

Our Contributors.

CLOSE TO OUR HEAVENLY FATHER.

BY REV. T. L. CUYLER, D. D.

The peace, the purity and the power of every child of God depend very much upon his or her living very nigh to our Heavenly Father. It is well for us not only to sing "Nearer, My God, to Thee," but also to pray, "Nearer, O God, to Me." We are too apt to think of him as dwelling in an infinite distance from us—as a Father up in heaven and not as a Father close by us. His actual nearness should be both a solemn caution and a sweet comfort. Not a thought in our inmost heart is concealed from him, not a secret sin we commit that is not as visible to his all searching eye as the noonday sun. This ought to have a prodigious restraining power upon us.

What a comfort it is that God is so close to us that he is always within speaking distance! A Christian's prayer is not a message dispatched to a far-away throne; it is his intimate converse with One near at hand. Childlike faith reverently and lovingly talks with God, breathes confession of sin into his open ear, tells him its secrets, and unbosoms the whole soul to him. In perplexity and trouble we want a helper near at hand. Abraham Lincoln once said: "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day." What our heroic president often felt amid his distressing perplexities we have often felt in life's dark hours. The chief-feeling is waked up in us, and we want an Almighty Father close by us that we can talk to and lean upon. The persecuted apostle in Cæsar's judgment hall, with guards in iron mail on every side, realized this cheering truth when he said, "No man stood by me, but all men forsook me; notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me." The sincere prayer of the true Christian is a breathing of the heart's desire into an ear that is close at hand. I don't believe that ear is ever deaf to the humble, honest prayer of faith. Every proper desire from the heart of God's child obtains recognition and a proper answer in the heart of God himself. The pull of our prayer may not seem to move the everlasting throne, but—like the pull on a line from the bow of a boat—it may draw us into fuller harmony with his wise and holy will. When our desires chime with the will of God we are sure to receive some blessing.

If we live near to our Heavenly Father, we should strive to realize his constant companionship. Wherever a devout soul meets God is a sacred spot, whether it be like Jacob's solitary pillar of stone or a Sabbath sanctuary. We ought to make the workshop, the counting-room, the study, the kitchen, and the farmer's field sacred with God's presence. The nursery in which the pious mother trains her child is one of God's dwelling places, and I have seen many a sick chamber that was the vestibule of heaven. Happy the pastor

who, returning to his study, finds both his Bible open and the mercy seat close beside him, with precious promises strewn thick about it! The nearer he gets to his Lord and Master in that study, the nearer will he get to the hearts of his people in his pastoral work and in his pulpit. The man of business who gets a little time with God in the morning, over his Bible or on his knees, will go to the tumult of the day all the stronger. To begin the day with prayer will keep it from raveling out into many a folly or sin. Stout old Luther used to say that he "could not get on without two hours a day in prayer and close fellowship with God."

The much-talked-about "higher life" is simply living close to God, on the Sabbath in his sanctuary, and through the week in our own dwellings and places of business. It is keeping our citizenship in heaven, and our eyes above the blinding mists of worldliness, and our hearts in close touch with our divine Master. They that thus wait on God shall renew their strength; they shall mount up as eagles. Their outlook is wide: their spiritual atmosphere is bracing; their fellowship with their Father and their Saviour is sweet; they rehearse a great deal of heaven before they get there. Close to God here, they will find the gates of pearl opening to them all in good time, and they will go in to be "forever with their Lord."

THE JANITOR.

It may seem, to some of my readers, a long step from a minister to a janitor, but really it is not. A minister cannot very well be a janitor, but a janitor may be a minister. At least, I think I have seen them act very much like some ministers with whom I have been acquainted.

That every church should have a janitor needs no argument, whether a minister is to be obtained or not. To have more than one for large churches depends much on the outfit the church has given him. I have seen the whole congregation acting in that capacity. When such is an experience, the pastor has to ring the bell, and to furnish artificial lights with which to begin a revival. These congregational janitors are very expensive luxuries. Most ministers and churches prefer one, regularly engaged, and churches prosper better with one.

Unhappily, the janitor, like many other servants of the church, have never served an apprenticeship before being promoted to the office. The church is largely to blame for this. If any irregularity is experienced thereby, the church ought to bear it without a murmur, or forfeit its charter. If the congregation were asked to provide a prescribed course of instruction for these servants of the church, I am quite certain that theoretical speculation would be the only curriculum possible, experimental instruction being out of the question. Men, in the church, can often tell how a thing should be done

much better than they can do it. A man outside can often tell another inside, working with a swarm of bees, how to hive them. Such instruction usually gets a cold reception, and is often not edifying.

The appointment of a janitor is usually performed with little ceremony. Nothing particular denotes the work done. No special singing or sermon gives the congregation warning that the church has passed through this ordeal. The question as to how a janitor should be called and elected has not sharpened the wit of any ecclesiastical council. If it is an honorable position, some one's friend is promoted. If it happens to be otherwise, "the survival of the fittest" bestows it on a blemished mortal who, through some freak of nature, is compelled to work less than others or starve. I have known cases of Christian women with large families volunteering their services gratuitously. It is a good thing for such churches to have such women, for a few often save a whole church from destruction. But it would be better for business men to look after this work and see that it is properly and satisfactorily performed.

In watching the career of the janitor, this question begs for an answer: Is it his business to get religion. How few of them become converted. And those already Christians find it difficult to continue in the good way. Indeed, a Christian janitor, in some places, would be considered a hero. I have known them while on duty to backslide; yes, I have known deacon janitors to actually excuse themselves from a public confession of Christ while on janitor duty. To serve our interests in the church, why must his servants be ungodly? Will the arguments in favor of ministers having bad children be explanative of why the servants of the church show little spirituality, or none?

It is very important that the congregations appreciate the labors of their servants. When a young man, I heard from the desk, "When your minister has helped you, tell him of it." But nothing was particularly said for the janitor. The only break in this monotony was the "church mouse song." The janitor is an unadvertised boon to a church. He is a leader of no small number of people bound for a home where there are neither fires nor wooden houses. Indeed, he may rightly be called a minister, preventing eternal fires, an associate of the minister by profession, but assuming no equality in rank. Being continuously on duty, lest sparks escape; regulating not only parts of church furniture, but church occupants, lest impure air may kindle human ire, or stupify the sense of devout worshippers; he is forgotten, while the minister deals with his objective—the human soul—in his mission of saving them from the everlasting burnings.

Soul stirring sermons, interesting and uplifting songs have often been congregational luxuries, more because of good janitorship than anything else, if testimony where there is bad janitorship is worth anything. Cheerful countenances and pleasant faces have often wrongly been accredited to interest in ministers or choir. Thus his glory has departed by misuse of his

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