

Sunday Reading.

Songs of the Christian Life.

UNKNOWN.

"As unknown, and yet well known."
—Paul.
Unknown the flowers oft-tint the earth
With colours fair and bright;
Unknown the birds trill forth their notes,
The stars throw down their light.

Unknown the brooklet sings its psalm,
E'en when the birds have fled;
Unknown the dew-drops kiss the flowers,
And cheer each drooping head.

Unknown the falling drops of rain
The heavens with glory span,
With brilliant tints, e'en as they fade,
Read out God's love to man.

Unknown the silent ray of light
From yonder star doth fly,
With image fair on silver wings,
To paint on thoughtless eye.

Unknown the morn's first early smile,
So gentle and so calm;
Unknown the still night's pensive choir,
The everlasting psalm.

And He whose words all things pro-
duced,
And claimed them as His own,
The God of glory, King of bliss,
Here lived and died unknown.

So, like the fragrance of the flowers,
And influence of the sun,
Unseen, but felt, may we pass on,
And live in work well done.

BRIGHTON. W. POOLE BALFERN.

Pillars in the Church.

BY S. CORNELIUS, D. D.

This is a title applied by Paul to three of his fellow-apostles. He says of James, Peter and John that they "seemed to be pillars." Conspicuous talents, when these are accompanied with other needful qualifications, fit their possessors in an eminent degree to be pillars in the church. There are "born leaders" in the Church as well as in the State; God-endowed and God-anointed men, with abilities just fitting them to sustain weighty cares and responsibilities; men with the very strength of mind and will to decide those critical cases and to meet those momentous emergencies which will come, sooner or later, in almost every church. God never made choice of fools to guide the affairs of his church. The great leaders whom he has put in the van, such as Moses, Elijah, David, Paul and John, have been men of exceptional intellect. No man, then, should ever have a place assigned him among the elders and rulers in Zion who is not gifted with, at least, sanctified common sense. A pillar must have the right stuff in it, or it can never answer the purpose of a pillar. A good building never can be constructed of poor material, nor a solid structure be sustained by weak supports. Hence the chosen pillars of the church should be men like the oaks of Bashan and the cedars of Lebanon, men of sound minds as well as sound morals, without those grievous flaws in character or conduct which are suggestive of some sudden fall. Alas, how many a prostrate pillar among the ruins of Zion, presenting all the sadder spectacle because of its former stateliness!

A steady uniformity of character is another essential of a pillar in the church. No spiritually nervous and tremulous man is fit for such a position. The trying times that come upon the church prove above all other times, who and what its real pillars are. Others are "moved from their steadfastness," but these stand firm. Others hesitate and tremble when troubles come, but these calmly meet the difficulties of the case. The honor of the church is maintained, and that of the Great Head of the church, because these good and faithful servants have not swerved. False doctrine has been rooted out, faithful discipline has been administered, and a wholesome awe has been awakened in offenders, because there have been pillars in the church. No partisan, heading a church-faction, can ever be a true pillar in the church; but surely John, that man of love, must have seemed a noble pillar. Discords and divisions, schisms and heresies only tend to pull down and destroy the fair fabric which the great Builder of Zion is rearing, but "love buildeth up." Its office is to restore, to repair, to preserve,

to perpetuate. The turbulent and the contentious would often overthrow the deepest and strongest foundations but for the conservatism of the peacemaker.

The pillars of a church are not always those who hold official positions in it. Elders and deacons do not necessarily possess qualifications appropriate to the offices they fill. They are sometimes weak when they ought to be strong, timid when they ought to be bold, absent when they ought to be at hand. They quiver under the load that is laid upon them, and instead of begetting confidence, they beget alarm and disorder. Their titles are misnomers, and their offices should be transferred to men of a stronger mould; they are not and cannot be pillars. Whatever is made to rest on their stability, or to rely on their fidelity, will but fall the sooner. Pillars in the church are men like Caleb and Joshua, their faith standing but the firmer when the faith of others fails, and their courage growing more assured as their associates yield to cowardice. These true pillars of the church are also comparable to Aaron and Hur, upholding, as they do, the hands that are ready to fall, and turning threatened defeat into thorough victory. Many of the strongest supports of a great building are out of sight, and so it is in God's building. The humble artisan, obscure and unknown, except as his unostentatious piety and benevolence chance to be discovered by a few—the lonely widow, tutored by affliction to practical sympathy, and making herself a messenger of mercy to the poor, the sick and the sorrowful—the bed-ridden sufferer, witnessing for Christ by faith and patience, by precept and by prayer—these are indeed pillars in the church.

The Doric, the Ionic and the Corinthian columns do not present greater contrasts than did Peter, James and John. Peter was a very fountain of fiery zeal; James the untiring advocate of good works; John the bright exemplification of benignant love; but each was in his own way a pillar. No two pillars in the church were ever made upon the same model. Christ has use for the widest range of individuality. Moreover, grace can fashion into the highest utility what has seemed the most unlikely material. Peter, one of the weakest and most fallible of men, was made a mighty pillar. If unworthiness were a fatal bar to usefulness there would be no pillars in the church. But as it is otherwise, an apostle exhorts all his brethren, "Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Whatever the honors of any saint here, there are higher honors awaiting him, for the Master says: "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out."

Stealing a Sermon.

The celebrated William Jay, author of the well-known "Morning and Evening Exercises," was an extraordinary preacher, even at the age of eighteen. While he was a student at Marlborough England, a chapel which had recently been built was to be dedicated; and Mr. Jay, the student, and one of the professors in the seminary were chosen for that service.

On arrival at the town in which the chapel had been built, the professor, on the afternoon of Saturday, called upon Mr. Jay. He informed him that the arrangement was for the professor to preach in the morning and Mr. Jay in the afternoon.

"And now," said the professor, "what text have you chosen?"

The young man gave the text.

"And your divisions, what are they?"

The student named the heads of his discourse.

"Capital!" said the professor; "and your illustrations?"

These were given, and they pleased the professor exceedingly.

"Now," said he, "Mr. Jay, if your application is as good as all the rest, your sermon will be a brilliant success."

The "improvement" of the sermon was given, and the professor expressed himself delighted with the whole treatment of the subject. The next morning, arriving early at the chapel, Mr. Jay saw his friend, the professor, ascending the pulpit stairs, in quite a

pleasant frame of mind. But it so happened that the professor was a man of corpulent figure; and the pulpit-shaped like a barrel, with a section of the circle for the door, proved to be too small for the preacher's admission. Try as he might, face foremost and sideways, it was impossible for the fat professor to get through the door. An obliging deacon, seeing the difficulty, obtained a small step-ladder, placed it on the landing, and by this means the professor scaled the wall of the pulpit, and got inside; but the congregation could hardly be said to be in a devotional mood during the operation.

The professor, however, began the service, and, to the great astonishment of Mr. Jay, not only read the text he had selected and expounded to the professor the day before, but delivered with wonderful accuracy, Mr. Jay's sermon—divisions, illustrations, application, and all. At the close of the service the friendly deacon assisted the fat professor to get out of the pulpit in the same way as he had helped him into it.

In the afternoon Mr. Jay rose to announce his text, the professor being now in the pew, while the young preacher occupied the pulpit. With that peculiar emphasis, which no man could imitate, Mr. Jay read the words of John x. 1, "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."

Beyond.

"No, I haven't been to the meetings; I'm opposed to revivals, anyway," said Mrs. Wallace, drawing her needle a little faster through the dress she was mending, as she expressed her opinions.

"I never believed in it. The young folks get together in the back of the room to play and giggle, and older people grow to think they are a thousand times wickeder than they are. It only stirs people up and makes them uncomfortable. There's father, so excited over the conversions, he didn't eat the amount of two crackers all day yesterday, and he spends his whole time running after this one and that one, to see if they 'enjoy their minds,' or if their 'sins are weighing upon them,' and I truly think, from his looks in the morning, that he spends half the night in prayer."

"Bless the Lord that he has the heart to do it, Sarah," said Lucy Gray; "and if you would only come to the meetings, you would see that there is a reality to this, that there is more in it than you think, and that you too, Sarah, have a soul to save."

Mrs. Wallace shook her head. "I am satisfied to stay away," she said; "and as for my soul, if I don't get to heaven, it is a great consolation to know I shall have plenty of company outside. You may not be there, Lucy, but I know plenty that will be."

"Does that thought really give you pleasure?"

"Yes, certainly. I can enumerate many who will be with me, excellent, worthy people, whom I love,—only not professors, people not wrought up by revivals; and as I said before, I don't believe in them. It is true, Lucy Gray, I always fall back on that thought if I ever feel any anxiety about my future. There are thousands of good people, who, according to your standard, must forever remain outside the gates, such people as Uncle Willeys and the Clays. If they remain outside, I can afford to be content in such company."

"It isn't my standard," cried Lucy; "I'm not the judge; I don't say who shall remain outside, or who shall enter in. Let the Bible be your standard, nothing else."

"Well, I don't know, Lucy. I do about as well as I can, and if I 'miss the kingdom,' as father says, there'll be many more to miss it with me. I shall have society enough; and going to meeting isn't the best thing in the world. It's my opinion my sister Lydia would have got a better husband if she had stayed away from revivals. That's where she became acquainted with John."

"John is a good man, Sarah."

"He may be well enough in his way, and if preaching and praying will save them, they'll all be saved; but they would have brought up in the almshouse before this time if it had not

been for my husband and me. He's no force and no spirit; sits by the fire and prays, as if expecting manna to rain down from heaven."

"Well, Sarah, I hope you will see things differently, by and by," said Lucy Gray, arising and bidding her friend good bye.

In the little town of Brookfield the religious revival went on. The good people of the neighboring villages came to attend the meetings, and went away refreshed in spirit and comforted. The giggling maidens on the back seats came down the aisle to the altar, one after another, and the young men who came to scoff remained to pray.

The keeper of a saloon, which for years had been a bane and a blight upon the otherwise peaceful little town, opening its enticing arms day and night to the children's fathers and the maidens' brothers and sweet-hearts, drew down his shutters and locked his doors, and knelt in prayer before the altar, and laid bare his sin-cursed soul before this gathering of seekers after truth, entreating forgiveness of God and those he had wronged.

But through it all Mrs. Wallace, resisting entreaties, kept away. She had always the same answer: "There'll be plenty of good people left in company with me here and on the other side. They won't all go in at the straight gate, and most that start in the narrow way will fall out again."

The winter melted out in the great warm heart of spring. Spring deepened into summer, and Mrs. Wallace grew ill. It was only a cold at first, which grew into a low delirious fever, though which she muttered and moaned, or talked wildly, ceaselessly.

Lucy Gray came over to nurse her, and watched through anxious days and weary nights, till there came a day when the delirium seemed spent, and the restless muttering ceased. She lay quiet and cold and white, with her hands folded over her breast, in a strange sleep, so very like death only the doctor's repeated assurances that she was not dead could convince those about her that she still lived. For many hours she lay like this, in a strange trance,—death in life,—and no human presence could tell in what land she might awake.

Lucy Gray watched her constantly, and one day, sitting by her bed, commenced singing a low, sweet hymn.

Suddenly the still figure lying in this abnormal sleep moved, the eyes opened, and with a glad cry of "Lucy!" Mrs. Wallace held out her hands and wept.

It was many days after this, when she had quite recovered, that she said to her friend, one day: "Lucy, did you know that when I was sick I died?"

Lucy smiled: "Not hardly," she said; "if you had died you would not be here to tell us of it. You lay in an unnatural sleep, so like death, that recalling it now, it seems as if I had seen you in that last long sleep."

"But it was death," said Mrs. Wallace; "the soul lived outside of the body, and I am going to tell you what happened."

"Perhaps you had a dream or vision."

"It was no dream or vision, it was reality. A vision is something we behold; this was an experience as real, more real, than any experience which my physical being ever knew. It was my soul, Lucy, my soul's experience."

"Without being aware of the transition, I suddenly knew or thought that I was dead. I was a strange being in a strange country, walking forward, and many were walking with me. There were some that I knew, yet I did not speak to them, and they did not seem to notice me. Every now and again, every few moments, we passed an entrance or a gate. There was no inscription upon them, and I could not see beyond, neither did I see any entrance open, yet I seemed to be aware that those who were walking with me were passing in, one after another, at the several gates."

"By and by one like all the others opened, and I was conscious that this had opened for me. Involuntarily, I entered. Inside, a guide, or a being who might have been an angel, yet who bore no resemblance to our conception of angels, led the way for me to follow. At this time the clearness of my mind became dim. I seemed

almost unconscious of my surroundings. I cannot tell what kind of a place I was in; I seemed to think of nothing, I was simply following a guide. After a time we stopped, and the guide said: 'This is Hades, a place of departed spirits.'

"Then suddenly everything was clear to me. I seemed to awaken to the full reality of my situation, just as we awaken sometimes in the morning when we have been in a state that is half consciousness and half sleep—awaken to see the bright sun shining in upon us, and know that it is day."

"I looked about me. Here I shall fail, Lucy, to give a just idea of what it was like, because there is nothing like it on earth, nothing like it that you have ever experienced, or thought of, or read of, so I have but little power of description, yet as well as I can let me tell you of it."

"I was standing on a dull, level, empty plane, and stretched out endlessly. There was not a blade of grass, not a tree or flower, not a bird or bee or insect. Beside myself there was not one thing either animate or inanimate that had life. There was nothing, nothing but dead, horrible stillness, and on every side of me interminable space, space, space everywhere. It stretched out on my right hand and on my left. Before and behind me there was nothing else. Above me there was neither sky, nor cloud, nor sun, nor star, nothing but endless space, nothing but unutterable loneliness and desolation; a place without life or sound or motion. Oh, Lucy, if you were put down in a desert alone, you would still have the blue sky above the passing clouds, the music of the wind, perhaps the hum or murmur of insects which would be life, which would be company. But here there was nothing. There could be no noise, for there was nothing to move; there could be no change, for there was nothing to change; and surrounded by eternal space in the midst of stillness deeper than death, and indescribable loneliness, I lived."

"I tried to speak, that the sound of my own voice might bring relief, but I had no voice. I beat the level plane on which I stood with my feet, and clapped my hands in the vain hope of breaking the fearful stillness, but no sound came."

"It was neither night nor day, I was neither hungry nor athirst, only unutterably oppressed with the silence and loneliness. And this was Hades, a place of departed spirits. Yet there were no spirits but mine. In this immensity I lived alone. I would have welcomed a spirit of the darkest dye. I would have made friends of imps and demons, of anything rather than to be thus alone. I wanted neither heat nor cold, nothing but company nothing but some sound, some motion or life."

"I could not speak, but I could think. I remembered with strange distinctness all my past life. I remembered how often I had assured myself that wherever I might be in a future life, I should have plenty of company. And this was Hades, and Hades I had supposed would hold the spirits of myriads of men and women, yet I was alone."

"Oppressed with the weight of desolation, I moved forward and onward constantly, but I could never tell how far I traveled, since it was the same everywhere. I do not know how long the time was that I spent here, yet it seemed longer than the years of my life, and this misery, this unspeakable wretchedness was broken at last by a sweet voice singing. I opened my eyes here in this room; my soul had come back to earth, and it was your voice, Lucy, singing:

"Safe into the haven guide,
Oh, receive my soul at last."

Lucy Gray was silent when her friend ceased to speak. Lucy, who could always talk, who never failed to draw a lesson or a moral from passing events. Perhaps she had caught the terror of the story, perhaps she felt the weight and burden and depression of the loneliness her friend had described, and Lucy was silent and awe-stricken.

It was Mrs. Wallace who looked up brightly at last, and said: "And for the years that still lie before us we will thank God, and spend them in doing his work."—Golden Rule.

We usually learn to wait only when we have no longer anything to wait for.—Marie Eschenbach.

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1883.

THIRD QUARTER.

Lesson X.—SEPTEMBER 2, 1883.

THE DEATH OF SAMSON.

Judges xvi. 21-31.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vs. 28-30.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"The God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people."—Psalm lxxviii. 35.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

M. The Lesson, Judges xvi. 21-31.

T. Samson's Birth, Judges xiii. 24.

W. Samson's Might, Judges, ch. xv.

T. Samson's Weakness, Judges xvi. 4-20.

F. Israel Strong, Lev. xxvi. 1-13.

S. Israel Weak, Lev. xxvi. 14-28.

S. Confidence in God, Psalm xxv.

ISRAEL'S WEAKNESS AND STRENGTH.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Weakness without God, Vs. 21-25; II. Strength from God, Vs. 26-31.

QUESTIONS.—Who were the Philistines? ch. iii. 3. Where was Gaza? Relate briefly the previous history of Samson.

Vs. 21-25.—What always results from violation of God's ordinances? Who betrayed Samson? What may we learn about wicked women? What terrible evils befell Samson? What degradation?

Vs. 26-31.—What is stated in vs. 22? Why? Who were in and on the temple? What did Samson do? Would such a prayer be proper now? What does Christ teach as to our enemies? When Israel returned to God, what did he give them? (Golden Text). On what conditions can Christians be strong? Why are so many weak? How can they regain strength? What warning here to those who profess to serve God? What encouragement here for those who have fallen into sin and misery?

Scripture Searchings.—How many apostates and how many "judges" do you find in the Book of Judges? What disaster befell Dagon later?

Samson (Sunlike) was of the tribe of Dan, whose territory bordered on the country of the Philistines. His father's name was Manoah. His birth was announced by an angel, who foretold that he was to be a Nazirite, abstaining from wine and strong drink, from things ceremonially unclean, and permitting no razor to "come on his head." The angel declared that Samson was to "begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines," who had scattered the Simeonites, and were holding the tribes of Dan and Judah in terror. He was endowed with miraculous strength, and "judged Israel twenty years"; but his efforts at delivering his people were the isolated acts of an individual, fitful, daring, but without any consistent or concerted plan. Becoming a slave to his lusts, he revealed the secret of his strength to Delilah, who cut off his locks (the sign of Naziritishness), and delivered him up to his enemies. At this point our Lesson begins.

Notes.—Vs. 21.—The Philistines. A powerful race of aboriginal Canaanites who, though occupying only the southwestern portion of the country, gave their name to the whole land of Palestine; as Palestine is but another form of the word Philistia. Their territory was assigned to Dan and Judah, the latter tribe giving some of the cities to Simeon. But they were not entirely conquered and driven out in the time of Joshua, nor in the period subsequent to his death. As a consequence, they soon recovered much of their territory, and began such an aggressive policy against the Israelites as to gain great ascendancy over them. Indeed, the national spirit of the Israelites was so broken, by reason of the successes of the Philistines, that they even repudiated any attempt at deliverance (xv. 12). Took him. Took Samson, who, by his own folly, was deprived of his strength, and was delivered to them by Delilah (vs. 19, 20). Put (lored) out his eyes. They preferred to degrade him and make him an object of sport, rather than to kill him; but put out his eyes that he might be helpless to do mischief. His eyes that "offended" (Matt. xviii. 9), and which he would not "pluck out," in the sense of turning them away from sin, are plucked out for him. Gaza. Their chief city, and far removed from any chance of rescue by the Israelites. Fetters of brass. Rather than thongs of leather; a tribute to his strength. Did grind in the prison house. A menial employment. The mill of that day was simply one stone made, by a handle, to revolve upon another. By providing stones of great size and weight the work would be laborious to him, as well as degrading. Doubtless he was thus exposed to the sight of jeering crowds.