

SLIPPING AWAY.

They are slipping away—these sweet, swift years—
Like the leaf on the current cast;
With never a break in the rapid flow,
We watch them as one by one they go
Into the beautiful past.

As silent and swift as a weaver's thread,
Or an arrow's flying gleam,
As soft as the languorous breezes hid,
That lift the willow's long golden lid
And ripple the glassy stream.

As light as the breath of the thistle-
down;
As fond as a lover's dream;
As pure as a flush in the sea-shell's throat,
As sweet as the wood-bird's wooing note,
So tender and sweet they stem.

One after another we see them pass
Down the dim-lit stair,
We hear the sound of their heavy tread
In the steps of the centuries long since
dead.

As beautiful and as fair.
There are only a few years left to love;
Shall we waste them in idle strife?
Shall we trample under our ruthless feet
Those beautiful blossoms rare and sweet
By the dusty way of life!

There are only a few swift years—ah, let
No envious taunt be heard;
Make life's fair pattern of rare design,
And fill up the measure with love's sweet
wine,
But never an angry word!

HOBBIES.

[A paper read at the Free Baptist General Conference at Marion, Ohio, by Professor Ramsom Dunn, D. D.]

It is not strange, in these days of carriages, railways and balloons, that saddles are rather ignored and hobbies unpopular. But the real noble horse, the noblest work of God next to man, can never be discarded. It is the hobby in law and medicine, in teaching and politics, in sociology and theology, that are fearfully unpopular. But even these, judging from the universality of employment, are not so unpopular as supposed. What doctor does not attribute most diseases to some particular type, demanding some particular medicines of which he is sure?—like the Indian doctor whose skill by many was considered almost miraculous, but who could not reduce the bone fracture, but could "burn it and then cure, for he was death on burns." What lawyer has not some special principle of law, or special pleading, which applies in most cases? What teacher or politician has not some peculiar method or motive universally applicable in all governments?

Hobbies, so common everywhere else, must be expected in the church and ministry. Of these there are four distinct classes.

I. Ecclesiastical. As there are but three distinct forms of church government, it does not require a great deal of skill or practice to employ one of these hobbies. And so some, with very much reverence for antiquity and power, dwell eloquently upon the "Apostolic succession" and "Executive force" of Episcopacy. Others see in the beautiful combination of centralization and representation of Presbyterianism a full justification for repeated eulogies of their system as so liberal and well adapted to the work and ends of church life that it cannot be questioned; and so they profess to ask no conditions of membership but piety, thus assuming that Presbyterians and Episcopalians have no consciences or no piety. To be sure, in uniting with an independent church that form of polity must be accepted, but then, of course, it is said, they will do this if true believers. This hobby of unionism was adopted vigorously by the Romanists 1,200 years ago, and has been in constant use by all State churches; and is still believed and advocated as though physical organizations were the same as the spiritual union of the Father and the Son, and of those "baptized by one Spirit into one body."

II. We have several species of theological hobbies. There is scarcely an attribute of Deity which has not at some time, by some men, been made the foundation and theme of their religion. The same is true of every doctrine of the Bible. Every creed and confession of faith, written and unwritten (and there are many more unpublished than published creeds), gives special prominence to some doctrine. And so it comes to pass that in personal experience and belief in ecclesiastical organization and life, there are theological hobbies too numerous to mention.

III. There are sentimental hobbies. The sensibilities are awakened by religious experience and purpose, but not always nor generally in symmetrical currents. Penitential emotion, the warmth of love, the peace of faith, the joy of hope are in different degrees, by different ones, made the characteristic experiences. Temperance, Sunday-schools, missions, sanctification, and worship, all appear in different ones and at different times as leading types of Christian character. Some imagine that honesty is the greatest part of true piety, while others think benevolence, including honesty, is the sum total of religion. But benevolence for the young, the suffering, the sinful, the ignorant, are special forms of benevolence assumed separately by different Christians, who respectively, if not collectively, em-

ploy hobbies in different types of personal experience.

IV. But homiletical hobbies, if not the most common, are the most noted and notorious. They are numerous and occupy a large place in the pulpit.

1. Some ministers precede their sermons with troops of excuses, the most inferior, useless and stupid hobbies ever employed. The assumption that but for a "severe cold," "lack of time for preparation," or other unfavorable conditions, a lion's roar would be heard, is generally proved false, as the lion's skin slides off, revealing an immense proportion upon the outside of the head.

2. Others are constantly depending upon feelings to fill their souls and move the people. And certain kinds and degrees of feeling are repeated until they become hobbies as real as any other species.

3. Others are just as dependent upon peculiar and repeated gestures, without which progress seems to be impossible.

4. Anecdotes are probably the most common and prolific species known. They are not like mules, except in endurance and ability for heavy burdens, but they multiply and grow with the years; and many men, when unable to do service with the infantry and artillery, can make some tremendous displays of cavalry skill with a few hobbies of anecdotes.

5. Preachers having doctrinal hobbies will, of course, preach upon these doctrines, or against the opposite errors. And so some preach against infidelity, sectarianism, or the faults and errors of the church, in about every sermon; while others and different ones preach upon sanctification, the second coming of Christ, or the Sabbath, every Sabbath in the year.

6. Quite as commonly different duties are made hobbies. Love, prayer, faith, and every Christian duty, are each, by different men, made the special theme for repeated discourses, until the sameness of the preacher becomes wearisome to the people. And yet there is more fault found with pastors in this regard than is reasonable. Some truths and feelings are as essential to goodness and piety as the same kinds of food in repeated meals are to good health. Preaching is not intended to gratify curiosity or intellectual taste, and the constant demand for something new indicates more thirst for novelty than for the unchanging God and abiding Christ.

V. These hobbies, exhibiting such lack of symmetry in individuals, may develop more power upon each subject, and render the workers, and society as a whole, more symmetrical as well as better developed by these "one-idea" men than could be possible without such division of labor and concentration upon specialties. There is frequently more power developed upon single points than could be possible with equalized distribution; and by habits thus formed minds frequently move on with great power, without the wear and weariness of specific resolutions, as the momentum drives the car after the engine is detached. As the horse is strengthened by repeated efforts, to a given extent, but ruined if repetitions are too frequent or too long continued, so ministerial and church hobbies, even if good and useful with proper limits, may be ruinous if employed too frequently or too long.

1. As the rider loses the strength gained by walking, so a man by his hobbies is in great danger of losing relative, if not real power.

2. In relying upon the momentum of habit, and expecting results from mere repetition, study and personal development are likely to be neglected, and not only will there be the loss of power, but the loss of means of truths and knowledge needed in many efforts.

3. It disgusts and wearies the people, terminating probably more pastoral relations than any other one cause. Fastidious taste and love of novelty must not be over-estimated; but the people wish to see and hear a man who is something in himself, and not a bundle of habits and worn-out appendages.

Between the two extremes of sensational novelty and stale repetition, there is a safe and reasonable path; and to find and pursue this path nothing is necessary but growth and common sense. In the growth of the mind, in strength and knowledge, new types of thoughts and methods of expression will leave the old that is useless. In growth in grace, the very atmosphere of the soul will be life-giving, like the air we breathe; and new experiences, new duties and enterprises will save from the evils complained of, and make all life a reality, and the hope of endless praise a lively hope.—*Morning Star.*

KEPT FROM FALLING.

BY THE REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER.

When we encounter a limping backslider, with his crippled character, we look upon him with pity and with shame; those scars were

got in the service of the devil. A face disfigured by a bursting shell is a face to be proud of; a face bloated by the bottle is a face to be ashamed of. I know of many a sturdy Christian whose poverty is a badge of honor; it was the price paid by conscience for integrity. Other church members I wot of who have wasted their substance in wanton extravagance or in wild speculations; their poverty is a punishment and disgrace. Failures are not always falls. There have been numerous failures lately in the circles of business, but no man has really fallen who has saved his character.

The most frequent source of danger is trifling with conscience. This invariably "goes before a fall." No professed Christian can indulge in any practice or take any step which conscience condemns without straining the very fiber of character and without provoking God to let him tumble into the dust. A healthy conscience always keeps a safe margin between the pathway of conduct and the precipice of temptation. The moment that we venture to the dangerous edge in order to grasp some forbidden flower or fruit, the eye grows dizzy and we lose our balance; in that moment we have really no claim on God to keep us from falling—any more than David had when he leaned over the precipice of lust. That may a venturesome Christian who has discovered his danger and cried unto God for help has been rescued we do not doubt; but it is equally true that down at the base of every precipice of temptation lie multitudes of mangled forms.

Christ's sustaining, upholding power is infinite; but it is only secured to us "through faith." If that connection is cut, we are gone; and it is in our power to cut it. The same Peter who had been upheld once from sinking in the waves, afterward detached himself from Christ, and instantly fell. The spirit of boastful presumption, the reckless tampering with sin, and every wilful disobedience of Christ's commandments, *forget the protection of divine grace.* There are paths and practices and pursuits in which the protecting arm of God is no more assured to us than it would be in the rapids of Niagara. How can a church member expect his Master to preserve him from drunkenness while he is tampering with his deceiver? How can he expect to be saved from reproach or ruin while he is using trust-funds for his own benefit, or is risking his good name on the gambling-table of reckless speculation? How can any of our Christian daughters keep the heart pure while peopling it with unclean images from a licentious literature or an impure stage? So on through the whole category of sin. Grace never suspends law, never nullifies law. The Christian who asks God to keep him from falling must also keep his own heart with all diligence, and keep himself in the love of Christ, and keep a conscience void of offence. When we have done our best and utmost, we have been dependant on the divine help for that very doing. Without the indwelling grace, and without the enfolding arm, not one of us would be safe for a moment; without that, a whole church—even with a Westminster Confession in his hands—might slide away from the sacramental table into apostasy and perdition.

Here in this world none of us are "blameless;" but when the pierced hand has brought us into the presence of His glory, He will "present us faultless." The cleansing blood will then leave us without blemish. Acquitted for the past through Jesus, and perfected for the future! With united breath we shall ascribe all our conquests to the Lamb; and one of the joyful surprises of heaven will be to look back and see how close we often came to dizzy dangers and disgraceful discomfitures, and were only held back by the unseen hand! We shall then adore the grace that kept us from falling ten thousand times over. Paul will wonder at the grace that made such a saint out of such a sinner. John Calvin and John Wesley will join in singing "None but Christ."

There will be no discords in that grateful hallelujah-burst of praise, "Now unto Him who kept us from falling, and has presented us without blemish before the presence of His glory, to the only wise God our Saviour be the majesty, the glory, dominion and power, both now and forever more!"—*New York Evangelist.*

SENSITIVENESS.

We have heard people talk about their sensitiveness sometimes as if it was a peculiar meritorious quality—something to be proud of, indeed—until we had longed to undeceive them; for sensitiveness they only meant that they were extremely quick to take offence, and uncommonly apt to fancy hidden meanings where none existed.

Such sensitiveness has other names not quite so flattering to its possessors, as touchiness, suspicious temper, and even self-conceit. Few people

are more uncomfortable in every-day life than these sensitive ones; and too often they exhaust the patience and alienate the love of their best friends. To be explaining or smoothing over is a wearisome task, and when we must stop to measure our words and adjust our phrases continually, the constraint becomes irritating, as well as tiresome, and we feel like that Rhode Island woman who used to say to her son, "I don't know what to make of my Sammy; he is so 'sensible' I don't know what on air to do with him."

A little good, wholesome self-restraint and homely common sense would greatly improve these "sensible" people, who seem to think the world revolves around them, and that everybody is thinking of them, or speaking of them, or intruding on them. When they learn the lesson of their own littleness, and find how small a place they occupy in the universe, they will be less self-conscious and sensitive, and much more peaceful and comfortable.—*The Christian.*

EARNESTNESS.

"If I were asked," says Mr. Spurgeon, "What in a Christian minister is the most essential quality for securing success in winning souls to Christ?" I should reply, "earnestness;" and if I were asked a second or a third time, I should not vary the answer; for personal observation drives me to the conclusion that, as a rule, success is proportionate to the preacher's earnestness. Both great men and little men succeed if they are thoroughly alive unto God, and they fail if they are not so. We know men of eminence who have gained a high reputation, who attract good audiences, and obtain much admiration, who nevertheless are very low in the scale as soul-winners; for all they do in that direction they might as well be lecturers on anatomy or political orators. At the same time we have seen their compeers in ability, so useful in the business of conversion that evidently their acquirements and gifts have been no hindrance to them, but the reverse; for by the intense and devout use of their powers, and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, they have turned many to righteousness. We have seen brethren of very scanty abilities who have been terrible drags upon a church, and have proved as inefficient in their sphere as blind men in an observatory; but, on the other hand, men of equally small attainments are well known to us as "mighty hunters before the Lord," by whose holy energies many hearts have been captured for the Saviour. I delight in M. Cheney's remark, "It is not so much great talents that God blesses, as great likeness to Christ." In many instances, ministerial success is traceable, almost entirely, to an intense zeal, a consuming passion for souls, and an eager enthusiasm in the cause of God; and we believe that in every case, other things being equal, men prosper in the divine service in proportion as their hearts are blazing with holy love. "The God that answereth by fire, let him be God;" and the man that has the tongue of fire, let him be God's minister.

FULLNESS OF THE GOSPEL.

The gospel is neither an exploded force nor a useless agency. It is in the world, and in it to stay. It comes to bless the individual and to gladden society. It carries, wherever it goes, the richest and choicest benefits. It has a hope of glory with which to bless existence, a rule of life to direct and shape conduct, an eye of prayer to glance heavenward, and a fortress into which to flee when temptation assails. It provides an ark of faith to keep alive amidst the raging sea. It has a source of evidence and truth that imparts life and strength, a test by which to try the spirit whether it be God-like, a melody of song for the service of praise, a richness of experience to cheer and comfort under trial and adversity, a fiat of omnipotence which defies all resistance, a light for the soul's illumination, and a staff for the pilgrim journeying Zionward. It offers a mercy-seat to the suppliant, a welcome to the returning prodigal, a rest to the weary, a joy to the disconsolate, a righteousness to the sinner, a support to the weak, victory to the dying, resurrection to the body, a crown to the conqueror, a heaven to the purified and perfected soul. Suited in all respects to man, let it be accepted, prized and made known. Humanity's boon, let it go to and fro upon its beneficent errand, that all the earth may rejoice in its way.

THE LORD'S POCKET-BOOK.

"Whose pocket-book is that you carry?" said a friend to a business man, as he drew a well-filled wallet from his pocket.

"Why, my own, of course. Whose else could it be?" was the prompt reply.

"To whom the pocket-book be-

longs depends on another question. If you belong to the Lord, I guess the purse is his also."

"Well," said the man, thoughtfully, "I hope I do belong to the Lord; but your remark throws a new light on the subject. It never impressed me before, as it does just now, that I am to carry and use this pocket-book, 'my pocket-book,' as my Lord directs. I must think this matter out, for I confess, honestly, I never looked at it in the light in which you place it."

This pocket-book question is one which needs to be brought before men more frequently, more faithfully and more fully than it has been heretofore. Is there not a work here for the pulpit and for the press, as well as for personal effort, which needs to be attended to at once? If Christian men and women can be induced to look to Christ for direction as to the use they shall make of their pocket-books every time they shall open them, the church will soon be rescued from covetousness, and the world will feel the power of the gospel.

"OCCUPY TILL I COME,"

was the motto which the writer once saw in golden letters on the pocket-book of a well-known Christian merchant, whose name is known in connection with Christ's work in other lands as well as our own.

We would suggest that such a pocket-book be called "The Christian Giver Pocket-book." When you open the book your eyes catch the words, "Honor the Lord with thy substance;" on the opposite side you read, "The silver and the gold is mine." As you open the inmost portion of the book your eyes catch the words of a loving disciple, "The love of Christ constraineth us." Here you find the mainspring of all real Christian effort. The outside motto, "Occupy till I come," is only the outgrowth of this plant of love to Christ in the heart.

We shall close this by asking the question with which we started, "Whose pocket-book is that which you carry?"—*The Christian Guide.*

BRIGHTEN YOUR PRAYER ROOM.

It would not be a bad idea if one of the first sociables this winter were devoted to the beautifying of the prayer-meeting room. Make the room more home-like. Let the sociable be a "Devotion Visit," not to the minister but to the room. Let a number bring contributions as they come in, and deposit them on a table, and afterwards at a given moment let the packages be opened. Three or four can unite to get a neatly framed picture, suited to the place. Five or six pictures thus contributed would wonderfully take the stiffness from the room. Are you sparsely supplied with hymn books? Let some bring contributions of this sort. Ten additional hymn books would increase the power of the service. A great many bare, unsightly vestries in the country churches could gradually be turned into warm, hospitable, cheery rooms. It would seem, indeed, like the "home of the soul."

ONE FRIEND ONLY.

The time must come in every life that carries with it any great density of meaning, when revolutionary changes will drive the soul in upon itself. A thoughtful man who is conscious of such a deepening significance in his own life learns to read by intuition the lives of others. He cannot walk the streets of a crowded city without observing in a multitude of faces as they pass a look which tells of unspoken conflict. Some are bearing their lot patiently; some are battling with it angrily; a few are triumphing over it; all are walking in the shadow of it. This one is not like that one. None can understand fully the trial of another. It is no unselfishness in any that none can very essentially help his fellow. Each must bear his own. Each treads a path in which he is the only traveler. We need in such a life some friend who can and will save us from the abyss of stoical despair to which unblest affliction dooms a man. There is but one such friend in the universe, —*Austin Phelps, D. D.*

It is a good plan to study the Bible topically, but this should never interfere with consecutive reading. We will never get a correct idea of a book or epistle by picking out here and there a verse or two bearing on some certain subject. From some of the Bible Readings published, it is plain that this kind of reading has been sadly neglected. It does not follow that because the same word is used that it treats of the same subject. A Bible Reading ought never to be prepared until there is a careful reading of the context and a knowledge obtained of the circumstances under which it was written; otherwise there is danger that it will be like a string of beads having only an artificial connection.

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