

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 POET'S VISION OF REVIVAL.

BY J. G. WHITTIER.

At first a tremor of silent fear
The creep of the flesh at danger near,
A vague foreboding and discontent
Over the hearts of the people went.
Through ceiled chambers of secret sin
Sudden and strong the light shone in;
A guilty sense of his neighbor's needs
Startled the man of title deeds;
The trembling hand of the wordling shook
The dust of years from the Holy Book.
* * * * *

A solemn fear on the listening crowd
Fell like the shadow of a cloud;
And careless boyhood, living the free,
Unconscious life of bird and tree,
Suddenly awakened to a sense
Of sin and its guilty consequence,
As if a strong hand rent apart
The veils of sense from soul and heart,
Showing, in light ineffable,
The joys of heaven and woes of hell!
* * * * *

Never on custom's oiled grooves
The world to a higher level moves,
But grates and grinds with friction hard
On granite, boulder, and flinty shard.
The heart must bleed before it feels;
The pool is troubled before it heals;
The fiend still rends as of old he rent
The tortured body from which it went.
* * * * *

But time tests all. In the overdrift
And flood of the Nile, with its annual gift,
The tide that loosens the temple's stones,
And scatters the sacred ibis bones,
Drives away from the valley land
That Arab robber, the wandering sand,
Moistens the fields that know no rain,
Fringes the desert with belts of grain,
And bread to the sower brings again.
So the flood of emotion, deep and strong,
Troubled the land as it swept along,
But left a result of holier lives,
Tenderer mothers and worthier wives.
The husband and father whose children fled,
And sad wife wept when his drunken tread
Frightened peace from his roof-tree's shade,
And a rock of offense his hearthstone made,
In a strength that was not his own began
To rise from the brute's to the plane of a man.
Old friends embraced, long held apart
By evil counsel and pride of heart;
And patience saw, through misty tears,
In the bow of hope on its cloud of fears,
The promise of heaven's eternal years—
The peace of God for the world's annoy—
Beauty of ashes, and oil of joy!

And if in thy life on earth,
In the chamber or by the hearth,
'Mid the crowded city's tide,
Or high on the lone hillside,
Thou canst cause a thought of peace,
Or an aching thought to cease,
Or a gleam of joy to burst
On a soul in sadness nursed:
Spare not thy hand, my child;
Though the gladdened should never know
The well-spring amid the wild,
Whence the waters of blessing flow.
—George Macdonald.

Contributions.

THE EFFECTUAL PRAYER.

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

Does every prayer have power with God? By no means; for we are told that we shall receive nothing if we ask amiss. But there is an "effectual prayer that availeth much." In the Revised Version the passage is rendered "the supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working." True prayer is an infinitely deeper and stronger thing than the mere repetition of devout words; it is a believing soul's direct converse with God. Phillips Brooks condensed it into four words, "a true wish sent Godward." By it adoration, thanksgiving, confession of sin, and petition for mercies and favors ascend to the throne, and by means of it precious blessings are brought down from Heaven. The pull of our prayers may not move the everlasting throne, but—like the pull on a line from the bow of a boat—it may draw us into closer fellowship with God, and into fuller harmony with his holy will.

(1) This the first characteristic of successful prayer. "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart." Too many prayers are born of selfishness and are too much like dictation or command. The indispensable quality of all right asking is a right spirit towards our Heavenly Father. When a soul feels such an entire submissiveness towards God that it delights in seeing him reign, and his glory advanced, it may confidently pour out its desire; for then the desires of God and the desires of that humble and submissive soul will agree. God loves to give to them who love to let him have his way. They find their happiness in the chime of their own desires with the will of God.

Two of Christ's disciples, James and John, once came to him and made the astonishing request that he would place one of them on his right hand and the other on his left hand when he set up his royal government at Jerusalem! As long as these self-seeking disciples sought only their own glory, Christ could not give them the askings of their ambitious hearts. Afterwards when their hearts had been baptized by the Holy Spirit, and they had become so consecrated to Christ that they were in complete chime with him, they were not afraid to pour out their deepest desires. James was the man to tell us that "the effectual prayer of a righteous man availeth much;" and John declared that "whatsoever we ask, we receive of him because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." As soon as those two Christians found their supreme joy in serving Christ, they received the desires of their hearts. If a minister prays for a revival in order that he may glorify himself by counting converts, the Lord does not commonly give him many converts to count.

(2) The second trait of effectual prayer is that it aims at a mark, and knows what it is after. When we enter a store or shop we ask the salesman to hand us

the particular article we want. There is an immense amount of pointless praying done in our devotional meetings; it begins with nothing, and ends nowhere. The model prayers mentioned in the Bible were short and right to the mark. "God be merciful to me a sinner." "Lord, save me!" cries sinking Peter. "Come down ere my child die," exclaims the heart-stricken nobleman. Those men knew what they wanted. Old Rowland Hill used to say, "I like short ejaculatory prayer; it reaches Heaven before the Devil can get a shot at it."

(3) In the next place the prayer that has influence with God must be a prepaid prayer. If we expect a letter to reach its destination we put a stamp on it; otherwise it goes to the Dead-Letter Office. There is what may be called a Dead-Prayer Office, and thousands of well-worded petitions get buried up there. All of God's promises have their conditions; we must comply with these conditions, or we cannot expect the blessings coupled with the promises. We must be sure that we are doing our part if we expect God to do his part. There is a legitimate sense in which every Christian should do his utmost for the answering of his own prayers. When a certain venerable minister was called on to pray at a missionary convention he first fumbled in his pocket, and when he had tossed a bank-note into the plate he said, "I cannot pray until I have given something." He prepaid his own prayer.

When I hear requests for prayer for the conversion of a son or a daughter, I say to myself—how much is that parent doing to win that child to Christ? The godly wife who makes her daily life attractive to a husband has a right to ask God for the conversion of that husband. She is co-operating with the Holy Spirit and prepaying her heart's request. God never defaults; but he requires that we prove our faith by our works, and that we never ask for a blessing that we are not willing to labor for, and to make any sacrifice to secure that longed-for blessing.

(4) Another essential of prevailing prayer is that it be the prayer of faith, and be offered in the name of Jesus Christ. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." The chief "wrestling" that we have to do is not with any reluctance on God's part, but with the obstacles which sin and unbelief put in our pathway. What Providence orders we must submit to uncomplainingly; but we must never submit to what God can better. Never submit to be blocked in any pious purpose or benevolent undertaking if with the divine help you can roll the blocks out of your path. The faith that works while it prays commonly conquers;—for such faith creates such a condition of things that our Heavenly Father can wisely hear us and help us.

The firmament of Bible-history blazes with answers to effectual prayer, from the days when Elijah unlocked the heavens on to the days when petitions in the house of John Mark unlocked the dungeon and brought the liberated Peter into their presence! The early Church was born in a prayer-meeting held in that "upper room" at Jerusalem. During my own pastoral experience the most powerful revivals in my church showed the first indications of the Holy Spirit's presence when we were "gathered with one accord" in our devotional meeting. The prayer-room is the place to hang the church thermometer. That thermometer "below zero" indicates both the cause and the effect of a terrible spiritual declension. When a pastor and even a few dead-earnest members of his church begin to feel a tremendous responsibility for souls and an insatiate hunger for a descent of the Spirit, then there will be effectual praying, and the church will be under the baptism of fire from on high.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

CHURCH FESTIVALS.

BY MARGARET R. SEEBACH.

Everything has two sides, and the practical problem of Christian giving is no exception. During the last few years we have been hearing the side of direct giving ably contended for, and have rejoiced to know that men are more and more inclined to honor the Lord with their substance. The emphasis here, however, belongs on the word "men." It is well, indeed, that the wage-earners of the world give liberally and systematically to the work of God's kingdom on earth. But what of those who earn no wages? What do they give to the church?

Do not say this class is small. It is the largest class in the church to-day, as it has been in all ages. The large majority of women do not earn wages, and have no money they can give except what they ask for, or manage to save out of the amounts entrusted to them for household expenses—often scanty for these purposes. And the young people—the school-boys and girls who are newly admitted members of the church—how many of them have an allowance, or time to earn money that shall make the responsibility of Christian giving a reality to them? Notice who writes in favor of direct giving, and in condemnation of all other methods, and who is it? Always the men, or women of independent means. Shall not some one tell them—what surely they have not considered—that all are not as they?

When Israel reared the tabernacle in the wilderness, there was found work for the hands of all. For the men was the work in wood and metal; for the women the weaving and embroidering of the curtains. Even for the boys and girls, we may well believe, there were errands and simple tasks that rendered actual help in the building.

To-day the great principle of division of labor has entered into all our life. No longer do we each make every article we use, as the early nomads did. Even the parts of our church furnishings which might seem woman's work are done far better and more cheaply by the whirling loom in a far-off factory. There was a day, not many years ago, when women might make cushions for the pews in their church. Even these, when desired, are now ordered in quantity from a firm that supplies hundreds of churches. So then, if the women of a church desire to give, they can give only one article, and that is the money to purchase what is needed. Their time and labor can no longer make the furniture of the sanctuary, these gifts of theirs must be expended in raising the money.

Now, it would be strictly in accord with the spirit of our age if these many who do not earn and who wish to give, and who are each so impotent to work alone, should combine in some effort which should give them all a share, and supply the needed funds. What can a woman do? She can cook and sew. What can a child do? Run errands and wait on older people. So the woman makes, with what she can save from her household supplies, salable articles, and the child runs errands, waits on tables, helps her to sell these articles. What more fitting? But this is a festival, or a bazar! What then? Who has done any wrong? Is it not all natural enough? If one woman had worked alone to raise her share, we would applaud her. Why not a dozen, a score, or a hundred such efforts combined?

You see, if we go back to first intentions there is not much to be said against the idea of the church festival. Its bad repute has come from its misuse. Yet perhaps, if it were cleared of these abuses, it could vindicate its claims to a place in our church economy.

The question of festivals in relation to church quarrels has been discussed in a previous paper. Even if this be a source of disagreement, perhaps the results