The Watchword.

may be given although they ought not to be asked. We simply say that this is the spirit that the missionary should manifest, and the missionary boards should afford an opportunity for its manifestation. Let there be a heroic department opened in all our missionary societies along the lines that we have indicated, and wait for the results. But we shall have to recur to this in our next.

CHURCH ENTERTAINMENT VS. CHURCH MINISTRY.

DR. IAN MACLAREN, the famous English preacher and writer, recently remarked on the mistaken idea which many churches seem to hold—that if they can only get the people to come and sit in the pews, they have successfully solved the problem of popular attendance, no matter what the people come for, or how much the religious service may be diluted. What do "full sittings and hundreds turned away" amount to, he asked, if they do not get the gospel of Christ after they come? Upon this the Mid-Continent remarks: "That is the question—what is our idea of a church service? What do we give the people after we get them there? Is it their 'entertainment' we are after? And shall an evening of song be considered the mission of the gospel? Or, in imitation of King Nebuchadnezzar, shall we give the people 'the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music,' with a 'ten-minute address' apologetically sandwiched in among the classical and artistic 'renditions'? Or, is it an evening's intellectual entertainment—the discussion of questions of literature and art or civic problems and sociology? Or shall we 'reach the masses' by taking to the low plane of vapid sensationalism and waggery in the pulpit? It is not altogether difficult to get an audience. But getting an audience is not an end in itself and can never be the seal of one's ministry. The question is, what does the preacher do with the audience after he gets it? Are the people giving their attendance for that which is not bread, and their eager listening for that which satisfies not?"

WAITING FOR THE MOVING OF THE WATER.

BY A. J. GORDON.

"Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. "In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water; whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had," etc. John 5:2-10.

THE picture which is here presented is so distinctly drawn by the Evangelist that it requires no very vivid imagination to reproduce the scene and bring before us the various characters of which it is composed. Reading the narrative we stand in thought in one of those porches of Bethesda. There is the blind man upon whose sightless balls the world with all its glory and magnificence sheds no longer any ray of cheerful beauty. Some loving friend perhaps is leading him by the hand and guiding his uncertain footsteps among the jostling crowd.

Here, too, is the cripple, bending wearily upon his crutches and telling by his pale suffering countenance how heavily his burden rests upon him and how he longs for restoration to soundness and strength. Yonder is one borne upon a couch, his haggard form distorted with disease and his face stamped in every lineament and feature with the hieroglyphics of pain. There perhaps is a consumptive, there a paralytic, and there an epileptic. Around the pool these people lie, all anxiously waiting for the moving of that water by stepping into which they hoped to be healed.

We can imagine no more pitiable spectacle than this which here meets the gaze of Jesus. It was like a gala
day of misery, a carnival of disease, when all the varied forms of wretchedness and pain were put on exhibition, each branded with some separate form of woe and each presenting a different appeal for sympathy and commiseration. And we can imagine how that compassionate heart, that was so sensitive to the appeals of suffering, must have been stirred and agitated by this appalling spectacle of woe.

Upon one of the wretched throng Christ casts a look. He is a desperate and a well-nigh hopeless sufferer. Thirty and eight years has he been bound in the bonds of disease, and nothing has been able to loose him. He has heard that this pool of Bethesda has power to cure disease at a certain season. But though he has come again and again, he has been constantly disappointed for want of some friend to put him in. “Wilt thou be made whole?” asks Christ, seeking as it seems to draw his thoughts and his faith to himself, the mighty Physician. But he can think only of the pool. “I have no man when the water is troubled to put me into the pool; but while I am coming another steppeth down before me.” Little did the poor man know that he was standing by another fountain, that fountain seen by Zechariah in prophetic vision when he said, “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.” But so it was. And from that fountain now goes forth divine virtue, even that word of Christ, “Rise, take up thy bed and walk,” and the man who has waited through thirty-eight long and weary years of baffled expectation is at last made whole and once more walks erect and well.

The analogies which the miracle suggests are too plain to be mistaken.

In the first place in that expression, “A great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water,” do we not find an exact description of the spiritual attitude and condition of a large number of those who frequent the house of God? Would that the “impotent folk” embraced only those who are outside the church; but this is not so. They are found lying in the porches of every sanctuary. Blind professors whose eyes having been once opened have grown over again with the films of worldliness so that they can no longer see the claims of duty and the obligations of discipleship; halting Christians, who did run well for a season, but have now grown weary in well doing and are only idle loiterers in the path of duty; withered limbs of the church that instead of being strong and vigorous for service hang like dead weights upon its body, making it feeble and inefficient. These are found waiting for the moving of the water. They are conscious that their backslidings must be healed, that their spiritual strength must be renewed before they can be of any service to the cause. But instead of rousing their dormant energies by a manly and determined effort, instead of scourging their indolence into fervid devotion as they ought, they simply wait, hoping that something may happen that shall help them, trusting that some angel of revival may come down and trouble the sluggish pool of the church’s life so that they then can step into the waters and be healed. That is to say, there are so many persons in the church who depend entirely upon times and seasons, who can work well enough at high-water mark, but can never do anything at low tide; who, instead of depending solely on the perennial fountain of communion with Christ, depend entirely for their activity upon the tide of feeling—a tide which is liable to rise and fall with every change of moon.

You will often notice that in some little bay by the seaside there are a few scattered shrubs and bushes that are always green and thriving whether the tide is in or out. But the beach is covered with a quantity of loose wood
and sticks that never stirs when the wave has receded, but lies there flat and motionless waiting for the moving of the water. When, however, the tide comes in it is all astir, presenting a most lively activity and commotion.

The prayer meeting is a bay of the church. There are a few faithful ones that grow upon its banks; they are like trees planted by the rivers of water, that bring forth their fruit in its season and whose leaf does not wither. But on the other hand you will always find lying on its banks a great number who are simply waiting to be moved. If a little revival springs up and sends a few waves of refreshing into the church, they come drifting into the conference meeting and outdoing the most zealous by their activity; but when the tide ebbs they slip out again and are seen no more till another wave returns.

Thus their Christian life is spent in constant fluctuation. They never become rooted and grounded in the faith. They never grow like trees of the sanctuary, shooting their boughs and branches heavenward in the thirst and luxuriance of Christian vigor. All the life they have is merely accidental and intermittent, depending solely on causes without itself, upon transient impulses and vagrant moods. Now I believe there is such a thing as Christian waiting, but I am sure it is not to be found in any such attitude of spiritual indifference as this. The Psalmist says, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." But what kind of waiting is this? It is the waiting of the soldier who with his armor all on and his weapons all bright waits the command to charge upon the foe. It is the waiting of the husbandman who, having cast his seed into the earth, watches and tends it through rain and sunshine, through heat and cold, till the time comes for thrusting in the sickle and reaping. God will bless no other kind of waiting. It is one of the most discouraging facts in Christian labor that so many church members place their entire dependence for doing good upon the inspiration of great awakenings and marvellous spiritual manifestations.

They will ask, "Are there any signs of a revival in the church?" as much as to say, "If there are, I'm coming in to the meetings. It is a pleasant thing to know that the work of the Lord is prospering on our hands, and I shall be glad to see it go on;" and they come perhaps so long as the interest continues. They pray perhaps as long as they can see the visible results of their labor. But there is none of that faith that holds on to God when the faith of the many fails; of that love that loves still when the love of the many waxeth cold; of that hope that hopes against hope.

Oh, my brethren, you who for months have never been seen in our place of prayer, who every time you meet your neighbor complain of the drought that is prevailing in the land, but who never seem to think that a more terrible drought is prevailing in the church, drying up the fountains of her activity and parching her moral life, a drought which has been created by your indifference and which is prolonged by your neglect, remember that in God's sight there is no such thing as life in them who have only a name to live, but who are dead. You may say you are simply waiting for deeper feeling and a warmer interest. But that cannot excuse you. Religion, if it is anything, is a conflict, not an ignominious resting on our arms. Salvation, if it is anything, is a victory, not a craven compromise with the world and with our own sluggish nature and affections. And if we ever get to heaven at all, it will not be because we drifted in on the flood tide of some happy feeling, because we were wafted thither on the smooth current of our natural desires. No, the Christian course is against wind and tide, and if those who pull and toil with all their strength are scarcely saved, where shall those be who are living from month to month without a single honest effort or self-denial?
This church numbers something like one hundred and seventy members. Of that number but five male members were present last Friday evening at the covenant meeting. Where were the others? Waiting to feel more interest in the cause? Waiting a return of former love and zeal? Waiting for the time when business cares shall press less heavily? Waiting for you know not what? Supposing that every one of you should stop waiting, and come next Friday and meet Christ. Come from closets where you have invoked the Spirit’s presence in the house of prayer. Come with what little warmth you have, determined to seek more. Come at the call of duty and not at the bidding of impulse. Would not this combined action on the part of the church create that interest for which you have been vainly waiting at your homes?

Oh, this is the bane and destruction of vital religion, that Christians will allow themselves to be such creatures of feeling and impulse, that they will allow circumstances to mould them instead of themselves moulding circumstances, and accommodating them to an unbending principle and an unswerving Christian rectitude. The religion of Christ, if it be true and genuine, is an every-day and an every-hour religion. It is not a life preserver simply that is to be kept collapsed for the larger part of the time, and only inflated for the purpose of buoying the soul up in some great emergency, or some great trial, or some great flood of feeling. It is a lifeboat in which we have embarked for heaven, whose oars are not to be idle a single moment and whose sails are never to be taken in.

That answer of Napoleon’s when one of his officers asked if circumstances were favorable to a certain military movement, “Sir, I make circumstances,” is worthy to be the motto of every Christian man. If we are to accomplish anything for Christ, we must determine that instead of waiting for more favorable opportunities, we will make opportunities, that instead of waiting for some imaginary angel to trouble the sluggish streams of the church’s zeal, we will stir them ourselves; that instead of wandering in the desert and complaining that we have no water, we will do as Moses did, smite the Rock of Ages with our prayers and make the streams of mercy gush out.

The great fact for us to bear in mind is that God’s time is always now, that Christ’s command is, “Go work to-day in my vineyard. Say not, There are four months, and then cometh the harvest. Look upon the fields already ripe to harvest,” God’s Spirit is always working and always demands our cooperation. There are days of Pentecost, when he comes with a rushing mighty wind to shake the church. But he is always present with his “still, small voice.”

We have here our spiritual Bethesda. We have been waiting and praying for these baptismal waters to be stirred. And shall we only wait? Oh, no! While we know that only the Spirit can move upon the face of the waters, yet God’s heavens are always “full of rain.” Even now the clouds above us are ready to burst and pour out their floods upon us. It is for us by prayer and labor to open them and bring down their contents. We need not wait. Now, if we will but take hold on God, if we will only call upon him in earnest, we may receive the “dayspring from on high,” so that this, our “Baca, shall become a well, and the rain also fill the pools.”

END

When once a man is become as nothing before God, and when he is delivered from himself so that he is nothing, and hath nothing, then through this time of loss and sorrow he enters into surpassing joy. For it is sorrow and suffering to a man to be stripped and emptied of all, and to learn through tribulation and temptation what it is to rest in God alone.—John Tauler.
But there is another aspect of this question. God’s purposes concerning the nations of the earth have their centre within the bounds of this empire. Jerusalem was to be trodden down only until the times of the Gentiles would come to an end. That end is at our very doors. Jerusalem must be recovered and rebuilt, and before that day the Turkish Empire must be destroyed and its territory divided. It was made known by Daniel while at Babylon that when the old Roman Empire appears in its last form, having ten kingdoms, all under one head, four of those kingdoms would correspond to the four divisions into which Alexander’s domain was partitioned amongst his four great generals. Turkey covers that ground. It therefore must give way, and must be divided into four great kingdoms, so that the Gentile nations may assume the final form assigned to them, till a stone cut out without hands shall smite the empire in its final form and break it in pieces. Then “shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people.”

So there are three great forces centering in that land. First comes the extraordinary selfishness and jealousy of the modern nations of Europe. Twenty millions of men under arms for no other purpose than to see that no nation dares to take possession of any portion of the decaying Turkish Empire! Then comes the purpose of God to have his ancient people restored to their own land and their capital city rebuilt. This shall come in its season by peace, although the way of the return will probably be opened by preceding and devastating war. Lastly, there is nothing plainer than that the final form of the Roman Empire, now about to appear upon the scene, is ten kingdoms under one emperor. It will extend all the way from Scotland to the Persian Gulf, and it will involve the repeopling of the East and the rebuilding of Babylon. When a circle is completed, we reach the point of departure. Man’s career began on the plains of Shinar, and his last display of commercial enterprise, military greatness, luxurious indulgence, dazzling splendor, and unbelieving blasphemy will be in that very spot again. But all of the nations will be drunk with the same intoxicating cup, filled with the dreams of human greatness and human destiny.

Every event in Europe, since the French Revolution, has been gradually shaping itself towards this reforming of the old Roman Empire, this partitioning of the domain of the Turks, and this liberating and return of the Jews. No wonder then that the “Eastern question” is the sensitive point—the sore point—of European history today. The jealousies of the nations, the purposes of God, and the long-cherished hopes of the despised Jewish race gather around that question. The cup of the Turkish iniquity will soon be full, and the day of her destruction will come.—awful day! The lawlessness of European masses will soon culminate, and then will come the hour for that “king of men” called the Anti-christ, to whom the kings of the earth will give their power, in order to secure the submission of their people. The clock of Jewish destiny will soon strike twelve, and all nations will imitate Pharaoh in “hastening the departing guests” to their own land. Like Pharaoh, too, the fulsome flattery will soon be followed by the bitterest hatred. But God’s hand will interfere, and his own purposes will bring the King of kings and the everlasting kingdom and the peace and good will for which we wait.

WAITING FOR THE MOVING OF THE WATER.

BY A. J. GORDON.

(Continued from April number.)

IN this poor, sick man, thinking only of the pool when Christ would draw his attention to himself as the Healer present and ready to help, do
we not recognize a type of those unconverted persons who, instead of coming immediately to a present and willing Saviour, are waiting for some great religious movement, some powerful revival, to come and move them from their indifference and bring them into Christ's kingdom?

There are many such probably even in this congregation. You urge them to repent and they reply: "I have no feeling on the subject. I am waiting for an interest to spring up so that I can become really aroused on the subject before I can hope to be converted."

Oh, there are sadder and more pitiable cases here, I fear, than this one of the impotent man of Bethesda,—souls bowed with the infirmity of sin, hearts aching from the wounds of disobedience, bedridden consciences and sin-sick spirits. Why are you here? Why do you tarry in these pews? Is it that you may here present your case to the Great Physician,—that you may tell Him your need and seek His healing grace?

I would I could know it were so. But alas! you have come here Sabbath after Sabbath, and though you have felt your need, you have not once cried out, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me." You have been waiting, looking for some great opportunity, expecting some superhuman power to come and put you into the fountain of redemption. But such waiting is as needless as it is perilous. Salvation is already at hand. Though our spiritual waters be as stagnant as the Dead Sea, though no angel of grace has descended for months to stir their lifeless depths, it matters not. Jesus, the divine healer, is passing by and asking of you, Wilt thou be made whole?

Christ does not wait for special seasons and peculiar opportunities in which to work. He is ever near,—the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. It is only now and then that his Spirit comes in the storm and sweep of the tempest. It is always present in its soft breathings and silent admonitions. It is only now and then that it rolls over the land in some mighty wave of power; it is always falling upon the church in the gentle rain from heaven and the mild dews of vernal green.

There is neither need of delay nor excuse for delay. Salvation is not a ship making occasional voyages from the port of heaven and touching only periodically on these shores of ours to take in a few waiting souls and carry them to the harbor of the blessed. If there, we might well sit down and fold our hands and wait our turn.

It is a way that is always open to us. It is a door that is never barred to us. And whether we come in the dullest or most prosperous period of the church, in the light and glory of some revival day or in the midnight darkness of declension and unbelief, the invitation is always ours, "Knock and it shall be opened unto you."

Of that wretched throng that lay about Bethesda, how many think you were restored to health? We know of only one, and he that one on whom the Saviour wrought this miracle.

Of the multitudes of sinners who are waiting for some special visitation of God's Spirit to save them, how many think you will live to see their desire fulfilled? To some such an event may come. To others it may never come.

Waiting is perilous. Delaying is risking the soul's immortal safety. Now Christ is near. Now is the chosen time.

CANON FARRAR AND THE BOOK OF DANIEL.

BY REV. NATHANIEL WEST.

The great "Seventy Weeks Prophecy," Dan. 9: 24–27, affords opportunity to show the mode in which Canon Farrar treats a theme of such magnitude and solemnity. The Church of Christ has a deep interest in this. For 1800 years it has been one of the chief bulwarks of her defence of