

"MORE THAN THEY ALL."

[Luke xxi. 5.]

The rich men in the treasury cast
Offerings of silver and of gold,
Shewels and rings and drachms fell fast,
And chalices of carving old;
For Greek and Roman, Jew and Copt,
The glorious Temple's tribute swelled;
While at the gate the Master stopped,
And all the votive gifts beheld.

Behind the stately Pharisee,
An ill-clad widow meekly moved;
What could her scanty offering be
To the great temple which she loved?
With scorn the rich man could not hide,
As from her hand the farthing fell,
His talent swelled his breast with pride,
Her mites inspired a parable.

"More than they all the widow gave,"
The Christ of his deep wisdom said;
And in his words a precept gave
For all the ages may be read:

"More than they all, for they bestowed
Of plenty what they well might spare;
While she, 'neath penury's heavy load,
Sundered all her living there."

When to the altars of our Lord
We bear our sacred tribute yet,
Less by our gift than by our heart,
His eyes will gauge our duty's debt;
Shewels of gold may shrink to grains
Into his treasury as they fall;
While a poor widow's hard-earned gains
May win the plaud, "More than they all."

—Prof. W. C. Richards.

PRAYER-MEETING KILLERS.

BY DONALD MURRAY.

The prayer-meeting is of the utmost importance to the life and welfare of the Christian church. Religious prosperity among the people of God will depend largely upon it. Near the beginning of this century occurred that deplorable apostasy among the Congregational churches of New England which swept Harvard College, as well as the Boston churches, into Unitarianism. The outbreak was preceded by the abandonment on the part of a large number of churches of the meeting for weekly prayer. Even in the Old South church, which stood the shock and outrode the gale—the only Congregational church in Boston that did—the prayer-meeting was abandoned for four years, and when the pastor, Dr. Eckley, warmed by his intercourse with Drs. Baldwin and Stillman, of our faith, in 1807, started a meeting to pray for the revival of the church, he found but one man in the whole congregation who had confidence to lead in prayer. The life of the churches withered in proportion to the abandonment of the weekly prayer-meeting.

We may be sure that like causes will produce like results. Anything that injures the prayer-meeting injures the church; whatever tends to kill the prayer-meeting aims at the heart of all piety among the church-members. All this is so obvious that it does not need an argument to prove it, nor a fact to illustrate it.

Now the prayer-meeting, holding such a place in our religious life, should be carefully guarded from harm. Nothing should be allowed to mar its benign work or injure its influence. Everything should be kept out of it that is destructive to its power, and all means should be used to give it the proper tone and direction. Now I have attended prayer-meetings for many years, and have often seen them rendered useless by some well-meaning brother, who, in spite of his piety in a prayer-meeting killer. Our minister sometimes kills the prayer-meeting. He comes in and reads a long chapter in the Bible, talks three-quarters of an hour, and at ten minutes before the time to close the service he declares "the meeting open." He has exhausted the Scripture lesson, the patience of the people and himself. A dozen young converts wanted to speak, a score of earnest people had something to say, but in his folly he took up all the time. He complains of the work of the ministry as hard work. He wonders why the church does not come up to his help. He regrets that no more come out to prayer-meeting. But he does not seem to know that he has killed the meeting, and is solely to blame for the fact that people stay away.

And then we have the homiletical brother, who thinks he must preach a sermon. He has come prepared. He has it on his tongue's end. The pastor has opened on "regeneration." He preaches a sermon on "brotherly love." The minister has given one key-note, and he strikes another. He is elaborate, profound, metaphysical—or thinks he is. He takes twenty minutes. The people yawn. The minister looks at the clock. The brother preaches his peroration and sits down. The meeting is dead. He does not see the sarcasm, when on leaving the church a good sister says to him, "Brother Jones, you ought to have been a minister."

Then we have the brother who has an impediment in his speech. He cannot make one word in ten understood by anybody. As soon as he begins Christians hang their heads, the pastor fidgets in his seat as if he was sitting on a tack or a pin, and the boys and girls begin to giggle. Naughty boys and girls, but they cannot help it. Even the deacons curl their lips. He begins to speak just when the meeting has become intensely solemn and inter-

esting, and manages in five minutes to dispel all seriousness from the service. No wonder that one night when he closed the pastor prayed, "O Lord, if thou dost give Brother Sam anything to say, do in mercy untie his tongue and let him say it."

Then we have the self-righteous brother. He has a mission. It is to warn, rebuke and reprove the church for its worldliness. From week to week it is the same doleful story. He deals in insinuations. He intimates that somebody has gone wrong. He tells us we can never prosper while we have such doings, that God will never revive his work while the members of the church are so worldly. Sinners listen, and begin to think the Christians a bad lot. Quiet people are annoyed at the assumption of superior holiness, and the brother goes home with the consoling thought, "I have done my duty," but does not know that he has killed the meeting.

Then we have the controversial brother. His head is level, he thinks; the people all say he is a crank. He takes issue. He rises slowly and pretentiously. He says, "I don't quite agree with the interpretation that the pastor has given this Scripture." Then he argues it—at least thinks he does—and turns the service into a debate, and the prayer-meeting is killed.

Then Deacon Longfellow prays—you ought to hear him. He turns his back to the audience, and is slow and low. He prays about the Jews and the antediluvians, remembers the Sunday-school and the pastor, goes out in his heart two or three times for the sick, tells the Lord where he has been, what he has thought, discusses missions, education, the labor question and the kingdom to come. He goes round and round and round, until he cannot think of anything to say, and winds up with a benediction. You cannot say a word against the deacon. He is one of the best of men, but he does kill the prayer-meeting. Then Sister Mary talks—women talk in our meetings. She tells about her wicked "pardon," who is unwilling to have her pray at him, and who cruelly tells her that if she is going to heaven he don't want to go that way, describes her ailments, mostly physical, suggests that the reason why the pastor does not call on her is that he don't go among the poor, and winds up with a fit of hysterical crying, which unnerves everybody in the house, and kills the meeting. Then we have a brother who thinks he can sing. And sing he will. At a moment when meetings are tender, and heart-doors are opening to let Christ in, he strikes up—yes, "strikes up,"—that is a good term for it. The tune is unfamiliar and the words are unknown, but he "strikes up." He pitches it so high that nobody can follow him, and his voice becomes a squeak. He stops and "pitches" again—this time too low—so low that the few who try to get down to where he is, make sounds like so many frogs on a night in autumn. One by one they drop out, and he grunts on to the end and kills the meeting.

Then young Brother Jehu, who is a good Christian, but has a way of his own, you know. The meeting has had for its subject "Christ's Solitude for Souls." Everything has been tender, and the pastor is about to ask the serious-minded who wish for prayers, to stand up. It is the critical moment of the meeting. Brother Jehu rises. The pastor sees him and kindly gives way to him. Brother Jehu has but one word to say, will detain the meeting but a moment, thinks perhaps he ought not to speak at all. He is interested in the subject of the hour, but his mind has been led in another channel, and he cannot satisfy his conscience unless he says what is on his mind. It is this, that "men should vote as they pray." Now, mind you, Brother Jehu was made a vote distributor the other night by the party of reform. He has his say out. Nobody rises for prayer, though the heart-full pastor pleads. The meeting is killed. At another time the remarks of Brother Jehu would have been good: to-night they are murderous.

These are a few of the prayer-meeting killers that come up in our churches and do a fearful, but perhaps unconscious wrong. The poor prayer-meeting which ought to be the life of the church, is spoiled by those who have not common-sense enough to know whether they are doing good or evil. Some pray it into the ground. Some sing it into the ground. Some talk it to death. The sexton often kills it by compelling people to breathe a poisonous atmosphere which makes them stupid, and sends them to their homes with aching heads. Or, he lets the door squeak every time it is opened, for want of a drop of oil. Or, he leaves windows open, and keeps the people shivering in cold currents of air.

Now how can we save our prayer-meeting from the disastrous work of these persons? The deacon says it is his right to pray a half hour if he wants to, and as to being heard, he

does not pray to be heard of men. The critic says that he is only obeying the church covenant when he reproves his brethren. The minister thinks he ought to have all the time he wants, as he is the best talker. The singing brother is offended if you tell him that he don't know how to sing. The political exhorter says that "truth" is always in order. And dear, good old stammerer, who talks in the unknown tongue, seems to enjoy it so much that you don't want to put him down if you could.

Must the prayer-meeting go, as some say the Chinese must go? Or, shall we call a fast, and sanctify a solemn assembly, and pray for the revival of common-sense in the conduct of that blessed institution of the Christian church—the weekly prayer-meeting?—Standard.

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS IN TRIFLES.

Those who imagine that the practice of trickery or dishonesty on the playground or in matters of trifling moment does not exert on their moral character a fruitful influence, manifest great ignorance of themselves. The most cursory self-examination could not fail to convince any one thus guilty of the injury by this means inflicted on one's moral sensibility. That one can do such things and not suffer from an accusing conscience, proves that already, from some cause, one's conscience has become hardened. That one can regard deception, even in an affair the most insignificant, with indifference, ought to excite in one alarm. Are we not in danger, should a sufficiently strong temptation occur, or a sufficiently favorable opportunity, of carrying deceit to a greater length and into matters of importance?

It is a universally acknowledged truism that no one becomes very wicked all at once. The process of moral deterioration, all unobserved, perhaps, has been going on for years. When the boy who habitually cheated at marbles turns out a rogue, we regard this result as perfectly natural. There is nothing strange or unexpected in it. But you who are guilty so frequently of unfairness in what you call little things, remember you come under the operation of the same law. As you value, then, your honor and your integrity, resolve to overcome this evil habit into which you may have thoughtlessly fallen. Experience and observation confirm the truth of the inspired declaration: "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much" (Luke xvi. 10).

To show that this is not mere theory, that it is not raising a false alarm, that it is not a purely imaginary danger against which you are warned, observe closely the conduct on other occasions of those of your friends who are known to be addicted in little things to cheating. You will, if you follow them up, discover in their character a most serious weakness, one that can not fail to excite in you the gravest fears for their safety. There are manifest in them a sad lack of principle, and a degree of untrustworthiness that at times will make you tremble.

If it be said this lack of conscientiousness in small matters is an effect and not a cause, bear in mind that the effect sometimes reacts upon the cause, giving it added strength and intensity. Habit or repetition also makes it easier to do wrong, as well as easier to do right. It not only strengthens virtuous principles, it equally confirms evil ones. Hence the repetition of acts of deception, no matter what petty circumstances were the occasion of them, makes one increasingly inclined to transgress in this way, and renders one more and more dull to perceive the wrong committed.

The only way to preserve unimpaired our sensitiveness to wrongdoing is to be equally scrupulous at all times and places—and in everything, whether little or great, important or unimportant. Our conscience should never fail to reprove us for any deviation, however slight, from the straight line of rectitude; and it will not, unless we do it violence. And as in this world of temptation there is no better or surer protection than a holy fear of God and a tender conscience, let us be aware of blunting our moral sensibility by sinning against our conscience; let us be in the fear of the Lord all the day long; let us ever remember, "Thou God seest me."

In connection with the foregoing remarks, very appropriate are the admonitions of Burns, in his "Epistle to a Young Friend" (Stanza 8):

The fear o' hell's a hangman's whip,
To hold the wretch in order;
But were you feel your honor grip,
Let that awe be your border.
Its slightest touches, instant pause,
Debar a side pretences;
And resolutely keep its laws,
Uncaring consequences.

—Journal and Messenger.

I have been benefited by praying for others; for by making an errand to God for them I have gotten something for myself.—Rutherford.

THE SILENCE OF SCRIPTURE.

The silence of Scripture is not a new theme, but it has been set forth by Dr. Herrick Johnson in the last *Presbyterian Review* with new interest and force. It may be said of the gospel penman that they are aged in their reverses, while otherwise there is a natural diversity and freedom in their narratives. It is obviously a reserve on purpose, and just where speech would ordinarily be abundant and of much human interest.

Note first (as Dr. Johnson does) the silence of the evangelists regarding our Lord. They tell us neither the day, the month, nor the year of his birth. We can fix the year within a range of five or six years: we cannot even roughly guess the day or the month. Four biographies of Jesus, and yet none tell us the date of his nativity. Why is this? The evangelists knew full well the supreme importance of the event. They knew also the importance of his life as a child, as a boy, as a young man. Yet we have no gospel of the infancy or youth of Jesus. All that the gospels tell us of his life before he was thirty years old, can be read in two minutes. Our Saviour was thirty-three years on earth; yet his biographers almost confine their attention to the last three years. Was life thus written over before or ever since? It is indeed without the faintest approach to a parallel in biographical literature.

Remarkable also is the silence of the gospels regarding the stature, appearance and complexion of our Saviour. We know absolutely nothing of his looks as a man. No "picture" of him is given except in terms so general that as to leave imagination its freest scope. All biographers seek to gratify the universal craving for a "pen-picture" or some other indications of the appearance of their hero: why should the biographers of Christ differ so widely from all others?

If the gospels are genuine, the writers must have known the exact date of the birth of Christ. They must also have known all about his childhood and early years. His personal appearance must have been perfectly familiar to them. How then are we to account for their unique silence? John, who knew the Lord so intimately, tells us not one word of his first thirty years. Why is this?

But suppose the gospels forgeries written in the second or third century. How would you account for such silence? You could not do so at all. Forgers would have taken good care to give us ample details of the infancy, the boyhood and early maturity of Jesus. In fact, we have spurious "gospels" thus overlaid with "miracles" wrought by Jesus while still a child. The silence of the gospels is explained by their divine inspiration. On the theory of forgery this silence is utterly inexplicable.

Wonderful also is the silence of the gospels and epistles concerning the mother of Jesus. We are not told of her birth or her death. There must have been much delightful and precious intercourse between Mary and her divine son. Yet the gospels tell us only of three occasions in which he spoke to her—once in the temple when he was twelve years old, once at Cana, and once while on the cross. On two of the three occasions gentle rebuke is implied. Mary, his mother, is mentioned once, and once only, after the resurrection of Jesus. Had it been otherwise, what a basis there would have been for Mary-worship! As it is, the good and holy woman has been the object of idolatrous worship. How much worse had not the Scriptures by their silence checked and restrained this tendency of our fallen nature!

Note the silence of Scripture respecting "days." We hear of "Holy Week," "Good Friday," "Easter Sunday," "Easter Monday," "Trinity," "All Saints," and a vast array of other days, of which there is not the slightest trace in the New Testament.

How wonderful (to many how vexing and disappointing) the absence of ritualism from the New Testament! No minute regulations as to church government; no formulated creeds; no Liturgy. Archbishop Whately makes the following remarkable declaration: "That a number of Jews, accustomed from their infancy to so strict a ritual, should in introducing Christianity as the second part of the same dispensation, have abstained not only from accurately prescribing for the use of all Christian churches forever the mode of divine worship, but even from recording what was actually in use under their own direction, seems utterly incredible, unless we suppose them to have been restrained from doing this by a special admonition of the divine Spirit."

"Let us thank God for the 'Silence of Scripture.' He knew best what would secure our highest good. He left our reason, our action, and our imagination free, where mere human teachers would have bound us down as with fetters of iron.

GROUNDED AND STEADFAST.

The currents which set against us are prodigiously powerful. Some of them work stealthily underneath, like the waters which lately undermined the railway embankment near Greenfield and hurled a whole train to destruction. Temptations work secretly upon a church member's heart, and unless he is clamped fast to the Rock he gives way under the pressure. The reason why men of hitherto good repute default or topple over into open disgrace is that they had been undermined already, and temptations swept them down. This world's silent, steady tide takes hold of a Christian's keel and before he is aware he is carried away from his moorings—unless he keeps well anchored. There was never a time when our young converts required more of the clamping power of a Christ-held conscience than now. In business the fierce competitions strain hard on a man's sense of right. In social life the under-currents set powerfully away from what the world nicknames "Puritanism." Social clubs are especially dangerous to young Christians—yes, and older ones also. It is increasingly common for business men to "treat" with a glass or two of tipple after a good bargain. I have known this to trip up some church-members heels, and give them a disgraceful fall. Theatres bid importunately for the support of the Church; often the "hook" of sensuality is concealed under a very plausible and attractive bait.

If Charles G. Finney had been told that thousands of church-members would commence the Lord's Day with a dozen columns of secular news and police reports, and sporting items and unclean scandals in a Sunday morning journal, he would have lifted his clean hands in holy horror!

But why specify all the customs and currents that set against the foundations of Christian character? They are strong to wash out those who are not clamped to the rock and to carry away those who are not well grounded. The only safeguard is to have the Almighty power of the Lord Jesus infused into the will, and to give him the supreme control of the affections. Young friend, you have not long since owned Christ before the world by joining His Church. Now you must let Him own you. Look out for rivals that will try to steal away your heart from your Saviour. Give him the first place, the best you have got. If you try to please everybody you will not please Christ. Heart-love for him ought not to cool off when the novelty is over; it should rather be kindled into a deeper, richer and warmer glow the longer you are with him. Keep that flame at white heat.

Be steadfast in prayer. If you begin to neglect this vital duty, the locks of your strength will be stealthily clipped away, and when sudden temptations assail you like the Philistines, you will be but a poor shorn Sampson. Prayer is the perpetual power that will hold you fast to the underlying Rock of Ages. Keep your footing firm on Christ's commandments. Grounded on these immutable principles you can build up a character which will stand four square to every wind of heaven. If you do not your structure will soon topple over. Unless you have stamina enough to say "no" to every false friend who invites you into danger; unless you have backbone to stand pressure, your Christian profession will soon turn to pulp.

Your loving Master is ready to help you if you will but allow him to. Nor will you ever outgrow the need of him. The winds will not cease to smite you, nor the floods to strike against the foundation of your structure. Grip closely to Christ—so closely and firmly that neither the world, the flesh, nor the devil shall be able to move you a single inch from the underlying, everlasting "love of God in Christ your Lord."—Dr. T. L. Cuyler, in N. Y. Evangelist.

SHINING CHRISTIANS.

A friend told me that he was visiting a lighthouse lately, and said to the keeper: "Are you not afraid to live here? It is a dreadful place to be constantly in." "No," replied the man. "I am not afraid. We never think of ourselves here." "Never think of yourselves?" How is that? The reply was a good one: "We know that we are perfectly safe, and only think of having our lights burning brightly, and keeping the reflectors clear, that those in danger may be saved."

Christians are safe in a house built on a rock, which can not be moved by the wildest storm, and in a spirit of holy selfishness they should let their light gleam across the dark waves of sin, that imperiled ones may be guided into the harbor of heaven.

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