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Love's Welcome to the Penitent.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is connected with the two preceding parables which formed the text of our Bible lesson for last week. It is like those parables in its gracious purpose of teaching God's compassionate love for the erring and sinful, while it differs from them both, both in respect to form and in the greater fulness and impressiveness of the truth presented. The other parables had led up to this and prepared the minds of the hearers for the grand climax of this peerless parable in which the loving-kindness of the Heavenly Father toward sinful men is set forth with matchless beauty and power. The case of a soul alienated from God by its sin is not to be adequately set forth by the illustration of a lost piece of money or a lost sheep. A lost man is infinitely more to God than a lost coin is to its owner, or a lost sheep to its shepherd. He is what a lost son is to a father, longed for with the love of a father's heart which cannot be satisfied but by the son's return. When Jesus would make us understand how much God cares for men—even for the outcast and the despised—he cannot stop short of this story of the Prodigal, in which we see how longingly and forgivingly the wounded love of a good father goes out to an absent and erring son.

It will be observed that this parable differs from the others in that it brings out strongly the free action and therefore the responsibility of the sinner. In the parable of the coin there is no hint of free action, and in that of the lost sheep there is scarcely more than a hint. But in the third parable, the son, of his own will and deliberately, turns his back upon his father and his home. So, in the restoration, the coin is simply passive, the sheep is nearly so. They do not enter into fellowship with the joy which their finding causes. But in the story of the prodigal there is a difference. He responds to the compassion which he hopes still survives for him in the father's heart, he arises and comes, is met and welcomed and participates in all the gladness of the feast that love makes for him.

In seeking to draw from this parable the lessons it is designed to teach, it seems important to lay some emphasis upon the folly of turning away from God. In the earthly relations of father and son separation is often right and necessary. The son must leave his home and perhaps go into a far country. But it is never necessary that a young man should go away from God. This is the great temptation which in every generation has beset the young man, the supreme folly into which he is liable to fall. What mistakes of thought or judgment or action he may make, matter comparatively little, if only he holds fast by God. But if he turn his back upon his Heavenly Father, rejecting the light of truth, making his ear deaf to the pleadings of love, and spending in wasteful dissipation or in alien service the substance which God has given, then, there is indeed a condition of things which must lead to terrible disaster and bitter distress, for "mighty famines" are sure to be encountered by the man who, in his search for something to satisfy his soul, has turned his back upon God. The far country which in his foolish expectation was to yield him all manner of delights has at last nothing for him but swine-feeding and husks.

When the prodigal "comes to himself" he resolves to come back to his father. So when the sinner comes to his true self he arises and comes to God. The humble repentance which makes the prodigal willing to accept a servant's place in the Father's house is an indication that his madness is past. And when the insanity of rebellion has gone out of the heart then the Father's face will be sought and found.

But the great central truth of the parable is that of the Father's love. The fountain of divine grace flows on ceaselessly. The Father's heart waits in yearning tenderness for the return of the wanderer. Love's welcome to the prodigal is not to the place of a hired servant who shall have food and raiment in return for the services he may perform. Love's welcome is the glad and bountiful welcome of parental tenderness receiving back safe and sound a son long mourned as lost. It is a welcome to sonship and to all the largeness and blessing of the Father's house. And this gospel of the grace of God Jesus Christ declares to men in order that all those who are wandering in far countries may come home and find love's forgiveness and love's welcome.

Editorial Notes.

—Enquiries sometimes come to us for second-hand Sunday School libraries. If any Sunday Schools in connection with our churches have books or papers in a fair state of preservation, which they would be willing to donate or sell to a needy school, we shall be pleased if they will send to this office a general statement of what they have to dispose of and the terms, in order that we may pass the information on to the enquirers. Just now there is at hand an enquiry for books or papers from Mrs. Wm. H. Craig, East Sable, Shelburne county, N. S. Any School having books or papers to dispose of may communicate directly with Mrs. Craig.

—The Congregationalist of Boston, which has always stood for high ideals in religious journalism and worked with great ability for their realization, has taken an advanced step by making the first issue of each month considerably thicker than the ordinary weekly issue. This monthly issue, which is to put forth under the title of "The Christian World," embraces a wider outlook and considerably more matter than the ordinary issue. This new departure was instituted with the present month, and the publishers say that the reception which their new venture has met with is very encouraging. The Congregationalist already stood well up in the first rank of the world's religious journals, and this new feature will still further increase its value and attractiveness.

—It would seem to be a truly Christ-like spirit which leads men and women to devote themselves to ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of those afflicted with the terrible and loathsome disease of leprosy. The self sacrificing ministry of Father Damien to the lepers of Molokai, which called forth the admiration of Robert Louis Stevenson, is well known. Some months ago we called attention to the remarkable work of Mary Reid, missionary to the lepers in a Himalayan district of India. More recently we have seen mention of a mission to lepers in Madagascar, under the direction of Father Beyzim, a Polish Roman Catholic priest. As a result of the publication in Europe of the work of this mission, it is said that five nuns have been led to volunteer for service in connection with it, and these women are now in Madagascar, ministering to more than six hundred lepers.

—A correspondent in another column presents objections to what has been called "the historic roll" in connection with the raising of the proposed Century Fund of $50,000 for missions. As we understand the matter the proposal (embodied in the report of the committee on the subject) to have such a roll, was negatived by the Convention, and the only roll approved was what is called the "In Memoriam Roll" on which, by the payment of a sum of not less than five dollars, any one can have the name of a deceased relation or friend inscribed. (See MESSENGER AND VISITOR of September 6, page 8). To our mind the objections felt by many others besides our correspondent, to the "historic roll" idea were not unreasonable, and it is well that it should be generally understood that the proposal to have such a roll has been dropped. To the In Memoriam Roll there cannot, we think, be any reasonable objection, and we trust that many will take advantage of the opportunity thus afforded to honor the memory of the departed.

—About five years ago Mr. Samuel L. Clemens—more generally known as Mark Twain—entered upon the task of paying off, by means of lectures and other literary labors, a debt of $200,000 owed by an insolvent firm of publishers for which he felt himself to be financially responsible. Mr. Clemens has kept his honorable purpose steadily in view. He has made lecturing tours in India, South Africa and Australia, and after spending some time of late in Europe, has now returned to his own country as his permanent home. It is gratifying to learn that Mr. Clemens has fully achieved his purpose in paying off the large debt for which he held himself responsible, and further, that his income from unencumbered royalties from his books is quite sufficient for his maintenance for the rest of his life. For a man to succeed in paying off so great a debt by literary work, after having reached the age of sixty-four, is probably an unparalleled achievement. If we admire Mark Twain as a prince amongst humorists, we must equally admire Samuel L. Clemens for his heroic assumption and successful discharge of a duty which too many men, making far more pretensions to Christianity than he, are willing quietly to ignore.

—A young man who was clerk in a New Jersey bank was a very clever accountant. He was clever also at other things, so clever that he seemed for a while to succeed in walking in two different paths at the same time. To the people of Elizabethport he seemed a model young man, living moderately and economically on his rather slender salary and helping to support his mother and sister. But there was a very different side to his life. His evenings and many of his nights were spent in New York, where he lived a gay life, spending in prodigal profusion, money obtained by systematic peculations of the funds of the bank in which he was employed. The true character of the man was not discovered until his pilferings had amounted to more than a hundred thousand dollars. Now his gay career is at an end, he is a fugitive from justice, his name covered with infamy, his life ruined, his family disgraced, his mother heart-broken over her son's ruin. Very likely that young man wishes now that it were possible for him to go back to honest ways and really to live the quiet, humble life that he seemed to be living in the New Jersey town. That is impossible for him. But it is possible for many another young man to profit by the warning which this case presents and determine to resist to the utmost every temptation to forsake the pathway of integrity.

—The article on Consecration which we publish from the pen of Rev. W. N. Hutchins of Canning is a characteristically strong and judicious discussion of the subject. It is worthy of a careful reading. If those who by profession are Christians did more generally recognize in a devout and practical way the lordship of Jesus Christ, the result would be great gain to themselves and to the influence of Christianity in the world. We fear that Mr. Hutchins is quite correct in thinking that the matter is apt to be treated with too little seriousness, and we fear too that the custom of requesting people to stand up in a public meeting as a sign and seal of their complete consecration to God, is one that is likely to result in more harm than good.

—Every lover of hymns will be sure to enjoy Miss Bishop's article entitled, A Joyful Saint. The devout and stirring strains of Watts did much to cheer and help our fathers and grandfathers on their pilgrimage. And the people of this generation have not outgrown him. Our young people will derive much advantage from making his acquaintance, and with advancing years they will appreciate him more and more. We may miss in Watts the refined and tender graces of expression which charm and soothe us in the writings of some sacred poets, but there is in his hymns a grasp of fundamental truths, a strength, directness and simplicity—often rising to sublimity—of thought and language, that appeal to the minds and hearts of all sorts and conditions of men and afford fit expression for lofty Christian sentiment and profound emotion. Of course the quality of Watts' work was by no means all on a level with his best. It seemed as if necessity was laid upon him to sing, and if he could not make a good hymn, he was not above making a poor one. Some of the worst were to be sure rather atrocious, but there are good ones enough to immortalize the singer, and in his best our souls are lifted up as on eagles' wings in the utterance of joyful and triumphant praise.

—Certain persons, either from ignorance or from other motives, have on divers occasions taken it upon themselves to write bitter or contemptuous things of Christian missionaries in heathen countries. It is no matter for surprise that this class of writers should represent the work of the missionaries in China as one of the chief causes of the anti-foreign outbreak which is at present causing so much trouble in that country. Such however is not the opinion of men who have the best right to be regarded as intelligent and unbiased authorities upon the subject. Such men as the Hon. John W. Foster, formerly Secretary of State in the United States, and subsequently Counsellor of the Chinese Government in its negotiations for peace with Japan; the Hon. John Barrett, late Minister of the United States to Siam; Hon. Charles Denby and the Hon. George T. Seward, formerly United States Ministers to China, have all of them nothing but good to say of Christian missionaries and their influence in eastern countries. Hon. Mr. Seward lately wrote in the Boston Herald: "During my twenty years stay in China I always congratulated myself that the missionaries were there. I have the profoundest admiration for the missionary as I have known him in China. He is a power for good and peace, not for evil."

—At the recent session of the Kings County, N. S., District Meeting, a resolution was adopted referring to the retirement from the active duties of the pastorate of Rev. M. P. Freeman, lately pastor at Billtown. The resolution gives expression to the regard entertained for Mr. Freeman by his brethren in the ministry, because of "his beautiful Christian spirit, unblemished character, unflagging zeal, nobility of purpose and profound loyalty to the Word of God." All who have had the happiness to know our brother Freeman will heartily confirm this testimony. And now that increasing years have made it necessary for him to lay aside labors in which he has been so long and so faithfully employed, we trust that there may be for our brother a long and sunny eventide of life, occupied with such ministries as his strength may be equal to and blessed with the assurance of larger life beyond. We would not forget too that there are other of our ministers who, after long and faithful service, have lately retired from the arduous labors of the pastorate, to whom these words may apply with equal propriety. There occur to us in this connection the names of Revs. Alfred Chipman and P. O. Foster, who must be nearly contemporaries in age with Mr. Freeman, and who have lately established pleasant homes for themselves in Berwick, N. S., one of the most beautiful of our country towns.

—Thanksgiving-day was observed in St. John by a very general closing of business places. Religious services appropriate to the day were held in many of the churches, the Baptist congregations of the city uniting in a service in the Leinster St. church. Pastor Smith presided, and the sermon was preached by Rev. H. F. Waring of Brussels St. Rev. A. White of Main St., Rev. J. H. Hughes, and Rev. G. W. Springer of Jemseg were also present and took part in the services. Dr. Gates was absent from the city. The congregation was quite a large one, although, considering that it was supposed to represent the united Baptist strength of the city, it might well have been very much larger. The service throughout was one of much interest and the sermon was strong in thought, earnest in spirit and every way appropriate. Mr. Waring selected as the text of his discourse the 117th Psalm. He dwelt upon the reasons for and the essence of thanksgiving, showing how much the people of Canada have to be thankful for and indicating ways in which a sense of the divine goodness should be expressed. The preacher pointed out that righteous living was one of the ways in which a people's thanksgiving might find the truest expression. This led him to speak of national sins and shortcomings, which called for repentance and amendment—especially instancing the evils of the liquor traffic and the prevalent corruption in connection with political elections. In this connection Mr. Waring spoke out plainly and forcefully, as every preacher in the land ought to speak, condemning bribery and political corruption in all its forms as treason to the principle of popular government and infamy in the sight of God.