

A Heathen Temple out of Debt.

BY REV. WM. RAMSEY.

The following poem has been rescued from oblivion or obscurity under these circumstances: An old gentleman of this county, Mr. Richard J. S. Rogers, repeated the last seven verses to one of our subscribers, but could not remember the beginning. The person wrote them down and sent them to the *Illustrated Christian Weekly*, with such account of their origin and author as Mr. R. remembered and a request that the missing stanzas be supplied. His communication was published and elicited a reply from the Rev. James M. Thompson, of Philadelphia, who writes "The lines appear in a book entitled 'Church Debts; their Origin, Evils, and Cure,' published by Robert E. Paterson, Philadelphia, 1851. The only surviving members of Mr. Ramsey's immediate family...are members of my church. Some time ago they gave to me one of the only two remaining copies of 'Church Debts' in their possession. The work of course is out of print and out of market. Its equal, as to the sin of church debts I have never read. Mr. Ramsey was a remarkably clear and forcible writer, a man of great power and learning. Having been a missionary in India, he had thus a large and comparatively new field from which to draw his illustrations.

The book is made up of a series of letters first published in the newspaper, *Christian Observer*, of Philadelphia. That these letters did good is a matter of record. That their republication would do great good to-day towards rousing an active sentiment against this greatest curse to the church of Christ, 'debt,' I do not doubt.

Allow me to give the introduction of Mr. Ramsey to the poem, a part of which your correspondent gave with wonderful correctness:

"The Rev. Mr. Kincaid, missionary in Barmah, in speaking of the great temple at Ava, says: 'This structure is 200 feet square, the walls being 8 feet thick and 70 high. On the top of it is a structure 150 feet square and 50 feet high; on this a third, 120 feet square and 30 feet high; and on this a fourth 75 feet square and 10 feet high, from the top of which ascends a magnificent spire. From the top of this spire, and of a spire ascending from each of the four corners of each of the four structures, are suspended bells, in all two hundred, with clappers so constructed that a strong wind keeps them ringing. On walking along by this temple when the wind is strong, and all these bells are ringing, a wonderful sensation is produced, as though music was falling all around from the clouds. This temple was a free-will offering from the heathen to their gods, with which it is filled.'

I might make many reflections on this fact, but shall conclude with the following lines on seeing

A HEATHEN TEMPLE OUT OF DEBT.

As near a temple once I stood,
I saw a mighty multitude
Of heathen, prostrate on the ground,
While music filled the air around;
Two hundred bells in concert met,
Proclaimed "This temple's out of debt."

The priests arose amid the crowd;
With stentor voice they shout aloud
"We've cheered the heart of Gaudama,
By rearing up this pagoda."
The bells around, with wondrous glee,
Ring loud, "From debt this house is free."

"This house we freely dedicate
To all the gods, both small and great."
The people rose, and upward went
A shout which e'en the heavens rent:
"Great Gaudama! we give to thee
This costly fane—from debt 'tis free."

Again they bowed, and shouted loud—
One joyous feeling filled the crowd;
In exultation loud they sing,
And yield their hearts an offering:
"Hail! Gaudama! still glorious be;
Dwell in thy house, 'from debt 'tis free.'"

A Christian church I entered then,
Within were women, children, men,
A deep-toned organ sounded loud
To gratify the well-dressed crowd,
But now and then 'twas heard to say,
"I am in debt and should not play."

The organist the keys did fret
But still 'twould say "I am in debt!"
The thundering bass, the sharp falsetti,
Repeat the sound, "I am in debt!"
And echo did all else forget,
And cried aloud "In debt! in debt!"

The parson preached and prayed and wept,
The people thoughtless heard or slept;
The cause of this now understand,
When on the wall I saw a hand
In awful form, with "Ichabod!"
A debt is on this house of God!"

Just o'er his head where all might see,
The hand records, "Ye have robbed me;
Your van oblations I despise,
They're despicable in mine eyes;
In vain ye have together met,
While still my house remains in debt."

The preacher cried, "Awake! awake!
Your pride and thoughtlessness forsake;
Your God reproach and rob no more,
His free forgiveness now implore,
Repent! His house redeem from debt!"
Echo responding says "From debt!"

I turned and wept in deep distress
To see the church's worldliness,
Lord, in thy churches can there be
So great a lack of piety?

The people thoughtlessly forget
Their vows, and leave thy house in debt!

"Why weepst thou?" a heathen said,
"Are all thy friends and kindred dead?"
Ah no! the church through gold is cursed.
He said, "Of sinners you're the worst!
We're not as bad as Christians yet;
Our gods have temples out of debt."

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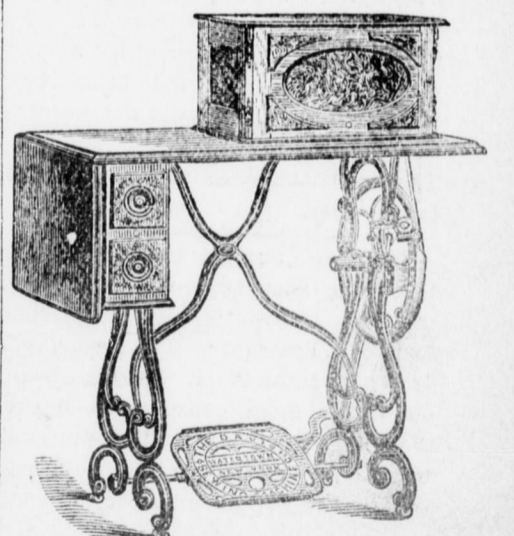
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