

# Sunday Reading.

## VISITATIONS FROM GOD.

When the Lord Visits His People It Is to Save and Not Destroy.

Rev. C. M. Addison, of Fitchburg, Mass., speaks as follows on this topic: And there came a great fear on all; and they glorified God, saying that a great prophet is risen up among us, and that God hath visited his people.—Luke vii., 16.

When sorrow and trouble come to us ought we to say of each that it is a visitation from God? That is the common phrase for such things; they are called "visitations."

In the verse I have chosen we find this same word; and in the story in which it occurs we have a chance to see whether Christ would have us agree with the popular idea or not.

The story tells of the bringing to life again of the son of the widow of Nain.

Just outside the gate of the city, between the walls and the cemetery, Jesus was met by the funeral train. A poor mother—a widow—who had been left with an only son had been "visited by God," as her neighbors said. The son had been taken away from her: she was utterly alone. It was one of the saddest of funerals, and clearly "a visitation;" any pious neighbor could see that.

What will Christ, the son of God, say about it? Will he go to the widowed mother and say: "This is a visitation from God; he has punished you severely. You must hear the punishment without questioning, because it is God's will?" No? "When the Lord saw her he had compassion on her, and said unto her: Weep not. And he came nigh and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said: Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up and began to speak." Then it was that a strange fear, a holy awe, fell on the crowd of mourners, and they glorified God and said that God had visited his people.

Here was a strange reversal of their thought. That death which they had been saying was God's visitation and God's will was found to be opposite to his will, and the visitation—by the miracle of Christ—was found to be in the raising from the dead, instead of in the killing. It was not God's will that the mother should lose her son, and so, when he visited her in Christ, he gave him back to her again.

It is true that, in the Old Testament, a visitation from God was always a calamity; God interfered to punish. But in the New Testament the word "visitation" is never used, except to denote the love and goodness of God. His coming to save is his only visitation. Those opening words of the hymn "Benedictus," in St. Luke, express the whole teaching of the gospels and epistles: "God hath visited and redeemed his people." He visits to redeem. And so Christ comes to the widow of Nain and says, as clearly as acts can speak: "This death of a young man, a boy in the flower of his youth, is all wrong; it is a terrible evil; let me show you how God would visit you; let me show you what God thinks of death and sorrow and pain. This is what he says by touching the coffin; by turning the mother's grief to joy. It is just the opposite of what they had thought. Evil had visited them before; now God has visited them."

Therefore, I say that to try to comfort the mourner with the statement that God sends trouble is to offer a medicine that is really a poison; is to give an explanation, at any rate, that does not explain. It is a false humility that will claim every ill as a deserved punishment; it is a foolish sophistry to make believe that evil is a good thing for us, and it is a stultification of our human nature to say we are ignorant, and do not know a thing is evil when we see it. Good may come out of it afterward, but that will depend entirely upon how we use it.

No. Let us believe that God is good. If he is, this superficial mystery is solved by being done away with altogether. Let us be sure that, when God visits his people, it is to save, not to destroy; it is to give health and peace and joy, not pain and worry and tears.

But somebody will say: Are you not saving God's goodness at the expense of his power? If he is so good as not to send evil, why, being all powerful, does he permit it to come? Why does he not wipe it out altogether? A man throws himself over a precipice and is dashed to pieces; an ocean steamer dashes on the rocks in a storm and her passengers are drowned; an epidemic breaks out and destroys thousands of innocent people. Are not all these in accordance with what we call the law of nature? Did not gravitation kill the man, drowning the passengers, and disease the children? I say no. The laws of God—that is, the way God works in nature—are perfect and beneficial; we only suffer when we disobey these.

The drunkard says: "This burning disease, this excruciating agony is God's will," when he is only paying the penalty of disobeying God's law. The mother sends her daughter to a dance lightly clad on a cold night, and, when she dies of pneumonia, wonders how God could so visit her. But the truth is, the mother killed the child and not God.

In a certain true sense, whatever befalls us is according to law. God made the law and to break it is to suffer. But God does not come down and deliberately inflict the punishment. The broken law avenges itself; just as when a man recklessly entangles himself in a moving belt in a shop, and gets torn limb from limb. There is no direct intervention of God, no visitation from him to punish the man; the engine relentlessly moves on, and the man is killed. We not only cannot blame God for the accident—we cannot really say that God did it; the law that a man cannot be ground about a shaft with impunity is a good one; if a man is killed, it is his doing, and not God's.

I think these things are true. I think it will be a help to our knowledge of God and to our love for him to consider that, if a brakeman is crushed between two cars, it may be his fault and it may be the fault of the management of the railroad company; but that it can't, in justice, be called a visitation from God. And when we have stopped putting off the blame on God, we may go on to put it where it does belong, and so help the world to be saved from the consequences of recklessness and cupidity.

But there is one more point to be considered. Here we are; here are evil and suffering right in our midst, and we must believe that God is here, too, right in our midst. Lay the blame where we will, we know that death and disaster will come for many a year. If God does not will it, if he pities us under it, if he is omnipotent and able to stop it, why does he leave us to suffer?

"The sting of death is sin," i. e., the cause of all the suffering of the world, from Adam to us, lies in the sin of all the world from Adam's sin to yours and mine. And God is no more the author of sin than he is of suffering. He made us with free wills, capable of doing right and not suffering, but capable also—alas! how well we ought to know it—capable, also, of doing wrong and suffering. It is here, ingrained in our lives—both are here. We are nearly overwhelmed. We cry out to God; but God cannot take back that which he has given us—our freedom to choose. Freely we sinned, freely we must come back to him. Here he is to help; he has sent his Son, that we may know how intimately he is related to us: Immanuel—God with us and in us. He has visited us, he is our Saviour, for he pities us, and wants us, and will have us.

When we see this it is not so hard. Sin and sorrow are here, close to us; but God is nearer. God is fighting on our side against these two, the one cause, and the other effect. And the strange, the divine, thing about it all is that, while he cannot—or he would stultify himself—make all right by a word, he is turning sin's weapons against sin, making the very weapon of our salvation perfect through suffering; using that very thing we dread and he hates as the means by which we overcome sin and come to him.

The way of the cross, my dear friends, is God's way of salvation—not the way he would choose, but the way our sins have made him choose—until, as we look at our Saviour, Christ, we see how inevitable it is. Christ, hanging on the cross, because our sins have brought him there, and crying to us, as the captain breaks through the enemies' lines to conquer a way for us. There is no way but this—the way at the cross; take it up and follow me, and win a victory out of defeat. Beat sin with its own weapons; become perfect like me, through suffering. But believe that God and I shrink from it, even more than you do; even as the child's pain hurts the mother, standing over it, more than it hurts the child. Bear your suffering patiently, then; not because God sends it, but because he sympathizes with you in your hatred of it, and means, by his love, that if you use it rightly, you may climb to him by it.

The miracle of the widow's son applies to all our sorrows. If you will hold fast to God—who sorrow, you who, perhaps, like the widow, have lost some one whom you loved much—bear your sorrow proudly, because some day, when the kingdom of heaven comes upon earth, you will see this same Jesus coming to you and laying his hand upon the coffin where your sorrow lies buried still, and will say to you: God did not do this, and he has saved your son alive for you. Young man, I say unto thee, arise; and so shall all our losses be made good, all our pains healed, even all our dead be raised, because God must conquer. Oh how hard we ought to work with him against our sin and the sin of the world, that the glorious victory may come soon!

## FREELY YE HAVE RECEIVED.

The Story of two old Fashioned Folks and the Debts of the Boards.

"We're plain, old-fashioned folks, my husband and me, and we're getting along into years. Ezra is past seventy, and I'm so near it there ain't any fun in it—but we're considerable smart and independent yet, and so we live on in our snug little home instead of breaking up and going to live with the children as some folks would."

"There's more than a fifty-yard lot in the place and plenty of fruit trees and vines, and my roses and geraniums are famous, if I do say it, and Ezra keeps things up in good shape outdoors and me the same indoors, which is the natural scriptural way according to my thinking."

I never did like women doing men's work, nor men women's for that matter. Ezra does offer to wipe the dishes often, but somehow I can't stand it to see him with one of my big gingham aprons on, and he'd get all spotted up if he didn't put it on, which I'd hate to see even worse, and so, there it is. The children are all married and settled, making a fight for a living just as we used to do, and they're all steady, go-to-meeting folks. I'm thankful

to say, and prosperous enough, I guess. Once I was going to have the boys all presidents, and the girls riding in coaches, but now I'm thankful to have them good plain, honest folks. There's nothing like seventy years to take nonsense out of a body!

"Yes; we're fixed so that we don't need to worry if we're cheerful, and don't go in to no extravagancies, like keeping two fires or having a bit of sickness. We're used to saving and wearing our clothes forever (I've worn my black straw bonnet ten years, just having Miss Armstrong touch it up now and then, and Ezra—I couldn't tell without reckoning when he had his best Sunday coat), but we always pay our pew rent and help support the causes—that's the way we were brought up. But goodness me, how the causes do grow and multiply! Once there was only foreign missions and home missions and the Bible Society and the Tract Society, but now there's the women's boards too, and the freedmen's and the old ministers and church extension and the Sunday-school and Y. M. C. A. and W. C. T. U., and the land knows what. Well, of course, we couldn't give only a mite to the old boards, and the only way we can do anything for all these new causes is to keep crowding on a little more load every time—same as the man that got so he could carry an ox just by beginning with it as a calf. Ezra's a tailor, you know, and he always made a fair sort of living in old times, but with great stores full of ready-made clothes and such lots of machinery, it got so that all he could do was to repair and fix over things, and he's a master hand at it, if I do say it. It's something I could help about, and every time there was a new cause I'd say, 'Now, I can earn a dollar for that, I guess,' and many's the day I've cleaned and patched and pressed till my back was pretty well used up. Somehow, we've always managed to do something for every single one of the causes. I never could sit in church and have a contribution box shoved right before me and not have a nickel to drop in it. Ezra's the same way, only more so. I do believe he'd feel like going right through the floor if he couldn't put something in it. Maybe it's habit; it is, it's a good one, ever so much better than smoking, isn't it? Maybe it's pride; I wouldn't wonder a bit if it was in my case, but I ain't going to make myself miserable with what my good old mother used to call 'self-examination.' It took her a week to get real cheerful after one of those spells of raking herself over the coals, yet she thought it was her bounden duty to do it, at least once in two months. I'm glad we don't have time for it nowadays, for I shouldn't get over it nowhere as quick as mother did! Well, whatever the motive may be, that's the way Ezra and I feel about the causes."

"But what I start to tell you was not about any of these little regular affairs. It's something a great deal bigger. It's how we helped about the debts—foreign and home. We always treat the boards just alike, same as we do the children. We don't believe in debts; that's habit and pride too, maybe—but we don't. Ezra's a great reader; I ain't, I couldn't ever seem to get the time when I was young, and now my eyes have given out considerable, and I shall have to wait till kingdom come before I am a scholar, but Ezra'd rather read than eat any day. It's been amazing convenient for me when he had to wait a bit for his dinner or supper. Catch him harrying or fussing if he could get hold of a book or paper! So, of course, we've got no end of books, histories, and such. Somebody's always giving them to Ezra—old Elder Harris would give him books, you know, and when any of our church folks moves away we're sure to get a fresh stock. We take the 'Church,' and the 'Home Missionary,' and 'Women's Work,' and Ezra's sister always sends us the New York Observer." I read of them what I can, but Ezra, he just devours them, and so he is what I call a scholar, and when he talks in prayer meeting folks like to hear him, if I do say it, and he can give illustrations better than lots of ministers. Ezra prays well to, at meeting and at home, and lives all the same as he prays. If he didn't I wouldn't mention the praying."

"Well, we were thinking and talking a great deal about the debts of the boards, three years ago this summer, and casting about to see what we could do. Of course, I've always had missionary eggs, giving fifth eggs, as my rule. If the old folks have a tenth, pity if the Christians can't give a fifth! And there's my cherry and apricot trees. Some years they've helped me out ever so much; and there's the rest of our spare room, I always set aside part of that; but what was it all among the causes when each wanted an extra effort, and deserved it, too? It's the extras that make the trouble always. What was left for the debts? On our mite box it says, 'Freely you have received,' and I hope I'm not a stock or a stone not to know that I've had mercies enough! Just to be well and breathe, in California, is a pretty big blessing. Ezra says, when he reads about the cyclones and the sunstrokes and the blizzards back east. But it's when he goes to talking about history that Ezra gets real eloquent. Why, he'll go on by the hour about what the early Christians went through, just to spread the gospel, and the way they crept here and there with their little rolls of Scripture, even across the sea, into England, among the awfulest heathen that ever was, if they were our ancestor; and about the Waldenses and the Huguenots and the Covenanters. I declare for it, when Ezra gets to telling these stories, I feel so worked up, I'm ashamed to think I've had my bonnet done over at all. What do I know about self-denial anyway?"

"But to go back about those debts. We haven't had a bit of new furniture for thirty years. Everything's just what we got when we first came to California. Oh, yes, I'd get a new rocking-chair for the front

room after Eliza was married, and I wanted to rent the room. Then, when mother came to live with us, she brought from the old home in Maine the things her mother gave her when she was married—an old cherry desk and an eight-day clock, and a spinning-wheel, if you believe it, a little old-fashioned flax-wheel, spindle, distaff and all. We thought that was a big jke, but you'll see. We put the wheel up in the loft, and the children used to play with it, though grandma kept a pretty sharp watch to see that they didn't break it. I think she always hoped it would come in fashion to spin our own linen again. After mother died the young folks used to get it down for tableaux and New England kitchens and such things, and once Cora Gillette, the banker's daughter, asked my Eliza if we would sell it, which, of course, Eliza wouldn't let 'em to—sell grandma's wheel, indeed!

"Talking about the debts—'if we had something we could sell,' said Ezra, and I just laughed, but he fell to telling about the early Christians living under ground and starving to death till I was sober enough to cry. I always lie awake nights when anything troubles me—foolishest thing in the world to do—and I was lying awake that night, and all at once I thought of the wheel. Of course, I hated to part with it, but what was that to be thinking about such a time as this! So in the morning after Ezra went to the shop I got down the wheel and cleaned it and oiled it and rubbed it till it shone, and then I put on my bonnet and went over to Mrs. Gillette's, who is such a genuine lady that nobody is afraid of her, so I just told her I'd like to sell mother's wheel. Miss Gillette was in the room and she joined right in. 'Of course, we want it, mamma,' says she, 'do send the man right over for it.'"

"I think I'll step over to Mrs. Johnson's and look at it myself," says her mother, and so she came home with me, and when she came in she sat down, and we had a nice visit. She said right away that she'd take the wheel, and would give me ten dollars for it, which I thought a real good price. Then she says, in her soft beautiful way: 'Dear Mrs. Johnson, you're not in any trouble I hope, that makes you anxious to sell this wheel?'

"No," says I, "only those board debts."

"Whose debts? What debts?" says she, in a kind of surprised, inquiring voice. "Board debts," says I, and upon my word, I had to explain to her, although she's one of our church members, and a most lovely woman, but she never had an Ezra for a husband. Well, when she understood it, her great soft eyes filled with tears and she took out her purse: 'Dear Mrs. Johnson,' says she, 'I didn't offer you half enough for that wheel,' and she just made me take twenty dollars."

"It's always Mrs. Gillette's way when she's been doing anything generous to act as if it was nothing remarkable, and so she began to walk around the room and to look at father and mother's pictures and the old clock and the desk. 'You have a fortune in these quaint old things,' says she. 'People give a great deal for them nowadays, but of course you'll never part with them.'"

"No, indeed," says I, and I felt almost hurt to have her speak of it, but she came and took both my hands in her soft, pretty ones, and kissed me, and said she was more grateful to me than she could tell for the wheel, and for a lesson, and then she went away. Poor thing, she's just crowded to death with her big house, and her help and her company! It's no wonder she hadn't thought about the debts."

"Well, you should have seen Ezra when he came home, and I told him, 'Twenty dollars!' says he. 'Who'd have thought we could give twenty dollars towards the debt?' But we did; I put it in my envelope at our thank-offering meeting with this text, which Ezra found for me: 'Thou, O God, has prepared of Thy goodness for the poor.' But there was a gift of a hundred dollars that was taken from another envelope with this verse:

"I thank Thee for thy written word, O God: For every sacred line: But for thy humblest saint, Whose daily life doth shine: A living page, most true, most pure, most sweet, Fresh from thy hand divine."

"That was Mrs. Gillette's, we knew. Of course, she meant Ezra. Nobody ever thought of calling me a saint!"

"Well, a year went by, and if those blessed old boards wasn't just as bad off as ever! Some says they ain't managed right, but Ezra says, 'How can they stop spending when they get such letters, not only from missionaries, but from converted heathen?'

"I'd noticed Ezra looking at the desk, and I just felt in my bones what was coming. It would have to go, much as we set by it, and so it did. We'd kind of planned to give it to son Ezra, but just as like as not there'd have been some hard feeling between him and his brothers about it; so Ezra put all his papers in a bureau drawer that I cleared out for him, and I found places easy enough for all the things I had in the desk, and Mr. Gillette came over and gave us twenty-five dollars for it. Of course, we missed it some, but what's that when you think of what you have received? Mrs. Gillette gave a hundred dollars to foreign missions, and a hundred dollars to home missions last year and I'm pretty sure that the boards are beholden to Ezra for a good share of it, but that's the last thing he thinks of. When son Ezra came to us last fall he was a little put out about the desk, though afterwards he saw it just as we did; but he went out and bought his father a little writing-table, wonderfully handy."

"And now here is the same old story ringing in our ears again about the debts? There's just one thing left. It did seem for a while as if I couldn't part with it. I'm a natural born miser, I am! I was gazing at the clock the other evening, and says I to Ezra: 'What an heirloom this clock is!'"

"Yes," says he, "but the gospel is a great deal older and preciouser heirloom; thanks to the missionaries who bought to England!"

"I was lying awake that night, and got to thinking how I'd been blessed in my godly mother and grandmother, and how glad they'd be to have the old clock help spread the gospel, and then the queerest thing happened. The clock began to tick: 'Free-ly ye have received; free-ly ye have received.'"

"It's kept it going ever since till I'm most crazy. I told Ezra of it this morning, and he says maybe it is this went over to Mrs. Gillette's and stood on that broad landing up on her stairs, it might keep on saying

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# SATINS,

The Finest

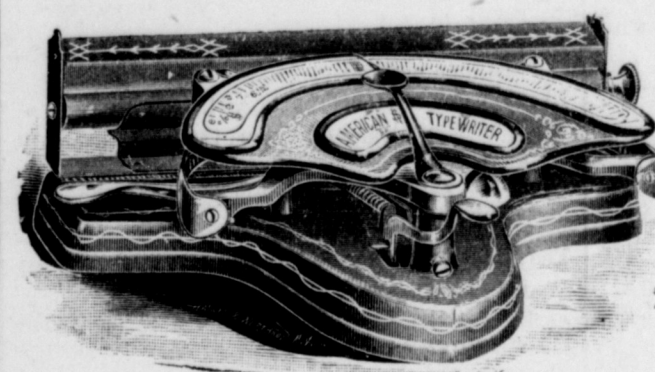
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he same thing, till even Mr. Gillette, who never goes to church, would hear it. Who knows?—New York Observer.

## Legend of the Holy Family.

The poetry of the old Christian legends, though only poetry, rises to a more adequate expression of a mystery so transcendent than any cold recapitulation of the simple narrative. "It happened," says one of these, "that, as Mary and Joseph were going toward Bethlehem, the time came that Jesus should be born, and Joseph led her to a cave by the wayside, into which the light never entered, and, leaving her there, hurried into Bethlehem for help. But, as she entered it, beams as if from the sun forthwith filled it with brightness, and continued to do so while she remained in it. In this cave the child was born, and angels were round about and worshipped the babe, singing 'Glory to God in the highest heavens, and on earth peace and good will to men.' Meanwhile Joseph was hurrying on after help, and when he looked up to heaven he saw that the pole of the heavens stood still and the birds of the air stopped in the midst of their flight, and the sky was darkened. And, looking on the earth, he saw a dish full of food prepared for workmen who were sitting round it; but though their hands were in the dish to eat those who had them there did not move them, nor did those who were already lifting their hands to their mouths; but the faces of all were turned upward. And he saw sheep which were being driven along; but they stood still, and when the shepherd lifted his staff to make them go on it remained lifted. And he came to a spring and saw the goats with their mouths touching the water, but they did not drink, but were under a spell, for all nature was at a pause."—Cunningham Geikie.

## The Shepherds In Judea.

It is easy for any one familiar with the life of Judea now to picture the scene of that memorable night, near the old town of Bethlehem. Night has fallen darkly over all the wilderness, blotting out the landscape, save only the dim outline of Moab on the distant horizon, but revealing the full splendors of the Syrian sky. The wide reaching stillness is broken only by voices of beasts of prey, and the lights of the village, glimmering from behind the olives on the hill to westward, might almost be mistaken for the gleaming of their eyes. The wearied sheep, gathered together and numbered, lie still, in quiet confidence beside their shaggy canine guardians, their masters sleeping lightly in their midst, or under a neighboring tree. Alarm at night was no new thing to them, ever ready as they were to grasp their clubs and sally forth against their wandering foes. But we can imagine with what amazement they would spring up and gaze and listen, when all the sky was filled with a burst of heavenly splendor and the air throbbed around them with the strains of unearthly music.—W. Ewing.

## The Incarnation.

The great wonder of the incarnation is that the son of man could so empty himself of attributes and powers as to be born a babe. We find it hard to empty a pocket for him. He empties himself for us. A full pocket may represent the toil, the outgo of self for a day or a year. We can do that. But who would consent to be emptied

of faculties? Who would give up memory, power of thought, come to a babe's conditions, and slowly creep in a babe's way toward manhood? It was necessary, I were vain to tell man in words that he could have power to become a son of God be a partaker of the divine nature. That would make no impression on man's hopeless despair. It must be shown in actual process, under the most unfavorable circumstances. The passage from the lowliest to the highest must be made by one, in order to be followed by millions in all ages and lands.—Bishop Warren.

## Seeking the Love of God.

Do you want to have love for the children of God overflowing outside your own little circle; to be set in fire with love; that the self-sacrificing love of Jesus may take possession of you, so that you may learn to bear and forbear, with the long-suffering, gentleness, tenderness, the very meekness of Christ, so that you may move about as the helper and servant of all. Do you long for this? Child of God, you need to be filled with the Spirit; cry for it, claim it, rest on it. The Spirit is the Spirit of God's love, the crucified love of Jesus. Receive the Holy Ghost, and the love of God will be shed abroad in your heart's, never to be taken away.—Rev. Andrew Murray.

## Advice to young Men.

I received a letter from a lad, asking me to find him an easy berth. To this I replied: "You can not be an editor; do not try the law; do not think of the ministry; let alone all ships, shops, and merchandise; abhor politics, don't practise medicine; be not a farmer nor a mechanic; neither be a soldier nor a sailor. Don't work. Don't study. Don't think. None of these are easy. O my son! You have come into a hard world. I know of only one easy place in it, and that is the grave."—Henry Ward Beecher.

## A Message From God.

Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised." Prov. 31, 30.

## HIS FACE WAS A MASS OF BLOTCHES.

But now his Skin is Clear as a year Old Babe's.

Scott's Sarsaparilla his Salvation.

Nothing blights existence like the knowledge that our appearance is repellant to those with whom we come in contact, nor is there any relief like that of feeling that the disfiguring causes have been removed. Says Mr. William Alger: My face on one side was a mass of blotches, some of which were constantly full of matter. I ran a bake shop, doing my own work, but my face got so bad that customers drifted away. Then I hired a man and went to a doctor. He said my blood was in a horrible condition. I sold my business and moved to the city where Scott's Sarsaparilla was recommended to me. The first bottle did me much good, and after taking five bottles my skin is as clear as possible, and not a sign of my previous disfigurement. I say Scott's Sarsaparilla is the best blood medicine going and am speaking from experience.

Pimples, blot