

From the American Messenger.

THE FIRST AND LAST COMMUNION.

It was a chill morning of the Sabbath in November, when the congregation assembled to obey the last command of their dying Lord, "Do this in remembrance of me." The table was spread with the emblems of his broken body and shed blood: still, the pastor deferred entering upon the service; there were anxious looks towards the door, while a pew evidently prepared for an invalid was still unoccupied.

It was generally known, that among the candidates for admission, Sarah D— had been received, and it was much feared that she would not be able to attend this her first, and in all probability her last communion; and all who knew her, hoped that she would not encounter such weather, with her slight hold on life. But they were not long kept in doubt. The door opened. For the first time in many months she entered the sanctuary of God. Supported by her brother, she came feebly up the aisle. Every eye turned involuntarily upon her, but as quickly was averted. Not one, I am sure, in that large assembly was tearless, as they saw the ravages disease had made upon that once blooming face, and how death had marked her for his own. She alone was composed, for she knew it all.— There was a calm, sweet expression, which bespoke an inward joy and peace unshaken; for now the long desire of her heart was to be gratified. She was to confess her Saviour before men.

The pastor rose, and after looking to God for a blessing, requested those who were to take upon themselves their covenant vows to come forward. There was an effort to rise by the young invalid, but the pastor beckoned her to remain seated. While with a solemn though tremulous voice he proceeded with the forms of admission to the church, much he feared that she might even then pass up to the marriage-supper of the Lamb. He had heard her oft-repeated prayer for this privilege, and the expression of her confidence that the sure promise would not fail, "My strength is sufficient for thee." How many hearts went up to God in her behalf—not that her life might be spared, for God had settled that point, but that his presence might continue with her, and bear her rejoicing through the dark valley, and bind up the bleeding hearts of her afflicted parents, and that devoted only brother.

The service, always deeply impressive, was now peculiarly so. She seemed to stand a link between the living and the dead. Never did I realize the preciousness of a Saviour's love so fully, as when I sat at his table with that dying girl, and with the eye of faith saw her spirit, washed in the blood of Jesus, passing the portals of heaven. I had been much with her through her long sickness, knew how she had clung to life, how strong were its ties for her, the child of affluence, and an only idolized daughter. I had often pleaded with her to commit all into the hands of God—had watched with intense interest the struggle going on in her own mind, and God's dealings with her; at last had seen grace triumphing over doubts and fears, and heard her, sweetly submissive, yea, rejoicing, utter the words of the psalmist, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now keep I thy word." Oh, how much had a pious mother's instructions and wrestling prayers been instrumental in it—God seldom fails to bless such means.

After this precious communion-season was over, and the benediction had been pronounced, no one ventured to approach the young invalid, feeling that she must be too much exhausted. She sent her brother requesting me to come to her. When I went, she said, "Will you go without welcoming me as one of the lambs of the flock? Oh, what a precious, precious privilege, that God should have permitted me to come as one of his own chosen ones!"

Months passed, and again we gathered to renew our covenant vows around the table of our common Lord. Sarah was not there, she had gone to the upper sanctuary, to the marriage-supper of the Lamb.

"Where the smile of the Lord is the feast of the soul."

She had lingered long on the confines of the tomb, and even so far revived as to be carried to a balmy clime, her friends hoping to prolong life; but they were compelled to hasten back to gratify her last wish, of looking once more upon the home of her childhood, and to be laid in the village graveyard beside one to whom she had given her first affections, and

who had gone before her a victim to the same insidious disease which was cutting her down. Much she hoped once more to enter the sanctuary of God and commemorate the Saviour's love, but he had ordered otherwise. Her first was her last communion.

Practical Workings of Systematic Benevolence.

Few "signs of the times" are more hopeful than the prompt adoption by Christians of the scriptural principle discussed in the "Premium Essays," of stated and proportionate benevolence. Once made general, that principle will furnish to overflowing the means for prosecuting evangelical enterprises on a more adequate scale. We append a few illustrations from our correspondence of the workings of this plan:

A gentleman in Baltimore encloses a donation of \$20, and writes, "The Prize Essays have instructed, and brought me to adopt a fixed system of benevolence. I set aside, monthly, a definite portion of my income; and as often, adjust my accounts with this fund. One great advantage I derive from this system is this, that I avoid all controversy with my selfishness. Regarding the Lord's share as not my own, I can dispose of it for benevolent purposes without depending on some eloquent appeal. The only questions are, Is the object a laudable one; and is there any money in the treasury? Then I can act systematically, deliberately, and impartially."

"A friend to the tract cause," in sending \$50, says, "it is one of the results of a system which I adopted when I commenced in life. I was led to resolve that the tenth of all my increase should be the Lord's. This was fifteen years ago, and I have ever kept it in view through the darkest as well as the brightest days. As I began with nothing except a cabinet-maker's trade, my progress was slow; but I found occasion to bless God that he had put it into my heart to make this resolution. About a year and a half since, I made it a tenth of my income, and find it a feast to my soul to do something to aid in the benevolent enterprises of the day."

An anonymous friend encloses \$15, to the Secretary of the American Tract Society, Boston, towards the support of the 1,000 colporteurs, and proposes to remit the same quarterly. Though in comparatively humble life, he resolved, about two years since, to set apart one tenth of his salary and other sources of income to objects of Christian charity; but fearing he was not doing all he ought, he has increased the amount.

A pious female sends \$2, as laid by "on the first day of the week," during a season of protracted sickness.

The Elder in Trouble.

"Be not deceived," said one, when giving admonition under the direction of the Spirit. The necessity of this was finely illustrated in a recent conversation. An old Christian woman was visiting her friends. They were content with the antiquated creed known in the Apostles' day as "the faith which was once delivered to the saints." It seemed that the visitor's attainments far outreached the things there intended, for these she called "the rudiments," and her wonderful experience "perfection," which she explained to mean complete and entire freedom from sin. Now it so happened that the head of the household was an old man, and an elder in his church. But his guest's experience seemed not only far beyond his, but also entirely contradictory to his understanding of that rule of faith, the Word. As might be expected of a simple Dutchman, he became quite puzzled. He could not at a jump get over it. The ninth chapter of Daniel and the seventh of Romans—the one containing the prayer of a holy prophet, and the other the experience of a holy apostle, came to mind. The purity of the old woman, "enjoying the blessing of perfection," seemed to leave those holy men in such depths of impurity as to bewilder him. He was fast making up his mind to bring the matter before the dominie for explanation; for, thought he, if he be a teacher sent from God, he ought to know something about this matter. But "the meek will He guide in judgment;" and the old man was soon taught in a way the least expected.

"You don't mean that you are absolutely free from all sin?" suggested the elder, as though he might be mistaken in her meaning.

"O, yes," said the old woman; "I can truly say, that for the past two weeks I have not known what sin is."

The elder was afraid she did not know the nature of sin; but as her words were intended to mean that she "had no sin," he was sorely embarrassed; for, despite of himself, the words of John the apostle came plump to mind: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." Nor was he less so, even after a most vigorous scratching over his right ear—a habit of the old man, whenever perplexed.

"Did you hear," said the visitor, abruptly changing the subject, "did you hear about those two young Jews abroad, who have suddenly entered into a most enormous property? I saw it in the paper."

"No," said the elder, mechanically; for the new doctrine "kept troubling him."

"O, it is wonderful how some folks do get rich, and others don't!" exclaimed the good woman.

But still the new doctrine was perplexing the elder.

"Very wonderful!" continued the old lady. "And I've been thinking for the week past, if I had one tenth of what they've got, I should be satisfied."

"What!" exclaimed the elder. "How is this? You have lived in sinless perfection for two weeks past, and yet for half that time have been committing covetousness, the most deadly sin mentioned in the holy book. Well, this too is contrary to my understanding.—But this I do know, 'the heart is deceitful above all things.' And the elder shook his head, like one relieved of his embarrassment, at the same time very mildly adding, "Take heed that ye be not deceived."—*Ch. Intelligencer.*

Sorrow.

Sorrow is essential to penitence. We have not been made partakers of penitence if we do not feel inward grief on the review of our transgressions. We read of "godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation." If we have injured a fellow creature, the indication of a right sense of the aggression, is a sincere regret that we should have so acted. How much more necessary is it that we should be unfeignedly sorry for our innumerable offences against God. Sorrow for sin, is not, however, to be estimated only by violent emotions and copious tears. The passions are much stronger in themselves, are much more excitable in some than in others; and therefore the same degree of inward emotion or outward grief is not to be expected from all. The degrees of sorrow, as well as the outward modes of expressing it, will vary, as belonging more to the sensitive nature than to the rational; and for avoiding all scruple and doubtfulness, on this head, it may be laid down for certain, that the least degree of sorrow is sufficient, if it produce reformation; the greatest is insufficient, if it do not.

The next step in penitence is confession.—Real sorrow for sin is always frank and impartial, while false or partial sorrow is prone to concealment, palliation and apology.—There is a wretched proneness in many persons, when convicted of sin, to offer excuses and to endeavour to think the best of their case. They cannot be brought to admit the charge in all its length and breadth, but they attempt to hide its magnitude from their own eyes. This is a dangerous disposition, and has often come between man's soul and his salvation. All the great and precious promises of pardon are suspended upon the condition of confession. "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins." Confession must be in detail, not in general only; it must be free and impartial.—*Rev. J. A. James.*

Paul's Estimate of Heaven.

"I reckon," he says, like a man skilled in this spiritual arithmetic; "I reckon, after a due estimate of their comparative value, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed."

No man was ever so well qualified to make this estimate. Of the sufferings of the present world he had shared more largely than any other man. Of the glory that shall be revealed, he had a glimpse granted to no other man. He had the words of God, and seen the vision of Almighty, and the result of this privileged experience was, he "desired to depart and be with Christ," that he desired to escape from this valley of tears; that he was impatient to recover the celestial vision, eager to perpetuate the momentary foretaste of the glories of immortality.—*Hannah More.*

A Suspicious Mind.

It is difficult to tell who suffers most from suspicion, he who entertains it, or he who incurs it. There are few evils more intolerable in life, than the coldness and distrust of friends and acquaintances. But the pain of discovering an unworthy trait or vile deed in those whom we have trusted, is hardly less distressing. God has made us social beings, and the social instinct cannot be outraged without pain. There is hardly any habit more unfortunate, than that of readily taking up an evil report, or of easily imbibing a suspicion of the conduct or character of our fellow men. It is a habit which finds many incentives in our evil natures, and the world we live in. Every man has his sinister side, and society is at best but a cracked mirror, in which no man's character or motives get a full and fair reflection. It is easy to find in almost every one, some flaw which may be expected to be an irreparable leak; or some speck upon the surface, that may seem to indicate a radical rot at the core. Few, indeed, go through life not only without wrong, but the appearance of wrong; and if we suffer ourselves to suspect the worst when we see the least, we shall inevitably find ourselves surrounded by rogues, and breathing a very atmosphere of corruption.

Wholly to avoid suspicions of men is impossible, because there is unmistakable occasion for them. But if he is happiest who is freest from them, we would be slow to entertain them. It is better to think well than to think evil of any one. It is better to find a good motive for a doubtful deed, if a good one be possible, than an evil one. It may be nearer the truth; and if not, it will confer a pleasure. Our suspicions often do great wrong to their objects; justice, no less than charity, should make us cautious in indulging in them. And if we do not injure them, such is the retributive law of life, we wound ourselves, we drive charity weeping from our hearts, and deprive ourselves of the blessedness of kind thoughts. It is a loss on all sides. We lose our peace, and our friend loses the joy of our confidence. Charity is profitable as well as right—it is due to our own peace of mind as well as to that of others.—*Evangelist.*

Hindoo Treatment of the Dying.

One remarkable but most painful spectacle that I witnessed in Calcutta was that of the dying-houses on the banks of the Hoogly.—The one I saw was small, and contained only one chamber with four empty bedsteads, and hither the dying are brought by their relations to pass their last moments, and placed on the bedsteads, or, if these are full, on the ground, or even outside the huts in the burning sun. The places for burning the dead are in the immediate neighborhood. I found five dying persons inside the house, and two outside; the latter were so completely enveloped in straw and coverings that I thought they must be dead already, but when I inquired, the attendants threw back the covering, and I saw the poor creatures move; I think they must have been almost stifled. Inside the hut a very old woman lay on the floor journeying heavily and painfully through her last hour; and the four bedsteads were similarly occupied, while the relations sat quietly round and awaited in the utmost tranquility the last breath of the sufferer. To my question, as to whether nothing was given them, it was answered that if they did not die immediately they had from time to time a spoonful of the Ganges water, but less and less and at greater intervals, for when they were once brought there they must die. As soon as they are dead, almost before they are cold, they are carried out to the burning-place, which is enclosed by a wall. In this place I saw one dead and one dying man, and on six funeral piles six corpses, which the high darting flames were rapidly consuming. Birds of the stork kind, larger than turkeys, small vultures, and ravens, were sitting round in great numbers on the neighboring roofs and trees, and eagerly waiting for the half-burned bodies. I hastened shuddering from the spot, and could not for a long time banish its painful image from my memory. To the rich the burning of their dead often costs as much as 1,000 rupees. With poor people, of course, there is not so much ceremony.—*A Lady's Voyage round the World.*

No two things differ more than hurry and dispatch; hurry is the mark of a weak mind—dispatch of a strong one.

Learn to think, and you will learn to write; the more you think, the better you will express your ideas.