"Hold Thou My Hands."

"Hold Thou my hands!
In grief and joy, in hope and fear,
Lord, let me feel that Thou art near;
Hold Thou my hands!

"If e'er by doubts
Of Thy good Fatherhood depressed,
I cannot find in Thee my rest,
Hold Thou my hands!

"Hold Thou my hands!
These passionate hands too quick to smite;
These hands so eager for delight;
Hold Thou my hands!

"And when at length,
With darkened eyes and fingers cold,
I seek some lost loved hand to hold,
Hold Thou my hand;"

God's Unspeakable Gift.

The Gospels surround the birth of Jesus with an atmosphere of prophecy. The sacred story does not linger upon the manger and the babe, but hastens on to tell the significance of this divine event. Salvation, revelation, peace among men, a new order, a kingdom of heaven on earth, this is the key-note of the gospel of the infancy.

Christmas is the day of gifts. At no time in the year do we think so much of the happiness of others as at the Christmas season. This fact alone makes Christmas a means of grace. Apart from religious considerations, the practice of making on this day our offerings of gratitude and affection to those we love has rendered Christmas beautiful. The day is an annual incentive to kindness and unselfishness. Its memories and associations touch hearts and purses not always accessible on other days. Who can tell how much of the joy of giving men, women, and children get to themselves in offering on this day their gifts and tokens of affection?

It is no accident that Christmas is the world's gift time. Its deeper meaning is found in the fact that on this day we celebrate the bestowment of God's unspeakable gift to the world of our Lord Jesus Christ. It should add new meaning, dignity, and sweetness to this day to consider the meaning and value of this gift.

One purpose of Jesus was to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory. In a word, he reveals God to men. It is true that God had not been unknown before Christ. Through visions and inspirations granted to holy men of old he had revealed himself. In a visible symbol of his glory he had gone before the children of Israel on their way to the land of promise, and had abode in their sanctuary. On Sinai, tremulous with the thunders of divine law, God had spoken. Through prophet and through psalmist he had revealed his will and his judgments, but all these were but the foregleams of a grander and completer revelation, — the faint flush of morning light on the eastern horizon that heralds the splendors of day. Greater than the angels who had revealed God in the olden time, greater than Moses, who was the mediator of the old covenant, is this Son, who, though heir of all things was made in his humiliation a little lower than the angels for the sufferings of death, that he, by the grace of God, should "taste death for every man."

Jesus reveals in his own person the nature of God as it could not be revealed before his coming. Words of prophet and poet issuing from an inspired soul, commands and laws of God, may teach us much of him, but no swords, though they be those of an archangel, no voices, though they speak direct from heaven itself, can teach us of God as the personal revelation in the divine Son can do. No poetry, though it be the most exquisite ever written, no description, though it be in language of the utmost power and tenderness, can make us know the love of a human friend as the personal friendship of that friend can make us know it. These revelations are best made, not through words, but through personality. Thus is God's revelation of himself made in Jesus. It is his life radiant and filled with divinity that teaches us, as nothing else does or can, what God is.

Jesus is also a gift of example. His life is the divine pattern set for our lives. It is true, he was divine, we are human. But it is also true that he was in a real and profound sense human, dwelling under the conditions of our life, and capable of being touched with the feelings of our infirmities. Jesus would lay his sublime life down alongside of our weak and erring lives; and, though that life is a powerful rebuke to our sins, it is still the hope of our lives and the pledge of the untold possibilities which grace may develop in them. Laws and maxims can do something toward setting forth the ideal life of man, but that ideal can only be perfectly revealed in a person. The painter can do something toward presenting us with a conception of a landscape or a sunset, but how much more Nature herself! The artist can show us a model of our friend's face, but it is at best a description; it helps us to remember how our friend looks, but it cannot speak; it has no warmth, no glow of actual affection. Such are all means of presenting the ideal life of man as compared with the personal Christ. They are but as pictures compared with the actual personality and presence of the one we love.

And here is something which distinguishes Christianity most widely from all other forms of religion. The ethnic religions have many lofty maxims and wise and just laws, but they can point to no such founder and pattern as Jesus was. There is Muhammadanism taking its rise in Muhammad, at first a recluse, then a warrior and persecutor; Booddhism, with its legends of its ascetic author Booddha, and the rest. What hope for human society would there be were the authors of these religions the ideals of human life? Were the world to turn and follow consistently after Muhammad, it would present a civilization like that of Turkey, which stands, where she must stand so long as Islam reigns supreme, in the very lowest place on the scale of European nations.

The personal Christ, and he alone, is the world's life-pattern. His life marks the goal of our effort and our hope. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ" is the loftiest maxim of life. Did the motives which reigned in the life of Jesus rule in the lives of men everywhere, the cries of earth's oppressed and down-trodden millions would cease ascending, the tears that are wrung from countless eyes by man's inhumanity to man would be dried, and the murderous thunders of war would be hushed in the silence of universal peace, of good-will.

And Christ is a gift of sacrifice. He taught us that the divine nature is love, and that love is vicarious. Nay, he did more than teach us this. He wrought out this grand truth in the life he lived and in the death he died. Man is ruined by sin. God loves him still, and Jesus' life and death of sacrifice are the crowning proof of that love. The sorrows of Gethsemane and the agonies of Calvary tell what God's love will do for man. On his heart the Son of God bore the weight of the world's sin that men might bear it no more. Could anything be more touching than this sacrifice of God in Christ? Could anything yield us such views of God's nature as this? Can anything so prove and impress upon us the love of God? Can anything so proclaim the justice of God as the severity of the Saviour's vicarious suffering? This gift of sacrifice is God's testimony to the gilt of sin, but it is also his sublimest proof and pledge of love, most deep and tender, for our souls, and is the proclamation, grandest ever made from heaven to earth, that One has already "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows," and that unto him every weary, heavy-laden soul may come and find rest.

"Yea, once, Immanuel's orphaned cry
his universe hath shaken;
It went up single, echoless, 'My God,
I am forsaken!'
It went up from the holy lips amid his
lost creation,
That, of the lost, no son should use
those words of desolation."
—S. S. Times.

Do not wait for somebody to call upon you for your subscription to the INTELLIGENCER. Give personal attention to the matter.

Getting Out of the Ruts.

The minister of a non-evangelical church was once asked, "What do you consider to be your duties as pastor?" He replied, promptly and tersely, "To preach twice on Sunday and to keep the Society together." Probably ministers not a few, if they were living in the palace of truth, would make a similar reply, although the sphere of duties would be so far enlarged as to include the weekly prayer-meeting, the Sunday school, pastoral visiting, weddings and funerals. But is there nothing more than this? The real aim of the minister is success. This being fixed as his end, the next thing is how? In a conversation with General A. H. Terry, General Sherman said, "Where Grant excelled everybody else was in his magnificent resolution. If one method failed, he would try another; but the end must be reached." Mr. Beecher, in his Yale lectures, which will probably live longer than anything else that he ever did, likens the minister to an enthusiastic sportsman, who comes to an unfamiliar locality, and asks, "Are there trout in that stream?" "Oh, yes," the old residents tell him, "there are trout enough, but nobody can catch them." "So, they will not bite? I will see," and he tries one bait, and then another, puts on different hooks, uses one after another all sorts of flies, until by and by, to the amazement of everybody, he begins to draw out the speckled beauties. The minister says to himself, "I am discharging all the prescribed duties; I am preaching the truth; I am giving a suitable portion of my time to study; I am visiting with system; but there are no results; what now?" He asks wisdom from God. He says, "O Lord, I must succeed. Thou hast not called me to failure; but how succeed?" Presently something is suggested to his eager mind; perhaps a teachers' meeting; perhaps some new movement among the young people; perhaps a reading circle; perhaps a fresh method of conducting the prayer-meeting, the enlisting of more voices, the introduction of novel topics, growing out of the personal experiences of the members; perhaps a meeting in some outlying district; perhaps the awakening of a new interest in missions; perhaps a conference with some neighboring minister, who has been blessed with success, followed by an interchange of labor, the sole object of the interchange being, not rest, but the deepening of interest and the salvation of souls.

A successful pastor recently said in a public meeting, "Once, when everything seemed dull, I invited, on Sunday, any to meet me on Tuesday evening who would pledge themselves to labor and pray for the salvation of one particular soul. I want none but these." He added, "I thought possibly there might be six. There were sixteen. As they prayed and talked, their earnestness increased. The next week there were more; and presently we were in the midst of a revival." The writer once spent a few days in Pittsfield, Mass., during a religious awakening, and asked the pastor, the late Dr. Lemuel Porter, if he could explain how the work began. He said, "I was led to read the Bible more constantly. As I did so, I became more and more interested." His wife interposed, "He became so interested that he would hurry away from the table to get to his reading. If he went out on an errand he would hasten back to his study. He would rise earlier to have half an hour more; it was difficult to get him out of his study for anything." The minister went on, "Gradually all this affected my preaching, making it more earnest, more spiritual; presently there came what you see." Another pastor addressed a note to a hundred young men asking them to put on the inclosed postal card, without their names, what was the besetting sin of young men. Then, upon the basis of these replies, he preached a series of Sunday evening sermons, addressed to young men, on these sins. The result was seen in increased congregations and in conversions. A shrewd pastor once said, "There was some religious interest; there were some inquirers who would wait after the evening meeting for conversation. With one woman I had often talked, without result. She seemed very much opposed to the truth. After asking God for guidance, I determined on a different course. At the next inquiry meeting, I passed directly by her without a word. This apparent neglect accomplished what no amount of attention would have done. She came to me overwhelmed with a sense of her condition, and soon found the Lord."

Perhaps the minister will realize, on looking back, that he has preached constantly on one class of subjects, on the more winning aspects of the Gospel, or on the more alarming features. Perhaps he has divorced his pastoral work from the pulpit. Perhaps he has preached too much about passing events, too much about the times and too little about the eternities; or again, he has neglected to engage the attention of the people by the improvement of current events. There should be no foolish pride of consistency, no blind obstinacy and sticking to a course because he has once adopted it.— The Examiner.

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Spiritual Growth.

BY REV. W. C. SHUPP, IN TELESCOPE.

This is a subject that has disturbed the minds and hearts of sincere, heavenly-minded men ever since the creation, and will continue to do so as long as humanity continues in a world where good and evil are placed side by side; as long, even, as our own goodness depends in any measure on our own actions. Volumes have been written upon the subject; sermons, lectures, and addresses have been delivered or printed and sent everywhere, but still the world is asking, "How may we attain unto greater spiritual energy and God-like life?"

The reason in part for such a condition is, that very much of the inquiry in this direction is in the nature of that with which the rich young man came to Jesus asking for the way to eternal life. For after he had been shown plainly the way, he was not willing to pay the price, for it meant a complete surrendering of his all to Jesus Christ, and we are told that he "went away sorrowful."

How many a Christian, and even how many that stand on the walls of Zion and declare the life-giving word, and who lead the flock into green pastures, are themselves starving, until in the words of the Psalmist their bones look and stare upon them. They dry up and die for the want of water while pointing others to the wells of living water, not because they do not know, but just because they are unwilling to pay the price. The "price" is their all. It costs "the world." Some one said after listening to a great evangelist, "I would give the world for such power." He was told that that was exactly the price of real power with God and man. It means deadly conflict with sin. The easy-going, satisfied professor of Christianity seldom meets with decisive opposition from Satan. But let such a one by the power of God take on a new life and begin to be a mighty opponent of the adversary, business, and he will find himself in difficulties out of which the infinite power of God alone can help him. Then it means that I must get just as far from the danger line of worldliness as possible. It is a fulfilling of the law rather from the positive than from the negative side. It is not how much can I do that is questionable and yet not offend God, but how much can I do to please him. John Bunyan said that the way to the "Delectable Mountains" was through the "Valley of Humiliation," and up a steep, rocky ascent which only the bravest dare to traverse.

We are in the midst of a mighty struggle. Satan is in the world seducing and deceiving if possible even the elect. The world is rushing on in its mad course, and unless we make a heroic struggle against it we shall be swept over the Niagara of worldly pleasures and pursuits, or else be slowly submerged in the refined, so-called Christianity of the present day. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force," does not mean merely a passive desire to be good and to grow in spirit, but it means a calling in of all the energies of the physical and spiritual man, and such a consecration of all to the conflict of life, as to show to the world that we really believe the things we teach. It has been said that a misdirected or feeble energy is better than no energy at all, and so it is in the Christian life, for it is better to try to walk and fall a hundred times, than forever to sit still fearing to rise lest you fall.

Many prevent the entering in of the pure sunlight of heaven by living in known sin. Oh, how that destroys our happiness and breaks our communications with heaven, for when we would come into the father's presence, that sin just rises up between us and God, and we can go no further. We "roll it as a sweet morsel under our tongues," and for the sake of momentary debasing pleasure we forfeit the pure, life-giving happiness which springs from true service and consecration.

Perhaps but few realize the powerful hold worldly-mindedness has upon them. If you are tempted to think this means some one else, just try to think undividedly of heavenly things for half an hour and you will probably find more worldliness hidden away in your heart than you were aware of. While we need in some measure to mind the things of this life, yet they ought to be to us as outer garments that can be put aside at will. But alas, how often do these things become very "bone of our bone, and blood of our blood"! We try to approach the Father, but there is a "great gulf fixed" over which we cannot pass. We have forgotten the language of the Spirit and could not understand if he spoke to us.

Then we must set a strict watch upon our words and thoughts, and give no place in our minds or on our lips to anything unholy if we would enjoy much of his presence. For the One we would invite to dwell within is holy and "cannot look upon sin with any degree of allowance."

One thing especially essential to rapid and permanent spiritual growth is extended daily communion with the Father. It is not enough that we spend a few paltry minutes each day in "family worship," but there ought to be a systematic giving of a considerable portion of time each day to the prayerful study of God's holy Word, and to meditation and prayer. It takes time to be holy, just as surely as it takes time for any great undertaking. This is a busy world. And especially is this a busy age, in which men are wearing and tearing themselves to pieces that they may gain an advantage, and we are prone to say that we have not time for such devotions; but the real fact is we are so busy we cannot afford to neglect it, for a season of sweet communion with the Father in the morning will greatly increase one's courage and power to meet the battles of the day. By it we take into our confidence One who is abundantly able to meet every difficulty that may arise.

Take time to be holy, for the history of the race teaches clearly that those who have left the greatest blessings to the world were those who tarried long at the feet of the Great Teacher and there learned to live well.

The INTELLIGENCER should be put into the hands of every new member of a church.

Earnest Preaching.

Perhaps one great reason of the frequent weakness of preaching is that it is not in dead earnest. No other preaching is worth while. If you see not the eyes of your congregation eager on you, but the tops of their heads bowing politely towards you, then you must bestir yourself; for you are not preaching, only prosing. Archbishop Whately says that a good preacher preaches because he has something to say, a poor one because he has to say something. That is just the difference. There never can be too much of dead earnest preaching. There is no man so much in demand to-day as the preacher all on fire with his theme. Whenever he comes, his welcome goes before him. Even if men stone him, still he sits his throne and rules the hearts of men. There are no triumphs of the past so great as the triumphs of speech, from Demosthenes down to Gladstone, from John the Baptist to Whitefield. Men bow absolutely before the magic of speech. It is not in vain that the highest revelation of God is called the Word.—Church Union.

FEELINGS AN UNSAFE GUIDE.—Our personal feelings are not a safe guide even as to our condition or prospects. When we are in bounding health, without an ache or a pain, we forget that we ever felt otherwise, and it does not seem that we are in danger of sickness or physical suffering. But a temporary attack of disease, even for a few days or hours, may bring us to feel that we can hardly hope ever to be up and about again with our former vigor. In the one case we are all hope; in the other, we have none. We are in fault in both instances. Hope is a duty in the darkest hour. Darkness is sure to follow each day in our present life. Our feelings are usually wrong; they unduly influenced and swayed by merely temporary considerations. The words of the doctor or the nurse, or of the Great Physician, are a surer guide to your true condition than your personal feelings on the subject.—S. S. Times.

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