THANKSGIVING DAY.

IT ORIGINATED WITH THE PILGRIM FATHERS.

The New England Origin of the Festival and How It Has Enlarged Its Significance—The Colonial Meeting-House—Sermons, Mince Pie and Turkeys.

From Fasting to Feasting.

Of all our national holidays none is more universally or more joyously celebrated than that of Thanksgiving Day. Though of New England origin and for many years confined almost exclusively to that section, it has slowly but surely extended itself all over our great country.

We are indebted for it to the Pilgrim Fathers, who may be said to have celebrated it for the first time upon the completion of their first harvest at Plymouth in 1621, when Gov. Bradford sent out four fowlers in search of game, that they "might after a more special manner rejoice together." But fasts were much more common among those hardy Puritans than feasts, and though they occasionally observed a general thanksgiving day for some specially propitious occurrence, such as some action favorable to them on the part of the mother country or the arrival of a shipload of provisions, they devoted much more time to deploring their miseries than they did to rejoicing over their blessings.

It is said that their adoption of the custom of annually appointing a Thanksgiving Day was due to a sensible old farmer—whose name tradition has unfortunately failed to preserve—who rose up when it was proposed in the Assembly to proclaim another fast, and plainly told them that he believed God was weary of their complaints, in view of the fact that He was causing the earth to reward their labors; that He had filled the seas and rivers with fish, had made the air sweet and the climate healthful, and was permitting them the full enjoyment of civil and religious liberty. The speaker therefore proposed that instead of a fast a day of feasting and thanksgiving should thereafter be annually proclaimed, which sensible suggestion was unanimously adopted. Whether or not this is a true account of the origin of that practice, it is a thoroughly established fact that by the year 1680 it had become a fixed custom for the Governors of the colonies of Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay to appoint a Thanksgiving Day late in the autumn of each year—a usage that soon extended to all other New England colonies.

The adoption of this custom outside of New England was very slow. How slow will be readily understood from the fact that as recently as 1855 it was considered a remarkable event in Virginia when Gov. Johnson recommended the observance of a Thanksgiving Day, and that Gov. Wise refused to appoint one in 1857 on the ground that he had no authority to interfere in religious matters. Thanksgiving Day was not regularly appointed by the Governors of New York until 1817.

During the revolutionary war Congress annually recommended a general Thanksgiving Day. Washington proclaimed one in 1789, on the adoption of the Constitution, and another in 1795 for the suppression of the whisky insurrection in Western Pennsylvania, while Madison proclaimed one for peace with England in 1815. After Madison, Abraham Lincoln was the first President to proclaim a Thanksgiving Day, and he did it in 1862 and 1863 for war victories. In 1864 he proclaimed a Thanksgiving Day in November for general blessings, and his example of that year has since been annually followed by every one of his successors and by nearly every State Governor down to the present time.

But popular as Thanksgiving Day now is throughout the length and breadth of this land, it is in New England that it still continues to be what it has been for more than two centuries—the greatest and most eagerly anticipated holiday of the entire year. The old Puritans and their descendants, who so long frowned severely upon Christmas—which, indeed, many of the latter still continue to do, refusing to give it any recognition whatever—found an excellent substitute for its cheerful hilarity, peace and good-will in Thanksgiving Day. For at least a week before the important occasion all was activity in an old-fashioned rural New England household. A bushel or more of the best wheat was sent to the mill to be converted into flour. Great rounds of beef were chopped up into mincemeat. Cartloads of yellow pumpkins, with an abundance of milk, spices, ginger, molasses and sugar, were made up into pumpkin pies. An abundance of turkeys, chickens and geese were killed and made ready for roasting. A pair of immense plum puddings were baked in the largest sized earthen pots, with Indian puddings and custard puddings to match, while there was baking of pound cake, plum cake and sponge cake from morning till night.

For the following quaint account of an old colonial Thanksgiving church service and dinner I am indebted says Geoffrey Christine, to a letter written in the year 1714 by an ancestor of mine, the Rev. Lawrence Conant, of the old South Parish in Danvers, Mass., and still preserved as a most precious heirloom in my family:

Ye Governor was in ye house, and her Majesty's Commissioners of ye Customs, and they sat together in a high seat by ye pulpit stairs. Ye Governor appears very devout and attentive, although he favors Episcopacy and tolerates ye Quakers and Baptists. He was dressed in a black velvet coat, bordered with gold lace, and buff breeches with gold buckles at ye knees, and white silk stockings. There was a disturbance in ye galleries, where it was filled with divers negroes, mulattoes and Indians, and a negro call'd Pomp Shorter, belonging to Mr. Gardner, was called forth and put in ye broad aisle, where he was reproved with great carefulness and solemnity. He was then put in ye deacons' seat between two deacons, in view of ye whole congregation; but ye sexton was ordered by Mr. Prescott to take him out, because of his levity and strange contortion of countenance (giving grave scandal to ye grave deacons), and put him in ye lobby under ye stairs; some children and a mulatto woman were repremanded for laughing at Pomp Shorter. When ye services at ye meeting house were ended ye council and other dignitaries were entertained at ye house of Mr. Epes, on ye hill near by, and we had a bountiful Thanksgiving dinner, with bear's meat and venison, the last of which was a fine buck, shot in ye woods near by. Ye bear was killed in Lynn woods, near Reading. After ye blessing was craved by Mr. Garrish, of Wrentham, word came that ye buck was shot on the Lord's day, by Pequot, an Indian, who came to Mr. Epes with a lye in his mouth, like Ananias of old. Ye council, therefore, refused to eat ye venison, but it was afterward agreed that Pequot should receive forty stripes, save one, for a lyeing and profaning ye Lord's Day, restore Mr. Epes ye cost of ye deer; and considering this a just and righteous sentence on ye sinful heathen and that a blessing had been craved on ye meat, ye council all partook of it but Mr. Shepard, whose conscience was tender on ye point of venison.

OLD THANKSGIVING FUN.

Rev. Dr. Talmage Recalls a Thanksgiving of His Boyhood.

How my mind is crowded with Thanksgiving memories! On no other day does my memory become such a kaleidoscope, and as I sit here in my darkened room and write, almost every minute the scene changes. I give to the kaleidoscope of memory a turn, and there they are, natural as life, around the country hearth on a cold winter night. I hear the hickory fire crackle, and see the shadows flit up

and down the wall. Games that sometimes well-nigh upset the chairs—"Blind-Man's Buff," "Who's Got the Button," "The Popping Corn," "The Molasses Pudding," and the witch stories that made the neighbors' boys afraid to go home after dark. Hickory nuts on one dish, roseate apples on the other. The boisterous plays of "More Bags on the Mill," "Leap Frog," "Catcher," around and around the room until some one got hurt and a kiss was offered to make up the hurt, the kiss more resented than the hurt. High old time! Father and mother got up and went into the next room because they could not stand the racket. Then, instead of compunctions of conscience, a worse racket. The mothers and wives came in the afternoon, all wrapped up from the cold, and their feet on a foot-stove. When they got warm and took out their needles and sat down it was a merry group and full of news. Once in a while a needle would slip and make a bad scratch upon the character of some absentee, but for the most part it was good, wholesome talk. And in the evening, when the young people came and the old people were in one room and the young people in another, in the latter there was some lively stepping, while the black boy played "Moneymusk;" even grandfather in the next room, who had distributed many tracts on the sin of dancing, was seen to make his heel go. It seemed to me a great fuss and a great gathering to get one quilt made. But the fact was, that good neighborhood was quilted, warm sympathies were quilted, lifetime friendships were quilted, and connubial bliss was quilted. And they stayed late. And such plays as you had in that back room when you joined hands, and one of the loveliest stood in the ring! What a circumference to what a center! But now the scene is fading out. The old fireplace is down, and the house is down with it. One of those boys went to sea and was never heard of. Another became squire in a neighboring village. Another went to college and became a minister. Another died the following summer, until now they are all gone.—T. De Witt Talmage, in Ladies' Home Journal.

BOBBY'S THANSGIVING.

T a table fairly
groaning under everything
that's good
That you or I
could think of
in the catalogue of food,
There sat a happy
family, as jolly
as could be,
To celebrate
Thanksgiving
Day with due
festivity.

The boys, with mouths wide open, kept
their eyes upon the tray,
As if the turkey on it would spread wings
and fly away;
The while the girls sat up quite straight,
their dignity at hand,
And by their prim example gave the boys
a reprimand.

But such a shining gobbler, with his drumsticks in the air,
Would make a Chesterfield unquiet, forget himself and stare.
How can we blame the hungry boys if they perchance betrayed
Conspicuously the fact that they had stomachs to be stayed?

Above the steaming turkey rose the master, six feet tall,
And silence, deep, impressive, fell alike on one and all.
He bowed his head and reverently, in language full and clear,
He thanked our great Creator for the blessings of the year.

And when the simple prayer was done, thus

the good father spoke:
"My children, it becomes each one his blessing to invoke;
Therefore let each one here thank him for this Thanksgiving treat,
For all the favors he has shown, and these good things to eat."

With trembling voice and reverent air each pious one bowed low
And thanked our Heavenly Father great that he had blessed them so,
For all the good things, and their home, to them a hallowed spot,
Until it came to little Bob, the smallest of the lot.

And thus he spoke, his head bowed down, while round he glanced an eye:
"I fank Thee for the turkey and the great big chicken pie;
I fank Thee for the other fings"—at this prospect of bliss
He paused, and then—"say, mamma, please, w'at's comin' after this?"

Nocturnal Creatures.

Most curious in origin of all nocturnal insect hunters are the leather-winged bats, which may be regarded, practically speaking, as very tiny monkeys, highly specialized for the task of catching nocturnal flies and midges. Few people know how nearly they are related to us. They belong to the self-same division of the higher mammals as man and the apes; their skeleton answers to ours, bone for bone and joint for joint, in an ordinary manner; only the unessential fact that they have very long fingers with a web between as an organ of flight prevents us from instantly and instinctively recognizing them as remote cousins, once removed from the gorilla.

The female bat in particular is absurdly human. Most of them feed off insects alone; but a few, like the famous vampire bats of South America, take a mean advantage of sleeping animals, and suck their blood after the fashion of mosquitoes, as they lie defenseless in the forest or on the open pampas. Others, like the flying foxes of the Malay archipelago, make a frugal meal off fruits and vegetables; but even these are persistent night fliers. They hang head downward from the boughs of trees during the hot tropical daytime, but sally forth at night, with Milton's sons of Belial, to rob the banana patches and invade the plaintain grounds of the industrious native. The bat is a lemur, compelled by dire necessity to become a flying night bird.—Cornhill Magazine.

TURKEY WITH SAUCE.

THERE was once a turkey who was a cripple. When his brethren scratched and scrambled for seats at the first table, he was rudely pushed aside and left behind. This gave him much time for meditation, so he stood by the pump and reflected upon the folly of too ardent eating.

"These fowls," thought he, "think only of the pleasure of the moment," for though he was yet young he observed that the plump, self-indulgent among his kind were earliest invited to ride in the market "death-cart," or pitilessly dispatched upon the farmer's own private guillotine. He grew old and waxed wise. He could have challenged the calendar in knowledge of Xmas and Thanksgiving days. Choice might have made him a sybarite, necessity made him a philosopher, and he learned to be thankful in a grim, hungry sort of way for the infirmity that kept him out of danger. A great pity filled his soul. Was it not his duty, nay his highest privilege, to teach his fellow turkeys this doctrine of abstinence unfolded to him by his affliction? He was a modest turkey, sensitive to a degree, but conscientious. He was not a bird to shirk duty, so lifting up his voice he gobbled unto all that feathered throng. He gobbled from his heart. What stories he told of countless bloody deeds! There was not a dry eye in the audience. He told of the near approach of Thanksgiving Day. All were impressed, attentive, subdued. [They had just demolished a huge dish of corn.] There was, for a time, profound silence over all the barnyard.

But the doctrine of abstinence is never a popular one, and long before the farmer's wife again threw out the food a frisky young turkey strutted over to the pump and publicly invited the philosopher to hear his side of the story. A great flapping of wings greeted his audacity, for "cheek" is a talent even in turkeydom. Clouds of dust announced that the meeting was to be a crowded one. Big chicks, little chicks, geese, ganders, even goslings elbowed—pardon, winged—with the turkeys to hear what this young fellow could say on this, the burning question of the hour. With so many quills present it is monstrous that there should be no verbatim report of the masterly oration. It was a strong rendering of the well-beloved old text, "eat, drink and be merry." The speaker gave a graphic description of the happy lot of his hearers, showing them how rarely fortunate they were in that their greatest pleasure was at the same time their highest duty. He gobbled with burning satire upon his "learned friend" who would have them live for this life alone. He asked his audience if it were creditable that in this nineteenth century a turkey so well posted as his "esteemed adversary" had not heard of the doctrine of evolution. Here he painted in scholarly language the slow transition from turkeydom to humanity by the Darwinian route.

His audience was depressed—it seemed such hopeless waiting—that long, slow, infinitesimal changing. Then, in that moment of inner anguish, he burst upon them this climax: "And yours, yours, my winged brethren, is the power to leap across this multitude of intermediate stages, this frightful chasm of time, to become in a few brief hours a part of man, a living factor in the noblest work of nature. You have only to be young and plump and tender to be with one blow, and a little dressing, translated to the realms of your highest dreams." Such cackling! Such crowing! Such quacking! Such gobbling! It woke the farmer's man to a remembrance of unfulfilled instructions and the orator turkey turned pale as he felt that firm, relentless clutch upon his long red neck. There were many deaths that day, but the philosopher stood by the pump unharmed. He, of course, saw the fallacy of his late friend's reasoning, but as deceased was no longer his rival he called him a "promising young turkey" and was even tolerant of those gobblers who shook their wicked old heads and said, "of a truth the good die young." The orator turkey was buried on Thanksgiving day, in the Smith family. No flowers. After-dinner speeches of a rare order were delivered, however.

A Suggestion.

Thanksgiving Day means much in the larger sense, and it were well for the country if we added to our present happy domestic and churchly custom of observing it by some distinctly public ceremonial that would associate more directly our well being with the thought of the nation's work and mission.—Chicago Inter Ocean.

Chant of the Thanksgiving Glutton.

I never had a sweet gazelle
To glad me with its soft black eye—
But I would love it passing well
Baked in a rich and crusty pie.
If I could have a bird to love
And nestle sweetly in my breast,
All other nestling birds above,
The turkey—stuffed—would be that bird.

Reason for Thankfulness.

It is time for devout thanksgiving; because the world is no worse than it is, and man's future is so bright, because the joy and wealth of life are as well distributed as they are, and better than ever before, because the movement of humanity is constantly upward and the revelation of God's goodness is ever clearer as the earth rolls on in its appointed path.—Syracuse Standard.

Digging for Treasures.

The attention paid to St. Luke's Hospital, the institution in which the Vanderbilts are interested, is doubtless responsible for the revival of stories concerning the burial of treasure, decades ago, on the sight of that granite pile. Gold, silver, and jewelry that would make a Monte Cristo feel poor in comparison figure in the narrative of those who place faith in these legends. A hospital patron, who is very near the Vanderbilts, gives this account of it all:

"The treasure story originated years since, owing to the find of misers' hoards near the hospital lot. So far from there being a wish to dig for treasure on the grounds, I doubt if there has been the remotest whisper of such a thing. Indeed, most of the officers and patrons of St. Luke's do not know that treasure was even supposed to be buried near the hospital. There is absolutely no foundation for the story."

"What of the report that St. Luke's people repudiate the treasure story so as to get it themselves?"

"Well, if anyone thinks there is a fortune under the ground, let him buy the property and begin digging."—New York special.

Thanksgiving Like All Gaul.

Like All Gaul, Thanksgiving may be divided into three parts—the Thanksgiving of worship, the Thanksgiving of feasting and the Thanksgiving of amusement. There is a small but determined fourth part, which might be termed the Thanksgiving of nightmare, but, broadly speaking, this may be included in the amusement column.—Unidentified.

Conclusive.

"Here's a queer story about a turkey that died for grief. I don't know whether it is intended to be pathetic or whether it's a joke." "What do you find it in?" "A London comic paper. "Then it's no joke."—Chicago Tribune.

He'll Arrive at Christmas.

A youth out in far Albuquerque
Wrote East in a hand rather juerque
That if still in the mood
And the walking was good
He'd be home for his Thanksgiving tuerque.
—Yonkers Gazette.

A DAY OF REJOICING.

BACK to the home of
childhood,
Though scattered
far and wide,
Back to the dear
old kitchen,
Yes, back to your
mother's side.
Come, kiss her wrinkled forehead,
Her hair, as white
as snow,
And sit down on her
footstool,
As in the long ago.

While father bends above you,
Weak with the weight of years,
His trembling voice with gladness,
His dim eyes filled with tears.
To both the greatest pleasure
The year brings on its way
Is this, the glad home-coming
Upon Thanksgiving Day.

Once more the rooms re-echo
From kitchen, stairs and hall,
The sound of old-time voices,
And merry dinner call.
While many sweet grandchildren,
With laughter light and gay,
Come pressing round the table,
This glad Thanksgiving Day.

So come, ye sons and daughters,
From restless city strife;
Come, ere you lose your relish
For the quiet joys of life;
Come back, ye roving children,
From prairies far and wide,
And cluster round the hearthstone
Once more at eventide.

Take up the song of childhood,
And sing it o'er again;
Forget that ye are matrons,
Or business-loving men.
And if your eyes grow misty,
Rejoice that it is so:
A heart sincerely tender
Is the purest one to know.

Remember, with your loved ones,
Life's lamp doth feebly burn;
Your parents may not linger
To greet a late return.
Forget them not, though patient,
Oh, come now while you may;
Praise God—rejoice together—
On this Thanksgiving Day.
—Good Housekeeping.

At a Colored Boarding House.

Mr. Newsome (the carver)—Miss Clufley, would you hab some ob de fowl?

Miss Clufley (thickly, as the bird slides off the dish)—Thanks, Mistah Newsome, but I's would radder hab er little at er time.—Texas Siftings.

TALMAGE'S SERMON.

THE BROOKLYN PREACHER ON THE "IFS" OF THE BIBLE.

Two Letters the Pivot on Which Everything Turns—Only Four Steps Between Faith and Unbelief—The Gospel of Jesus Christ the Religion for Adversity.

The Tabernacle Pulpit.

In the Brooklyn Tabernacle Sunday morning Rev Dr. Talmage delivered one of his most unique and useful sermons from a text never before preached from. Subject, The "Ifs" of the Bible. The text chosen was Exodus xxxii, 32, "If thou wilt forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book."

There is in our English language a small conjunction which I propose, by God's help, to haul out of its present insignificancy and set upon the throne where it belongs, and that is the conjunction "if." Though made of only two letters, it is the pivot on which everything turns. All time and all eternity are at its disposal. We slure it in our utterance, we ignore it in our appreciation, and none of us recognizes it as the most tremendous word in all the vocabulary outside of those words which describe deity.

"If!" Why, that word we take as a tramp among words, now appearing here, how appearing there, but having no value of its own, when it really has a millionairedom of words, and in its train walk all planetary, stellar, lunar, solar destinies. If the boat of leaves made watertight, in which the infant Moses sailed the Nile, had sunk, who would have led Israel out of Egypt? If the Red Sea had not parted for the escape of one host and then come together for the submergence of another, would the book of Exodus ever have been written? If the ship on which Columbus sailed for America had gone down in an Atlantic cyclone, how much longer would it have taken for the discovery of this continent?

If Grouchy had come up with re-enforcements in time to give the French the victory of Waterlo, what would have been the fate of Europe? If the Spanish armada had not been wrecked off the coast, how different would have been chapters in English history! If the battle of Hastings, or the battle of Pultowa, or the battle of Valmy, or the battle of Mataurus, or the battle of Arbela, or the battle of Chalons, each one of which turned the world's destiny, had been decided the other way.

The Infinity of "If."

If Shakespeare had never been born for the drama, or Handel had never been born for music, or Titian had never been born for painting, or Thorwaldsen had never been born for sculpture, or Edmund Burke had never been born for eloquence, or Socrates had never been born for philosophy, or Blackstone had never been born for the law, or Copernicus had never been born for astronomy, or Luther had never been born for the reformation!

Oh, that conjunction "if!" How much has depended on it! The height of it, the depth of it, the length of it, the breadth of it, the immensity of it, the infinity of it—who can measure? It would swamp anything but omnipotence. But I must confine myself today to the "ifs" of the Bible, and in doing so I shall speak of the "if" of overpowering earnestness, the "if" of incredulity, the "if" of threat, the "if" of argumentation, the "if" of eternal significance, or so many of these "ifs" as I can compass in the time that may be reasonably allotted to pulpit discourse.

First, the "if" of overpowering earnestness. My text gives it. The Israelites have been worshiping an idol, notwithstanding all that God had done for them, and now Moses offers the most vehement prayer of all history, and it turns upon an "if." "If thou wilt forgive their sins—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book." Oh, what an overwhelming "if!" It was as much as to say: "If thou wilt not pardon them, do not pardon me. If thou wilt not bring them to the promised land, let me never see the promised land. If they must perish, let me perish with them. In that book where thou recordest their doom record my doom. If they are shut out of heaven, let me be shut out of heaven. If they go down into darkness, let me go down into darkness.' What vehemence and holy recklessness of prayer!

A Mother's Tears.

Yet there are those here who, I have no doubt, have, in their all absorbing desire to have others saved, risked the same prayer, for it is a risk. You must not make it unless you are willing to balance your eternal salvation on such an "if." Yet there have been cases where a mother has been so anxious for the recovery of a wayward son that her prayer has swung and trembled and poised on an "if" like that of the text. "If not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book. Write his name in the Lamb's Book of Life, or turn to the page where my name was written ten or twenty or forty or sixty years ago, and with the black ink of everlasting midnight erase my first name, and my last name, and all my name. If he is to go into shipwreck, let me be tossed amid the same breakers. If he cannot be a partner in my bliss, let me be a partner in his woe. I have for many years loved Thee, O God, and it has been my expectation to sit with Christ and all the redeemed at the banquet of the skies, but now I give up my promised place at the feast, and my promised robe, and my promised crown, and my promised throne unless John, unless George, unless Henry, unless my darling son can share them with me. Heaven will be no Heaven without him. O God, save my boy, or count me among the lost!"

That is a terrific prayer, and yet there is a young man sitting in the pew on the main floor, or in the lower gallery, or in the top gallery, who has already crushed such a prayer from his mother's heart. He hardly ever writes home, or, living at home, what does he care how much trouble he gives her? Her tears are no more to him than the rain that drops from the eaves of a house on a dark night. The fact that she does not sleep because of watching for his return late at night does not choke his laughter or hasten his step forward.

She has tried coaxing and kindness and self-sacrifices and all the ordinary prayers that mothers make for their children, and all have failed. She is coming toward the vivid and venturesome and terrific prayer of my text. She is going to lift her own eternity and set it upon that one "if," by which she expects to decide whether you will go up with her or she down with you. She may be this moment looking heavenward and saying, "O Lord, reclaim him by thy grace," and then adding that heart rendering "if" of my text, "If not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book."

After three years of absence a son wrote his mother in one of the New England whailing villages that he was coming home in a certain ship. Motherlike, she stood watching, and the ship was in the offing, but a fearful storm struck it and dashed the ship on the rocks that night. All that night the mother prayed for the safety of the son, and just at dawn there was a knock at the cottage door, and the son entered, crying out, "Mother, I knew you would pray me home!" If I would ask all those in this assemblage who have been prayed home to God by pious mothers to stand up, there would be scores that would stand, and if I should ask them to give testimony it would be the testimony of that New England son coming ashore from the split timbers of the whaling ship, "My mother prayed me home!"

The "If" of Incredulity.

Another Bible "if" is the "if" of incredulity. Satan used it when Christ's vitality was depressed by forty days' abstinence from food, and the tempter pointed to some stones, in color and shape like loaves of bread, and said, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." That was appropriate, for satan is the father of that "if" of incredulity. Peter used the same "if" when, standing on the wet and slippery deck of a fishing smack off Lake Galilee, he saw Christ walking on the sea as though it were as solid as a pavement of basalt from the adjoining volcanic hills, and Peter cried, "If it be thou, let me come to thee on the water."

What a preposterous "if!" What human foot was ever so constructed as to walk on water? In what part of the earth did law of gravitation make exception to the rule that man will sink to the elbow when he touches the wave of river or lake and will sink still farther unless he can swim? But here Peter looks out upon the form in the shape of a man defying the mightiest law of the universe, the law of gravitation, and standing erect on the top of the liquid. Yet the incredulous Peter cries out to the Lord, "If it be thou." Alas, for that incredulous "if!" It is working as powerfully in the latter part of this nineteenth Christian century as it did in the early part of the first Christian century.

Though a small conjunction, it is the biggest block to-day in the way of the gospel chariot. "If!" "If!" We have theological seminaries which spend most of their time and employ their learning and their genius in the manufacturing of "ifs." With that weaponry are assailed the Pentateuch, and the miracles, and the divinity of Jesus Christ. Almost everybody is chewing on an "if." When many a man bows for prayer, he puts his knee on an "if." The door through which people pass into infidelity and atheism and all immoralities has two doorposts, and the one is made of the letter "i" and the other of the letter "f."

Four Momentous Steps.

There are only four steps between strong faith and complete unbelief: First, surrender the idea of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures and adopt the idea that they were all generally supervised by the Lord. Second, surrender the idea that they were all generally supervised by the Lord and adopt the theory that they were not all, but partly, supervised by the Lord. Third, believe that they are the gradual evolution of the ages, and men wrote according to the wisdom of the times in which they lived. Fourth, believe that the Bible is a bad book and not only unworthy of credence, but pernicious and debasing and cruel.

Only four steps from the stout faith in which the martyrs died to the blatant caricature of Christianity as the greatest sham of the centuries. But the door to all that precipitation and horror is made out of an "if." The mother of unrests in the minds of Christian people and in those who regard sacred things is the "if" of incredulity. In 1879 in Scotland, I saw a letter which had been written many years ago by Thomas Carlyle to Thomas Chalmers. Carlyle at the time of writing the letter was a young man. The letter was not to be published until after the death of Carlyle. His death having taken place, the letter ought to be published.

It was a letter in which Thomas Carlyle expresses the tortures of his own mind while relaxing his faith in Christianity, while at the same time he expresses his admiration for Dr. Chalmers, and in which Carlyle wishes that he had the same faith that the great Scotch minister evidently exercised. Nothing that Thomas Carlyle ever wrote in "Sartor Resartus," or the "French Revolution," or his "Life of Cromwell," or his immortal "Essays," had in it more wondrous power than that letter which bewailed his own doubts and extolled the strong faith of another.

I made an exact copy of that letter, with the understanding that it should not be published until after the death of Thomas Carlyle, but returning to my hotel in Edinburgh I felt uneasy lest somehow that letter should get out of my possession and be published before its time. So I took it back to the person by whose permission I had copied it. All reasons for its privacy having vanished, I wish it might be published.

The Boy and His Bible.

Perhaps this sermon, finding its way into a Scottish home, may suggest its printing, for that letter shows more mightily than anything I have ever read the difference between the "I know" of Paul, and the "I know" of Job, and the "I know" of Thomas Chalmers, and the "I know" of all those who hold with a firm grip the Gospel, on the one hand, and the unmooring, bestorming, and torturing "if" of incredulity on the other. I like the positive faith of that sailor boy that Captain Judkins of the steamship Scotia picked up in a hurricane. "Go aloft," said Captain Judkins to his mate, "and look out for wrecks."

Before the mate had gone far up the ratlines he shouted: "A wreck! A wreck!" "Where away?" said Captain Judkins. "Off the port bow," was the answer. Lifeboats were lowered, and forty men volunteered to put out across the angry sea for the wreck. They came back with a dozen shipwrecked, and among them a boy of 12 years.

"Who are you?" said Captain Judkins. The answer was: "I am a Scotch boy. My father and mother are dead, and I am on my way to America." "What have you here?" said Captain Judkins as he opened the boy's jacket and took hold of a rope around the boy's body. "It is a rope," said the boy. "But what is that tied by this rope under your arm?" "That, sir, is my mother's bible. She told me never to lose that." "Could you not have saved something else?" "Not and saved that." "Did you expect to go down?" "Yes, sir, but I meant to take my mother's Bible down with me." "Bravo!" said Captain Judkins. "I will take care of you."

Another Bible "if" is the "if" of eternal significance. Solomon gives us that "if" twice in one sentence when he says, "If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself, but if thou scornest thou alone shalt bear it." Christ gives us that "if" when he says, "If thou hadst known in this thy day the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hidden from thine eyes." Paul gives us that "if" when he says, "If they shall enter into my rest." All those "ifs" and a score more that I might recall put the whole responsibility of our salvation on ourselves. Christ's willingness to pardon—no "if" about that. Realms of glory awaiting the righteous—no "if" about that.

The only "if" in all the case worth a moment's consideration is the "if" that attaches itself to the question as to whether we will accept, whether we will repent, whether we will believe, whether we will rise forever. Is it not time that we take our eternal future off that swivel? Is it not time that we extirpate that "if," that miserable "if," that hazardous "if?" We would not allow this uncertain "if" to stay long in anything else of importance. Let some one say in regard to a railroad bridge, "I have reasons for asking if that bridge is safe," and you would not cross it. Let some one say, "I have reasons to ask if that steamer is trustworthy," and you would not take passage on it.

Let some one suggest in regard to a property that you are about to purchase, "I have reasons to ask if they can give a good title," and you would not pay a dollar down until you had some skillful real estate lawyer examine the title. But I allowed for years of my lifetime, and some of you have allowed for years of your lifetime, an "if" to stand tossing up and down questions of eternal destiny. Oh, decide! Perhaps your arrival here today may decide. Stranger things than that have put to flight forever the "if" of uncertainty.

The Miner's Moving Story.

A few Sabbath nights ago in this church a man passing at the foot of the pulpit said to me, "I am a miner from England," and then he pushed back his coat sleeve and said, "Do you see that scar on my arm?" I said, "Yes; you must have had an awful wound there some time." He said: "Yes; it nearly cost me my life. I was in a mine in England 600 feet underground and three miles from the shaft of the mine, and a rock fell on me, and my fellow laborer pried off the rock, and I was bleeding to death, and he took a newspaper from around his luncheon and bound it around my wound and then helped me over the three miles underground to the shaft, where I was lifted to the top, and when the newspaper was taken off my wound I read in it something that saved my soul, and it was one of your sermons. Good night," he said as he passed on, leaving me transfixed with grateful emotion.

And who knows but the words I now speak, blessed of God, may reach some wounded soul deep down in the black mine of sin, and that these words may be blessed to the stanching of the wound and the eternal life of the soul? Settle this matter instantly, positively and forever. Slay the last "if." Bury deep the last "if." How to do it? Fling body, mind, and soul in a prayer as earnest as that of Moses in the text. Can you doubt the earnestness of this prayer of the text? It is so heavy with emotion that it breaks down in the middle. It was so earnest that the translators in the modern copies of the Bible were obliged to put a mark, a straight line, a dash, for an omission that will never be filled up. Such an abrupt pause, such a sudden snapping off of the sentence!

A Great Explorer's Prayer Answered.

Between the first and last sentences of my text there was a paroxysm of earnestness too mighty for words. It will take half of an eternity to tell of all the answers of earnest and faithful prayer. In his last journal David Livingstone, in Africa, records the prayer so soon to be answered: "19 March—birthday. My Jesus, my God, my life, my all, I again dedicate my whole self to thee. Accept me, and grant, O Gracious Father, that ere this year is gone I may finish my task. In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen."

When the dusky servant looked into Livingston's tent and found him dead on his knees, he saw that the prayer had been answered. But notwithstanding the earnestness of the prayer of Moses in the text, it was a defeated prayer and was not answered. I think the two "ifs" in the prayer defeated it, and one "if" is enough to defeat any prayer, whatever other good characteristics it may have. "If thou wilt forgive their sins—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book." God did neither. As the following verses show, he punished their sins, but I am sure did not blot out one letter of the name of Moses from the Book of Life.

The Six "Ifs" About Sodom.

Abraham's prayer for the rescue of Sodom was a grand prayer in some respects, but there were six "ifs" in it, or "peradventures," which mean the same thing. "Peradventure there may be fifty righteous in the city, peradventure forty-five, peradventure forty, peradventure thirty, peradventure twenty, peradventure ten." Those six peradventures, those six "if's" killed the prayer, and Sodom went down under. Nearly all the prayers that were answered had no "ifs" in them—the prayer of Elijah that changed dry weather to wet weather, the prayer that changed Hezekiah from a sick man to a well man, the prayer that halted sun and moon without shaking the universe to pieces.

Oh, rally your soul for a prayer with no "ifs" in it! Say in substance: "Lord, Thou hast promised pardon, and I take it. Here are my wounds; heal them. Here is my blindness; irradiate it. Here are my chains of bondage; by the Gospel hammer strike them off. I am fleeing to the City of Refuge, and I am sure this is the right way. Thanks be to God, I am free!"

Once, by the law, my hopes were slain,
But now, in Christ, I live again.

With the Mosaic earnestness of my text and without its Mosaic "ifs" let us cry out to God. Aye, if words fail us, let us take the suggestion of that printer's dash of the text, and with a wordless silence implore pardon and comfort and life and Heaven. For this assemblage, all of whom I shall meet in the last judgment, I dare not offer the prayer of my text, and so I change it and say, "Lord God, forgive our sins and write our names in the book of Thy loving remembrance, from which they shall never be blotted out."

Marvelous Preaching by a Negress.

Probably the most remarkable religious service ever conducted behind prison bars was held in the Pettis County jail by Mrs. Lena Mason of Hannibal, better known as the "Black Sam Jones of Missouri." Mrs. Mason entered the jail in company with Messrs. Douglas and Tyler, and after prayers by the two gentlemen she began a ten minutes' discourse that caused every prisoner to plead for forgiveness. The woman does not talk like a colored person, but uses the best of English, and her earnestness is something remarkable. She kept her eyes closed during the entire service, and before she had talked three minutes Dick Robinson, the convicted murderer, and other notorious prisoners were on their knees in prayer. Two colored women serving out fines for vagrancy, scoffed at the service when it began, but before it was concluded they grabbed Mrs. Mason's hand and begged her to pray for them, at the same time calling upon the Lord to wash away their sins. Mrs. Mason preached the same night to nearly twenty-five hundred people, acres of ground being covered with vehicles containing white people who had been attracted by her singular exhortations.

WE all deserve so much credit that we never get.