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SUNDAY READING.

PRAYER AND POTATOES.

A SERMON BY REV. J. PETER.

If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful for the body: what doth it profit?—James ii. 15, 16.

An old lady sat in her old arm-chair With wrinkled visage and disheveled hair. And hunger-worn her features;

For days and for weeks her old fare, As she sat there in her old arm-chair, Had been potatoes.

But now they were gone! of bad or good Not one was left for the old lady's food Of those potatoes; And sighed and said, "What shall I do? Where shall I send, and to whom shall I go For more potatoes?"

And she thought of the deacon over the way. The deacon so ready to worship and pray, Whose cellar was full of potatoes, And she said, "I will send for the deacon to come; He'll not mind much to give me some Of such a store of potatoes.

And the deacon came over as fast as he could, Thinking to do the old lady some good. But never for once of potatoes: He asked her at once what was her chief want, And she, simple soul, expecting a grant, Immediately answered, "Potatoes."

But the deacon's religion didn't lie that way: He was more accustomed to preach and pray, Than to give of his hoarded potatoes; So, not hearing, of course, what the old lady said, He rose to pray, with uncovered head, But she only thought of potatoes.

He prayed for patience, and wisdom, and grace, But when he prayed "Lord give her peace," She audibly sighed, "Give potatoes;" And at the end of each prayer which he said He heard or thought that he heard in its stead, The same request for potatoes.

The deacon was troubled; knew not what to do: 'Twas very embarrassing to have her act so About "those carnal potatoes." So, ending his prayer, he started for home; But, as the door closed behind him, he heard a deep groan, "O, give the hungry potatoes!"

And that groan followed him all the way home; In the midst of the night it haunted his room—"O, give the hungry potatoes!" He could bear it no longer; arose and dressed, From his well-filled cellar taking in haste A bag of his best potatoes.

Again he went to the widow's lone hut; Her sleepless eyes she had not yet shut; But there she sat in that old arm chair, With the same wan features, the same sad air, And, entering in, he poured on the floor A bushel or more from his goodly store Of choice potatoes.

The widow's heart jumped up for joy; Her face was haggard and wan no more. "Now," said the deacon, "shall we pray?" "Yes," said the widow, "now you may." And he knelt him down on the sanded floor, Where he had poured his goodly store, And such a prayer the deacon prayed As never before his lips essayed:

No longer embarrassed, but free and full, He poured out the voice of a liberal soul, And the widow responded aloud, "amen!" But said no more of potatoes.

And would you, who hear this simple tale, Pray for the poor, and praying, "prevail," Then preface your prayers with alms and good deeds; Search out the poor, their wants and their needs; Pray for peace, and grace, and spiritual food, For wisdom, and guidance, for all these are good, But don't forget the potatoes.

Sleep and Death.

"NO live without fearing death," said Hufeland, "is the only means of living happy and dying at a good old age. People who dread death seldom attain longevity. If death presents itself to us under a repulsive and terrifying aspect, it is solely owing to our habits and prejudices having perverted our feelings."

Montaigne justly said, that it is the darkening room, the faces of grief and desolation, the mourning and crying, that make death terrific. Civilization, by investing death with the most lugubrious associations that it can conjure up, has also contributed to render it a hideous spectre. It is the reverse with the patient. In nine cases out of ten it is not only a relief, but almost a sense of voluptuousness.

Sleep daily teaches us the reality of death. "Sleep and death are twins," said the poets of antiquity. Why, then, should we fear death, when we daily invoke its brother as a friend and a consolation?

"Life," said Buffon, "begins to fail long before it is utterly gone." Why, then, should we dread the last moment, when we are prepared for its advent by so many other moments of a similar character?

Death is as natural as life. Both come to us in the same way, without our consciousness, without our being able to determine the advent of either. No one knows the exact moment when he goes to sleep; none will know the exact moment of his death. It is certain that death is generally a pleasant feeling.

Lucan used to say that life would be insupportable to man if the gods had not hidden from him the happiness he would experience in dying. Tullius Marcellinus, Francis Saurez, and the philosopher La Mettrie, all spoke of the voluptuousness of their last moments. Such are the consolations which philosophy presents to timid minds that dread death.—We need not say that such higher and loftier consolations await the Christian, who is firm and steadfast in his faith, and has before him the prospect of eternal life.

A SCARED FIRM.

AS EVERY one is aware, the failures in business that have occurred at the opening of the year have made all business men keenly alive to every report or rumor affecting mercantile credit, while losses of some firms by shrinkage of values and the misfortunes of customers have caused them to look after all available means pretty sharply. A firm of this class, which had been prospecting as how to make every dollar possible, the other day had an interview with a responsible customer, of long standing, with regard to the latter's discounting his own paper, which they held to quite a large amount. The transaction was nearly concluded, but left quiet for a day or two by the firm in question—not wishing to press too hard in a quarter they expected to realize so favorably; then one of the partners found to his consternation, on going to the merchant's counting-room that he had left very suddenly for the West the day before.

A council of partners was immediately held. How should the money be raised? In the midst of the discussion the letters just arrived by mail from the West were passed in, among which, one bearing the absent merchant's well known chirography was detected.

"Ah!" exclaimed one of the trio, "here's something from old Bugle; but what the deuce is he doing at Erie?" added he glancing at the postmark of the epistle. "Let me see."

The letter was opened, and the partner holding it proceeded to read as follows: "ERIE, PENN., January—, 1871.

Messrs. Shorters, Pike Rust & Co., GENTLEMEN.—It was unfortunate that I did not see you before leaving town in respect to the proposition made to take up the paper. I was compelled by pressing circumstances to leave. You may think it singular to hear from me here, but things were going wrong at Chicago. You yourself must know the worst by this time; I have failed—"

"Busted, by all the gods!" ejaculated Pike, dashing the letter down upon the floor. "The game's up gentlemen; our goose is cooked."

"Failed, is it?" said the 'Co.' "That's the very word," roared Pike; "failed, and just one hundred and five thousand dollars gone to pot, because you were so cursed slow about the matter."

"Slow; what d'ye mean by that?" shouted the other. "If I was as fast as some men in this firm, it would have gone to the wall months ago."

"Well, well, gentlemen," said old Shorters, "don't quarrel; let us see what can be done about it." "Done," said Rust, putting in his oar; "nothing can be done. Our firm's done. You won't get ten cents on the dollar. I always knew old Bugle would go under some time—(Rust was one of those men who always told you so when anything happened)—Bugle has got away off in Pennsylvania to get rid of his creditors—you'll whistle for your money. But one thing is certain, sixty thousand more has got to come into this party before Thursday noon, or there will be another failure."

The "Co." evidently thought seriously of the "whistling" effort for he followed his partner's assertion with a long-drawn, expressive whew-w. "Send up to Briquet's office and get out an attachment. Come let's get in first among the first mourners, at all events," said Pike, leaping to his feet, seizing his hat.

"Wait a bit," said old Shorters, adjusting his eye-glasses, "let's look at the letter again. Why," said he, taking it up from the floor, "you haven't read it all—here's writtin' on 'other side."

"Is there?" said Pike with a gasp, "Well, what does he offer—twenty cents?" "You shall hear," said the senior partner and proceeded to read the letter as Pike had done, till he came to the following: "You yourselves must know the west—that's west, Pike, not west."

"The deuce it is; well, go on." "I have failed—"

"Ha, ha," said Pike, "no mistake about that word." "None at all said Shorters, turning over the page, and continuing: "I have failed to make connection with the night train and therefore improve the opportunity to drop you this line saying I will cash the whole amount of the paper at the figures proposed. I send by this mail, drafts to my cashier, with instructions to do the needful."

"Yours, respectfully, I BULGE."

"Hurrah!" shouted the 'Co.,' executing a pirouette; "that comes of being slow; slow's the word my boy." "That's a piece of luck, if it did cost twelve per cent.," said Rust. "Bugle understands a thing or two. I always told you so; he is sure to cash up if he can make a good shave."

Bulge did cash up; he made a good shave. Shorters, Pike, Rust & Co., were in funds, and Pike ever since always looks on both sides of the letter sheets, as well as questions, before coming to a conclusion.

A clergyman, having on a certain occasion delivered himself of what is called a fine address, was met by one of his hearers the next day, when, in the course of conversation, allusion was made to it. The paragon remarked that he had a book containing every word of it, and had heard it before. To this the clergyman boldly asserted that the address was written by himself the week previous to its delivery, and therefore the assertion could not be correct. The next day he received a splendid copy of Webster's Dictionary.

The man who didn't believe in advertising has gone into partnership with the Sheriff, and they are going to have an auction.

The Honest Deacon.

Deacon M. was an honest old codger, a kind neighbor, and a good Christian, believing in the Presbyterian creed to the fullest extent; but lack-a-day! The deacon would occasionally get exceedingly "mellow," and almost every Sunday at dinner, he would indulge in his favorite cider brandy to such an extent that it was, with difficulty that he reached his pew, in the broad aisle, near the pulpit, and between the minister and the village 'squire's.

One Sunday morning, the parson told his flock that he should preach a sermon touching many glaring sins so conspicuous among them; and that he hoped they would listen attentively, and not flinch if he happened to be severe.

The afternoon came, and the house was full. Everybody turned out to hear their neighbor "dressed down" by the minister, who, after well opening his sermon, commenced on the transgressors in a loud voice, with the question: "Where is the drunkard?"

A solemn pause succeeded the inquiry, when up rose Deacon M., his face red with draughts of his favorite drink, and steadying himself as well as he could by the pew rail, looked up to the parson and replied, in a trembling and piping voice: "Here I am."

Of course a consternation in the congregation was the result of the honest deacon's response. However, the parson went on with his remarks as he had written them, commenting severely upon the drunkard, and closed by warning him to forsake at once such evil habits if he would seek salvation and flee the coming wrath. The deacon then made a bow and seated himself again.

"And now," asked the preacher in his loudest tones, "Where is the hypocrite?"

A pause, but no one responded. Eyes were turned upon this and that man, but the most glances seemed directed to the 'squire's pew, and indeed, the parson seemed to squint hard in that direction.

The deacon saw where the shaft was aimed, or where it should be aimed, and rising once more, leaned over his pew rail to the squire, whom he tapped on the shoulders, and thus addressed: "Come squire, why don't you get up? I did when he called me up!"

A Novel Experiment.

THERE is a comical story connected with the Ordnance Select Committee of England. It was at one time proposed to fire mountain-guns off the back of the mules that carried them. It was urged that this would obviate the necessity of dismounting the gun from the mule's back and mounting it on its carriage; a mountain battery could thus come into action in far less time. This proposal was warmly taken up by the committee, who forthwith proceeded to test its feasibility. A mule or donkey was procured, and a small gun strapped firmly to a cradle resting on the pack-saddle, so that the muzzle of the weapon pointed over the donkey's tail. The animal was then led into the marshes at Woolwich, accompanied by the committee and several "big wigs," who were attracted by such a novel experiment. On arrival at the butt, the gun was loaded, the donkey turned with his tail towards the earthen mound, and the usual preparations made for firing by means of a lanyard and friction tube. Hereupon one of the committee remarked that this mode of firing might derange the aim by the jerk on pulling the lanyard. A discussion followed, and it was finally arranged to fire the gun by the piece of slow-matched tied to the vent. This was done, and the match duly ignited.—Hitherto the donkey had taken rather a sleepy interest in the proceedings; but the firing of the match on his back caused him first to prick up his ears, then to lay them back, and finally to turn round. The committee were thunder-struck, and "skeddaddled" in all directions; the secretary threw himself flat on his face; there was a moment of agonizing suspense; then—bang!—the shot went ricocheting away in one direction, while the wretched donkey turned a complete summersault in the other.

The late Col. Colt was himself a practical mechanic. By his will he left to his nephew an immense fortune. At the time of Colt's death the nephew was learning his trade of a machinist in his uncle's shop, working diligently in his overalls by day, subject to the same rule as other apprentices. On his uncle's death he became a millionaire; but, choosing a guardian to manage his property, he continued at his labor and served his apprenticeship. Now as he walks the rooms of his fine house, or drives his handsome and costly team, he has a consciousness that if his riches take to themselves wings and fly away, he is furnished with the means of getting an honest livelihood, and may make a fortune for himself. He was a greasy mechanic, and is not ashamed of it again. Labor and its accompanying dirt are not dishonorable nor degrading; laziness and its almost necessary evils are disgusting and destroying. Dirty hands and a sense of independence are to be preferred to kid gloves and a consciousness of being a mere drone to the human hive. Tools rust from neglect; use is beneficial. So with man's capabilities—better wear them out than let them rust.

Pat's Colt.

A gentleman who favors us with some reminiscences respecting the early settlement of old Derryfield, N. H.,—relates the following anecdote:

When my grandfather resided at Goffstown and Derryfield, then settled by the Irish, he hired a wild sort of an Irishman to work on his farm. One day soon after his arrival, he told him to take a bridle and go out in the field and catch the black colt. "Don't come without him," said the old gentleman. Patrick started and was gone some time, but at last returned without a bridle, with his face and hands badly scratched, as though he had received bad treatment.

"Why, Patrick, what is the matter? What in the world ails you?"

"An' faith, isn't it me, your honor, that never will catch the old black colt again? Bad luck to him! An' didn't he all but scratch the eyes out o' my head? An' faith as true as my shoulder's my own, I had to climb up the tree after the colt!"

"Climb a tree after him? Nonsense! Where is the beast?"

"An' it's tied to the tree he is to be shure, yer honor."

We all followed Patrick to the spot to get a solution of the difficulty, and on reaching the field, we found, to our no small amusement, that he had been chasing a young black bear, which he had succeeded in catching after a great deal of rough usage on both sides, and actually tied it with the bridle to an old tree. Bruin was kept for a long time, and was ever after known as Patrick's colt.

An Error Illustrated.

THE feeling has been quite too common that any one can "keep school;" so that many schools have been kept, while but few have been well taught; they have been kept from true knowledge, and not for garnering up for future usefulness. Hence, mere striplings, or men of maturer age with no fixed views or plans, engage in "keeping school," though they never teach, because themselves untaught. They can neither discipline nor instruct, because they have never themselves been properly disciplined and instructed.

When Dinter was school-counselor in Prussia, a military man of great influence urged him to recommend a disabled soldier, in whom he was interested, as a school teacher. "I will do so," said Dinter, "if he can sustain the requisite examination."

"Oh," said the colonel, "he does not know aught about school-teaching; but he is a good, moral, steady man, and I hope you will recommend him, to oblige me."

"O, yes," said Dinter, "to oblige you, if you, in your turn, will do me a favor." "And what favor can I do you asked the colonel.

"Why, get me appointed drum major in your regiment," said Dinter. "It is true that I can neither beat a drum nor play a fife; but I am a good, moral, steady man as ever lived.

An Irish Boy's Theology.

Pat was but an idle boy; one day he was suddenly called up and the question propounded by the pedagogue:

"Patrick, how many Gods are there?" Pat was not a distinguished theologian, but he promptly answered, "Three, sir."

"Take your seat!", thundered the master, "and if you don't answer in five minutes I will welt you!"

The probationary period passed, and Pat taking the floor, hesitatingly stated the number of Gods to be "five, sir." He received the promised "welting," and returned to his seat, ten minutes for consideration.

Ten minutes up, Pat up, too, and satisfied that he hadn't fixed the number sufficiently high before, shouted out: "There's ten, sir!"

He saw the ferule descending and broke for the door; he cleared a five rail fence and ran like a quarter-horse a cross a meadow. Panting with exertion, he met a lad with a book in his hand, and with the look of one in the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties.

"Where are you going?" "To school yonder," was the reply.

"How many gods are there?" "One," answered the boy.

"Well, you'd better not go down there. You will have a good time with your one God. I just left there with ten, and that wasn't enough to save me from the darn'est licking you ever heard of."

An Angry Subscriber.

The editor of an agricultural paper was much astonished one day to receive a call from farmer Blank, who in a great passion wanted to know what he meant by "speaking of his shallow brains." An explanation followed, when it appeared that an article written on "Advantages of Drains," had on setting up been made to read brains instead of drains, and then went on to state "that even the shallow brains of Farmer Blank had been of great advantage to his farm."

A gentleman recently hired a negro girl to act as servant in his house.—Therefore the rooms were not redolent of roses, and the mistress then appealed to the girl's better feelings. In reply the girl said, "Well, missus, I generally wash myself twice a year, but the fact is, dis soun I've neglected myself."