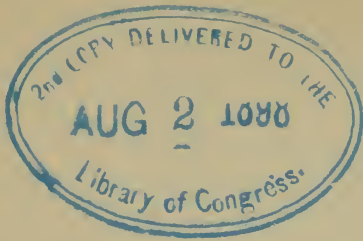


THE
JOY OF SERVICE
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THOMAS Y. CROWELL & COMPANY,
NEW YORK AND BOSTON.

THE
JOY OF SERVICE

BY

J. R. MILLER, D.D.

James Russell
AUTHOR OF "MAKING THE MOST OF LIFE," "THE BUILDING OF
CHARACTER," "THINGS TO LIVE FOR," ETC.

*"I ran at His commands,
and sang for joy of heart."*

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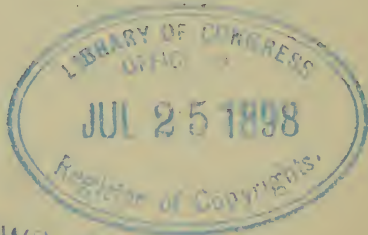
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THESE fragments of lessons may have their mission of helpfulness to some who are earnestly striving to grow into a braver, truer, richer-hearted life, and to become inspirers of others in their efforts and struggles. The author finds in these lines of Lowell's such an interpretation of his own feeling that he takes the liberty of quoting them on this page: —

It may be glorious to write
Thoughts that shall glad the two or three
High souls, like those far stars that come in sight
Once in a century;

But better far it is to speak
One simple word, which now and then
Shall waken their free nature in the weak
And friendless sons of men;

To write some earnest verse or line,
Which, seeking not the praise of art,
Shall make a clearer faith and manhood shine
In the untutored heart.

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THE JOY OF SERVICE.

CHAPTER I.

THE JOY OF SERVICE.

Take joy home,
And make a place in thy heart for her;
And give her time to grow, and cherish her;
Then will she come and sing to thee
When thou art working in the furrow; ay,
It is a comely fashion to be glad;
Joy is the grace we say to God.

JEAN INGELOW.

THERE are many sources of joy. All men are in quest of happiness, and upon a thousand paths the shoeprints of the seekers are found. There is nothing available in all the world, nothing which holds the slightest promise or hope of happiness, that has not been tried by some one eager to find the magic secret.

We are accustomed to say that the only

true, deep, unfailling joy is that which we may find in God. The Bible has many promises of happiness, but they all point to spiritual and eternal sources. We read of the joy of the Lord, of rejoicing in God; Christ promises his own joy to his followers. Joy, therefore, is the inheritance of the Christian,—he has a right to claim it. Yet not all Christians are happy. Many whose faith in Christ is unmistakable have joy only in the quiet lulls of life. They are easily disturbed. The song of to-day is choked with tears to-morrow.

It is worth our while to try to find the secret of true and abiding Christian joy. We often hear it said that trust in God yields joy, or that a blameless life produces happiness. There is one kind of living, however, which more than any other contains the master secret of joy. It is a life of service. It begins in consecration to Christ: we must, first of all, be his servants. It includes trust,—reposing upon God. But there can be no continued quiet confidence if there be no activity in Christian life. Still water stagnates.

Even trust without action soon loses its restfulness.

Work itself is always a helper of happiness. Indolence is never truly happy. The happiest man is the busy man. Even physical health depends largely upon regular occupation. No man, able for duty, who is not busy, can be truly or deeply happy. The idle man may be living a life of pleasure, but it is not a life of real happiness. Work is a condition of joy. It is a blessing that most people, when sorrow comes, dare not pause to indulge their grief. Their duties are waiting for them, waiting so clamorously that they cannot linger even for the tender sentiment of sorrow. There is scarcely time to wait for the funeral to be over, after a bereavement, before imperative tasks must receive attention. It is well that it is so. The necessary activity keeps the heart from breaking, and preserves the life from the morbidity which so often sorrow produces when the hands lie folded.

Work is therefore a secret of happiness. It saves the heart from being overcharged.

The emotions which otherwise would lie pent up, to the hurt of the life, find vent and are wrought out in activities which bless others, while they produce health and wholesomeness in him who performs them. No worse mistake can be made by one in grief than to drop life's duties and tasks out of the hands, and cut one's self off from the common duties and ministries of life. God's comfort is not found in this way. Joy comes not back to him who nourishes his sorrow in idle brooding; it is found only in the earnest and faithful doing of every duty. Work has saved many a life from despair in time of great grief.

But there is something higher and diviner yet than even work alone. Work may be selfish. It may be solely for the advancement of one's own interests, without any thought of another's benefit or comfort. Even then there is blessing in it; for it fills the hands and occupies the thoughts — there is good in occupation itself. But if we add to work the element of serving, with love and thought of

others, we have one of the noblest of all the secrets of joy.

Serving comes from loving; it is love's expression. Serving that is not inspired by love yields no joy. Love that does not serve is not love at all. The measure of self-denial that one is ready to suffer is the measure of the love that is in one's heart. Love that will not sacrifice is only a sentiment, a fair blossom from which no fruit comes. Love is ready always for serving.

Wherever we see life in its best forms and developments, it has in it the element of service. In every glimpse of heavenly life shown to us in the Bible, we find service as the highest expression of the life's spirit. The angels who appear, coming and going between heaven and earth, are always engaged in service for some of God's children. Their mission is described in one sentence: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" They come to earth expressly to serve. We know that the angels possess the secret of

joy; they are represented as praising God continually. It is the joy of service that fills their hearts. Never a thought of self poisons their pure gladness.

The greatest and highest of all beings is God himself. His is the life which had no beginning, and shall have no ending. All other life—all angel life, all human life—flows from the one great fountain. Yet God lives not for himself. God is love, and the very essence of love is always service. He is ever giving out blessing and good to men. Every revealing of God shows him to us as a God who serves his creatures. He thinks ever of their good. He works continually in providence, in most thoughtful, gentle serving. The highest reach of the divine serving was in the incarnation, when God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.

Then, in the story of the life of Christ, where we have the revealing of the divine character in all its beauty, we find the most wonderful serving. Never did any other man live for his friends as Jesus lived for his. He

kept nothing back from them. On the last night of his life, as if to express his love in a way that never could be forgotten, we see him clad as a servant, washing his disciples' feet. No picture of Jesus in all the Gospels is truer to the very heart of his life than this. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. He took on him the form of a servant, to show the divine spirit. A little later he actually gave his life in his matchless service of love. Thus this divinest of all ideals of life is seen serving even unto the uttermost.

We know that in this serving, Jesus found deep and holy joy. It used to be taught that he was a sad man. There was a tradition that he never smiled. But this conception of Jesus could not have been true. He was indeed a man of sorrows, but there was in his heart a deep joy which even his sorrows could not quench. He spoke distinctly and repeatedly of his joy and of his peace. One of the New Testament writers tells us that it was for the joy set before

him that he endured the cross, despising the shame.

We can readily think of many sources in the joy of Christ. His fellowship with his Father was never broken, nor even most faintly shadowed for a moment. He was sinless; there was never in his heart the least trace of that sorrow which mars the sweetest human joy, the consciousness of having done evil. His perfect faith made all spiritual things eternal realities to him, more real than the rocks and hills and trees and paths of earth. He never groped in the darkness of doubt and fear, as at times the holiest saints on earth must do when faith's vision grows dim. He saw the ultimate meaning of all sorrow, and looked to the end and final harvest of all sacrifice and loss. He was never discouraged; he knew that his work would not fail. He had full confidence in the future of his ministry, and in the ultimate triumph of his kingdom.

Yet it is evident that the richest of all the sources of the joy of Christ was in his

love and service. It was the joy of doing good, of giving comfort, of saving the lost, that meant the most to him. The travail of his soul was forgotten in the knowledge that a world would be redeemed by his blood.

This joy of service Christ bequeathed also to his followers, — “that my joy may be in you.” There are other sources, too, of Christian joy, — forgiveness, childship in God’s family, hope, divine fellowship; but the joy that comes from serving is the purest and fullest of all. We have a hint of this in the Master’s word, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” This is a much deeper saying than we usually think it to be. There is much giving to us that is very wonderful. There are many and great spiritual blessings which come to us as gifts. Salvation is all of grace; we earn nothing that we receive. We have the gift of pardon, of life, of the Holy Spirit, of the inheritance in glory; but it is more blessed for us to give than to receive even these divine gifts. The richest, truest, deepest, realest blessing that can come

to any heart is the blessing of giving, of doing, of suffering, of sacrificing for others, of serving them in love.

The joy of service is therefore the sweetest, holiest joy possible. After the best happiness that can come through all other pure sources, human or divine, the joy that means the most to the heart and life is that which is found in loving and serving others in the name of Christ.

Without this element no other joy is complete. God's best gifts to us would not make us deeply and securely happy, if we only received and enjoyed them, and did not become servants of others with them. Even communion with God would fail to bring us true and abiding blessing, if we went not out from the holy presence on ministries of love to those who need. No blessing we keep for ourselves alone can give us deep and holy gladness. No vision of angels, no theophany, can produce such thrills of rapture in the heart as are enjoyed in some lowly service of love.

There is a beautiful legend which tells that

one shepherd was kept at home, watching a fevered guest, the night the angels came to Bethlehem with the announcement of the birth of Jesus, and sang their songs of joy. The other shepherds saw the heavenly host, heard their song, and beheld the glory. Returning home, their hearts were wondrously elated. But all the night Shemuel sat alone by the restless sufferer, and waited. His fellow-shepherds pitied his deprivation,—that he missed the vision and the glory which they had seen. But in his lowly serving Shemuel had blessing and reward of his own. He missed, indeed, the splendor of that night in the fields, and in his serving he gave his own life; but his eyes saw then a more wondrous glory than that which his fellow-shepherds had seen.

“Shemuel, by the fever-bed,
Touched by beckoning hands that led,
Died and saw the Uncreated;
All his fellows lived, and waited.”

He had waited by the bed of sickness while they saw the glory; now they waited amid earth's dull scenes, while he witnessed the

glory of the Eternal. So it is always in life in this world. Those who sit by fever-beds, and minister to human need in its countless forms, seem to miss much that is very beautiful. Their holy ministry keeps them away from places of honor, even from scenes of spiritual ecstasy. While at their common tasks they see not the angel hosts nor hear the music. Absorption in the duties of human love in the home, or among the poor, causes men and women to miss much that the world esteems. But meanwhile there is a higher reward, not only in store at the end, but even now, for those who serve. They enter more fully and deeply into the joy of the Lord; and then, in heaven, they will be received into holier fellowship, closer to Christ.

After all, only that life is worth living which has in it the spirit and quality of service and sacrifice. Dora Greenwell says, "I have often felt a significance in the fact that nothing belonging to Christ's kingdom tells much upon the world which has not in it the element of sacrifice, and of Christlike willingness to par-

ticipate in pain. A righteous man may effect much good through beneficent deeds and wise and kind plans for the benefit of others ; but it is to the man for whom some, peradventure, would even dare to die, the man who himself, if need were, would die for men, that the hearts of men cleave."

It is only life itself that is worth giving to others. That which we do for others or give to them, and which costs us nothing, has small blessing or help in it for them. A man may speak to us eloquently ; but if it is only words that he speaks, we are no richer for listening to them. Only when we serve in love, giving out life itself in our ministry, do we either find deep joy for our own heart, or make others truly happier or more blessed.

CHAPTER II.

THE DUTY OF JOY.

Be like the bird that, halting in her flight,
Awhile on boughs too slight,
Feels them give way beneath her, and yet sings,
Knowing she hath wings.

VICTOR HUGO.

THEY are in the habit of saying in the East that in India the flowers yield no fragrance, the birds do not sing, and the women never smile. In a sense, it is almost literally true. Flowers, even of the richest hues, give out but little perfume; birds of brightest plumage utter only piercing notes instead of sweet songs; and the faces of the women are sad as they go about, enduring their sorrowful lot. All this is suggestive of the spiritual condition of a country where the gospel of Christ is not known.

Christianity brings joy. The message of

the angel to the shepherds was, "I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Joy was born into the world that Christmas night when Jesus began his life on the earth. He came to bless men, to comfort sorrow, to open prisons, to lift the lost up to heaven. Jesus talked much about joy. He had a wondrous joy of his own. He was called a man of sorrows — never was there any other sorrow like unto his sorrow. Yet all the while there was in his heart a deep joy which nothing could disturb. Before he went away he bequeathed his joy to his disciples, and prayed that their joy might be full.

Christians should have joy. But Christian joy is not happiness, as the world understands that word. Happiness is on the surface. It depends upon things that happen, and is easily disturbed. During a great battle the soldiers noticed, perched on a tree, a bird which sang whenever the roar of battle was hushed for a few moments. But when the terrific noise began again, the bird was silent. So it is with earthly happiness ; it sings in the brief pauses

of life's struggles, but is silent while the strife goes on.

Christian joy, however, is too deep to be affected by this world's occurrences. It is like those fresh-water springs beside the sea, over which the brackish tides pour, but whose waters are sweet as ever when the tides recede. It is joy which the world can neither give nor take away. It lives in the heart under the bitterest sorrows, and sings its songs in the darkest nights.

Joy is not merely a privilege which a Christian may enjoy—it is also a duty. It is a fruit of the Spirit, and not a mere accident of temperament, or a mere index of experience. Christian life should always be victorious. We are to be more than conquerors through him that loved us. The experience told so exuberantly in the following lines ought not to be impossible many days in any truly victorious life,—

“ Give me joy, give me joy, O my friends!
For once in my life has a day
Passed over my head and out of my sight,
And my soul has naught to unsay.

No querulous word to the fair little child
Who drew me from study to play ;
No fretful reply to the hundred and one
Who questioned me, gravely and gay ;
No word to the beggar I fain would take back,
No word to the debtor at bay ;
No angry retorts to those who misjudge,
And desire not a nay, but a yea :
No word, though I know I remember them all,
Which I would, if I could, e'er unsay.
Give me joy, give me joy, O my friends !
For the patience that lasted all day."

Christians are to be light, and light is a symbol of joy. Gloom, therefore, in the life of any friend of the Master is a contradiction of Christlikeness. It is our duty to be cheerful, joyful, songful, whatever the circumstances or experiences may be. We should never yield to discouragement, to depression, to disheartenment. If we let the darkness into our soul, it will darken our eyes, and mar the beauty of our life. Discouragement is dangerous. It robs a man of strength and skill, and makes him faint in the struggle. It chills his heart, takes the enthusiasm out of his life, and imperils all his career. One

of the firm resolves of every man should be, never to be discouraged, since discouragement is defeat.

Then we owe it to the world, also, to live a life of victorious joy. We are to be a blessing to others, and there is no other way in which we can do so much for those about us as by being habitually joyful. If we go about with sad words on our lips, disheartening words, we make it harder for others to live heroically and worthily. The influence of one depressed spirit on others cannot be estimated. Their burdens seem heavier, the road seems steeper to them, and the struggle seems sorer, because our hands hang down, the light fades from our eye, and our lips speak discouragingly.

But if we go through life, singing happy songs as we go, songs of joy and gladness, they will become inspiration in the hearts of those who hear them. Men will grow braver, hope will come out of discouragement, and defeat will be changed to victory. Burdens will seem lighter, battles less fierce, and tasks

easier, as the joyous notes of our songs ring out on the air. Ella Wheeler Wilcox writes, —

“ Smile upon the troubled pilgrims
Whom you pass and meet ;
Frowns are thorns, and smiles are blossoms,
Oft, to weary feet.
Do not make the way seem harder
By a sullen face ;
Smile a little, smile a little,
Brighten up the place.”

We have no right to make life harder for others. It is a sin against humanity to do so. The law of love forbids it. He who makes it harder for a brother to live nobly, and do his work well, has sinned against one of Christ's little ones — therefore, against Christ himself. We dare not go about among our fellows saying discouraging things, dispiriting things; for, if we do, we are imperiling those whose burdens are already as heavy as they can bear. One discouraging word may cause them to sink down and perish.

The law of love bids us bear one another's burdens, and there is no other way in which

we can do this so effectively as by living a life of victorious joy ourselves. He who goes among men throughout the day with glad heart and cheerful face, speaking to every one he meets some encouraging word, saying something uplifting in every ear, is a wonderful inspirer of strength, courage, and hope, in men. He is a divine minister of good to others. He makes every one a little braver and stronger. Weary plodders on the dusty way pluck up fresh energy after meeting him. Fainting ones awake to new courage when his hopeful words have fallen upon their ears. The influence of such a habitual encourager can never be measured. It is a noble thing to live thus.

There are few lessons which are needed more than this teaching that joy is a duty. The mass of Christian people seem to pay no heed to it. There really are not many joyful Christians. It would seem as if a large number of them think there is a virtue in sadness and gloom. They make no attempt to live victoriously, but yield to every dis-

couragement, and allow it to get into their heart. Even the little ills, which full-grown men should be ashamed to be affected by, they allow to master them. Even strong men are made wretched by a slight indisposition, by a little disappointment, or by hearing of some other's success.

Then, what is worse, they not only let their own spirits be disturbed by these trivial incidents of pain or inconvenience, but they must needs make every one they meet share their miserable dispiriting. They carry the dark shadow of their unhappy feeling on their face. They chafe and fret when things do not go well. They pout and sulk like spoiled children when they do not get their own way. If they have not slept well, or if they have a headache, or a cold, or a discomfort of any kind, however trivial, they compel every one who salutes them courteously throughout the day to listen to the recital of all the tiresome story of their maladies.

Could any habit be more utterly selfish than this? Do persons imagine that the neighbors

who inquire kindly after their health have any pleasure in listening to such an unwholesome tale of woe, often about nothing but some imaginary ailment? Does any one think that he has a right to pour such a burden of complaining into any human ear? Every noble man is ready to extend sympathy in any case of real trouble; but there is no call for sympathy in such ailments as make up the staple of the complaints which many of us have to tell our neighbors about. This is one of the human habits concerning which it were well if some power would "the giftie gie us to see oursel's as others see us." We only tire out our friends, and make it harder for them to live, while at the same time we add to our own wretchedness. For such miseries will grow if we nurse them, until by and by they become giants, and bind us hand and foot in hopeless bondage.

Far better is it for one to seal his lips resolutely and persistently against all such morbid talk, and speak only glad, joyous, encouraging things. This is one of the childish things

we should put away as we become men, if we find ourselves indulging in it. It is unmanly and it is most unlovely. It is a grievous sin against others to inflict upon them our miserable hypochondrias. We should be scatterers of light, not of darkness ; of good, not of evil ; of inspiring influence, not of that which can only make life harder for every one we meet.

Well would it be for us all if we learned the lesson that joy is a duty. God wants us to be happy ; and if we live as we should live, we shall be happy. This is not saying that we shall have no sorrow, or that life will be always easy and pleasant for us ; but we may at least be always overcomers. We have reason to rejoice, whatever our circumstances and our condition may be. There is an inner life, a life hid with Christ in God, which should be unconquerable in a Christian, though all earthly things are swept away. There is a world beyond this sphere, — a world where no storms beat, and where nothing hurtful ever shall come ; why should we be so affected by what

takes place here, where we are staying but a little time ?

Life is made up of habits. We ask God to help us to keep sweet and to live joyfully. He is ready to do it, but the way he would help us is in little lessons which we must learn for ourselves. He will never take out of our life all our miserable ways at one time, and put in place of them a full set of lovely ways, as one might change the works of a watch. That is not God's way of remaking us. We are scholars in Christ's school, and are to learn of him. No pupil can master an art or a science in a day: it takes months and years. We cannot learn in a day to live joyfully and victoriously; but we can get a lesson to-day and another to-morrow, letting no day pass without its line. Meanwhile, God will help us continually, encouraging every effort, permitting us to fail in no lesson. If only we are diligent and persistent, the most cheerless of us can at last so learn the habit of joy, that we shall fill our days with song. Susan Coolidge tells us how all such lessons are learned:—

“How does the soul grow? Not all in a minute.
Now it may lose ground, and now it may win it;
Now it resolves, and again the will faileth;
Now it rejoiceth, and now it bewaileth;
Now its hopes fructify, then they are blighted;
Now it walks sunnily, now gropes benighted,
Fed by discouragements, taught by disaster.
So it goes forward, now slower, now faster,
Till, all the pain past, and failures made whole,
It is full-grown, and the Lord rules the soul.”

CHAPTER III.

THUNDER, OR ANGEL'S VOICE.

"Whither leads this pathway, little one?" —

"It runs just on and on, is never done."

"Whither leads this pathway, mistress fair?" —

"That path to town, sir; to the village square."

"Whither leads this pathway, father old?" —

"To the white quiet of the churchyard fold."

DIFFERENT persons continually give a different answer to the same question. Our eyes are alike, and yet no two persons see the same picture on the canvas. Our ears are constructed on the same pattern, and yet no two hear the same song as they listen side by side to the singer. The world is not the same to any two persons. We carry within us a mysterious power, which interprets to us whatever we see or hear of the sights and voices of the outside world; and this power is distinct

in each one. Thus it happens continually that the same voice falls upon the ears of two different persons, and is altogether different to the two. Each hears what his own soul is prepared for hearing.

We have an illustration of this in the story of Christ. One day a voice was heard in the temple. It was a divine voice speaking from heaven. The people standing about the Master heard it, and were strangely impressed by it. Yet they were not all impressed in the same way. Some thought it thundered; the voice awed and terrified them. Others thought an angel had spoken. It was the same sound; the difference was in those who heard it. The mood of their spirit gave tone to the voice.

It is always so; our own heart makes our world for us, and fills and peoples it, and the music we hear is modulated as it passes over the chords of our own soul. If you hold a smooth sea-shell to your ear, you hear a strange, murmuring sound, which we used to be told in childhood was a sort of reminiscence of the ocean's roar. The fancy is that

the shell, having lain long amid the waves, the music of the sea has hidden in its magic chambers, and that this is what you hear when you hold the shell to your ear.

This pretty fancy is dispelled, however, when you learn that, instead of the music of the ocean, the sound you hear is caused by the beating of your own heart, the throbbing of the blood in your fingers. Lay the shell on a table, and put your ear to it, and there is no music; you hear the murmur only when you hold the shell in your hands.

Many of the sounds which we hear, attributing them to various sources, are but the noise of our own pulses; and every sound that breaks upon our ear is modified at least by the mood or quality of our own inner life. When our heart is glad, the world is full of song. When our heart is sad, the world is full of tears.

“In ourselves the sunshine dwells;
In ourselves the music swells;
Everywhere the heart awake
Finds what pleasure it can make;
Everywhere the light and shade
By the gazer’s eye is made.”

What men and women find in life depends on what they are themselves. We hear some people talk of the coldness of the world. They find no love anywhere, no gratitude, no appreciation, no sympathy, no tenderness. Others, living in like circumstances and conditions, find only brightness, beauty, gladness, and tenderness wherever they go. The same skies are dull and leaden to one, and glorious with their deep, wonderful blue to another. The same fields are dreary and desolate to one eye, and filled with splendid beauty to another. The same people seem unsympathetic, uncongenial, unneighborly to one, and to the other appear cordial, kindly, responsive, and unselfish.

Each person's heart casts its own hue and tinge upon all other lives. Two listen to the same voice; and while one hears what seems to him to be terrifying thunder, the other hears the entrancing strains of angels' songs.

“Two men looked out from their prison bars—
One saw the mud, the other the stars.”

This same difference is seen in the way life's experiences appear to different persons.

To one class everything seems discouraging. They see only the troubles, the difficulties, the hindrances, the disheartenments. They talk always in sad tone of their burdens, tasks, duties, disappointments, and trials. There is no sky in their picture, and no stars shine down upon them. Then there are others who always look upon life optimistically. They are never discouraged. They are not disturbed by the perplexing things which they meet. They expect to have struggles; since with only easy life there can be no progress, no victories, no struggling upward, and they grow only the braver and more resolute in battle. They meet obstacles and hindrances; but they are not disheartened by them, and turn them into stepping-stones for upward striving. They suffer defeats and reverses; but they are not dismayed, only learning from their failures how to keep from being defeated again. Everywhere they go they hear music, and everywhere they find something beautiful and good. Emerson puts it well: —

Let me go where'er I will,
I hear a sky-born music still ;
It sounds from all things old,
It sounds from all things young ;
From all that's fair, from all that's foul,
Peals out a cheerful song.
It is not only in the rose,
It is not only in the bird,
Not only where the rainbow glows,
Nor in the song of woman heard,
But in the darkest, meanest things
There alway, alway something sings.
'Tis not in the high stars alone,
Nor in the cups of budding flowers,
Nor in the redbreast's mellow tone,
Nor in the bow that smiles in showers,
But in the mud and scum of things
There alway, alway something sings.

All will admit that the man with the optimistic spirit gets far more out of life, and makes far more of life, than his pessimistic neighbor. It is a great deal better to see blue sky and stars than only dull, leaden clouds. It is a more noble thing to hear angel music than thunder in the voices that break on our ears.

Happiness or unhappiness is, therefore, not so much a matter of condition as of heart. We gather in life what our habit of heart has

fitted us for gathering. One bird, when it finds itself imprisoned in a cage, begins to struggle, trying to escape, flying wildly against the wires ; but it only bruises its breast and wings in its unavailing efforts. Another bird, when caged, cheerfully accepts the inevitable, and fills all the place with sweet songs.' The canary is wiser than the starling. It is both good philosophy and good religion to make the best of one's condition.

There is something sacred about that which is inevitable. When we find ourselves in hard or painful conditions, which are clearly providential, over which we have no power, we must conclude that, for the time, these conditions represent the will of God for us. This should help us to accept them, not sullenly, but joyously. Instead of the voice of thunder in them, we should hear angels' songs.

It is not enough, however, merely to state the law, that our own heart gives the quality to the music that breaks on our ears. The fact that one has a temperament which sees everything hopelessly, in shadow, is not to be

regarded as a final, unchangeable fact. We are not to say in excuse for our gloomy way of looking at things that we were made thus, and cannot remake ourselves.

In the first place, we were not made thus, but, following a trend of tendency in our nature, have fallen into the miserable habit of weakly yielding to discouragement. Then, even if we had been made thus, with melancholy temperament, that would be no reason for our continuing unto the end of life in this unhappy state. Our business is to grow into the likeness of Christ, and he never let himself become subject to unhappy moods. He always found the beautiful things. He always heard songs of angels, or the voice of God, even when others heard only the sound of thunder. He saw the flowers where others saw only the thorns. He saw the stars where those about him saw only muddy roads. He found hope where others found only despair.

We should seek to be like Christ in his wonderful optimism. If we find ourselves turning every sight and sound of earth into sadness, we

should take ourselves resolutely in hand. We are living wastefully, sinfully, while we submit to such moods; and we should set ourselves to work to change the miserable trend and habit into something more beautiful and wholesome. Part of the work of Christ in us is to transform us into songful, cheerful, rejoicing Christians. St. Paul learned during his long life, in whatsoever state he was, therein to be content. He carried the secret in his own heart, so that he was not dependent on this world's weather for the temperature of his inner life.

“Always keep sweet, and go on singing,” is a good motto. Easy, do you say? Only a lesson for children? Do you think so? Did you ever try to live it out for a week, even for a day? The perfection of Christian living is included in this motto. He who has learned to live by this rule has reached a high attainment. Yet it is thus we are to seek to live continually. We should overcome our morbidity, our unwholesomeness of temperament, and should train ourselves to see beauty in all things, and good in every experience.

In order to do this we must have the beauty and the good in ourselves. "You must have the bird in your heart before you can find the bird in the bush." So we must have bird-songs in our soul, or we cannot hear bird-songs in the groves. Mr. Burroughs tells of a woman who asked a bird-lover where she could hear the bluebird. "What, never heard the bluebird!" said he. "Then you never will hear it." He could have taken her in a few minutes where a bluebird's song or warble would fall upon her ears, but there was no capacity in her ears to hear it. They were not sensitized by love for birds. It requires a special organ, as it were, a power either given in creation, or acquired by long training, to hear the voices of nature.

So it is with other things. An earthly mind cannot hear heavenly voices. An unspiritual person finds no beauty in the Bible. Spiritual things can be only spiritually discerned. We must have the peace of God in our bosom; and then, and then only, we shall find the peace of God in all things, even in

life's wildest storms. We must have the joy of Christ within us; and then, and only then, all earth's noises, even its roaring thunder, will make music of angel voices in our ears.

We cannot change the world, taking out all its thorns, making its tasks easy and its burdens light, modulating all its discords into harmonies, transforming its ugliness into beauty; but we can have our own hearts renewed by the grace of God, and thus the world will be made over for us. A new heart makes all things new. A heart of love will find love everywhere. A soul full of song will find sweet music everywhere.

CHAPTER IV.

BELONGING TO GOD.

Our wills are ours, we know not how;
Our wills are ours, to make them thine.

TENNYSON.

What matters happiness?
Duty! There's man's one moment:
This is yours.

BROWNING.

It is a great thing to have God for master, and to own it. The trouble with too many of us is, we try to be our own master. We make sorry work of it, too, whenever we take into our own hands the direction of our life. There is only one safe place to leave it — in the hands of God.

St. Paul packs into one terse sentence a whole volume of practical teaching when he says, "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God." It is not easy for us with our proud human nature to

confess that we really are not our own. We like to feel that we are independent beings. We are loath to call any one master. Many of us resent even God's claim to ownership in us, and deny his right to command us.

But the first principle of true religion declares that we belong to God, that his right over us is absolute. It is nothing unreasonable, either, that is thus required of us. We rightfully belong to God. The authority he claims over us is not arbitrary nor assumed. He made us, and has the Creator's right over us, his creatures. He is our Father; and as his children we owe him all homage, obedience, submission, and love. Then, he is our Lord and King; and we ought to recognize his authority, and without question submit ourselves to him, bringing every thought, feeling, disposition, and affection into subjection to him.

But there is a higher ground on which this ownership rests. "Ye are bought with a price." We know well what this price was. We need to think much of the cost of the blessings we enjoy as Christians. It will make them far

more sacred when we remember that it was through the humiliation, sorrow, and death of our Redeemer that the blessings of faith became ours. A nation's flag is dear, not merely because of the pieces of cloth that compose it, but because it represents, not only all that the nation stands for, but has written into it all the story of the nation's life.

“Did worth not find its symbol in the flag,
'Twould only be a gaudy, sorry rag;
But while high sentiments our people hold,
We need not blush to greet each beauteous fold.”

So in the symbols of Christianity are folded up for us all that Christianity means to the world and to our own heart.

There are things which can be bought with money, but there also are things which money cannot purchase. With money a man may build a house, and adorn and furnish it; but money will not buy home happiness, and the sweetness, comfort, and refinement which make true home life. With money we may purchase bread and raiment, coal for the fire, and luxuries for physical enjoyment; but money will

not acquire fine character, moral beauty, a gentle spirit, peace in the heart, or any of the elements which make up a noble personality. Money ransomed many a slave from captivity in ancient times, but human redemption was not obtained at any money price. The Son of God gave his life a ransom for souls. Thus our belonging to God is confirmed and sealed by the holiest sanctions.

Yet, while the authority of God over us and his right to us are unquestioned, the relation is one that, as moral beings, we must each voluntarily accept and acknowledge. God never compels us to be his. We are sovereigns over our own life; this is part of the likeness of God in us. We can do as we will. We can resist even God's authority. Our puny will can shut omnipotence out of our life. We can proudly say, "Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?"

The truth that we are not our own must be acknowledged by ourselves. We must make our life God's by an act of personal devotion. The mere acknowledgment of the fact

that we belong to God is not enough — there must be a transaction, a surrender, a giving of the keys of our life over into the hands of God out of our own hands. No one can make this devotement for us. No mother can make her child God's. She may dedicate it to him in its infancy, and bring it up for him along the years; but the child is not truly God's until for itself it makes the personal devotement.

It is with this great act that a Christian life really begins. What we call faith in Christ is nothing less than a committal of our whole life to Christ. It is related of Wendell Phillips that, when in the valley of shadows, he was asked by a friend who sat beside him, "Did you ever make a personal consecration of yourself to God?" The great man answered: "Yes; when I was a boy fourteen years of age I heard Lyman Beecher preach on the theme, 'You belong to God.' I went home after hearing that sermon, threw myself on the floor of my room, with the door locked, and said: 'God, I belong to you; take what is thine own. I ask but this, that whenever

a thing be right it take no courage to do it, that whenever a thing be wrong it may have no power of temptation over me.'”

A like confession of God's right over him every one of us must make if he would put himself in right relations with God. Our will is our own, and it is ours to make it God's. No one can do it for us, and God will never take it until we freely give it him. Jesus Christ is our rightful king, and is worthy to receive all homage, love, and obedience; and we cannot be right until we have confessed that we are his, and have begun to live a life of obedience.

“Therefore glorify God.” That is what we must do with the life which belongs to God, and which he recommits to us. How can we augment God's glory? We cannot add a single beam to the splendor of the noonday sun; we cannot make the evening star more brilliant; and God's name is infinitely beyond our poor glorifying. Yet we may honor God among men. You travel abroad, and meet in a foreign land a man who is noble, gifted, and worthy. Here at home he is not known at all, or at the best

his name is known only vaguely and by a very few. You return home, and begin at once to speak of this man to your friends, telling them of his life, his work, his charming personality. You pass among your friends the books he has written, which contain his helpful, inspiring words. His name is now no longer unknown in your community, but becomes familiar to many people. His influence begins to be felt in many lives. His books are read, and do good. You have glorified him.

In the same way we may make God glorious. We know his name, his character, his works, and we have his word, which is full of divine revealings. We can speak of his mercy, love, and goodness. We can tell what we know of him, what he has been to us, and has done for us. We can show others the words he has spoken, full of comfort, inspiration, and cheer. Where God was scarcely known before, he becomes well known, and many begin to love him and trust him. We have glorified God.

Not only by telling others of God may we glorify him, but also in our own life. Being

is more than speaking. In the Palazzo Rospiglioso, in Rome, is the great picture of the Aurora. It is on the ceiling, and can be studied only with much difficulty from the floor. But a mirror is so placed on a table that it reflects the picture, and one can study it there with ease and pleasure.

God is a spirit; and he is in heaven, dwelling in light unapproachable. The incarnation was the bringing of the reflection of the glorious person of God down to earth in a human life. Men looked at Jesus, and saw in him the very image of God.

Jesus is no longer here in the flesh to reveal the unseen God; but we are here for him, and it is ours, if we are truly Christians, to be mirrors, reflecting in our own character the beauty of the Lord, and thus glorifying him. It is of the utmost importance that those who look into the mirror of our life may see a true and faithful revealing of God. How else shall they learn what God is like? It would be a sad thing if we should misrepresent him, giving to any one a wrong thought of his character.

A little child one day, after reading in the New Testament, asked her mother, "Is Jesus like anybody we know?" The child was eager to discover just what were the elements of the character of Christ, his disposition, his spirit, the mind that was in him. The mother ought to have been able to answer, "Yes, I am trying to be like Jesus; if you will look at my life and study my character, you will see a little of what Jesus is like." Every follower of Christ should be able to say the same to all who know him. The likeness is imperfect, for in many things we come short; but, if we are true Christians, we must be trying to live as he would if he were in our place. Unless we live thus, we are not glorifying God.

But doing is important as well as being. Jesus glorified God by a life of divine love among men. At every step he wrought deeds of mercy. There is a legend which says that, as he walked away from his grave, sweet flowers grew in his path. It was really so in every path on which those blessed feet trod; flowers of kindness blossomed wherever he went. He

did the works of his Father, and thus glorified him. If we belong to God, we must glorify him in the same way; we must continue the ministry of love which our Master began. It is the divine will that we carry blessing and help to every one we meet. If we fail to be loving, we disappoint God.

CHAPTER V.

OUR DEPOSIT WITH CHRIST.

“Wearily my spirit sinketh
Into Jesus’ heart and hands,
Calmly trusting, though the journey
Lie through strange, untrodden lands.
All my spirit is at rest
On the loving Father’s breast.”

IN one of his epistles St. Paul tells us of a trust which he had committed to Christ. Speaking of him with whom he had made this deposit, he says he knows him whom he has trusted. Christ was no stranger to him, no untried friend. He could not have trusted him with such tremendous interests if he had not known him. Very foolish is the young person who puts confidence in a stranger, admitting him to the place of a friend. She would be a very careless, thoughtless mother who would commit the keeping of her child

to a nurse concerning whose character she had not thoroughly satisfied herself. Men who are prudent will not invest money in an institution which they do not reasonably believe to be safe. If you were going to cross the sea, you would want to be well assured of the stanchness and seaworthiness of the ship to which you commit your life.

St. Paul knew him whom he had trusted as his Saviour. Some people know a great deal about Christ, yet do not know him. You may read or hear much concerning a man while you have never seen him. But one day you meet this man, and he becomes your friend. That is the way St. Paul knew Christ, — “I know him.” It was no hearsay knowledge on which he based his confidence.

There are some people whom the better we know the less we trust. Acquaintance reveals faults and flaws in their character. We find they are not trustworthy, cannot be depended on. Their friendship is inconstant, fickle, uncertain. When we know them well we learn that we would better not commit ourselves to

them. We read that on one occasion Jesus did not commit himself to certain people because he knew what was in men; he knew he could not trust himself in their hands, that they would not prove true to him. This is the outcome of acquaintance in too many cases—we may not safely intrust our interests to men's keeping.

Others there are whom the better we know the more implicitly we trust. We find them faithful and true in every feeling, in every word, in every act. They never disappoint us, nor fail us, nor harm us. Every thought of their heart is loyal. They would make any sacrifice for our sake. Such a friend is Christ.

If you are travelling in a strange land, you may feel a little uncertain at first about your guide, not having tried him before; but as you go on, and he shows familiarity with the way and ability to conduct you on your journey, you learn to trust him, and at length all fear gives way to complete confidence. So it is that trust in Christ grows as we go on with

him, and find him always faithful and wise. He never disappoints us. In all experiences of need or trial he proves his love. Sometimes he denies us what we ask, but we always learn in the end that he was right. Thus it is that we learn to know Christ — by trying and trusting him.

St. Paul then tells us that he has placed a sacred deposit in the hands of Christ, and that he knows it is absolutely secure. "I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day." The figure is of a deposit one would make in trusted keeping, as of rare and costly jewels which the owner might put into the hands of one who would safely guard them, delivering them up in due time.

What was it that St. Paul had thus deposited with Christ? For one thing, it was his soul. It was a guilty soul when the young rabbi first met Christ; he had been openly fighting against Jesus. It was a hurt soul; he had wounded himself in his resistance. That guilty, hurt soul he had committed to

the keeping of Christ ; and he was sure Christ would guard it sacredly, and save it unto life eternal. Paul never worried about his own salvation after making this committal. He knew that all was safe in Christ's hands, and he then gave up his life to the service of Christ.

No one but Christ can keep our soul. There are no other hands in which we may place this sacred deposit. No gentlest, purest, wisest mother can take charge of her own child's soul. She cannot cleanse its heart of evil dispositions and tendencies. She cannot keep it from the power of evil, and shelter it from temptation. She cannot put upon its nature Christ's likeness. She may care for its body, and train its mind, but she cannot save and keep its soul. Only Christ can do this.

There is a wonderful verse in the little letter of Jude, which reads : "Unto him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of his glory without blemish in exceeding joy . . . be glory and majesty, dominion and power." That which he

is able to do is to guard us from stumbling on our way through this world, and at the end present us without blemish before God. The same confidence is in St. Paul's words: "He is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day." This keeping is no easy task. There are a thousand things that may hurt a life. Evil lurks in sunshine and shadow, in joy and sorrow, in pleasure and pain, in success and failure, in health and sickness, in companionship and loneliness, in prosperity and adversity.

An hour's association with one not good may leave in a soul a suggestion of evil which shall work the life's utter ruin in the end. A happy home by its very happiness may become the enemy of the spiritual life, drawing thought, love, and devotion from God and from the higher things of God's service to things lower and earthly. Business success may lead to moral failure; or, on the other hand, failure in business may dishearten and break the spirit. A time of sickness may breed discontent and fretfulness. Invalidism may make

one selfish and exacting ; or unbroken health may weaken the sense of dependence on God, or may rob the heart of patient sympathy, making one harsh and ungentle towards others in their infirmities. Too much companionship or too great absorption in work may interfere with the soul's communion with God ; or too much aloneness may make one's life morbid, unwholesome, self-absorbed, and out of sympathy with others.

These are suggestions of the possible evils that lurk in the common experiences of even the most sheltered life. This is not an easy world to live in and in which to keep one's self unspotted. It is not easy amid such antagonisms to grow into Christly beauty. One who has sincerely tried to keep himself pure, loving, gentle, unselfish, rich-hearted in all sympathy and helpfulness, generous, patient, true, and sweet in all ways, even for one little day, knows that it is no easy task. But that is what Christ is able to do for us, — to guard that which we have committed to him until the day of final revealing.

In another burst of confidence, just before his martyrdom, St. Paul used these remarkable words : " The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom." He was in Nero's hands, and soon would die ; but his deposit was still safe, and would be guarded until it should be presented in glory.

Our affairs are also a part of this deposit. We soon learn that we cannot be master of our own condition and circumstances. We cannot make our environment helpful to our spiritual growth. We cannot bring good out of evil, blessing out of pain, victory out of defeat. Take the story of Joseph as an example. Wrong and cruelty seemed to be utterly destroying his young life in its early years. But the strange, tangled experiences were in the hands of God, and out of them all came in due time great blessing for Joseph and for the world. To have broken into that story with human interference at any point, in those days of trial, would have been to spoil the outworking of a beautiful divine plan.

“Because I was impatient, would not wait,
But thrust my impious hands across thy threads,
And marred the pattern drawn out for my life —
O Lord, I do repent.”

There is a special phase of the lesson which emerges at this point. You are suffering wrong from others. They are unkind to you, unjust, treating you injuriously. What is your duty as a Christian in this case? Is it not the quiet committal of all the hurts and wrongs into Christ's hands? You are not a judge; you have nothing whatever to do with judgment. Your whole duty is to put the matter absolutely and forever out of your own hands into Christ's, and to leave it there. It is not your province to set wrong things right, to vindicate yourself from false blame, to avenge injustice or injury inflicted upon you.

In another passage of the Scriptures we are told what Jesus himself did with the wrongs he suffered: “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” We have also this counsel:

“Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well doing unto a faithful Creator.”

How simple this teaching makes all life if only we learn the lesson! Our soul's salvation, the keeping of our life in the midst of this world's dangers and enmities, the out-working of all experiences, the direction of our affairs, the adjustment of all wrongs and inequities, the overruling of all evil, so as to bring us home at last to glory without blemish,—all this is to be committed to Christ, left absolutely, without question, doubt, or fear, in his strong and skilful hands. Our one duty is always to do God's will as it is made known to us, and then leave all the tangles with Christ. In one of the Psalms the lesson is put very clearly:—

“Commit thy way unto the Lord;
Trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass.
And he shall make thy righteousness to go forth as the light,
And thy judgment as the noon-day.

Then, St. Paul's words of confidence and assurance come in again with wondrous strength-

ening for our hearts : “ I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day.” Thus assured, faith can sing :—

“ I will not doubt, though all my ships at sea
Come drifting home with broken masts and sails;
I will believe the Hand which never fails
From seeming evil worketh good for me:
And though I weep because those sails are tattered,
Still will I cry, while my best hopes lie shattered,
‘ I trust in thee.’ ”

CHAPTER VI.

CHRIST'S DEPOSIT WITH US.

“What wouldst thou have me do, O Lord?
Each morn and eve we seem to say,
And he gives back no doubtful word:
‘Remember, little child, all day,
Thine early vows, the hallow’d wave
Where Jesus first his blessing gave:
There stoop, there cleanse thee every hour;
Christ’s laver hath refreshing power.’”

CHRISTIAN faith is the committing of the life into the hands of Christ. It is spoken of in the Scriptures as the depositing of all life’s interests with one who is surely able to keep them safely until the day of final revealing. The thought is very beautiful. Our life is hid with Christ in God.

Then, there is something else to correspond with this. There is another deposit. Christ commits something to us, something which we are to keep and care for and use, bringing it

home and restoring it to him at last unblemished, unwasted. In one of St. Paul's letters to Timothy we have an illustration: "Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee guard through the Holy Ghost." Timothy was a young minister; and St. Paul, who was his spiritual father, and had taught him the truths of the gospel, is exhorting him to be careful and faithful in his holy trust.

The preacher's work is very sacred. What if he should not deliver his message correctly? In transmitting a telegraphic despatch the operator made a mistake, left out just one little word. But the omission of that word changed the sense of the whole message. A large business transaction was involved, and great financial loss resulted. The company receiving and transmitting the telegram was held responsible for the consequences of the mistake.

The preacher stands between God and human souls. If in delivering God's message he

makes mistakes, leaving out words, or inserting words of his own, or putting the emphasis in the wrong place, thus changing the meaning of the message, who can tell what the consequences may be? It is of vital importance that the preacher should hold the pattern of sound words which he has received.

An edition of the Bible was once printed; and when it was ready to be distributed it was discovered that the word "not" had been left out of one of the Ten Commandments. The edition had to be suppressed and destroyed. Like care has not been exercised always by those who have undertaken to interpret the words of God to man. Sometimes they have left out words, or added words, not giving their message as God delivered it to them.

Men hang on the preacher's utterances to learn how to live, so as not to fail of eternal life. But suppose that the teaching is wrong — what will the consequences be? The minister's half-hour on Sunday before a listening people is a holy time. Not a moment of it should ever be wasted. Not a word should

ever be spoken which is not after the pattern of sound words which God has given. A wrong interpretation may start a soul on a course of fatal error.

A Christian woman has told how all her life has been shadowed by the effects of the preaching she heard in her girlhood. Only the sterner phases of truth were preached — God's justice and terribleness. So she was made to dread God. His name meant terror to her. No thought of love found a place in the conception of the Deity which the preaching of those years left on her mind. Later, the truth of God's Fatherhood, with all that fatherhood, interpreted by the life, teachings, and death of Jesus Christ, means, was brought to her; but the early teaching had so wrought itself into the very fibre of her life, into all her thoughts, feelings, and motives, that its effect never has been altogether neutralized. Her life still suffers from the mistaken teachings of her girlhood years.

Countless lives have been hurt or marred by unfaithful or mistaken handling of truth in

those who were truth's ordained guardians. The teacher of the young comes under the same responsibility. The writer of books, to whom the gift of composition is intrusted, is charged with a sacred duty in this regard. There is no distinction of moral and secular in the matter of authorship. It is just as important that the novelist, the romancer, and the poet shall follow the pattern of sound words, as that the writer of books of devotion or religious instruction shall do it. This puts a most serious responsibility upon every one who can write what people will read. Many a popular story has carried in its pages perversions of truth, misinterpretations, errors, insidious scoffs or sneers, which have marred lives and wrecked destinies.

It is a serious thing to give a traveller who asks the way a careless or mistaken direction by which he is led out of his course, perhaps to his own great loss or disadvantage. It is a serious thing to give unwise advice to a young person, or to any one who is seeking guidance in perplexity. Wrong advice has

wrecked many a destiny. We cannot too carefully weigh our language when we are speaking words which may influence or shape the lives of others, or determine the course they shall take.

All our influence over others is included in the deposit committed to us. Every one has his influence. God puts into the hands of each one of us something which belongs to him, which we are to carry through this world for him, and bring at last to his feet. When a little child is laid in a young mother's arms, something of God's work which no other one can do becomes hers. She is charged to guard the precious life in its journey across this world, and to lead it safely home. Her keeping includes far more than the child's body. Its whole being is intrusted to her, that she may woo out in it whatever of beauty and strength is folded up in the immortal soul; that she may train the life for its mission, and develop in it all its possibilities of power and usefulness.

This work requires the best that is in the

mother. She must teach her child the truth of God. In the ancient Jewish law the greatest stress was laid upon home instruction. Parents were commanded to teach the words of God continually to their children, until their very souls were saturated with the spirit of the holy precepts. Then there was but one book, — now there are many; but the duty of home instruction remains. No book should be permitted in the hands of children which would bring to them anything that is not the word of God. The mother should read the book before her child reads it, since she is set to hold for it the pattern of sound words in faith and love.

The home where children are growing up should be made as beautiful, as sweet, as pure, as full of love and gentleness and all holy inspirations, as it is possible to make any spot in this world. The good thing committed to the mother she is required to guard through the Holy Ghost. She cannot do her sacred work alone without divine help; she needs the help of God continually, and must live near the

heart of Christ, if she would be fitted for her holy ministry.

The same is true of all influence. It is part of the deposit which the Master has made with us, something which we are to cherish and guard most sacredly, and use to its last particle for the bettering, sweetening, and enriching of other lives. A good man on his last day wrote: "I die to-night; but the members of my own family and of my own circle of acquaintance will never be again as if I had not known them. My influence upon them for evil or for good will be perpetuated in them, and through them to others, modifying remote generations; it will live for evermore, enduring as the waters of the deep, with countless changes, a power throughout all ages." Such a trust as this we must use with holy reverence.

This lesson has its bearing also upon friendship. When a man takes a new friend into his life, he has received a new deposit from Christ. A good thing has been committed unto him, and he is bidden to guard it. Many people believe in guardian angels — that one

of these heavenly ministers is appointed to attend each life from infancy to the grave. The thought is very beautiful, and there is no reason to doubt that such guardianship is assigned to each soul in its passage through this world of danger. But there are also human angels set to guard our steps on the earth. When a new friend comes into our life, with confidence, we are ordained to a guardianship which is very sacred.

Perhaps we are not apt to think of the responsibility of being a friend. We find pleasure in friendship; and we are apt to welcome eagerly those who come to us with trust and regard, not thinking what we owe to them, or must do for them, if we accept their confidence. We find cheer, inspiration, stimulation, and help in congenial companionship. Our friends meet our needs, satisfy our cravings, do us good; and we do not think always of the other side—what we are to them. The essential thing is not to have friends, but to be a friend; not to receive, but to give; not what we get, but what we give.

We are seriously concerned, therefore, with the question what kind of guardian angel we are to the person whose life God has committed to us in friendship. We must bring our charge back to God, not only unblemished and unhurt, but also enriched and helped in every possible way. We dare not take a life into our hands unless our hands are clean. What if we should put a stain upon the trusting soul instead of a touch of beauty? What if we should guide the feet into wrong paths, paths leading to ruin? What if our influence should be hurtful instead of helpful?

It is ours as far as in us lies to keep our friend from falling, and to present him faultless before the presence of God's glory. We can do this with joy only by being faithful in every thought, word, motive, and influence. "That good thing which was committed unto thee guard through the Holy Ghost." We are fit to be a friend only when our own life is under the power of the divine Spirit.

CHAPTER VII.

MINISTRIES THAT BLESS.

“ Never are kind acts done
 To wipe the weeping eyes,
But like the flashes of the sun
 They signal to the skies ;
And up above, the angels read
How we have helped the sorer need.”

WE mistake when we think that only great deeds make worthy service. In no life can there be many large and conspicuous things ; the years must chiefly be filled with little things. Take even the story of the life of Jesus. In it there were, as recorded, a definite number of miracles which stand out in the narrative as stars of the first magnitude in the heavens. But strewn through all the days, filling all the moments, crowded into all the interstices of that wonderful life, were innumerable kindnesses and thoughtfulnesses, un-

recorded, even unremembered words and acts. Jesus was not always working miracles, but he was always doing good; and the greater measure of the blessing he left in the world came, not from his few supernatural works, but from the countless common human kindnesses he wrought.

It is so in every really great and good life. Now and then there may be some conspicuous deed done which wins the applause of men, an account of which gets into the newspapers, and which is talked about near and far. But on all the days of all the years there is going on a ministry of love which makes many people happier, which gives pleasure to old and young, which leaves inspiration of good or of beauty in countless hearts, which makes one spot of the world sweeter.

Sometimes it happens that those who seek human applause for what they can accomplish, striving to do things that are conspicuous and that make a sensation in the world, have no beautiful ministry of kindness to fill and brighten the days of their common life. When

they do alms they sound a trumpet proclaiming the fact, that their good deeds may be seen and praised of men. But when they are not exhibiting their charity or their generosity, that is, when others are not watching, they are neither charitable nor generous. They do not take the trouble to be kind or loving when there is nothing to be gained by it. That is, their doing of good is spurious, because it is something enacted for men's eyes, not for God's. The staple of their life is selfishness. When they are not posing for effect, their days are full of things which are not lovely.

It may be set down as a principle that the true test of a life is found in the things that are done when no eye is watching, — the things of the quiet days. The ten thousand little acts and words and manifestations of disposition, which make up the substance of living, much more fairly index the real character than do the one or two things which people talk about.

After all, the greatness is not in the conspicuousness of that which is done, but in its

spirit, its moral quality. "With God there is neither little nor great; there is only straight or crooked." That which we do really for God is great, though it seem but a trifle in human eyes. That which we do only for men is small, though it bulk large as a mountain.

We never know what will be the end of the smallest good we do in this world. It may start a series of blessings which shall extend, with increasing benefit, through centuries. There are single sentences in the Bible which have been helping, comforting, strengthening, guiding, cheering, and inspiring men and women for thousands of years and in all lands. There have been single acts of simple kindness, done even without the thought that they would be helpful, which have proved the beginning of endless chains of blessing. Says Faber, "When men do anything for God, — the very least thing, — they never know where it will end, nor what amount of work it will do for him. Love's secret, therefore, is to be always doing things for God, and not to mind because they are very little ones."

When they get home at last, and all the harvest of their lives has been gathered in, good people will experience two great surprises. They will be surprised to find that certain things which they have done, which they regarded as great things, beautiful and good and largely useful, were really of very small account, received but slight commendation of God, and left but small blessing in the world. But they will be surprised, on the other hand, at the great beauty and the rare value of other things which they have done, which they had not considered as of any importance, — things, perhaps, they do not even remember doing, they were done with so little thought that they could be of any worth.

It is a law of God's kingdom that what we do with thought of self lacks one of the finest elements of moral quality. Consciousness of being beautiful mars the beauty. What we do, intending that it shall be fine and winsome, is of far less worth in God's sight, than what we do when our left hand does not know what our right hand is doing.

There are two classes of ministry in every life. There are the things which a man does purposely, which he plans to do, which he trains himself to do, which he does with special thought and deliberation. Then there is a wayside ministry, which he does without previous purpose, as he goes along through life, engaged in his allotted duties. This embraces the countless little things of common courtesy and kindness, the things done on the instant, the greetings, the amenities of the street, the words of cheer, comfort, or encouragement, spoken as men meet each other. We are apt not to make much account of these wayside services, while we usually set a high value on the things we have done with care, thought, and preparation. Yet it may be that oftentimes the former are of more worth to God than the latter. There is less of self in them, less thought of being seen of men, and more of the simple outworking of the heart's love.

The doing of God's will is always a great thing, whether it be something that affects

the welfare of a nation, or something that concerns only the good or the comfort of the lowliest of Christ's little ones. There is a legend of an angel who was sent to earth to keep a king from sinning, and at the same time to help a little struggling ant home with its burden. Both tasks were alike noble because both were God's will. In a great painting by one of the masters, there is a convent kitchen in which angels are doing the work. One is putting the kettle on the fire, one is lifting a pail of water, one is reaching up to the dresser-shelf after a plate; and these angels seem just as heavenly in this lowly work as if they were doing divine errands around God's throne.

We need to learn the lesson that anything that is God's will is great, and that whatever is not God's will is unworthy and ignoble, though it be swaying a sceptre over a nation, or being a world's idol. Many of us have to spend most of our life in what seems drudgery. Perhaps we think it is unworthy of us. We feel that we are capable of greater

things, and should not be required to spend our time in matters so trivial, perhaps so menial. But if it is God's will we are doing, our drudgery, as it appears to heavenly eyes is radiant as angels' ministry.

Some people, when they think of how little they can do to help others, despair of making of their life anything worth while. They cannot leave blessings in the world. They cannot speak words that will impress others, or write books that will give cheer, comfort, and hope to any one. They cannot do kindnesses which the recording angel will care to write down to their account. But God can use the smallest deeds, the smallest words, even a smile that comes from a loving heart, in making the world happier and sweeter. Nothing that has love in it ever perishes or fails to be useful.

“The look of sympathy, the gentle word
Spoken so low that only angels heard,
The secret act of pure self-sacrifice
Unseen by men but marked by angels' eyes —
These are not lost.

The sacred music of a tender strain
Wrung from a poet's heart by grief and pain,
And chanted timidly with doubt and fear
To busy crowds that scarcely pause to hear—
It is not lost.

The kindly plans devised for others' good,
So seldom guessed, so little understood,
The quiet, steadfast love that strove to win
Some wanderer from the woeful ways of sin—
These are not lost."

It has been said that he who makes two blades of grass grow where only one grew before is a benefactor. He has done that which makes one small spot of the world a little brighter and more beautiful. There is a story of a nobleman who always carried acorns in his pocket, and, whenever he found a bare place on his estate, he would plant one of them, that a tree might spring up to brighten the dreariness. That was something worth while. He who watches ever for lives that are bare of gladness, and drops a kindness to grow into a blessing, is doing work worthy of the archangel.

We need never vex ourselves over the small-

ness of our opportunities ; our only care should be that we use the opportunities that are given to us. Our one little word or kindly act, our one look that gives a moment's cheer, may tell on ages. We need not fear to waste our strength in lowliest ministry, to wear out our life in serving others ; nothing is really wasted that is poured out on God's altar in service of love for Christ and for his little ones.

“Can we believe, O God, that we have done
To full perfection our appointed task,
Offered the sacrifice that thou dost ask,
If, like small flowers, we brave the burning sun,
Nor shrink from storms, but slowly, one by one,
Tear from ourselves the grimy husks that mask
An inward beauty, and disdain to ask
A better heritage than there upon
That lonely hill to bloom and fade and die,
Content if in the tenure of our life
Some haggard soul uplift his weary eye,
And pause amid the muddy world's dull strife
To gaze on us, and so forget to sigh?
Is this to live the veritable life?”

CHAPTER VIII.

MISTAKEN MINISTERING.

"A little bit of patience often makes the sunshine come,
And a little bit of love makes a very happy home;
A little bit of hope makes a rainy day look gay,
And a little bit of charity makes glad a weary way."

WE are to serve others. When we find God we at once think of our brother. We begin to be like Christ only when we begin to be helpful. But many mistakes are made by those who are only learning this lesson. Our very eagerness oftentimes leads us to try to help unwisely.

A friend tells of a young girl who recently became a Christian, and at once felt that she must serve somebody. But she did not know where or how to begin. She looked about among her companions — she was then attending a large girls' school — to see if there were

any to whom she could be of use. There was one girl who was greatly burdened with her work. This eager young Christian thought she might do for this girl services which would relieve her. So she began to help her in caring for her room. But she soon learned that her assistance was not welcome ; indeed, it was resented. She found that she had hurt her friend's feelings, and that she could not continue the help she had begun to give.

Her mistake was that she was doing service merely for the sake of service. She wanted to be helpful, and looking round saw that here were things she might do. But the serving had not come naturally.

The incident suggests that help may never be rendered merely for the sake of doing something. We may not go out some morning, saying that we want to do two or three kindnesses before the sun sets, and choose certain persons to whom we will do these kindnesses, without reference to their necessity or our own duty to them. We give a man some money, for example ; but if he is in no real need we

have done him no kindness. A young man, in his eagerness to be useful, may help his younger brother with his examples, working them for him. But that is mistaken kindness; the boy would better be left to work the examples himself, with no more than a helpful hint.

Or take, again, the case of the young girl in school. She was eager to express her love in some service, and she supposed she had found an opportunity. But her friend did not need this help. She was not sick; if she had been, the serving would have been beautiful and natural, and no doubt would have been gratefully accepted. As it was, however, the ministering, though well meant, was little short of an impertinence. It was unwelcome, and weakened rather than strengthened the bond of friendship between the two girls.

It requires wisdom as well as tact to help others in truly good and beneficent ways. There is always danger of over-helping. There are some persons who never decline a favor that any one is disposed to render to them. Children naturally accept whatever is given

to them. Then there are older persons who seem always to have a hand stretched out for help. Indolent people never refuse to allow others to do their work for them. They are ready to accept gifts, to have their burdens lightened, to have their hard tasks done for them. But much of the help given to such people is real unkindness to them. Too much giving to children only teaches them wrong ways of living, gives them false ideas of their own duty and responsibility and of what they should expect from others, and makes them less strong and self-reliant.

Many a father says, "I had a hard and toilsome youth. I had to fight my own battles unhelped. I am not going to have my children do as I had to do." So he makes life wondrously easy for his boys, has everything possible done for them, and indulges them in every wish. The good man forgets that whatever is noble in his own character and worthy in his career he owes to the very hardships of his young days. It was in those struggles, tasks, and self-denials, that he got his manly

strength. Then he is surprised that his boys do not turn out well, do not become strong, heroic, and useful men. It is the father's over-helping that is responsible for their failure. If he had trained them to bear their own burdens, to do their own work, to restrain their desires, to endure hardships, to learn self-reliance, he would have been a far better and wiser father to them.

There are many other examples of similar mistakes in helping. Much of the fashionable charity of the day belongs in the same class. It is not wise help. It may make life easier for a day for its beneficiaries, but it makes them less able to struggle on in the long years to come. At the beautiful gate of the temple Peter found a beggar asking alms. Instinctively the beggar held out his hand when Peter came up. But instead of putting a coin into the man's greasy palm, Peter began to talk to him. He told him he had no money to give him, but instead he would do something for him which would make it unnecessary for him ever to beg any more. So in

Christ's name he cured his lameness. Surely what Peter did for the beggar was far better than any number of coins he might have piled in his hand.

We cannot work miracles like this, but oft-times we may do that which will be as good as a miracle. Instead of giving money to one who has a pressing need, we may find him something to do which will make it unnecessary to give him the money. Or we may put cheer and courage into a man's heart, enabling him to earn the money he needs. Either of these ways of helping is far better than giving money would be. The man's spirit of independence is preserved. He is trained in self-reliance. His self-respect has not been impaired. Then he is stronger now for life in all the future. Over-helping is unwise helping—it does harm rather than good. Our best friend is not the man who makes life easy for us, but the man who inspires, impels, even compels, us to do our own best.

In the minds of many persons who really need help, there is a repugnance to being

helped which makes it difficult to do anything for them. They deem it inconsistent with a fine spirit of manliness to accept help from any one. It is a noble spirit in them which inclines them to want to live thus independently, although it may assert itself too energetically. The spirit of love, which seeks to minister rather than to be ministered unto, to give rather than to receive help, should not obstinately refuse to accept all kindnesses. It should allow others the privilege it prizes so highly and seeks so earnestly for itself. Jesus, while living to serve, did not reject the service of love which his friends were so glad to render to him. He did not decline the ministry of the women friends who followed him from Galilee, devoting their means to providing for his wants. He accepted the hospitality of Martha and Mary and others with grateful spirit. Even if the service offered to him was of small value, he yet received it in such a way as not to disappoint or hurt the heart which had prompted it.

It is not a beautiful spirit, therefore, which

rejects all favors, and refuses to give others the pleasure of ministering to us. We should be willing to receive as well as give. When love or gratitude is eager to do something for us to express its feeling, we should show the most delicate appreciation of the spirit, and should be careful not to mar the pleasure which our friend has in ministering to us. Even if the thing done is itself something distasteful to us, we owe it to the sentiment prompting it to accept it gracefully and gratefully.

On the other hand, in helping or serving others we need to exercise great wisdom. Many a new and growing friendship is hindered by over-eagerness to be of use. Favors are pressed with an earnestness that is sincere enough, but indelicate; and the result on our friend is a shrinking from an intimacy which promises to be too urgent. There should be a prudent reserve in all showing of kindness. We should not be too eager — eagerness may seem meddlesomeness. We should not help too soon. Over-doing is worse than under-

doing. We should respect the personality of our friend, and not put him under obligations. Even when there is need for help we may not be the friend who should render it. Relations of helping and serving must be mutual, and we should not seek to outdo our friend in kindness. This would destroy the balance of friendship which must always be maintained if the relations are to be kept free from embarrassment.

What is wanted, after all, is a heart of true love — love learned from Christ. This will make us ready to serve always every one who comes within the circle of our life. It will save us from all pride; for love is lowly, seeking not recognition and praise, but seeking only to honor Christ and do good. It will save us from all invidiousness; for love asks not who it is that needs help, but finds in every one a brother. It will save us from all selfishness; for love forgets and loses itself in the one desire to do good, pouring out its best and sweetest blessings on the lowliest and least worthy.

“Not mine to mount to courts where seraphs sing
Or glad archangels soar on outstretched wing ;
Not mine in union with celestial choirs
To sound heaven’s trump or strike the gentler wires.
Not mine to stand enrolled at crystal gates,
Where Michael thunders or where Uriel waits.

But lesser words a Father’s kindness know.
Be mine some simpler service here below —
To weep with those who weep, their joys to share,
Their pain to solace or their burdens bear ;
Some widow in her agony to meet,
Some exile in his new-found home to greet ;
To serve some child of thine and so serve thee.
Lo, here am I ; to such a work send me.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE CURSE OF USELESSNESS.

My business is not to remake myself,
But make the absolute best of what God made.

BROWNING.

No lesson was taught by our Lord more impressively than that we are responsible for making and doing the most and the best with our gifts and opportunities. The crowning is not for great deeds, but for faithfulness. The penalty for non-use of life's talents is the losing of them.

There is an old-time curse that has a suggestive lesson for all time. There had been a great battle. A country's very life was in the issue. When the call for men went forth, and patriots from all over the land heeded the call, one hamlet did not respond. Then in the song of victory that was sung after the battle, when the valiant deeds of this and that

clan had been recounted, there came this fierce strain, "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

What was the reason for this curse? What had the inhabitants of Meroz done? They had not joined with the enemies of the country. They had not taken up arms against their brethren. They had not harbored the foe within their gates. They had only not come to the battle when the call rang in their ears.

Men search now in vain for the site of Meroz. It is not marked on any map. The very memory of the place has perished. This single bitter strain in the old song of victory is the one mention of it in any book. The word stands only as the symbol of a curse for not doing one's duty. It represents the man who, when other men are loyal, remains neutral; when others are in the midst of the battle, braving danger, receiving wounds, is found hiding at home, taking no part in the struggle. Meroz stands for the man who shirks

his duty, who saves his own life when the call is for sacrifice, who abides at ease when he ought to be at the forefront of the field.

The story is old, but the lesson is always timely. Every good cause is the cause of God. Christ's kingdom comes not only in the personal sanctification of his followers, as they yield heart and life to his sway ; it comes also in every struggle between right and wrong, between purity and corruption, in every movement for reform, in every holy sentiment.

The battle is going on forever in this world ; and the trumpet is evermore sounding, calling men to the help of the Lord against the mighty. It is not enough not to be against the right and the good ; God wants us to come to his help in every contest. Not to act for God is to act against him. "He that is not with me," said the Master, "is against me."

Many of the gravest and most serious sins of men are sins of not doing. No wickedness is charged against Meroz. The people were cursed because they did nothing. It was a sin of omission. There are other illustrations.

The priest and the Levite did not do any injury to the wounded man. They did not rob him, did not smite him, did not say abusive or unkind words to him. Yet every one who reads the story feels at once that they did this man grievous wrong, sinned most sorely against him. They did it by not rendering to him love's offices, by passing him by, and leaving him unhelped in his bitter need. They came not to the help of the Lord in this sufferer's behalf.

In our Lord's picture of the last judgment, too, those who are set on the left hand are condemned, not for evil wrought by them, not for wicked deeds they had done, but because they came not to the help of the Lord in feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, providing for the needy, visiting the sick. They are condemned for not doing.

We need to think carefully of our own lives in the light of this teaching. It is not enough that we are honest, truthful, upright, diligent in business, and faithful in our religious duties; are we doing or are we neglecting the

duties of love which wait for us at every turn ? We are to be judged by the things we leave undone quite as much as by the things we do which we ought not to have done. Many people imagine that they are very good because they have not done certain openly wicked things ; but one may be able to hold up his hands, and say, "My hands are unstained by any guilt," and yet the heaviest curse may hang over him, because he has not done the things he ought to have done. The word sin means missing the mark ; whenever we fail to come up to the full measure of love's duty, we have sinned.

It may have been cowardice that kept the inhabitants of Meroz from coming to the help of the Lord that day ; for the enemies who were to be met had chariots of iron, and were fierce and cruel. At least, there is no doubt that the cause of the inactivity of many men in the Lord's work in these days is moral cowardice. They have not the courage to confess themselves Christians. They are afraid to be singular. They are not brave enough

to take a side on great moral questions. So they hide away, and skulk back in their tents, when they ought to be in the field, fighting the Lord's battles. Many more people than we care to confess are useless to Christ because of their moral cowardice.

Or these men of Meroz may have thought they were so few in number that they could be of but little use, and that it was not worth while for them to go up to the battle. Many Christian people are rendered useless through the same false sentiment. They have no gifts, they say, and cannot do anything; so they stay in the background, and come not to the help of the Lord. They forget that nothing is small which it is our duty to do; that failure in a little duty may bring wreck to some great plan of God which needs our small part to fulfil it.

Littleness is no evidence that a duty is unimportant, or that we may omit the doing of it without hurt to the work intrusted to us. We should do the little things just as faithfully and conscientiously as the great things.

“ Despise not thou small things ;
The soul that longs for wings
To soar to some great height of sacrifice, too oft
Forgets the daily round,
Where the little cares abound,
And shakes off little duties while she looks aloft.”

Israel won the battle that day without the men of Meroz, but it might easily have happened that the absence of a few men from the ranks had caused defeat. There are times when the failure of one person to do his duty in his place will bring disaster to the cause. A young girl found herself the only Christian in a school of a hundred. Her first thought was that no good could come from her confessing her Master amid such overpowering worldly antagonism. One little candle could give no light worth while in all that darkness. But her second thought was that she dare not fail to confess Christ. “ I am the only one he has here,” she said ; “ and I must confess him.” No one can tell what a loss it would have been to the cause of Christ in that school if she had not come to his help.

However small the influence of any Chris-

tian may be, or however little he can do, the Master needs him and his little piece of work well done, and something will go wrong if he fails to do his duty. The humblest of us dare not fail ever; for God needs us and our gift, however small it may be, and our not coming to his help will make disaster to some cause or to some other life.

Or even if it should make no difference to the cause of Christ whether we do our part or not, it makes infinite difference to ourselves. The consequence of the one-talented man's failure to use his talent was that he lost it. The penalty of uselessness always is the loss of power to be useful. We cannot neglect the most insignificant duty without harm to our own spiritual life and hurt to our character. The battle was won without Meroz, but Meroz never got back what it lost that day.

Or it may have been self-indulgence that kept the inhabitants of Meroz away from the battle. They had their own little affairs to attend to, — their vineyards, their gardens, their fields. They were comfortable in their

pleasant homes among the hills. Of course they were interested in the saving of their country; but, as almost everybody was hurrying to the field, victory was certain without their help. So they self-indulgently kept out of the conflict, and stayed quietly at home. They seemed to be saving their lives, sparing themselves much cost and sacrifice. Yes, but when it was all over, and the victory had been won, a curse rang out against them because they had not come to the help of the Lord. This was the result of their self-saving.

No doubt, if the thoughts of men's hearts were read, it would appear that much of the uselessness of people's lives can be traced to self-indulgence, unwillingness to make self-denials and sacrifices for the sake of Christ's kingdom. The centring of thought and effort on ourselves is always a fatal error in a life, and draws a curse with it. He who saves his life loses it.

Yet it is easy to allow the self-indulgent spirit to creep into one's life. Others need us; but we are busy with our own affairs, and are not

willing to put ourselves out to serve them. To do what is required we should have to miss some pleasant engagement,—a dinner or a party, or give up our own comfort and ease for a day or for an evening. There is a brief struggle, and then we decide that we cannot turn aside to give the help. That is, we come not to the help of the Lord. We have saved our life. We are spared the discomfort of the self-denial. Our hands are not soiled with the rough work. We have our money still in our pocket. But as we go back to our self-seeking pursuit we hear the echo of a curse, “Because they came not to the help of the Lord.” Browning puts it in his strong phrasing thus:—

For I say, this is death, and the sole death,
When a man's loss comes to him from his gain,
Darkness from light, from knowledge ignorance,
And lack of love from love made manifest.

Even in our Christian life the danger of self-seeking is imminent. It is not enough that we find Christ for ourselves. If we rest satisfied with this, and sit down to the enjoy-

ment of the blessings and privileges of friendship with Christ, giving no thought to the saving and helping of others, we are guilty of the worst selfishness. Only once did Jesus hang upon the cross, giving his life for the world ; but he would have his followers repeat and continue the spirit of that sacrifice evermore in the eyes of men. It is not enough to hold up the cross in our preaching, in our hymns and prayers, in the Lord's Supper. We must have the cross in our own life ; we must live the life of self-sacrificing love of which the cross is the symbol.

The application of the lesson must rest with each one's own conscience. The curse is not against the enemies of Christ, but against those who call themselves his friends, and who come not to his help against the mighty. It is the curse, not of enmity and opposition, but of inactivity ; the curse of hiding away at ease when the Lord's cause needs all one's energy ; the curse, not of fighting against the Lord, but of not fighting with him. The impulse of the lesson should bring us out of our hiding-

places of cowardice, of indolence, of self-indulgence, to declare ourselves unequivocally on the Lord's side, and to stand forth boldly among his friends. This is no time for unconfessed discipleship. Cowardice is treason to the King. We should gather close about our Master with holy devotion, and cleave to him with unalterable fidelity. To shirk our duty now is to miss the crown at the end.

CHAPTER X.

THE LIVING GOD.

Fearest sometimes that thy Father
Hath forgot?
When the clouds around thee gather
Doubt him not.
Always hath the daylight broken —
Always hath he comfort spoken —
Better hath he been for years
Than thy fears.

KARL R. HAGENBACH.

THE God of the Bible is a living God. He has a heart of tenderness and love like our mother's heart. He thinks of his creatures, and cares for them. He seeks their companionship, is interested in their life, craves their affection, and is grieved by their sin or alienation from him. Jesus was the revealer of God; and he used but one name in making God known, — the name Father, putting into the holy word all that is tender, sweet, and

compassionate, all that love could possibly mean.

This truth of the living God is full of rich encouragement. It assures us of complete satisfaction for all our cravings. We know what a satisfying of the heart even a strong human friendship gives. There are friends who are to us like a great rock in a weary land. We flee to them in the heat of parching days, and rest in their shadow. A friend in whom we can confide without fear of disappointment; who, we are sure, will never fail us, will never stint his love in serving us; who always has healing tenderness for the hurt of our heart, comfort for our sorrows, and cheer for our discouragement, — such a friend is not only a rock of shelter for us in time of danger, but is also as rivers of water in a thirsty land, when our hearts cry out for life and love.

Yet this, at its best, is only a hint of what God is to those who bring their thirsts to him. The cross of Christ meets the soul's most intense cry for pardon. The divine love meets the deepest yearnings of the hungri-

est heart for love. God's wisdom answers all the questions of human eagerness to know. Things alone will never satisfy an immortal life; even the best of God's blessings and gifts will not do it; nothing less than God himself will suffice. Yet this is what Christian faith finds — not the mere tokens of divine favor, the comforts of divine care, but God himself. "I am thy friend," is the assurance that comes to each trusting one. Thus it is that God meets all human cravings — by giving us himself.

The truth of the living God gives us confidence in prayer. Is there any one to hear us when we cry out of a sense of need, danger, or desire? Is there any one who cares to help us or bless us? If God is only a great central Force at the heart of things, it is in vain that we bow down, morning and night, and tell out our heart's yearnings. Can a Force hear the cry of the children, the pleading of the distressed, or the sighing of the prisoner? Would a man pray to the wind, or to the sun, or to gravitation? If there is

no living God, there can be no prayer; for then there is no heart to care, no ear to hear, no hand to help.

Suppose we were to learn that all this cherished belief of ours concerning prayer is a mistake, that there really is no one who cares for us, or can give us any help, how dark the world would become to us! Men who have been reared in the simple teachings of Christianity, believing in a God of love, in the cross of Christ, and in prayer, and then have lost these faiths, have confessed that in the fading out of the childhood lessons from their heart they have lost their sweetest joy and their dearest happiness, and that the brightness has died out of the world for them.

No other loss, no bereavement, no possible misfortune, could equal for a moment the loss of faith in God as our Father, and as the hearer of our prayers. A little poem tells the story of a band of pilgrims, sitting one evening beside the sea, each telling of some great loss which he had suffered,—one of a ship which went down with all his household,

one of a fair face lost in the depths of a great town, one mourning a lost youth, some of vanished gold, others of friends proved untrue.

But when their tales were done
There spake among them one,
A stranger, seeming from all sorrow free—
“Sad losses have ye met,
But mine is heavier yet,
For a believing heart has gone from me.”

“Alas!” these pilgrims said,
“For the living and the dead,
For fortune’s cruelty, for love’s sore cross,
For the wrecks of land and sea!
But, howe’er it came to thee,
Thine, stranger, is life’s last and heaviest loss.”

It is indeed true that no other possible loss can so bereave the heart and darken the life as the losing of faith in God. It leaves the world cold and empty. If we were to learn some day that all our Christian faith is but a dream, with no reality, life would lose for us its sweetest joys and holiest hopes.

But we need not vex ourselves with such distressing suppositions. Our God is the living

God who loves us, knows our needs, thinks upon us, and hears our feeblest prayer — our own Father.

This truth gives us assurance also of divine thought and care in all our life. Suppose, again, that one sad day we were to learn that there is no one, no intelligent being above ourselves, interested in the affairs of the universe; that this is a world of chance; that no wisdom directs, that no hand guides events; that the universe is only a vast machine, grinding on forever; that bad men and devils have no check put upon their power to hurt; and that our lives are hopeless victims of this resistless, heartless, remorseless grinding, — how it would darken all life for us! A world without a Father! A universe without love! What would we do in the day of earthly disaster?

But how different is the teaching of the word of God! This is our Father's world. We do not have to wait for heaven to find ourselves in God's care. Events do not run riot here, crushing all gentle things under their feet. There is no lawlessness anywhere.

No wave of the sea in wildest storm ever dashes out of God's control. No pestilence, no earthquake, no flood of trouble, no tidal wave of misfortune, ever gets beyond the power of him who sits on the throne.

It does not always seem so even to Christian faith. God's children sometimes appear to be sorely hurt in life's experiences. Things appear to go wrong, with no hand of wisdom or love restraining or directing them. When we look at circumstances, — the loss, the suffering, the apparent triumph of wrong, — we sometimes almost question the truth of the words on which we have learned to trust. But we need to take wider views of the divine providences. Earthly evil is not the sorest evil. Sorrow, pain, and personal injury are not the things that really hurt our lives. It is possible to suffer every manner of trial and ill, and yet to be continually receiving blessing. God's keeping us from evil does not necessarily mean his keeping us from pain and suffering. Jesus was kept in the divinest keeping, and yet all the world's bitterness

swept over him. St. Paul's course was one of loss and persecution to the very end; and yet his real life, which he had intrusted as a holy deposit with Christ, was kept untouched by harm through all his sore experiences.

So it ever is with those who commit their soul to Christ, and abide in him. Property may be taken away, friends may forsake, pain may rack, the body may be torn; but none of these things can touch the soul. It is in the keeping of the living God, who is faithful, and in whose hands we never can perish, nor even suffer real harm. The pain and shadow are only the ways to the best blessings.

“ We must live through the weary winter
If we would value the spring;
And the woods must be cold and silent
Before the robins sing.
The flowers must lie buried in darkness
Before they can bud and bloom;
And the sweetest and warmest sunshine
Comes after the storm and gloom.”

At night, on ships at sea, when the bell strikes the hours, the watch in the lookout

calls, "All's well." There may be terror on the sea, a storm raging, the waves breaking over the decks. The passengers may be in dread, many of them sick, others trembling and afraid. There may be sore distress on board. Yet hour after hour, as the night passes and the bells ring, the cheerful words ring down from the little nest on the mast, where the lookout keeps watch, "Ten o'clock and all's well." In truth, all is well in spite of the storm, the waves, the sickness, and the terror. The great ship is riding in safety through the tempest, mastering wind and wave, bearing its precious cargo of life steadily toward the haven. "Twelve o'clock, and all's well!" So the hours move, and at length morning comes, the sun shines forth, the waves sob themselves into a calm, and there is joy once more on board.

So it is that the voice of Christian hope ever sings its song of cheer in men's ears in the midst of earth's storms. "All's well!" In the world at large, amid all human sin and failure, God's plan of love goes on without

interruption. Good will come at last out of all that seems evil. The morning will break, the sun will shine out, and the great ship will be found beyond the storm, sailing on, triumphant over every danger.

“God’s in his heaven ;
All’s well with the world.”

We need never doubt that the destiny of the world is good and not evil, life and not death. God lives, and he will bring us through the night to the morning. It is his voice we hear calling down, as the hours pass, “Midnight, and all’s well !” “Morning watch, and all’s well !”

What is true for the Father’s world at large, is true for each one of the Father’s trusting children. We have no promise that we shall escape trial and sorrow. But we have the assurance that nothing can harm us if we are the true followers of Christ. We are in divine keeping, and none is able to snatch us out of our Father’s hands. What seems loss to us is but God’s taking our treasures into his own

safer keeping. What seems misfortune to us is only God's way of doing for us something better than we could ever have dreamed. God lives, and nothing can really go wrong with one who trusts him, and does his will.

CHAPTER XI.

THE INCREASING CHRIST.

“ He leads us on
Through all the unquiet years ;
Past all our dreamland hopes and doubts and fears
He guides our steps ; through all the tangled maze
Of sin, of sorrow, and o'er-clouded days,
 We know his will is done,
And still he leads us on.”

It is a joyful day when one finds Christ. But the truest coming to him is only the beginning of an acquaintance with Christ. Even in human friendships the beginning shows but a little of what comes out in the familiar intercourse of after years. The friend of to-day who is so much to us, whose character appears so noble, so worthy, whose personality is so rich, so charming, whose life is so strong in its influence and so faithful in its ministry, is not the friend we saw at the first meeting.

He has been changing continually, growing in winningness, in helpfulness, more and more of the worthy things in him being revealed, as we learned to know him better.

The same is true of friendship with Christ. If we are faithful as disciples, the Christ of each new day will be different from the Christ of the day before. Then at the end of the longest life we shall find that we have only begun to know Christ.

This is true of our knowledge of the character of Christ. The mother tells her baby about Jesus, puts his name into its mind and heart earliest of all names. The little child soon learns something about him, — that he is good and gentle, that he loves children, that he died for sinners, that he safely keeps all little ones who trust in him. Sweet, indeed, is the child's thought of Christ, but it is very little that the child knows of him. Its conception of him is dim and vague, only a child's thought. But the study of the Master's character goes on as the child becomes a man or a woman, ever eager to learn more and more

of him. Every day brings its surprises of new revealing.

Christ is an exhaustless study. Every line in the Gospels reveals some new glimpse of beauty in him. Every sentence flashes some new revealing of loveliness in him. In Christ dwells all the fulness of the Godhead, all that God is. To know Christ, therefore, is to know God. In him is also full and complete manhood, all that God meant man to be, all the possibilities of humanity. What a boundless field of knowledge this is! All the Bible, all history, all science, all art, all nature, is full of the outshinings of Christ. The great business of our life should be to know him, to get acquainted with him.

It is a shame if, with these wonderful books spread open before our eyes, every page glowing with the rich treasures of the knowledge of Christ, we give our chief time, thought, and study to the mere trifles of earthly life. It is a shame if Christ is not ever changing to our thought, ever increasing in the beauty and glory of his character. It is a pity if we have

the same Christ year after year, with no new revealings of loveliness. If we make it the aim of our life to know Christ, every day will have its fresh disclosures of him.

Then Christ should grow constantly in the mastership of our life. "He must increase," said John the Baptist, "but I must decrease." From that day Jesus became ever greater, and John grew less and less, until the Baptist's light faded like the beams of the morning star in the glory of the rising sun. The saintly French preacher, Monod, tells us how at first his heart's answer to Christ was, "All of self and none of thee." At length he caught a glimpse of the Saviour on the cross, hearing his voice of tender, patient pleading. Then his wistful heart said faintly, under the new influence, "Some of self and some of thee." The work of grace went on, day by day, bringing him lower and lower in humility, until at length his longing was, "Less of self and more of thee." Still the work was not finished, nor did it rest until the petition became, at length, "None of self and all of thee."

This should be the final outcome of every Christian's experience. Usually the heart's full surrender to Christ is reached in just this way — not suddenly, in a moment, but gradually, through a series of experiences. Little by little Christ wins the mastery over us, gaining something each day. The old nature yields slowly, — it is the work of years to bring the whole being into subjection to Christ. Yet he must increase, and the old life must decrease, until it is, "None of self and all of thee." Christ must reign in each life until he has put all things under his feet.

The words of Christ also mean more and more as the new life goes on. The young Christian at first may not see great beauty nor find great help in the Bible. This may be to him also a cause of anxiety; he may think that something is wrong because he cannot find in the Bible all the things other persons have found in it. The Bible is a book which discloses its meaning of comfort and helpfulness gradually, and only as we come to experiences in which the special revealing is needed.

Every day of life brings us to some new sense of need, and then the Scripture word comes with its blessing. When Jesus met the tempter, his Father's word—just the right word—came with its revealing of light and truth, and the battle was won. Thousands of times since, when Christ's disciples have been on temptation's battle-fields, have the holy words of inspiration come with their cheer and strength. When life's first great sorrow is met the Christian finds almost a new Bible; countless verses, which he had read repeatedly before, without seeing any special beauty in them, or finding any particular help, now disclose rich divine comfort.

Robert Louis Stevenson says, "The dearest friends are the auldest friends; the young are just on trial." A friend must be tried and proved before we can take him into our life, and give him our fullest confidence. We often hear persons in some sore trial say, "I never knew I had so many friends until my trouble came." We can learn friendship's holiest and best only in time of need.

Human friendships oftentimes fail for years to realize their richest possibilities, because there has been nothing to test their faithfulness or bring out their best. All this while they are only surface friendships, sincere and true, but not deep. Then some experience comes which demands the utmost that friendship can do in the way of service and sacrifice. The ordeal is past, the test has been made, friendship has not failed; it has kept nothing back in the time of need. And now the friendship grows to its holiest and best. It is no longer a mere surface attachment; heart has become knit to heart, life and life have blended in one.

It is thus also with the friendship of Christ. Many Christians go on for years with only a surface attachment for him. It is no fault of theirs, perhaps. There has been nothing in their life to compel them into closer relation with Christ. They believe in him as their Saviour, they take his promises and lean on them, they accept his commandments as the law of their life and obey them; but they have never learned to know Christ as their personal friend.

By and by something happens which compels them to trust him in the darkness, — to trust everything to him. In the deep need, the sore stress, or the great sorrow, when the friendship of Christ is put to the proof, it does not fail. After that Christ means more to the heart than he ever meant before. He becomes a friend as well as a Saviour. His love flows about them and fills their heart. They have really found Christ anew — have found a new Christ.

We dread the hard things in life, — the burdens, the crosses, the responsibilities, the loss of earthly good, the pinching times, the struggles, the sorrows ; but really, if we are Christians, these are life's best things, because they become revealers of spiritual blessing. The Beatitudes illustrate this. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst ;" "Blessed are they that mourn ;" "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." The world would never write beatitudes for such experiences as these. It puts

these experiences down among the misfortunes of life. What is the Christian secret of blessing in these ways? It is not that tears and hunger and reviling are good in themselves, but that they bring us to points in life where we find spiritual food. As night reveals the stars, so do these experiences reveal the divine meanings of the words of Scripture; and as through our necessities we discover the golden qualities of our human friendships, so through the sterner and harder things of life we find the richest blessings of the friendship of Christ.

CHAPTER XII.

IN DOUBT AND PERPLEXITY.

Hold thou my hands!

In grief and joy, in hope and fear,
Lord, let me feel that thou art near;
Hold thou my hands!

If e'er by doubts

Of thy good Fatherhood depressed,
I cannot find in thee my rest,
Hold thou my hands!

WILLIAM CANTON.

DOUBT need not be sin. Unbelief is sin, — unbelief that rejects Christ and denies God. But there is doubt which is only faith searching for and finding its way. It is not content to take things for granted because it finds them in a creed, or hears some one state them; it would know them for itself. Such knowledge gives a much securer foundation for faith than that which is merely accepted on the statement of others.

It must be confessed, however, that there are real perplexities in Christian life. Even doctrines which in the days of our happiness and prosperity we think are among our settled and impregnable beliefs, when the sore testing-times come must be relearned, and won back again into sure faiths through experiences of doubt, fear, struggle, and toil.

Take the Christian doctrine of divine providence. We believe that this is our Father's world, and that all things work together for good to them that love God. While all our affairs are prosperous, with nothing to interrupt our comfort, it is easy enough to formulate our faith. But when our condition changes, when the blue is hidden by sombre clouds, when the stars go out of sight, when prosperity gives way to loss and adversity, it is not so easy to maintain belief in the final outcome of good from all events. Most of us at least have to learn the lesson then anew, finding our way step by step through the dim shadows to the clear, full light of peace.

We all may learn many things from others

who have gone over the way before us, and many things from books in which the lessons of other lives are enshrined; but, after all, each one of us must learn life's real lessons in experiences of our own. However many before us have found goodness and mercy in life's hard ways, and divine comfort in life's bitter sorrows, we cannot get these blessings until we have passed through the painful ways for ourselves. No other one's experience will do for us.

Many good people are perplexed by troubles in their affairs. Their plans miscarry. Their harvests fail. They lose money. They find it hard to make ends meet so as to get daily bread. It need not be surprising that in such experiences anxiety creeps into the heart. Yet the Bible does not admit that there are any circumstances in which Christian confidence and peace should be disturbed. There are no experiences which the divine promises do not cover. Our Lord's counsel is simple, "Be not anxious for your life." Then he gives sufficient reasons why we should not be anx-

ious. St. Paul puts the lesson in like words. "Be anxious for nothing." No room is left in the divine life-plan for worry or care. We have the promise of God's own peace, and God never worries. Christ bequeathed his peace to his disciples, and in the sorest stress of his life he was never anxious.

What, then, are we to do with things that naturally would perplex us, if we may not worry about them? The Master tells us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and then assures us that all needful things shall be added to us. That is, our own duty is to do God's will, leaving the care of our life, without anxiety, in God's hands. St. Paul's teaching is practically the same: we are to be anxious about nothing, but instead are to make all our requests known to God, and leave all with him; then the peace of God will guard us.

Another frequent cause of perplexity is unjust treatment. Others wrong us, do us harm, injure us. It is hard to bear unkindness, and keep our heart sweet and loving under it all.

It seems to us that our life itself must suffer from these wrongs ; and we are tempted to think that we should do something to defend ourselves from them, or should try to set right the things which seem to have gone wrong. But the Bible teaching is that we need not be disturbed by the injustices or injuries which we have to suffer, and that we may safely leave them in the hands of God, committing them to him, while we go on with our simple duty.

The story of Joseph furnishes a remarkable illustration of the powerlessness of wrong to harm a life which is in God's keeping. We pity the boy as he is cruelly sold by his brothers, and carried away as a slave. But we have only to read the story through to its close to see how even the wrongs which he suffered were made to minister good. We are apt to think, however, that Joseph's case was exceptional, that God does not take the same interest in ordinary lives. But this is not true. Joseph was no exception. He was no dearer to God than thousands of other

boys have been, and his life was no more important in God's plan than the life of many others along the centuries. Every one who will commit his wrongs into the hands of God, going forward meanwhile in the path of duty, will learn that evil has been changed to good for him, and that blessing has come out of what seemed to be hurt.

Jesus himself is the best illustration: "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." If only we will keep our hands off, keep our heart patient and gentle, and go forward in faithful duty, blessing will come from the enduring of even the bitterest cruelties.

Another experience which brings perplexity and dismay to many good people is sorrow. A minister has just been telling of his sore bereavement. He had been married for eleven years, and has two beautiful children. His wife was a woman of rare strength of character and firmness of spirit. She brought great joy and good into his life, and seemed to be

altogether indispensable to his happiness. The other day, when he was absent in a distant city, his wife suddenly became ill with pneumonia. He was summoned by telegraph, but before he could reach her side she had passed away.

What is the Christian word for this good man in his grief? God does not blame him for his tears, — the divine comfort does not deaden the affections so that we do not feel the pangs of bereavement. Indeed, the love of God only makes the human heart the more tender, and human affection the sweeter and richer, so that the pang of bereavement is even keener in the Christian than in the worldly man. God does not promise to keep us from tears. "Jesus wept." But the teaching of the Bible is that our sorrow shall not be bitter or insubmissive, but shall be chastened by reverent love, its darkness struck through with the light of peace. God's comfort is strength — strength to endure.

What is this comfort which can produce in the bereft life the quiet peace of God?

For one thing, it is the divine revealing concerning those who are taken from us. There was no accident, to the mind of God, in the taking away of the happy young wife from her devoted husband, and from her sacred place at the heart of the home. Her mission on earth was ended, her work here was finished. Her life was not ended, however; it has only passed into another sphere, where, with greater power to be a blessing, she will continue to serve her Master.

Then, for those who remain in the emptied home, the comfort is that God's love in the taking away of the dear life is just as deep and true as it was in the giving of it; that there are blessings in sorrow itself which far more than compensate for the pain and anguish; and that heaven will be nearer now since the dear life has passed into its brightness.

Some day we shall know that no mistake was made when the messenger of sorrow came to our door. God's comfort is so satisfying, so enriching, so uplifting, that it is well worth

our while to have grief that we may receive the blessing of divine consolation.

“Sometime, when all life’s lessons have been learned,
And sun and stars for evermore have set,
The things which our weak judgments here have spurned,
The things o’er which we grieved with lashes wet,
Will flash before us out of life’s dark night,
As stars shine most in deeper tints of blue ;
And we shall see how all God’s plans are right,
And how what seemed reproof was love most true.”

Another case of perplexity in many lives is in the not answering of prayers. The promises that prayers will be answered seem clear and direct as we read them ; and yet, when we make our requests, the things we ask for are not given to us. Many persons are sorely perplexed on this account, and sometimes they even begin to doubt that prayer is heard and answered at all.

But it is important that the Bible teaching on the subject of prayer shall be well understood. Much of our perplexity comes from an imperfect understanding of the divine words. The whole truth concerning the matter of prayer may not be found in any one passage.

The teaching certainly is not that every request made by any one in prayer shall be granted. This would indicate that God had abdicated his place as Lord of the universe. Then, God is not like an over-indulgent parent who gives his child everything he asks for. There are many foolish prayers for things which would not be blessings if they were given; our Father will not answer these, however urgently the requests are pressed. There are prayers also to which answers come, but come in a form different from that in which the suppliant expected to receive them. We ask to have the burden taken away, and instead, God strengthens us that we may still carry it. This really is a better answer than we sought. There are prayers, too, whose answers are long delayed; to grant them at once would be to give us unripe fruit, which would only harm us.

The key of all perplexities concerning prayer is found in the reference of all our requests, however urgent, to the wisdom of God, asking him to consider them, and to do for us what is best, to give or to withhold, to grant what

we ask or something else if that is better. If we thus exercise faith in asking, we shall not be perplexed in the answering or the not answering of our requests.

These are a few of the perplexities which are common in much Christian experience, with the Bible teaching which ought to relieve them of their disturbing power. By every Marah grows the tree which will sweeten the bitter waters. For every form of distress in our life God has ready just the word of promise, or the grace which will give comfort and peace. The trouble with us too often is, that we have eyes only for the perplexity, and not for the peace that waits for us. If we were as quick to find the blessing as we are to see the trouble, it would be better for us.

“O Father, I am in the dark,
My soul is heavy-bowed;
I send my prayer up like a lark,
Up through my vapory shroud,
To find thee,
And remind thee
I am thy child, and thou my Father,
Though round me death itself should gather.

Lay thy loved hand upon my head,
Let thy heart beat in mine ;
One thought from thee, when all seems dead,
Will make the darkness shine
About me
And throughout me !
And should again the dull night gather,
I'll cry again, Thou art my Father."

CHAPTER XIII.

A PROBLEM OF LIVING.

“ The wind that blows can never kill
The tree God plants;
It bloweth east ; it bloweth west ;
The tender leaves have little rest ;
But any wind that blows is best.
The tree God plants
Strikes deeper root, grows higher still,
Spreads wider boughs, for God’s good will
Meets all its wants.”

ONE of the problems of true living is to pass through the experiences of life without being hurt by them. We are often admonished concerning the seriousness of dying, but it is really a far more serious matter to live than to die. When one has lived well, dying is easy ; but life is always hard. It never ceases to mean toil, struggle, self-abnegation, resistance to wrong, earnest effort. Many people are hurt, too, in these experiences. They

do not pass through them victoriously. They are wounded in life's battles. They are crushed by its burdens. Its antagonisms wound and scar them. They lose something of the sweetness and gentleness of their heart in its hard struggles. Its harsh and rude experiences leave their spirit embittered. Its sorrows break the music of their joy.

However, there is a way of relating ourselves to the incidents of life through which we must pass, so that none of them shall work us injury. There is no power in sorrow, pain, temptation, or injustice, which can hurt us, unless in some way we fail in our own duty in meeting the experience. No one can harm us but ourselves. It was a saying of Bernard, "Nothing can work me damage but myself. The harm I sustain I carry about with me, and I never am a real sufferer but by my own faults."

These words are true. When Jesus was committing his disciples to his Father's care, as he was about to leave them in this world, his prayer for them was, that they might be kept from the evil. He did not say evils—

there is but one evil. He did not ask that they should be kept from struggle, from suffering, from earthly loss, or from wrong or persecution. These are not evils; in themselves they have no power to hurt the Christian's true life. The only evil in all the world is sin. So long as we do not sin, we have not been actually hurt by any experience. Our body may be mangled, cut to pieces, or burned in the flames; but so long as we do not sin in thought, feeling, or act, we have received no trace of real harm.

Just before his martyrdom, St. Paul wrote from his prison these words of sublime confidence, "The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me unto his heavenly kingdom." He did not mean that the Lord would deliver him from the cruelty of Nero, from the horrors of prison life, from suffering, from a violent death; but that in whatever he might have to endure no actual harm could come to him. The Lord would bring him through all his experience, with life unhurt, to the heavenly gates.

There is a wonderful verse in the little Epistle of Jude which reads, "Unto him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of his glory without blemish in exceeding joy, . . . be glory." No matter how full of danger the world may be, how on every hand sin may work, how wicked men and evil spirits may seek our destruction, yet there is a power which can keep us through all these perils without a trace of hurt, guarding us ever from stumbling, preserving us from all tarnishing of the soul, and presenting us at last without blemish before God.

It becomes a very practical question, how we may meet life so that we shall take no harm from its experiences of testing and danger.

Consider sorrow, for instance. There is a prevalent impression that sorrow is at least a safe condition, that those who endure it are thereby brought nearer to God, and that some good or blessing comes always from the bitterness of grief. But this impression is not correct. Sorrow is an experience of great

spiritual peril. Many gentle lives are irreparably hurt by it. Too often in the experience of grief faith's vision of Christ is obscured, fellowship with God is interrupted, Christian energy is paralyzed, and the heart grows bitter.

Yet it is possible to pass through sorrow without being harmed by it. One's heart may be kept sweet under all the brackish tides of grief, like the fresh-water spring beside the sea, over which the salt floods pour twice each day, but which emerges from each burial fresh as ever. All depends upon the way we relate ourselves to our sorrow. If we meet it without submission, with rebellious feeling; or hopelessly, shutting out the stars; or without faith, letting go the hand of Christ and forgetting the divine love and grace, — only harm can come to us from it. But if we meet it with reverent trust, knowing that we are in God's hands, and resting there in quietness and confidence, singing while we suffer, we deprive sorrow of its power to work us harm, and compel it to yield us rich blessing instead. Acquiescence in the will and way of

God takes the bitterness out of trouble, and preserves in the heart the gentleness of Christ and the peace of God through the darkest hours.

Or consider temptation. When we think of the malignity of the Evil One, the fierceness and persistence of the assaults which are made upon every human soul, and the insidiousness of sin, it is no wonder that we sometimes cry out in alarm, and ask how it is possible to pass through this world and keep our life unspotted. Yet it is possible. There is a way of meeting the sorest temptation so that no trace of harming shall be left. No power of evil can force the door of our heart, or enter, unless we open to it with our own hand. As Luther somewhere says, we cannot keep the birds from flying about our head, but we can prevent them from building their nests in our hair. We may endure the utmost pressure of temptation, and not be hurt, — being tempted is not sin; but the moment we yield in any degree, we have received harm. Yet it is not necessary that we should yield; for Christ

has overcome the world, and through him the weakest of us may be more than conquerors.

There is a wonderful word of Scripture which speaks of a Christian's life as being hid with Christ in God. What a blessed place this is, how warm and safe, how impregnably sheltered! Men seem ambitious to rush into the world where they must meet peril. But it is wiser far to avoid the danger of sin unless duty calls us to go into it. It is thus that the Master taught us to live in this world, when he bade us pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." We ought to fear the evil, and should be willing to meet temptation only when it comes in the path of duty in which God leads us. It is better to seek to dwell in the secret place of the Most High than out in the streets amid life's dangers.

"I would rather be
'Neath a greenwood tree,
With a song and a handful of daisies,
Than the darling of victory
'Mid the bray of the rabble's praises.

I would rather ride
On the wings inside,
Where the hoofs and the horns come not after,
Than fold loud Fame as a bride,
Rouged Fame, with her leer and her laughter."

The same is true of unjust treatment. There is a great deal of unlovingness in the world. There are some persons whose life is one long record of endured wrong or injustice. There are few, if any, who at some time do not have to suffer at the hand of others. How to meet these experiences is one of the most important questions we have to consider. There are two aspects of it: What is our duty toward others? What does the law of love require? Here the teaching of the New Testament is very plain. We are to cherish the spirit of forgiveness. We are to return kindness for unkindness, good for evil. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him."

Then there is an aspect of the question which concerns our own inner spiritual life. We must see to it that we are not hurt in our soul, in the depths of our being, in our life and

character, by wrongs, injustices, or unkindnesses which others do to us. The wounding which one may inflict upon our body by a blow is not all the injury which may result. If, when we are struck, we become angry, and permit the anger to grow into resentment and bitterness and a desire for revenge, we have now received a second hurt, which is far more serious than the bodily injury inflicted by the blow.

Here it is true again, that nothing can cause one damage except one's self. One is never a real sufferer but by his own faults. Only sin can actually do us harm. So long, therefore, as we keep our heart free from bitterness while enduring injustice or unkind treatment, we remain unharmed and beyond the reach of harm.

No other one ever suffered such wrongs as did Jesus ; but the hurts he bore never reached his soul, left no woundings there. When he was reviled, he reviled not again, but kept forgiveness in his heart. He gave love for hate. They pierced his hands with nails ; but the only

cry the pain wrung from him was a prayer for his enemies, and the blood from the cruel wounds became the blood of redemption. Paul is another example of the powerlessness of hatred and injury to harm a soul. He endured untold suffering, was beaten, stoned, imprisoned, tortured; but you will search the records in vain for one word of bitterness or resentment. His heart remained sweet through the worst that human hate and rage could do.

This is an important lesson, and one that every Christian should learn. We are always in danger of allowing ourselves to be embittered by injustice or cruel treatment. When we have sought to do good to others, and our love has been despised, rejected, and cast away; when we have suffered and sacrificed in vain, receiving only ingratitude and unkindness in return for love's most sacred gifts, freely lavished,—it is easy to permit our heart to lose its tenderness, and to grow hard and misanthropic. Then it is that life has wrought damage to our spirit, that we have sinned against our own soul. The problem of Christian living

is to pass through any and every possible experience of pain, loss, sorrow, temptation, or wrong, uninjured, with spirit sweet, peaceful, wholesome, loving, and unimpaired.

The secret is, abiding in Christ, with Christ abiding in us. We cannot keep ourselves; nothing less than the divine keeping is able to guard us from stumbling, and to shelter us from the hurt of sin. The old promise runs, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee." Our part is only the staying on God, in his love, close to his heart; God's is the keeping. It was the promise of the Master that his disciples should take up serpents, and, if they drank any deadly thing, that it should in no wise hurt them. This promise stands for all who are in living relations with Christ.

"O Lord, seek us, O Lord, find us in thy patient care;
Be thy love before, behind us, round us, everywhere;
Lest the god of this world blind us, lest he speak us fair;
Lest he forge a chain to bind us, lest he bait a snare.
Turn not from us, call to mind us, find, embrace us, bear;
Be thy love before, behind us, round us, everywhere."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MARKS OF JESUS.

O Hands that were extended upon the awful tree,
Hold up those precious nail-prints, and intercede for me.

O Head so deeply pierced with thorns which sharpest be,
Bend low before thy Father, and intercede for me.

O Body scarred and wounded my sacrifice to be,
Present thy perfect offering, and intercede for me.

Old Hymn.

IN a passage of one of his epistles, St. Paul speaks of himself as bearing, branded on his body, the marks of Jesus. His allusion probably was to the custom of branding slaves with the initial or some other distinguishing mark of their owner. These brands could not be removed; and wherever the slave went he carried, burnt indelibly in his flesh, these witnesses of his servitude and his ownership.

The marks in himself to which St. Paul referred were the scars, or other lines and

impressions, made upon him by what he had endured and suffered in serving and following Christ. He had been beaten with the scourge, and the weals were yet upon his body. He had been stoned, and he bore yet the scars of the bruises. He had suffered shipwreck, and had been exposed to cold and heat and storm, enduring hunger, thirst, and weariness. All these experiences had left their traces in his body. He was no longer the blithe, vigorous, fresh young man who had witnessed Stephen's martyrdom. He was prematurely old.

He called these records of his persecutions and toils marks of Jesus, because they had been received in the service of Christ. It was because he was a Christian that he had been scourged, beaten with rods, and stoned. It was in missionary journeyings that he had suffered shipwreck, hunger, and cold. If he had continued the life of a popular Jewish rabbi, receiving honors, enjoying wealth, dwelling in luxurious conditions, the idol of his nation, there would have been none of these

tell-tale lines of care, suffering, and persecution. These were the price-marks of his Christian consecration and life.

Yet he was not ashamed of his scars. His tone is even triumphant as he speaks of bearing about, branded on his body, these stigmata. He wore them as decorations. The patriot soldier is not ashamed of his wounds received in his country's cause. He does not try to hide them, or to have them obliterated; but is proud of them, and loves to show them, and tell in what battles he received the wounds of which these scars tell. Says an old writer, "It is not gold, precious stones, and statues that adorn a soldier, but a torn buckler, a cracked helmet, a blunted sword, and a scarred face." So St. Paul gloried in his sufferings for Christ, and in being the branded slave of Christ. He never thought of the marks of his sufferings as being in any way marks of dishonor.

Every true Christian bears also in his body the marks of Jesus. The body is the scroll on which the spirit writes all the life's story.

If a man lives in self-indulgence, giving way to appetite, to passion, to lust, the signs of his sensuality and sottishness soon begin to appear on his face. If one yields to anxiety, to discontent, to fretfulness, the countenance will register the inner unrest and feverishness. Bad temper declares its hideous unloveliness in the features. It is impossible for the envious man to conceal his envy; it writes itself all over his face, withering and wizening its freshness and beauty.

In all departments of life the body is the revealer of the spirit. We all carry about with us the marks of our servitude, the brands of our master. The horny hand that grasps yours tells of hard, un pitying toil. The sailor's weather-beaten face tells of rough seafaring. The wasted frame, the trembling limbs, the pale cheeks, tell of disease. The whitening hair, the wrinkled face, the bowing form, declare that old age is advancing in your friend.

The finer spiritual qualities also show their indices in the body. As sottishness, sensual-

ity, and selfishness put forth their symbols, so do nobleness, self-restraint, and all moral qualities set their seal upon the features. A beautiful soul makes a beautiful face. Noble thoughts carve their majesty in strong lines on the brow.

We are not called in these days to suffer persecution in serving Christ, and therefore we cannot point to any such marks of Jesus as St. Paul bore. We have no weals on our back made by scourgings because we are Christians. We have no disfigurements telling of stonings because we loved Christ. Not many of us have suffered from exposure, or have lost our health, or worn out our strength, in Christian work. But if we are Christians at all, there are other memorials of struggle, self-denial, and sacrifice, which God and angels see in our life. All our best lessons are learned at real cost. We reach the higher by trampling under our feet the lower. We attain beauty of spirit by the crucifying of the flesh. We get our moral strength out of struggle. No one ever rises into noble char-

acter in vales of ease, walking along mossy paths, merely having "a good time." It is the life of toil, of conflict, of self-denial, of pain, that makes the saints whose character shines in radiant beauty.

It is a strange story, that of Jacob's all-night wrestle. In the morning he went from the Jabbok maimed, lame, limping, but a new man, with a new name, a victor over self, over his old nature. From that day, Jacob the supplanter was Israel, a prince with God. Through all his life, to its close, he limped when he walked; but his limping was the mark of God upon his body, a symbol of spiritual victory.

So it is oftentimes in the story of life. Out of our earthly defeats come our truest victories. Many a man brings from business reverses a new spirit, chastened, disciplined, with an eye for heavenly things. Many a woman comes from a sick-room with a blessing of patience, gentleness, sympathy, thoughtfulness, which she had never worn before. Many persons come out of sorrow with a broken heart,

and yet with a holy beauty, a divine enrichment, a spiritual power, they had never possessed before. These are all brands or marks of Jesus. They seem to be woundings. They appear to our eyes to be scars — disfigurements, telling of hard usage. Yet they stand for spiritual qualities, pearls of character growing out of the woundings of the flesh, marks of growth, of new grace.

There is something very suggestive in the thought that it is the woundings and disfigurements of life that are the marks of Jesus. We remember that it was by his wounds, the prints of the nails, that Jesus himself was known after his resurrection. May it not be, too, that we shall recognize him in heaven by the same tokens? Every older Christian bears some marks of woundings. We are wounded in our conflicts with the enemy of our souls. The holiest saint ofttimes has had the hardest battles. Many people carry wounds in their heart — wounds made by sorrows.

A young man who had been long in the English army became a minister. When preach-

ing in the city of his birth, he sought out his aged mother, whom he had not seen for many years. She did not recognize him ; but it had happened that one day, when he was a child, she had accidentally wounded the boy's wrist with a knife. To comfort him she cried, "Never mind, my bonnie bairn, your mither will ken you by that when you are a man." So now, when the old woman could not believe that this grave, fine-looking minister was her own son, he drew up his sleeve, and said, "Mither, mither, dinna ye ken that?" In a moment the old mother had her boy in her arms. She knew him by the scar.

So Christ recognizes his own by their wounds — wounds made sometimes by his own chastening. In the pearl oyster a tiny grain of sand makes a wound, which causes the little creature much suffering. But by and by a beautiful pearl comes from the wound. Thus it is in the true Christian life, — the wounds of chastening, of sorrow, of trial, of conflict, through the power of divine grace, become rich pearls in the character, true marks of Jesus.

“Ask ye how such from others may be known?
Mark those whose look is calm, their brow serene,
Gentle their words, love breathing in each tone,
Scattering rich blessing all around unseen.”

Young Christians may not be able yet to point to such insignia of their Christian life. The joy of youth is in their heart, the bound of youth is in their step, the hope of youth shines in their face, their strength is unwasted, and they have no scars from conflicts, hardships, or sorrows, to which to point as witnesses of their devotion to Christ. Their life is yet before them, their record is yet to make. But while they have not yet had the trying experiences which brand their imprints on the life, they may have true marks of Jesus in their faith, their obedience, their consecration, the fruits of the Spirit in them, and their earnest, holy living.

There is a legend of Francis of Assisi which says that in a holy rapture he once beheld the form of one crucified. When the vision had vanished, the saint bore in his hands and feet and side the imprints of the wounds

of the Saviour. This is only a legend. But there is a spiritual sense in which, when we gaze long and adoringly upon the Master, the marks of his life are really imprinted upon us ; not upon our hands and feet and side, in any merely physical branding of wounds upon our flesh, but in the putting upon our soul of the features of Christ's own beauty. Instead of literal nail-prints on our hands and feet, our hands bear the same love-marks that were on the hands of Jesus ; they become serving hands, giving hands, holy hands, hands of help and healing ; and our feet become like Christ's feet — swift to run on love's errands and in the ways of God's will. To bear the marks of Jesus is to have the spirit of the cross deep in our heart, animating all our life.

CHAPTER XV.

IF CHRIST WERE OUR GUEST.

“So still, dear Lord, in every place
Thou standest by the toiling folk,
With love and pity in thy face,
And givest of thy help and grace
To those who meekly bear the yoke.”

THERE is a little book entitled “How Christ Came to Church.” A minister dreamed that a stranger one day came to the service, and that, upon asking who it was, he was told that it was Jesus of Nazareth. The book goes on to ask, “If Christ came to church, and sat in one of the pews — what then?” The question leads to many earnest thoughts.

The form of this fancy may be changed. I dreamt that a stranger came to my door, and desired to be my guest. There was something winsome in his face and manner. I felt at a glance that he could be my friend in the deep-

est sense, and that his influence upon my life would be inspiring. Instinctively I opened to him, and said as I took him up to his room, "This is your house while you are here. You are welcome to all that we have and are."

Instantly he seemed like an old friend. He entered with zest and freedom into all our home-life. There was no restraint in his manner, and his presence made no feeling of restraint in our home. At the table, at my request, he asked the blessing on our food, and then entered into the conversation in a most cheerful way. So the visit began, and so day after day it continued. Each day we saw some new beauty in our guest, as he entered more and more deeply, but never obtrusively, into our home-life.

But, strange to say, we had never learned his name. Indeed, the question, "Who is our guest?" seemed never to have arisen. At length, however, as we sat one day at the table, I noticed his hands, and there were prints of nails in them. Then I knew it was Jesus who was our guest. Yet I was not disturbed nor

overawed by this discovery. There was in him such sweetness, such humanness, such beauty, such dear familiarity of friendship, that even the surprise of learning who the stranger was seemed not to amaze me. Only a wondrous warmth came into my heart, and I felt that we would never lose this heavenly guest from our home. In the gladness of my feeling, as I listened to his cheerful table-talk, I awoke, and my dream ended.

Suppose that Jesus Christ were a guest in your home, not for the night merely, but an abiding guest; how would it affect your home-life? What would be the influence of that loving presence on the spirit, the conduct, the speech, of the household?

How would it affect you parents in the training of your children? Jesus would not interfere with your family government. That is the way some good people do harm when they are guests in a home. They give too much advice. They have too many criticisms to make, too many suggestions to give. Without meaning it or being aware of it, they in-

terfere with the home-life, — a sacred matter in which no stranger, no closest friend, should ever intermeddle. But Jesus would not do so. He would be your children's best friend. He would be interested in all their life, — in their studies, their play, their books, their companionships. His holiness would not be of the kind to make them afraid of him, or to lay the slightest restraint on their innocent pleasure. He would be ready also to talk with you about your children. But he would never meddle with your family government and discipline.

If Jesus were living with you, how would you mothers bring up your children? It is a holy moment to a true-hearted woman when her child is laid in her arms, and she looks for the first time into its face. Croons a reverent mother over the cradle of her first-born : —

“ My child, I fear thee ; thou'rt a spirit, soul !

How shall I walk before thee ; keep my garments whole ?
O Lord, give strength, give wisdom, for the task,
To train this child for thee.”

With this feeling in your heart, would you not keep most careful watch over your own life, that it may be ever beautiful and worthy? The mother's life is her child's sky, atmosphere, climate, and weather. She must make sure that it is full of wholesome influence in which all lovely things may grow. One writes : —

Would you know the baby's skies?
Baby's skies are mother's eyes.
Mother's eyes and smile together
Make the baby's pleasant weather.

Mother, keep your eyes from tears,
Keep your heart from foolish fears,
Keep your lips from dull complaining,
Lest the baby think 'tis raining.

It is living that counts first in its influence upon a child's life, before words can make much impression. A mother's love should be stainless in its purity, rich in its spirituality, tender in its affection, and strong in its moral principle. It should never be weak in a way that would make it over-kind, over-indulgent. There is almost as much harm wrought by

unwise loving in mothers as would be by a lack of lovingness. The influence of Jesus as guest in the home would never lead to sentimental kindness to a little child.

Then, as your child grows older, and begins to listen to your teachings, what would you do for it if Jesus were your guest? Would you not teach it the words of Christ, tell it of his love, point out to it the way of duty, and daily commit it to his care? It would seem worth while for every mother to try to weave holy home memories into the early years of her children's life. There is no surer way to bind them as with chains of gold fast around the feet of God. Is there any mother so busy that she cannot find time to spend a few moments every evening in her children's room in loving talk and earnest prayer? Far down into the years will go the memories of such holy moments, proving many times a bond of safety.

The father's responsibility in the training of the children should not be overlooked. If Jesus were a guest, this sacred duty would

not be neglected. No doubt, in ordinary cases, the responsibility is the mother's first. In the present conditions of society the burdens which most men carry in the world's life and in providing for their families are so great that they can give only fragments of time to the direct work of training their children. Besides, there are certain parts of the home duty which a woman can do infinitely better than a man could do. We all know how awkward most men are with a baby, while a woman does not even need to learn how to handle it with grace and ease. No hands so well as a mother's can write God's holiest lessons upon a child's heart.

Yet fathers have a serious responsibility. What would a true father do for his children if Jesus were living in his family? He would, first of all, live a noble, manly life. He would maintain a character without spot. His life is one of the first two books his child reads, and he should want it to be well worth reading. He would make every effort to provide a good, beautiful, and comfortable home for his family,

filling it with those things whose influence will be refining and inspiring. He would seek to give his children the best possible education. He would maintain in his home the forms, as well as the spirit, of religion, since he is the priest of the family.

As children grow up they also have their share in the home-making. If Jesus were living with them, what kind of life would the young people give to their home? What spirit would they show toward their parents? How would brothers and sisters live together?

If Jesus were a guest, love would rule in all the home relations. Mrs. Stowe has said, "How much we might make of our family life, if every secret thought of love blossomed into a deed! There are words and looks and little observances, thoughtfulnesses, watchful little attentions, which speak of love, which make love manifest; and there is scarcely a family that might not be richer in heart-wealth for more of them."

We love each other at home — of course we do. We would die for each other. But too

many of us have a very inadequate way of showing our love. It were well if we learned to live for each other for the present, while there is no special reason why we should die for each other. There are homes chill and wintry, which could be warmed into love's richest glow in a little time, if all the household were to grow affectionate — letting the heart's gentle feelings have simple, natural expression.

If Jesus were our guest, there would be true religion in our home. That is not saying that our family life would be gloomy, silent, joyless. It does not mean that all the time would be spent in praying and reading the Bible. There would be merry laughter and happy song. They misrepresent the religion of Christ who would have us think of it as cheerless and severe. It is full of joy. It represses nothing that is beautiful and good. It forbids no pure pleasure. It casts restraint upon no right spirit. Perhaps we do things now that we would not do if Jesus were living with us ; but, if so, these are not things we should keep in

our home-life. No doubt his presence as a guest would greatly add to the gladness and mirth of many a home which now lacks these very qualities, and is too sober and serious in its life.

No one needs to be reminded that this dream of Jesus as guest is not mere fancy. He is a guest in every Christian home. When we accepted the gospel Jesus came into our house to live with us. He has never gone away unless we have thrust him out. He is living continually in each home of ours, and we should shape all our home-life so that it will please him. Jesus in a home sweetens all its life so that benedictions pour out from its doors and windows to bless the whole world. Then —

“ Each sweet and secret thing within
Gives out a fragrance on the air, —
A thankful breath, sent forth to win
A little smile from others' care.”

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN TWO AGREE.

It is not prayer,
This clamor of our eager wants,
That fills the air
With wearying, selfish plaints.

It is true prayer,
To seek the giver more than gift ;
God's life to share
And love — for this our cry to lift.

WHITE.

“IF two of you shall agree.” Why two? What is the advantage of two over one in prayer? Why may we not pray alone, singly, each one in his own closet, quite as well and as effectually as when two are together? Why is there a special promise to the prayer of two agreeing? Will not the things asked for be given as certainly when one prays as if two united in the request?

Jesus said also, “Where two or three are

gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Why will he be present more really, with fuller blessing, where two or three are gathered together, than where one bows in faith-filled supplication? Why are two better than one in praying?

For one thing, when two pray together, each is drawn out of self, to pray for something else besides his own needs. While praying only alone, important as is such prayer in the individual spiritual life, we are apt to narrow our petitions to things we want for ourselves. We bring our own burdens to God. We pray about our own affairs, pleading for prosperity in our own business, imploring help in our own difficulties, deliverance in our own perils, and grace for our own experiences. This is the tendency of secret prayer. Its very blessedness as a privilege is in the fact that we can come into such intimate communion with God, and can bring all our questions, our sorrows, our fears, our weaknesses, our mistakes, our heart-hungers, to him. There is a great blessing in secret prayer.

Praying by one's self is a duty. We cannot pray in secret while another is present. But praying only alone, with no outlook on the needs of others, tends to make us selfish, to keep our thoughts on ourselves, to narrow our desires, to repress our sympathies, and to stunt our growth in spiritual life. But when two pray together these unwholesome tendencies are corrected. We are led to forget our own burdens and cares, for the time at least, and think of the needs of others, or the wider interests of Christ's kingdom. This is always a wholesome experience. It gives enlargement to our life.

Another advantage of prayer together is in the influence life has on life. You have some interest for which you are praying. You may pray very earnestly for this object which is so near your heart. But if another person who has the same interest and is carrying the same burden meets you, and you confer together about the matter, and then kneel side by side to pray, your fervor and earnestness will be intensified. Faith in the one makes

the other's faith stronger. Love in your friend's heart for an imperilled life quickens the love in your heart. Your brother's sympathy with you in your sorrow or your trial strengthens you in your pleading with God for comfort or relief. The interest of each grows deeper as both confer together.

We all need companionship in our Christian life. Cloister piety has manifold perils which are obviated in associated Christian life. One log will not burn alone; soon the flame dies out. It is the same with lives.

"A life can't glow alone!
The smile seems sad, the senses start,
The will lies useless, limp, and prone;
Unchallenged and uncheered the heart;
And one by one the stars depart
From all one's sky, to darkness grown, —
A life is death alone."

It is good to pray together. Life warms life. Heart quickens heart. Two logs together will burn, the fire will become bright, and the room will grow warm. Two friends praying together stimulate each other, and the earnestness of each is increased.

When two pray together, their chief burden usually is intercession. Perhaps we do not fully realize the value of intercessory prayer. Love desires always to be helpful to others ; yet how little can we do one for another ! We may be willing enough ; but, to begin with, we do not know what our friend really needs, or how we can most truly help him. Perhaps the service we would render, even at much cost to ourselves, would do him harm rather than good. We would lift away his burden, and carry it for him. We would do the hard task ourselves to spare him. We would lessen the stress of the temptation for him, that the struggle may be easier. We would take out of his life the unpleasant things, that he may have ease and comfort.

That is the way human love usually seeks to help. We think that is what love demands of us. But it is almost certain that we thus do harm to our friend instead of good. It is better that we keep our hands off his life, not trying to make providences for him. It is safer to commit all such cases to God, that he

may do what is best. He does not help in this way. He does not take away the burden, because there is a blessing in it which we would miss if the burden were removed. We may interfere with God's wise discipline of our friend's life if we seek always to make life easier for him.

We know far less about people than we suppose we do. Here is a man in grief; he has lost a child, he is in poor health, he has suffered reverses in business, or he has had a sore struggle with adversity. You pity him. It makes your heart bleed to think of his sorrow or trial. You would like to help him, to relieve him in his hard condition. But perhaps if you could see within, you would not pity him, but would bow your head in reverence before him. His heart is filled with the peace of God. He is living victoriously. He needs no pity, no help, from you. The best you can do for him is to pray God to keep him brave and strong in his trial.

Here is another man who seems to be the favorite of fortune. Everything he touches

turns to gold. Sunshine floods his pathway. You congratulate this friend on his prosperity. You would name him as the most favored man in the community. Ah! perhaps, if you could see within his soul, where fierce passions and unrestrained desires hold sway, your congratulations would turn to sad pity. This man needs your prayers far more than your felicitations. Your prayer for him should be that in his worldly prosperity his soul may not perish or be hurt.

We can really know but little of the lives about us. It is scarcely safe even to try to help another by changing his condition or circumstances. We may only mar the Master's work in him if we try to make life easier for him. It is better that, as we pray, we let God do what his wisdom knows is best for him.

But we should never cease our intercession. We have not a friend who does not need our prayer for something. We do not know how much of the blessing wrought by Christ when he was on earth came through his prayers. He spent whole nights in supplication. On his

heart he carried the burden of human sorrow and human sin, and went continually with it to his Father. Then we are told that his work now in heaven for his people is continual intercession. All the blessings that come to us these days come in answer to the pleading of our great High Priest. Much of our work as Christians likewise should be intercession. People need our prayers. We are not altogether faithful to the friend for whom we do not pray. "Pray for whom thou lovest," says an old writer; "thou wilt never have any comfort of his friendship for whom thou dost not pray."

Perhaps many of us are in danger of overlooking this part of our duty toward others. If only we realized the danger in which our friends are living, even when all things appear bright about them, when they are walking in flowery paths, we would never cease our supplication for them. We sorrow, with breaking heart, over our dead, who have fallen asleep in Jesus; we do not know that oftentimes there is far more reason for sorrow over our living.

We readily think of many who are in circumstances of trial. Here is a young man who is making perilous associations, and is in danger of being dragged down to ruin. Here is a young woman who has been caught in the whirl of society, and is being carried away from the beautiful simplicity of her early days. Here is a man who has met a terrible bereavement, and is reeling under the staggering blow. Here is one who has suffered a financial loss, and is left, stript bare and empty-handed, to start anew in life. Here is one who has fallen unawares into sin, and lies in the dust of despair. Then there are those who are prosperous, whose very prosperity is their peril. There are those who, by a new, sweet, human friendship, which fills and satisfies their heart, are in danger of being drawn away from Christ. There are those who are just beginning the Christian life, and who, in their inexperience, need most careful guidance in the new and unaccustomed paths. There are broken families — father or mother gone, or both — where there is infinite need of God's help.

We have a duty toward all of these. We do but one part of our duty as Christians when we live faithfully, consistently, and uprightly. It is not enough for us to be good ourselves; we must reach out our hand to serve. The strong must help the weak. We must assist others by wholesome sympathy, by cheerful encouragement, by sharing our life with them, by all manner of self-forgetful ministry. But we should never cease to help them also by prayer. We know not what blessings from God we can call down upon them by loving, importunate intercession.

It is told of a good man that in a great bereavement he was strangely, supernaturally calm and peaceful. It was discovered that some friends had agreed together in prayer for him, that his faith might not fail. That was the secret of his wonderful victoriousness in sorrow. Thousands are strengthened for their struggles, and carried in safety through untold perils, because loved ones are praying for them. Verily, "more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." None

of us know what we owe to the intercessions of those who love us and pray for us.

But there is another side. How many go down in their struggles, are defeated in their battles, are wrecked in life's storms, because no one is praying! A missionary came back from a preaching-tour, and reported that there had been almost no blessing on his work. A good woman said, "Alas! I am to blame. I did not pray this time for you as I have always done before when you were out." A mother, seeing her son led away as a prisoner, arrested for crime, cried bitterly, "It is my fault; I did not pray enough for him."

If Monica had not prayed for her son with all the persistence of faith and love, the world would never have had Augustine. If Jesus had not made supplication for Peter, that apostle would have fallen away utterly. Who knows what moral failures there are continually in all life's paths because those who ought to have made intercession were silent? Who can estimate the loss from unoffered prayers?

We need to watch lest we grow selfish in

our praying. We should remember that we sin against God when we cease to pray for others. No other duty to our friends can be more solemn or obligatory than this. And to add power to our intercessions, we should band together in leagues of twos or threes, and thus come within the scope of the promise that if two shall agree on earth, touching the thing that they ask, it shall be given to them.

CHAPTER XVII.

LAMPS AND BUSHELS.

“Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
Not light us for ourselves.”

THE illustration is homely, but very suggestive. In the evening, when it began to grow dark, and the housekeeper lighted her rude lamp, she did not set it on the floor and turn a bushel over it, but set it on the lampstand, that its light might fill the apartment. Jesus told his disciples that they were his lamps, and that he wanted their light to shine out clearly. Yet there are many ways in which Christian people hide or obscure the light that is in them.

For example, there is the covering of shyness. There are persons who love Christ, but shrink from a public confession of him. The very depth and intensity of their love seem to

make it impossible for them to express the love. Their feelings are too sacred to be revealed. There must always be an inner chamber of faith and love in a Christian's heart, where only God may hold tryst with the soul. There are feelings which can be uttered to no human friend. There is a love of which we cannot speak. We are not required to talk with many people about our heart religion. It is a proper reserve which shrinks from laying bare one's inner spiritual experiences. We say it is scarcely less than desecration when a man prates in public of the sacred things of even a tender human affection. Is the heart's friendship with Christ less sacred, less holy? Surely no one should be expected to expose to public gaze all that belongs to the holy of holies of his communion with Christ.

Still, there is danger that shyness may become a covering which shall hide the light of Christian confession. Even so good a man as Timothy seems to have needed the exhortation from St. Paul, "Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee." Timothy was not making the

most of his Christian life. He was not using all the power he had. Only a comparatively feeble light was shining out from his life, when there ought to have been burning brightness. St. Paul said this to him, "God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and discipline." Timothy seems to have been covering his light under a spirit of timidity, shyness, almost cowardliness.

It becomes all of us to look to ourselves to know whether the gift that is in us does not need stirring up like a fire that is smouldering, whether we do not need to get more courage, whether our shyness may not be a serious fault in us, and whether it may not be hindering our usefulness as Christians. We should get the lamp out from under the covering of timid reserve, and set it on the candlestick of sincere and courageous confession.

There is also the covering of natural feeling. The very heart of all Christian life is love. God is love, and we are commanded to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. The sum of the commandments is, "Thou

shalt love." We are taught to be longsuffering in the endurance of injury and wrong; to be patient unto all men; to love our enemies; to forgive those who have done aught against us; that the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men; that when reviled we should not revile again; that we should not avenge ourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; that we should put away malice, anger, and clamor, and be sweet-spirited. Love is the light that should shine continually from the Christ-life in us.

But some people hide this cheerful light of love under the old natural feelings of resentfulness, unforgiveness, bitterness. They are quick to take offence. They hold grudges. They are not thoughtful. They do not forgive. They are quick-tempered, hasty in their speech, lacking affectionateness and sympathy. They may have a heart of love; but it seems as if there were surrounding it and covering it a hard crust which prevents the outflow of the love.

There are many good people who do not

reveal their best self. They are like frowning fortresses, — outside, cold, stern, forbidding walls, but within, a beautiful garden spot, with home love, and refuge. These men are outwardly brusque, severe, unapproachable; but, when you find the way to their heart, there is warmth there, with faithful constancy and shelter of strong love. But how much better it would be if there were not this grim outside; if the love found its way into the manners, the speech, all the expression! We should not hide the warm light of love in our heart beneath a covering of external unlovableness, but should set the lamp where its shining will reach every life that touches ours or comes under our influence.

Then, there is a covering of egotism and self-conceit which sometimes obscures the light. The Christian religion teaches us to be modest and humble in our demeanor, to desire to give rather than to receive, to seek to minister rather than to be ministered unto, in honor to prefer one another instead of demanding honor for ourselves. We are not to

insist upon always having our own way, nor to think that none but we know anything well or can do anything in the right way.

But sometimes we find a man, a Christian man, who is so full of vanity that he considers no other one's opinion as of any account. He is upright, truthful, honorable, firm in his principles, inflexible in his integrity; but the lamp of his good life is hidden under the bushel of an offensive egotism, an intolerable self-conceit. He treats other people and their suggestions almost with contempt. He is dictatorial and despotic, incapable of co-operation in work with others. Such a man, by the grave fault in his character, defeats the very purpose of his own best aim. He wants to be a leader; but he seeks position as a right, claiming it, demanding it, rather than winning it by force of character and fitness, and by readiness to serve. Some splendid men, with magnificent powers, are rendered almost useless to their fellows by this offensive spirit. The true leaders are those who pay no heed to the mere outward forms of position, prece-

dence, and rank, but devote themselves in love and self-denying service to the good of others.

By demanding place one may become like the figure-head, which vaunts itself in vanity upon the ship's prow; but the true man of influence is rather like the propeller, which, hidden out of sight, drives the vessel through seas and storms. Jesus said they are chief, not who claim to be first and to have highest rank, but who serve the most deeply and unselfishly. We must not hide the light of our life under the covering of an unlovely egotism, but should set the lamp on the candlestick of self-forgetting devotion to the good of others.

Another of the bushels which some Christians put over their lamps is the fretful, complaining habit. Light is clear and white. Christian life in its divine beauty is all brightness. Two words, peace and joy, express its true spirit. Peace is quietness, calmness, restfulness, contentment in any circumstances. The light of peace should shine in every Christian life. Then, joy is distinctive of the

Christian, — not the joy of this world, which depends on worldly conditions, and ebbs and flows with the tides of circumstances; but the joy of Christ, which the world cannot give and cannot take away.

Peace and joy are essential characteristics of the light that should shine from every Christian's lamp. But how many people cover this white, pure light with the habit of discontent and complaining! How many of us have allowed the spirit of worry to creep into our life! How many of us permit ourselves to murmur, and to find fault with almost everything in our lot! How many of us live in a perpetual fever of discontent! Such habits dim the shining of the light that should ray out from our life. Fretfulness spoils spiritual beauty. A habit of anxiety hides the light of peace and joy. If only we would strip off these unfit coverings, and let the light of Christ in us shine out, it would add tenfold to our influence and power as Christians. Even in life's sorest trials and deepest griefs the light of the lamp burning within should

shine out undimmed. Indeed, in sorrow the inner light should be even clearer than in joy.

“ Grief is a tattered tent
Wherethrough God’s light doth shine ;
Who glances up at every rent
May catch a ray divine.”

Another covering which obscures the light in too many Christians is ungentleness. Perhaps we do not realize how much of life’s influence depends on manners. There are those who are true Christians—no one doubts their sincerity. They are honest, loyal to truth, liberal in giving, useful men. Yet in their manners they are so ungentle that they mar, oftentimes almost destroy, their influence for good.

We need to study the art of living as to its manner. By the way one says Good-morning, one leaves either a pleasing and an inspiring impression, or casts a chilling shadow over a sensitive life. We need to train ourselves to thoughtfulness, kindness, sweet Christian courtesy,—not effusiveness, not ex-

aggeration of appreciation, for these are marks which betoken a measure of insincerity and weakness, and are almost worse than rudeness; but to sincere affectionateness in our bearing toward all. We should be courteous to every one, even to the beggar at our gate, to the lowliest person we meet.

“Hush, I pray you.

What if this friend should happen to be—God!”

Our Christian manners should be the interpretation of our Christian life. Perhaps we may say in excuse for a lack of refined courtesy, that our heart is better than our manners; if so, how will people know that it is? If our manners are wanting in gentleness and sweetness, we are hiding our light under a bushel, and it is not shining out to bless others.

Such are some of the coverings which too often obscure the light of Christian life. If these seem little things, mere faults of manner or expression, it should be remembered that far more than we are aware are our lives

hurt in their influence by what we call little things. Those who see us and judge of our character cannot look into our heart to behold the bright light that is burning there under all the obscuring; they must judge altogether from what shines out. We must take care, therefore, that nothing shall hide or dim the brightness of our lamp's shining.

St. Paul exhorted the Philippians to think not only of whatsoever things are true, just, honorable, and pure, but also of whatsoever things are lovely and of good report. If we do not make our life beautiful and winning in its outward form, which alone men see, how will they know of the beauty, the grace, the worth, within? We must express ever in our dispositions and our conduct, in all our behavior and bearing, the best that is in us, if we would fitly honor our Lord.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE VEILING OF LIVES.

See this soul of ours!
How it strives weakly in the child, is loosed
In manhood, clogged by sickness, back compelled
By age and waste, set free at last by death:
Why is it, flesh enthalls it or enthrones?
What is this flesh we have to penetrate?

BROWNING.

WHEN Moses came down from the mount his face shone with a strange brightness. So dazzling was the shining, that, in order to conceal the glory, he had to put on a veil when he talked with the people.

Many people wear veils over their life. Those among whom they live do not see them as they are. There are some who move among men without any apparent heavenliness in their features, yet who really have a divine glow on their soul. They commune much with God; and then they come out and

mingle again with us in life's common ways, walking on our streets, sitting at our tables, joining with us in work and fellowship. We see no shining on their faces. They are not greatly different in appearance from the other persons we meet. At least there is no radiance, no halo of saintliness, visible.

Yet their lives are in truth transfigured. Christ lives in them, and his life shines out in their faces. But they wear a veil, which conceals the splendor from human eyes. It is no purpose of their own to walk veiled among men. They do not try to hide the grace of God that is in them. But it is in the very nature of heavenly goodness to veil itself. We are counselled by our Master not to do good to be seen of men, but to give our alms secretly, only for God's eye. We are taught that we should be clothed with humility, and the garment of humility is a veil which covers and conceals the brightness of saintliness. We do not see the best of the good people about us. Many lowly, commonplace duties and services are really veiled angel ministries.

“The highest duties of life are found
Lying upon the lowest ground
In hidden and unnoticed ways,
In household works, on common days.”

This is true, oftentimes, of the loved ones in our homes, and of the friends who are most to us. We do not perceive the noble things in them while they live beside us, and serve us in so many familiar ways. Their lives appear plain and commonplace. We see no halo, no shining of angel brightness. One sad day they leave us; and then, when we have them no more, we realize for the first time what angels of God they were to us. Their help had been coming to us so long and so quietly, without ostentation, without demonstration, that we did not appreciate its worth until we missed it. Their virtues and graces of character had grown so familiar to us, wearing such common human form, so plain, so modest, that we saw not the angelic, the divine, beauty in them.

Love walks veiled before us, so that we cannot see the shining glory of his face. Death

is the rending of the veil, and then we see the splendor as it vanishes.

In other ways, too, are our lives veiled. The body is a veil which conceals within it all the mysteries of life. No one sees what goes on in your brain, — your thoughts, your imaginations, your fancies, your visions and dreams. No eye can look into your heart to note its daily history, — the affections, the feelings, the desires, the motives, the joys and sorrows, of your days. Every life carries a world of mystery within it, veiled from the eye of even the closest, dearest friend.

The spirit is always hampered and limited by the flesh. The body not only veils the life which dwells within it, but also conceals much of its power and beauty. No good man ever lives out all the goodness that his heart conceives and desires to express. No most skillful artist ever gets upon his canvas the whole of the vision which is born in his soul.

“What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thought had been?
What will but felt the fleshly screen?”

Sometimes a veil is put on purposely, by design, to hide a secret evil life. There are those who steal the livery of heaven to serve the devil in. They wish the world to think their life fair and beautiful, and they wear a white veil. But the covering only dimly conceals the blackness and loathsomeness within. Jesus, as his eye pierced life's thin disguises, — for he knew what was in men, — spoke of certain men who were like whited sepulchres, outwardly beautiful, but inwardly full of uncleanness. What mockeries are any veils which earth's looms can weave, as coverings of men's sins !

There can be no really veiled sins. True, from men's eyes they may be concealed for a time. The dishonest man may cover his embezzlements from those at the desk beside him. The faithless husband or wife may hide from the other the faithlessness that so stains the sacredness of holy wedlock. But no veil hides the sin from the offender's own conscience — none hides it from God. What miserable folly it is to live a hollow life, with only a flimsy rag covering sin and guilt ! The only worthy life

is one which is open to all the world, which has no secrets that would bring a blush to the cheek if they were suddenly proclaimed on the housetop.

But there are veils which are not intended to conceal plots or secret wickednesses. St. Paul says, "If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." We imagine that we know each other, because we have lived in very close relations for a long time. We speak of knowing a man perfectly. But really we know no one perfectly. Every life is veiled from every eye. The concealment may not be intentional, but from the very nature of life it is impossible for us to know any other person in more than a general and superficial way. We cannot see the motives which are back of actions, nor the reasons for the things our closest friend does. If we judge from appearances, we shall judge ignorantly, perhaps harshly and unjustly.

There are many divine counsels against judging others. One reason we should not do it is that our knowledge of other lives must al-

ways be only partial at the best, and very imperfect. We see only "through a glass darkly." We see only fragments, and it never is fair to judge from fragments. We see only one side, and we condemn the act or the character, while perhaps the other side is lovely. If we saw that, our condemnation would change to praise.

Another reason why we should not judge others is because nothing is as yet finished. An artist complains if you criticize his picture before he has completed his work on it. Until that time he keeps it veiled. God is an artist. He is working on men's lives in this world, but nothing is finished here. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." The work is still uncompleted. By and by the veil will be drawn, and then we shall see the finished work in the lives which in their incompleteness seem so faulty. "We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him." We should never judge God's unfinished work in men's lives.

This teaches us that we should be very patient with each other's life. Too often a

misunderstanding arises through only partial knowledge. We see it sometimes in families. For want of wise, loving patience, alienations occur, and lives which ought to be one in sympathy, affection, and interest, are held apart. We have all seen such estrangements, beginning with a seeming trifle, yet becoming so complete that two lives, dwelling under the same roof, touching each other continually and closely in the contacts of daily association, have grown miles and miles apart in heart, in spirit, in all that concerns real and true living.

How careful we should be in all our friendships, — how thoughtful, how forbearing, how considerate, how charitable! We should not judge others; and if we are misjudged we should not complain, but wait quietly for the fuller revealing which some day will come.

We are moving toward a day when every veil shall be taken away. The veil of flesh shall rend at the touch of death, and the real self shall pass out into clear vision. Then shall we know, even as also we are known.

We do not see realities while in this life; death is the great revealer. Thus Browning: —

You never know what life means till you die;
Even throughout life 'tis death that makes life live,
Gives it whatever the significance.

In that life of full revealing we shall no more wear veils, hiding us from each other. There shall be no mystery there — knowledge shall be full. There shall be no hiding of goodness or excellence behind blemishes or faults. No one shall be misunderstood. No motives shall be misconstrued. There shall be no misjudging, no wrong interpretation of acts. There shall be no veils between friends, leading to alienation and separation. Friendships shall have nothing there to hinder their perfect fellowship. Lives kept apart here through misunderstandings or incompatibility shall there find the best in each other, and be knit together in love.

There is one eye from which there are no veils; nothing hides any life, any nook or cranny of any life, from Christ. To him all

is open as day He never fails to see the evil in us which may be hidden from human vision, nor the good in us which may be obscured by our faults or frailties. He never misunderstands us, never misjudges us. He loves us, too, with all our faults; for he knows what he can make even of our weaknesses and our failures. We can, therefore, intrust our life, as it is, with Christ, knowing that in him our holiest interests shall be safe.

“One day the fingers of the Lord
Upon my eyes shall lie;
And when their tender weight shall lift,
'Twill be eternity.

But while he holds my yielding lids
With that soft force of his,
My spirit shall not sleep, but wake
Into his utter bliss.”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MAKING OF CHARACTER.

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in his hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half: trust God: see all, nor be afraid."

BROWNING.

THE artist was trying to improve on a dead mother's picture. It showed lines and wrinkles, and he wanted to take them out, so as to make the portrait more beautiful. But the son said, "No; don't take out the lines; just leave them every one. It wouldn't be my mother if all the lines were gone."

He said it was well enough for young people who had never known a care to have a picture with a face smooth and fair, without wrinkles; but when one has lived seventy years, years of earnest and noble life, full of

suffering, toil, struggle, and self-denial, it would be like lying to cover up their track.

Then the young man went on to speak in detail of some of the burdens which his mother had borne, the sacrifices she had made, and the sufferings and sorrows which had furrowed her life. He did not want a picture with the story of all these years taken out of the face. Its very beauty was in the marks and lines which told of what the mother's brave heart and faithful hands had done for love's sake.

This incident has its suggestions concerning the cost and sacredness of motherhood. It is not easy to be a mother, and to bring up a family of children, especially in plain circumstances, where the burdens of household care rest heavily on the mother herself. We should honor the marks which tell the story of what love has done. The dearest things in our mother should be the lines in which the record of her love is kept. Sometimes children forget this. They see that the mother's face has lost something of its freshness, that she has not her old alertness and viva-

city, that her hands are wrinkled; but they do not remember that these signs of decay or wasting of strength and beauty are the furrows which love for them has ploughed. Instead of being considered marrings or blemishes, they should be regarded as insignia of honor, like the soldier's scars gotten in fighting for his country.

But the incident suggests also in a larger way how character is made. The word character meant originally the lines, furrows, or scratches which the engraver made upon the metal. In life, character consists of the impressions left, the tracks cut in the soul, by experiences. A baby has no character; its life is like a smooth tablet with nothing yet engraved upon it. At once, however, the record begins to be made. Education, influence, the impacts of other lives, joys, sorrows, successes, and failures, all leave their touches, their lines of beauty or of marring, their furrows of suffering; and at length, in mature years, the man stands among men with a character distinctively his own, the compos-

ite product of all the varied experiences of his whole life.

The face oftentimes carries in itself an outer record, one that all can see, of the inner life. The face of a young girl has only fair beauty. She has never suffered, nor has she known care, struggle, or pain. Love comes; and its story is written in glowing, transfiguring lines on the features. Motherhood brings another new experience, and the girl-face passes, is left behind. We see now instead the earnest, thoughtful, serious, solicitous woman-face. The years move on with their eager life and deep yearning, their trial, their care, their broken nights and anxious days, their hopes and fears, their desires and longings, their prayers and cryings for help. There is sickness; and the mother is ever at the bedside, her heart in her watching. Perhaps death comes, and sorrow overwhelms her. As the children grow up, the mother's load grows heavier. She has her fond hopes and dreams, which too often she must see vanish without realization. So she lives on until she is threescore and ten.

Now, if we were to bring together the portraits of the young girl at twenty and the mother at seventy, we should see all the story of the fifty years graven on the old woman's face. We might comment upon the difference in the two pictures, saying, "What a pity the mother at seventy could not still have the sweet girl-face of twenty!" But there is far more meaning in the old woman's face than in the girl's. Every line holds a story of self-denial. Every mark of fading is a record of love's toil and cost. Under all the traces which tell of age and feebleness there run under-lines which tell of victoriousness, of battles fought and won, of lessons learned in tears, of heart struggles, of joy and hope, of pain and sorrow, of griefs and disappointments.

The son was right in saying that the lines should not be taken from his mother's picture — it would not have been his mother's picture at all if the marks of the years had been taken out. Beautiful in its way was the face of the young girl before there was a line of experi-

ence furrowed in it; but far more beautiful in its way is the face of the woman at seventy, — faded, wrinkled, deeply tracked, — because it records a story of heroism, gentleness, endurance, patience, self-sacrifice, pain, suffering, all the marvellous story of mother-love.

Those who are young are only beginning to make their character, but every day will leave some mark. The lesson is, the need of watchfulness over all their life. Every book they read, every picture they look at, every friendship they form, every touch of another life on theirs, every thought they cherish, every experience of joy or sorrow, of victory or defeat, has its place among the makers of their character.

If at the end we would have a character of which we shall not be ashamed, we must keep a close watch over every influence which we allow to affect us. The heart builds the character. Our thoughts carve the lines in our soul. If we are weak, cowardly, mean, selfish, sordid, or envious, these blemishes will appear in the final result. But if we are strong, brave, true, just, unselfish, and holy in thought and

feeling, these qualities will become part of an enduring and noble personality.

Life's moods also write their story, both in the character and on the countenance. Worry or discontent makes an unquiet face. Peace in the heart sets its shining beauty on the features. "Human physiognomy," says Victor Hugo, "is formed by the conscience and by the life, and is the result of a number of mysterious excavations." This is more true than any of us imagine. We carry the story of all our inner life on our face for all men to read it.

A daughter writes after her father's death: "His face had been my greatest comfort all this summer, even when he could converse but little. It was the same pure, childlike face and smile in all his sufferings." But it took seventy years of noble, unselfish, holy living for Christ and for the good of men to make this transfigured face.

The work which Christ gives to us really is to build character. We are not in the world to have a good time, to make money, to do great

things, to write books, to cultivate farms, to sell goods, or to study; we are here to make men and women of ourselves. The test of success at the end is not our wealth, the extent of our fame, the number of things we have done, but our character — that which will live on the other side of death, the person who will appear before God when our spirit presents itself there. It is of the greatest importance, therefore, that we give first heed to the work that is being done on our inner life along the years.

We must remember, too, that every thought, feeling, and desire, every play of emotion, every decision, every motive cherished, does its part in making the character. All life writes its records, and the records are indelible. Men are digging up these days in Assyria clay tablets which bear yet the writing put upon them thousands of years since. We are writing records, as we go on, in the books of our own life; and from these records we shall be judged in the great day of accounts. We never can get away from ourself or from the story of

our own life. How important it is that every thought shall be white and holy!

It is not the easy life that leaves the noblest record in character. It is plainly taught in Holy Scripture that we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom. A twofold baptism is appointed to believers — with the Holy Ghost and with fire. We are told even of Jesus that, though he were a Son, yet he learned obedience through the things that he suffered, and that he was made perfect through suffering. Much more needful is it for us that we pass through tribulations in the purifying of our life, and the making of Christly character in us.

We are not to suppose that the bereavements and the common sorrows of which others know are all of the trials through which we must pass. Our bitterest griefs and struggles are endured in the sacred secrecy of our own heart, where no eye but God's can see. We can make no step forward and upward in spiritual life but through battle, through victory over our old self. Something in self must die in every true gain we make in char-

acter. In the Revelation we read of certain great blessings which are offered to the followers of Christ, but every one of them waits beyond a line of battle. Only "to him that overcometh" are these prizes of character, these rewards for achievement, promised. There are other graves along our pathway besides those in which we lay away our beloved.

"What is it thou buriest so softly and still?
Oh, this is the grave of my own proud will.
I bid it sleep softly in death's little room,
And my hopes, too, I bury with it in the tomb."

It is these inward struggles and battles that most deeply scar our life. We come out of them bearing marks which we shall carry forever. But these marks are not disfigurements, — they are lines which tell of spiritual gains. Gold is not hurt by the fire. The stone is not marred by the sculptor's hewing. "While the marble wastes, the image grows." At the last that which will be most beautiful in us will not be what we have saved from the hard blows of the hammer, but the marks which will tell of the deepest cuttings of the chisel.

CHAPTER XX.

“DO NOTHING RASHLY.”

Had I but known that nothing is undone
From rising until setting of the sun,
That full-fledged words fly off beyond our reach,
That not a deed brought forth to life dies ever,
I would have measured out and weighed my speech;
To bear good deeds had been my sole endeavor.

MACCULLOCH.

THE town-clerk was wise when he urged the people of Ephesus to do nothing rashly. He told them they might do injustice to the men concerning whom the disturbance had arisen. He said there was a right way to proceed; if the men had done anything wrong, the courts were open, and it would be easy to have them tried and convicted. Rashness, he assured them, might bring upon themselves serious trouble.

This was good advice that day, and it is good for us all. Most of us are inclined, at

times at least, to act rashly. We are readily carried off by excitement or by feeling, and we do things then which cost us no end of trouble before we are through with them.

There are many rash words spoken. Persons get angry, and in anger the tongue is too often like a runaway horse. The driver has lost control; and the horse rushes along the street, perhaps trampling down women and children, perhaps dashing the vehicle to pieces, and injuring the unfortunate driver himself. A runaway tongue may do even more serious harm than a runaway horse. It may speak words which will hurt lives irreparably, and it may do incalculable injury to the speaker himself. Rash words hurt tender hearts. They alienate friends. They start suspicion concerning good people, and blast reputations. What cruel things are rash words!

How much better it would be if we all learned never to speak hastily! It were good to be slow of speech in a way; for then we would not talk rashly—we would take time to think before speaking. We were never

sorry for not saying the hot word that flew to our lips when we were excited. It would have been bitter, unloving, ungentle. It could have done no good. It would have wrought only pain and harm. It would have dishonored our Master, for it would have been an exhibition of un-Christlikeness. Jesus never spoke a hasty word. He kept silent under insult, pain, reproach, and sorest injury — not sullen silence, but silence sweet with patient, peaceful love. We are never sorry for following this perfect example, and restraining the cutting words. But we are sorry always when we have spoken hastily. If we had taken a little time to think, we would not have made the sharp retort which has done so much harm.

There are other rash words besides those spoken in hot temper. There are persons who never wait to hear all of a story before they express an opinion. Their judgments are only half formed, for they wait for but half the information they need to form a fair opinion. They jump to a conclusion when they have only a part of the facts before them. As a

consequence, they are often wrong, and not infrequently do serious injustice to others whom they condemn on only one-sided evidence. We have no right to form an opinion in which the character or interest of another is concerned, until we have gone patiently and conscientiously over all the facts, so as to be able to judge fairly. Hastily formed judgments of others are most likely to be unjust judgments.

There are those also who make rash decisions, and enter into rash engagements. They are carried off by their emotions, and in their excitement give promises which afterward they find themselves unable to keep. Failures in business and losses of money result oftentimes from rash investing; men are deceived by illusory prospects, and rush into schemes which prove unprofitable. Many persons make like mistakes in choosing friends. Young men are charmed by a pretty face or a pleasant manner, and fall in love only to find by and by what silly fools they were. A great many broken engagements and many unhappy marriages

would have been averted if there had been more deliberation at the beginning.

Many persons have a reputation for not regarding their promises. Those who know them put but little dependence upon their word, for it is broken as frequently as it is kept. Sometimes the trouble lies in a lack of conscience on the subject, — men seem never to think that it is wrong to break a promise, to fail in an engagement, or to disregard a pledge. Sometimes, however, it is because they make promises rashly, not considering whether they can keep them or not. A truly honorable man never breaks his lightest word, but he never gives his word without having first thought of the matter carefully.

Even in religion, Jesus teaches that men should count the cost before they make their decision, — not that there can be any doubt regarding their duty, but because great harm results from beginning to follow Christ, and then giving up and turning back. It is better not to vow, than to vow and not pay. It is better not to profess to follow Christ, than,

having made the profession, to fail in keeping it, and to go back again into the world.

Thus in many different departments of life mischief is wrought by rashness. People do not take time to think ; and then they do foolish and reckless things which bring them into trouble, and do incalculable harm to others. We should train ourselves to greater deliberateness in speech and act. We should get such mastery over ourselves that our tongue shall never betray us by any unadvised word, and that neither appetite nor passion shall ever lead us to do anything we shall be sorry afterward for doing.

It is a safe rule to do nothing in excitement. If one speaks sharply or bitterly to us, we would better not give any rejoinder for some hours, until there has been time for the bitterness to pass away. If we receive a letter which contains something that hurts us, we would better lay it aside, not answering it at once. Then, after we have written our reply, it would be well if we laid that away at least over night, and read it again before sending it. When

young people begin to fancy that they are in love, they would better place a firm hand on their feelings, and put a bridle on their tongue, waiting a reasonable time before they make any declaration or confession. Nothing will suffer by delay, and perhaps there will be one less folly committed if time is taken to think over the matter before saying anything.

If some new project is proposed, with its glowing visions of success and wealth, and young men are tempted to embark at once in the splendid enterprise, perhaps putting all their money into it, they would better wait. They would better be sure that it is not a mere bubble which will burst to-morrow. "Nothing ventured, nothing won," may be a wise enough maxim in some lines; but often it is a very foolish motto. At least, before the venture is made, it should be known, of a reasonable certainty, that the project is not a mere visionary one, nor a fraudulent scheme to get the money of credulous investors.

We may well write the town clerk's bit of sage counsel down among our maxims for self-

government. We shall never be sorry afterward for thinking twice before we speak, for counting the cost before entering upon any new course, for sleeping over stings and injuries before saying or doing anything in answer, or for carefully considering any business scheme presented to us before putting money or name into it. It will save us from much regret, loss, and sorrow, always to remember to do nothing rashly.

"My mind was ruffled with small cares to-day,
And I said pettish words, and did not keep
Long-suffering patience well, and now how deep
My trouble for this sin! In vain I weep
For foolish words I never can unsay."

CHAPTER XXI.

TALKING OF ONE'S AILMENTS.

“Thy trouble, loss, or greatest grief,
May in thy darkest day
Fill black despair with no relief,
Find in the gloom no ray ;
But struggle on, be brave and strong,
And to the front look forth ;
This world is not completely wrong —
Press on and test thy worth.”

SOME persons seem to enjoy being miserable. At least, they make far more of life's discomforts than of its pleasant things. They say very little about their mercies, but a great deal about their miseries. When you meet them some bright morning, and ask, “How are you to-day ?” you will have to listen to a long recital of personal ills ; and you will escape well if you are not favored also with a dismal catalogue of the distresses and sufferings of all the members of your friend's family.

You learn by and by, if you are a busy person, not to make inquiries which will lead to such extended confessions of wretchedness.

These people seem to think there is some sort of merit in having ailments or afflictions to speak of to others. It appears to them to be an altogether undesirable and unworthy state to be in, when they can say they are very well, with nothing to complain of. They appear to be happy only when something is wrong with them, so that they can make appeal to the sympathy of their friends.

What is the real secret of the commonness, the almost universality, of this habit of mind? For it must be confessed that there are comparatively few persons with whom one meets who are not addicted to this unwholesome way of talking about their ills and ailments, real or imaginary. What is the motive for it? Why does it appear to give so much pleasure? Is it prompted by an unhealthy craving for sympathy? One who is always well, and who never complains, is not commiserated. Nobody says, "How pale you look!

I am very sorry you are such a sufferer ;” and many persons seem to find great comfort in being pitied in this way. They would rather have others speak to them of their ailments than of their fine health.

But the best that can be said about such a craving is that it is miserably unwholesome. It is exaggerated selfishness, too, which takes delight in burdening others with the recital of all one’s little bodily pains or discomforts — how many hours one lay awake last night ; what a hard cough one has, how one’s head ached all the morning, how one suffers from rheumatism or neuralgia, how one’s digestion has been bad for a week, and the endless catalogue of ills to which flesh is heir. Suppose you had a restless night, or did cough for hours, or were nervous ; or suppose you have pains in your back, or in your head, or have a heavy cold, — why must you go over all the details of your wretchedness in talking with any one you can get to listen to the recital ? What good comes of speaking about these unpleasant things ?

The fact is, that people do not like to hear such unwholesome complaining unless they are given to the same morbid habit themselves, and can get you to listen sympathetically to their story, which they will probably try to make more touching than yours. There really is no virtue in being miserable; it is far better to be well and strong. Then, even if one has actual infirmities, aches, or disorders of any kind, one has no right to display them before others; one would far better endure the discomfort silently, and be sweet, brave, and cheerful in the presence of one's friends and neighbors.

It is immeasurably better to talk about the ten thousand comforts, blessings, and pleasures of one's life, than about the few pains and miseries. It is better for one's self; for we are building character out of our habits, and we would better build into our life the gold and silver and precious stones of good cheer, than the wood, hay, and stubble of miserable morbidity. It is better, too, for the world; for it has real troubles enough of its

own, and needs far more our songs than our sorrows.

A writer gives this incident, which is in the line of what has been written: The principal of a girls' school once administered an effective rebuke to a pupil who was always complaining of her ailments. This student came to school one morning whining about a "dreadful cold." The teacher said cheerfully, "Oh, I'm so glad you have one!" Naturally the girl was astonished; but the wise woman continued, "Why shouldn't I be glad? You are always doing something to make yourself ill; so of course you must enjoy it, and I am happy to have you pleased."

This stinging sarcasm opened the girl's eyes to the knowledge that she herself was responsible, to a large extent, for her own bodily conditions, and that it was a reflection upon her intelligence, as well as her conscience, thus to ignore the laws of her physical being. No sane person ever points with pride to the existence in himself of mental defects arising from neglect of intellectual culture. Yet it is noth-

ing uncommon for one to pose as an object of sympathy when ill, from failure to exercise common sense in matters of simple hygiene. Moreover, it is an offence against good breeding to parade one's distempers before others.

Emerson says on this same subject: "If you have not slept, or if you have slept, or if you have a headache, or sciatica, or leprosy, or thunder-stroke, I beseech you, by all the angels, to hold your peace."

There is a better way—it is to seal one's lips resolutely upon all words of complaining about one's self, all talking about one's discomforts or ailments. Nobody is really interested in such recital, no one enjoys listening to it. Even those who patiently hear your lugubrious tale do so only out of amiable courtesy. Speak only of the bright and cheerful things in your life. Tell others of your thousand mercies, and not of your one or two miseries. Find the pleasant things, and talk of these, rather than of the painful things. You have no right to add to the world's disquietude by pouring out your story of woes, real or fancied. Give out

cheer and gladness instead, and breathe out song.

It was said of a beautiful Christian woman, beside her coffin, that wherever she went the air was sweeter after she had gone by. It is such an influence we should all seek to leave behind us wherever we go. To do this we must train ourselves to consume our own selfishness, to repress our discontents, to bear in silence the trials and sufferings of our life, to endure in sweet patience the things that are disagreeable and unpleasant, and to give out to others and to the world only sweetness and light, however keen our own pain or heavy our burden.

“By the cynic, the sad, the fallen,
Who had no strength for the strife,
The world's highway is cumbered to-day ;
They make up the item of life.
But the virtue that conquers passion,
And the sorrow that hides in a smile,
It is these that are worth the homage of earth ;
For we find them but once in a while.”

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CHILDREN.

In your hearts are the birds and the sunshine,
In your thoughts the brooklets flow,
But in mine is the wind of autumn
And the first fall of the snow.

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Come to me, O ye children,
And whisper in my ear
What the birds and the winds are singing
In your sunny atmosphere.

LONGFELLOW.

MANY sermons are preached and books written on the responsibility of parents for their children,—for their education and training, for their mental, moral, spiritual, and material outfitting for life. Parents are exhorted to live for their children. They are reminded that they may hurt their children's lives and mar their future, and by their unfaithfulness foredoom them to failure.

No doubt this phase of responsibility is very important. There is a lame man going about the streets these days, walking on crutches, — an old man now, who has always walked on crutches, and whose life has been one of pitiful suffering, and burdensomeness both to himself and others, because more than sixty years ago a mother stumbled with her baby in her arms. There are people, many of them, going through life maimed or hurt in some way, in body, mind, or spirit, through the stumbling or fault of their parents. Society is bearing the burdens continually of the wrongdoings, the crimes, the unfaithfulness, the neglect, the false teaching, of past generations. We have a share in making the success of the lives of those who will come after us. We may be the cause of the failure of our children. We may rob them of the goodly inheritance which we ought to transmit to them. We may blot their fair names by acts of shame which we commit, and foredoom them to reproach. We may give them a heritage of dishonor instead of a heritage of honor. Much may be said

of the responsibility of parents for the success and the blessing of their children.

But there is another responsibility,—that of children for their parents. Bible incident is always good framework, for it is more than illustration. The Lord said of Abraham, “Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.” That was God’s plan for Abraham’s life. Then the Lord told how this greatness should be achieved, how this universal blessing of the nations should come about: “For I have known him,”—that is, I have chosen him, called him, and blessed him,—“to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.”

Thus far it is Abraham’s part and responsibility that we see. He, himself, could not, personally, with his own life, touch all nations of future ages, to bless them; but he could command his children, and train them in the way of the Lord, and thus transmit through

them the blessing to all the nations of the future. If Abraham had failed in his part as a father, failed in his teaching, failed in his example, the fault would have been his, and his the responsibility for the failure of God's purpose of blessing for the nations.

There is something almost startling in the truth that God needs and depends upon our faithfulness in carrying on his work in this world, and in blessing, helping, and saving others. We say, "Surely God does not need me in doing anything he desires to have done. He is omnipotent, and can do whatsoever he pleases, and never need wait for me." That is true in a sense; certainly nothing is impossible to God. Yet in his work among men in this world God chooses to use human instruments. The old violin-maker said that God could not make man's best work without best men to help him, — could not make Stradivari's violins without Stradivari; and that if his hand should slack he would rob God, leaving a blank where there should have been good violins. God needed and depended on

Abraham's faithfulness in the training of his household, in order to send a blessing to the nations. Had Abraham failed, there would have been a blank instead of a blessing, and the responsibility would have been his.

But the responsibility did not end with Abraham. He should train his children to do justice and judgment, "to the end that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he had spoken of him." That is, in order that the promised blessings might be realized, Abraham's children and descendants must keep the way of the Lord. They were responsible for the final success of their father's life. After all his faithfulness the good work of Abraham would come to nothing unless they kept the way of the Lord, living out his teachings. Each generation in turn would be responsible for guarding and passing on the heritage of promise and blessing received from its predecessors. The reach of Abraham's covenant was to remotest ages. A break in fidelity anywhere along the centuries would be a marring of the covenant blessing. The

divine purpose could be fulfilled only by unbroken faithfulness through the generations. Abraham's children were responsible for the final and complete carrying out of their father's mission in the world.

The same is true in every household. The legacy which a parent transmits to a child is a legacy of unfinished work. It is something to guard, to use, to augment, to pass on to the next generation. It is not merely something to live upon, to enjoy, to consume, to do with as we will; it is a sacred trust, to impair which would be a sin, a wrong to the honor of him who gave it in charge, and to those for whom it is to be kept. Many a child wrecks and destroys all the good that in a long lifetime a godly parent has wrought in the world. A man by industry, diligence, economy, and honesty gathers a fortune. Every dollar of it represents toil and self-denial. At his death it passes into the hands of his children. They are responsible for the continuance of the good life, the thrift, and the prosperity of their father. He only began a career which it is

theirs to carry forward into still larger success. The money which comes into their hands is not theirs to use in any selfish way; it is a sacred trust for which they are responsible.

A man by true living wins for himself a name of honor among men. His conduct is exemplary. He conducts his business affairs on principles of truth, integrity, and uprightness. He is broad-minded and liberal. His hand dispenses kindness and charity. He becomes a blessing to a whole community. His influence reaches far, and the fragrance of his good name breathes everywhere. Then his work ends, and he goes away, leaving his goodly heritage of honor to his children. They are responsible for the perpetuation of the life which he has begun. He has started blessings in the world which it is theirs to continue. They cannot, without disloyalty to their father, lower the tone of the noble living which marked his course. They cannot, without dishonoring him, deviate from the lofty principles which characterized his career. The heritage of his good name is theirs to preserve

unsullied. They are responsible for the continuance in the community of the good work and the wholesome influence which he started. If they fail to maintain in their own life the beauty, the truth, the worth, the purity, the unselfishness, and the usefulness of their father, they are not true to the sacred trust which he has committed to them.

The lesson has wide application. Children hold the inheritance they receive from their father to be guarded and then transmitted. They should make their life worthy of him, so that, if he were to come back any day to the old walks, they would not be ashamed to meet him. They are builders on the walls whose foundation he laid in sacrifice and toil; and they must build reverently and with conscientious care, that the work he began may not be marred, but may be carried upward in graceful beauty.

It is an interesting thought that in God's great plan each one of us has but his own little portion to do. No one finishes anything. Work comes unfinished into our hands from

those who have gone before us. They did their part on it, and we in turn are to do our part, and then give way to others who will do their fragment. If we fail in diligence or in faithfulness we mar the work of God, and leave a blank where our part should have been done. This truth shows us how serious life is, and what a blemish unfit work leaves in God's universe. If, however, we are true to our duty, conscientious, doing always our best, doing that which is given to us to do, we shall assure the success of those who have gone before us, and shall receive the reward of those who are faithful.

“Man's life is but a working day,
Whose tasks are set aright :
A time to work, a time to pray,
And then a quiet night ;
And then—please God!—a quiet night,
Where palms are green and robes are white ;
A long-drawn breath, a balm for sorrow,
And all things lovely on the morrow.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE METHOD OF GRACE.

God lays a little on us every day,
And never, I believe, on all the way
Will burdens bear so deep,
Or pathways lie so threatening and so steep,
But we can go, if by God's power
We only bear the burden of the hour.

GEORGE KLINGLE.

THERE is a phrase in one of the Gospels, referring to Christ, which is very suggestive. The whole verse reads: "Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." The words "grace for grace" are very suggestive. They describe the manner in which the divine fulness is given out. The meaning is, grace instead of grace, one grace coming in the place of another when the first has done its work.

One suggestion is that even grace has its day, and dies. The blessing of one grace is

exhausted, and has to be replaced by the blessing of another. The days are full of transient graces, tender, beautiful, enriching, but passing with the day. We cannot keep them to give us cheer, comfort, or help, on other days. You cannot feed to-day on yesterday's bread; it was consumed in imparting its nutriment. Yesterday's fire will not warm your house to-day; its warmth was exhausted in giving out the heat which then made so much comfort for you. The light from your lamp which filled your room with cheer last night will not give you brightness again to-night.

In spiritual things, too, it is not otherwise. You kneel in your morning prayer, and as you commune with God there flow into your soul rich blessings of strength and peace. You come from your closet with a holy light on your face, and a new secret of gladness in your heart. All the day the strength of that communing will be with you. But you cannot go another day on that same strength. It did its work, and passed away.

The lesson of "grace for grace," however,

is that one grace is given instead of another. We cannot live to-day on the strength of yesterday's food, — each day has a portion of its own. Yesterday's sunshine will not light the earth to-day, but there is other sunshine ready each new morning. When you were in sorrow a while ago, God came to you and comforted you in wonderful ways — through his promises, or through a human friend who brought you blessing, or through a book whose words were like a heavenly lamp pouring its light upon your darkness. When a new sorrow comes, that old comfort cannot be used again; but you will have other comfort for your new sorrow, comfort in place of the comfort which is past. No grace received from God is ever the last. The time will never come to any child of God when a grace will fade out, and no other one be ready to take its place.

It is not the same grace that is given always, regardless of the person's need, — the same to the little child and to the old man; the same to the mother nursing her baby, and the mother sitting beside her baby's coffin.

“As thy days, so shall thy strength be,” runs the old promise, — not the same degree of strength for the day of gladness and the day of sadness, but strength suited to the particular day’s experience. The boy in school needs grace to help him to be true, brave, and manly; but he does not need the same grace that he will need when, a little later, as a man, he stands amid life’s battles, facing grave responsibilities and carrying heavy burdens. The young girl in the summer of her joy needs grace that she may live beautifully and sweetly, keeping herself unspotted from the world, making wise choices, and growing into whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are pure; but she does not need just the same grace that she will require years hence, when her hands are full of hard tasks, when her thoughts are occupied with serious questions, or when her heart is breaking with sorrow.

It is the law of grace that it is given according to the hour’s need. It is not always the same, not the same to all persons, not the same to any two, not the same to any one person

two days in succession. It is given always according to the need of the moment. Grace is given to each person with wise discrimination, what is best for each at the time.

Life has hard points for every one. There are struggles which must be made. Not all battle-fields are marked on the world's maps; there are sore battles in human hearts. There are sorrows too; no life escapes them. There are sicknesses which call us aside from active duty, and bid us rest a while. For each of these changing experiences there is grace ready. The same grace in every instance would not do. The grace that will help you when you are strong and busy in life's active duties would not meet your need when you are shut up in a sick-room. Then it is the grace of patience you require instead of the grace of energy; and this God will give.

This also must be noted — that grace need not be expected out of season. One cause of much anxiety in good persons is the fear that they will not be able to meet certain experiences which they foresee, or imagine they

foresee. You, in the enjoyment of health, see a friend in sickness, who is wondrously patient, suffering quietly, even joyfully, with a heart full of song. You say, "I could not meet sickness as my friend does. I could not bear pain so patiently and sweetly. I could not sing if I were suffering so."

Of course you do not to-day have the particular grace your friend has. With the grace you are now receiving you might not be able to endure sickness patiently. Your present grace is grace for earnest, active life, for living sweetly amid trial and care, for doing well life's common duties. It would be a waste of divine grace for God to give you now strength to meet anguish or sorrow, when you have neither anguish nor sorrow to endure. If by and by God shall lead you into a chamber of suffering, then you may expect grace to meet the new experiences.

A mother reads the story of some other mother whose little child was taken up to God. This mother in her great sorrow did not rebel, but laid her darling in Christ's arms

just as sweetly as if she were only bringing it to him for his blessing. "I could not do that," says this mother of the happy, living child. "I have not grace enough to give up my child, even to Christ, as my friend gave up hers."

But why should she have this grace to-day, when her child is in health? Her duty for it now is not laying it in Christ's arms in death, and then going on, bereft and lonely, yet rejoicing, but rather training it for Christ; and for this duty of Christian motherhood she will receive the needed grace if she seeks it. Then if, some painful day, God asks her to let her child be taken away to heaven, she will receive grace to give it up to him, and to walk on in sweet faith without its companionship.

There can be no blessing in such foreboding anxiety. Nothing good can come of it. It will not prepare the heart for suffering, if it comes, to go forward now in fear and dread. No grace is promised either for imaginary or anticipated troubles. Our duty is to accept each day the actual experiences of the day,

and for these we shall always receive strength. Then if to-morrow brings new needs, it will bring with them new grace.

“What if to-morrow’s cares were here,
Without its rest?
Rather would I unlock the day,
And, as the hours swing open, say,
‘Thy will is best.’”

Many persons distress themselves because they do not have the consciousness of victory over death long before they meet death. They say they could not die in peace as this or that saint died. This perplexes them. They think they ought to be able to say the dying believer’s words of confidence now, just as if they were entering the valley. But it is not in this way that God gives grace. He gives what we need for the present hour. While we are well and strong, we require, not dying grace, but grace to live well—thoughtful love to make us gentle and kindly in life’s relations, strength to be faithful in duty and struggle; and this grace we shall receive, if we seek it.

We have no promise of dying grace while we are in the midst of healthful, active life. Of what use would such grace be to us then? It would not fit us for the work we have to do, and the battles we have to fight. Not submission, laying down our tasks, folding our arms, saying farewell to our friends—not these are our duties now, but courage, energy, loyal friendship, diligence in business, and faithfulness in witnessing. By and by, when our work is done, and our time to fall asleep has come, we shall receive dying grace in place of grace for living, and shall meet death without fear.

There is a word which warns us against receiving the grace of God in vain. We receive it in vain when we make nothing of it; when we allow it to die in our heart, and yield no strength; when we take God's comfort, and are not comforted by it; when we hear God's calls, and do not obey them; when we feel the strivings of the Spirit, and do not submit to them; when the still small voice whispers its divine inspirations in our soul, and we pay no

heed. We receive grace not in vain when it sinks into our heart, like the dew into the bosom of the thirsty rose, and revives our life; when we accept the divine consolations, and are comforted; when we take the strength of God into our life, and grow strong.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE OTHER DAYS.

“ Never a day is given
But it tones the after years,
And it carries up to heaven
Its sunshine or its tears ;
While the to-morrows stand and wait —
The silent mutes by the outer gate.”

ANYBODY can be a Christian on Sunday. It is not hard to have holy thoughts and heavenward aspirations and longings for communion with God, while we are amid devout worshippers whose hearts are all aflame with love for Christ. It is not hard to be sweet-tempered and to feel kindly and unselfish when we are sitting in the church, listening to a good sermon, joining in an inspiring hymn, or bowing in prayer. It ought not to be hard for us to be good amid the holy influences which belong to the holy day.

But it is the other days that test our life, the days which come between the Sundays. Then we have to go out among people, and people are not always good. Some of them are selfish, some are worldly, some antagonize us, some irritate us. It is not so easy to keep our heart gentle and our speech kindly in these experiences. We find the world's atmosphere different altogether from that of the church or that of the sheltered home.

Then, on the other days we have to bear many burdens which we lay off on Sunday. As soon as the Sabbath is over, we must take up again the task-work of the week-days. We must carry on our regular occupation, and sometimes the work is hard. Our tasks irk us. The routine wears us out. It is the same thing over and over again for six days, beginning every morning, toiling all day, coming home tired at night.

Then, sometimes the work does not succeed — we have many failures. We find also competition and rivalry. Other people contest every inch of the ground with us. If we are

in business, the competition is usually very sharp and keen. Sometimes we meet with meanness and dishonesty, too, in those who are our rivals. They are not always willing to apply the Golden Rule to their business methods. All this makes it hard for us to meet the life of the other days. It is not easy for us to keep cheerful in spirit, and to maintain gentle feelings, as we move through these trying experiences.

The other days also bring to us, to appeal to our human nature, forms of amusement and pleasure which do not usually tempt us on Sunday. Most of us are in a measure shut away from the world on the Lord's Day. Our Christian habits are our protection. We spend the day in religious services, and in duties of love which fill hand and heart. We scarcely think of the great world outside, with its throbbing life and its sin and sorrow. Our environment for the day is so kindly, so full of spiritual help, so friendly to devotion, so warm and congenial, as almost to make us forget that we are in a world where temptation

assails, where evil rules. But as we go out on Monday, we find ourselves suddenly in contact with all manner of worldly influences. The very atmosphere is antagonistic to spirituality. It is as if we had passed suddenly from a tropical summer into arctic winter. It is not easy to live the holy life of a Christian amid the scenes and experiences of the weekdays.

But a Christian must be a Christian all the days. It is not enough to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day — we must be in the Spirit on the other days too. We are to keep ourselves in the love of God all the week. Holiness does not consist merely in devout feelings toward God, and reverent worship in God's house. We are to be Christians in our school life, in our business, in our amusements, in our friendships. We are to carry out the principles of Christianity in our associations with the world. Our hands are God's, and can be used fitly only in doing God's work on any day. Our feet are God's, and may be employed only in walking in good ways, the ways of the

divine commandments, whether it be Sunday or Monday. Our lips are God's, and should speak only words that honor God, and do good, whether it be in religious conversation, or in the talk of the parlor or the place of business.

It is our week-day life, under the stress and strain of temptation, far more than our Sunday life, under the gentle warmth of favoring conditions, that really tests our religion. Not how well we sing and pray, nor how devoutly we worship in church; but how well we live out in the stress of affairs, how loyally we do God's will, how faithfully we carry out the principles of our religion in our conduct,—these are the things that tell what manner of Christians we are.

The influence of the Sabbath, like a precious perfume, should pervade all the days of the week. Its spirit of holiness and reverence should flow down into all the paths of the other days. Its voices of hope and joy should become inspirations in all our cares and toils in the outside world. Its teaching should be the guide of hand and foot in the midst of

all trial and temptation. Its words of comfort should be as lamps shining in the sick-room and in the chambers of sorrow. Its visions of spiritual beauty should be translated into reality in conduct, disposition, and character.

A well-spent Sabbath is an excellent preparation for a week amid cares and struggles. There is blessing in the Sabbath rest. We cannot go on forever; we must pause here and there to renew our strength.

“ Birds cannot always sing ;

 Silence at times they ask, to nurse spent feeling,
To see some new, bright thing,
 Ere a fresh burst of song, fresh joy revealing.

Flowers cannot always blow ;

 Some Sabbath rest they need of silent winter,
Ere from its sheath below
 Shoots up a small green blade, brown earth to splinter.

Tongues cannot always speak ;

 O God! in this loud world of noise and clatter,
Save us this once a week,
 To let the sown seed grow, not always scatter.”

True Sabbath rest, however, is not merely the cessation of all effort, the dropping of

all work. As far as possible we should seek to be freed from the common tasks of the other days. Happy is he who can leave behind him, on Saturday night, all his week-day affairs, to enjoy a Sabbath in heavenly places, as it were, engaged with thoughts and occupations altogether different from those of the busy week. This even alone gives rest.

As for the Sabbath itself, it should be a day for the uplifting of the whole life. A tourist among the Alps tells of climbing one of the mountains in a dense and dripping mist, until at length he passed through the clouds, and stood on a lofty peak in the clear sunlight. Beneath him lay the fog, like a waveless sea of white vapor; and, as he listened, he could hear the sounds of labor, the lowing of the cattle, and the peals of the village bells, coming up from the vales below. As he stood there, he saw a bird fly up out of the mists, soar about for a little while, and then dart down again and disappear. What those moments of sunshine were to the bird, coming up out of the cloud, the Sab-

bath should be to us. During week-days we live down in the low vales of life, amid the mists. Life is not easy for us; it is full of struggle and burden-bearing. The Sabbath comes; and we fly up out of the low climes of care, toil, and tears, and spend one day in the pure, sweet air of God's love and peace. There we have new visions of beauty. We get near to the heart of Christ, into the warmth of his love. We come into the goodly fellowship of Christian people, and get fresh inspiration from the contact.

Thus we are lifted up for one day out of the atmosphere of earthliness into a region of peace, calm, and quiet. We see all things more plainly in the unclouded sky; and we are prepared to begin another week with new views of duty, under the influence of fresh motives, and with our life fountains refilled. Thus the Sabbath rest prepares us for the work and the struggle of the other days. We learn new lessons, which we are to live out in the common experience of the life before us. We see the patterns of heavenly things as we

read our Bible, and bow before God in prayer; and we are to go down from the holy mount to weave the fashion of these patterns into the fabric of our character. We should be better, truer-souled, and richer-hearted all the week because of the Sabbath inspirations. We should carry the holy impressions, the sacred influences, in our heart as we go out into the world, singing the songs of heaven amid earth's clatter and noise. True Sabbath-keeping makes us ready for true week-day living.

“ There are, in this loud, stunning tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
Of th' everlasting chime —
Who carry music in their heart,
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.”

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