

Christian Messenger.

A RELIGIOUS AND GENERAL FAMILY NEWSPAPER.

"Not slothful in business : fervent in spirit."

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Poetry.

For the Christian Messenger.

The Grave of the Year.

Let us bury the year out of our sight
We will dig its grave this December night,
And heap the snow,
So white and cold,
Over the frozen lifeless mould.

Let us bury the year with its grief and pain,
Dig its grave so deep, neither sun nor rain,
Nor any caress
Of Nature can bring
It to life in the blossoming time of spring.

Can we bury the year—the bygone year?
Its fruit not ripe, though its leaves are eere,
We caught it as
Weaver catcheth hold
Of a shuttle filled with threads of gold.

To light up the sombre web he weaves
With flashes of gold and laurel leaves,
But the heavy press
Of the dark old loom
Has broken our tinsel—we sit in the gloom.

Shall we bury the year—the kind old year?
Let our touch be soft as we move its bier,
For oft in the "New"
Mid hours of pain
We may long for the clasp of its hands again.

If we bury the year—the dear old year,
Reverently, lovingly, move with its bier
God's love hath looked
Through its eyes into ours;
God's smile hath opened some buds into flowers,
Prayerfully, lovingly, bury the year.

Riverbank, New Year's Eve.

Religious.

Light, Fellowship, and Cleansing.

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED TO THE MEMBERS OF
THE BAPTIST UNION AT THE PRAYER MEET-
ING INTRODUCTORY TO THE AUTUMNAL SES-
SION AT CARDIFF.

By the Rev. S. G. Green, of Rawdon
College, Yorkshire.

We are here together my brethren, to begin the manifold work of these two days by communion with God; that we may go into our assembly from the mercy seat with some rays of Divine light and love resting upon our hearts. There could be no happier preparation for our counsels, nor any higher hope than that they may lead us back to the same point, only with a more vivid realization of the Eternal Presence, and a spirit upborne to closer fellowship with Heaven. Thus will our beginning and our ending be with God. I know not that a more suitable motto could be found, nor one more expressive of our best desires and aims, than the words of the Apostle John: "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."—(1 Epistle i. 7.)

To walk in the light, brethren, is to live and act in conscious fellowship with God; for "He is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Darkness is ignorance, but in Him is all truth; darkness is sin, but He is the infinitely holy; darkness is selfishness, but He is perfect love; darkness is sorrow, but He is the happy God. Behold, then, His gifts to us: truth, holiness love and joy! To win them from amid the shadows of our earthly life, is our highest aspiration; to dwell in them together is the blessed hope of the Church redeemed. That Church only realizes its high calling when it thus enters into communion with Him, thinking God's thoughts living on earth the life of heaven, breathing the atmosphere of Divine affection, and finding its strength in the joy of the Lord. Strength I say, for with such light there will be vigour. The Divine life will reveal itself in living activity; and the Church so blessed, will follow Him who said, "As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world," and therefore, "I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

Now, all that we say or do while we are together, if wisely said and well done will tend to these results. We are here that we may become holier churches, better men—more active, joyful, hopeful Christians. For such ends certain means must be adopted, which it is our business to discover, and wisely to apply. But let us remember, as we discuss them that they are only means, and that the end lies beyond them. We meet for instance as a "denomination." Our position in the great body of the faithful is special and defined. We have come hither to set a renewed seal to certain doctrines, to avow our continued adhesion to certain practices, connected with the Christian life. These practices and beliefs we prize,—yet not on their own account. The doctrine is for the sake of the life; the ordinances are the support of the life; but the life is greater than all. Of course, we believe that the doctrines we hold, and the ordinances we observe, are most truly helpful to that life, or we should scarcely have assembled. Yet, there is such a thing as the idolatry of our own convictions. For if that to which we pay our chief veneration, be it aught below the highest and holiest, is an idol what else can we call an opinion treasured for its own sake, or an ordinance honoured for itself alone, in forgetfulness of the greater things to which it is tributary? The scaffolding is one thing: the temple is another. But the temple is invisible: it requires the deep insight of faith to tell its towers, to mark well its bulwarks, and to consider its palaces. The scaffolding all can measure, and so we are tempted to concentrate our attention upon its form and proportion. How compact, how symmetrical, and how strong it is! We hang upon it the flowers of our eloquence; we call the world to gaze and admire; but, meanwhile the temple within arises slowly!

Is the doctrine purer? it should lead to holier service. Is the Church more scriptural? it should the more be filled with the Holy Ghost. Are the ordinances in nearer conformity with the Divine command? so should the life be nearer the Divine ideal. Otherwise will our glory but become our shame.

It is possible, brethren, to be bigots, for the truth, Pharisees in the maintenance of evangelic doctrine, and ritualists in adherence to Christ's own ordinances. The danger is insidious; it besets us all. The boast of the Pharisee may be uttered by churches as well as by individuals, and may refer to the creed as well as to the life. "God, we thank Thee that we are not as other churches—for our doctrine is pure, our discipline uncorrupt!" May we not the rather, when we ask what our discipline and our doctrine have made us at this hour, take our place "afar off" in the Christian temple, and cry, "God, be merciful unto us sinners!"

But if, striving for the light, in any measure we succeed; this will be the result and the test of our attainment—"We have fellowship one with another," and "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."—Here are two thoughts, most valuable always perhaps especially valuable and significant now.

We have fellowship one with another: that is, "we Christians mutually: not (as some who have read the passage) 'We with God and God with us,' which would do violence to the language, and besides, would only be a repetition of the foregoing thought. No, the fellowship which marks the Divine life of the church is the communion of saints.

And the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. Here is a gift beyond pardon, beyond reconciliation itself. In the light there is cleansing, progressive, sure, even to the complete restoration of the image of God. But this is still through the sacrifice, always efficacious, and, in its application ever renewed.

Now here we may notice that we have the twofold gift, for which the heart of the faithful has ever been crying out. Nay, it is the twofold gift most falsely claimed by the votaries of a corrupt Christianity, who in that claim win all their power. For mark, brethren, every superstition that has held sway over mankind has been but the distorted image of a Divine reality; wrought in the vain attempt of the yearning uninstrusted human heart to grasp a spiritual truth. We in these days are amazed, as well we may be, at the hold

which the idea of a Catholic visible Church, and the figment of a perpetual Sacrifice, have obtained over a large portion of the English community. The "Real Presence" in the Lord's Supper is openly taught as an undoubted doctrine of the English Church; and very recently, a large part of the Anglican hierarchy, in addressing the members of their communion, everywhere have employed the term "Catholic," where their predecessors, through many generations, would assuredly have said "Protestant." These, we say, are signs of the times; they are indications of something deeper, belonging to all time. We meet the claim at once with these words of the Apostle John, and avow that all who walk in the light have found already the secret of catholicity, for they "have fellowship one with another; and daily know the power of the Divine sacrifice, for 'the blood of Jesus Christ is cleansing them from all sin.'"

The fellowship, we say, is that of a universal brotherhood. We do not think lightly of those smaller groups, or sectional gatherings, in connexion with which we find so many of the happiest associations of our Christian life; for where "two or three" are met together, Christ is with them. And God forbid that it should not be possible for the least and humblest Baptist church to be as truly catholic as the most magnificent assembly of confederated Christians! The true harmony of Christian hearts, the peace and mutual trust of each individual church, arises not from the superficial agreement caused by common adherence to a special doctrine or a distinguishing observance, but from that deep reality, ONENESS IN CHRIST. If even it be right that only those who think the same thing, on those questions which divide the Church, should consort together, pray together, work together; be it remembered that even their fellowship does not rest on such agreement, but on a yet holier concord. They stand together in the light of God and therefore they are one! Then, irrepressibly, spontaneously arises the sense of kinship with the whole family of the redeemed. There is no restriction to the exulting spirit, whatever there may be in the outward form and order. The Church is one, whether the churches will have it so or not; and to the individual Christian soul, next to the joy unspeakable of conscious communion with God, is the gladness of the kindred thought, "I, even I, in my solitary insignificance, am a member of God's Church universal, and a fellow-citizen with all the saints." Hold fast such thoughts dear brethren; they elevate and inspire.—And whatever our belief may be as to the methods by which this heavenly reality shall pass into earthly manifestation, we shall all agree in the ardent prayer, nay, the certain hope, that the Infinite Father will, in His own time, reveal in His Church the hidden unity, will perfect among His children the holy bond of fellowship and love, and will gather into one the whole family in earth and heaven.

Then with the catholic spirit there will be the sanctified heart. The blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin.

Here, brethren, is not only the fact of holiness, as a "note" of God's true church, but the secret of holiness, as the result of an infinite sacrifice. We have just referred to the perversion of this truth. In our protest against the error, do we keep alive the remembrance of the fact that it is the offering which sanctifies? Redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, we live new lives.—The Cross is an ever-present power; mightiest in our souls when we are nearest to God. For in God's light do we most truly estimate the evil of sin, and discern most clearly the infinite glory of His work who gave Himself as a ransom. It is true that His sacrifice has perfected us "once for all." Nothing can be added to its efficacy; for by it we are reconciled to God. Salvation is complete. We are cleansed, and yet we need the daily cleansing. How is this? You remember the words of Christ himself to Peter, wherein, by a figure, the truth is impressively set forth "He that has been cleansed" (or bathed) "needs only to wash his feet, he is clean every whit." That is, in the morning of the Christian life, the pilgrim goes forth, washed once for all in the fountain set open for sin and uncleanness; but, as he walks the world's dusty ways, his feet need continual cleans-

ing. So, at every pause, he loosens his sandals, and seeks the self-same fountain, that, refreshed and purified, he may travel on until the day is done.

Thus will Christ be truly with us. The power of the Cross to sanctify means the power given through virtue of that great sacrifice to conquer self, to strive for holiness, to maintain the war against temptation, to work for Christ with unwearied energy—in a word to live as those must live who have learned to say, "We are not our own for we are bought with a price." And more it is not motive alone—this might fail in many a crisis; it is the presence and the might of Christ Himself by the Spirit which He has given. Thus He has declared, "I will come to you."—"Ye see me, because I am gone to the Father." He comes, and we "rejoice, and our joy no man taketh from us." Brethren, we must not put from us the power of such promises as though they were only to be fulfilled in the far-off time for which we long. Christ is with us—with us now. Our faith in a dying Saviour rises to its highest exaltation as faith in a living Saviour. We also hold fast the belief in a real presence, though not upon an earthly altar, or in the forms of sacrifice. Christ's presence is real, because it is not bodily but spiritual; nay, the more truly real, because invisible: for in this world of shadows the only real is the unseen. By faith alone we stand in the light of God, in holy fellowship one with another; and our joy is crowned by the promise which, from the midst of that glory, falls upon our ear, even as it fell upon the ears of the disciples when the Master passed away into the invisible realm:

"Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

May God lead us all into His light!

A few Words about Controversy.

One way of gaining popularity is to cry out lustily against controversy as a bad thing and as something which is entirely inconsistent with the spirit of the meek and lowly Jesus. Of course the inference which such persons wish you to draw is, that they themselves possess a large measure of the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

Now it has not been my experience that those parties who are everlastingly running down all religious controversy, are of the most kind and yielding temperament. I have found that, when I have come to co-operate with them, they were just as fond of having it their own way, and as ready to take offence when thwarted, as any other class of Christians.

Again, in looking over the history of the Christian Church, I don't find that those most eminent for true piety and usefulness in the Church either avoided controversy, as an un-mixed evil, or set their face against it. On the contrary, I find all the most eminent and successful reformers were controversialists. I find the Apostles much engaged in controversy. And, coming to a still higher example, I find our blessed Lord controverting error continually; and I remember that on one occasion, when remonstrated with for having exposed the errors of the Pharisees, on the ground that it had given offence, his reply was, "Every plant which my Heavenly Father hath not planted, must be rooted up."

Whether controversy be right or wrong, depends entirely on the spirit in which we enter upon it, and the motive by which we are actuated. If our aim in controversy be to promote mere party views, to display our own abilities or simply to gain a victory over an opponent, we are engaged in a most unholy warfare, and are sure to do a serious injury to our own souls, if not to the souls of others. If, on the other hand, our aim be to preserve in purity that truth which we have found to be precious to our own souls, and which we believe to be God's chosen instrument for the regeneration and sanctification of fallen men; if our ruling motive be to promote the glory of Him who has redeemed our souls from death, we shall never have to regret in a dying hour, or before the great white throne, that we have stood up in the defence of truth. A man who is actuated by this motive can well endure the expressed disapprobation of his fellow-mortals, he can well stand up in the defence of unpopular truth, even though he