

THE BARREN FIG-TREE REVIVED.

A pious minister, Mr. X—, was traveling on horseback, one Saturday afternoon, towards a large town, where there were many religious professors of different denominations. Thinking it probable that he might be requested to preach on the following day, he employed the solitude of his journey in meditating on a subject for a sermon. The text to which his thoughts were directed, was the language of the dresser of the vineyard, in our Lord's beautiful parable of the barren fig-tree: "Lord, let it alone for this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then, after that, thou shalt cut it down."

At rather a late hour in the evening, he arrived at an inn in the town; and it was not known that he had arrived, till he appeared on the Lord's day morning as a hearer in a place of worship, where he was well known and highly respected. The minister of the congregation, who was in the pulpit when Mr. X. entered the place, conducted the service.—Mr. X. was struck with his text: it was the awful denunciation of the lord of the vineyard, respecting the barren fig-tree, in the above-mentioned parable. "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" The leading idea of his sermon, which he entered into with great seriousness, was, That when the patience of God towards sinners has long been abused and subverted, we are warranted to expect that it will be exchanged for merited displeasure and wrath, if not in this world, yet in the next.—Having illustrated his subject in a very impressive and edifying manner, he drew this inference: That the Divine procedure with sinners should be considered as a pattern for the imitation of Christian churches; and that, although it was their duty to exercise great forbearance towards sinners, and to adopt every mode of exhortation, admonition and reproof; yet that, when they had withstood all, and appeared incorrigible, it became equally their duty, however painful the task, to cut them off, as cumberers of the ground; at the same time, recommending them to the mercy of the Lord of the vineyard.

After the service, Mr. X. was requested by his brother minister to preach in the afternoon; and readily consented. The morning sermon, though founded on the same parable, had not pre-occupied his ground; he did not, therefore, deem it necessary to alter his plan; but considering the coincidence as one of those unforeseen events, which Providence often overrules for good, he preached, as he before intended, on the plea of the dresser of the vineyard. On the forbearance and long-suffering of God displayed towards sinners, through the intercession of the great Mediator, he expatiated with great affection. In the application of his sermon, he was led to hint at the long extended forbearance which the disciples of Christ, in imitation of such an example, should exercise towards those who have offended; not knowing but that, by delaying the awful sentence of exclusion, they might be happily instrumental in leading them at length to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance." If so, it would be well indeed; and if not, the excluding sentence would be more obviously and satisfactorily the requisition of duty.

The minister of the place thanked his brother for the sermon, acknowledged the truth and excellence of the doctrine contained in it; but expressed a fear that, undesignedly, it might be the occasion of some trouble to the church. He then proceeded to relate the circumstance which had directed him to his morning subject: A man, who for some years had been an exemplary member of the society, had now, for a considerable time, been addicted to the sin of drunkenness, which had been followed by the breach of the Sabbath, the love of irreligious company, the neglect of domestic duties, and, as a result of the rest, an awful hardness of heart, which resisted every effort to produce salutary impressions. He had been admonished repeatedly by the minister, the deacons, and many of the members; and from the time that his apostasy had been discovered, he had been suspended from the Lord's Supper: but all appearing to be in vain, the church had been summoned to meet that evening, for the awful purpose of totally "putting away from among themselves that wicked person." To prepare them for this painful though necessary service, the morning sermon had been preached; and the good man expressed a fear, that the kind, conciliating doctrine of the afternoon, though by no means in reality opposed to the other, might

operate unseasonably on the minds of some of the members, to urge a further delay, which, in this case, was not likely to answer any valuable end. Mr. X. with great sincerity, avowed his previous ignorance of these circumstances; stated the manner in which the subject of his discourse had occurred to him the preceding evening; and added, that he had been confirmed in his design to preach on it by the morning sermon, thinking the contrast between the two, while both were equally consistent with evangelical truth, might render each more beneficial. Had he previously known of the peculiar reason which influenced his friend's choice, he should have deemed it a call to turn his thoughts into some other channel; but as he did not know it, he could not but regard it as wisely ordered by Providence for some good end, which did not yet appear.

In the evening, when the church met, the pastor soon found that he had not mistaken the probable tendency of his friend's sermon; for when the sad evidences of the unhappy man's apostasy, and the methods which had been unsuccessfully tried with him to bring him to repentance, had been recapitulated, and the vote of exclusion was solemnly proposed, several of the members strongly urged the expediency of a little longer lenity; and mentioned the general impression produced by Mr. X.'s sermon in the afternoon; an impression the more to be regarded, as it could not be supposed that he knew anything previously of the affair before the church. After a long and interesting debate, some pleading the necessity of maintaining the purity of the church by an immediate excommunication; others arguing, from the example in the parable, in favour of longer suspense, the latter arguments prevailed; and the sentence passed by the majority of the members was, "Let him alone once more. If he bear fruit, well; if not, then after that, let him be cut off." A deputation was also appointed to acquaint the man with this result; and to endeavour to impress his mind with a sense of his guilt, on the one hand, and of the compassion of God and the Redeemer on the other.

The members who were commissioned on this important errand, found, when they visited the offender, what they little expected.—They met with a cordial reception; which no others who had visited him from the church had done. On briefly relating their business, and declaring the continued forbearance of the church, he received the communication with tears; and called on them to join in adoring the wisdom and grace of that kind Shepherd, who has such various methods of bringing back his wandering sheep into the fold which they had deserted. He then informed them that his wife, a serious woman, who had maintained her steadfastness, on returning from public worship in the morning, had, contrary to her expectation, found him at home, a heavy rain having prevented him from joining a Sabbath-breaking party, to which he had engaged himself. In her way home, she had been informed by some friends, that Mr. X. was to preach in the afternoon. The unhappy man having been very partial to his preaching in his former and better days, she persuaded him, as the day continued wet, and he could not go out on his pleasure, to accompany her to the meeting. Reluctantly he complied.—The text, "Let it alone this year," &c., powerfully struck him. The display of Divine compassion melted his stony heart, showed him the heinousness of his guilt, and led him to apply for pardoning and sanctifying grace to Him who is "exalted on high a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins."

In this frame of mind the messengers of the church found him. The lenity of Christian friends, so like the compassion of a Saviour's heart, completely overcame him. The impression was deep, and it was lasting. He became once more a consistent professor of the Gospel, walking more steadfastly and more humbly than ever with God; and continued to "adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour."—*The Columbia Magazine.*

The Boatman's Hymn.

I was standing upon the deck of a steamer lying at the wharf at St. Louis. I had wandered many miles from home, with all its fond endearments in the form of warm-hearted friends, whom I had left with tearful eyes, to go forth "a stranger and in a strange land." My heart felt sad as it reverted to the past, and as far as human eye could see, the prospects of the future were far from flattering. Vividly

the word of Scripture came to my mind, "Ye know the heart of a stranger;" and I felt, in its full force, all that loneliness and desolation that passes description. Although my confidence was strong in the Divine protection, yet the horrid oaths of the boatmen, the curses of the draymen, mingling in confusion with the noise and bustle on the wharf, all tended to increase my sadness, and make me feel indeed that my heart was not there; and I turned away thinking I would give all I had upon earth for some sweet confidential spirit to whom I could unburden my soul.

Suddenly a rich melodious voice burst upon my ear, which at once riveted my attention. It proceeded from the fireman of a neighbouring steamer, who, busily prosecuting his labour among the smoke and cinders, was struck upon that beautiful hymn,—

"O! to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wand'ring heart to thee:
Prone to wander, Lord I feel it—
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it;
Seal it for thy courts above."

And as his clear, sweet voice sounded out far above the din and confusion, its earnest, melting tones touched a very tender chord in my heart. That hymn was a favorite with a now sainted mother, and full well do I recollect, when a child, how often I laid my head on her lap, and heard her sing it until every line became indelibly impressed upon my memory.

How instantly my heart warmed toward that child of the waters. I felt that the hymn came from the depths of his soul, and that in him I had, indeed, a brother. Each line was like oil upon the waters; and as he finished the last, I could have greeted him as an old familiar friend. But just then we were separated by the starting of the boat, and he was left in ignorance of the effect of the hymn upon my feelings. How it cheered my heart to think, that even among the wicked throng we had just left, there was one who was not ashamed to lift up his voice publicly in praise of the Lord of Hosts. No longer I felt a stranger, but deeply grateful to God, who had thus raised up a ministering spirit. A new train of reflections were started, my sadness vanished, and I felt, indeed, that I was under the care of Him who letteth not a sparrow fall without his knowledge.

And of all this the boatman was unconscious. In the joy of his heart he had sung the hymn, and, perhaps perfectly careless if any heard, save the Father. Little did he imagine how he had cheered the heart of the stranger. Where he is now I know not—I never expect to; but I have often, in the closet, asked God to repay that comfort four-fold when he shall need it. And now when I feel that my life has been so far spent in vain, that I have been utterly useless to both God and man, and then I think of the boatman's hymn.

When I see the watchman on the walls of Zion, weak and faint of heart, mourning her desolation and his insufficiency, then I think of the effect produced by the hymn of the unconscious boatman, and marvel at the wisdom of the Almighty in hiding from him the effect of his labours.

When I see all Zion struggling against the encroachments of sin, her people weeping and praying, beseeching God with many entreaties, to stretch forth his hand and bless her labours, then I think that if the righteous Judge could so bless the boatman's hymn, how much more the labours of his people when persevered in with supplications and tears.—*N. Y. Christian Advocate and Journal.*

Spiritual Blindness.

It is in this light that the Scriptures exhibit the doctrine of the works of creation. The heavens and the earth are represented as proclaiming the glory of God; but they are never represented as proclaiming a Saviour. Paul refers to these preachers, to show that the heathens were without excuse in their idolatry, not that by them they were informed of a way of salvation. The nineteenth Psalm appeals to these preachers, and shows the amount of their doctrine. The Psalmist tells us that the heavens proclaim the glory of their Creator. They are the work of his hands, and all the wisdom, and power, and goodness displayed in them is his. These preachers preach unceasingly day and night, and universally, over the globe. When, for a time, they retire, they retire not for rest, but for a change of pulpits. When the sun goes down, he covers not himself for sleep, but rises to new lands for uninterrupted labor. He and his fellow-preachers,

speak every language. Beyond all preachers they possess the gift of tongues. They address the barbarous as well as the civilized. Their language is intelligible to the ignorant as well as to the learned. These great missionaries are completely furnished for their work; and never were preachers favored with such an audience. All nations of all ages have heard them. Even in the same day they preach to every nation under heaven. They need neither food, nor raiment, nor house. Surely such preachers deserve a hearing. Yet, strange to say, of all preachers they have been the most unsuccessful. They have never made a single convert. They have never brought an individual from idolatry to the worship of the one living and true God. There is not, in all heathen antiquity, one solitary instance, in which the preaching of the sun, moon, and stars has brought an idolater to the knowledge and worship of God, even as he is manifested in his works. Socrates and Cicero are no exceptions to this, more than are the Egyptians, who worshipped the leeks and onions of their gardens. Noah had little success; Jeremiah had little success; but the heavenly preachers have had the least success of all. What, then, must be the blindness, what must be the corruption, what must be the guilt of human nature, which continues in darkness in the midst of light? The greatest natural blindness, that ever afflicted man, can not exceed the spiritual blindness that belongs by nature to all the children of men.

The Greatest Innovators.

The greatest Innovator that ever appeared in our world was Jesus Christ himself. He aimed absolutely to abrogate the old, and to make all things new. He aimed to bring the temple and the sacrifices and the priesthood to an end, not as a system of error, indeed, but as a system which had nothing more to accomplish, and which was now to be supplanted by a higher dispensation. He aimed to destroy the national caste of the Jew, and to introduce a brotherhood of Jew and Samaritan and Gentile. He attacked without reserve the wisdom and sanctity of the Scribe and the Pharisee. He met the doctor of the law and the ruler of the people with the calm brow and the clear and unfaltering voice of truth. He threw himself upon the merits of his cause, and professed himself a radical innovator and reformer. What justified him? Simply, that he had truth on his side, and he had authority from heaven.

Christianity, introduced to the world by the apostles, was an innovation upon old and venerable institutions. No innovation ever attempted was so destructive of the old order of things. It is an amazing history this of the twelve apostles, poor and unknown, going out into the world to upturn all the religions of the world. How they were ridiculed, scorned and laughed at—they, a few ignorant, miserable fanatics, attacking these religions which had stood for mighty centuries, which celebrated their rites in majestic temples crowded by joyful worshippers bowing down before beautiful idols, which lived in the most glorious forms of art, which were the religions of ancient, powerful, and heroic nations, which had gathered around them history, philosophy, and poetry, which had been acknowledged from time immemorial by their fathers, by kings and heroes, by artists, poets, and philosophers! It is not to be wondered at, that when they first appeared they were objects of mere amusement, and the curious multitude cried out, "Let us hear what these babblers have to say." Nor is it to be wondered at, that as they produced a deeper and deeper impression, and the number of their adherents increased, they should have been met by violent opposition and rancorous persecution. They were reproached as disturbers of the public peace; they were unsettling old beliefs; they were invading sacred institutions; they were scattering abroad infamous doctrines; they were turning the world upside down.—*Christian Review.*

GOD WISE IN COUNSEL.—In not a few of the Asiatic islands under the burning sun of the tropics, vast beds of coal are found. We now know why this fuel should have been provided in such localities. It will render it possible and easy for numberless steamships to ply in these waters: and thus to carry commerce, civilization and Christianity to the more than ten thousand islands of that wonderful archipelago. But what if these coal beds had been discovered years ago, when infidelity was rampant; an infidelity very shallow in many