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Communications.

For the Lutheran Visitor.

Luther on Liberty.

The following thoughts of Luther on the subject of liberty are taken from his works after Trinity. They are suitable to the times in which we live, and I have taken the liberty of translating them into English. In the original the objects now called "liberty of conscience" are not mentioned. The voluntary system of supporting the colleges, seminaries, dissenting churches, and the like, did not exist. We see that Luther discussed the subject of liberty as a principle of Christianity, and gives it prominence as a Christian duty, as it were in the original, and not as we do, in connection with the many objects so now calling for aid in our day. The reason, his remarks possess the same power. He did not enforce his views by pleading the immediate objects requiring aid. He left the hearers to create the objects for which the objects, and then their contributions. But let us see what a scraping, grasping, and something there is at present, among those who call themselves Christians, from the lowest even to the highest position in life, so that we wish to hear of it. Every one goes along securely, not only giving but takes wherever he can lay his hands on anything. The gold and silver, as it stands in the gospel, is entirely overlooked, and, as it were, rob and steal substituted for it.

Will such persons stand in that day when Christ will ask whether his admonition has been obeyed? The Saviour enjoins benevolence and every one to enemies, how much more will they be required of Christians towards each other?—It is one who not injure one's enemies, how can he injure his fellow Christians? These are not average themselves, unbelievers, how can they have a revenged spirit towards those of the same faith? Turn over the page and you will find robbery, and dishonesty in all its forms, fearfully prevalent in the world in our day. In the gospel we are told, give, and it shall be given you, and as we reject this Scripture, and refuse to obey it, and we change it into take and rob, and it shall be taken from you, and you shall be robbed.

Lord God, in his providence, has sent misfortune upon a city or country, after the people have long prayed and scratched, and some Sir will make his appearance to the people must contribute by their share, or he will help him; for it will finally come to this: people will forget give (date), God will change it into take (rapite). For such a misfortune we are daily striving in our day; for when the Lord enjoins give, we can only take. But go on! Take, and rob, so long as you see fit, what do you gain? The page will be turned back some day, and everything will be taken from you in the day.

We see in all history that when a people or principality or a city had fallen to the greatest opulence, then came some other calamity was permitted to befall them, and they were reduced to poverty. The same is true of communities and individuals. When they become suddenly rich and powerful, they as suddenly fall into poverty. Why? Simply because they refused to give according to the command of Christ; but the other hand would continually take from others. For this reason circumstances changed, and everything was taken from them. Every observation will teach this, and the prophet:

"Wealth that was by fraud obtained, shall come long with heirs remained."

Examples of this, I say, we can see every day, in all conditions of men. If wealth, unjustly obtained, remains in the family from father to son, it will seldom go beyond the third generation; for a curse is laid upon such property, whether gained by robbery or hoarded by avarice.

Through such daily experiences the children of the world should learn wisdom, and say within themselves, "Why should we scrape and pry after wealth? We can not

rightfully possess property thus acquired. We can not be prospered in its possession, as we can see in the experience around us." The Christian, however, should be influenced more by what the Scriptures teach, as Ps. xxxvii: 16: *A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked,* and followed by verse 17 and 18, *For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, &c. The Lord knoweth the days of the upright; and their inheritance shall be forever.* All of this means: though a pious man possess little, yet if he possess that little with honor and the approbation of God, it will afford him more enjoyment than all the treasures of the wicked can produce; because God bestows his blessing upon that little, so that it will be secured to children's children even to a thousand generations.

But why need we say more? No one will become wise except by personal experience. Men admit that God promises and threatens; but who regards either? Long since has it been preached, Prov. xi: 4, *Riches profit not in the day of wrath, and verse 18, He that trusteth in his riches shall fall;* yet man says, "My dear sir, say what you please; but give me money and goods and I shall be placed beyond all necessities." Such an one pronounces God a liar. He will experience sooner than he may expect that he is woefully in error.

The prophet Haggal in chapter 1st says of the covetous, that they put their money into "a bag with holes," by which he means to say, that although they may accumulate much, they will not be prospered and blessed in the possession; because their wealth was gotten by avarice, and it may be at the expense of another's welfare. Solomon teaches: "The wicked, though he accumulate in abundance, has such a curse resting upon his house, that he is not only deprived of all benefit by the possession, but that his wealth melts away under his hands, as though consumed by rust."

It is truly astonishing that we should put forth all our energies, with all caution, anxiety and labor; just to bring upon our own house great injury and the curse of God, (1 Tim. vi: 10) whilst, with much less labor and a cheerful mind, we might be truly rich—if we would be willing to assist our neighbor, and give according to the teachings of the Saviour. He who said, *give, and it shall be given you,* will make good his promise to all who will obey his command, and bestow upon them richly; for he says it shall be a full, pressed-down, shaken-together and overflowing measure with which it shall be returned to us.

Were it not better to have a little, with God and with honor, and to give and assist the needy, according to your means, and to have with all a good conscience, together with the rich consolation that God will bless and increase that little; than with great anxiety and uneasiness, and an evil conscience, to possess great riches that can not be enjoyed nor place you in power and influence; for the covetous man is the servant and captive of mammon, and above all, to be assured from God's word as well as from daily observation, that neither your children nor heirs will ever be profited by your wealth; for consumption will sweep it all away and leave them paupers!

What advantage will you then have, wretched man! after having long scraped, and scratched and grasped, and suffered your life to be wasted in anxiety and sin, to be seized by the devil in your last hour, and dragged into the abyss of hell and thus miserably perish; and your money and possessions, which in your life time afforded you no true happiness, all gone, and with them your body and soul lost; with God's disfavor and curse resting upon your unhallowed wealth, so that your children and heirs will not be benefited by the inheritance; but become poor and sink into helpless misfortune! *He that hath ears to hear let him hear! Every one must bear his own burden,* as Paul says. The Lord grant us eyes that we may see, ears that we may hear, and hearts that we may obey and follow Him through his Spirit! Amen! D. H. B.

How hard it is to feel that the power of life is to be found inside, not outside; in the heart and thoughts, not in the visible actions and show; in the living seed, not in the plant which has no root! How often do men cultivate the garden of their souls just the other way!

Selections.

Unconscious Religious Influence.

Of the influence exerted by an individual, a large part is exerted unconsciously; at least without effort put forth for that purpose specifically. Example does more than precept. The life is greater than words.

Just what this unconscious religious influence is, will be made to appear by a reference to an incident in the life of Saul. That monarch, envious of the growing popularity of David, sought his death. David fled to Naloth. At Naloth was a school of the prophets under the leadership of Samuel. These schools were the great centres of moral and religious influence in the kingdom of Israel. A religious atmosphere surrounded Naloth, as a literary atmosphere surrounds Cambridge, as a commercial atmosphere envelops London or New York. Men found it difficult not to think of religion there, as they find it difficult not to think of business on Broadway or Wall Street. To this place David fled; and Saul sent thither messengers to take him. The moment, however, they came within the town they forgot their message of blood, and began to prophesy. So with a second, and a third company. Then Saul himself arose, his thirst for vengeance increased by the failure of those sent by him. No doubt he determined that nothing should prevent his capture of the fugitive. Burning with rage he went there; but he too succumbed before the religious atmosphere of the place, and gave himself to prophesy; so that men could not restrain this expression of their surprise, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" Naloth thus became to David as safe a covert as the cave of Adullam, as sure a defence as the stronghold of Engedi, not because of any purpose exerted influence upon either the messengers or the king, but simply because of the unconscious influence exerted upon them by the religious life of the place. The fact was, that murder would have been so unnatural in such a place, that Saul could not think of executing his intention; and prayer and prophesy were so natural that even he, murderer as he was, could not refrain from them.

That this is the way in which Christians are expected to exert most of their religious influence could be shown very easily from the words of Christ. But it can also be shown from certain qualities which it possesses.

1. It is unobtrusive. This is no small recommendation. A great many earnest disciples of Christ do not speak to their fellow men upon the subject of religion, for the sole reason that they do not care to appear obtrusive. They fear to engender a "coolness" between themselves and those to whom they speak without doing any good that would compensate them. It is a fact, however we may explain it, that such conversation is hard to carry on in that way; impatient men are very impatient of it. It seems to them to imply a superior sanctity on the part of those addressing them, and this is the very last thing they will stand. Accordingly it is very desirable, if it be possible, to exert an influence which will be positive and yet not be obnoxious to this charge.

2. This unconscious influence when exerted at all, is exerted always and upon all with whom the person exerting it comes in contact. One difficulty connected with religious work is that it is spasmodic; at best intermittent. The mind and body both need rest at times. Another difficulty is the feeling that one can influence so few of all whom he ought apparently to influence. And it is highly probable that a great many Christians, despairing on these accounts of doing very much good for men, do nothing at all. For this despair and resultant indolence, the reflection that we must do our best work unconsciously ought to be a specific. We can all do brave work for Christ by such a consecration of the life, that men shall see the power of our religion in whatever we may be doing. So secular work becomes religious, and each day becomes holy time.

3. It is no less obvious, that, unlike any other religious influence, it is exerted by every class of Christians. There are those who are unable to talk much of Christ, and others who are unable to give much, and others still who are quite unprepared to do much specific religious work. But there is no man who can not live a Christian life, and so no man who can not exert a Christian influence. This is a ministry which requires no special ordination. All have the natural gifts, and all may obtain the supernatural grace requisite to engage in it.

This is what we would say: religious talk is not enough. Respect for the character of a clergyman must be felt by his congregation before his words can do their appropriate work. The influence that is unconscious must be exerted before souls can be saved. A child will think little of the warning of a father who is the slave of a vice which he condemns. An inconsistent professor of religion can not reasonably hope that much good will follow his exhortations. A "working church" will be largely composed of those whose lives move mightily, but unobservedly upon their fellows.

The unconscious influence of a man being the influence of his life as distinguished from his words, it will always be exactly proportioned to the vigor of the life itself. So we are led back to the old rule for becoming working and influential Christians. It is to drink in the spirit of Christ himself; to seek more and more the life that was in Him. There is no other rule. Without Him we can do nothing.—*The Working Church.*

A Groundless Distinction.

A young convert once asked how much time he ought to spend in the performance of religious duties.

"All the time," was the reply. As the reply was made by a man of wisdom and enlarged Christian experience, it caused no little perplexity to the young man's mind. He knew his friend would not trifle with him. He set himself therefore to find out the meaning of the reply. It occurred to him that his friend's idea of religious duty must differ from his. He had been accustomed to regard the Bible, prayer, meditation, attendance at prayer-meeting, and the public worship on the Sabbath, as religious duties. It was plain that he could not spend all his time in performing those duties. That would require that the duties of his daily calling be neglected, and the hours devoted to refreshment and repose otherwise employed. There would be a conflict between secular and religious duties. Duty, he saw, was something which ought to be done.

Could there really be any such thing as a conflict of duties? Would not such a conflict of duties be a conflict between different portions of God's will? That he saw was impossible. It was certainly his duty to work and to eat his own bread. This was plainly the will of God. He was commanded to work, to be diligent in business. Hence, it could not be his duty to spend all his time in what he had been accustomed to regard as religious duties. It occurred to him that if it was God's will that he should be diligent in the duties of his secular calling, it was his duty to be diligent in the spiritual; further, a duty to God must be a religious duty. He saw that he had given too restricted a meaning to the term "religious duty." He saw that it comprehended more than devotional duties. He proceeded to inquire as to the duties thus comprehended. He found that God's will had reference to all the actions of life. He could find no actions to which the divine will was indifferent. He saw the meaning of the text "Whether ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." He now understood his friend's reply to his question. He admitted its correctness. He saw that he had but one thing to do, the will of God. He saw that all his duties were religious duties.

He saw that the question he intended to ask, was, "How much time ought one to spend in devotional duties?" He saw that no answer could be given which would apply to all persons under all circumstances. As every one must give account of himself under God, so every one must, by the aid of the Bible and the careful exercise of the powers given him, decide what the Lord would have him to do at each successive hour.

It is a great thing to get just conceptions of duty. Knowledge precedes action. We must know what we ought to do before we can do it. Imperfections in our views of duty must cause imperfection in its performance.

No small evils have resulted from the false distinction made between secular and religious duties, as though the latter did not include the former.—*S. & Times.*

The Confession of an Atheist.

Notwithstanding the conclusive evidence of the divine adaptation of Christianity to the wants of man—evidence which seems to be imbedded in the human soul, there are undoubtedly those who have wickedly cherished a spirit of unbelief, until God, in retribution, "has sent them strong unbelief that they should believe a lie." The following incident affecting illustrates this truth:

The writer, a few years ago, at the close of the Sabbath afternoon's service in the church, on a summer's day, was called upon in his studies by a man of dignified person and manners, whose countenance and whole demeanor indicated superior intellectual culture. I had noticed him for one or two Sabbaths in the church. His marked features and his profound attention to the preaching had awakened my interest. With much courtesy he apologized for intruding upon my time, but expressed an earnest desire to have a little conversation with me.

"I have," said he, "for several Sabbaths attended public worship in your church, and need not say that I have been interested in the preaching. And you will probably be surprised to have me add that I can not believe the sentiments you advocate. I can not believe that the Bible is a divine revelation, or that there is any personal God. I am what you would probably call both an infidel and an Atheist. And I should be glad to give you a brief account of my history."

"When a young man I became interested in the writings of the French philosophers, Voltaire, Helvetius, Diderot and D'Alembert. I filled my library with their works and perused them with eagerness. Their teachings I gladly accepted. They were in harmony with my desires and I lived accordingly. Renouncing all faith in Christianity, in any other God than the powers of nature, and in any future life, I surrendered myself unreservedly to the indulgence which those principles naturally inculcated. Christianity and its professors have been the subjects of my ridicule and contempt. Thus have I lived."

"I still retain those principles. The arguments with which I have stored my mind, and upon which I have so long relied, appear to me invincible. I can not believe that the Bible is anything more than a human production. When I look upon the world, its confusion and misery, I can see no evidence that there is any God who takes an interest in the affairs of men. I see that the wrong is just as likely to triumph as the right. In the animal creation there is, from the lowest forms of organization to the highest, a regular gradation. And as they all, at birth, come from nothing, so at death into nothing they will vanish."

"I have now passed my threescore years and ten. I have lost most of my property. My eyesight is rapidly failing. The companions of my youthful days are all gone. Most of my children are in the grave. And I have no more expectation of meeting them in another world than of meeting my faithful dog or my sagacious horse. There is nothing in the retrospect of the past to give me pleasure; the present brings but weariness, gloom and sadness; before me is the abyss of annihilation."

"Now could I only believe, as you believe, that there is a loving heavenly Father who watches over his children; that the trials of this life are intended to form our characters for endless happiness; that beyond the grave is immortal existence, in happy realms where the sorrows of earth are never known; that provision is made for the forgiveness of all my sins; and that after a few more days here I could enter golden gates and be forever in heaven with loved ones who had gone before me, I should indeed be the happiest man in the world. But I can not believe it. There is no evidence sufficiently strong to remove my unbelief."

Such were the confessions of an unbeliever. And we know that such, essentially, must be the moral condition of every man who is approaching the grave without the Christian's hope. How different from this was the testimony of Paul, the

Christian, as he drew near the close of his noble life, even with the pains of martyrdom opening before him. He writes to Timothy:

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

I will simply say in conclusion, in reference to my venerable and unhappy friend, whom I could not but love, that though he would admit that there was a power which he called nature, which had introduced him to this world, and which would, ere long, remove him from it, no persuasions of mine could induce him to pray to that power for light and guidance, though he would, apparently with profoundest reverence, fall upon his knees by my side and listen to my prayers to the Creator.

Circumstances soon removed me several hundred miles from his dwelling. Whether he be living, as with a tearful eye I now write these lines, I know not. A few years ago, after two years of absence, I met him. Sorrow had left unmistakably additional traces on his marked features. As I took his hand he admitted, in mournful tones, that there were, as yet no rays of light to gild his pathway to the grave.—*Christian Weekly.*

A Million of Money.

There lived and died, not long since, in the West of England, a gentleman of wealth and position, whose death was attended by circumstances of the deepest solemnity. He had been left an orphan in early life, and the property bequeathed to him gradually accumulated until he became of age. The day he completed his twenty-first year, a large dinner was given by him to his tenants and numerous friends. When the cloth had been removed, one of the former proposed the health of their host, wishing him "long life and prosperity."

He arose almost immediately to reply, thanked all for the kind manner in which they responded to the toast, and, referring to the mention made of "success in life," added with great emphasis and determination, that he intended to make a million of money if he went to hell for it.

Many seemed momentarily shocked at the awful resolution; but wine was flowing freely and their spirits rose high, so the transitory effect speedily passed away. Many years, also, rolled rapidly away, until it seemed as though his desire would be realized. Every mercantile speculation prospered, and money came in with great rapidity. Wealth brought a large circle of friends and every comfort in its train, while, to crown all, he was returned to Parliament as one of the members for the county.

Hitherto he had been living an ungodly life, that is, "without God in the world." The glittering show of this present evil scene engrossed his attention, and absorbed every thought from morning until night. He had been left for many years to "go his own way," but the Lord in his providential dealings saw fit to lay him on a bed of sickness, and bring him even to the very door of death. At first everything was treated in an off hand, careless manner; but the disease took so serious a turn that the worst apprehensions were entertained. The best physicians were called in, friends telegraphed for, consultations held, an arrangement made for settling his worldly affairs on the following Thursday, in case of an emergency. So anxious, indeed, had he become that he should not live until then, that he sent for his favorite physician, saying: "Doctor, I will give you a hundred pounds if you make me live till Thursday." He was told that the utmost would be done for him, and more than that was impossible. This was not sufficient, for, on the following day, he cried out in mental agony: "Doctor, I will give you a thousand pounds if you will make me live till Thursday." Receiving the same reply, he became so enraged that, with all the passion his poor frame was capable of, he cursed and blasphemed the name of the Most High, ordered his medical attendant out of his presence, bidding him never to visit him again.

Soon after this a faithful old servant came rushing from his room exclaiming: "I could hear to hear my

poor master curse and swear, but I can not remain now. He says he sees a dreadful creature who has come to take him away." Thus alarmed, his relatives rushed to his dying couch, to find only the poor corpse with all its features agonized and distorted, as if the very devil himself had come and literally torn body and soul asunder. The will was read, it was found that he had made "a million of money."

"What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark viii: 36, 37.) When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed forever." (Psalm xcii: 7).—*O. S. Presbyterian.*

Sometimes there is a way of self-culture attempted in the name of religion, which is not in any proper sense religious, having no element of faith in it, and expecting no uplifting help from gracious inspirations. The self-culture is what a man may do upon himself; mending his defects, correcting his mistakes, chastening his faults, tempering his passion, putting himself into the charities he has learned from Christ, perhaps, to admire, finishing himself in the graces that have won his approval or commanded his respect. But the work is a far more hopeless one than he imagines, and is almost sure to result, even visibly, in more affectations of character than are likely to be much approved. Besides, it holds him to a continual self-contemplation which is selfish, and keeps him all the while filing and polishing on his nature by his will; which is, in fact, the most wearisome possible, or rather impossible, kind of self-attention. The old faults conquered, too, will be coming back on him just when he is conquering another set. And, turning round to fight them off, he will find the whole swarm loose upon him again; till finally, getting worried, vexed, and soured and discouraged, he virtually, though perhaps not consciously, gives over his whole undertaking. O, if he could have gone up to Christ, or to God, in a true faith-culture, and let his faults fall off as blasted flowers fall off the trees, dislodged by the life-principle in them, his beautiful thought of finishing a character would have been how easily put forward—without a care, too, and in the sweetest liberty. No man finishes a character who does not go above himself, and take the culture of God's own Spirit; by that growing out a character from within which can not be manipulated inwardly from without. If there be any good gift that cometh from above, and can not be made below, it is character.—*Dr. Bushnell.*

Hindoo Prisons.

It would appear that at least in praise the European has not advanced much beyond the Hindoo. "Noise," Mr. Gogery says, "is what they best understand, and he that sings the loudest is considered the best." There are also English congregations that would be puzzled to give as pertinent a reason for their silence, as these Hindoo Christians for the opposite. I have occasionally remonstrated with them on the subject, but the reply I once received silenced me forever after. "Sing softly, brother," I said to one of the principal members. "Sing softly," he replied; "is it you, our father, who tells us to sing softly? Did you ever hear us sing the praises of our Hindoo gods? How we threw our heads backward, and with all our might shouted out the praises of those who are no gods! And now do you tell us to whisper the praises of Jesus! No, sir, we can not—we must express in loud tones our gratitude to Him who loved us and died for us."

THE BURDEN OF LIFE.—The grand difference between the Christian and the man of the world is: that the burden of the one is gathering as he proceeds, while the other is becoming lighter and more easy; the man of carnal mind and worldly affections clings more and more to the earth and new cares thicken around his death-bed; his burden is collecting as he advances, and when he comes to the edge of the grave it bears him down to the bottom like a millstone. But the blessed Spirit, by gradually elevating the Christian's temper and desires, makes obedience more easy and delightful, until he mounts in the presence of God, where he finds it a service of perfect freedom.