

THE OLD YEAR.

BY REV. J. H. HILLMAN.
The north wind's will so lonely
Is falling on the ear,
Its cadence telling only
The death-knell of the year.

ANCIENT NEW YEAR'S CUSTOMS.

As Christmas customs were for a long time a blending of heathen rites and Christian festivals, so, too, we find many of the New Year's doings of our forefathers were but remnants of by-gone customs of various nations.

The Jews, Chinese, Romans and Mohammedans, although differing to the time from which they received the commencement of the year, all regarded it as a day of especial interest. Says Abbott: "The old Roman year began in March; and on the first day of the month, the festival Ancyilia was celebrated, when the Sili, or priests of Mars, carried the sacred shield in procession through the city, and the people spent the day in feasting and rejoicing. The same sacredness was attached to the first day of the year, after the change took place in the Roman calendar, which made January the commencing month instead of March."

Pliny tells us that on the first of January people wished each other health and prosperity, and sent presents to each other. It was accounted a public holiday, and games were celebrated in the Campus Martius. The people gave themselves up to riotous excess and various kinds of heathen superstitions. It was to offer a counter influence and to protect Christians against its contagious debauchery and superstition that Christian assemblies were at last held on the first day of January.

The early disciples strove to exhibit in their life the contrast between the Christian and the heathen temper, to substitute alms for New Year's gifts, readings from Scripture for merry songs, and fasts for riotous feasting. This principle was gradually adopted in the practice of the Western Church; and three days of penitence and fasting were opposed to the pagan celebration of January until the time of Christ's birth being designated, when the festival of Christ's circumcision was transferred to this season.

In the time of Numa Pompilius, the day was dedicated to Janus, the double-faced deity, who faced the future, while he looked back upon the past. The Romans offered him a cake of silted meal, with incense, salt, and wine. The Hindus call the first of the year the day of the Lord of Creation. It is sacred to the God of Wisdom, to whom they sacrifice male kid and wild deer, while they celebrate the festival with illuminations and general rejoicings.

Says one: "The Chinese begin their year about the vernal equinox, and the festival observed on the occasion is one of the most splendid of their religious feasts. All the people, including the emperor, mingle in free and unrestrained intercourse, and unite in thanksgiving for mercies received, as well as in prayers for a genial season and abundant crop. In Japan, the day is spent in feasting and visiting."

Among the ancient Persians, prisoners were liberated and offenders forgiven, and thus the Persian New Year somewhat resembled the sabbatical year of the Jews. The "Feast of Trumpets" is another ceremony kept in continuance by many, especially the Jews, and thought appropriate for the beginning of their New Year.

The old Romans considered it peculiarly lucky to begin any new enterprise or to enter upon any new office upon New Year's Day. All the mechanics began something of their art or trade, and men of letters did the same, as to book, poem, etc. And the consuls, though chosen before, took the chair and entered upon their duties this day. After the government was in the hands of the emperors, the consuls, all in new clothes, marched on New Year's Day to the capital, attended by a crowd where two white bulls, never before yoked, were sacrificed to Jupiter Capitolinus. A great deal of incense and other perfumes was spent in the temple. The Flamens, together with the consuls, during the religious solemnity, offered their vows for the prosperity of the empire; and the emperor having taken

an oath of allegiance and confirmed all public acts done by him during the preceding year, festivities took place among all classes, and lasted several days. It was a time of universal rejoicing, when presents were exchanged and differences reconciled.

The Druids also sacrificed two white bulls, and at the same time the ceremony of cutting the mistletoe was performed. One of the priests, clothed in white, mounted the tree, and cut off the mistletoe with a knife of gold, which was received by another priest standing on the ground in his white robe. The sacrifice was then performed, and prayers were offered to God to send a blessing upon his own gift. The plant thus gathered was supposed to bestow fertility upon man and beast, and to be a specific against all sorts of poison. Houses and temples were adorned with it, and many superstitions held in connection with it.

It was considered unlucky, in some parts of Germany, to leave any work unfinished; and it was supposed that Lady Berchta—a mythical spiritual being, who has the oversight of sinners—was angered by it. The last day of the year is sacred to her; and, if she finds any flax left on the distaff that day, she spoils it. There was a curious Oriental custom peculiar to the day, called by the Arabs and Persians "the game of the beardless river." A deformed man, whose hair has been shaved off and his face ludicrously painted with variegated colors, rides through the streets on an ass, and behaves in the most whimsical and extravagant manner, to the great delight of multitude that follow him. In this manner, he proceeds from door to door, soliciting small pieces of money. A similar custom is still found in various parts of Scotland, under the name of guizarding.

In England, amid the ringing of church bells, ringing out the old year and ushering in the new year, it was customary for the young women of the village to carry from door to door a bowl of spiced ale, in imitation of the "wassail bowl," which they offered to the inhabitants of every house, singing congratulatory verses, generally made by themselves, and suggesting small presents. The young people also exchanged garments, which they called wumming and disguising.

The social observance of the first day of the new year seems to have been in substance similar in all ages. From the earliest recorded celebration, we find notice of feasting and the interchange of presents. Tacitus mentions the giving and receiving New Year's gifts. Loyal subjects availed themselves of this occasion to present their respective sovereigns with gifts, which varied in quality and value with the position and means of the donor. Many of the presents were very curious. Says Hore, "Stern old Latimore, instead of presenting Henry VIII. with a purse of gold, as was customary for a New Year's gift, put in the king's hand a New Testament, with a leaf conspicuously folded down at Hebrews xiii. 4."

Queen Elizabeth is thought to have maintained her immense wardrobe from the New Year's contributions of her loving subjects; and, as she is said never to have worn a dress twice, it may be imagined what they and her jewels, etc., amounted to. It appears that "all the peer and peeresses of the realm, all the bishops, the chief officers of state, and several of the queen's household servants, down to her apothecaries, master cook, and sergeant of pastry, etc., gave New Year's gifts to her majesty, consisting in general either of a sum of money, jewels, trinkets, or wearing apparel. From her household and tradespeople she also received a great variety of presents, and always made gifts in return, though of far less value than those she received. Down to James II., the monarchs continued to receive and give presents. At present, the court custom, it is said, has dwindled down to the placing of a crown piece under the ginner plates of the two chaplains in waiting at court on New Year's Day."

Gloves were more expensive in olden times, and money given in lieu of them was called "glove money." It is said Sir Thos. More, as Lord Chancellor, decreed in favor of a Mrs. Croaker against Lord Arundel. On the following New Year's Day, in token of her gratitude, she presented Sir Thomas with a pair of gloves containing forty angels. "It would be against good manners," said the chancellor "to forsake a gentlewoman's New Year's gift, and I accept the gloves. Their lining you will please bestow otherwise."

Pins, or gold and jewelled skewers, were also popular New Year's gifts; and from the money given for that purpose arose the phrase "pin-money," as applied strictly for personal enjoyment. With us and of late years, gift-making is more generally confined to Christmas, and calling on New Year's Day. It was

customary, however, not very many years ago, in France as well as here, for gentlemen in calling to carry with them little conuopias or packages of bon-bons, to present to the ladies with a "Happy New Year;" and, for some especial favorite, to hide among the sugar plums a little trinket of value.

THE SURRENDERS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

In the first place we expect the Christian to give up these things that are always and everywhere wrong for any man to do; that in themselves are essentially and intrinsically evil. We expect that your intention of renunciation will be absolutely pure and sincere, that there shall be no reserve, and no hesitation, in your resolve to cast out and utterly destroy every sinful thing from the lives that Christ has redeemed, and that you have given to him. You were required just as much to give up these things before, but you may now look to Christ for a fuller, a richer help in doing it. I think this is most important for you to consider, for there are many people in the Church who begin their Christianity with some great reserve, some special and gracious little sin, they think they may keep, if only they renounce the others, retaining some failing that they think must be too strong for them to resist, and which they expect to weakly give in to, and to serve. When you say, "I renounce all sin," let your intention be absolutely sincere, and claim Christ's help in making your intention fact.

There is another surrender which Christians are called on to make, which relates to a class of things that are not always and everywhere essentially wrong in themselves; there is no moral quality in them whatever; indeed, considered by themselves, they not only are not wrong, but may be good and beneficial; but they may not be so for you; they may hinder and retard your progress into the knowledge and character of God; they may make another interest in your life that would interfere with the great supreme interest. You can not, perhaps, tell before hand what these things will be, but they will come up again and again for decision as you go on in your Christian life, and you want to have the principle settled by which you must decide them, and the principle is plain enough. It is the one great supreme purpose of your life to advance in holiness, to grow into God, and nothing, even the dearest or the best, must be allowed to interfere with this purpose. The question for you then is, is this thing going to help or hinder me in my growth, my sanctification? If your conscience tells you that it will prove a hindrance, then there should be no hesitation in giving it up. People come to me and say, "Must I renounce this, that so many people, who are as good Christians as I, find so innocent? Must I give up that which some deary, and others declare brings to them a positive good? Is this, that so many good people do, wrong? Is this, that other good people do, right to do?" St. Paul declares that if meat makes his brother offend, he will eat no meat while the sun standeth, and so I, who, if I am a Christian at all, must desire so earnestly to help the lives of my brethren to God as well as to come completely to him myself, will gladly relinquish any pleasure, any satisfaction or growth for myself, if only I know surely that it may not help but hinder the life of my humblest brother to have me to do it. Then I must take others into consideration, and think nothing right for me to do that could hurt or hinder their best growth, and I must be ready also to surrender anything that is not clearly my duty, if it will injure them. What I said about surrenders is sufficiently plain to you. First, as a Christian I will do nothing that is essentially wrong; secondly, I will do nothing, that although right in itself will be wrong for me, because it will keep me from drawing closer to God; and, lastly, I will do nothing that could put a bar in the way of any of his other children whom I long to help, and will not hinder. — Phillippe Brooks, D. D.

THE ROCK-BUILT CHRISTIANS.

BY THE REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER, D. D.

Rembrandt was the king of portrait painters; but an infinitely greater than he has drawn in a few strokes the picture of the righteous man. Open to the thirty-third chapter of Isaiah and look at him on his lofty pedestal. He is pictured as the man that "walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly;" his word is as good as his bond, and he never gets lost in a straight road. He "despiseeth the gains of fraud (as the Revised Version has it), and shaketh his hands from touching bribes." A timely hint is this for our days when so many poison their character fatally by touching trust funds. He "stoppeh his ear from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil;" sin is not to be looked at, however attractive, or listened to, however alluring. Eyes, ears, feet and hands are all held subject to a God-fearing conscience. The summing up of this description is that the genuine Christian masters himself because Jesus Christ has mastered him; he controls himself because he has given Jesus the supreme control of his heart. Now see his Position.

1. "He shall dwell on high." While others build down on the shifting sands or in the quaking morass, his abode is up on the everlasting cliff. I once climbed up to the magnificent fortress of Salzburg, which overlooks the emerald plains for many a league, with the ice-crowned Tyrolean Alps in the background. It is one of the most enchanting outlooks in all Europe. But while I could only enjoy the splendid prospect for an hour or two, I found that a hundred or more people were living up there. So it is with the redeemed and rejoicing Christian; he is risen above the grovelling pursuits, the tainted atmosphere, and the soul-veiling cares of the worldling. He lives up with God. This is the true "higher life." The morning sun of God's countenance shines upon him, and every time it is still light. Such a happy Christian can sing:

"God lives—there rest, my soul!
God speaks—and cannot lie,
God sees—and can control;
God leads; then follow I;
Oh, heart, have done with all thy care,
And live with God, up there!"

MR. MOODY'S EXPERIENCE.

I can myself go back almost twenty years and remember two holy women who used to come to my meetings. It was delightful to see them there. When I began to preach I could tell by the expression of their faces that they were praying for me. At the close of the Sabbath evening meetings they would say to me, "We have been praying for you." I said, "Why don't you pray for the people?" They answered, "You need the power." "I need power?" I said to myself; "why, I thought I had the power."

I had a large Sabbath-school, and the largest congregation in Chicago. There were some conversions at that time. I was, in a sense, satisfied.

But right along these two godly women kept praying for me, and their earnest talk about "anointing for special service" set me thinking. I asked them to come and talk with me, and we got down on our knees. They poured out their hearts that I might receive the anointing from the Holy Spirit, and there came a hunger into my soul. I did not know what it was. I began to cry as I never did before. The hunger increased. I really felt that I did not want to live any longer if I could not have this power for service.

Then came the Chicago fire. I was burnt out of house and home at two o'clock in the morning. This did not so much affect me; my heart was full of the yearning for divine power. I was to go on a special mission to raise funds for the homeless, but my heart was not in the work for begging. I could not appeal. I was crying all the time that God would fill me with his Spirit.

Well, one day, in the City of New York—ah, what a day! I cannot describe it; I seldom refer to it; it is almost too sacred an experience of which he never spoke for fourteen years. I can only say that God revealed himself to me, and I had such an experience of his love that I had to ask him to stay his hand. I went to preaching again. The sermons were not different; I did not present any new truths; and yet hundreds were converted. I would not now be placed back where I was before that blessed experience, if you would give me all Glasgow—it would be as the small dust of the balance. I tell you it is a sad day when a convert goes into the church, and that's the last you hear of him. If, however, you want this power for some selfish end—as, for example, to gratify your own ambition, you will not get it. "No flesh," says God, "shall glory in my presence." —Chris. Witness.

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vealed truth. It is the redeemed soul's rest on an Almighty Saviour. Jesus says, "Trust Me," and the believer trusts Him. When I cross over yonder East River bridge, I do not anxiously inquire of the gate-keeper "Is it safe?" or walk over it with quaking knees. I know what adamantite piers support the structure. God says to me, "Trust ye in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is the rock of ages." My Saviour says to me, "I give unto my sheep eternal life; they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hands." When I put my soul, my interests, my wants, my business and my all into his keeping, why should I worry? All the devils in hell cannot harm me. Who should separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Brethren! if we dwell thus at the foundations of rocks, our characters become wonderfully solidified. We become to partake of Christ's unchangeableness. We become men and women of rock. Peter, when writing to his fellow Christians about Christ, says: "To whom coming as unto a living stone, ye also become living stones, built up into a spiritual house." He that doeth the will of God abideth forever. As the Scotch version of the 125th Psalm has it,

"Who sticketh to God in stable trust,
As Zion's mount, he stands tall just
Which moveth no whit, nor yet can reel,
But standeth forever as stiff as steel."

In this age of shaky pulpits and pliable mucilaginous professors in our churches, it is pleasant to encounter rock built Christians.

3. They cannot be starved out. Sometimes a garrison is obliged to surrender because their provisions are exhausted; or else the supply of water has failed. But there is no danger of this sort with the children of faith who dwell up in Christ's fortress. We are told of those who live on the munition of rocks that "bread shall be given them, their waters shall be sure." There is an everlasting well in the citadel. Even in worldly matters, they who live the life of earnest faith and obedience to God's commandments, fare better than the ungodly. Christianity does not breed idlers, or gamblers, or knaves, or beggars, or tramps. Wonderful provision often comes to those who "live from heaven to mouth," when the mouth is the mouth of faith, and the hand is the hand of our Heavenly Father.

But it is to spiritual supplies that the promise chiefly points. Oh, how abundantly the manna falls every day! How sweet and full the streams which we draw from Christ, our unfailing well. How rich the sufficiency of his grace! Happy is the rock-built heaven-fed child of God; he shall never be moved until he is transferred to glory.—Christian at Work.

NOBILITY OF CHARACTER.

As an illustration of the ruling spirit of consideration in a noble character, we may cite the anecdote of the gallant Sir Ralph Abercrombie, of whom it is related that, when mortally wounded in the battle of Aboukir, he was carried in a litter on board the "Foudroyant," and to ease his pain a soldier's blanket was placed under his head, from which he experienced considerable relief.

He asked what it was.

"It's only a soldier's blanket," was the reply.

"Whose blanket is it?" said he, half lifting himself.

"Only one of the men's."

"I wish I knew the name of the man whose blanket this is."

"It is Duncan Roy's, of the Forty-second, Sir Ralph."

"Then see that Duncan Roy gets his blanket this very night."

"Even to ease his dying agony, the General would not deprive the private soldier of his blanket for one night."

HOME DUTIES FIRST.

A girl of fourteen, who had lately been converted, asked God to show her what to do for him, and what was her special work. After praying for some time she thought came to her mind that she could take her baby brother, only a few months old, and nurse him for the Lord. So she took the charge of the child, and relieved her mother in the work and care of the little one.

This was godly and Christ-like. Home duties and fireside responsibilities have the first claim upon every child of God. We need not go abroad for work when God places work within our reach.

The daily round, the common task, provides ample opportunities for serving God, doing whatsoever our hands find to do.

Little words, not eloquent speeches; little deeds, not miracles nor battles, nor one great, heroic act or mighty martyrdom make up the Christian life.

LEMON JELLY CAKE.—Take two cups of sugar, one cup milk, three eggs, two teaspoonfuls cream tartar, one teaspoonful soda, three cups flour; mix and bake in thin layers, then place the jelly between.

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