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Revs. Rude & Miller, Editors.

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Communications.

For the Lutheran Visitor.
Novelties in Religion.

One of the most marked and offensive emanations from the "form of godliness" now so prevalent, is the tendency to introduce novelties in religion. Everything is done to entertain, amuse, or create a sensation; all weariness of the flesh and spirit must be carefully guarded against in public worship; the place of prayer and praise must be made as attractive as the place of amusement, or this formidable rival will probably engulf many who have renounced the world and its vanities.

The expedients to secure this end are as diverse as the temperaments of the individuals who originate them. Some ministers, whose political proclivities can not be restrained even by the sanctity of their office, which certainly does not authorize an interference with worldly politics, in the exercise of its sacred functions at least, entertain their deeply interested auditors with eloquent political harangues--too often mere stump speeches--the only effect of which is to make men more strongly partisan in political feeling than before.

Others again, appreciating the sentimental and poetical taste of their hearers, discourse of brooks, trees, flowers, birds, etc. They appeal to their sympathies, and melt their souls with touching delineations of earthly affection, or harrow their feelings with thrilling pictures of separation from the loved ones of their homes or social circles.

Another class aspire to something greater, and instruct their audiences in the different sciences; and a yet larger number deal in vague abstractions, and the whole Gospel of Christ is never heard from them. If Christ and Him crucified be faithfully preached, there will be no danger from special forms of error; and ministers will not be under the necessity of indulging in bitter denunciations against evils of which the greater portion of their congregation knows nothing.

This same desire to have things conducted in as entertaining and amusing a manner as possible, also manifests itself in the want of reverence--we had almost said flippancy--in the demeanor of ministers, and laity, too, at meetings convened especially for the transaction of church business. The sober-minded and the devout have been frequently shocked at such indecorous proceedings; but as those who indulge in such questionable conduct almost always make more pretensions to piety and spiritual-mindedness than those who venture to disapprove of their manner of conducting public worship and meetings, the latter have submitted to the imputation of formalism and generally remained silent.

The exhibitions of clerical buffoonery, too, with which the country is sometimes entertained, can not fail to have a most injurious effect, whilst the thoughtful and reverent can not but mourn at the desecration of so high an officer.

Another novelty is the fairs, festivals, concerts, and, in some instances, even theatrical exhibitions, that are held for religious purposes. A close observer can not fail to see their demoralizing tendency, and yet such is the general approbation, that the few who venture to offer a protest are stigmatized as fanatics and hypocritical pretenders to superfluous degrees of piety. Many of the adjuncts of these so-called religious charities are of so objectionable a nature, and it seems they can not be conducted without these abuses, that we know not how it is possible for a Christian to justify them. We have heard of reputable young men embezzling the funds of their employers from impudently solicitations to pay exorbitant prices for articles of trifling value; and of the feeling of modesty being entirely obliterated from the hearts of young girls from being brought forward so prominently on such occasions in order to beguile these same young men into extravagance which they could not afford. We will say no more on this subject, but will simply introduce the following extract:

How to PAY FOR CHURCHES.--The Iowa Kirchenblatt, of September 15, has an article headed "In what way can the means be obtained for building and supporting schools and churches?" The answer is, "By giving them." This alone would be sufficient to show the spirit of the writer. He says this answer is plain and terse, but as it calls for an un-

pleasant amount of exertion on the part of the church members, other ways of getting money have been invented. The Pope, for instance, sells indulgences, or institutes holidays for over-eating, drunkenness, and dancing. The sects zealously imitate their grandfather. Lotteries, fairs, festivals, pic-nics, etc., are gotten up at great expense, and in such numbers that one throngs the other out. That brings money, much money; for \$1 must make \$10, \$100, \$1,000. After all this the hard work of begging is carried on, with friend and foe, with great endurance. And that brings money again, though the church beggar must pocket many a curse with the gifts. Any one has sense enough to see that "this way of the Pope and the sects" is much more practical than to take the means out of one's own pocket. "But the poor hand-maiden of the Lord Jesus Christ, our dear Evangelical Lutheran Church, has still always * * * regarded these ways and means as dishonorable." "All the above named things, lotteries, fairs, etc., spring from avarice, and lead to carnal lust.

Even the music of our fashionable churches excites the sadness, pity, and almost disgust of those who are not carried away by the stream of worldliness. They feel that such music has "no unison with our Creator's praise;" and often the question arises whether it would not be more profitable to absent themselves entirely from churches where abuses prevail in every department of the service.

In many of the Sunday-schools the influence of these novelties is still more extensively seen. The hymnology, exhibitions, speeches, prizes, pic-nics, etc., are all of a piece. The children are certainly amused and entertained; the humorous speeches excite their risibility, and they quite enjoy their Sunday-schools. Far be it from us to render religion repulsive or unattractive to young or old; but we have heard little ones of three years of age sing the solemn hymns, "While Thee I seek, protecting Power," and "Jesus, Lover of my soul," and seeming to enjoy it, too. We have heard others a little older, spontaneously break forth in their play with "Glory be to God on high;" and their little hearts seemed full of love to God in their pure happiness and glee. The words were not unintelligible to them, nor sung because they constantly heard them; but they had been taught to understand the object of praise and adoration, and their full hearts gave utterance to what they felt in their joy. We do not suppose all Sunday-schools are thus conducted; we are happy to testify from our own experience to the contrary; but such is the general rule, and it has become problematical whether they are not doing more harm than good. We mentored speaking of the pernicious character of many of the books in the libraries, and we know whereof we affirm, but we leave that at present.

Such, it seems to us, is the nominal church of the present day. In her own estimation, "rich, increased with goods, and having need of nothing;" and yet so "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked;" that we fear, the fate of the Laodiceans awaits her. Of course the gates of hell can never prevail against the true church. This worldly church is beautiful to look upon with her gorgeous temples, her stupendous and zealous enterprises, and her many zealous votaries. So it was in the days of Constantine, and we know the ages of death-like darkness that succeeded that seemingly prosperous era. She is asleep, and the enemy has indeed sown tares. No wonder iniquity and infidelity stalk abroad in the world. No wonder spiritualism blasphemously announces in one of its papers the anticipated advent of a wonderful woman--the Deific Mother, as they wickedly style her--who is to rule over the earth, and that at the name of woman "every knee is to bow;" that God has hitherto only revealed the masculine side of His character, and that now the feminine is to be developed. No wonder, under the circumstances, that such blasphemy should pass unnoticed and unrebuked. It is saddening to dwell on these things; and much more might be said, but we must forbear.

M. E. S.
If we work upon marble, it will perish; or work upon brass, time will efface it; if we raise temples they will crumble into dust; but if we work upon immortal minds, if we imbue them with the just fear of God and our fellow men, we engrave upon those tablets something that will brighten all eternity.

Selections.

"Who Shall Roll Us Away the Stone?"

It is pleasant to remember that amid all the harsh and cruel treatment endured by our Lord Jesus Christ upon earth, there were, nevertheless, some who loved him and administered to his wants, as far as opportunity offered, with tender care. There was a loving bosom that nursed him, and strong arms that shielded him in his infancy. There was a friendly roof at Bethany that sometimes sheltered him. There were patient and pious women who stood by the cross, even when his Disciples had fled, and with tearful eyes and pitiful hearts, looked up at the innocent sufferer as he expired in more than mortal agony. They beheld where his lifeless body was laid; and now, early on the morning of the third day, they went their way to the sepulchre with sweet spices and ointment, to perform the last sad offices of affection.

That is a beautiful trait in our nature which prompts us to take care for the graves of our dead. There is no superstition in it--no fanaticism nor folly. We know they are not there; our ministrations can not reach the departed spirit, and even the precious dust, but a little way beneath our feet, is insensible alike to our tears or our attention. And yet a flower dropped upon the mound, a sprig of green plauted upon the sacred spot, proves that there must be something which survives the shock and lives beyond the darkness of the tomb. We know not all the thoughts which may have filled the loving hearts of these devoted women, as they went on their sad errand; but suddenly the thought occurs to them that their pious purposes may be defeated. They remember that an sepulchre in which the body of their Lord had been laid was hewn out of the solid rock, and a heavy stone, too heavy for their united strength to move, had been rolled to the door. They are in a sad dilemma; they had not thought of this difficulty before, so occupied had they been with their original intention.

Nevertheless, they go on. Their object is praiseworthy; they are actuated by motives which even those who crucified Him can not condemn, and perhaps some unexpected help may present itself--at any rate, they can visit the grave and look upon the place where He was lying. By this time we may suppose they were near the place of their destination, and lifting up their eyes they saw, with astonishment, that "the stone was rolled away--for it was very great!" No doubt their first thought was, his enemies have done this; they have even gilded his grave, taken him away, and now, where shall we find him? But there had been a great earthquake, for the angel had descended from heaven and rolled away the stone and set upon it and said, He is not here. He is risen as he said. Come see the place where the Lord lay!

The sequel of the story is well known; but there are several lessons to be derived from it which may be useful to us all.

The first is that we should go resolutely forward in the path of duty, despite all the obstacles which may confront us from without, or the discouragements which may suggest themselves within us. Here, said these women among themselves, is a great stone rolled against the door of the sepulchre; it is too heavy for us to move--and besides this, it is sealed with a seal which it is felony to break--what shall we do? "Who shall roll us away the stone?" They might have turned back, as many would have done under similar circumstances, but they went persistently on, not only from the impulse of affection, but moved also by conscience and duty. Duty is ours, results are God's. An insuperable difficulty suggested itself to these pious women as they made their way to the sepulchre, but still they went on, leaving the results in the hands of Him to whom they belonged; and behold! they realized far more than they dared hope for. Instead of finding the door of the sepulchre closed, the heavy stone is already rolled away--instead of finding the bruised and lifeless body within, the sepulchre is empty, and the living and risen Lord is at hand! How often are we discouraged by the performance of duty by opposition from without, or by anxieties within! Let us give no heed to them. God

never exacts impossibilities of us. He never requires us to make brick without straw. He never calls us to duty, if we are his loving and loyal children, without giving us grace to help us, nor lays upon us a burden without providing the strength to bear it.

Another lesson to be learned from this incident is, the folly of anticipating evil. Who does not know by his own experience that the anticipation of evil is oftentimes harder to bear than the evil itself! and yet we are constantly committing this outrage upon ourselves. If distance leads enchantment to the view," it is equally certain that by a disposition of morbid foreboding some of us double the ordinary burdens of life, and multiply our cares more than twofold. It is a merciful arrangement of Providence, that while we are endowed with sufficient foresight and prudence to meet all the ordinary and practical duties of life, we can not lift the veil of that which lies beyond our mortal ken. Even those little evils which we now so easily surmount, and of which every day has its full portion, if seen through the magnifying medium of anticipation, would be multiplied and enlarged far beyond their real number and importance. "Who shall roll us away the stone?" The result proved that the anxieties of these women were relieved; not only was the difficulty which they apprehended removed, but far more than they expected was realized. What would have been the consequence if, discouraged by the thought of the heavy stone at the door of the sepulchre, they had turned back and gone home again! Let us provide, as far as the Good One may enable us, for all future contingencies, but let us not anticipate evil--that is, take it beforehand. There will be enough of it, and it will be bitter enough when it does come. An eloquent writer says, "Let to-morrow's ill sleep quietly until to-morrow's sun awakes them; for if you bring them into to-day, you will have a double day's burden for a single day's strength;" and therefore it is, I suppose, that our Lord teaches us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread"--not for to-morrow, but for to-day. What have you to do with to-morrow? There is no "to-morrow!"--"It is all yesterday or to-day!" "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and God "requireth that which is just."

These women stumbled far more at the stone before they reached the sepulchre than when they got there--nay, the only stumbling they had over the stone, at all, was while they were upon their way to it, and even then it was only a stone which existed in their anticipation of evil! There may be, and doubtless there is, a heavy stone lying somewhere across your path; yes, there may be a mountain rising up in your vision of the future, but leaving both in God's hands for the present, do not strive to remove the one nor climb the other until you come to it. Then you may find that the mountain has become a mole-hill, and the stone is already "rolled away." Our duty is with the present, and if we care for that as we ought, God will take care of the future.--David H. Porter, D.D.

Spelling Our Fascinations.

Sir James Thornhill was the person who painted the inside of the cupola of St. Paul's, London. After having finished one of the compartments, he stepped back gradually to see how it would look at a distance. He needed so far (still keeping his eye intently fixed on the painting) that he was out almost to the very edge of the scaffolding without perceiving it. Had he continued to retreat, half a minute more would have completed his destruction, and he must have fallen to the pavement underneath. A person present, who saw the danger the great artist was in, had the happy presence of mind to suddenly snatch up one of the brushes and spoil the painting by rubbing it over. Sir James, transported with rage, sprang forward to save the remainder of the piece. But his rage was soon turned into thanks when the person told him, "Sir, by spoiling the painting, I have saved the life of the painter. You were advanced to the extremity of the scaffold without knowing it. Had I called out to you to apprise you of your danger, you would naturally have turned to look behind you, and the surprise of finding yourself in such a dreadful situation would have made you fall indeed."

I had, therefore, no other method of retrieving you but by acting as I did." Similar, if I may so speak, is the method of God's dealing with his people. We are all naturally fond of our own legal performances. We admire them to our ruin, unless the Holy Spirit retrieve us from our folly. This he does by marring, as it were, our best works--that is, by showing us their insufficiency to justify us before God. When we are truly taught of him, we thank him for his grace instead of being angry at having our idols defaced. The only way by which we are saved from everlasting destruction is by being made to see that "by the deeds of the law no flesh living shall be justified."

The Prayer of Faith.

The writer heard the late aged and venerable Rev. Dr. Cleaveland, of Boston, relate the following incident, illustrating the power of believing prayer.

In a revival of religion in the church of which he was pastor, he was visited one morning by a member of his church, a widow, whose only son was a sailor. With a voice trembling with emotion, she said: "Dr. Cleaveland, I have called to entreat you to join me in praying that the wind may change." He looked at her in silent amazement. "Yes," she exclaimed, earnestly, "my son has gone on board his vessel; they sail to-night unless the wind changes." "Well, madam," replied the doctor, "I will pray that your son may be converted on this voyage; but to pray that God would alter the laws of the universe on his account, I fear, is presumptuous."

"Doctor," she replied, "my heart tells me differently. God's Spirit is here. Sons are being converted here. You have a meeting this evening, and, if the wind should change, John would stay and go to it; and I believe if he went he would be converted. Now, if you can not join me, I must pray alone, for he must stay." "I will pray for his conversion," said the doctor.

On his way to the meeting, he glanced at the weather-vane, and, to his surprise, the wind had changed, and it was blowing landward.

On entering his crowded vestry, he soon observed John, sitting upon the front seat. The young man seemed to drink in every word, rose to be prayed for, and attended the inquiry-meeting.

When he sailed from port, the mother's prayers had been answered; he went a Christian.

The pastor had learned a lesson he never forgot. The Lord had said: "O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee, even as thou wilt."--Am. Messenger.

Religion, A Help In Life.

How it helps a man to suffer and to toil! How it calms his temper and soothes his spirit! How it heals his wounds and animates him with joy. "His tool slipped," says Malah, in his beautiful tract, *The Watchmaker of Geneva*, "his tool slipped, and the work was spoiled. He repeated the attempt, and again he was unsuccessful. A slight and momentary expression of trouble appeared on his countenance, but the cloud soon passed away. He clasped his hands and looked upward, while his lips moved as if uttering a silent and fervent prayer; the expression of trouble disappeared--he resumed his work." And so many a good man in his cottage or workshop, amidst the spoiling of his work or the breaking of his tools, or the anger of his master, or the loss of his employment, or the cries of his children, or the sorrows of his wife, or the sickness of his body, or the trouble of his soul, finds prayer is the secret of peace. And in manifold ways does religion bless the poor man in his pilgrimage. Faith is a rod with which He cleaves Red Seas of difficulty; and God's Word is a pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night, amidst the rocks of a sandy wilderness. And Sabbaths are wells of waters, and ordinances are beautiful and shady palm trees; and prayer brings down manna every morning; and the sight of the cross heals the bite of fiery serpents; and hope is a spy going beforehand, to bring back the clusters of Eschol. And then, at last, God's presence is as the ark in the midst of the river; and the pilgrim passes dry shod into "the land that floweth with milk and honey."

Gradually Approached.

We often wonder that certain men and women are left by God to the commission of sins which shock us. We wonder how, under the temptations of a single hour, they fall from the very heights of virtue and of honor into sin and shame. The fact is, there are no such falls as these, or there are next to none. These men and women are those who have dallied with temptation, have exposed themselves to the influence of it, and have been weakened and corrupted by it.

If we could get at the secret histories of those who stand suddenly discovered as vicious, we should find that they had been through the most polluting preparatory process; that they had been in the habit of going out and meeting temptation, in order that they might enjoy its excitements; that underneath a blameless outward life they have welcomed and entertained sin in their imaginations, until their moral sense was blunted, and they were ready for the deed of which they thought they were incapable.

I very earnestly and gratefully believe in the exercise of a divinely restraining influence upon the minds of those who are tempted; but I believe there is a point beyond which it rarely goes. I do not believe that God will interpose to prevent a man from sinning who either seeks or willingly encounters the temptation and the opportunity to sin. When a man finds charm in opportunity and delight in temptation, he has already committed in heart the sin which he shrinks from embodying in action; and God rarely stands between him and further guilt. We are to keep ourselves from opportunities, and God will keep us from sin. He must be a hard and irreverent, or a very ignorant and deluded man who can pray to be delivered from the overcoming power of a temptation into whose atmosphere he willingly enters. In fact, we are taught to pray, not that we may be delivered from the power of temptation, but that we may not be led into it.

There is vice enough in the world of actual life, and it is there that we look for it; but there is more in that other world of the imagination that we do not see--vice that poisons, vice that kills, vice that makes whitened sepulchres of temples that are deemed pure, even by multitudes of their tenants. Sooner or later in their life will they find, that from all willing dalliance with temptation and unresisted entertainment of unworthy and impure imaginations, their character has suffered an injury which untold ages will fail to remedy.

"Callings."

It is an important consideration that you are permitted to go into your business occupation by a really divine call. Not many, I suspect, ever think of such a possibility, for a merely secular employment, or for any but that perhaps of the Christian ministry. Whereas the real and really grand truth is, that God has a place for every man, in what is to be his particular employment, as He has a place for every rock, and tree, and river, and star.

And exactly this we assume, perhaps without knowing it, when we speak of this or that man's employment as being this or that man's calling. We use the word as in smothered meaning, to signify only his engagement or life-occupation; but there lingers in it, we may see, a certain divine recollection, as if it were his privilege to be, as by God's personal and particular call. He may himself not believe, but just as surely as he is in his own right place, he is in that to which he is called, whether he has ever thought of it that way or not. Some are not in their place, and it is their infelicity that they never can be. But the great majority of men, I do think, are led, drawn, beckoned, whispered into their calling, some pushed in by stern necessity, some by urgent wants or incapacities, some crowded in by providential circumstances. Meantime, a blessed few find their places appointed by God for them. And this most sublime and really glorious privilege is for all, and for all kinds of places and employments. There is such a thing as spiritual guidance for men.

You can form some judgement of your calling by finding what others think of you; by considering, also, your tastes, and temper, and capabilities; what kind of loads you can carry; what kind of annoyances you can bear; also, by considering what opportunities are afforded; and where you can make yourself of greatest consequence to mankind; but when all such inquiries are ended, you may be absolutely sure of your calling by looking into God's oracle for it. Tided inwardly by his divine spirit, as you may be, into the very thing which is to be your calling. And then having found your occupation, and come into it by the calling of God, what satisfaction will you have in it! How reverently, lovingly, safely, will you invest life in it!

Christianity, it is to be feared, too often, unintentionally, do great evil by overlooking what may be considered by some the mere proprieties of life. They are careful, perhaps, in respect to all the cardinal virtues, but the minor duties of the day are almost wholly neglected, and very many of those things which, in general society, are of good report, such as becoming manners, tastes, general deportment, social observances, and the ordinary amenities of life, are considered beneath their notice. But the truth is, this is one way our Christianity is to develop itself, and by which we may effectually approve ourselves before men. And, unless we are essentially improved in our varied private and public relations, in our disposition, in our conduct, in all our habits, we give but little evidence of the transforming and elevating power of Christian piety.

Social Proprieties.

The pat remark of a cultured old lady, whose thoughts we learned early to prize, we have often quoted, and now make bold to print it: "If religion does not make a gentleman of one, what is it good for?"

A Happy Man.

Reader, this is what you would like to be. It is quite natural. All people want to be happy. But remember my words this day: The true Christian, the believer in Christ, the converted man, he is the only happy man.

Such a one is in an ark. When the last fiery deluge is sweeping over all things on the surface of the earth, it shall not come nigh him. He shall be caught up and borne securely above it all. He is in Christ.

Such a one is in a hiding-place. When God arises to judge terribly the earth, and men are calling to rocks and mountains to fall upon them and cover them, the everlasting arms shall be thrown around him, and the storm shall pass over his head. He shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. He is in Christ.

Such a one is rich. He has treasures in heaven which can not be effected by worldly changes. He need not envy the richest merchants and bankers. He has a portion that will endure when bank-notes and sovereigns are worthless things. He has Christ.

Such a one is insured. He is ready for anything that may happen. Nothing can harm him. Banks may break, and governments may be overturned. Famine and pestilence may rage around him. Sickness and sorrow may visit his own fireside. But still he is ready for all--ready for health, ready for disease, ready for tears, ready for joy, ready for poverty, ready for plenty, ready for life, ready for death. He has Christ.

Reader, this happiness may be yours. Seek Christ and be happy. Repent, believe, follow Jesus, and you will be a happy man.

CHRISTIAN CHEERFULNESS.--The Gospel is pure and genuine gladness. It is God reconciled; it is peace in the conscience; it is the blessed prospect of glory; and did we tarry under its constant shining, its hopefulness should gild our countenances, and beam on all our movements. The Christian teacher should be an embodied gospel; and if despondency or severity be our habitual temperament, we may be devout, but we are not evangelical. We have got a wrong version of the Christian revelation, and are giving forth an erroneous view of it. But, more than this, few have ever effected anything important, as reformers or evangelists, who do not carry with them a genial atmosphere, and look at the brightest side of things.