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REGENERATION.

ITS MYSTERY NOT A PRACTICAL DIFFICULTY.

This has been a mystery to unscriptural minds ever since the days of Nicodemus. We wish to show that for practical uses, the doctrine of regeneration is no more a mystery than many other doctrines of which all persons continually avail themselves without asking, "How can these things be?"

A mystery is something that cannot be scientifically explained. The circulation of the blood is a mystery to one who has never studied physiology. It is still a mystery to him who has learned all that physiology in its present stage can teach. But who hesitates on that account to observe those conditions of life which will promote the healthful circulation of the blood? The magnetic telegraph is a mystery to most of the merchants who use it every day. The secrets of magnetic currents have not all been discovered by Prof. Morse himself.

One reason sometimes given for regarding regeneration as a special mystery, is its supernaturalness. It is a kind of miracle, and if it is ever wrought on or in us, it must be because of a supernatural action which we cannot control. But there is no authority for the assertion that regeneration may not have its laws, just as the clouds have in their coming and going. Indeed our Saviour's illustration of the new birth is taken from the realm of nature. "Marvel not that I said unto you, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof; but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit." Who marvels at the laws of the winds, so as not to take advantage of them? The sailor sees the white-caps and sets his sails, though he knows nothing of vacuums at the Equator. The laws which govern the action of the Spirit may be still unknown to us, when we have exhausted the knowledge of all the Esays of meteorological science. But if we have plain directions as to how we may avail ourselves of the Spirit's power in regeneration, the supernaturalness of the change ought to be the last thing about which we should trouble ourselves.

Much unnecessary mystery has doubtless been thrown about this doctrine by one-sided views of Scripture. There are two classes of passages which describe the spiritual change referred to. "Ye must be born again," or, more correctly, "Ye must be born from above," is the type of one class. "Then will I wash you and make you clean," "I will give you a new heart," are passages similar in their import.

The type of the other class of passages is "Repent," "Wash yourselves and make you clean," "Make you a new heart and a new spirit, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" These are kindred passages. The first class seem to represent the soul as wholly passive in the matter, as if action on our part could be of no avail. The second class seem to represent the soul as wholly active, as if the responsibility of regeneration were entirely with ourselves. If a person were to dwell only on the first class, he might wait forever for a change which would never come. Were he to act in accordance with the second class, failing of dependence upon God, he might imagine himself converted while he has only reformed. Were he to consider these passages as contradictory, he might be left in a hopeless puzzle between the two.

Now there are passages on which these two classes meet, as e. g. "Repent and be converted," "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of His good pleasure." These passages bring out the two great ideas which run through warp and woof of the Bible: man's responsibility and man's dependence. The unnecessary mystery which clouds the whole subject disappears, when we take our stand on these passages and say, "I will do my duty and God will help me. I will offer Him my heart, and He will cleanse it."

We are seldom puzzled by the mingling of activity and dependence which marks our daily lives. If my hand is cold, I hold it by the fire. I know that it will not be warm unless it is heated. I know it will be warm when I take the necessary means. I am free in going to the fire. I am dependent upon the fire. God's work is, indeed, associated with man's work in the process of regeneration, throughout; but, practically, this occasions no difficulty. Repentance is man's work, so far as his free turning from sin is concerned; it is God's work so far as the influence of the Holy Spirit is involved. But we never think our freedom is violated when we act under

the influences of our associates. Man's will is rectified by God in regeneration, but it is freely submitted to God, as a chronometer is freely carried to a watch-maker for repairs. We do not offer these analogies as perfect, only as showing that, practically, there is no more difficulty in the puzzle of God's sovereignty and man's free agency, than there is in many things which never occasion hesitancy in the conduct of our daily lives. Any one who is ready to "repent," can "be converted."

The doctrine of regeneration is often beclouded also by relations of remarkable experiences. Men beginning to reflect seriously upon this subject, catch eagerly at the accounts others give of their supposed renewal. They sift religious biographies for testimony. And when they hear persons in prayer-meetings relate their overwhelming convictions or their overwhelming joys, they imagine that such experiences are necessary to conversion, whereas they are only the adjuncts of it. Remarkable experiences are often due as much to nervous reactions as to the influences of the Holy Ghost. The negroes at the South think no conversion is genuine unless it is attended by voices in the air, or vivid dreams, or spasmodic convulsion, or by some strange physical phenomena. We must clear ourselves of all such impressions. Regeneration is a moral change. It adds nothing to sense or blood or nerve. It changes no physical drop or fiber. It may take place in the calm as well as in the storm. The silent rain may fructify the field as well as the driving tempest. The whirlwind is not necessary to the springing of the grass.

Furthermore, we cannot expect that our experiences in regeneration will ever be precisely like those of another. We are individuals, and each of us will have peculiarities in moral as well as in intellectual movements and changes. If, now, any one is really anxious to solve what is really mysterious in regeneration, he must be content with its practical tests. If he asks precisely how God works in the change, he will get no answer. If he seeks to know precisely how divine sovereignty and human free agency are blended, he will get no answer. But if he will comply with the invitations of the Gospel, he shall have the result of a practical experience. Music is a mystery until you hear it; painting until you see it; sweetness until you taste it; regeneration until you are the subject of it by repentance and faith. "He that hath ears to hear let him hear." "If any man will, let him come and take of the water of Life freely." Z. M. H.

WHOLESOMENESS OF SICKNESS.

Among the sore trials of life is the severe sickness of a leading member of the household. When man or woman, father or mother, in middle life is stricken down, and all the serious duties of their station are left undone, and in place of their daily and almost indispensable presence in all the affairs of the household, comes a great blank, and a fearful apprehension of something still worse, then both the sick and the well pass through some of those stern experiences of life that make up no small part of its discipline.

What is it that they are meant to teach? 1. The lesson of frailty, mortality, and sin. Sickness is but the symptom of a deeper fact, the shadow of a sterner reality, and a more sweeping disaster than itself. It is a significant hint that we are marked as the prey of the destroyer, and that our time must come at last. It is a warning to be ready. It is the forerunner of the king of terrors. The beams and timbers of our tabernacle already tremble under his grasp. We may recover. Strength, health, and elasticity may come back to us in the glow of a happy convalescence. The hope of long years of life may again animate us. Yet, after all, it is only a reprieve. After all we must die. Mortal sickness, accident, decay must at last be our lot. It is an unalterable moral and physical arrangement. The wages of sin is death.

2. Blessed is he to whom sickness is as the herald of the Lord, reminding him of his final release, and of the welcome summons, sure to come at last, to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Severe sickness brings no foreshadowing of gloom to his soul. His tabernacle is indeed frail and shakeling, but he would not have it as a prison, to keep him pent up here, away from the glories of his Saviour and his heavenly home. Sickness reminds him that his body is rather a moving tent, which shall one day be taken down; a "muddy vesture of decay," that shall not forever close in the soul and prevent its hearing the celestial harmonies. The outward man perishes, but the inward man is renewed day by day. Flesh and heart fail, but only that the sufferer may feel that God is the strength of his heart and his portion forever.

3. But sickness is one of the most important

parts of discipline for this world, as well as for the next. How every petulant, irascible, provoking part of human nature is apt to display itself upon the sick bed. How trying, not only the pain that will not be lulled, the disorder of the chief bodily functions that will not be set right, but, more than all, the weariness of inaction; the enforced and distasteful quiet, the long days and the longer nights, the thought of business-suffering, of home and family affairs going adrift, of public duties left undone—ah! what opportunity in all to let patience have her perfect work! How hard, and yet how wholesome the lesson, that whatever estimate we may have of our own importance, God does not think us indispensable in family, church, or business! How sharply drawn, how emphatic the lesson, that, after all our planning, and enterprise, and indefatigableness, we and all our interests are in God's hands; that except the Lord build the house, their labor in vain who build it; that man lives not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

And among the associates and immediate family and helpers of the sick, what opportunity for forbearance, for unvarying kindness, for the culture of a far higher, more assiduous, more tender sort of regard, is given in attendance on the sick! Devotion is perhaps the one word which more than another describes it. Christianity accepts waiting on the sick as one of its characteristic acts. Sick and ye visited me, is one of the sentences of approval at the day of judgment. It is by no means a false tendency that unites those, who would especially train themselves in Christian virtue, in organizations for the systematic visitation and care of the sick.

But, above all things, the virtues of the Christian home should glow and grow under the training of severe sickness in the household. The sick chamber is the high school of domestic morals and affections. And as the afflicted one emerges from the shadow of death, and from the restraints of convalescence, and enters once more the round of home duties and relations, it should be with a wealth of new and tenderer associations that will enrich and mellow all the after-history and memories of home. Woven in these memories will come the thrill of penitence and rebuke; the picture of helpless dependence relieved by a thousand little ministries, and not least among them all, an image of the keenly watchful eye, the unflinching assiduity, the calm zeal, the never quite baffled sagacity of the physician, blest of God to the restoration of the loved one.

4. Few seasons of sickness are without their warning against needless over-exertion. Many of the most dangerous and prolonged, like typhoid fever, are nature's manifest reaction and revenge against our merciless treatment of ourselves. They are a rebellion against self-oppression and extortion. We overload ourselves; or, unbelievably imagine ourselves to be overloaded with duty; we goad ourselves with greater ambitions than God made us capable of, for wealth, for business success, for household thrift; we go in a wild, restless chase after pleasure; we rob from the time of rest, and add to the time of labor and excitement; but nature, like conscience, unnoticed behind her desk, is keeping strict account of all; and well for us, if she but stops payment before we are utterly bankrupt, and gives us some chance, by long weeks of enforced rest, for squaring up accounts again; rather than to tumble us unceremoniously and without warning out of our misused bodies. It may be we shall be more reasonable with ourselves, and more patient of the limitations of our bodily powers after such a warning.

So may we grow better for being ill, learn wisdom from our deliriums, gain new visions of heavenly good when shut from the earthly, and live better; and help all others to live better for having been at the verge of the grave.

PERSISTENCE IN A GREAT WRONG.

The Chinese in California, numbering sixty thousand, and filling many industrial positions, which would be almost unsupplied without them, are still treated with the most outrageous injustice. Neither Congressional legislation nor treaties between the two Governments avail for their protection. Mr. Burlingame's mission, which has excited such interest throughout the civilized world, and which promised such great results for the Chinese, has had no perceptible effect in California. Our country, which furnished the Ambassador, which was the first to ratify the treaty, and which contains the largest Chinese population, we fear will only become more conspicuous in the violation of the treaty. Chinese citizenship is refused in the California Courts, and consequently all the protection derived from this most important civil right is withheld from the Chinese. The question was recently argued in one

of the Courts of that State, and the Fourteenth Amendment and Civil Rights bill were quoted in support of the right of the Chinamen to testify, but the barbarous State laws of California, under which the right is denied, were sustained by the Judge, on the ground that the Chinese are not citizens, and therefore do not come within the provisions of the acts. Such decisions do not only leave these industrious people with no adequate protection from the injuries which might ordinarily be visited upon them, but they actually tend to "rouse against them all the cruel and persecuting impulses of depraved human nature." It is not surprising, therefore, to read in San Francisco papers such a shameful narrative, as the following:

"On Sunday last the Oakland boat brought over to our city quite a number of Chinamen, who came in their holiday attire, to visit their friends on this side of the Bay. As they were walking peacefully along Pacific street, they were assailed with a shower of stones, hurled by half-grown boys, set on and encouraged by their parents, who, every time a stone would strike one of the poor creatures and cause him to yell out with pain, would set up a laugh of approval. This still further encouraged the boys not to rest contented with bruising their offensive victims, but they gathered up handfuls of mud to beset their garments, besides setting upon them three large-sized bull-dogs, who bit and worried them. Several poor fellows took refuge inside neighboring stores, obliged to wait an hour, or longer, until they could see coming along some persons to escort them out of harm's way. This kind of amusement was kept up for at least an hour, in the open Sabbath day, without a policeman around to check the outrage."

We cannot believe that public sentiment in California approves of such brutality; if it does, we are sure the public sentiment of the country does not, and it should be strong and decided enough to procure such legislation as will put an end to it. Great outcry would be made over all the civilized world, if a company of travellers or missionaries were treated with half so much violence in one of the seaport towns of China; it would be regarded as proof of the heathenish exclusiveness of the Chinese; war, or a speedy apology and reparation would be the result. Incomparably worse,—yes, incomparably worse is such conduct in a professedly Christian country, especially if treated with indifference by Christian men and legislators. We lift our voice in protest against it, and wash our hands of the iniquity.

MEETING OF THE ASSEMBLY'S COMMITTEE ON REUNION.

In view of the new aspect given to the Reunion question by the rejection of the Joint Committee's Basis by the Presbyteries of the other Branch, and by the unauthorized but very general offer of Reunion without guarantees from those Presbyteries, a meeting of the Committee of our Branch was held in New York last week. The Committee of the other Branch is no longer in existence. The meeting was largely attended, and was prolonged, earnest and substantially unanimous. The conclusion reached, but yet to be fully matured before it can be considered final, involved the recommendation of a certain line of policy to the General Assembly designed to preserve the orthodox-liberal type of Presbyterianism, while removing every obstacle from the way of Reunion, so far as it can be done, consistently with that policy. We trust the Committee will lay their matured action before the Church in time for our Presbyteries, meeting in the Spring, to harmonize upon it.

In the last number of *Lippincott's Magazine* there is an article on Southern Reconstruction from the pen of one "connected with an institution of learning at the South." The writer, avoiding the important matter of the status of the freedmen, heartily accepts the political situation in other respects, and writes in a spirit which, if shared in by Southern leaders, would open a favorable prospect for the future of that section. He, however, regards the attitude of the positively loyal Churches of the North, as a formidable obstacle in the way of social restoration. These Churches he contemptuously calls "certain politico-ecclesiastical bodies, which persist in regarding the mass of the Southern people as incorrigible rebels and reprobate sinners against the laws of God and man." A little more respectfully he adds: "While great bodies of Christians refuse to hold communion with their Southern brethren on the ground of a quasi-connection in the past with slavery, and the rebellion there can be no genuine reconstruction," &c.

Two or three grave errors are manifest here, as throughout the article. (1) There is no recognition of the sin and crime of unjustifiable rebellion against God's ordinance of Government. (2) It is implied that when any huge social and political wrong, like slavery, or rebellion, is rebuked by the Church, it sacrifices its sacred character and becomes so far a political body. Hence, in order to escape censure from the great

bodies of Christians which control public opinion, a great wrong needs but link itself with the political structure. It must then be rigidly let alone. (3) Our "Southern brethren" in the Church had only a quasi-connection with slavery and rebellion! Fervently, and in the name of half a million men slaughtered without shadow of justification by the rebellion, do we wish that the connection of the Church in the South with slavery and the rebellion had not been so intensely real and effective as it was. Without that, there could have been neither slavery nor rebellion in the South; and without the more than quasi-connection of certain Churches in the North with slavery, there would have been immeasurably less sympathy with the rebellion among us and less difficulty in subduing it.

How Church-reconstruction is to be brought about, we know not; but we are perfectly clear on one point; that next in mischief to the success of a great and bloody rebellion in the interest of slavery, is to let such a rebellion pass without emphatic and lasting rebuke from the great Christian bodies of the land.

—Some weeks ago we announced the final result of the suit instituted against the rector of St. Alban's, London, being a condemnation of the extreme Romanizing practices maintained in that notorious church. In another part of the paper, we give the particulars of the case, with the comments of various English journals. It is the greatest blow, probably, that the Ritualists have received, and they seem quite at their wit's ends in consequence. Possibly we shall soon see a very large exodus from the Established Church to Rome. All, however, depends upon the real strength of the Romanizing party. If they feel strong enough, they may make a move for a free Anglo-Catholic Church, in the hope of carrying the main part of the Church of England with them. Those who have made such an ado about the aesthetic and sentimental sort of cross-bearing will then have an opportunity of tasting the real thing. This they must do, or suppress their convictions, play the hypocrite, and bide their time for a change. Meanwhile, there appears to be no kind of authority in the Church of England to check heretical opinions of the most ultra and contradictory sort.

—A society styling itself the American Branch of the Universal Peace Association, but which would more correctly be styled the Universal License and Anarchy Association, met last week in Washington, and majestically resolved "that all idea of punishment, both in the human and divine governments, should be done away with!" If only some Universal Association would not merely resolve, but put the resolve in practice, that all vice and crime should be done away with, we do not know that we should have any serious objection to the former resolution.

—Oxford chapel was crowded to an unusual degree on Sabbath. Four services were held, and a deep solemnity prevailed.

BOXES TO HOME MISSIONARIES.—The ladies of our churches are at work as usual in this most pleasant and effective sphere of Home Missionary effort. It takes so little time and labor from each of the many in every large congregation, and it accomplishes such an untold amount in filling up the gaps, multiplying the comforts and lightening the heavy burdens of the missionary's family, and it brings back so many prayers and blessings upon the donors, that we wonder it is not engaged in far more frequently. We have before us a letter from a missionary in Jefferson Co., Missouri, in acknowledgment of a box received from the ladies in Hanover church, Wilmington; the box coming to hand three days before the letter announcing it. The letter, not meant for publication, is so full of grateful expressions for the varied and carefully adapted contents, including candy and toys for the children, and a sum of money, besides outfits for the different members of the family, that it must work powerfully to encourage them in similar labors for the future.

One of the most thoughtful ladies of the First church in this city has an excellent practice of enclosing a receipt for a year's subscription to the AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN in the boxes in which her liberal hand and heart are engaged. Home Missionaries are charged \$2.

LIFE'S MYSTERY.

A little smiling, mingled with tears;
A little hoping, linked with many fears;
A little trusting, chased by doubt and dread;
A little light, unto much darkness wed;
This call we life—to breathe, to love, to die!
Who shall for us unfold, the great, sad mystery!
Heaven's radiance, making rainbows through the tears;
Humility's sweet flower; up-springing from the fears;
The holy shield of faith, tempered in fires of grief;
The seed in weeping sown, returned a golden sheaf;
Oh glorious Life in Death! no more, no more to die!
One bath dissolved for us the deep, sweet mystery!
K. H. J.