

Sunday Reading.

Trusting God in the Dark.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER, D. D.

Sometimes we have an experience in life that seems like walking through a long, dark tunnel. The chilling air and the thick darkness made it hard walking, and the constant wonder is why we are compelled to tread so gloomy a path, while others are in the open day of health and happiness. We can only fix our eyes on the bright light at the end of the tunnel, and we comfort ourselves with the thought that every step we take brings us nearer to the joy and the rest that lies at the end of the way. Extinguish the light of heaven that gleams in the distance, and this tunnel of trial would become a horrible tomb! Some of us are passing through just such an experience now. We can adopt the plaintive language of the Psalmist, and cry out: "Thy hand presseth us sore; as for the light of our eyes, it also is gone from us; we are ready to halt, and our sorrow is continually before us."

One of the most trying features of our trial is that we cannot discover the "why" or the "wherefore" of our special afflictions. Our Heavenly Father did not consult us before the trial came, and he does not explain to us why he sent it. His ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts; nay, they are the very opposite. The mystery of the providence perplexes and staggers us. For example, I open my daily journal, and read that the Bishop of Jerusalem, whom I left a few months ago in the prime of vigorous health and wide usefulness, is cut off in the midst of his days. All his preparatory training for his office by eighteen years of missionary life comes to naught. This very day I am called, for the sixth time in a few years, to bury the dead from a certain Christian household. This time it is the head of the house that is taken and the children are left to orphanage. Beside me now sits a mourning mother, whose aching heart cannot understand why a beloved child is snatched away, when she seems the most indispensable to the happiness of the home. Every week a pastor has to confront these mysteries in the dealings of a God of love. To the torturing question, "Why does God lead me in this valley of the shadow of darkness?" we can only reply: "Even so, Father, for so it seems good in thy sight." We are brought into the tunnel, however we shrink back. There is no retreat; we have nothing left us but to grasp the very hand that brought us there, and push forward. Like Bunyan's Pilgrim, we can only say: "I see not but that my road to heaven lieth through this very valley."

Just in such trying hours it is that the Adversary assails us most fiercely. He stirs up in our hearts bitter thoughts against God. He points us to the actual and realized loss, and tells us that heaven is utterly unseemly, and no one comes back to assure us of its reality. And so he endeavors, with devilish suggestions, to blow out such lamps of divine promise as we have, to shatter every staff that we carry, and to make the pathway of trial more dark and desperate than before. This is not poetry; it is the actual trial to which the faith of thousands of God's people is at this moment subjected. Under these severe experiences more than one Christian has been sorely tempted to turn infidel, and to "choose death rather than life."

To my mind there is only one solution for these mysteries, and only one support for these days of terrible affliction. The only relief I can find is in the certainty that this life is not the end; but simply and only the preparatory school for the real and the endless life that is beyond. The moment that I accept this truth fully and hold it firmly, I find solid ground for my feet and light for my sorrowing soul. Then I discover that the whole journey of the believer is "portioned out" to him, and that the dark tunnel on the road is just as surely appointed wisely as is the most flowery mead or the happiest walk over the "Delectable Mountains." Nay, more. When we reach heaven, we may discover that the richest and deepest and most profitable experiences we had in this world were those which were

gained in the very roads from which we shrunk back with dread. The bitter cups we tried to push away contained the medicines we most needed. The hardest lessons that we learn are those which teach us the most, and best fit us for service here and glory hereafter. It is the easiest thing in the world to obey God when he commands us to do what we like and to trust him when the path is all sunshine. The real victory of faith is to trust God in the dark and through the dark. Let us be assured of this, that if the lesson and the rod are of his appointing and that his all-wise love has engineered the deep tunnels of trial on the heavenward road, he will never desert us during the discipline. The vital thing for us is, not to deny and desert Him.

Let us also keep in mind that the chief object of the discipline is to develop character and to improve the graces of his children. Whom he loveth he chasteneth, and correcteth every son whom he receiveth. Every branch that beareth not fruit he pruneth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. "Why do you cut that pomegranate bush so cruelly?" said a gentleman to his gardener. The answer was: "Because it is all running to useless leaves, and I want to make it bear." Ah! it is a keen knife that our Divine Gardener often employs, and he often severs the very heart-strings by his discipline; but "afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them who have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness." God has a great many crucibles for his gold, where he may refine it. There is so much alloy of pride and self-will, or covetousness, or sinful idolatry in genuine Christians that they require the "fining-pot" and the furnace. Sometimes prosperity is tenfold more damaging to us than sharp adversity. A fit of sickness may do more for soul health than years of bodily strength and comfort.

To all my readers who are wondering why a loving God has subjected them so often to the furnace, my only answer is that God owns you and me, and he has a right to do with us just as he pleases. If he were to melt us over a hot flame, until he can see his own countenance reflected in the metal, then he has a right to do so. It is the Lord, it is my loving teacher, it is my heavenly Father; let him do what seemeth him good. He will not lay on one stroke in cruelty or a single one that he cannot give me grace to bear. Life's school-days and nights will soon be over. Pruning-time will soon be ended. The crucibles will not be needed in heaven.

So, to all my fellow-sufferers who are threading their way through the tunnels of trial, I would say: Tighten your loins with the promises that keep the strong staff of faith well in hand. Trust God in the dark. We are safer with him in the dark than without him in the sunshine. He will not suffer thy foot to stumble. His rod and his staff never break. Why he brought us here we know not now, but shall know hereafter. At the end of the gloomy passage beams the heavenly light. Then comes the exceeding and eternal weight of glory.—The Independent.

The Old Barrel.

A MINISTER'S SOLILOQUY.

The barrel is a metaphor. Ministers never write their sermons on circular paper. A sermon always has angles to it, if it is good for anything. It would not be economical to pack them in barrels; it would leave too many chinks. But here they are in a dry-goods box, fifteen hundred of them, all ready for the paper-mill. Pretty heavy it is. It seems to me when I lift it as though it were as heavy as lead. Ah me! how much hot lead I have poured into people's ears! But now these old sermons are hard and cold. It would take a hot fire to warm some of them again, so that they might run and have free course and be glorified.

I suppose I ought not to handle them much; for the man will be here soon, and it is almost time to nail down the cover. But it doesn't matter in what order they go, so long as they are all going to the mill. That sermon on "Revelation" is as likely to be torn to pieces first as the sermon on "Genesis;" and "Job's Patience (No.

68)," and "Joseph's Goodness (417)," "The Dry Bones (221)," and "The Thorn in the Flesh (1,279)," are all likely to go to the bath together. Somehow, it seems to me that they ought to be worth more than two cents a pound. But paper-mills are not sentimental and thoughtful, and the ink on the page only lessens its value. I think I would burn them up rather than send them to the mill if I did not have a satisfaction in feeling that the many sheets I have spoiled can be made white again. *Quod scripsi, scripsi.* Would that the only blots and blunders I have made were those on the pages of these sermons!

As I look into this box, it seems as if I were looking into a soul-glass which mirrored my moral and intellectual features. I can see my own soul in this box of sermons. I have poured it out for forty years. Thank heaven it is not all in this box, and cannot be sent to any mill. But what burrowed memories these old sermons awaken! What a record they contain of the history of a human mind and heart! The mind was small, but the heart large. Perhaps if there were more intellect in them, it would not be necessary to send them to the paper-mill. And yet all that seems valuable to me in them now is the heart that beats in some of them still, and which makes me feel as if I were going to bury them before they were quite dead.

I wonder if the idle words they contain are all taken down in heaven. I should be sorry to feel that any angel scribe had recorded them all in full. For some of them I don't want to see again. And yet, if I could send to the judgment-seat a transcript of my soul to be used as documentary evidence in a great trial, I should like to send these sermons. Bad as they are in form and style of expression, their dry leaves are redolent of the best thought I ever had. They are stained with no impurity, embittered with no rancor, soiled with no earthly passions, marred by no dishonesty. Here are no drops of brain or heart. I put conscience into them. The loftiest aspirations, the most exalted ideas of virtue, the gladdest hope, the sincerest devotion to truth, and the profoundest faith that I could cherish have all been poured into these sermons. Whatever else I was when out of the pulpit, however faulty and imperfect my life, I was pure in heart and devout in spirit when I wrote these sermons. To these the best energies of my heart and soul were consecrated.

The old thrill comes back again as I look over some of these pages. They may be nothing but cinders and ashes for every one else; but in the embers there is a still some live sparks for me, which set my soul aflame. (My heart always had a good deal of tinder in it, and the experiences of life furnished the flint.) Some of them are so old and so perfunctory, or so alien to my usual mood, that I never can remember where they came from; and others are so commonplace I wonder they ever came at all. But how can I ever forget the joy and the agony of soul in which some of them were born? Like a stream of molten fire they flowed from my pen. The thought breathed, and the words burned, and the paper seemed to scorch as I wrote upon it. These were the sermons that flamed in the pulpit. The congregation caught the fire. It is a joy to think that some of the lives they kindled shone brighter and brighter to the perfect day. It is easy to pick these sermons from the pile. They are bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, my blood flows through their arteries; but the spirit that speaks in them seems not my voice, but the very breath of God. And yet I never felt so humble as when I had delivered one of these sermons. Precious legacies of a long ministry, shall I send you with the rest? But why keep them now? Their work, like mine, is done. It is a comforting thought that the mill cannot destroy their influence. These words have been transmuted into life and character. Why should I keep the paper on which they are written? Let them go.

Is it a little morbid to linger so long over this old box? It is not the exaltation of vanity, nor the sad brooding of regret, but a little self-indulgent contemplation of the monuments—

shall I call them the wrecks?—of years. Fifteen hundred weeks of my life packed into that box! I can almost live them over in an hour. What is the fruit? Hollingsworth will say as he puts them on the scales, "Nothing but leaves." But leaves have their use, for the leaves of the tree of life are to be for the healing of the nations. Here and there in the orderly pile I think I find a little balsam. There is No. 542, "Oil for the Wounded Spirit," and 763, "Blessed are They that Mourn."—Shall I ever forget the sweet and humble satisfaction that came to me with the assurance that the waves of sorrow in a troubled soul had been stilled by words of mine? Joy enough for any heart to be called and inspired as a messenger of the Holy Ghost. And there, too, is that old sermon on "The Ways of Providence." How many miles we have travelled together? What a medley of towns and dates on the last page! Let me see—fifty-one times! And the secret of it all was that Deacon White said to me, "Parson, when you exchange, preach that sermon." And so I put it on wheels. I think five thousand people must have heard it; but it would have been hard work for me to get them together all at once. But here is another, with only one entry on the back. It wasn't worth preaching twice, nor once for that matter. Oh, the distressing sense of shame and failure! Who can ever forget it? It takes the light from the eye, the color from the cheek, the very marrow from the bones. That sermon almost cost me a spell of sickness; but now I shall have my revenge.

How patient and how long suffering are congregations, and how uncertain, too, is their response! I spent weeks and almost months on this discourse on "The a posteriori argument for the being and attributes of God," and half the people went to sleep when I gave it. And there is that superficial sermon on "Mary and Martha," which I dashed off at a sitting, and people said 'twas "grand." Pretty hard it is to tell sometimes what diet a congregation will digest best.

Well, I've nearly reached the bottom of the box. These are two or three that I preached in the Seminary. I have had grace given to me never to preach them anywhere else. And there is No. 1, the head of the list, not so bad as it might have been; and here is 1,567, the last of the list, not so good as it ought to have been. Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

Pure, sweet, and soul-thrilling memories, let them rise. The old church-bell is ringing in my ear. I can see the people crossing the village-green. I am standing once more in the old pulpit. Before me are the saintly forms of those I loved. Soft, sweet harmonies from the organ float upon the air. We raise our hymn of praise. We lift our hearts in prayer. Together we read the Word. Once more I feel the indescribable joy of him whose heart is fired with the Holy Ghost, who preaches with authority, and not as the scribes. Then my speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

It is worth all the pain and toil and self-denial to have this alluring recollection, and with it surges in the memory of happy homes, perfumed with the sanctities of affection, where I was ever welcome; hours spent in delightful converse at the social board; and the un fading remembrance, too, of the patient sufferers languishing on their beds of pain, and yet illustrating the sweetness and the sublimity of the Christian faith. I always brought away more than I carried. How often have I held their hands as they entered the vale and crossed the narrow stram, when it seemed to me as if the very windows of heaven were opened, and the glory of God shone on the transfigured sea!

Was it the door-bell? Did you say he had come? I meant to be ready, but I dropped into reverie. It is soon done. Put on the cover. Another nail, if you please. It seems like hailing down my own coffin; as if I were a pall-bearer at my own funeral. There it is. All ready. "Take them up gently, lit them with care." Stop! Let me write the epitaph:

My words shall pass away, but the word of the Lord shall endure forever.

Memorandum in Cash Book.
Sold to Tieston & Hollingsworth 261
lbs. of paper, at 2 cents \$5.22
[Then in a bold hand beneath the entry—]
RECEIVED PAYMENT.
—Christian Register.

MISSIONARY INTELLIGENCE.

THE SCRIPTURES IN TELUGU.

The Rev. A. V. Timpany writing to the Canadian Baptist on Bible Work among the Telugus, says:

I wish to write a short letter about our Bible work. In thus doing it is not my wish to say a word against the British and Foreign Bible Society. There is no doubt but that it is wrong in circulating Romish translations of the Scriptures, as is done, and also in refusing to help our translations because we persist in a strict translation of the terms relating to baptism. But, on the other hand, the good done by the Society is beyond computation. This same remark may be truly made of all Protestant missions. Because this is so, is no solid reason why I should cease to be a Baptist, and do all I can to advance the views we hold. In this is included our Bible Work among the Telugus. We have had to break with the Madras Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society in our Telugu work as far as the New Testament is concerned. We could not conscientiously circulate and use the New Testament in Telugu, prepared by the above Society. We now have a large edition of the Telugu New Testament gotten out by funds given by the American Baptist Missionary Union to their mission here, and by the American and Foreign Bible Society, by funds given to us. The cost of our part of the edition, I may say, has not been so far entirely defrayed by the funds given by the American and Foreign Bible Society, but mainly so, and they may yet send sufficient funds to do so. I got out 2,000 copies of Matthew, and sent half of them to the brethren of the Maritime Provinces, 1,000 we kept for our own missions at Cocanada, Tuni, and Akidu. These are already nearly all used up. We need portions of the other gospels and of Acts and Romans. These Matthews were paid for by funds sent some time ago by the American and Foreign Bible Society.

We ought to have next year for our Canadian Baptist Missions alone not less than \$2,000. I hope, for my part, that some arrangement may be come to with the American and Foreign Bible Society under which the said Society may get right loyal help from Canada, and be able to give us here the needed help.—Cocanada, Nov. 10, 1881.

GATHERING IN CONVERTS.

Rev. John Craig also writes from India in most encouraging strains, as follows:—

In September a number of my helpers were in Akidu at one time, and when some were about to leave, I proposed a little season of prayer. I then spoke about the responsibility resting on us—missionaries, preachers and teachers, and told them I believed God would turn many hearts to himself, if we sought the blessing with faith. The Holy Spirit brought to my mind Ezekiel's vision, in which the dry bones were transformed into living beings. It seems to me our work is described so plainly there. First we must prophesy to the bones, and then we must prophesy to the Spirit. Men cannot believe what they have not heard, but God wants them to believe after they have heard, and the Spirit is waiting to put life into these. If God's children call him, he will come. When the Akidu church met on the first Sunday of October I made this vision the subject of my remarks, and asked the members to beseech God to send us at least 200 or 300 true converts before the close of this year. The fact is that hundreds of people have not heard the truth until they are like the lifeless bodies which took the place of the dry bones. They need to feel the life-giving breath of the Holy Spirit. They are, so to speak, ready for that. Why is it not given? God says: "I will for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." God's people must prophesy to the Spirit and say, "O, Holy Spirit! come and breathe upon these slain that they may live." I think some of us have been crying to the Spirit for some time past.

As I remarked above, I left Akidu on the 4th Oct. for Cocanada. I needed the rest and the change, and furthermore I wanted to see my baby girl, and returned to Akidu on the 22nd.

On the 25th I set out for Colair Lake. Owing to the lowness of the water the boat could not reach Gannanapudia, so I had to leave it. I found that all the men were busy watering their fields, as October had not given a drop of rain. When we met on Sunday the 30th we prayed for two blessings, copious showers of rain to save the crops, and an

out-pouring of the Spirit to save the people. The first of these blessings has been graciously given to such an extent as to make touring a rather unpleasant operation without the aid of a boat, so my men have gone for the boat to-day. On Thursday we had a beginning of God's answer to our prayer for the Spirit. In a new village about three miles South of one of the old villages, Commalamudi, we had a very happy day. I went in my palanquin, and put up in a cow-shed. The people gathered in the yard in front of the shed which was open on that side. The number that came forward for baptism was a sight worth seeing, and when I heard the answers given in reply to the questions concerning their trust in Christ, I just wished for a room to retire to that I might weep. I could not help believing that this was the commencement of a gracious out-pouring of the Spirit. The sun was setting by the time we reached the tank where they were to be baptized, so the ordinance was performed for the most part by the moonlight. Thirty-five men and twenty women were baptized by Peter. All of these but one man and one woman belonging to that village. The name of the village is Peyyairu.

The Mala village is large. There are probably 20 adults in all, so we may expect a great many more from that same place. The people are mostly farm-laborers, working for farmers of a higher caste. None of them have land of their own. Their masters threatened them with trouble of various kinds if they persisted in being baptized, and on the other hand promised many good things to those who would draw back. Hence a few who asked for baptism some two weeks or so ago were missing when the time came.

The Christians at Commalamudi built a neat school house some months ago. I am in it at present, the top of my palanquin is my table as I write. The brethren at Gannanapudi owed Bro. McLaurin, R. 80, about \$33, a debt on their school house. I have just received the last of it.

Commalamudi, India 5th Nov., 1881.

BURMAH. CARE IN RECEIVING CANDIDATES.

A letter from Rev. Dr. Vinton, of Rangoon, to the Missionary Magazine, Sept. 13th, shows the care that is taken in the reception of candidates for baptism. He says:

A week ago Sunday, I baptized twenty-four of the school-children; among them was a young Burman who gives great promise of usefulness. He goes out preaching every Saturday when out of school. Every one who meets him is deeply impressed with the great earnestness and zeal with which he works. During the vacations I shall send him to preach among the Buddhist Karens,—a class we have not been able to reach as efficiently as we could wish. Last Sunday I baptized three more. The work of grace seems to be going on; may it not stop while we have an unconverted jail!

The charge has been publicly made that our Karen churches and preachers are careless in their examination of candidates. I said nothing to the church of my object, but asked them to examine the candidates themselves. They had been privately examined at the houses of all the members in turn, yet the public examination took five hours and forty-eight minutes for the twenty-four candidates. All were examined, not only in their experience, but theologically, as to their views of Christian doctrine, and were expected to give chapter and verse for every statement; and the last candidate was examined as carefully as the first. Last rains, while a jungle Karen, with little or no education, was being subjected to a running fire of cross-questions, the poor fellow blurted out, "I'm applying for baptism, and not ordination. What harder examination have you left for a candidate for the ministry?" I am eagerly glad to be able to report that, with the greater spread of education, there is an increasing determination to have more searching examinations of all applicants for baptism.

We have lately lost two very valuable native preachers by fever. If you could see how fast our men drop when exposed to the deadly fire of jungle-fever, it would inspire a still more earnest desire for the spread of ministerial education. It makes me feel sad at times to think how many live-it costs to carry the gospel,—to think how many must die that souls may live in Christ; yet, after all, can there be a nobler death? Are we worth anything else but to live and die for Christ? I have not spared my preachers, and I hope I shall have grace not to spare myself. I shall still send these men to dangerous places, and go with and before them, knowing full well that we can ask for no nobler reward than that of dying in the harness. Comparatively few of my father's old veterans are still in the ranks; but what are left are just as eager as ever, and just as ready for danger service in the fever districts.