

The Christian Life.

A HYMN FOR CHRISTMAS.

Saviour, come and bring salvation,
Chase away the lingering night,
Pour thy beams on every nation,
Bless the world with heavenly light,
Let thy glory
Fill the earth from pole to pole
Till the story
Wakens love in every soul.

Saviour, bring the glad to-morrow,
Bring the fullness of the day,
When shall cease the tears of sorrow,
In the mildness of thy sway;
When the nations
Learn the arts of war no more
And hosannas
Wing in peace from shore to shore.

Break the gloom where souls are dying,
Lost in darkness, sin and strife;
Speak the word to mourners sighing,
Thou the Way, the Truth, the Life;
Hallelujahs
Wide o'er the earth be sung;
And redemption
Kindle praise on every tongue.

PEACE AND GOOD WILL.

This hard, driving, money-loving age clings to its better ideals, and cherishes, even though it be in awful mockery, the secret hope of the Bethlehem song. The air is filled with noise and tumult, the streets are thronged with crowds bent on their own pleasure or their own gain, social life is pierced through with many bitter words of envy and strife, and even in the churches, where all should be at peace, there is heard the clash of warring creeds. All this is sadly, hurtfully, needlessly true. And yet, as the season of Christ's nativity draws near, there seem to come again through the cloven skies snatches of divine minstrelsy, and, for a while at least, the Peace Song of Bethlehem becomes the music of the world.

Is it not wonderful—O how wonderful—this stout refusal of the heart to surrender its pretty dreams? Here we are, a generation crooked and perverse beyond all our forefathers, devoted passionately to money-getting and money-spending, our hands red with blood and the maddest lust in our hearts, and yet a bit of holly sets us a-thinking, and a snatch of school children's carol tossed about by the vagrant wind, sends us humming, as in a pleasant dream, about peace on earth. The unbelieving critic may chatter about the Bethlehem story being a poem, but we do not heed, for deep in our hearts the vulgar voices of the world die into silence, and clearer than a lark on a summer morning sound the angel voices with their Christmas song of Peace.

And yet the battle-song rings loud over many a tented field, and the martial music keeps its power over even tender souls. The pictures of wild carnage, "Scotland Forever," "Majuba Day," and "The Thin Red Line," hold as if by their heart-strings the passing crowds. Is it that at heart the best of us is a murderer, and so the average of us rejoices in the scenes of myriad-handed murder done by nations in their wanton fury? It may be that. Or may it not be that our joy is not in the killing, but in the thought that there are those who are willing to be killed for what they count a worthy cause? May we not think that there are evils worse

than war which must be cut away before there can be peace?

But the Bethlehem song is a promise of peace. Its first annunciation was a challenge against Rome's imperial creed; for what the Cæsars could not do the Babe in the manger-cradle, so the angels said, would bring to pass. He was called the Prince of Peace. And who will say that his coming has not brought peace on earth? Nero deluged the ground with blood, and in that was his right to undying fame. Jesus has taught even this slow-hearted age another lesson, and the ruler who cannot show good cause for drawing the sword is doomed to infamy rather than to honor. We may not be cured of our blood-thirst, but our war talk must needs have some excuse. The conscience of humanity stands up and condemns unjust and cruel and selfish war. When we shall have learned our lesson better, and when his love shall have burned the hate out of our hearts, we shall take no excuse from ourselves for any word or act that spoils his peace on earth.

There can be no peace on earth until men become willing to seek one another's good. And there can be no such good-will unless there are good hearts. Our most elaborate schemes of reforming society are but child's play, and our most extravagant war expenditures are but foolish waste unless we care for goodness in ourselves more than we care for right behaviour in others. If what we will for other men has not back of it, and penetrating every particle of it, the spirit of simple and honest goodness, our most pretentious demonstrations are but ill-advised stage play by which we long deceive not even ourselves.

Look at all this stir and swagger of the militarists; listen to the high sounding words of the imperialists. They talk loftily about duty and honor, and about righting ancient wrongs at the ends of the earth. Do they really care so much as all this noise and bluster go to show about duty and honor and right? All about them are wrongs which they have never resisted, and causes calling in vain for their aid. They themselves too often cherish jealousies, and nurse to a burning heat a hate that never was just. Officers are vain and envious and coarse of speech, and the goodness for which the militarists have a care is not their own, but other men's. A man's first duty in the matter of goodness is to himself, and all his clamor about the wickedness of the enemies of his nation is empty as the east wind unless he hates with a fiercer hatred the wickedness he finds in himself.

So, too, in our warring against social conditions, and in our heroic efforts to make other people behave as we find it convenient to behave ourselves. Every little while some wild-eyed reformer essays to reform people with a club, and knocks about him recklessly, as though to break down and to make a noise were to reform. A vast deal of our morality is a negative affair. We have an intense desire to see that some things are not done, and the temptation is strong upon us to frown upon other people's pleasures. Our will toward others lack the element of goodness, and all our schemes of reform miscarry because we are not good ourselves.

All this brings us back to the primal message of the Bethlehem song. It throbbed with the promise of peace and good-will because it told of a Saviour born. It bespoke the time foretold by psalmist and prophet, and believed that time was near, because of the new power brought into human life, the cleansing power of heavenly love. After all, the hope of the world is a consuming fire, the angels' song comes to the fulfilment. It is worth while pausing for a little to let our hearts listen to that deepest, truest, divinest message, which carries with it its own fulfilment, the angel-message of Christmas peace and good-will.

PRAYER BEFORE PREACHING.

Many things are needful in order that a sermon may do good. Some degree of intelligence on the part of the preacher is needful. The Hebrews in Jerusalem would not have called on Ezra the scribe to instruct them of the law of the Lord if he had not been an intelligent man; and if they had they would have called in vain. We must have intelligent men to teach the Word of the Lord, or the flock of God will perish for lack of knowledge, and those who are without will make merry over the folly of those who profess to be leaders in Zion. Study is also necessary. No matter how intelligent a preacher may be, he cannot teach the deep things of the law of God to men without diligent study.

But passing by all other important elements of preparation, it is worthy of consideration that every sermon must be accompanied with much prayer. Prayer will open the scriptures to the mind of the preacher more effectually than the best commentary ever written. Prayer will enlighten his understanding and give him a comprehensive and firm grasp of the truth. Prayer will lead his mind to the right subject to be considered at each particular service. Prayer will warm his heart and enable him to speak from the heart to the heart. The best sermons come from the heart. A sermon which comes from the head only may be a great sermon in many respects, but it will surely be a cold sermon. The sermon which has been preceded by much prayer on the part of the preacher and the congregation will come from a warm heart and will be baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

The Sermon that is after a Soul.

The sermon that is after a soul is, like the Master, "filled with compassion." It will have in it what was in Christ's eyes when he looked on Peter, with the curses and denials scarce off that poor disciple's lips. It will have in it what was in Christ's voice when he stood weeping over Jerusalem, and said, "How oft would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her brood under her wing, and ye would not." The severest rebuke will get its chief severity from the deep undertone of divine compassion. And whether it be warning or entreaty, command or invitation, the terrors of the law or the forgiveness of the gospel, the pathos of a suffering and beseeching and pursuing love will bathe it all and make it clear that if the sermon does not bring the prodigal home it will be because he preferred to trample on his father's heart and murder mercy.

Brethren of the ministry, what are sermons to "the times," compared with sermons to the eternities? Sermons of

instruction are indeed priceless. But the gospel is not simply food for saints. It is a cry of alarm. It is a word of rescue. It is a call to repentance. If sinners are not brought to Christ, how can they build up in Christ? Let it never be forgotten that souls are before us every Sabbath—sinful, unsaved, perishing, lost souls. Men of God, "throw out the lifeline."—Herrick Johnson.

I AM OUT NOW.

A man once came to a well-known servant of Christ, and said to him; "I was filled with joy in the meeting yesterday and now it is all gone—all and I do not know what to do. It is as dark as night!"

"I am so glad," was the reply.

He looked at the servant of God with astonishment, and said, "What do you mean?"

"Yesterday God gave you joy, and to-day he sees you are resting on your emotions instead of on Christ, and he has taken them away in order to turn you to Christ. You have lost your joy, but you have Christ none the less. Did you ever pass through a railway tunnel?"

"Yes, often."

"Did you, because it was dark, become melancholy and alarmed?"

"Of course not."

"And did you after a while come out again into the light?"

"I am out now!" he exclaimed, interrupting the servant of Christ. "It is all right—feelings or no feelings."

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It what month do men talk the least?—In February, because it is the shortest month.

That tormenting cold that made you wretched last winter will not come back if you take Allen's Lung Balsam when your throat is raw and sore. This admirable remedy is free from opium. Take it in time.

It is distrust of God to be troubled about what is not present, and anger against God to be troubled by what is come; impatience against God to be troubled by what is past.