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Poetry.

IN THE ROUGH.

The marble was pure and white
Though only a block at best,
But the artist, with inward sight,
Looked further than all the rest.
And saw in the hard, rough stone,
The loveliest statue the sun shone on.
So he set to work with care
And chiselled a form of grace—
A figure divinely fair,
With a tender, beautiful face;
But the blows were hard and fast
That brought from the marble that work at last.
So I think that human lives
Must bear God's chisel keen,
If the spirit yearns and strives
For the better life unseen.
For men are only blocks at best,
Till the chiselling brings out all the rest.
Congregationalist.

BLESSING OF TO-DAY.

If we knew the woe and heartache
Waiting for us down the road,
If our lips could taste the wormwood,
If our backs could feel the lead;
Should we waste the day in wishing
For a time that ne'er can be?
Should we wait with such impatience
For our ships to come from sea?
If we knew the baby-fingers
Pressed against the window-pane
Would be cold and stiff to-morrow,
Never trouble us again;
Would the bright eyes of our darling
Catch the frown upon our brow?
Would the prints of rosy fingers
Vex us then as they do now!
Ah! those little ice-cold fingers,
How they point our memories back
To the hasty words and actions
Strewed along our dusky track!
How those little hands remind us,
As in snowy grace they lie,
Not to scatter thorns—but roses—
For our reaping by-and-by!
Strange we seldom prize the music
Till the sweet-voiced bird has flown,
Strange that we should slight the violets
Till the lovely flowers are gone;
Strange that summer skies and sunshine
Never seem one-half so fair
As when winter's snowy plinions
Shake the white down in the air.
Lips from which the seal of silence
None but God can roll away,
Never blossomed in such beauty
As adorned the mouth to-day;
And sweet words that freight our memory
With their beautiful perfume
Come to us in sweeter accents
Through the portals of the tomb.
Let us gather up the sunbeams
Lying all along our path;
Let us keep the wheat and roses,
Casting out the thorns and chaff;
Let us find our sweetest comfort
In the blessings of to-day;
With a patient hand removing
All the briars from our way.

Religious.

BUYING OPPORTUNITIES.

BR. REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER.

It is agreed by Dean Alford and all the most accurate students of the Greek New Testament, that the text "redeeming the time" should read "buying the opportunity." The word "redeem" has a rather theological sound to the ordinary reader, and suggests Christ's ransom of our souls. "Time" is a word of indefinite extent. But "opportunity" is a sharply-defined word. It describes the very nick of time—the golden moment for the doing of a thing. It is that especial season most favorable for the purpose. Therefore Paul—who was himself a minute-man—urges his readers to "secure their opportunities." Our Lord emphasized the supreme value of grasping the present moment: "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; for the night cometh in which no man can work." "Work while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you." Mark, too, with what sharp precision the

time for securing our salvation is presented in God's Word: "Now is the well-accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation." Three times over is that tremendous alarm-bell rung by the hand of the Holy Spirit; "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart." If we dig underneath the surface of several passages, we find the same idea lurking there. A "word fitly spoken" signifies a word opportunely spoken. In Leviticus we read of a "fit man"; but it should be read—the man of opportunity.

The men who have succeeded best, have been the men who grasped their opportunities. In nearly every battle of life there are pivot-occasions, on which the greatest interests are depending. The loss of them never can be retrieved. There are merchants who never buy until the wares have gone up, and never sell until they have gone down. They complain of their "bad luck"; but it is always the luck of loitering stupidity to be just a little way behind the point where all the successes are won. The secret of success is to secure life's opportunities. Ten minutes of sharp striking when the iron is hot, is worth days of tire-some hammering when it has grown cold.

There is a lesson for Christians in this. For Bible religion is the highest common sense applied to the service of God. "As we have therefore opportunity let us do good unto all men." Paul practised as he wrote. There was a chance given him to restore a cripple at Lystra, and to direct a converted sinner in the dungeon of Philippi, and to put a plain truth into the ears of Felix, and to speak the right word at the right time on the Hill of Mars. He did not let one of his chances slip. McCheyene's success as a winner of souls—and Payson's too—depended much on their happy talent of buying opportunities. Good Harlan Page, who is about the model man among working American laymen, had a fixed rule never to lose the opportunity to win a soul to Jesus. The wisest pastor is the one who knows how to time his visits when sickness or sorrow require them most, and to speak the word in season when a hearer's heart is melted. Let every young minister write this sentence on the first page of his life-record—"the loss of opportunities will be the loss of success in my ministry."

There is a solemn lesson for every unconverted reader of ours in the truth we are enforcing. Friend, if you ever reach hell—for there is a hell—it will be because you lost your opportunities for securing heaven. You have thrown away many such already. There have been times when God's Spirit of love strove with you most powerfully. You quenched the Spirit. You may do this once too often. "He that being often reproved hardeneth his heart shall suddenly be cut off and that without remedy." When such tremendous interests are at stake delay may be death.

A sea captain said that on a certain evening, just as the dark was coming on, he hoisted in sight of the ill-fated steamer "Central America" carrying signals of distress. He ran up to her and inquired if they needed help. Captain Herndon replied, "we are in a sinking condition, but try and lie by us until morning." "You had better send your passengers and men on board now." The captain still replied, "Lay by me till morning." In two hours the lights of the "Central America" disappeared. In those two hours were crowded the last opportunity to save the precious lives on board.

Unconverted friend! You are really in a sinking condition too. Every sinner is. The voice of mercy hails you. The lifeboat of salvation waits to be sent off to you. The trumpet-call to you is "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." The present is yours. You have not one inch of future in your hand. Secure your opportunity and you secure eternal life. It is only a moment's work to accept Christ when

you are in earnest. But even that moment will never come after the "door is shut."
"Of all sad words uttered by tongue or pen
The saddest are these—it might have been."
Evangelist.

PHILEMON, THE CHRISTIAN LAYMAN.

The materials for a sketch of Philemon's character might seem at first thought quite scanty, but scattered here and there through the epistle addressed to him, there are indications enough if we look closely. There is the especial advantage in considering his character that he occupied no official position, and, therefore, it cannot be argued that there was anything exceptional about him.

Philemon was a man of faith. "Hearing of thy love and faith which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus Christ"—so Paul speaks of him. The foundation of all that was solidly excellent in his character was this devotion to the service of God. This is not to say that he had no natural excellencies; men are honest and just and courteous and generous sometimes without being Christians. But mere natural excellencies without Christian principle stand on a sandy foundation, and are very likely to give way just when they are most needed. Such a character, moreover, is developed simply on its earthward and lower side. A man, at the best, is only half a man, who has not faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Philemon was a man of prayer. "I trust," says Paul, the prisoner at Rome, "that through your prayers I shall be given unto you." This incidental touch in the picture brings this Colossian householder to our view as a man who believed in prayer. He even dared—not having heard in those unenlightened days of Prof. Tyndall—to pray for physical good; the idea of the inflexibility of natural law did not trouble him. He knew that God was mightier than Cæsar. Here, then, is a beautiful picture. Rome and Colosse, as travelling went in those days, were far apart; but Paul, the prisoner, and Philemon, the prosperous citizen, were each praying for the other, and their prayers met at the mercy seat, for heaven was near both to Rome and to Colosse.

Philemon's piety was expansive. It was not "a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." Paul speaks of "hearing" of his love and faith. It was not necessary to stop to consider whether, in the judgment of charity, Philemon could be called a Christian. There was no question about the matter. His faith was evident because it could not be hid any more than the sunlight can be hid when it is day, any more than fragrance can be shut in by a garden wall. Loving Christ, Philemon loved Christ's people, and sought to benefit them in spiritual as well as in temporal things; "the hearts of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother."

Philemon united practical excellence to his piety. The two do not always go together. There are some Christians whom we cannot regard as agreeable company; some whose only practical use seems to be to lengthen the church roll. This can be said, without denying that such persons are Christians. "Grace," said a quaint old preacher, can dwell where you or I could not.

There is evidence, in this connection, that Philemon was a reasonable man. It was a delicate matter for Paul to ask him to receive back Onesimus, his runaway slave, who had robbed him; for slavery, was regarded then in a light very different from that in which we now view it. But Paul's tone all through, is that of one who is writing to a man open to conviction. Paul was convinced that Philemon would yield to his wishes. Piety ought to have this outcome that it makes us reasonable, willing to be persuaded upon sufficient argument.

Another characteristic of Philemon's practical goodness was loveliness.

He drew out the personal love of the Apostle; Paul regarded him not merely as a Christian brother, but as a friend. Into this loveliness there entered as elements, justice, an element of stability; docility, willingness to be influenced upon good grounds; a manifestation of his affection, not leaving men to guess whether or no he cared for them, but showing out his love—by no means a small element, this, in that force which is to bring the world to Christ.

And last, he was devoted to the interests of the church. It does not appear that he occupied any official position, but Paul styles him "our fellow-laborer." He was an example of a working Christian. Whoever was minister of the church at Colosse, had, no doubt, great cause to bless God for his faithful co-operation and earnest zeal. He opened his house as a place of worship for the infant church, not excusing himself or putting off the burden upon others. This Christian layman of so many centuries ago, was not a mere name on the church roll, not a mere critical listener, not a captious man, not a grumbler, sitting idly by and then complaining that things are running down at the heel. No, he was a worker. He did not preach the Gospel in the sense that Paul did; but the great Apostle calls him a "fellow-laborer," for in his own sphere he was seeking to advance the kingdom and glory of their common Lord.

Men and brethren, is not Philemon, the Christian layman of Colosse, an example worthy of our imitation?

WHAT IT IS TO PRAY.

To pray is, first of all, to put the understanding in motion, and to direct it upon the highest object to which it can possibly address itself—the infinite God. In our private prayers, as in our public liturgies, we generally preface the petition itself by naming one or more of his attributes—Almighty and everlasting God! If the understanding is really at work at all, how overwhelming are the ideas, the truths, which thus pass before it; a boundless power, an existence which knows neither beginning nor end. Then the substance of the petition, the motives which are alleged for urging it, the issues which depend upon its being refused, present themselves to the eye of the understanding. And if our Lord Jesus Christ is not himself, as being both God and man, the object of prayer, yet his perpetual and prevailing intercession opens upon Christian thought the inmost mysteries before the eternal throne. And thus any common act of real prayer keeps, not the imagination, but the understanding, occupied earnestly, absorbingly, under the guidance of faith, from first to last.

Next, to pray is to put the affections in motion; it is to open the heart. The object of prayer is the uncreated love, the eternal beauty; he, of whose beauty all that moves love and admiration here is at best but a pale reflection. To be in his presence in prayer is to be conscious of an expansion of the heart, and of the pleasure which accompanies it, which we feel in another sense when speaking with an intimate and loved friend and relative. And this movement of the affections is sustained throughout the act of prayer. It is invigorated by the spiritual sight of God, but it is also the original impulse which leads us to draw near to him.

In true prayer as in teaching, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

Once more, to pray is to put the will in motion, just as decidedly as we do when we sit down to read hard, or to walk up a steep hill against time. That sovereign power in the soul, which we name the will, does not merely in prayer impel us to make the first necessary mental effort, but enters most penetratingly and vitally into the very action of the prayer itself. It is the will which presses the petition, it is the will which struggles with the reluctance of sloth or with the op-

positions of passion; it is the will which exclaims, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." The amount of will which we severally carry into the act of prayer is the ratio of its sincerity; and where prayer is at once real and prolonged, the demands which it makes upon our power of concentrating determination into a specific and continuous act are very considerable indeed. Now, these three ingredients of prayer are also ingredients in all real work, whether of the brains or of the hands.

The sustained effort of the intelligence and of the will must be seconded in work no less than in prayer by a movement of the affections, if work is to be really successful. A man must love his work to do it well. The difference between prayer and ordinary work is that in prayer the three ingredients are more equally balanced. Study may in time become intellectual habit, which scarcely demands any effort of will; handiwork may in time become so mechanical as to require little or no guidance from thought; each may exist in considerable, although not in the highest degree of excellence, without any co-operation of the affections. Not so prayer. It is always the joint act of the will and the understanding, impelled by the affections; and when either will or intelligence is wanting, prayer at once ceases to be itself, by degenerating into a barren intellectual exercise, or into a mechanical and unspiritual routine.—*Dr. Liddon.*

PREPARATION FOR THE PEW.

We hear a great deal about preparation for the pulpit—a most important theme, as all must admit; we propose to say a few words on a subject equally important, but strangely neglected—that is, preparation for the pew.

Much fault is sometimes found with the pulpit because it does not more deeply interest the occupants of the pews. While we do not regard the pulpit beyond criticism, and are ready to admit its points of weakness, we must also keep before our readers the fact that the hearers have some responsibility to share with the speaker. It is not right to throw the whole burden of the church service on the preacher. Many go to church as they would go to a lecture or a concert. The man in the pulpit is a performer; the men in the pews are spectators or auditors. There is no sympathy between them. Let the preacher so conduct the service as to keep them awake and attentive. If he succeed in this, he is considered popular and attractive; if he fail, he must take the consequences of his failure: sleepy hearers and slender congregations.

While a few men of unusually strong natures can compel the attention of their audience, there are many men of genuine talent and piety who must have the sympathy and the interest of their hearers in order to succeed. If the religious portion of the congregation are interested, as they ought to be, from the commencement of the service, the preacher will feel the power of this fact, and it will not be long before even the careless in the congregation will give heed to the sermon.

One of the best means of preparation for the pew is to be found in meditation and praying before going to chapel. We all of us carry too much of the world with us to God's house. How can any ordinary preacher succeed when the majority of his congregation come to church burdened in this manner, and look to him to cast the burden off, as though he were a Titan who could go among the pews and lift the mountain load from every heart? Previous thought and prayer on the part of God's people would remove this burden, and leave the heart to enjoy the privileges of God's house unmolested.

Another preparation for the pew is in the worship at church. Having begun at home, pious hearts are ready to resume when the introductory hymn of praise is sung. This and all other hymns should be sung, not by the choir only, but by the whole congregation;