

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD. BY NATHAN OPPENHEIM. (*Macmillan*. Crown 8vo, pp. 296.)

A subject of universal and quite absorbing interest. Dr. Oppenheim treats it both scientifically and sympathetically. His chapter on Heredity and Environment is of priceless worth. If men and women would but come to know the overwhelming irresistible influence of a child's

surroundings. Heredity may or may not be much; Environment is enough to be practically everything. The chapter on Religion is the most amusing and not least true or instructive for that. Dr. Oppenheim has his illusions, no doubt, like other folk, but they are not the illusions of the multitude. He is independent to a paradox. And so the book has no dull pages, with all its scientific severity.

Sermonettes on the Golden Texts.

BY THE REV. J. S. MAVER, M.A., ABERDEEN.

I.

'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.'—Ps. cxvi. 15.

THE dear dust, we sometimes say; and when the loved presence is taken out of our life, we lay the precious dust in the grave tenderly, tearfully. Alas! it is all we can do,—all *we* can do. Is it in that sense that the words are here used? Is it only the dust that remains to God? Nay, there is a spirit in man, and, freed from the body, it goes back to God from Whom it came.

Precious, therefore, in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints, because *it brings them nearer to God*. How strange, indeed how absurd, this life would be if death ended all! Think of a man like Gladstone, who lived under a high sense of duty, whose life was one of prayer, who sang 'Praise to the Holiest in the height' amid the suffering of his last days; his whole life a trust in God, a serving God, a striving after God, and, finally, a longing to be free and get away to God,—just imagine all this ending in nothingness! Why, it reminds one of the famous Amblongus pie of the nonsense book. It was a pie of most elaborate construction. Particular directions were given as to the making of it, what was to be put in, and in what quantities. It was to be very carefully compounded, and most scientifically baked, and then the final instructions were to 'open the window and pitch it out as fast as possible.' Just as laughable, so to speak, is the idea of a man, trained to high thought and holy feeling and submissive will, being, at the last, simply 'cast as rubbish to the void.' But Christ hath brought life and immortality to light, and

'we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints, because *it ends their struggle*. There is no surer thing about life here than that it is a struggle; every way you look at it. Children dream of life as a great picnic, but soon enough they get that idea knocked out of them. It's a struggle for the daily bread, a struggle against temptation, a struggle after good. If you are not a struggler, you are a straggler on life's way. That is the only alternative. Many get past the struggling stage, so far as labouring for food is concerned. They are in what is called easy circumstances. But never while here will you get beyond the need for struggle as to the higher life of the soul. The road is uphill all the way, and you must wrestle on towards heaven. But it is just this struggling that makes us, and gives us a character worth taking into the next world. It is told of the mother of Mr. Balfour, the present leader of the House of Commons, that, on one occasion, when her sons were going to play in a football match, some friend advised her to keep them from going because of the danger. 'Would you have me spoil a character?' was the mother's reply. She herself was anxious about them, and didn't like their playing; but to keep them back from joining their comrades merely because of any risk, she felt, would do more harm than good. All the same, you may be sure, it would be a relief to her to see them safe home again after it was all over. And so God does not separate us from the need for struggle here, and the risks

attending it. We have to face them all. He wants us to gain and acquire character through a well-fought fight. But will not He too be pleased, —relieved, might we say?—when all the struggle is safely over, and death brings His children home?

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints, because *it ends their ignorance*. The longer we live, the more we know our own ignorance here. And sometimes our ignorance is very pathetic. It is said, for instance, and with a good deal of truth, that most people who do any good in the world die without knowing it. That is very hard. Surely such, above all, deserve to know at least the good they have done. But often not till they are gone is the value of their work realized. They may have thought they were failures, they may have longed to be taken away as useless; and yet, when they are gone, others rise up and call them blessed. 'Ah!' we say, 'if they had only known, if they had only had the satisfaction of knowing that while they were with us!' But do you not think they know now? We may be sure that death ends their ignorance as to that, and as to many of the things that men here have for ages desired to look into.

Now, if these be some among the many reasons that make their death precious in the sight of the Lord, let us, young and old, seek to be numbered among the saints, among those consecrated, body, soul, and spirit, to the Lord, among those who sanctify in their hearts Christ as Lord; and then we need not fear, and we shall not fear, when the Lord's time comes, to go down 'the well-trodden path to the grave.'

II.

'They also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way.'—ISA. xxviii. 7.

THE writer lived for some time in a country where there are very peculiar views as to the drink question. What would you think of a thanksgiving service in a church for the repeal of a tax on brandy? That actually happened, about ten years ago, in a Dutch church in South Africa. Farming was in a low condition, and the farmers blamed the heavy brandy-tax as one of the causes of their difficulties. The Government of the time, to keep themselves in power, being largely dependent on the Dutch vote, agreed to take it off, and, to

this day, there is no tax on the brandy made there. Shortly afterwards, a special service was held, one week-day, in a church near Cape Town, to give thanks to Almighty God for the repeal of the brandy-tax! Surely we might apply the words of the text, in one sense at least, to ministers and people, and say, 'They have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way.' And yet the Dutch are a God-fearing race, which, in a way, that very service only illustrates, and they are great regarders of their Bible. You see, however, that it is not enough to have the Bible, but we need to have the Bible rightly interpreted. The Dutch keep very much by the Old Testament, and if you try to live up to all that is in the Old Testament, you will land yourself in a very peculiar position as to many things. No, the Bible is not our master; it is 'the record of a spirit that ought to master us far more completely than it did those of the olden time.'

Now, if you exaggerate a statement, you weaken it, but surely it is no exaggeration to say, of strong drink, that it is a greater cause of misery and crime than all others put together. What multitudes it has led to err and to be out of the way, in every sense of the words, —bodily, mentally, and spiritually! You have seen a helpless fool, staggering and reeling to and fro. Mentally, too, he is in a blurred and dazed condition; and, spiritually, 'let no such man be trusted.' And it is curious, and a very solemn consideration, how, from their intimate connexion, body and spirit react, the one upon the other, when any sinful indulgence is yielded to. The body affects the spirit, and the spirit again the body. There was Coleridge, for instance,—a man of wonderful mind, but with a deadly flaw in his character, from indulgence in a drug,—'an archangel slightly damaged,' as Charles Lamb called him,—alas! very materially damaged. One, who knew him, says, 'I observed that he continually crossed me on the way by shifting from one side of the footpath to the other. This struck me as an odd movement, but I did not connect it with any instability of purpose, as I have done since.' This description of the poet's undulating walk just coincides with his character. He erred and was out of the way in his spiritual nature, and so it revealed itself outwardly in a shambling, shifting walk.

A friend told me that she once crossed the

ocean in the same steamer with General Gordon. At table he seldom talked, and seemed shy, but you could tell, she said, from his very tread, as he walked on deck, that there was decision in his character. There was a directness in his walk, and a peculiar firmness of step, that indicated the spirit of the man who in every sense was straight in the way.

Still, let us not too readily sit in judgment upon our fellow-creatures. Some, from their very nature, are more liable to err and stumble than others. Some have a fierce struggle against their temptation, a struggle in which grace alone can enable them to conquer. Let us be stern enough in our judgment of self, but gentle and hesitating in our judgment of others.

What's done we partly may compute,
We know not what's resisted.

God help them, and God save us all from ever coming to such a pass!

A remarkable musical genius, the composer of 'St. Kilda,' a psalm tune well-known in Scottish churches, was one to whom the words of the text applied. Again and again did his friends try to uplift him, and many a hard struggle did he make himself. Ultimately, I believe, he succeeded, but by that time his life was a wreck. On his tombstone, subscribed for by friends, in the cemetery at Aberdeen, are written the notes of his best-known tune, the plaintive 'St. Kilda,' and underneath them are the first lines of the metrical version of the 51st Psalm—

After Thy loving kindness, Lord,
Have mercy upon me;
For Thy compassions great, blot out
All mine iniquity.

III.

'If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever.'—I CHRON. xxviii. 9.

WHATEVER you seek you find. That holds good in study, in business, in religion, in everything. If you do not get all you seek, you will find to some extent, at least, in the line of your search. 'Bode a silk gown,' according to the Scotch proverb, 'and you'll get a sleeve o't.' Here is Nansen goes in search of the North Pole. No doubt about his earnestness in the matter. He was no mere fireside traveller. Three years given to the

planning, three to the preparation, and three to the execution. Well, he has not reached it yet, but at least he has got farther north than any other man. Or, look at Disraeli,—howled down when he made his first speech in the House of Commons. He had to give in, but, as he sat down, he said, 'The time will come when you *shall* hear me.' And it did. By and by, instead of being shouted down, members would come rushing in from all parts of the House, when the word went round that Disraeli was up. Really, we would need to be very careful what we seek, just for this reason, that we shall find it; very careful that we are seeking what will do us good, and not harm. You know the common saying, 'He who seeks what he should not, finds what he would not.'

Equally true is it that, if we are earnest seekers after God, we shall find Him in a measure that will give satisfaction to our souls. And how are we to seek Him? It is said in Job, 'Canst thou by searching find out God?' No, we can't do much with our little minds by mere research. But, if we cannot find out by searching, we may by following. Follow Jesus, follow in His footsteps day by day, and that will lead you assuredly to the presence and the peace of God.

But there is another side also set forth in the text, 'If thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever.' Perhaps someone may say, 'Oh, but it hasn't come to that with me. I may not be seeking God with all my heart, as I should, but, at anyrate, I am not just in the position of having forsaken Him. There's a long distance between seeking and forsaking' Is there? You are mistaken if you think so. It is only a step from the one to the other in matters of love. There is no middle position there. 'I'd rather be a toad,' says Shakespeare, 'and live upon the vapours of a dungeon, than only keep a corner in the heart I love.' Love cannot be satisfied with corners. And it is just because He loves us that God will not be satisfied either with a corner of our heart. Nor shall we ourselves be satisfied till we have given Him our whole heart. There might be a distance between seeking and forsaking in most other things,—in business, say, or even in friendship,—but, in love, not to seek heartily, constantly and completely, *is* to forsake. Better cold than luke-warm there.

And then comes that awful statement, 'Cast off

for ever,' which is just in line with the first part of the text. As you get in accordance with your seeking, so you get in accordance with your forsaking. It is a sad state to be in, to be without God in the world; but what will it be to be without God in the world to come,—cast off for ever!

IV.

'No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.'—Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

It all depends on what you mean by a good thing. It does not follow, for instance, that a thing is good simply because it has a good name. Mankind is governed very much by names, and some very bad and hurtful things go by a good name in the world. Missionaries tell us that the Chinese are fond of giving grand names to the most insignificant-looking places. When you hear of the 'Hall of Continual Virtue,' or the 'Hall of the Five Happinesses,' you think of some palatial building, and are surprised to find only a little recess off the pavement, six feet by six, or thereby. There is much in a pleasant name when we can get it, even though the name makes no difference whatever to the thing named. The old name for the Cape of Good Hope was the Cape of Storms, but everybody would prefer the later name, though it does not lessen by an inch the height of the stormy waves. The Irish speak of the fairies as 'the good people'; not that they have much confidence in their goodness, but because they think it judicious to speak of them in that way.

Now, God's good things are very varied in their names. Some have the best and most beautiful of names. Others again, nominally, are not so attractive. What a lovely name was that which Jesus gave His disciples when he said, 'Henceforth I call you not servants, but I have called you friends!' They were raised to a higher level, and not merely got orders as servants, but confidences as friends. Who would presume, however, to call himself by that name? We leave it to the Saviour to speak in that way in His condescending love. We would only venture to take the humbler title, and may well be proud, like St. Paul, to call ourselves servants, if we can do so in truth. But I find that Jesus speaks, in another place, of a yoke. That is not such an attractive name. There is no doubt,

however, about its being a good thing, if it be Christ's yoke. It is through the taking of that yoke upon us that we shall find rest unto our souls.

I suppose, if we were asked as to the characteristics of a good thing, most of us would say that a very important one must be that it lasts. Well, that is true, above all, of God's good things. They last. Time has been called 'the prince of honest fellows,' for he brings out the real value of things in the long-run; and time has proved the value of the gospel, and the blessings that come to us through it. 'Why do I not like that story so well to-day as yesterday?' said a little girl, when her mother told her the same story a second time. It is mostly the way, however. The interest fades with repetition. But the old, old story of Jesus and His love gets more precious and fascinating the longer we live, and the more we think about it. Sometimes we wonder what will be the good things of the next world, the good things that God has in store; for, you see, they have to last such a long time there, they have to last and satisfy us to all eternity. But that is a secret that will be kept till the time comes. Let us only be sure of this, the Lord can provide, and the Lord will provide.

And to whom is the promise of the text made? To 'them that walk uprightly.' There is a great simplicity often about the Bible phrases. What could be simpler than these words, and yet what could better describe our spiritual requirements? There is something noble in the erect posture. Only man can stand erect. I have seen the remark somewhere, in connexion with the woman who was bowed together, and could in no wise lift herself up, and whom Jesus made straight, that there are souls that are bowed together as well as bodies. Yes, many a bent body is the home of a straight and erect soul, as many an upright body has within a soul that is grovelling and debased. The body does get bent as age creeps on, but the power of Christ can still make straight and keep straight the soul. No debility of age need set in there. And thus, walking uprightly, we shall find God's promise largely true in our experience, even amid loss, and we shall grow in the confidence that, as to the future—

There is never a longing the heart can feel
But a blessing shall fill it yet.