

Sunday Reading.

For the Christian Messenger. Be Ready.

A SERMON PREACHED AT CANARD, AT THE FUNERAL OF MRS. T. W. RAND, JAN. 24TH, 1882.

BY S. B. KEMPTON. "Be ye also ready."—Matt. xxiv. 44.

These words were evidently intended to put believers on their guard, and to arouse and awaken unbelievers. Our Lord would have His servants bear them in mind, and urge their import often, both upon those that believe and upon the lost. He causes us all to feel their force keenly sometimes. By His providence He startles us at times, and causes us to recall and repeat the warning He has given with fear. He comes "in an hour when we think not."

He sends unexpectedly for some among us. He calls suddenly some from the activities of life to the silence of the grave, and to the realities of eternity. Then His disciples remember the words of their Lord, "What I say unto you I say unto all, watch."

The words of our text are filled with unusual solemnity for us to-day. For our sister was called away from us very suddenly, and these words were nearly the last she uttered. Whether she repeated them to impress them upon the minds of those who stood about her, and witnessed her dying agony, or whether she repeated them to herself as the remembered admonition of her Lord, we know not.

It is pleasant to think of her as calling to mind, and applying to her own case in the hour of deep distress, this injunction of her Redeemer; to think of her as saying to herself, "This is the call of Him who hath bidden me 'be ready' for an unexpected summons." As if she were saying, "I am not taken by surprise, for I remember the warning."

It is instructive and touching if we regard the words—as we may do—as the last message of a dying friend to her friends, of a tender mother to her children. For no other message in dying did she leave. Evidently she knew that death was closing her eyes forever; that her children and friends she would see no more on earth. Was this all she had to say to them? all the message for sons abroad, as well as for those at home? She had no need to send loving words with dying lips, for her life had been one long, loving ministry. Nothing said in dying could give emphasis to the life of love she had lived. In the way of instruction let us dwell upon the message for a little.

I. Be ye also ready; ready for what? For sickness, pain, death? Not much preparation can be made for these! One may, perhaps, by one consideration and another, prepare the mind to bear these things as inevitable, to submit to them with more or less composure or indifference. But this is not the meaning of the sentence. The dying did not so understand it. It means, be ready to meet what follows upon death,—the judgment. "After death the judgment." Be ready to "give account of the deeds done in the body," ready for the awful assize. No one would neglect the matter if they had a case pending in an earthly court; yet there is possibility of appeal from one court to another on earth. But from the judgment to come there is no appeal. How needful, then, to be in readiness! Have the services of the Great Advocate secured. Be in correspondence with Him! Make sure that He understands your case. Give Him all needful information. Get from Him the assurance that He will clear you without fail, and make Him feel that you depend on Him to do it.

But further. After the judgment comes the acquittal for those who are in Christ, and then the glory, the entrance into life. Be ready for the "unspeakable weight of glory." Your Lord would have you ready for this. Departing friends say, "Meet me in heaven." And no one of you coolly intends to fail of the glory. Whatever else you believe, or don't believe, not one of you expects to fail of an entrance into the everlasting kingdom. You fear a little sometimes that you may not enter in, still you hope to do so. Why not be sure about it; be ready for it.

You know what you need,—raiment "pure and white garments," "unspotted from the world," "wedding garments," robes "washed in the blood of the Lamb." A "crown of righteousness that fadeth not away," "a palm of victory," of victory over self, and sin, and Satan, a harp to which to sing the "new song," "the song of Moses and the Lamb." You cannot stand among the sanctified through without these. You cannot enter at all without the white raiment. None stand draped in crapes, or clad in rags, in that multitude. All signs of sin, and sorrow and shame are put away forever.

Have you spoken for these things? Send in an order for them; get the promise of them. One can scarcely expect all this readiness to come to them without a thought or an effort. Even though all were provided free of charge, you would look, surely, to see that yours is not taken by some one else!

II. But again. Why in such concern about being ready? What need of haste? Why need our Lord so urge it? Why need a dying mother confine herself to this, when this is the only sentence she can speak?

No one asks these questions in these words. Some of you would be ashamed to do so. Yet, dear friends, this is the real language of your delay. This is what your conduct means. No other construction will it bear.

It seems almost unreasonable, under the present circumstances, to speak as if any one doubted, much less questioned, the propriety of immediate readiness for the eternal future; yet some will go from the solemn scenes and considerations of this hour, and neglect further all preparation for the coming "day of the Lord." If my words seem unreasonably urgent, how much more your conduct unreasonably negligent.

And what if the departed had not been ready, called, as she was, in an hour, from usual health to death, and judgment? What if prayer and praise were strange to her? Could she have learned, in the hour of brief but mortal agony, to pray and praise? Fifty-four years ago she sought and obtained "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Does any one think that she was ready too soon? Did any one ever know her regret that so early she sought the Lord? Will any one now censure her haste? Her dying words may be said to give her judgment of the matter, "Be ye also ready."

III. But can one be actually ready,—ready from the bustle and hurry, the anxiety and care, the work and perplexity, the temptation and sin of this life, to pass at once to the throne of judgment and to the heights of glory?

With men this may seem impossible, but with God all things are possible, and all things are possible, too, for them that believe. In faith attempt the seeming impossible. But there is no need to make such a difficulty of this matter, to think of it as at all among the impossible. If you were dying to-day, any of you who are parents, you would call your children about you, and tell them of the Saviour's love, and commit them to His care. Do it immediately, and by so much be in readiness. Some of you want to correct some wrong that you have done; set about it at once. Some of you would like to be reconciled to a neighbor with whom you are unfortunately at variance. Have it over with without delay. Another would like to correct some bad habit; commence instantly. Another would like to do some good before he dies. Don't wait to go home; but turn aside and do some service for the needy. Do these things that would press upon your attention in a dying hour, that trouble you now when you think of death, and have them "out of the way."

And further, you want your sins forgiven. You are not ready till this is done. Go to-day, to the forgiving God—go to the "fountain opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness," and have your sins "blotted out," washed away. You cannot stand in the presence of God as you are, sin-stained—guilty, polluted! You cannot bear the frown of an angry God! You cannot so much as speak, when He shall reveal Himself in wrath. Then "go" now, to-day, "and be forgiven." When He forgives you, He will say, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him;

and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet;" etc. Then you will be ready. And as well to-day as tomorrow, or next year. There is nothing but risk in delay. The Lord will never be more willing, or more at leisure to receive you, than to-day; and you will never be any more ready to seek than to-day. Better you cannot, will not be. But delay will make you worse. What a comfort that the departed, was found ready. The Master sent unexpectedly, and suddenly, and she went without hesitation. In regard to her, we may use the beautiful words of Miss Havergal, changing but one word:

"Friend, go up higher! so she took that night The one grand step, beyond the stars of God, Into the splendour, shadowless and broad, Into the everlasting joy and light.

The zenith of the earthly life was come. What marvel that the lips were for the moment dumb! What then? eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard! Wait till thou hast fought the noble strife.

And won, through Jesus Christ, the crown of life! Then shalt thou know the glory of the word, Then as the stars for ever—ever shine, Beneath the king's own smile—perpetual Zenith thine."

The following is from St. Nicholas for February. We would not have it supposed that we approve of dramatizing the Pilgrim's Progress; but it will interest our readers to learn how the wonderful Allegory produced in Bedford jail by the famous Baptist preacher, while incarcerated for preaching the gospel of Christ, is finding its way into the highest circles of English society. In the hands of so popular a writer as Dr. George MacDonald, and his talented family, it may possibly be the means of making deep religious impressions on many, and of inducing them to examine the Roll so precious to the Pilgrims.—Ed. C. M.

A Curious Drama.

BY EDWARD EGGLESTON.

It is more than four years since I saw that quaint and touching drama arranged from the second part of 'Pilgrim's Progress,' by Mrs. George MacDonald, and acted by her sons and daughters, with the assistance of Mr. and Mrs. MacDonald. A kind invitation for me to see the play came one day, when I was obliged to answer that I had another engagement at that hour.

I was disappointed that I could not accept the invitation, for I had very favourable and enthusiastic accounts of the drama from those who had seen it. Besides, I was a lover of Dr. George MacDonald and his stories—such as 'Robert Falconer,' 'Alex. Forbes,' and 'David Elginbrod.' I hope the young readers of these lines have seen his lovely fairy story, 'The Princess and the Goblin.' You surely ought to read that, if you love a story that may be truly called heavenly for its delightfulness. And while I am about it, there is also 'Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood,' a sweet brave, manly story for boys, written by MacDonald, which I wish to recommend to boys whose taste is not yet spoiled by reading too much literary pepper-sauce and spicery.

It was with sincere regret, as you may believe, that I got into a cab to keep my engagement in a remote quarter of London. When I reached my destination, I found that a sudden turn in events had left me free to pass the afternoon as I pleased. There was hardly time then to drive to the mansion in Portman Square in which the drama was to be given. Luckily I found my cabman yet standing where I had discharged him, hoping, perhaps, that I should want him again.

'If you'll reach Portman Square in an hour, I'll make it right with you,' I said.

At this hint of extra pay my driver sprang alertly to his seat, away up behind, seized the reins, and by the time I was fairly in my place in front, he was whirling his two-wheeled hansom cab away through the crowded streets of Eastern London.

On we dashed and twisted and turned in and out among the vehicles, plunging into the throng of Fleet Street, and thence into the roar of the Strand, through Charing Cross, past the insignificant-looking statue of Nelson on the tall column with four great lions at its base, and then bowing away, as though for dear life, through the clean, airy, aristocratic streets of the West End. The change was sudden from the poverty-stricken east, and the crowded streets of the 'city,' to the lofty and exclusive-looking region of Portman Square.

When the cabman landed me in front of the house in which the representation was to take place, there were carriages with coats-of-arms and liveried coachmen all about, for the house was that of a noble earl, and people of the 'upper class' (as they say, frankly, in England) were coming to see Christiana and her children journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City.

The large dining-room was fitted up with a little stage, and with seats, and was quite filled, so that the hostess—a lady better known in London by her intellectual gifts and her intelligent helpfulness to the poor than by her high rank—was obliged to order chairs for the vacant spaces in the room, and two young gentlemen actually took seats on the buffet!

They say that Americans like to know the cost of everything, and it may interest you to be told that the admission fee was ten shillings and sixpence. Being an American, I was puzzled at first to know why that odd sixpence was charged. But I remembered that ten shillings and a half was just half a guinea. There is to-day no such coin as the guinea in circulation in England; yet the prices of certain articles are always counted in guineas. The guinea is a gentleman; the pound, or sovereign, is nobody in particular. You pay your domestic servant in pounds and shillings, but you buy a work of art in guineas. You purchase your corn and flour for so many pounds; but for a fine horse you must pay in guineas. So the odd sixpence in the price of admission to the "Pilgrim's Progress" was the most natural thing in the world to an Englishman. It was a mark of entire respectability.

At last the audience is getting packed away, and even the young gentlemen who took seats on the buffet are provided with chairs.

I can not help thinking how time turns round the wheel and brings changes. Two hundred years ago, Bunyan, who wrote "Pilgrim's Progress," put on a wagner's smock-frock and held a cart-whip in his hand while preaching, to disguise himself, and so keep the officers from putting him back into the wretched Bedford jail, where he had already passed twelve years. The 'upper class' of that time laughed and railed at him as an ignorant tinker, who wrote in rough prose and doggerel verse. No gentleman of standing, and certainly no nobleman, ever invited him into wide halls or elegant dining-rooms. His writings were good enough rubbish for the uneducated; ladies and gentlemen of culture laughed at them. But now Bunyan's statue stands in Bedford, where he was once imprisoned, and his 'Pilgrim' is revered everywhere; great critics write about him, and his little story is turned into a quaint and beautiful drama, and acted by the family of a favorite writer, in the houses of earls and dukes, while persons of the upper class crowd the room, and wipe the tears from their eyes as they listen to the tender words and touching passages written by the rough but inspired tinker in Bedford jail.

Time turns things round, but I am not sure that Bunyan, the 'Baptist bishop,' as they used to nickname him, would have gone to see Christiana on the stage. I am afraid that even so good a play as this would have seemed a little naughty to the good tinker. Indeed, Mrs. MacDonald does not call her arrangement a drama. It is announced modestly, as 'Representation of Passages from the second part of Pilgrim's Progress.'

While I am thinking about this, the curtain has risen, and we are in the City of Destruction, in the house of Christiana, wife of Christian, the pilgrim, who left some time ago to make a pilgrimage. We are witness to a touching scene between the sorrowful Christiana and her four boys, who try to comfort her, and immediately we are made to laugh at Mrs. Bat's-Eyes, in green goggles, and Mrs. Timorous, who

coming in, seek to dissuade the family from setting out to follow Christian.

Mercy, another neighbor, joins Christiana and her boys, and, laughed at by their neighbors, they set forth together to seek the heavenly city.

One of the most striking scenes and some of the finest acting come when Mercy is left outside, while the rest are received at the Wicket Gate. In this scene, Christiana was the realization of motherly sweetness and heavenly grace, while the part of Mercy was a perfect picture of maidenly simplicity, sincerity and earnestness. Her alternations of hope and despair moved the audience deeply.

The parts borne by the sons of the family were also excellent. One whose acting particularly impressed me will assist no more in the drama—the noble youth has himself been called by the King's messenger to the other side of the river.

The scenes in the House Beautiful are in Bunyan's most poetic vein, and their spirit is charmingly preserved in the dramatic arrangement of Mrs. MacDonald, who takes the part of Prudence.

Mr. MacDonald did not intend to take a part himself; but, when he saw the play given, he was so much pleased with it that he consented to act in the part of Greatheart, and thus the family act all together in the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' Dr. MacDonald, indeed, has no need to feign. Nature made him a Greatheart, and he only acts out himself. It adds to the quaintness of the piece to find Greatheart speaking with a distinct Scotch burr. Mr. MacDonald also took the part of Ecangelist, who appears only in the first scene.

And I am told that in later representations a strong impression has been made by his appearance in this part, clad in a peculiar robe of gold-colored satin cloth. For, indeed, his looks become a prophet or heavenly messenger.

In the fifth part the play reached its climax. Old Mr. Honesty and the good brother Ready-to-Halt were both amusing and pathetic in their goings-on and their takings-off. But when Christiana came to bid adieu to her children, and to her companion, Mercy, the simple, human feeling, expressed by strong, restrained, and 'natural' acting, brought tears to all eyes, and I heard many sobs. A gentleman sitting rare me, who did not believe much in the attempting to put a religious subject into a play, cried like a good fellow along with all the rest of us, and declared to me that there probably was not another family in all England whose members possessed such deep religious feeling joined with such rare acting ability. I met another gentleman, a few days later, who was a friend of Mr. MacDonald's family, but who could not bear to see the drama, because it moved him to tears. You know that a man does hate to cry!

All good things have an end, and the audience slowly passed to the street through the wide hall. With true English hospitality, a table had been spread in an anteroom, and each person was courteously invited by a servant to stop and take coffee. I mention these little things because they will interest many young readers whose life and circumstances are very different from the life in a great European capital like London.

Dr. MacDonald's family were living at that time in a pleasant house overlooking the Thames, near Hammer-smith bridge. The house had a deep garden behind it, and a pleasant yard full of shrubbery in front. It will amuse the young American readers of St. Nicholas to be told that, to enter this and most other houses of its kind in the suburbs of London and other European cities, one must ring at the gate and be admitted through the high wall or fence by a 'wicket gate,' or something corresponding to it. The MacDonalds no longer live at Hammer-smith, but have now a house in the Riviera, the pleasantest coast in Italy. They return to England every now and then, and when they are in England the 'Pilgrim's Progress' is in great request. I heard that it was given nine times there in the early part of last summer.

Rev. J. M. Pendleton, D. D., recently read before the Philadelphia Ministerial Conference a paper giving an account of his fifty years' experience in the gospel ministry.

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

The Discussion of Christian Baptism at North Sydney, C. B.

I.

It has been noticed in the MESSENGER, that we have had a discussion of the subject of Christian Baptism, by Rev. D. G. McDonald, and Rev. Isaac Murray, D. D., both of Charlottetown. Many of your readers will be interested to learn what was the origin of this discussion! A few words of explanation will make the matter plain.

Rev. D. G. McDonald attended the Eastern Baptist Association, held at North Sydney last summer. After the Association closed, he was invited to lecture in Sydney, on Baptism. He went, and Dr. Murray was invited by the Pedobaptists of Sydney, to meet him. His time was limited, in consequence of previous engagements. When Dr. Murray arrived, the limited time at Mr. McDonald's disposal prevented him from entering then upon a full discussion of the subject of Baptism. He delivered several lectures, and Dr. Murray reviewed them. Then he had to leave. He told the Dr. distinctly that, if he remained and lectured after he was gone, his lectures would be taken down by a short-hand reporter, and he would return and review them in the autumn. Dr. Murray was then invited, by the Presbyterian congregation, to deliver three lectures for them on Baptism. It would have been reasonable to expect that he would expound the views held by Presbyterians on this subject; but instead of following this course, he pretended to review the lectures Mr. McDonald had delivered in Sydney. The Dr.'s real object seemed to be to sneer at, ridicule, misrepresent, and slander the Baptists, their principles and practices. Mr. McDonald says, in writing to the North Sydney Herald that "he had been both misrepresented and belied by Dr. Murray." I attended two of Dr. Murray's lectures and took notes, and resolved that he should return to North Sydney, and answer to the false statements he made, or refuse a direct challenge.

It was due to Mr. McDonald that he should have the privilege of meeting Dr. Murray where he had been slandered and misrepresented by him, and that the false charges made against Baptists should be refuted. Accordingly, arrangements were made, and Dr. Murray was challenged by Mr. McDonald, through the North Sydney Herald, to meet him here, on a public platform, and discuss the subject of Christian Baptism. It was evident from Dr. Murray's reply that he did not want to come. Mr. McDonald then resolved to come, whether the Dr. did or not. Dr. M. used all his powers of persuasion to prevent Mr. McDonald from coming, or to postpone his visit till next spring, but without avail. It was no wonder the Dr. did not want to come, as he had made statements, when here before, which had not a shadow of truth to support them; and he knew well that he would have to meet them. Mr. McDonald came, Dr. Murray followed, and arrangements were made, without delay, for the discussion.

When they met to make their arrangements, Mr. McDonald said to Dr. Murray, since he had stated in his lectures here last summer that "Immersion was a modern invention," he presumed that the Dr. would be ready to affirm that sprinkling of water was the act of baptism commanded by Christ, and practised by the Apostles. The Dr. declined to make such an affirmation, and denied that he had said that immersion was a modern invention. A short-hand reporter had taken the utterance down as it fell from the Dr.'s lips. I had it word for word in my notes, and just as clearly in my memory; and there were many in the audience remembered just what the Dr. had said.

You see, Mr. Editor, the Dr. began to back down, before the discussion commenced. He had made the assertion boldly, when here before, that "Immersion was a modern invention, but he dare not meet it before the public.

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