

Sunday Reading.

For the Christian Messenger. Nearer My God to Thee.

Jesus, my Lord, my God, Redeemer blest, Who saved me by thy blood, And gave me rest; May I now ever be, Near and still nearer thee, Lord Jesus, nearer thee, Still nearer thee.

Through this rough wilderness, My pathway leads; O help me in distress! Supply my needs! I trust alone in thee, That I may nearer be, Saviour, still nearer thee, Nearer to thee.

When deadly foes assail, Earth's comforts die, Thy grace shall still prevail— To thee I'll fly: Want and calamity But drive me nearer thee, O Christ! still nearer thee, Still nearer thee.

Son of the Living God, Thou Saviour dear, While guided by thy rod, I will not fear: O'erwhelm me, I will flee, To thee, O Lord, to thee; I'll flee to thee.

And when thou shalt descend, Thy Bride to meet, Bridegroom, Redeemer, Friend— Names, oh! how sweet! With rapture I shall see, How near I am to thee, Saviour, how dear to thee, How near to thee.

Or shouldst thou still delay, Thyself to come, But summon me away, To that bright home; Sweet shall that summons be, That brings me nearer thee; My Saviour, nearer thee, Still nearer thee.

And as I upward fly, By angels borne, Still this shall be my cry: "Oh! blissful morn! The hour that sets me free, And brings me near to thee, Blest Saviour! near to thee, Nearer to thee!"

And to eternity, Thy name I'll bless! Thou Lamb of Calvary! My Righteousness! Loud as the sounding sea, Shall swell the song to thee: "Nearer, my God to thee! Nearer to thee!"

S. T. R.

For the Christian Messenger. Thanksgiving Sermon.

PREACHED BY DR. WELTON IN THE PARLIAMENT STREET BAPTIST CHURCH, TORONTO, ON THURSDAY, NOV. 8, 1883.

"O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever." Psalm cxxxvi. 1.

Responsive to the call or proclamation of the powers that be, we come together to-day, my brethren, to render thanksgiving and praise to Almighty God for the mercies and blessings he has vouchsafed to us during the past year. Not indeed that we discover in this proclamation the only or chief reason for coming thus together. It were hardly complimentary to our piety to engage in this duty only when thus reminded of it or because thus reminded. But as professing Christians who are not insensible altogether of their obligations to God for the mercies temporal, providential, and gracious which he has profusely lavished upon them,—as professing Christians, and dwellers in a Christian land, we gladly unite with God's people of every name throughout the Dominion to-day in formally recounting his mercies and summoning our souls to grateful praise.

In all ages of the church, God's people—those at least worthy of the name—have been wont in various ways to acknowledge the divine goodness to them, and to express their gratitude for the same. Under the old economy the three great historical festivals furnished an excellent opportunity for this. These festivals were instituted largely for the purpose of commemorating great events,—great divine interpositions in Israel's history, and in each there was a distinct recognition of God's gifts at the different seasons of the year. "I was glad," said the pious Hebrew, "when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord . . . to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." Surely, if under that earlier dispensation all the

people united in seeking God's face and celebrating his mercies—if they did this three times a year; we of this later, more advanced dispensation should not be slow to imitate their example in this respect, at least once a year.

The Psalm from which the text is taken is a recital throughout of God's mighty acts—his marvellous interpositions on behalf of his ancient people, and it contains an exhortation to thanksgiving for the same. "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good"—and then comes the grand refrain, repeated in every successive verse,—"for his mercy endureth for ever."

The mighty and beneficent acts recorded in the Psalm are each suggestive of profitable meditation for ourselves. Let us advert to one or two of them in passing.

In the first place we have here an allusion to the divine power—and the divine benevolence I might add—as seen in the creation of the world, and the words remind us of the creation story on the first page of Genesis: "To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever. The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever. The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever." Now the question arises, what is there in the creation story to interest ourselves or stir our souls to praise? Much every way, I reply; for it is not only a story of divine power but, as I have said, of divine benevolence as well, and in the putting forth of each the well being of man appears to be directly contemplated. It is a matter of wonder and praise and this threefold thought is suggested by the creation narrative just alluded to—first, that God should create us at all; second, that he should create us men; and third that he should so frame and order the whole economy of the natural world as to promote our individual happiness. The great question of being or not being was settled in the affirmative for the first man, when God formed him of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he became a living soul. And what is true of the first man in this respect is virtually true of us all. God is the Creator of us all, and in our creation he has decided first that we shall be, and then that we shall be the noblest piece of his workmanship. See what a high place he has assigned to us in the scale of being! He has placed us not among ephemeral insects that begin to live in the morning and die before night; not among worms that crawl to be trodden under foot of the car-less passer by; but among rational, moral and spiritual beings. As the Psalmist expresses it, he has made us "a little lower than the angels," or as the words might better be rendered, "but little below divinity, and with glory and honor crowned us."

Indeed the superior nature of man and his superior position among the works of God is indicated by the peculiar phraseology of the inspired writer in the creation narrative just alluded to. Thus it is said of the creative work which preceded the sixth and last day, that when God looked upon it he pronounced it good. But it was only good and nothing more, for it was not yet complete; it had not yet received its finishing touch in the creation of man. When therefore man came upon the scene, made in the image of God, God pronounced his work very good. Creation had now reached its goal and crown. Alas! that the beautiful workmanship should so soon be defaced—that the story of man's creation should so soon be followed by that of his fall. But divine mercy, whose resources are infinite, was equal to the occasion. Divine mercy, as if anticipating the great catastrophe of the Fall, is prepared with an adequate expedient. And the very page that records the fall, records the great protevangelism—the first promise of a Saviour. The sentence, "thou shalt surely die," has scarcely done ringing in the ears of offending man, than his ear catches a sweeter note: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." In other words, a mighty Deliverer should come, by embracing whom through faith, man should ultimately reach a higher glory than that whence he fell. For under the gospel, my brethren, Paradise regained is better than Paradise lost. What man lost by abandoning sin, is more than made up to him by super-abounding grace. The misery that proceeds from the curse is more than atoned for in the mercy that streams from the cross. God, who caused the light to shine out of darkness when he made the world, "hath shined into our hearts to give us the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The spirit that brooded over chaos, drawing out of its bosom

this wonderful cosmos, this world of infinite order and beauty, moves upon the morally disordered nature of man, making him "a new creation in Christ Jesus." Let us then, my Christian friends, first praise God to-day for our creation, and then for our redemption—"His sovereign power without our aid, made use of clay and formed us men;" And when we had unmade ourselves by sin, he did not abandon the marred workmanship, but

"Brought us to his fold again." In this Psalm there is next allusion to Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage and from the power of Pharaoh in the miraculous passage of the Red Sea,—events typical of similar deliverances in the spiritual history of God's children. Israel's life in Egypt was made bitter by hard bondage. Then they cried unto the Lord, and he heard their cry and came down to deliver, leading them forth with a high hand and outstretched arm. But their deliverance from this trouble seemed to be but the beginning of another, for they now find themselves by the Red Sea, with the sea before them, impassable mountains on either hand, and the pursuing hosts of Pharaoh in the rear. To retreat meant destruction, to advance seemed impossible; yet the divine command is, "Say to the children of Israel that they go forward." How shall they go forward under such circumstances? Not certainly by their own strength or prowess; but when Jehovah shall commission his east wind to plough a path for them through the sea, so that they may pass over on dry ground, which the Egyptians assaying to do shall be drowned. How fitting that after this signal deliverance, Moses should lead the Israelitish men and Miriam the Israelitish women in this song, which was doubtless rung out far into the desert and along the shore of the sea; "Jehovah hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. Jehovah is a man of war: Jehovah is his name. Thy right hand, O Jehovah, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O Jehovah, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. They sank as lead in the mighty waters. Who is like unto thee, O Jehovah, among the gods? who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" And how fitting, my brethren, that to day, in the spirit of this song, we should gratefully remember similar deliverances in our spiritual history; when, for example, God emancipated us from the thralldom of sin, broke Satan's yoke from our neck and permitted us to taste the sweet liberty of his sons; and when, as some great Red sea of trouble was before us, which in our own wisdom and strength we were utterly unable to endure or escape, we were permitted to stand still and see his great salvation.

After the Red Sea was crossed, the great and terrible desert and forty years wandering therein still separated Israel from the promised land. But Jehovah did not forget his chosen people, nor his covenant with them. He gave them bread from heaven, brought them water from the flinty rock, and led them by a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. So ours, my Christian friends, is a covenant keeping God. The path we tread lies through a "desert land," the sands often seem hot beneath our feet, and the sun scorching over head; but ever and anon we reach an oasis, some refreshing Elish with its twelve wells of water, and its seventy palm trees; our strength is made equal to our day, and ere long we shall enter upon the rest of which the earthly Canaan was but an imperfect type. "Look up my soul, pant towards the heavenly hills. Those heavens are fairer than they seem; There pleasures all sincere glide on in crystal rills. There not a drop of guilt defiles nor grief disturbs the stream. That Canaan knows no noxious thing, No cursed soil, no tainted spring, Nor roses grow on thorns, nor honey wears a sting."

Let us praise our Heavenly Father to-day for guiding us with his counsel here and then receiving us to glory.

But other considerations than those suggested by the Psalm before us call for hearty thanksgiving and praise to-day. Let me name two or three of them.

1. There is the consideration of the multitude of the mercies we have received at God's hand the past year. To enumerate these mercies would be impossible; we might as well try to count the drops of rain or autumn's forest leaves. The best thing we can do is to attempt an imperfect classification of them, and that classification shall be fourfold.

(a). They may be designated as individual. I mean that they have pertained to our individual lives; they have distilled on our individual paths; they have tended to the multiplication and enlargement of our individual enjoyments; they have fallen into our individual cup, making it many a time to

overflow. In the mighty sweep of our heavenly Father's care, in which myriad other creatures and worlds have been noticed, none of us have felt that as an individual he has been overlooked. On the contrary, judging from the multiplicity of the favors we have received, and from the constant and assiduous loving kindness that has wrapped us around, we might rather conclude that others have been overlooked that particular regard might be shown us. True, the bitter has mingled with the sweet in our past experience, but we can say that the latter has ever predominated. Our past lives have not been all sunshine, but the cloud and storm have served to throw the sunshine into beautiful relief, and make it more precious to us. Our lives have not been altogether exempt from trial; it may be that into some of our hearts and homes great sorrows have come the past year; but with the great sorrows has been given great consolation and we have almost forgotten our trials in the divine sympathy that has lifted us above them. Yes, we have felt that we would rather know what trouble is and know also the supports that religion gives under it, than know nothing of either trouble or religion.

(b). These mercies may be called national. And here a wider field of thought is opened up than I can now traverse. Suffice to say that God in his Providence has cast our lot in one of the most highly favored lands under the sun; a country of which every loyal Canadian may feel justly proud; a country of vast extent, of vast resources and of vast possibilities in every conceivable line of human progress; a country lying in just the latitude that produces great and enterprising peoples; a country having to-day a greater population than the neighboring republic when its independence was declared, and destined in fifty years to come to be as populous and mighty as that republic is now; a country in which the blessings of civil and religious liberty are most largely and perfectly enjoyed, where every man can worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience, and where the path of promotion in all the great fields of human exertion lies open to all, be they rich or poor, lofty or lowly; a country whose political constitution is better than that of any other nation in the old world or new, for it combines in itself what is most excellent and omits what is most objectionable in the constitution of both the mother country and the great republic near by. We have reason to thank God that we belong to a race whose language and literature are now almost universal, and are destined to become entirely so;—a race whom God seems to have commissioned to carry the blessings of the highest civilization and the purest Christianity around the globe. Truly the lives have fallen to us in pleasant places, and we have a goodly heritage. Let us show ourselves worthy of this heritage, and so maintain and guard its interests that we may hand it down improved and enriched to our children and the generations to come.

(c). These mercies again might be denominated Providential. In their bestowment God's hand has been visible. They have come to us, not as a matter of course nor by any law of their own, but because we have been objects of the divine care and the divine thoughtfulness. In giving food to sustain life and raiment to put on, God has shown himself to be Jehovah Jireh. And while on the one hand he has defended us against natural evils, has shielded us from calamities and judgments in the form of earthquake and pestilence, fire and flood, on the other he has caused our fields to bring forth abundantly, has smiled upon the great material industries of the country, and caused the sea, the mine, and the forest to contribute both to the sustentation and embellishment of our existence. And how manifest from a review of the past that God has been choosing our way for us, and leading us therein. He has closed before us the path we would have pursued, and compelled us to take the path we would not have pursued, and in all has shown us that he would do better for us than we would or could have done for our selves. His providential dealings have often indeed been marked by mystery and obscurity, but they have been shot through and through with rays of loving kindness, the frowning providence has ever concealed the smiling face.

(d). Once more in this connection, these mercies have been seen to be spiritual, and they have directly subserved our spiritual good. The day of God has been ours with its many hallowed privileges. May the time never come when the Christian Sabbath shall be observed, or rather desecrated, in the new world as it is in the old. We have the Book of God, a written revelation of his will, and the divine promises scattered through it as rose leaves make it fragrant of heaven. We have the house of God, in which we may "behold his

beauty" and "worship at his feet." We have a name and place among his people, the excellent of the earth, members of the divine family, the elite of the universe. The heralds of the cross proclaim the gospel message in our hearing, and we are permitted to pour out our souls to God in prayer. It is these privileges and blessings, so richly enjoyed by us, which so highly distinguish our land, and every land that is favored with them, from those that have them not. It is these blessings which constitute the secret of England's and America's superiority over Africa and Tartary. England and America are great because the Christianity of the Bible has made them such. Who of us would live in a community, who would care to have his children brought up in a community, in which the privileges of the gospel are not enjoyed?

2. It is characteristic of God's people, or should be, that they are a thankful, praising people. Those in whom the disposition to praise is wanting show hereby that they do not belong to the divine family. Ingratitude is base when shown by man to man; but especially is it base as shown by the professing Christian to his God. What great things the Lord has done for us all! What great things he has promised to do for us, world without end. Verily, a thankless man is a monster in God's world! A thankless Christian is an anomaly in the kingdom of God's grace. The expression is as much a contradiction of terms as "an honest thief."

Under the old economy—and the same is eminently true of the new—the saints were wont gratefully to record the divine mercies to them. The purer the ancient church, the clearer and louder was the note of praise that rang forth from her bosom. In the Psalms, taken as a whole—and on this account they have been the precious property of the church of all times—we have the portrayal of an experience so typical in its character that every true child of God can adopt it as his own,—an experience in which the element of praise becomes more and more predominant to the end. In the first Psalm we have a description of the truly righteous man; and if we follow this righteous man through the book we find him the subject of hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, prayer and praise. But as he advances on his course there is less of fear and more of hope, less of sorrow and more of joy, less of prayer and more of praise, until, when the last Psalm is reached, it is all praise. For now he is about to join the celestial harpers; now he would say, "Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord, Hallelujah."

3. Praise again is the highest, most acceptable form of worship. God's people can render him no higher honor than to praise and magnify his name. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth God." There may be an element of selfishness in prayer, but there can hardly be any in praise. Prayer is prospective, it asks for blessings not yet received, but praise is retrospective, it calls to mind the blessings already received. We may ask for what it would not be for our good to receive and what therefore God may not be willing to grant; but he can never be other than pleased with praise for the blessings he has bestowed. So fond is he of praise, so delighted to have it ascend to him as a mighty cloud of incense to envelop his very throne, that he is said to "inhabit the praises of Israel." And we know that praise will be the endless employ of heaven. So far as we know there will be no occasion for prayer there, for every desire will have been gratified, but in memory of him that "loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood," we shall ever have occasion for praise. Let us not forget that in order to sing the song of praise in heaven we must first learn on earth. And while to-day with grateful hearts we erect a "new stone of remembrance, exclaiming, Ebenezer," let us enter with trusting hearts upon the year before us.

The Week of Prayer begins with the first Sunday in the year, January 6th, and the general arrangement of topics is as follows: Monday—Praise and Thanksgiving; Tuesday—Confession of Sin, and Prayer for Cleansing and Renewal; Wednesday—Prayer for Families and Instructors of Youth; Thursday—Prayer for the Church of Christ; Friday—Intercession for the Nations; Saturday—Prayer for Missions at Home and Abroad.

Knowledge is said to be power, Knowledge is power in the same sense that wood is fuel. Wood on fire is fuel, Knowledge on fire is power. There is no more power in knowledge than there is in the stones or stars which you know, unless there be a spirit and life in the knowledge which give it its energy. In proportion as men have this spiritual power do the become strong in the world.—Alex. McKensie.

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1883.

FOURTH QUARTER.

Lesson XI.—DECEMBER 16, 1883.

DAVID SPARING HIS ENEMY. 1 Sam. xxiv. 1-17.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vs. 15-17.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you."—Matt. v. 44.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

- M. David's last meeting with Jonathan, 1 Sam. ch. xxiii. T. The Lesson and Context, 1 Sam. ch. xxv. W. David's last meeting with Saul, 1 Sam. ch. xxvi. T. Slanderers and Enemies, Psalm xxxi. F. Betrayed and Hunted, Esa. liv. and lvii. S. Patience of Jesus, 1 Pet. ii. 19-25; iv. 12-19. G. How to Treat our Enemies, Matt. v. 38-48.

DAVID PERSECUTED BY SAUL.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I Saul Hunting David, Va. 1, 2. II Saul in David's Power, Vs. 3-7. III Evil Overcome with Good, Vs. 7-17.

PLACE.—Wilderness of Engedi. QUESTIONS.—Vs. 1, 2.—What did Saul do for a long time? Where did he now seek for David?

Vs. 3-7.—Where were David and his men hidden? What did Saul do? What temptation for David? How did he repel it? What did he do? Why? How does verse 5 show his conscientious respect for the king?

Vs. 7-17.—What did David do after Saul left the cave? How prove his innocence? Why did he call Saul "father"? How was Saul affected? What did he acknowledge? vs. 17-19. Did David trust Saul? vs. 22. Did Saul remain friendly? ch. xxvi. 2. What is said of Samuel's death, character, and work?

Scripture Searchings.—What similar scene can you find later in this history? What Messianic Psalms (Psalms prophetic of Christ) can you find?

After his tearful leave of Jonathan, as in last lesson, David was for years an exile and wanderer, fleeing for his life from Saul. His experiences during this part of his history are given in Psalms xxxiv., li., liv., lvi., lvii., etc. First, he went to Nob, the city of the priests, where he received refreshment and Goliath's sword; thence to Achish, king of Gath, among his enemies; thence to the cave of Adullam, where he gathered the nucleus of an army, and where his parents came to him; thence to Moab, to put his father and mother under the care of the Moabite king. The city of Keilah being invaded by the Philistines, he went against and defeated them; but, owing to the treachery of the inhabitants, had to make his escape. Thence to the Wilderness of Ziph, where he had a like experience of treachery, and from which he escaped to the Wilderness of Maon. At Ziph, Jonathan came to see him and "strengthened him in God." It was their last interview. At Maon he was pursued hotly by Saul, and seemed about to be taken, when news of an invasion of the Philistines came to Saul, who was compelled to turn aside to meet them. Meanwhile David, with six hundred men, escaped to the rocky stronghold of Engedi, where our present lesson finds him.

Notes.—Vs. 1-3.—Saul, having defeated the Philistines, returned to Gibeah his capital. There, certain informers (described by David in Ps. lix. 4) brought him intelligence that David was in the wilderness of Engedi, on the western border of the Dead Sea. It was very rocky, full of caverns, and hence afforded a good hiding-place. Saul took three thousand chosen men to hunt David and his men (numbering six hundred) upon the rocks of the wild goats. The rocks were steep, and inaccessible; such as the ibex would delight in. The sheep-cotes by the way. That is, lower down the mountains. Where was a cave. Used by the shepherds as a place of refuge for their flocks in a storm. This must have been a very large cave, as it sheltered David's six hundred men in its dark depths. Hidden there, they, in looking to the mouth of the cave, could readily see Saul as he entered to cover his feet. See Judges iii. 24.

Vs. 4-7.—David's men were quick to see their opportunity, and exhorted him to seize upon it; (see xv. 23; xvi. 1). The temptation was, like that of Christ in the wilderness, to a short course to the throne. Upon the impulse, David cautiously approached Saul and cut off a part of his robe; but so tender and conscientious was he, that afterwards, even this seemed to him