

Sunday Reading.

WHY NOT CALLED SOONER?

Mrs. Stephens was an aged saint, a real mother in Israel. For three years she had been kept in her bed with rheumatism, and was a great sufferer; but she had borne all her pain and deprivation without a murmur, as a true 'Shut in' will.

There was only one question that disturbed her mind, and this is the way she would sometimes put to her most intimate friends:

'Why am I kept here so long? Why does not the Lord take me home? I am ready and anxious to go—just waiting for him to call me. Still he does not call. Here I must lie and suffer, and yet I can be of no more use in the world. I won't complain; the Lord doeth all things well; but I simply cannot understand it.'

'It is all for the best, mother,' one of her pious neighbors would reply. You'll understand it some day.'

'Yes, yes, it is all for the best, all for the best.'

Yet the query troubled her a little. But the mystery was made clear some time afterward, and this is the way it happened.

One morning Mr. Freedman—who was Mrs. Stephens' pastor—was sitting in his study and brooding over the unsatisfactory condition of his church. Mr. Freedman, it must be said, was disheartened. There was some matters in his parish that were not just as they should have been, and he was naturally a little disposed to look on the dark side; and when he did that, he was apt to complain somewhat and even 'scold' in his pulpit, as some of his members expressed it.

Everybody knows that "scolding" is the worst thing a minister can do. It is proper at times to rebuke sin a firm and manly way, but whining and complaining will gradually enfeeble a pastor's staunchest friends. Well Mr. Freedman had been doing some of his "scolding" in his last three or four sermons, and while he felt dimly that it was only making matters worse, the depressed state of his feelings seemed to make it impossible for him to change his tone. What he needed was a spiritual tonic.

From what source was it to be supplied? Providence always has a way for the escape of the honest man from the toils of temptation.

After Mr. Freedman had been thinking awhile, he rose and walked to his library shelves to select a book. Perhaps he could find some relief in reading. A volume on comfort for the aged and infirm suggested a new train of thought.

"Yes, I had better call on Mrs. Stephens," he said to himself. It has been a long time since I have called on her, and I learned yesterday that she is very ill."

A half hour later he was knocking at the old lady's door. She greeted him cordially, and did not chide him for neglecting her. After a few words had been exchanged, she turned the conversation to her happy spiritual state.

"I do not know, Brother Freedman, why I am kept here so long," she said; "but I am sure it is for some good and useful purpose. My will is not as wise as God's will. You remember what Paul says: 'All things work together for good to them that love God.' I know that is true, and am content. Never have I been so happy and resigned as I have been since I have been lying on this sick bed. Jesus has been constantly present with me, as he promised to be with his disciples."

As her talk flowed on, her visitor looked at her with glowing eyes, which presently became dim with tears. This suffering saint was teaching him the very lesson in patience and cheerfulness that he needed.

"With all my blessings of health and every comfort. I have been discontented, while this mother in Israel has been happy in the midst of the keenest pain and rarest deprivation," he was thinking to himself, as he listened to her cheering speech.

After a brief prayer he rose to go.

"Thank you for your cheering and comforting visit," said Mrs. Stephens, as she gave him her thin hand.

"It is I who should thank you," he replied. "You have been my teacher today. I have received more benefit than you from this call. Good-by. I shall call again very soon."

"A few days later one of Mrs. Stephens' friends came into see her.

"You should have been at church, grandma," she chirped. "Our pastor, Mr. Freedman, preached a wonderful sermon. It was so cheering and helpful. You know he's been a little despondent of late and have done too much complaining; but yesterday he changed his tone altogether. And, grandma, you can't guess what it was that brought about this happy change."

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"No, I can't guess," she replied; "but the Lord must have put a brighter spirit into his mind in his own good way, I'm sure."

It was his visit to you the other day that helped him so much," declared the friend. "This is what he said at the opening of his sermon: 'I have listened to some powerful sermons in my life; but none of them has ever affected me so strongly as the one preached by Mother Stephens a few days ago when I made her a pastoral call. She had been sorely afflicted for years, as you know, but she was so patient and resigned and happy that my own gloom was put to shame. If she can be glad and cheerful, God forgive me for ever giving up to my feelings of dejection.'

"Then he dropped his voice low, and the congregation was so still that you could have heard a pin drop, when he said: 'I truly believe that God has been sparing Mother Stephens' life that she might preach me the very sermon I most needed before she went to her reward. Hereafter I am going to cheer and help you, my dear people, and I shall refrain from all murmuring and complaint.'

Then you should have heard him preach, grandma. Why, I never heard anything so heartening in my life. It made one feel that it was worth while to be a Christian; that there was everything to encourage one to serve Christ, whose reward is always with him."

The tears rose in Mother Stephens' faded eyes, and they were tears of joy and thanksgiving.

I am so happy," she whispered.

"Now I understand why I haven't been called home! sooner. God has had some work for me to do. That is the explanation. His ways are always best. All things—yes, all things—work together for good to them that love God."

Only two days later Mother Stephens' call came. She was bidden to 'come up higher,' and she went in triumph.

But the effect of her sermon on patience in suffering will never die. Rev. Mr. Freedman kept his pledge to cheer rather than to castigate, and it was the beginning of a career of great usefulness for him, and of great prosperity for his church. He has often said of the sainted old lady:

"She, being dead, yet speaketh."

True to His Word.

The Washington Post vouches for the truth of the following incident: Early last summer two young braves of the Greek quarrelled at a dance for the hand of a young girl whom they both wished to marry. They fought, and one was killed. According to the usage of our courts, the survivor, Watka by name, would have been found guilty only of homicide, but by Indian law he was convicted of murder, and sentenced to death in August. He was then, also according to usage, among the Greeks, released on parole. This is so common a custom that it did not occur to the people of the tribe as possible that he would fail to appear at the 'set time.'

Watka married the girl for whom he fought and worked hard to give her a home and support after his death. On the day of execution he received a reprieve until the last day of October, in order that he might play in base ball games for which he was scheduled. The games were played. On the last day of October Watka set out alone for the execution grounds. Crowds had gathered to witness the tragedy. He walked to the place marked for him, kneeled down, clasped his hands behind him, and closed his eyes. The next moment he lay dead in punishment for his crime.

It did not occur to the Indian spectators that he had done anything worthy of remark. 'A Creek,' they said, simply, 'keeps his word.'

How many white men would have kept that fatal tryst? Is the savage idea of honor along some lines of conduct higher than ours? 'Whatever things are true, whatsoever things are honest,' let us think

on these things. They are helpful, though we find some of them in a poor Creek Indian, his hands red with blood.

The Religious Uses Of Sunday.

Professor Marcus Dods holds to the wisdom of maintaining the strictly religious uses of Sunday Speaking not long ago at Perth on the subject of Sunday observance, he said that if the first step for the providing of the amusement on Sunday was taken, the second would not be long in following—abolishing Sunday rest altogether, because there were many people who honestly preferred to go to their work rather than indulge in amusements. If they abandoned the religious functions of the day they abandoned it altogether. Sunday was a day given them for cultivating certain elements of character. To spend such a day in merely formal attendance at church, in yawning idleness, in gossiping levity, and in vacant weariness, hailing dinner as the event of the day, was a scandal to their common humanity.

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ALLIGATORS PLAYING PYRAMID.

Rules of the Game as They Appear to an Outsider Watching the Sport.

Did you ever see the Zoo alligators play 'pyramid' or any other for their famous games? They were like old-time Græco-Roman boys, and strain and struggle in all sorts of ways at it. When, finally, one wins by getting the other on his back, a tunnier thing occurs. The victor makes a sound like a capping steam, then the others make sounds like escaping steam—alligators' applause, if you please. Then they all become still and watch the vanquished brother squirm to get off his back and onto his legs again. If he's longer in doing it than the gang think is proper they move up in single file and give him a jab with their jaw in his upturned belly. When finally he gets himself righted all hands again set up the steam escaping racket, cheering him long and as loud as they did his victor. Their meaning no fight is shown by their never hurting each other.

Another of the great midsummer pastimes of these Zoo alligators is playing pyramid. The 'gators play pyramid several times a day. To see it done you'd declare that the ugly things had been trained to it. But no. It's just one of the ways of the sporty side of their life. The game comes on by one of the bigger alligators uttering the steam hissing noise. This calls the others to attention. Then the big one says a line or two of alligator talk and stretches himself full length in the centre of the pen. No sooner is this done than a little bit smaller alligator crawls on top of the other and stretches out lengthwise, but head to tail with the other. The second one being settled, he lets off a little steam talk, and a third, a little smaller alligator, climbs up on top of the second and settles down as the second did. They keep this up until six or seven have builded themselves into as strange and wonderful a pyramid as ever an eye beheld. After each one has settled on top of the other he lies perfectly motionless, so that when the pyramid is completed it appears as some marvellous carving.

But this effect lasts only about two minutes after the pyramid is finished. Then comes a new chapter of the act. The Sandow 'gator underneath all starts to crawling. He heads for up and down places in the pen, the game clearly being to see how long it will take him to jolt his strange pyramid load to pieces. And right here develops what appears to be a strict rule of the game. Say there are seven in the pyramid, and the sixth from

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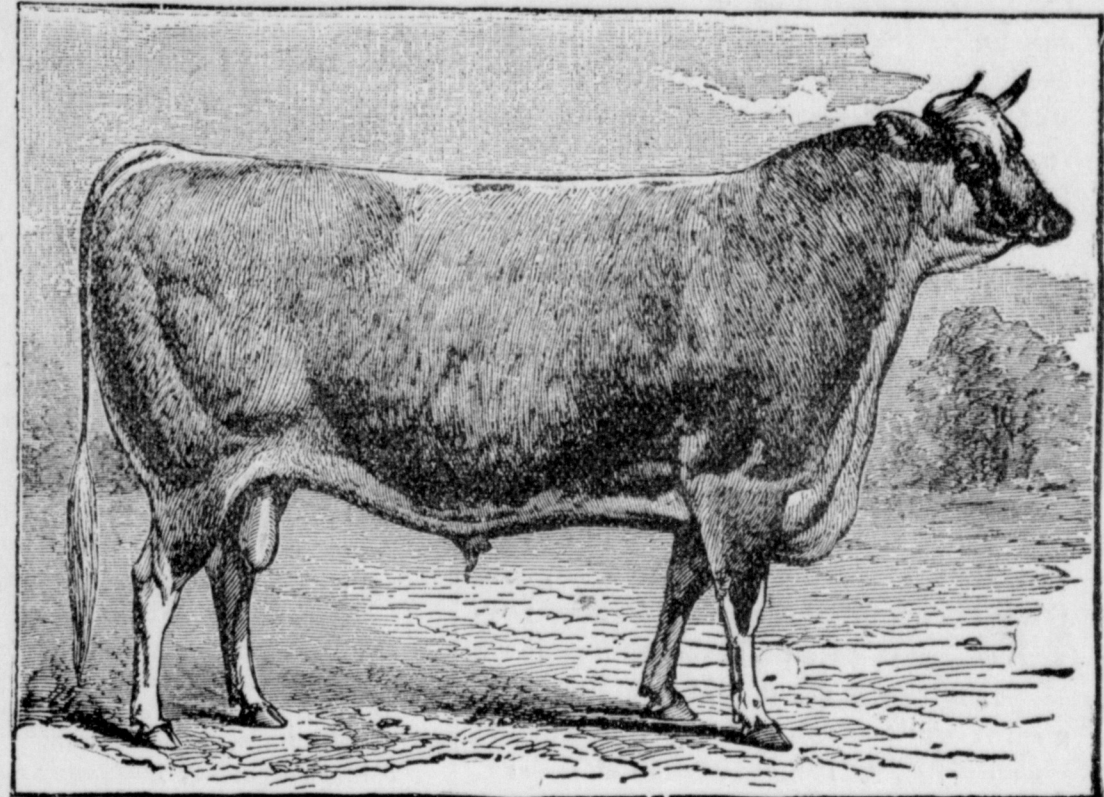
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the bottom jostles off first, taking, of course, the seventh one with him. You'd naturally think the game done for that sixth and seventh alligator. But not at all. It seems that the sixth one is in disgrace for having been shaken off before the seventh one, who was top of the heap, therefore, what does the seventh do but cling to the back of the sixth after they've fallen off, and proceeds to ride Mr. Alligator no six around the pen until Mr. Shadow Alligator has succeeded in dumping the whole shooting match. If the fourth is shaken off before the fifth, the fifth like the seventh, proceeds to ride his disgraced "next" until Shadow gets rid of all his load and another game is started.

Not Quite Successful.

Quite recently (writes a contributor who may be absolved from any charge of malice, as he is himself a Scotsman) a young friend from the Lanarkshire district who was visiting London complained to me of the difficulty of making himself understood by Londoners. A little puzzled, because the Scottish dialect is not exactly an unknown tongue in the metropolis, I questioned him on the subject, and elicited the fact that in his anxiety to pass as an Englishman he had tried to speak as much like a Londoner as possible. That explained the position. The 'confusion of tongues' must have been too much even for the versatile ear of the Cockney.

But the funniest instance was that of an old Paisley woman, who, having spent a few weeks in London, went home quite Anglicised, as she fondly thought.

"I was that changed," she said, in describing her experiences after her return, "ma freens hardly knew me; and when I want out, a' the bodies cam' crooding roun' to hear ma English accent!"

At It Yet.

One Sunday the minister of a small northern country parish church had the misfortune to forget his sermon and did not discover his loss till he reached the church. Suddenly an idea struck him. He sent for John the beadle, and instructed him to give out the one hundred and nineteenth psalm (containing one hundred and seventy-six verses), he hurried home for his sermon. On his journey back to church, he saw the faithful beadle standing at the church door waving his arms and shouting at him. On reaching the door, he exclaimed—"Are they all singing yet John?" "Ay, sir," replied John "they are at it yet, but they're dleepin' like sparries."

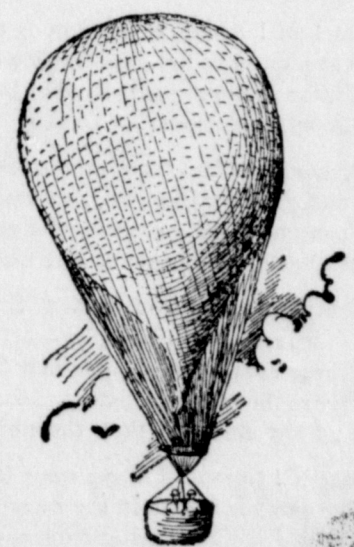
European Wars.

It is calculated that between the years 1800 and 1896 Spain has had more years of war than any other European country, with the possible exception of Turkey, which

country has been at war in one way or another for thirty-seven years out of the ninety-six. Spain comes next with thirty-one years (not including her wars with her colonies). During this century she has been at war with England twice, with Portugal twice, with France twice, and three times with Prussia. She has also had on hand two civil wars (the Carlist wars) extending over periods of eight and nine years. Out of the ninety-six years, Prussia has twelve years of war; France, twenty-seven; and Russia, twenty-four; but there have never been twelve months together when there has not been war in or with some part of the British Empire.

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Yours truly,

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