

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL & GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

NEW SERIES.
Vol. XI. No. 14.

HALIFAX, N. S., WEDNESDAY, APRIL 4, 1866.

WHOLE SERIES.
Vol. XXX. No. 14.

Poetry.

Psalm vi.

Domine, ne in jure.

CHASTEN me, O Lord! but not in anger.
Chide me not in Thy displeasure sore,
Spent with weeping, wearied out with languor,
Must I suffer more?

"Peace, my child, for I thy loving Father
Smite in love, and never smite in vain;
One by one the children round me gather,
Perfected by pain."

Every night I lay me down in sorrow,
Every morning finds me drowned in tears,
Endlessly to-morrow and to-morrow
Grows to months and years.

"Yet through paths assad, and hearts as hollow,
I, thy Lord and Master went before;
My disciple, is it hard to follow
With the cross I bore?"

No; but should my spirit fading, dying,
Lose that presence, vision wearing dim,
Can I, in the grave's dark chambers lying
Even remember Him?

"Christian, by that low and narrow portal,
Not so sad thy trembling soul should be;
By the breath which made that soul immortal,
He remembers thee."

Hush, my heart, the Lord has heard thy weeping,
Let Him stay thee as it likes Him best;
None can harm thee now, awake or sleeping,
Labouring or at rest.

Religious.

Mr. Wills's Cruelty.

Do you see the cottage yonder, almost opposite the railway station? Some years ago a Mr. Barker lived in it, and I must tell you something about him.

Mr. Barker was a clerk in a bank in Lombard Street. His salary was not by any means large, still he could live pretty comfortably upon it, as he had only to provide for himself and his little two year-old daughter, Annie, whose mother, to his great grief, had died a few days after the child was born. Mr. Barker had loved his wife so passionately, that when she was lying in her coffin, he felt almost as Jonah did when he said, "It is better for me to die than to live." But the child raised its voice, reminding him that he was not left wholly alone in the world, and that his beloved wife had left him a memorial—a living portrait of herself. So the child had a double love bestowed upon it; the mother's portion, in all its fullness, being bestowed upon the child. Annie soon became her father's idol, and he not only found it was better for him to live than to die, but the hope grew strong within him that he might live very, very long, to see the child develop her beauties and talents, already beginning to manifest themselves.

"But suppose you don't live so very long," said Mr. Wills, the grocer, a middle-aged man, who lived a few doors from Mr. Barker, and who used to meet him regularly at the station, going up to town. The train was behind time this morning, and so they paced up and down the platform, chatting in a lively way, and of course little Annie soon turned up; for Mr. Barker was full of her, and could scarce talk of aught else.

"Sir!" replied Mr. Barker, whose mind was not at all prepared for that unexpected turn of thought.

"Suppose you do not live so very long?" repeated Mr. Wills, this time with a very marked accent upon the *not*.

"Ah, well; of course everything is possible, for we are mortal. But I come of a strong, long-lived race, you must know. My father lived to the age of eighty-two, and my mother almost saw her eightieth year."

"But then, suppose that little Annie herself does not live long," rejoined Mr. Wills.

"Oh, don't speak in that way, Mr. Wills," cried Mr. Barker, with an expression of fright. "It would kill me to think of it."

Here the train came up, and the two neighbours hurried to their seats. Mr. Barker was glad that the conversation had been bro-

ken off. He could not but think it cruel of Mr. Wills to speak so. But though he was angry with him, he liked him. Mr. Wills had shown him much kindness during his poor wife's illness. Mrs. Wills had taken care of little Annie like a tender mother; and many kind services had followed, which had contributed very much to soothe Mr. Barker under his severe affliction. It was true Mr. Wills had something serious-looking, even stern, about him; but he was an honest, clear-sighted, and kind-hearted man for all that.

Now it was cruel of Mr. Wills, if you like to call it so; but there are cruelties which proceed from true love; and had Mr. Wills never spoken in that way, he would perhaps have been still more cruel. His was the cruelty of the able surgeon who applies the lancet to the patient's foul tumour. To tell the truth, Mr. Barker seemed to care little about the God who is in heaven, now that he had a little goddess beside him on earth. Everybody would not have observed it; for Mr. Barker led a very regular, respectable life, and was seldom missing at church. But it was different with Mr. Wills, who in his intercourse with his neighbour went a little deeper than the state of the weather, the crops, or the prospects of trade. He discovered that to Mr. Barker, God, the Creator of heaven and earth, was little else than an unknown mysterious being, living far off at some remote spot in the universe, where He had his hands too full of the great concerns of creation to give his constant attention to that little speck of dust which we inhabit. Mr. Wills found also that, to Mr. Barker's mind, eternity was quite an open question, a vague blank, indeed, of which he could not speak at all definitely. Still he had no objection to believe that there was such a place as heaven, and he hoped that, by continuing to do his duties every day, and giving to everybody what was right, he would get there safely and without difficulty. These notions were of course quite different from what the Bible teaches us, but Mr. Wills had also observed that the Bible was placed on the highest shelf of Mr. Barker's little library. The little elegant mahogany book-case in the front parlour contained some nicely bound volumes about history, natural philosophy, &c., and the book shelf suspended on the wall of the back parlour was filled with novels and light reading, which were often resorted to to pass an hour after little Annie was asleep; but the Bible was carefully laid out of sight. Indeed, there was nothing in the house which indicated that its owner from time to time engaged his attention on other things than such as the eye can see and the hand can touch.

Now Mr. Wills was of opinion that visible and tangible things, good and useful as they may be in themselves, yet have little concern with the saving of a man. From experience, he knew that he was a sinner, and through faith had laid hold on Jesus Christ. He knew, too, that his neighbour, Mr. Barker, was much in need of that Saviour, and from his conversations with Mr. Barker he had observed that there were many things in his heart separating between his soul and Jesus, and that of all these things none was so great as his absorbing love to little Annie. Nor could Mr. Wills entirely disapprove of the lovely little creature occupying a place in her father's affections; for how could any earthly father be the image of the Heavenly Father, if he did not tenderly love his children! But Mr. Barker's love to little Annie was all absorbing; it so entirely engrossed his affections, that there was really no room for Christ. And this, in Mr. Wills's opinion, was a very dangerous state of things, both for the father and the child.

Mr. Wills was not a doctor, but having himself trained up a numerous family he could pretty well judge whether a child was robust or not. Much to his grief he had observed some serious signs of debility in little Annie, which always reminded him of her mother, who had given birth to her child while in the last stage of consumption. He was almost certain that the day was not far distant when the poor father would see his little darling droop away before his eyes, like a rose after a severe night frost; and feeling deeply for the poor man, he would start when he pictured to himself the moment when this sad

trouble would come on Mr. Barker. At present, it was clear Mr. Barker saw nothing of it. But Mr. Wills thought it would be wise and good to try to gradually prepare him for the day of evil which was inevitable, above all, to endeavour in time to provide him with a "rod and staff which would comfort him," when his knees staggered from the heavy stroke which would fall upon him.

So much for the cruelty which Mr. Wills exhibited when he said to his neighbour; "Suppose little Annie does not live very long?"

After that time, when Mr. Barker happened to meet Mr. Wills, he studiously avoided everything that might lead the latter to turn the conversation to such grave topics as death and eternity. But man is singularly under the grasp of circumstances. A powerful king in his own estimation, he has not even the power to determine at one moment what he will be thinking of in the next—nor even what he may be talking about with somebody else. It happened one evening that when Mr. Wills stepped in he found Mr. Barker absorbed in looking at a photograph of his deceased wife, which he was holding in his hand, while a tear glistened in his eye.

"She was a good and lovely woman," said Mr. Wills, taking the portrait from his friend's hand, and looking at it with an expression of deep feeling.

"Indeed, she was; and how short was my happy dream by her side!"

"Just so, it was but a dream; and so is this whole life of ours. The real life is yet to come."

"I believe you are right. I was just thinking while looking on that portrait, that surely it is impossible so much goodness and beauty could be lost for ever; or should have been destined to shine only for a few years, and never to show its unparalleled brightness again. Oh certainly, I shall, I must see her again one day in a better world than this."

"Two things are necessary to your realising that hope," said Mr. Wills, in a pensive tone.

"What are they?"

"First, that she is in the better world; let us hope, however, that that is the case."

"And secondly?" asked Mr. Barker, with some curiosity. "Of course," he added, "that I am there too. Well, let us also hope that I am on the way to it."

"I could not well hope it unless I were not in doubt of it," observed Mr. Wills. "When we are sitting in the railway carriage we do not merely hope that we are on the way to town, but we are sure of it. A man who only hopes that he is on the way to a certain place, is most likely not on the way. As it is clear that he does not know the way, it is to be feared he must have started at random."

"Why," said Mr. Barker, after a few moments' reflection, "I think I am pretty certain I am going to heaven."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Mr. Wills. "What makes you certain of that?"

"Well, I don't see why I should not go there. I have always done my duty as far as I could."

"That's more than I can say of myself," answered Mr. Wills, in a soft voice.

"Nor have I done any harm to anybody, as far as I am aware," continued Mr. Barker.

"I wish I could give the same testimony about myself," replied Mr. Wills, with some gravity.

"But, Mr. Wills, you don't mean to say that you have neglected your duties and robbed other people?" exclaimed Mr. Barker.

"Not in the sight of man, nor do I know myself guilty before a human tribunal," replied Mr. Wills; "but when we speak of going to heaven, we of course think of appearing before a higher tribunal—before a Judge who has it in his power to open or to shut heaven according to his justice. Before that omniscient, holy, and almighty Judge, I feel I could say nothing in my own defence, if He reminded me of thousands of evil thoughts that have risen in my mind, of thousands of unkind words which came from my lips, of thousands of good deeds which I ought to have done, but which I left undone because I was too proud, too selfish, or too careless to do them. I feel I am a sinner in God's sight, Mr. Barker; and so you must perceive that

the ground upon which you rest your certainty of going to heaven cannot be mine. I rest my safety upon my having an all-sufficient advocate who will plead my cause and get me clear off in that great assize day. But of course you are not in need of Him, for I learn just now that you are a righteous man, who are able to plead for yourself."

"Why—of course—" said Mr. Barker, after a pause, "if you choose to look at matters in that light—of course—many things may be pointed out in my life too which might have been better than they were. We have all our defects and faults. But do you really think the great God will take notice of that?"

"If you are sure He will not," replied Mr. Wills, "that is very well; then you need not care about those faults and defects, as you call them. I am not sure of it, however. On the contrary, I am assured that He will place all those things in the light of his holy countenance. And so I have betaken myself to the crucified Saviour, who has atoned for all my sins, faults, and defects; and it is in Him, and in Him alone, that I know and feel myself safe. But of course you need not go to Him, for as to your faults and defects, you are sure that God will take no notice of them."

Mr. Barker looked his neighbour in the face to ascertain whether he could detect a smile on it, but Mr. Wills looked as grave as ever.

"There is something uncommonly caustic in your words," he said.

"In my words, perhaps, but not in my mind. I only want you to examine your ground well. You will not be able to live your life over again, in case you should at its close discover that you had taken the wrong way. I do not believe that you can get to heaven without Jesus. But if you think you can, very well, it is your business to be well-assured of that. But I almost forgot the end of my visit. I have brought you a little bottle of medicine for little Annie's cough. I would advise you to give it to her. It can do her no harm, at any rate."

"Thank you," said Mr. Barker, taking the bottle from his friend's hand. "You seem to think often of Annie's cough."

"Well, I believe the sooner she gets rid of it the better."

"Do you really think there is something the matter with her?"

"I hope not, but children of her age are delicate creatures, you know. They may stand an amazing amount of suffering, but then they may also suddenly succumb."

"Pray do not speak in that way, Mr. Wills. It is too cruel."

"Well, my dear friend, I will be silent about it at once. Only—"

"Only?"

"I wish your hopes for happiness were resting upon a surer foundation than a little creature of flesh and blood, however lovely and endearing. Suppose God in his wisdom takes her away from you one day, what will be left you to lay hold on if you have no Saviour for your soul? I wish you could give yourself and your child into the hands of Jesus. He is the only true physician, both for your soul and her body."

"Cruel, cruel man!" said Mr. Barker to himself after Mr. Wills had left. He went to the nursery, threw up the cover of the little cradle, and, with a feeling at once of unutterable delight and melancholy, stared at the beautiful fever-flushed little face. Alas! the child was too beautiful. It was as though nature was knowingly hastening the realisation of its masterly conception because its time was short.

"Oh no, no," the enthusiastic father whispered. "It cannot be! Impossible!"

Then, having impressed a gentle kiss on the thin coral lips, he returned to the parlour and fell into a train of deep thought. I cannot tell what those thoughts were, but this much I know, that the next day a Bible was found on the book-shelf in the back-room.

And what Mr. Barker had declared to be impossible proved only too possible, poor man! Scarcely twelve months had elapsed, when one Sunday afternoon two gentlemen were seen walking up to the cemetery. And when they had arrived at a new-made little grave, they stared at the little mound in profound silence. Then the elder of the two