

The Christian Messenger.

A RELIGIOUS AND GENERAL FAMILY NEWSPAPER.

NEW SERIES.
Vol. XVI., No. 45.

Halifax, Nova Scotia, Wednesday, November 8th, 1871.

WHOLE SERIES.
Vol. XXXV., No. 45.

Poetry.

WHO PICKED THAT FLOWER?

BY REV. J. E. RANKIN, D. D.

A gard'ner sought a seed
In foreign lands;
Some rare exotic!
And with a miser's greed,
And anxious trembling hands,
Lest some the deed should see,
Upon the ground he bent his knee,
And secret dropped it.

He watched it, day and night,
And when he began
To swell the ground above it,
No bound had his delight:
He almost crazy ran,
To mark its silent creep
Forth from its deep imbedded sleep,
And upward move it.

And when it blossomed sweet,
And fragrance sent
Through all the spot entrancing,
He danced upon his feet,
Or, like a pilgrim, bent
Before some orient shrine,
He seemed to pay it vows divine,
On knees advancing.

One day the flower was gone!
Dead seemed the air,
And dead all hearts without it;
The gard'ner, most forlorn,
With tear and cry, and prayer,
Backward and forth was pacing,
Eager each fellow-servant facing,
Asking about it.

"Who plucked that flower?
What right had he
To work me such disaster?
I miss it every hour!
Quick, tell! what is his plea?"
"Gard'ner," one servant said,
Drooping low down his reverent head,
"It was the Master!"

Religious.

PAYING THE FARE.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER.

That was an expensive voyage which Jonah made when he "fled from the presence of the Lord" and ran away to Tarshish. He found a ship just ready to sail, and he "paid the fare thereof." But he paid dearly. How much money he paid we do not know; but it was a dead loss, for he never got to Tarshish. He paid away his credit as a servant of the Lord. He made a hard draft on his conscience, and that is always a dear bargain for any man. Nothing hurts us like the hurts we give to our conscience.

After Jonah's sinful voyage began, the second part, and the hardest part of the bill came in. For the Almighty sent after him the policeman of a mighty gale which caught hold of the vessel and well nigh shivered it into wreck. Poor Jonah had not paid his fare to the bottom of the sea; but there is no help for him. The frightened crew pitched him out into the deep, and but for God's interposing mercy he might have been devoured by the sharks instead of being preserved by that "great fish" which was sent to transport him for safety to the dry land. A dear voyage that! The prophet who ran away from God lost his money, lost his time, lost his credit, lost the approval of his conscience and of his God, and would have lost his life but for a miraculous interposition. All this was the "fare" which one man paid for sinning.

But many of our readers may be committing the same terrible mistake. For no path seems to most people so easy and pleasant to travel, as the path of sinful inclination. It is what the Bible calls "walking in the way of a man's own heart," and in the sight of his own eyes. One man, for example, is entirely absorbed in making money. When this becomes a greedy appetite, the money-lover must pay for it with daily anxiety and worry, and he runs the fearful risk of being eaten up with covetousness. A greed for wealth grows with years. When the rich miser of New York tottered out into the street at fourscore, and a friend asked him how he felt? the feeble old miser replied eagerly, "I feel better

to-day; stocks are up." Ah! what a fare that old millionaire had to pay for travelling farther and faster than others on the road of wealth. It shrivelled up his very soul. Gold may be a useful servant, but it is a cruel master. It is not easy to own it, without its owning us. Where one man like Lenox or Peabody, or Wetmore or Dodge, makes it a rich blessing to others, thousands make it the ruin of their souls. Love of money drew Lot to the fertile valley of Sodom, and he, "paid the fare thereof" in the destruction of his family. Love of money made Gehazi a knave; he "paid the fare" in an incurable leprosy. Love of money was one of two sins for which Judas paid with the suicide's rope, and everlasting infamy. No man can make money safely and wisely, unless he holds his earnings as a trust from God. What would it profit you to win the wealth of an Astor or a Vanderbilt, if you should pay for it the price of your undying soul? "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Into no road do young persons press more eagerly than the road to sensual indulgence. No turnpike is more travelled, and none exacts a more terrible "toll." He who travels it must "pay the fare" thereof. The licentious man pays it in shame, and self-loathing, in remorse and "rottenness of the bones." No young man can take these hot coals into her bosom without being fearfully burned. The beautiful but ill-fated girl from New Jersey whose tragical end a few weeks since awakened such a universal thrill of horror, may have taken only one false step at first. But how far that led! It requires but one step to go down Niagara. She paid dearly for yielding to temptation; for the end of it was death. Hundreds of young men are pressing in every night to houses of wanton pleasure, bent only on enjoyment. But over the door of every house of infamy the finger of inspiration has written, "This house is the way to hell going down to the chambers of death."

All along the seductive pathways of self-indulgence God places his toll-gates of retribution. I sometimes pass in the streets a wretched man who often needs the help of a policeman to convey him to his desolated home. He was once rich and respected. Poor victim of the bottle—he is "paying the toll" on the devil's turnpike. The heartless dramsellers who furnish him the poison for guilty gain, will have to pay *themselves* when they reach the judgment-bar of God!

We cannot stop to recount all the penalties which men and women have to pay for sinning. The costliest thing in the world is *sin*. It costs purity of conscience, and costs the favor of God. It will cost at the last the loss of heaven. The sin of grieving the Holy Ghost has cost many a one *everlasting perdition*.

"Show me the better way—show me the safe way," exclaim some of my readers who are alarmed at their own course of sin, and who really desire to live a better life. "Show me the way and tell me what is the *fare thereof*!"

Friend, salvation is *free* on God's side; but on *your* side it must be won by repentance and faith. As far as Christ's precious atonement is concerned,

"Nothing, either great or small,
Remains for you to do;
Jesus died and paid it all—
All the debt you owe!"

But the road to heaven which the crucified Jesus has opened to you, can only be entered by your abandoning of your sins, and following him in faith and self-denial. "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Except a man take up his cross and follow Christ he cannot be his disciple." Friend, this "fare" you must "pay" to enter heaven. Are you willing?

Experience teaches, it is true, but she never teaches in time. Each event brings its lesson, and the lesson is remembered, but the same event never occurs again.

THE SUNDAY MORNING'S DREAM.

My first day of returning health, after many weeks of severe illness, was a bright Sunday in June. I was well enough to sit at an open window in my easy chair, and as our house stood in a pleasant garden in the suburbs of London, the first roses of the year scented the soft breeze that fanned my pale cheek and revived my languid frame. The bells of our parish church were just beginning their chimes, and the familiar sound awakened in me an intense longing to be with my family once more a worshipper in the house of God. I took up my Bible and Prayer Book, which had been placed ready on the table beside me, intending to begin to read when the hour of the eleven o'clock service should be announced by the ceasing of the bells; and in the meantime closed my eyes, and soothed my impatient wishes by picturing to myself the shady avenues of blossoming limes that led to our church, and the throngs that would now be entering it for the public worship of the day.

All at once I seemed to be walking in the beautiful churchyard, yet prevented from gratifying my eager wish to enter the church by some irresistible though unseen hand. One by one the congregation, in their gay Sunday dresses, passed by me and went in, where I vainly strove to follow. The parish children, in two long and orderly trains, defiled up the staircases into the galleries; and except a few stragglers hurrying in, as feeling themselves late, I was left alone.

Suddenly I was conscious of some awful presence, and felt myself addressed by a voice of most sweet solemnity in words to this effect: "Mortal, who by Divine mercy has just been permitted to return from the gates of the grave, pause before thou enterest God's holy house again; reflect how often thou hast profaned his solemn public worship by irreverence, or by inattention, which in his sight is irreverence: consider well the great privilege, the unspeakable benefit and blessing of united prayer, lest by again abusing it thou tire the patience of thy long-suffering God, and tempt him for ever to deprive thee of that which hitherto thou hast so little valued." Seeing me cast down my eyes and blush with conscious guilt, the gracious being continued in a milder tone,—"I am one of those angels commissioned to gather the prayers of the saints, and form them into wreaths of odoriferous incense that they may rise to the throne of God. Enter thou with me, and thou shalt, for thy warning, be able to discern those among the devotions about to be offered which are acceptable to Him, and to see how few in number, how weak, and unworthy they are."

As he ceased speaking I found myself by the side of the angel still, but within the church, and so placed that I could distinctly see every part of the building. "Observe," said the angel, "that those prayers which come from the heart, and which alone ascend on high, will seem to be uttered aloud. They will be more or less audible in proportion to their earnestness; when the thoughts wander the sounds will grow faint, and even cease altogether."

This explained to me why the organist, though apparently playing with all his might, produced no sound, and why, presently after, when the service began, though the lips of many moved, and all appeared attentive, only a few faint murmurings were heard.

How strange and awful it was to note the sort of death-like silence that prevailed in whole pews, in which, as was thus evident, no heart was raised in gratitude to heaven. Even in the Te Deum and Jubilate, the voices sometimes sunk into total silence. After the creed there was a low murmuring of the verses, and then distinct and clear above all other sounds, a sweet childish voice softly and reverently repeated the Lord's prayer. I turned in the direction of the sound; and distinguished among the parish children a very little boy. His hands were clasped together,

as he knelt his eyes were closed, his gentle face composed in reverence, and as the angel wrote on his tablets the words that fell from those infant lips, his smile, like a sunbeam, illuminated the church for a moment, and I remembered the words of holy David, where he says, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise."

Presently I was again reminded of a Scripture passage—the prayer of the publican. A wretched looking man, who swept the crossing near the church, lunged into the centre aisle during the reading of the lessons, his occupation being for the hour suspended. The second lesson was the 24th chapter of St. Matthew. Some verses attracted his attention. He listened with more and more seriousness, until he at length put his hand over his face and exclaimed aloud, "What will become of me at the day of judgment? Lord, have mercy on me a sinner." That prayer was inserted on the angel's tablets. Oh, may it not stand alone, but be an awakening of better things. May God indeed have mercy on such poor neglected ones as he, and raise up some to teach them, and care for their immortal souls.

After this, growing accustomed to the broken murmurs and interrupted sounds, I followed many a humble christian through large portions of the Litany: though often, while I was listening with hopeful attention, a sudden and total pause showed but too plainly that the thoughts of the kneeling suppliant had wandered far away, and that he who had appeared so earnest in his devotions had become languid and silent like the rest of the congregation.

"Thou art shocked at what thou hast observed," said the angel. "I will show thee greater abominations than these. God is strong and patient; he is provoked every day. Listen now, and thou shalt hear the thoughts of all these people; so shalt thou have some faint idea of the forbearance God continually exercises towards those who draw near to him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him."

As the angel spoke my ears were deafened with a clamour which would have been shocking in a public meeting, but which here, in God's holy house, was awfully profane. The countenances remained, indeed, as composed and serious as before, the lips moved with the words of prayer, but the phrases they uttered were of the world and its occupations.

"How shamefully late Mrs. Slack always comes," said one woman, who, looking over the edge of her Prayer Book, saw her neighbour and a train of daughters hustle into the next pew. "What an example to set to her family; thank goodness no one can accuse me of that sin." "New bonnets again already!" exclaimed the last comer, returning the neighbourly glance from the other seat, ere she composed herself to the semblance of devotion. "How they can afford it heaven only knows, and their father owing all his Christmas bills yet. If my girls look shabby, at least we pay our debts."

Ah, there's Tom Scott," nodded a young man to his friend in the opposite gallery, "he is growing quite religious and respectable, I declare. He has been at church two Sundays running. How much longer will the devout fit last?"

There were shocking and striking examples of irreverence; there were happily not many such, the involuntary wanderings of thought were more common.

I was much interested in a young couple near me, whose attention for a considerable part of the service had been remarkable. From the dress of the young man I judged him to be a clergyman. The lady wore deep mourning. They were evidently betrothed—they read out of one book. Gradually he forgot the awful presence in which he stood, his eyes wandered from the Bible to her gentle face, and fixing there, called off his thoughts from heaven. "How good she is," he began to say, "how attentive to her

prayers, as to all other duties! What a sweet wife she will make! How happy I am to have won her love." By this time the countenance of the young girl wore an expression which showed that she felt the earnestness of his gaze; her eyelids trembled,—her attention wavered, and though she looked at the book some moments longer she too began to murmur of earthly things, and I heard her say, "Oh, how he loves me—even here he cannot forget that I am beside him." It was many minutes before either of them returned in spirit to their devotions.

As the service proceeded the attention of the congregation flagged more and more—the hubbub of worldly talk increased. One man composed a letter he intended to send, and even altered whole passages, and rounded elegant periods, without one check or recollection of the holy place where he stood. Another repeated a long dialogue which had passed between himself and a friend the night before, and considered how he might have spoken more to the purpose. Some young girls rehearsed scenes with their lovers—some recalled the incidents of their last ball. Careful housewives planned schemes of economy, gave warning to their servants, arranged the turning of a gown, or decided the most becoming trimming of a bonnet.

To me, conscious of the recording angel's presence, all this solemn mockery of worship was frightful. I would have given worlds to rouse this congregation to a sense of what they were doing; and, to my comfort, I saw that for the involuntary offenders a gentle warning was provided.

A frown from the angel, or the waving of his impatient wings, as if about to quit a place so desecrated, recalled the thoughts of many a soul, unconscious whence came the breath that revived the dying flame of his devotions. Then self-blame, tears of penitence, and bitter remorse, of which those kneeling nearest knew nothing, wrung the heart, shocked at its own careless ingratitude, wondering at and adoring the forbearance of the Almighty, while more concentrated thought, and I trust more fervent prayer, succeeded to the momentary forgetfulness.

In spite of all these helps, however, the amount of real devotion was small; and when I looked at the angel's tablets I was shocked to see how little was written therein.

Out of three hundred christians, thought I, assembled after a week of mercies to praise and bless the Giver of all good, are these few words the sum of what they offer!

"Look to thyself," said the angel reading my inmost thoughts, "Such as these are, such hast thou long been. Darest thou, after what has been revealed to thee, act such a part again? Oh, could thy mortal ears bear to listen to the songs of the rejoicing angels before the throne of the Almighty, thou wouldst indeed wonder at the condescending mercy which stoops to accept these few faint wandering notes of prayer and praise. Yet the sinless angels veil their faces before him, in whose presence man stands boldly up with such mockery of worship as thou hast seen this day. Remember the solemn warning, lest hereafter it be counted to thee as an aggravation of guilt."

Suddenly the sweet, solemn voice ceased, the glorious angel disappeared, and so oppressive seemed the silence and loneliness that I started and awoke. My watch pointed to the hour of eleven; it must have been the stopping of the bells that interrupted my slumbers, and all this solemn scene passed before my mind in the short space of a few minutes.

May the lesson I learned in those few minutes never be effaced from my heart; and if this account of them should recall one wandering thought in the house of prayer, or teach any to value more highly, and cultivate more carefully, the privilege of joining