Sonnet.

Out in the meadow, one fair summer's day,
I went with the mowers to gather the hay;
In the day's sunny glimmer, as hours passed by,
I heard a lark singing, far up in the sky.
I watched the fair songster up, up in its flight,
Till in the blue heavens it faded from sight.
Though vanished from vision, the mowers still heard,
Borne rippling earthward, the song of the bird.
Oh! be it mine ever, though far from friends' sight,
To leave behind memories fraught with delight;
And when through death's portals I join the unseen,
May I be remembered for what I have been.

MARK NEAL.

Slaying Self.

BY REV. DR MACLAREN.

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth."—Col. 3:5.

We have here put very plainly the paradox of continual self-slaying as the all-embracing duty of a Christian.

It is a pity that the Revised Version has retained "mortify" here, as that Latinized word says to an ordinary reader much less than is meant, and hides the allusion to the preceding context. . . . The suggestion of the American revisers, which is printed at the end of the Revised Version, "put to death," is much better, and perhaps a single word, such as "slay" or "kill" might have been better still.

"Slay your members which are upon the earth." It is a vehement and paradoxical injunction, though it be but the echo of still more solemn and stringent words—"pluck it out, cut it off, and cast it from thee." The possibility of misunderstanding it and bringing it down to the level of that spurious asceticism and "severity to the body" against which he has just been thundering, seems to occur to the apostle, and therefore he hastens to explain that he does not mean the maiming of selves, or hacking away limbs, but the slaying of the passions and desires which root themselves in our bodily constitution. The eager haste of the explanation destroys the congruity of the sentence, but he does not mind that. And then follows a grim catalogue of the evil-doers on whom the sentence of death is passed.

Before dealing with that list, two points of some importance may be observed. The first is, that the practical exhortations of this letter begin with this command to put off certain characteristics which are assumed to belong to the Colossian Christians in their natural state, and that only afterwards comes the precept to put on (v. 12) the fairer robes of Christ-like purity, clasped about by the girdle of perfectness. That is to say, Paul's anthropology regards men as wrong and having to get right. A great deal of the moral teaching which is outside of Christianity and which does not sufficiently recognize that the first thing to be done is to cure and alter, but talks as if men were, on the whole, rather inclined to be good, is for that very reason perfectly useless. Its fine precepts and lofty sentiments go clean over people's heads, and are ludicrously inappropriate to the facts of the case. The serpent has twined itself round me, and unless you can give me a knife, sharp and strong enough to cut its loathsome coils asunder, it is cruel to bid me walk. There is not a man, woman, or child on the face of the earth, who does not need, for moral progress, to be shown and helped first how not to be what he or she has been, and only after that is it of the slightest use to tell them what they ought to be. The only thing that reaches the universal need is a power that will make us different from what we are. If we are to grow into goodness and beauty, we must begin by a complete reversal of tastes and tendencies. The thing we want first is not progress, the going on in the direction in which our faces are turned, but a power which can lay a mastering hand upon our shoulders, turn us right round, and make us go in the way opposite to that. Culture, the development of what is in us in germ, is not the beginning of good husbandry on human nature as it is. The thorns have to be stubbed up first, and the poisonous seeds sifted out, and new soil laid down, and then culture will bring forth something better than wild grapes. First, "mortify;" then, "put on."

Another point to be carefully noted, is that, according to the Apostle's teaching, the root and beginning of all such slaying of the evil which is in us all, lies in our being dead with Christ to the world. In the former chapter, we found that the Apostle's final condemnation of the false asceticism which was beginning to infest the Colossian Church, was that it was of no value as a counteractive of fleshly indulgence. But here he proclaims that what asceticism could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, that union with Jesus Christ in his death and risen life will do; it will subdue sin in the flesh. That slaying here enjoined as fundamental to all Christian holiness, is but the working out in life and character of the revolution in the inmost self which has been effected, if by faith we are joined to the living Lord, who was dead and is alive for evermore.

There must, however, be a very vigorous act of personal determination if the power of that union is to be manifested in us. The act of "slaying" can never be pleasant or easy. The vehemence of the command and the form of the metaphor express the strenuousness of the effort and the painfulness of the process, in the same way as Paul's other saying, "crucify the flesh," does. Suppose a man working at some machine. His fingers get drawn between the rollers or caught in some belting. Another minute and he will be flattened to a shapeless bloody mass. He catches up an axe lying by, and with his own arm hacks off his own hand at the wrist. It takes some nerve to do that. It is not easy nor pleasant, but it is the only alternative to a horrible death. I know of no stimulus that will string a man up to the analogous spiritual act enjoined, and enjoined by conscience also, except participation in the death of Christ and in the resulting life.

"Slay your members which are upon the earth," means tears and blood and more than blood. It is easier far to cut off the hand which, after all, is not me, than to sacrifice passions and desires which, though they be my worst self, are myself. It is useless to blink the fact that the only road to holiness is through self-suppression, self-annihilation, and nothing can make that easy and pleasant. True, the paths of religion are ways of pleasantness and paths of peace, but they are steep, and climbing is never easy. The upper air is bracing and exhilirating indeed, but trying to lungs accustomed to low levels. Religion is delightsome; but self-denial is always against the grain of the self which is denied, and there is no religion without it. Holiness is not to be won in a moment. It is not a matter of consciousness, possessed when we know that we possess it. But it has to be attained by effort. "The way to heaven is not by the primrose path." That leads to "the everlasting bonfire." For ever it remains true that men obtain forgiveness and eternal life as a gift for which the only requisite is faith, but they achieve holiness, which is the permeating of their characters with that eternal life, by patient, believing, continuous effort. An essential part of that effort is directed toward the conquest and casting out of the old self in its earthward looking lusts and passions. The love of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of his renewing spirit, make that conquest possible, by supplying an all-constraining motive and an all-conquering power.

The Perils of the Theatre.

BY THEODORE L. CUYLER, D. D.

Young people often ask me the question, "Would it be right for me to go to the theatre? If not, then why not?" Those who propound these questions are not of the dissipated and dissolute class, but clean young men and maidens—too clean to be smirched by a needless exposure to impure influences. That such questions are raised constantly is not surprising; for the playhouse is increasingly persistent in its demands on popular attention and patronage. It fills a constantly enlarging place in the daily journals. Theatres multiply more rapidly than churches in some of our great cities. Theatre-going increases more than church-going. The dead-walls are covered with flaunting pictorial representations of scenes and actors in full dress (or in no dress at all); and many of these are of such disgusting indecency that they deserve suppression by the public authorities. If the pictures be so shameless, what must the originals be? Before our youthful enquirers become patrons of the playhouse, it is but fair that they should know just what perils to their moral nature and to their welfare as immortal beings they are likely to encounter.

The first peril is to *purity of character*. Your eyes and ears are windows and doors to the heart. What enters once, never goes out. Photographs taken on the memory are not easily effaced or burned up: they stick there and often become tempters and tormentors for a lifetime. "I'd give my right hand," said a Christian to me once, "if I could rub out the abominable things that I put into my mind when I was a fast young man." He could not do it; neither will you be able to efface the lascivious images of the impure words which the stage may photograph on your very soul. We do not affirm that every popular play is immoral, or that every performer is impure, or that every theatre-goer is on the scent for sensual excitements. But the stage is to be estimated as a totality, and the whole trend of the average American stage is hostile to heart-purity. The exceptions do not alter the rule. Nor have honest attempts to bring the stage up to a high standard of moral purity been successful. The experiment once made in Boston of so managing a theatre as to exclude every indelicacy from the stage, and every notoriously improper person from the audience, ended in pecuniary failure. The Puritanic playhouse soon went into bankruptcy. The chief object of the manager is to make money; and if he can spice his evening's entertainment with a plot that turns on a seduction or a scene of sexual passion, or with a salacious exposure of physical beauty, the temptation is too strong to be very often resisted.

You must take the average stage as it is, and not as you would like to have it. It is an institution for which, if you patronize, you become morally responsible as much as if you patronize a public library or a public drinking saloon. As an institution it habitually unsexes woman by parading her before a mixed audience in man's attire. Too often it exposes her in such pitiable scantiness of any attire at all that if you saw your own sister in such a plight you would turn away your eyes in horror. Yet you propose to pay your money (through the box-office) to somebody else's sisters and daughters to violate womanly delicacy for your entertainment. If the daughter of Herodias dances to please you, then you are responsible for the dance, both in its influence on the dancer and on your own moral sense. There is no evading before God your accountability for the theatre, if you habitually support it. What its influence upon the average performer is, appears from most abundant testimony. One of the most celebrated actresses of this time informed a friend of mine that she "only enters a theatre to enact her part, and has very little association with her own profession." A converted actor once said to me, while passing a playhouse in which he had often performed: "Behind those curtains lies Sodom." Although sorely pressed to return to his old business, he said that he would starve sooner than go on the stage again. As an institution, the American theatre tolerates sensual impurity in its performers, and presents scenes of impurity to its patrons. If you become one of its patrons, you go into moral partnership with the theatre.

It would be a sufficient condemnation of the average playhouse if it stimulates one evil passion. But other temptations lurk about it. There are *dangerous associations* to be encountered there. It is a prevalent habit with young people who attend the theatre to remain until a late hour amid the excitement of the plays, and then finish off with a midnight supper, or a wine-drink at some neighboring restaurant. To this perilous practice a young lady of my acquaintance owed her downfall. Long after sensible people have laid their heads on their pillows, the habitues of the theatre are apt to be adding a second scene of dissipation to the first one; and it must be pretty hard work for a Christian to finish up such an evening's experience with an honest prayer for God's blessing. That is indeed a poor business and a poor pleasure on which we cannot, with a clear conscience, ask our heavenly Father's approval. Certainly there are enough innocent, wholesome, and beneficial recreations without venturing into the dangerous atmosphere of the playhouse. That is a dear bought pleasure which involves even a risk to the immortal soul.

Another peril of the theatre arises from *the fascination which it too often engenders*. Like wine drinking, it becomes an appetite, and a very greedy appetite. To gratify this growing passion for the playhouse, tens of thousands of young people squander their money and their time most profusely. Other and purer recreations become tame and insipid. Even the entertainments of the stage become dull, unless they are spiced with new excitements to the passions. Wholesome pleasures cease to please, just as a brandy-drinker ceases to be satisfied with cold water or a cup of coffee. It is not recreation, but stimulation, and a very dangerous sort of stimulation too, that you will be after when you become enslaved by the fascinations of the stage.

My young friends, be assured that no sagacious employer ever chooses a clerk, or accountant, or any other employee the sooner because he is a theatre-goer. No sensible man is apt to select the companion of his heart and home because she is a frequenter of a playhouse. No good woman wants her sons and daughters there. No pastor expects that his youthful church members can often go into that impure atmosphere without a terrible damage to their piety. I don't believe that the theatre has ever helped any souls towards heaven. I know that it has sent thousands to perdition.

And now that I have, in kind and candid plainness of speech, pointed out some of the inevitable perils of the playhouse, do you feel like taking the risk?

God so Loved.

I am reminded of a beautiful little incident which I have somewhere read or heard. It was when Luther was having his Bible printed in the vernacular of his beloved German people. A little girl, the daughter of one of his printers, had learned to spell out the words of the book which her father was printing, though largely ignorant of what it was. She had been reared in the faith (?) of Rome, and her whole thought of God was, that he was a great and dreadful Judge into whose presence she must finally come, to give an account for her sins. To her all religion consisted in a constant series of works, prayers, penances and such like acts, by means of which his wrath might be measurably appeased, and His punishment somewhat mitigated. She knew nothing of the "love of God," even if she had ever heard of it. One day she picked up a fragment of paper on which she spelled out these words: *"For God so loved the world that he gave—."* This was all. But it was a new revelation to her. She knew that it came from God's book which her father was printing; but it was a statement which she was entirely a stranger to. She pondered it long and well. Her little sensitive heart became quickly alive to its importance, and as she thought more and more upon it, the Spirit opened her mind and heart to take in the full import of it. With this word, now not only in her hands, but in her heart, her legal fear and dread of God vanished, as darkness before the rising sun. Her heart responded to the revelation, and soon began to sing with joy. She hid the little piece of paper containing this wonderful fragment of truth, in her bosom, as she would have done an amulet, and feasted her heart on it from day to day. Presently her mother, noticing so great a change in her spirit (for she had always been a serious child, and her dread of God had made her a sad one), especially in that she had grown cheerful and happy, and was often found singing some little songs, as if to herself—the mother said to her one day: "Why Gretchen, what aileth thee, child. Thou hast grown wondrously cheerful and happy of late. What is it that has come to thee?" The child pulled forth her wondrous piece of paper and said: "It is this that makes me so happy, mother." "And what is there in that scrap of paper to make thee happy, child?" "O, it is because of what it says out of God's book." "And what does it say, child: read it to me" (the mother could not read). So the child read her wondrous word: "For God so loved the world that he gave. . . ." This did not seem very clear to the mother. So she asked, again: "Gave what, my child? I do not see why that should make thee so happy." "Oh, mother," said the child with the light of heaven filling her whole face, and joy thrilling in her voice, "I do not know what he gave; but if he so loved the world that he gave *anything*, I will never be afraid of him again." Ah, dear child, thou hadst the secret of secrets in thy heart, though thou didst not know the fulness of it. I cannot but think if little Gretchen had known what we know, and what no doubt she came to know herself, that "he gave his *only begotten Son*," his well beloved, in whom he was well pleased, and that to take our sins and put them away in his own body upon the tree, and bring us back to himself, her little heart would have well nigh burst for gladness.

With the assurance of this sincere, eternal, and all-saving love that enables the heart of a sinner to come to rest, and his soul to magnify the Lord. If we take in this love, there is little time or inclination to be making microscopical examination after our love to God. Should the question arise, as it no doubt will, and does: "What will I render unto the Lord for this great love?" The only answer is; "I will take the cup of salvation and call upon his name." (Ps. cxvi, 12.) Nothing pleases God so much as for us to open our hearts and let him come in, or when he opens his heart to us, for us to come in to him. No return is so great as the glad acceptance on our part of that which he so freely bestows.—*Rev. Dr. Pentecost in Independent.*

The Church's Scapegoat.

One bright morning in January, Deacon S., of Hilltown, rode to Plainville and called on Deacon T. Deacon T. was very cordial—expressed himself as glad to see him, and soon asked him what the good word was from Hilltown?

"Well," said Deacon S., "the fact is, we are in a snarl, and I do not know what will come of it. Some of our people think that we had better ask our minister to resign, and some are dead set against it. So there we are; for my part, I think that he had better go before many months, and I told him so this morning."

"But I thought that you all liked him," said Deacon T.

"So we do all like the man," said Deacon S., "and every one says that he is a good preacher."

"Then what is the matter?" said Deacon T.

"Well," said Deacon S., after the drawing of a long breath, "our church members don't attend the prayer-meeting as they ought to; our prayer-meetings are small, and there are so few to take part that we are sometimes discouraged."

"But what has your good minister done?" said Deacon T.

"You have seen our organist," said Deacon S.; "and if you will believe me, on the Sunday before the last, she began to play the response after prayer, just before the minister had pronounced the amen. I was dreadfully shocked, and although I saw and heard her apologize to Mr. Smith for it, I cannot feel as though she were excusable for letting her thoughts so wander during prayer as to commit such an offence against propriety. You certainly cannot approve of her conduct. Just think of it."

"But what has the minister done?" said Deacon T. "Did he refuse to forgive her?"

"Oh! dear! no sir!" said Deacon S. "He is as forgiving as you could wish. But our young people, and our old people too, do not attend church as they did in my young days. Fifty years ago it was hardly considered respectable for a man to go to no place of worship. I am told that this is so everywhere. This habit of staying away from church entirely is a fearful one, especially for the young. What are we coming to, if our young men and women keep themselves aloof from all the means of grace?"

"But," said Deacon T., "you don't tell me what your minister has done to trouble you."

"Well," said Deacon S., "the unregenerate and the outsiders all like him. There is Squire Wilson, you know him. He goes to church pretty regularly, and contributes something towards the minister's salary, but he has no more religion than my horse. He said that our minister was the best man we had ever had in our church. Now I think that we have had others just as good; indeed, I have never gotten over it because our last minister was dismissed."

"But," said Deacon T., "you don't answer my question. What has the minister done?" Then went on Deacon S., "The Universalists have recently begun to have meetings in our village. They have hired a minister and a hall for a year. They have not had meetings for six years, except occasionally, until about six months ago, when there was some religious interest in our midst; and since then they have had meetings by themselves. This takes away some whom we hoped might be drawn into our church, and we have a heavy debt; some of our best supporters have died, and our house don't fill up. We have nothing against our minister, but here we are."

"I should think," said Deacon T., "that a man of such wisdom and good judgment as I have always supposed your good pastor, Mr. Smith, to be, would have known better than to allow a revival in his church. Why could he not have kept things along quietly? He might have known that after such a season of interest the church would be deader than ever, and would probably wish to get rid of him."

"Brother T., I am surprised! surprised and grieved," said Deacon S. "I have often heard you pray for a revival—what would become of our churches without them? What has changed your mind? You trouble me! But I am sure that you are jesting. We need revivals—we need one more in our church. The truth is, we are all dead, and we need some one to stir us up, and we thought that perhaps a change of pastors might give us a little stir."

"I see," said Deacon T., "I see that you are in trouble. You want some one to take you poor, sleepy, dull Christians by the hair of the head, and give you a good, thorough shaking. Much joy to the man who does it."

"You think, I presume, that you will be grateful for the operation. But, my brother, this is too serious a subject for jesting. I fear that you have sinned a great sin. In all that you have said, you have not uttered a word derogatory to Mr. Smith's character, ministerial or personal, and I have yet to hear the first word against him. You have picked up the faults of your church and society, and are trying to make your good minister the scapegoat to bear them all. I cannot but think that had your church spent as much time in praying for a blessing on the word preached, and in earnest, personal effort for the salvation of sinners, as you have spent in trying to bring about a change in the pastorate, you would all be happier and better. I do believe that if you had been trying to hold up the hands of your pastor, instead of trying to undermine his position, God himself would have condescended to arouse you from your dullness. You know, just as well as I do, that a minister cannot work alone. He must have the help of a live church in order to accomplish much for the Master."

"Well," said Deacon S., "you remember the passage 'like priests, like people.'"

"No," said Deacon T., "I don't remember any such passage. Here is a Bible, let us find it, if it is here. Hosea 4: 9, reads thus: 'And there shall be, like people, like priest!' It is often quoted wrong, as you just now did."

"Our churches are many of them in a sad condition, and this frequent change of pastors is a very unfortunate thing for the churches; but the saddest and the meanest thing about it, is the effort to make the minister responsible for all the troubles in the parish. Your minister is a Christian gentleman, and I should like to see him treated as such a man should be; but I remember the words, 'The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.' But I am sorry to see Christian ministers persecuted by those who call themselves Christians. I remember that I once heard you pray at our county conference that some of our children might become ministers of Christ. My dear brother, when I hear that prayer, I always pray for grace to be willing that either of my boys should become a minister, and I trust that I shall have it. But I cannot forget how soon the 'hosannas' of the multitude were changed to 'crucify him' in the life of our Lord."—*Vermont Chronicle.*

Why He Felt so Badly.

One of the secretaries of a Baptist Missionary Society was visited recently by a college class-mate, who, after attaining eminence as a Presbyterian clergyman, became a Professor of Greek in one of our large colleges. After talking over old times and old friends, the Professor expressed warm admiration of the piety, intelligence, zeal and enterprise of Baptists, but felt he must protest against the bigotry of their keeping members of other denominations away from the "communion" table. He was quietly asked by the Secretary if the Presbyterian Standards did not make baptism a necessary qualification for the Lord's Supper. He admitted it, but answered:

"We acknowledge your baptism to be valid. You should ours."

"Do you acknowledge immersion to be baptism as a concession to Baptists, because you cannot deny it? We cannot admit sprinkling to be baptism, and you cannot as a Greek scholar."

"I say this, that Christians should admit each other to the Lord's Supper. Close communion is very offensive."

"Yes, an offensive term, and generally used to give offence, and of those who use it not one in a hundred ever desires to come. They want the invitation, want it because we can't give it; in fact, want a complaint."

"No, we want to sit down at the Lord's table with those who expect to sup with us in heaven."

"Well, let me ask, you have been a Christian twenty-five years and a preacher twenty; how many times have you what you call 'communed' with any other Presbyterian Church than the one you were a member of, or officiated for?" He couldn't remember any case, but thought he had once or twice at some watering-place.

"Did you ever 'commune' with the Methodists?"

"No; but circumstances might arise"—

"Yes, but never mind circumstances, let us look at facts. Did you ever 'commune' with Episcopalians?"

"No, and what's more I wouldn't. You won't catch me kneeling at an altar, and calling it a table."

"Were you ever in your life slighted or annoyed in any way by Baptists' not inviting you?"

"Yes, I preached one morning for the First Baptist church in Providence, and announced the Lord's Supper for the afternoon, and was not myself invited to return."

"Would you have returned?"

"No, I had another engagement, but it was uncharitable not to ask me!"

Such facts as these could be verified in the experience of hundreds. There is little, very little intercommunion, and yet from the frowns, rebukes, and protests of the howlers against "close communion," as it is falsely called, people are made to think it is of practical moment, and that the denominations are eager to "commune" with Baptists—which they are not. They are eager to have their baptism acknowledged. "There's the rub."—*Exchange.*

Sunny and Bright.

BY [illegible]

A visitor went one cold day to see a poor girl, kept at home by a lame hip. The room was on the north side of a bleak house. It was not pleasant without, and was certainly cheerless within. Poor girl, she seemed to have very little cheer, and as you entered the room the first thought was: "If she only had a sunny room, on the south side of the house." Thinking of this her visitor said: "You never have any sun, not a ray comes into these windows. Sunshine is everything; I wish you could have a little." "O," the young girl answered, "my sun pours in at every window, and even through the cracks. All the light I want is Jesus. He shines in here and makes everything bright to me." And no one could doubt her who saw the sweet smile of happiness on her upturned face. Yes! Jesus "the Son of Righteousness" shining in, can make any spot beautiful and any home happy. Let Jesus shine in all the little hearts, and make them little rays of light, shining in dark places, lighting up home, school and play-ground. Ah! there isn't a spot where the little feet touch that will not reflect the light that Jesus gives. Jesus is God's gift to us. He came to take us by the hand, and lead us from under the cloud of God's anger into the sunshine, the great light of his grace. The hand he gives us is pierced—was pierced—for us; if it had not been it could not lead us into the light. A Christian's (a Christ's child's) life should be the sunniest, brightest life in the world.

A Little Child Shall Lead Them.

Little Mary was sitting with her Uncle George one afternoon. Uncle George had told her to keep quiet, as he had some accounts to look over; so Mary busied herself with a picture-book.

For an hour all was still; then Mary heard her uncle say:

"There! I have quite a nice little sum laid up against a time of need."

"What are you talking about, Uncle George?" asked Mary.

"About my treasures, little girl, that I have laid up."

"Up in heaven?" asked Mary, who had heard her father, that morning, read about laying up treasures in heaven.

"Oh no, Mary, my treasures are all on the earth—some in banks, and some in other places," answered Uncle George.

"But ain't you got any in heaven too?" asked Mary.

"Well, I don't believe I have," said Uncle George, thoughtfully; "but run away to mother now, for I am going out."

Uncle George went out, and was gone a good while; but all the time he was thinking that, after all, perhaps he was not so well off, if he had no treasures laid up in heaven, to be ready when he left this world with his money behind him. He was so impressed with the thought, that he wisely determined to commence at once to lay up treasures in heaven. He did so, and many a dollar which he had laid by was used to help in laying up better and more enduring treasure.

Little Mary never knew, until years after, when she also, with a clearer understanding of what it meant, began to lay up for herself treasure in heaven, that it was her childish question that started Uncle George on an active Christian life.

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