

## Our Contributors.

### THE UNSTABLE REUBENS.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER.

The eldest son of the patriarch Jacob has a prodigiously large family of descendants. "Unstable as water thou shalt not excel," was the verdict passed by the dying father upon the son who with all his good impulses was fatally lacking in moral stamina. Water is proverbially unstable—tipping too and fro with every motion of the vessel that contains it; but Jacob here refers to boiling water which foams up and effervesces from the heat, it is therefore a fit illustration of all lack of self-restraint and fixity of purpose. There was no hope for poor Reuben unless he had a radical change of heart, for the want of steadfastness, both mental and moral, is fatal to all success in life.

No pathway to success of any kind is an easy one. There are hills of difficulty to be climbed and boulders to be shoved out of the way, and temptations to turn to the right or left out of "air-line." The number of young men often possessed of good parts—who are wrecked through sheer instability—passes all computation. They are always starting and never finishing; they are everything by turns and nothing long. They have never learned Lincoln's secret of "pegging away." Oh, how much of human effort is utterly wasted; how many precious lives have ended in failure from this single vice of instability! How many bright intellects have been cursed by it into utter barrenness! How many good projects it has brought to naught, and what a vast amount of time, talent, energy, and precious opportunity have been trifled away only to end in mortification and disgrace. When the old, godly minded father of Burns was on his dying bed, he turned to his children and said, "There is one of you that I feel greatly troubled about." "Do you mean me, father?" enquired the brilliant young Reuben, whose heart was a boiling pot of unrestrained passions. "Yes, Robbie, I mean you," sadly replied the dying man. It has been too common to speak of Scotland's gifted genius as if he were only the victim of adverse circumstances, whereas his whole life was a conflict between the voice of conscience and the clamors of wayward passions that nearly always carried the day. Burns had no moral stamina. The tragic story of his sad life—if it were fully and honestly written, with all his own bitter confessions, would be one of the most painful, and yet profitable narratives to put into the hands of every young man in the land.

Instability is often regarded as an unfortunate mental weakness—a mere foible or constitutional weakness. But it is really a vice. It is often the besetting sin that makes utter wreck of all hope of excellence, and is fatal to character. When I see a young man setting out in life with no fixed habits, no steadfastness of purpose, drifting from one place to another, chasing after novelties and ready to throw away everything that he has gained in pursuit of the next near phantom, I fear that there

is at bottom a moral unsoundness that will end in ruin. If instability be a "constitutional weakness" then it must be resisted as much as a naturally violent temper or an hereditary appetite for strong drink, or an inborn lust of libidinousness. Whatever destroys all hope of honorable usefulness is more than a fault or a misfortune; it is a sin to be prayed against and fought against without compromise or cessation. Conquer it or you are lost!

Are there no Reubens in the church? I do not refer to such flagrant cases of moral inability as send some professors of religion into drunkenness and others into knavery and others into disgraceful lecheries. Brother A— is no such reprobate as that, but his piety is quite to periodical and spasmodic, one day he is up to boiling point, and another day he is down to freezing. During the "week of prayer" or when an evangelist comes along to hold special meetings he sings more loudly and prays more fervently than any of the brethren; but, when the tide ebbs, he goes out with the tide. Brother B— is very fertile in the suggestions of new schemes of benevolence, and while the novelty lasts, he works fiercely. The next new device pushes aside the old one, and Brother B—'s transient enthusiasm soon dries away. This type of church members are like the brooks swelled by midsummer showers. "What time they wax warm they vanish; when it is hot they are consumed out of their place." It is this sort of fitful, spasmodic religion that often makes church contributions such an uncertain quality. Instead of being the steady stream fed by systematic benevolence, they are dependent on the spasmodic influence of an eloquent sermon or a church bazaar. Some church members are only flourishing during the heavy rains of a revival season. The rest of the year they are brown and barren. If pastors get sick of such periodical professors, how weary the Master must be of them! But the joy of every pastor is the ever-green Christian, who, when the community is as dry spiritually as summer dust, keeps his heart fresh and his prayers fervent and his purse open and his daily life as beautiful as an orange tree in full bearing.

Sometimes there are symptoms of this vice of Reubenness (if we may coin such a word) in the pulpit. It shows itself both in running after new devices and running after new places. In nothing does patient, persevering, persistent work tell more effectively than in the ministry. No tree can bear fruit that is pulled up so often that it never fully takes root. The epitaph has been inscribed over the fitful labors and frequent failures of more than one minister who ought to have been equal to better things, is, "Unstable as water, he did not excel."

IT IS WELCOME.—A subscriber writes: "I should have sent this subscription before. Pardon neglect. I could not do without the INTELLIGENCER. It is a welcome visitor to our home."

### POLITICAL MORALS.

Writing of the conviction of election officials in Toronto for ballot frauds, the *Montreal Witness* says:

The most serious feature of these frauds was the fact that the accused thought very lightly of the offence they had committed almost up to the time of their conviction. Indeed, one of them, when standing up to receive sentence, said, 'I only now realize the seriousness of the offence.' And the accused were 'all honorable men,' one of them a lieutenant-colonel, and some or all of them were held in the highest esteem by their neighbors. How could such men commit such offences as ballot-stuffing and falsifying returns and all the dirty trickery of underground election work, and think so lightly of them until the knell rang out that sent them to prison? We quote the *Globe* in answer, which admits that the unserious view these in other ways respectable men took of their fraudulent proceedings 'is but a reflection of the thought and attitude of too many who take part in election work and who profit by bogus ballots and falsified returns. This electoral corruption is not confined to Toronto or to municipal elections. It has eaten too deeply into the working creed of not a few politicians in parliament and out of it. When the misdemeanors in parliamentary elections are not screened by party saw-offs, and when party offenders are shown no more clemency than these five municipal criminals received, such lessons in morality will have been read as will make every returning officer and poll clerk realize the seriousness of the crime.'

Of the endeavors to procure pardons for the convicted officials, the *Montreal Star* says: "We have seen too much pardoning of election criminals. Nothing is more calculated to bring the enforcement of election law into disrepute and to discourage judges in treating the offences with proper severity, than this outcry for the exercise of the pardoning power as soon as a ballot-box stuffer gets behind the bars. Behind the bars is the proper place for him; and if the community are ever to be taught the essential gravity of his offence, he will be left there, precisely as would a thief, a forger, or a sand-bagger. Another objection to the use of the pardoning power in these cases, is that the crime is political and the pardoning power is always in the hands of politicians. It is the last sort of crime for which political mercy should be sought. The temptation to pardon one's political friends and administer cold justice to one's political enemies, should never be thrust before a committee of politicians."

There are only 200,000 Christians in Japan, and yet Christianity is exerting a powerful influence on the country. A great many of the leaders are Christians as 155 officers in the army, the captains of the two largest battleships, the president of parliament and thirteen members. They are in cabinet, on the supreme bench, in the universities, on the newspapers, etc. Religious freedom prevails. It is an open door for the gospel.

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