

Lutheran Observer.

Unless with proofs of Holy Writ, or with manifest, clear and distinct principles and arguments, I am refuted and convinced, I can and will recant nothing.—Luther.

In Essentials, Unity; in Non-Essentials, Liberty; in all Things, Charity.

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Poetry.

A THING OF BEAUTY IS A JOY FOREVER.

BY JOHN KEATS.

A thing of beauty is a joy forever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways
Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits. Such the sun, the moon,
Trees old and young, sprouting a shady boon
For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
With the green world they live in; and clear rills
That for themselves a cooling covert make
'Gainst the hot season; the mid-forest brake,
Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms:
And such too is the grandeur of the dooms
We have imagined for the mighty dead;
All lovely tales that we have heard or read;
An endless fountain of immortal drink,
Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink.
—From "Endymion."

I WILL ABIDE IN THINE HOUSE.

BY MRS. A. D. T. WHITNEY.

Among so many can He care?
Can special love be everywhere?
A myriad homes,—a myriad ways,—
And God's eye over every place.
Over: but in? The world is full;
A grand omnipotence must rule;
But is there life that doth abide,
With mine own living, side by side?
So many and so wide abroad,
Can any heart have all of God?
From the great spaces, vague and dim,
May one small household gather Him?
I asked: my soul bethought of this:—
In just that very place of His
Where He hath put and keepeth you,
God hath no other thing to do.

THE MEMORY OF THE DEAD.

BY FREDERICK WILLIAM FABER.

Dear dead! they have become
Like guardian angels to us;
And distant heaven, like home,
Through them begins to woo us:
Love that was earthly, wings
Its flight to holier places:
The dead are sacred things
That multiply our graces.
They whom we loved on earth
Attract us now in heaven;
Who shared our grief and mirth
Back to us now are given.
They move with noiseless foot
Gravely and sweetly round us,
And their soft touch hath cut
Full many a chain that bound us.

Contributions.

CHRIST'S PRISONERS.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER, D. D.

These two words, when read together, sound like a singular pair of bedfellows. For to be behind the bars of a jail in our day commonly indicates an accomplice of Satan. But in apostolic days imprisonment often was a badge of honor. The chiefest of the apostles when he wrote a letter to his Colossian friend Philemon signed himself, "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ." The old hero is Christ's ambassador in Nero's fetters—a prisoner not for evil-doing but for well-doing. His manacles are badges of honor; and while his scarred body is bound, his soul is rejoicing as Christ's freed-man from the yoke of sin, and there is not a happier man in Rome.

The essence of imprisonment is to be confined to one place, without the permission or possibility of going when one chooses. In this sense, there are a great many good people who are Christ's servants and yet are prisoners. They are *shut-ins* without their own consent. Some of them are unable to get into God's house on the Sabbath, though the Lord of the house comes to them. Some have been confined within the walls of one room for long weary years. During my pastorate, I used to visit, year after year, a lovely and cultured young lady who knew nothing of the out-door world except the glimpse she got from her bed-room window. What sermons that brave girl used to preach to me on the beauties of Christian patience! I learned from her what a sweet rest there is in the "Everlasting Arm." She never uttered to me one syllable of discontent during the whole fourteen or fifteen years of her imprisonment in that sick chamber! When I read to her some cheering passage from God's Book or gave her a sip of honey from that inexhaustible honeycomb, a joyous smile passed over her face which was sadly distorted by long disease, as if she were saying "Oh, how good that tastes!" If there was one room in Brooklyn that the Master "oft-times resorted to" it was that in which this bright sunny-souled girl spent all her youthful years as a "prisoner of Jesus Christ."

Just why it is that the all-wise and loving Master permits some of his choicest servants to be laid aside from all active service and to be tortured often by sharp bodily pains, I can no more understand than I can understand why he permitted the brilliant and beloved Dr. Babcock to cut the cord of his own precious life under a sudden stroke of delirium. It is the frequent *permissive providences* of God that put the hardest strain on my faith. When every voice is so needed to teach and to preach his gospel, why does he doom so many to silence? When every hand is needed in his service, why does he allow so many of his soldiers to lie helpless in the hospitals? It is not my business to explain all these mysteries. But there are some explanations that give me partial relief.

One is that the Christian life is a school for the promotion of that vitally important thing—*Christly char-*

acter. And some of the most beautiful traits can only be got through suffering. Hot furnaces often make the brightest Christians. It is not those whom he hates, but those whom he loves that he often chastiseth. The Master sits as a *refiner* beside the furnace of affliction. He heats it until the metal melts, and the dross of selfishness and impatience and unbelief runs off. He often keeps his silver in the furnace till he can see his own face reflected in the clear metal of the heart as in a mirror. Then the affliction is doing its appointed work, and Jesus has "made the vessel unto his own honor." During my pastoral experience, I have discovered some of the most attractive and well-ripened Christian characters belonged to those who were confirmed invalids or who had been schooled by intense bodily sufferings. Perhaps when such reach heaven they may be more than content that in this world they were among the Lord's *shut-ins*.

Another truth must not be overlooked. The prisoners of Jesus Christ may be among the most useful of his servants—I mean useful to others. Paul did some of his very best work when a prisoner. A jailer locked him up at Philippi; but in a few hours, he had that very jailer at his feet crying out "What must I do to be saved?" At Rome he preached the gospel to those around him until there were many converts in Cæsar's household. He wrote seven of his inspired epistles while he was Nero's captive—one of them was the letter to Philippi which is the especial epistle of gratitude for divine mercies and of exultant joy under sharp afflictions. As canary birds sometimes sing when their cages are covered to prevent it, so this old hero, when caged at Rome, furnished to the world some most sublime melodies of faith and victorious courage. I need not remind my readers of the case of John Bunyan, who would probably never have written the immortal "Pilgrim's Progress" if he had not been an inmate of Bedford jail.

Miss Charlotte Elliott composed that wonderful hymn "Just as I am, without one plea," and some others of her exquisite songs of the soul, while she was imprisoned in a sick chamber. Several years ago the wife of my beloved friend Charles H. Spurgeon took me into what she called her "workshop." Although her ill-health did not allow her to attend her husband's church, she spent much of her time during the week in sending off volumes of commentaries and other helps in Bible study to poor ministers and "village-preachers," and she told me that she had sent off thousands of volumes on that beneficent errand! An invalid lady, who could no longer be a tract distributor in her district, spent her time in folding and directing leaflets of awakening to the impenitent, or consolations to the troubled—and these she sent through the post or by a special messenger. You may imprison a body, but you cannot imprison a soul that is luminous with the light of Jesus, and vocal with the inspirations of his spirit.

SPRECHER'S "GROUNDWORK."

It may be interesting to the readers of the OBSERVER, to review the critical opinion of the lamented and revered Dr. C. A. Stork, passed upon this theological work immediately after its publication in 1879 ("Lutheran Quarterly").

"The Lutheran Church in this country is to be congratulated that a work of such a character has been put forth by one of her sons. No such considerable enterprise in Lutheran theology has, as far as our knowledge extends, ever been undertaken in the English language. * * * * *

"There is something heroic in the projection of so vast a work; in these days of the carving of cherry-stones, and the elaboration of fine mosaics, it is rousing to see a master stretch his canvas for a great

monumental work. We only hope Dr. Sprecher may be spared to carry to completion the enterprise in theology for which he has laid so goodly a substructure.

"What, then, is the method propounded by our author? It is very simple in idea, and may be put into a nut-shell. His proposition is, that theology, like all sciences, must deal with a real knowledge given in experience. That as natural science has to do with the facts of experience given through the senses, and received as certainties, so theology must find its material in a real knowledge given in the soul's experience, and certified in its sphere to be as real as the facts of sensuous knowledge. * * * * * The foundation of theology must be the certitude of experience.

"Such a self-certifying experience he finds given in the great Lutheran principle of justification by faith. Here is a solid foundation, the foundation of a real experience in consciousness. Christ and his salvation are the objects of knowledge; the Scriptures are the means by which they are brought to our view; as St. Paul said, 'I know whom I have believed.'

"Our author shows how this principle is involved in the experience of every Christian believer. In the early church it was clear and conspicuous; with the growth of ecclesiasticism it declined; under the Romish doctrine of the Church it almost disappeared, personal assurance being replaced by the assurance of salvation given by an infallible Church.

"This was exactly the great revival of the Reformation. With Luther, salvation once more became a matter of personal experience, and, together with this, of personal certainty.

"He quotes largely from Luther's writings to show that this was his view. He depicts also with great force the decline of theology in the post-Reformation period, by reason of the neglect of this principle and the substitution of an intellectual cognition of justification and its related doctrines, in the place of an experience of the principle itself in the life of the believer. From this neglect springs the excessive doctrinal precision of the rigid Lutheran bodies, and from this by way of reaction the rationalistic tendencies of Lutheranism. In the restoration and unfolding of the theology built on this living experience of justification and personal assurance, he finds the *mission of the General Synod*.

"These, then, are the two great ideas of this *Groundwork*:

"1. That theology must build on the experience of the soul in its personal contact with God and its assurance of salvation in Christ; and

"2. That the conflict between Naturalism and Christianity can only be reconciled by showing that the Christian idea of God and man's communion with him is a veritable self-certifying experience, as really given in consciousness as the experience of the natural world is given in sense.

"Whatever else may be said of this scheme, it is certainly thorough-going. It goes to the bottom of things.

"It is Christ's own method, 'If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine.'

"A few strictures and we are done:

"1. Dr. Sprecher's presentation of the principle he advocates gives it too subjective an appearance.

"2. His quotations from Luther are the only tiresome part of the book.

"3. It loses force by the diffuseness of style.

"But with all these drawbacks it is a great work. It is great by reason of the largeness of its scope, the originality of its methods, the force of its ideas, and the breadth of its tone."

A study of these fundamentals of our faith will bring about a spirit of unity as nothing else will.

T. F. D.