's most exuberant promise to prayer is attached to faith, "What things soever ye desire when ye pray believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them."

Thus faith presents frankincense as well as gold, for "the spirit of faith" is "the spirit of grace and of supplications."

It seems much more difficult to prove that faith offers repentance or self-denial to the Saviour: because we are accustomed to regard repentance and faith as two distinct parts of our salvation, whereas under the Gospel of grace they are indissolubly connected.

It is impossible actually to believe God's good will towards us particularly, without a change of mind in some degree, (as to ourselves,) proportioned to the confidence we are enabled to yield to God. In the same mind, trust in God and self-distrust extend equally in opposite directions:—just as the root of a plant extends downwards while the stem is shooting upwards. The principle or germ of spiritual life rises in confidence towards God as it descends in self-abasement. Thus we "rejoice in Christ Jesus" precisely in proportion as we "have no confidence in the flesh."

When repentance is regarded as the commencement of a determined quarrel with sin and with self, protracted in self-denial—then it is seen that faith enters on this quarrel.

The same word of God which engenders faith engenders at the same time repentance, as an inseparable accompaniment of sincere faith. The principle of divine life implanted, involves faith in reference to God, and repentance in reference to ourselves. Therefore we read of "the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God."

Repentance and faith spring from the same germ growing in opposite directions: and self-denial is the fruit of repentance.

Perhaps we ought to remark that in spiritual life the natural process is reversed. Faith as the root or radical

principle shoots upwards to fasten itself to God, "that your faith and hope might be in God."

"But without faith it is impossible to please" God. And in illustration of this most general statement of a comprehensive truth, St. Paul gives the Hebrews illustrious instances of holy self-denial wrought by faith. Thus the manifest self-denial of Moses in suffering "affliction with the people of God," instead of choosing "to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" and so enjoying "the pleasures of sin for a season,"—this self-denial, I say—is traced to faith.

And, the sufferings of saints, who were only signalised by self-denial are without exception attributed to faith: "these all having obtained a good report through faith." Thus it is said, "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword." Therefore faith is the root self-denial (manifested in suffering) as well as of obedience and worship.

We conclude that the offering of a holy church militant would be incomplete unless her faith brought myrrh as well as gold and frankincense to the feet of her Saviour. For we have one peculiar motive to diligence concerning this myrrh—that it is especially our human offering which we must soon cease to present. In this respect,—as to bringing myrrh—a bed-ridden saint enjoys a privilege which angels may esteem, but cannot share; a privilege in common with Christ: "for He took not on Him the nature of angels." And yet besides it is written (Remember)—as if to touch the very deepest recesses of our heart—"Even Christ pleased not himself." Angels may bring gold to our King. "Angels that excel in strength do His commandments hearkening to the voice of His word." They delight in obedience and flame in love. Frankincense—the church triumphant shall not cease to offer. "Every creature which is in heaven" shall join in the chorus, "Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." But the time is short, the opportunity is limited, for our presenting the Myrrh—for our entering into the mind and sharing the self-denial of our Master. If there could be regret in heaven, it must be at the recollection of not having obtained—of not having offered more myrrh. "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him but also to suffer for His sake." My view of the tribute which is essential in grateful return to the Saviour, is supported by Milton who enumerates, although in a different order, prayer, repentance and obedience as the invariable constituents of true religion.

"To prayer repentance and obedience due,
"Though but endeavour'd with sincere intent,
"Mine ear shall not be slow, mine eye not shut."

The distinct meaning which I have assigned to these three symbolical offerings finds special and additional support from the very highest authority in the 6th Chapter of Matthew. There the Saviour promises blessings separately to three several kinds of pure service or devotion; which He orders us to perform with single eye to the glory of God. And the very three particulars, which He specifies, answer in succession exactly to the three general divisions which I have described. The first of these filial duties, when flowing from unmixed and sanctified motive, has evidently the character of the "gold." But "When thou doest alms let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth; That thine alms may be in secret: and Thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly."

The second blessing is promised to pure devotion which obviously corresponds with our view of Frankincense as spiritual worship. "But thou when thou prayest enter into thy closet and when thou hast shut thy door pray to Thy Father which is in secret, and Thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly."

The third blessing belongs to acts