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POETRY.

An Old Year Song.

BY OLIVER WENDILL HOLMES.

As through the forest, dimly lit,
The leaves of autumn fall;
A lonely minstrel, of the wood,
Was singing to the solitude:
I loved thy music, thus I said,
When o'er thy perch the leaves were piled:
Sweet was thy song, but sweeter now
Thy carol on the leafless bough.
Sing, little bird! thy note shall cheer
The sadness of the dying year.
When violets peeped the turf with blue,
And morning filled their cups with dew,
Thy slender voice with rippling drill
The budding April bowers would fill.
Now passed its joyous time away,
When April rounded into May,
Thy life shall hail no second dawn,
Sing, little bird! the spring is gone.
And I remember—well I do—
The full-blown summer roundelay,
As when behind a bordered screen
Some holy maiden thus unseen
With answering notes the woodland thrush
And every brood-top found a thrush.
How deep life thrills! the grove bewitched,
Sing, little bird! the woods are hushed.
But now the summer's end is done,
And thus the minstrel's song is o'er,
The birds have left the sheltering place,
To fit among the trilled, stilled, stilled,
Or fan the air with scented plumes,
Amid the love-sick orange blooms,
And thou art here alone—
Sing, little bird! the rest have flown.
The snow has capped yon distant hill,
At morn the running brook was still,
From driven herds the clouds that rise
Are like the smoke of sacrifice.
Ere long the frozen and still music,
The ploughshare, charged to stubborn rock,
The howling streams shall soon be dumb—
Sing, little bird! the frosts have come.
Fast, fast the lengthening shadows creep,
The songless fowls are half asleep,
The air grows chill, the setting sun
May leave thee ere thy song is done,
The pulse that warms thy breast grow cold,
Thy secret life wither, untold,
The lingering sunset still is bright—
Sing, little bird! 't will soon be night.
—ATLANTIC MONTHLY, FOR JANUARY.

RELIGIOUS.

For the Christian Messenger.

"O MY GOD, TAKE ME NOT AWAY IN THE MIDDLE OF MY DAYS."—Psalm cii, 24.

A Meditation.

We know not who offered this prayer. It might be David, when his life was in so much peril through Saul's malice, or in one of those fits of sickness which he occasionally passed through and which threatened life. (See Psalms vi, xxx, xxxviii.) Hezekiah prayed at such a time, and obtained a lengthening of his lease for fifteen years. Most men admit that the issues of life and death are in God's hands. It is not fatalism. It is not chance. It is the ordering of a wise, just, and loving Providence. Plagues and death around me fly, Till he bids I cannot die; Not a single shaft can hit me, Till the God of love sees fit. We know that death is "the way of all the earth." Though Enoch and Elijah did not die, they must have passed through a change equivalent to death, because "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Time and manner are God-arranged. Hezekiah knew how long he was to live. No other instance of the kind is known. There seems to be irregularity. "One dieth in his full strength." His children passed away in infancy. His parents will reach fourscore years. Yet each case is divinely provided for. We see not the links of the chain, but they are there, and we can form general calculations of the average duration of human life, although their application to individuals has much guess-work in it, as the experience of Life Assurance Companies shows. Man loves life. His occupations and enjoyments afford him pleasure; for God "giveth us richly all things to enjoy." The law of work is a merciful law, and an idle man is ignorant of bliss. Vice and misery abound in the world, but sin is not the natural state of man; it is altogether unnatural—for what can be more contrary to nature than refusal to love and obey the

Almighty, the All-wise, the All-righteous, the All-Bountiful? Man loves life, as God has constituted it. If he perverts the constitution, and determines to be his own master, what wonder if he and his are "born to trouble"? But let him live according to divine law, and he will find that God's Creation pours forth streams of joy for him. See Psalms ciii, cix, cxlviii.

We desire the continuance of life. We look for the natural limits. No one can say at any particular time, "I wish not to die," except under the pressure of excruciating pain or overwhelming grief, like Job's, and even then Christianity inculcates and produces patience—i.e., in a state of ecstatic enjoyment, as when Paul said, "Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." (Phil. i, 23.) Every man is disposed to say, "Take me not away in the midst of my days." The prayer is reasonable. There are good and valid reasons for it. In ten thousand cases the parent desires time and opportunity to train up his family—children dread the thought of losing father and mother; pastors and people cling to each other; the husband and the wife exclaim, "Spare my companion!"

We have such prayers on all sides; and yet, look where we will, we see groups of mourners weeping over the remains of those who were "taken away in the midst of their days." Hopes are dashed—prospects blighted—fond unions severed. Rachel weeps for her children! The Church makes great lamentation! over her Stephens. What shall we say to this? In the first place, it is "no strange thing." The history of the world is full of it. We know not Abel's age when he was murdered by his brother, but it seems highly probable that he was "in the midst of his days." Enoch was 365 years old when "God took him," but 365, in that age of the world, represented 28 or 29 now, so that Enoch was a vigorous young man, or, at any rate, "in the midst of his days." Josiah was thirty-nine years old when he was slain at Megiddo; John the Baptist was not much over thirty when Herod's headman killed him. To come to modern times; Samuel Pearce died at 33; Henry Martyn, at 31; Edward Irving, at 42; William Knibb, at 65; George Boardman, at 30; our own Isaac Chapman, at 35; and A. R. R. Crawley, at 46; &c., &c.

Next—it is not unjust. The law of death is in full force from the beginning, and execution may take place at any moment. No one has any right to a reprieve. Neither is it unkind. No act of God, however dark it may seem to us, is inconsistent with his fatherly goodness. The death in question may be kindness to the dead; it is best that he should die now. It may be kindness to the living—the commencement of preparation for heaven.

Who shall dare to say that it is unwise? God makes no mistakes. His reasons for a certain dispensation may not fully appear for centuries, but at length he will "make it plain"; and when it is understood, it will be approved. No believer, taken to heaven early or suddenly, thinks that he has reached the blessedness too soon.

We acknowledge and adore the sovereignty of God. There are two very sublime passages in the Bible. Job lost all—at one fell stroke: "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job i, 20, 21).

Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, "offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not." Fire from the Lord devoured them. God said by Moses, "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me"—"AND AARON HELD HIS PEACE" (Lev. x, 1-3).

These are the sublimities of religion. They are unexpressed continually. Blessed be God for the Bible, and for its living commentaries! S. S. W.

(From the Scottish Baptist Magazine.)
The Young in relation to Jesus.

There is hardly any question of more momentous interest to the family, the church, or the world at large, than the question, In what relation do the young stand to the knowledge of Jesus? At what age should that knowledge be received and acted on? To Baptists, above all, it becomes deeply important, in consequence of their rejection of what is called "the ordinance of infant baptism," an institution which, in parental eyes, seems to form some connecting link between their offspring and the kingdom of Christ. Are the children of Baptists to be regarded by themselves as a kind of undeveloped heathen? And consequently that some undefined period of their lives must be passed through, before anything like an earnest acquaintance with the love of Christ can be looked for in them? All their gambols, romances, trappings, and other forms of youthful amusement are but so much brilliant hilarity; and that as soon as they become what is called serious, the vein of life is changed, and a kind of morose gloom, on this side at least, settles upon all. If not this, what then is the relation in which the young stand to the knowledge of Jesus?

When we look, first of all, at the opening capacities of the human mind from the earliest dawn of intelligence, we find reason, conscience, will, affection, and so forth, gradually coming into power. The open mind recognizes right and wrong; it begins to learn that pain is hurt, and sorrow and death. But, in the midst of all the conditions of suffering that more or less press on the senses of the young, the buoyancy of youth prevails. And to try to divest the impulses of life, in the morning of existence of their native tendency, would be just as possible and just as wise as to try to divest the spring of its gaiety and mirth and joy. The very conditions of life at the period referred to, are ever, in health, conditions that would lead the unburdened young to laugh and dance and sing.

But then, they have something to do, it is supposed, with "One Jesus who was crucified, whom Paul affirmed to be alive." When the New Testament vision of this all-glorious One arises before the youthful mind, for what end has it appeared? Is it to be as wormwood and gall to the whole texture of individual and social life? Is it to be the forerunner of the pall, the mattock and the grave? No more of marbles and hoops and skipping ropes, and football and all the rest? Are they to join with the old satiated Epicure of ancient times, and say of laughter, "It is mad," and of mirth, "What doeth it?" Farewell to "quips and cranks and wanton wiles!" Farewell to "pastimes sweet and joyous, and innocent as sweet!" All is to be changed, and something like the pace of a melancholy dirge is to be the march of life from youth to age, and finally the grave? Is it so when the Teacher of Nazareth appears?

Where shall we take Him? Down there in Cana of Galilee at the marriage feast, where the water suddenly flashed into wine; or as Dryden puts it—
"The conscious water blushed to see its God."

The harmless joy of the occasion, when old and young, parents and children, young men and maidens, joined in the festivity of the hour, was countenanced and approved by Him. Or there in Capernaum, when He called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of the twelve, and pointed to the type of all that constitutes the noblest foundation of all that is greatest in man. Or again, when entering the temple in the lowly attire of Zion's anointed King, the children shouted in His hearing, "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is He that cometh in

the name of the Lord." Or again, when setting aside the inconsiderate opposition of His disciples, He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Surely then, if smile ever rested on the countenance of the Man of sorrows, it rested there, when His eye fell on the children in the market-place, as they in their mimicry of life cried one to another, "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced." "We have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented." And the yearnings of infinite love flowed towards the yet unpoliticized, unpharisaical life, made manifest in them.

Well, then, it is clear He does not wish to wait for the last days of the life of hoary sin. He does not wish to wait for what is called a "conversion," when "at thirty man suspects himself a fool." He desires that the earliest dawn of reason, conscience, will, should be directed to Him. He is human in the unfolding of the Divine Love, so that long ere the young can read the story of His loving life, His mysterious death and ascension to glory, they may be familiar in their thoughts of Him who is their revealed way to the possession of life eternal. The conversation of parents, or relatives, or friends, within the household—truly Christian—will make the story clear and simple and obvious to their minds. It is not necessary that they should be able to comprehend the ten commandments; nor yet the cross in its being the marvellous instrument in the annihilation of sin. It is the loving Jesus, as the evangelists hold Him forth to their view, that must become the supreme conception in their minds. So that at any time, in any place, in any engagement, the familiar thought of Him may start up and be quite congenial to the then and there. Nothing but what is known to be directly sin—something done in contradiction of His kind and loving will—seeks to repress the remembrance of Jesus, or to get away into a corner out of His sight. All that becomes childhood and youth in thought and speech and behaviour, becomes the constant remembrance, "Thou Christ seest me."

Of course all this implies that the sphere in which the young are trained is one permeated by the spirit of the cross, the concentration of infinite right and infinite mercy; that the believers believe most surely the things that have been revealed; and that the joy of the Lord is truly and pre-eminently the rejoicing of the soul. They must see religion as lived around them, not morose and sullen and gloomy and always, but, on the contrary, lighted up with kind looks and words and deeds of gentleness. The thing taught them must be the thing seen, as drawn out in living characters. If under the old economy the matter of the children's training stood thus—"These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. vi, 6), what shall we make of the New? We have the stories to tell of the men of old from Eden onward, in all the diversified interests of war and peace, till Israel stands triumphant on the soil of Canaan; and the glory of Salem is talked of in all lands. But the consummation comes in the stable of Bethlehem. And thence arises a scene that speaks to us through "signs and wonders and mighty deeds," through unparalleled life-like stories, that tell of the life to be lived here, and of the life to be possessed when this has come to an end; the whole terminating on the dread day of Calvary. Is there nothing to talk of here? Does this ever become effete, feeble, fusionless, dead? Men talk of the old gospel. Of course that is in relation to the vagaries of something supposed to be new. But in the Book of the covenant it is ever new. The herald-voice of the message, ever the same,

is new to-day and yesterday and forever. The teaching myriads that are ever coming into life now, are the same in nature and necessities as the millions on millions that have gone before. The native ignorance of man is the same. His native wants in mind and body, his native adaptation to the remedial grace of the Messiah, his passage into the joy of the kingdom, the same. So that it is not a new view, a new interpretation, a new version, of "the glad tidings of joy," that went forth of old to the conquest of the world,—but a loving, earnest, faith-alive utterance, of the things most surely conveyed to men by the Spirit of God.

The young, trained under an influence such as this, may, in multitudes of instances, never know when they passed from death into life. In accordance with ancient prophecy, the Messiah has, from the womb of the morning, the dew of His youth, Assiah sees them looking as doves to their windows. And so the high ideal of the New Testament kingdom is attained, in which the outpouring grace of the Lord the Spirit reigns; and all know Him from the least to the greatest. Why should it be otherwise? The nature of the human mind in youth, the nature of God's revelation to man, the high end of our existence here, and the transcendent glories of our existence hereafter, all harmonise with the early submission of the young, to the gentle and loving yoke of Jesus. To this consummation the church ought to awake. The deep solitude of the believing community, ought to be directed towards it; and in patient, believing supplication before God, continue instant, till the youth of our people, younger and more advanced, become as if it were simply the course of nature, the loving earnest, devoted followers of the Lamb.

Wanted immediately.

Wanted, in many places, too numerous to mention, Sunday-school people who will cease using the word children when they want to talk to the school! Wanted, also, pastors and preachers, who, when talking about the school and its work, will bear in mind that our scholars are of all sizes and of all ages! It is a most surprising blunder to talk about the number of children in our Sunday-schools. The very persons who lament so often "and so loudly the defection of the young men and the girls in their teens," are the greatest sinners in this particular. Only the other day we were at a Convention of Sunday-school workers, when a worthy gentleman asked "for a tabular statement of the children in the county Sunday schools, that he might compare it with the public returns of the county. If we want to drive away everybody who is above age for the common school, we cannot do better than call our Sunday-school scholars children, and pray that every child on the roll may be," &c.

Now that the idea of gathering the grown-up men and women into the Sunday or Bible-school is becoming familiar and attractive, the superintendents and teachers, with the pastors and the preachers, who use this inappropriate word must be firmly dealt with. We hope, however, that this word of ours may prove to be a word to the wise as well as a word in season. Please, brethren, say SCHOLARS, and not children. We mean to hammer away at this nail until it is driven home and clinched. There are some other words we want to make scarcer than they are, but this one is the most offensive and mischievous.—Baptist Teacher.

People ought to be very careful as to the companies in which they insure their lives. From a carefully prepared statement in a New York journal, we learn that in the States "Some sixty companies have ceased to struggle for that which at no time was ever more than a precarious existence."