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**‘Random Truths in Common Things.’**

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"RANDOM TRUTHS IN COMMON THINGS."

OCCASIONAL PAPERS

FROM

MY STUDY CHAIR.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE HARVEST OF A QUIET EVE," ETC.



LONDON :

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY,

56, PATERNOSTER ROW ; 65, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD :

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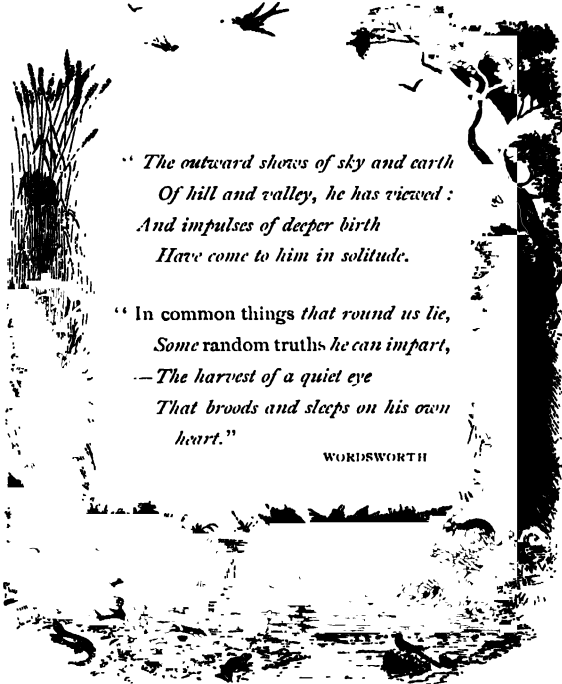
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BREAD STREET HILL



*“ The outward shows of sky and earth  
Of hill and valley, he has viewed :  
And impulses of deeper birth  
Have come to him in solitude.*

*“ In common things that round us lie,  
Some random truths he can impart,  
—The harvest of a quiet eye  
That broods and sleeps on his own  
heart.”*

WORDSWORTH





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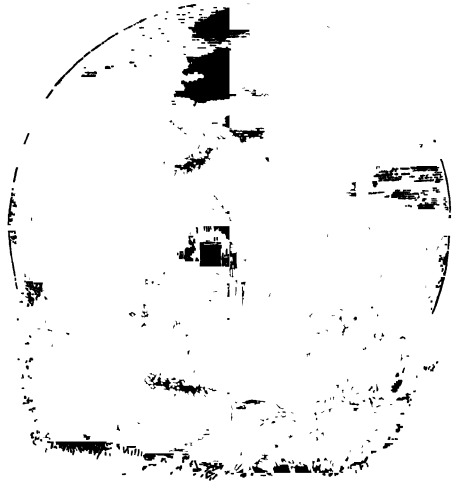
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INTRODUCTORY AND DESCRIPTIVE.





Y little white house stands in rather a bare slip of country, a mile from the sea. It has gathered to itself nearly all the few trees that are to be found within a mile or two, and has muffled itself up to the throat in a good thick, high, warm hedge. Chiefly sycamores the trees are, and Scotch firs. There is neither grandeur nor much beauty in the cottage or in its surroundings; but the place is snug and home-like. I remember, at least on one occasion, to have seen it look so pretty that I forthwith contemplated a sketch, only some more important business forbad. It was one of those quiet bright days in October (and that October was a sweet, warm, golden,



gleamy month): one of those mild still days that are among the most charming in the year: a golden day, steeped in a very faint mist, and softened by it. This mist, or, rather, perceptible air, lay, like the thinnest tissue-paper, athwart the hill that rose behind the little abode. Thus, against this background, the clean white house and the blue-green firs, and the gold-green sycamore boughs, came out with such vivid, fresh effect—such just-finished colouring, so to speak—that I could not but linger, and turn and turn again, instead of going steadily on in my parish round. The sparse leaves left on the sycamores caught the golden sunlight, and gleamed out against the dark rich ivy behind; a pale blue smoke wandered away into the air above. All was emphatically, almost obtrusively, still; a quiet, tender smile dwelt upon the scene, and yet, like that toning mist, a sadness very peaceful contended with the brightness; you could never have been at fault as to that calm, mist-hushed, golden October day—no, not if you could have forgotten that the merry young leaves, or the tranquil, deep foliage, were all curled up crisp and still and dead upon the white road, or under the hedge, or upon the lawn;—you could not, I say, even had you forgotten this, have ever for one moment mistaken the season, as you stood basking in the warmth, and soothed by the peace of that rare day. It could not possibly, for all its tenderness and beauty, have been one of the train of the child April, nor of the maiden May. October it must be: there was the peace of old age in its smile, and the calm of approaching rest in its glory. Hence its thoughtful stillness, hence its appearance of a tranquil waiting.

Well, I have dwelt somewhat long upon my sketch from memory, as, indeed, I did upon my contemplation. But this

has seemed to me an instance of how scenes, flat and even uninteresting to some eyes, or at some times, may appear at other times, and to observers of such vignette studies, exquisite little pictures. You may have noticed how Turner would not unseldom take some scene which most men would have passed by ; some simple, uninteresting, wayside bit ; and show you on canvas, what you could not, as he did, find out from nature,—that colour, light and shade, composition, all were, until the proper eye came, latent in the homely scene. For many a connoisseur of man's pictures passes most of God's quite unheeded.

“ For don't you mark, we're made so that we love  
First when we see them painted, things we have passed  
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see ?  
And so they are better, painted—better to us,  
Which is the same thing. Have you noticed now  
Your cullion's hanging face ? A bit of chalk,  
And trust me but you should, though ! ”

So Fra Lippo Lippi, the painter. But so long a prelude before I seat myself in my tittle, recalls to me the case of that ancient Puritan preacher who always preached an hour before he drew blood from the text. Let me get on to mine.

In this white cottage you may note a long window of the bow order, looking out upon a vivid green lawn, free at this season from the leaves which have been long since gleaned even to the last. This is the window of my study. The room, however, is hardly quite what might be your idea of a regular study. My books are all there, it is true, and in one corner is my special encampment—writing-table, desk, etc. But there is also in the room a piano, a sofa : generally a wife—sometimes a baby.

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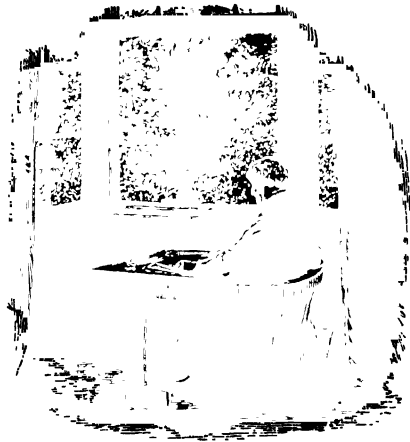
Just as a streak of poetry runs through the graver volumes on the shelves, so the social blends with the studious life in my room of usual habitation; now and then they may clash, but ordinarily they harmonize very well; and then the piano makes up for any little drawbacks: for, whether I be writing or reading, Handel and Mendelssohn always mightily assist me.

In this room, obviously, abides my study chair. *This* also partakes of the social and the studious element in shape, capabilities, and use. It is one of those accommodating chairs that enclose the back in a kind of stuffed horseshoe, and that are built to suit many purposes. It is admirable for my sitting at the desk to write, and its curve knows just the peculiar rest required by the spine, when I would lean back to think out some series of neatly-fitting thoughts, or to plane down the knots of some perplexity. It is also admirable for reading hours, being quite comfortable, but not provocative of sleep even in the half-hour of profoundest study; moreover I can, if it please me, face round to the fire, and rest my volume upon this or that arm of the horseshoe. Or in evening gatherings I can wheel it about, and find sufficient rest in back and arms to make it quite enough of an easy chair for aught that I require. And, as I shall show presently, it is suitable at such times, when it is wheeled away from the study table, for hearing music; for conversation; for musings alone, assisted by mechanical drumming on the arm. Thus much for its shape, which suits, you will perceive, alike purposes studious, social, meditative.

Its position next requires a few words. Those who see my drift will not be ungentle enough to accuse me of laborious trifling; for those who see it not, let them have patience with me till

they do. I would timidly remind them that the good and gentle-hearted Cowper sang of a sofa—and thought it not beneath him to trace up its being (preventing and forestalling the modern development theory) from the rocky ledge and the three-legged stool. I resume as to the position of my study chair.

Ordinarily, then, it is to be found, of course, in close connection with my study table. In this position I write and



study, and in this chair I indeed divine. For sitting here, and willing, and making certain movements of the legs and arms, I can call around me a noble gathering of the living and of the dead. Not only are the learned men of the present day bound to come at my beck, and give me their counsel and opinion in a case of difficulty; I stretch but an arm, and Butler, Waterland, Bacon, Pearson, obsequiously minister to

my requirements : yea, the great of yet older time cannot resist my spell ; about me in my chair stand Augustine, Chrysostom, Tertullian ; even Polycarp and Ignatius—men who played the martyr close upon the apostles' days. And further still, and yet more than this—not to let my conceit forget reverence—the mighty St. Paul and the divine St. John do not disdain, at my request, to confer with me here ; and I listen ; at will, to those trumpet-tones of zeal, or that harp-music of love. Yes, we call all these *Books* with which I am conversing in my study chair, and which lie in a half-circle on the table before me. But they are the undying, everlasting voices of the great and mighty dead, the wise and the good, who, being dead, are not speechless. And this page is but a paraphrase of Southey :

“ My days among the dead are passed ;  
 Around me I behold,  
 Where'er these casual eyes are cast,  
 The mighty minds of old :  
 My never-failing friends are they,  
 With whom I converse night and day.”

In this position, also, will my study chair be found during my hours of writing—whether sermons, essays, or letters. Yes :—and to take the first-named of these for one passing word, well may I lean back in my chair, almost overwhelmed with the hugeness of my undertaking, ere I pen the words which are the messages of God to man. An Ambassador from the land of Eternity to the dwellers in time ; a herald from God reconciled through Christ to a people many of whom are still in rebellion, sullen or careless : there they will sit, silent, attentive, to listen to me,—nay, rather, I pray, to my Master speaking through my

lips. Words, even words, have, before this, by God's might and mercy, moved hearts—words spoken by an instrument as weak even as I. Solemn thought! Awful thought—thought whose rapture is overcome by its awe! What words shall I set down? How shall I, knowing the terror of the Lord,



persuade men? Expectant they will sit, waiting for a word from God. Upon my knees let me first seek it, and then dispense what I shall but have received.

“ I speak as one who ne'er may speak again,  
And as a dying man to dying men.”

Recalling this grave saying of one of old, let me steady my mind before I dare to pen a word. Ah, that our hearers, and yet more, ah, that ourselves, would thus think always of this, often lightly-held, often, alas! lightly-used, part of the service of God!



But I am musing in my study chair, when I did but set out to describe it. Let me see. I was at my study table, and having shown how my chair aids and abets me in my reading and in my meditation there, I was about just further to hint at another branch of work at which in this position it assists ; and this is, the writing element of my working hours.

Yes, here, through many hours in the week I sit, consigning to paper, thoughts not fully grasped, in words inadequate : penning letters, sermons, essays. Sometimes I am in the humour, and then the pen flies fast, and the words seem to fit the thought, and sentences are born mature, and quickly,—too quickly,—completed page is laid upon completed page beside me. Then how often, having written thus in a glow, when I come, next morning, to read without the glow, how disappointed I find myself with what I had found it so easy, yea, delightful, to write ! But sometimes the chariot-wheels drag heavily, and the right word evades the long search, and the sentences want hammering out, and the whole production seems, as I write it, bald, dull, inadequate. Now, not seldom when I come to examine, after an interval, the product of such hard and toilsome work, it contents more, or discontents less, than the glib offspring of the runaway pen. I suppose that the effervescence may deceive, and that when this has died down you may best test the beverage. Nor is this only the case in writing. In my painting days I have found it so : namely, that the quick and pleasurable work disappointed the after-inspection ; the toilsome, unsatisfying labour would sometimes pleasingly surprise on the next day. And, since I have run off on this loop-line of thought, let me

apply it to religious experience. Which may be the more pleasing to God, our easy and enjoyed services, or those more difficult, and (we sadly feel) not so dear to us as they should be, and yet, nevertheless, but the more earnestly persisted in? At which time has God seen most real progress? when we seem to skim the ground, as though winged; or when, with stern and agonized determination, we set weary foot after weary foot, toiling upwards with sweat and groaning? Here are some verses in harmony with this train of thought:

“ Prune thou thy words, the thoughts control  
That o'er thee swell and throng;  
They will condense within thy soul,  
And change to purpose strong.

“ But he who lets his feelings run  
In soft luxurious flow,  
Shrinks when hard service must be done,  
And faints at every woe.

“ Faith's meanest deed more favour bears,  
Where hearts and wills are weighed,  
Than brightest transports, choicest prayers,  
Which bloom their hour and fade.”

But I recall that I have before dwelt on this truth, and, ceasing this digression, I curve back to the main line.

I write, then, in divers moods, in this study chair of which I treat. Also, at divers times and with divers surroundings. Now the steady rain streams down the panes, and makes its close deep rush all about the house, and shuts me in from fear of visitors, and from calls (unless it were a special call) of out-

door duty ; and so I write on with the sense of owning a wide, roomy day in which to think and to write. Now an article or a sermon presses—and so also do other things ; and I am fain to write in what gleams and snatches of leisure I can beg, borrow, or steal. Now I have the distracting beauty of a June afternoon smiling and beckoning to me through the open window. Now I am looking out too, too often upon that spotless snow-lawn (kept so perfectly smooth), and the blue network of branch-shadows upon it, and find myself hungering to wheel round to the dancing fire, and to draw the lithe paper-knife through the delicious new leaves of some long-desired and at-last-attained volume :—but that, I know, the writing must be done. Sometimes the family orisons have been offered, and the door has closed on me : the various sounds of boots thrown out and of turning locks have died into stillness : and I sit alone with my thoughts, that march devastatingly upon the paper's whiteness : and I hear the single "ting" at the half-hours, and the beats, at first increasing, but soon reduced as one day dies and another is born. Sometimes I am well, and up to my work ; sometimes weary, and worn, and quite below the mark. At these times it seems sad to have to address the small congregation of my church, or the larger and vast gathering to whom I speak through the pages of the magazine. But perhaps God, who needs no instrument, though He be pleased ordinarily to work by them, may be then most blessing our labour when He is most humbling us in it : He may be making it most sufficient when He is most dismaying us with a sense of its insufficiency. Not the burst of eloquence, but the halting word, was that perhaps which was guided home

to some heart, and left an effect there that did not die when the voice ceased.

My study chair has stood for a long while now at my desk. It has, however, other positions. It can, as I have hinted, be drawn to the fire, or wheeled into the sunny window for half-hours of lighter recreative study; of grave talk, or social chat, or genial conversation. In these positions this piece of furniture can sink and forget its more pedantic hours, and adapt itself to most requirements. You shall see the children scale it to beg a story of its occupant; you shall see the wife sitting upon the rug at its feet, and resting her soft face upon that happy occupant's hand. Or she is at the piano, and in a gracious, granting mood; and, like a schoolboy taken by some large-hearted friend into a confectioner's shop, it is but choose and have, one delicacy after another: songs without words, and some of the most loved twice over; sonatas, fugues;—Bach,—Beethoven,—Mendelssohn,—Handel: and now and then, like a daisy among the mountains, its simplicity not to be despised amid their grandeur, some simple ancient Scotch or Irish song.

At such times, and at others, the chair is good for day-dreaming, and for that calling up of old times and of old friends which, if melancholy, gives yet such a tender pleasure; those reminiscences which are not unuseful nor unwholesome, but which serve, indeed, to keep the heart gentle and not trampled into hardness by even the long traffic of accumulating years, and which thus make it kindly and sympathetic with the juniors, and mindful that it also once was young.

I dare say Longfellow sits in just such a chair when—

“ Ere the evening lamps are lighted,  
And, like phantoms grim and tall,  
Shadows from the fitful firelight  
Dance upon the parlour wall ;

“ Then the forms of the departed  
Enter at the open door ;  
The belovèd, the true-hearted,  
Come to visit me once more.”

And these departed dear ones, no doubt, would be both persons and feelings.

My study chair! You may see, then, unknown friend whom I am addressing therefrom, why I at first thought it a thing not unsuitable to send out a series of divers and diverse papers under such a name and title; and now, in an extended series, think it not ill to retain the title, at least partly. “The Writing Desk” would have been too narrow a heading, suggesting but half the process—the hatching, not the sitting upon the eggs. “My Study Table” would have covered only the graver and heavier work, the stiff reading and thought, however it might take in the writing too. It could not be wheeled about as my study chair can; nor would its patronage have nearly so well suited the requirements of a vagabond writer of essays, a roamer “from grave to gay, from lively to severe.” You would not, you see, have had the element of lighter study and meditation; and the flash and kindling of conversational interchange of thought would have been quite shut out. My chair, now, has been shown to be extremely

adaptable. I did not mention, by the way, another peculiar advantage possessed by it, namely, that, like some chair I remember to have read of in a fairy tale, it can waft its occupant far away beyond the study or its precincts: if need be, far away beyond the seas. You see, therefore, how uncircumscribed I am in it.

I purpose using the vantage ground, then, of my chair for a series of musings upon many things, and in divers places; in it I shall meditate and collect materials, and in it I shall set down in black and white the result of my meditations. Essays upon many subjects: hints grave but not sombre: disquisitions thoughtful rather than profound: fireside and summer-window metaphysics. You will detect in them the different constituent parts which I have brought before you. There will, doubtless, be a flavour of the sermon through all: there will be found thoughts suggested by other writers, ancient and modern, or quoted from them: there will be set down the result of conversational interchange with various minds. I shall look out from the warm bow-window at the dear and lovely works and creatures of God; I shall draw my chair to the fireside for quiet and peaceful meditation and reminiscence, and even for an occasional reverie and dream of poetry, when, at the spell of music, the heart wonders, amid its leaves that are thinning and reddening to the fall, to see, smiling from the autumn-smitten branches, a frail bunch of white spring blossom again. The sweet young faces of the children that look so earnestly into mine will certainly bring some subjects connected with them into the page; and the soft cheek upon my knee will give to the gravest thought a tender domestic atmosphere.

I have been musing and writing at this time in a mood which you may call light, but which you shall not stigmatise as frivolous. God does not mean us always to be sombre, least of all upon Sunday,\* the glad Feast of the Resurrection—a day whose atmosphere throughout should be one of quiet unworldly joy. Let not boisterous merriment disturb the calm; let hearty worship, and kindly intercourse, and refreshing rest—rest of tired mind from its dragging brood of week-day anxieties, rest of tired body from the round of week-day toil; let this be the employment, this the tone, of the hallowed day. Religion, not in every word, act, look, obtruded with painful effort, but present in the heart, should pervade the day, its rest, its reading, its conversation. That sun should shine out full in the hours of worship, and all the hours should be lit with a glow as of the sun behind a cloud: a glow surely that would be cheerful, gladdening, glorifying, and no whit dull, mournful, sombre. The common hues and colours of week-day life—the greens, the greys, the russets, the orange, the brown, should have been transfigured with the glory of that glow, until the lawn, the pine stems, the church, the lichened wall, should be now gold-green, gold-brown, gold-grey,—russet,—orange. Oh, never represent Sunday, at any rate to the young, as a dull and gloomy day: nor dream that a heart devoted to the kind God need aljure all that is genial and joyous, or that a subdued, spirit-broken step is necessary to the child who has chosen to walk beside that tender Father, holding by His hand. Let us look at God's mind, revealed to us in His works; and is it all sadness, even always all seriousness, there?

\* Many of the papers in this series appeared originally in *The Sunday at*

Is there—I speak with reverence—no playful element to be found in these embodied thoughts of the Creator? Nay, look at that field of racing lambs : watch those two kittens at graceful play, or the three puppies at ungainly, preposterous antics :



remember, also, that that faculty of smiling, yea, of hearty laughter, came to you from God's hand ; and learn that sorrow and sadness are not our normal state—are an accident of our fallen condition : that the anguishes and agonies, the desolations and despairs in the world, ay, even that best modification of them, the broken and contrite heart, the sighs of penitence, the tears of contrition ; that these all belong to sin, and are its shadow, which will pass away when the substance is removed. But that all that is glad, and sweet, and joyous, ay, redolent



with fulness of joy, is of God, and belongs to Him, and shall outlive, yea, with everlasting life, all sadness and sorrow, as the sun still shines when the mists that it scattered are seen no more. And lo, even as I write there falls on my ear a great voice out of heaven—a voice beneath which my weak lisping must be hushed: a voice saying—

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God.

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.

“And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, Write; for these words are true and faithful.”

What soul-resting words! How can any, in this world of tears, and death, and sorrow, and crying, and pain, afford to do without the sweet hope, the calm assurance they bring, lying, as in the ancient myth, at the bottom of the throng of woes? It is so exactly what we all must so often want, a comfortable plaister just fitting every place in which the old racking pain breaks out from time to time, and lulling those intolerable spasms and shoots into only a wholesome dulled aching by its peace-giving power,—that, I say, it seems strange indeed, and only yet more sad than strange, that you, my friend, who might have it, are content to forego it. Trying every drug, every nostrum, every poison: wasting all your living these many years on physicians under whom you can be nothing bettered, but rather grow worse, instead of persistently, perseveringly, spite of all obstacles and every crowd, whether of men or devils, coming to Him the very touch of

whose garments can make you whole. For in Christ Jesus, and through Him alone, may be had the possession of peace here and the promise of glory hereafter.

Well, I could not help giving you this taste or sample of my quiet thoughts and dreamy musings in my chair.\* Naturally, and of course, and with no sense of bondage from the necessity imposed on me from the fact of my writings having for their destiny a Sunday magazine :

“In this I find not bonds, but wings:”

a Sunday sun will, I hope, pervade these essays, a sun such as that I have described: sometimes fully and unmaskedly shining out, sometimes only, from behind a cloud, mellowing all with a pervading hallowing glow.

Thus my string of Essays will be, though not bilious, yet religious in tone: and though they will not necessarily shun every week-day topic or illustration, yet they will, I hope, be found suitable for Sunday reading. As I lean back upon my chair collecting materials, the distant ring of Sabbath bells will steal into my ear from the quiet church across the water. I shall not always be *conscious* of the sound, but it will always exercise a tender, hallowing influence on the tone of my thought. To borrow and alter an illustration of Whately's: False religion, at least imperfect religion, is like moonlight: you are principally occupied in regarding the light itself. But in true and complete religion, as in sunlight, although you are contemplating the many objects which surround you, they are

\* See note, p. 16.

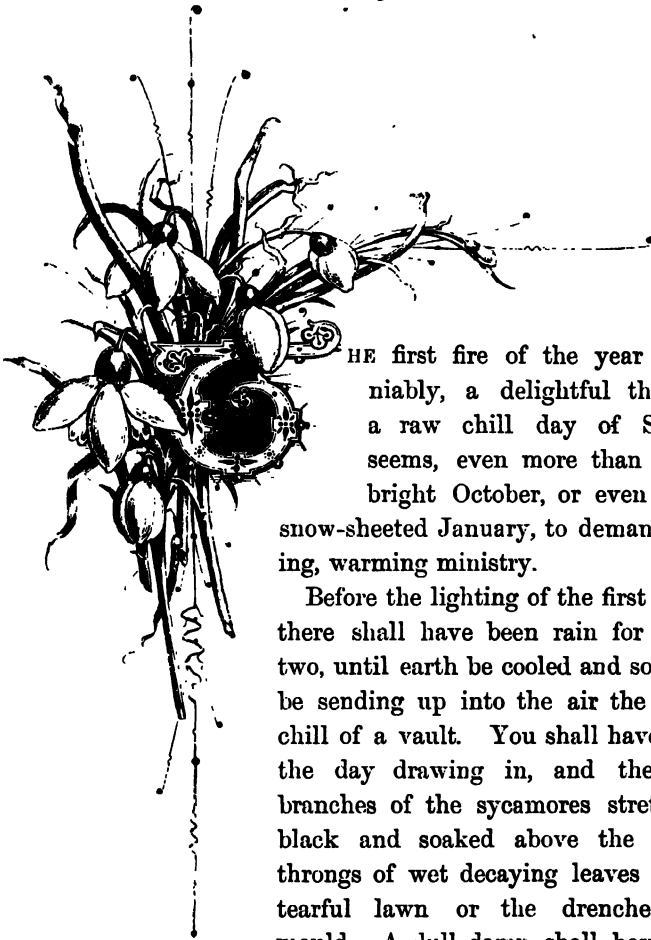
all beheld and revealed to you bathed in the glory of the sun. I end with Tennyson's description of circling and seemingly wandering thought and talk, which yet kept never far from the one chief purpose and aim, and alit thereon at last :

“ We listened : with the time we played ;  
We spoke of other things ; *we coursed about*  
*The subject most at heart*, more near and near,  
Like doves about a dovecote, wheeling round  
The central wish, until we settled there.”



FIRESIDE MUSINGS.





THE first fire of the year is, undeniably, a delightful thing. For a raw chill day of September seems, even more than the clear bright October, or even the dim, snow-sheeted January, to demand its drying, warming ministry.

Before the lighting of the first fire, then, there shall have been rain for a day or two, until earth be cooled and sodden, and be sending up into the air the shivering chill of a vault. You shall have watched the day drawing in, and the thinned branches of the sycamores stretched out black and soaked above the gathering throngs of wet decaying leaves upon the tearful lawn or the drenched brown mould. A dull damp shall have blurred the landscape, and breathed on the window-panes; a cheerless influence shall seem to settle down upon the earth with the falling

day; neither yourself nor your wife shall have donned the winter garb; a cold creeping, that is not yet a fully developed shiver, shall lurk about the back and legs;—then it is that a scarce-shaped thought dawns in either mind; in one or the other it attains perfection, and at last takes the form of the magic words, “*Don't you think a bit of fire would be comfortable?*” No sooner said than done; the match is struck, the lower paper kindled: a spire of yellow smoke passes into a curl of hesitation between the damp chimney and the room; a bunch of clasping knuckles of flame clutches at it, and assists its decision; there are crackles, and spits, and hissing sticks, and tumbling coals; triumphant towering flames at last, and an ever-growing red glow; and so, radiance for gloom, warmth for chilliness, comfort for undeveloped misery.

What a wretched system is that which would doom the starved frame to shiver on through damp, clammy days, fireless, when most of all a fire is desirable, because, forsooth, some particular day on which fires are supposed to begin has not yet arrived. I believe that such barbarian conduct is now rather a relic of a former generation. For myself, I like no ornament for the grate, even in Summer, so well as that of a laid fire; then, if it be cold, though the month be July or August,—quick, a match; and that cheery look which it is always in our power to call up, laughs from the grate, and gleams from the piano, and glimmers upon the wall.

It is January, at this time, however, let us suppose; and not September, far less June or July; there is no need now for doubt as to fires, nor do ourselves watch the process of their lighting. No, in the morning, while we are glowing in our bath, the







match has done its work; and a brave, solid core of heat, crowned, perhaps, with a hissing log, greets you, as you come down stairs with red fingers and blue nose (an additional argument for the man-monkey theory), and survey, with deep satisfaction, the genial amber-atmosphered room, so warm a contrast to the blue-shadowed snow that lies motionless under the cold evergreens outside, or to the interchanging flakes that course down against the dun, dark sky. And though it is eight o'clock in the morning, it is scarce daylight yet, and the snowy tablecloth has its shadow side towards the window, and its draping that faces the fire is a blaze of rosy light, and there are orange glints catching the silver here and there upon the table; and the comfort and warmth, contrasted with the cheerlessness and cold, stir your heart to greater fervour as the servants file in, and the "most living word of life," and the acceptable incense of prayer and praise, begin the household day.

Fireside musings. It will never do to begin them, however, at breakfast time. Busy men must out into the air, and exhale clouds of steaming, freezing breath; and huddle in omnibuses, or sit in railway carriages, or one way or another fare forth to their work or to their labour till the evening. And women,—they have their household work to do, and must bustle about busily here and there, and leave the fire to glow and gleam at its own warm will. At least it is better so. I pity those,—especially if they have a sorrow for sole company,—who can sit down at once beside the fire, with folded hands, and no business that should press upon them its imperious demands. Better and wholesomer to be obliged to earn your living by breaking

stones, or by taking in washing, than to be able and willing to nurse grief and foster it until it becomes a great shadow between yourself and all the kindly light which God has still left for you in His world.

And so fireside musings must not begin early in the day. Nor, to be musings, must they take place in company; at least, not if happy musings. For one may be lonely enough when with others, but the musings of such times are anything but pleasurable. And, just now, I want to deal with pleasant musings.

How beautiful a passage is that of Archbishop Leighton's, in which he compares the quiet and peace of the heart that is at one with God to the safe sitting within doors, and listening to the winter sounds without. Sitting by the fireside it is, as it were, in warmth and cheerfulness, while distress and anxieties, which might have chilled us to the bone, are but as hail rattling upon the tiles. Many a one is out in the storm, many a one has no home to go to, away from the shrieking, blustering wind, and the angry, driving hail, and the soaking sleet; many a one chose the world's warm streets in the Summer, and neglected to provide a fireside for the times when the skies should change. But he who has "loved God in his youth, and feared Him in his age," although he live to see that this world is made up of perturbations, yet ever has a quiet sphere of light and warmth to which to retire; and then, while he is there, these perturbations do indeed beat without with a muffled and dulled clatter, and never penetrate within. Nay, in one sense, it is an addition to the joy of that impregnable peace, to hear the noisy siege of those eager earth-troubles shut out now for a season, and serving but by their impotent beating to enhance

the value of that kindly warmth and glow. Ah, musing thus by the January fire, shall not our hearts yearn, and our prayerful labours endeavour to bring many a weather-beaten wanderer, ready to despair and perish, out of the cruel buffeting and biting chill? Oh (if thus pursued this thread of thought be not of too mean fibre),—how ONE did once leave all the kindly warmth, and comfort, and joy, and sweet conversation, and went away into the unkind and deadly cold, and desolation unspeakable, and was content to wait and wander there a long and weary while, trying to bring those in who rebuffed His kind beseechings, and shouldered by Him further into the ever-deepening snow, and the still darkening blackness!

Hark, how that gust rose and came up the street, and clutched and shook the window, and swayed the drawn red curtains, and fled with a long, shrill cry! Such an endeavour on the part of the besiegers demands fresh efforts on the part of the garrison. I pile therefore another log upon the fire, with half a scoop of Wallsend to back it. There, now the defences are in a satisfactory condition, and, for the lamp is not lit, the fire has no rival, but reigns in its full glory. I am alone tonight; very favourable for pleasant and profitable fireside musings is such a time of *tête-à-tête* with the fire. It is not a desolate loneliness, for the dear ones are almost within call (they are but away at some evening gathering a few doors off), and, sweet as genial society is by the fireside, there is a kind of luxury in a seldom and uncompelled loneliness; and such times are indeed very desirable for quiet meditation.

“ Shadows from the fitful firelight  
Dance upon the parlour wall.”

And I like to watch them flickering, rising and falling there, and to string together certain accordant thoughts, as I look into the glowing, steadfast hearth from which the changeful flashes come. Much like, it seems to me, the varying gleams and darks of feeling that will sometimes disturb a heart, whose very glow of life is yet a fixed, fervent love to God.

About firesides, then;—first, what a thing it is to have a warm fireside! a fireside from which cold chills and keen-pointed draughts are absent, and from which bickering and unkindness are quite shut out. How cold a fireside may be—even though it be yet one blaze—if all is not right at home; if dissensions and jealousies lurk like demons within the heart's chambers! And it is certain that there is no fire to be depended upon for continual and unextinguishable warmth and glow and cheeriness, except the fire of love to God, burning in the heart, and flashing into the life. Husband and Wife, brother and sister, Father and son—a community of love to God and service to Him, is that which alone can keep human love burning, and fellow-service unflagging.

This is a world into which, from time to time, chill, thin draughts will find entrance through some crack; or trickling drops wind through some loose tile, and drip at intervals like minute guns; and this, in the snuggest and closest-shut room. But the warmth of the earnest and common love to God, this, where it is found, is always in the end triumphant, and, (but this is a hazardous saying,) the warmth is sometimes even the more valued afterwards for that passing chill. Without this fire, however, there is no certainty, no security. Let the lover-

husband and the clinging bride vow unchanging love, entire trust, perfect fellow-service; let them list every cranny in door or window through which an unkind air might glide; and plug every loose slate or crevice through which a damp might drip upon their love; ay, and let years go on, and bid them believe that their precautions are all-sufficient, yet, I say, if their fire be but earth-fire, if their hearth be not also an altar, the world's outside Winter may beat them yet. They are not secure. They *may* rise some unexpected morning, saying, "This day shall be as the many kindly yesterdays, and to-morrow as this day, and yet more abundant." And lo, some word or look or thought or event, within or from without, may remove the careful listing and caulking, and a shrill, unkind draught penetrate the cosy warmth, and a dismal drip drive away the comfort; and sometimes, for want of a fire that would outlast all earth's chills, and keep up the spirits until walls and roof were mended again,—the cracks have increased, and the tiles slipped off, and the fire of human love died out, until the sweet, warm homestead is a dingy ruin, with the cruel winds and flooding rains possessing it at their will.

It is sad to see change of love, whether it be

"Much love that hath once been more,"

or actual estrangement, where all had been union, devotion, and endearment; still what security have we in this world of misunderstandings, conflicting interests, ailments of body and soul—this world in which

"Years of love have been forgot  
In the hatred of a minute,"

—what security against chills, what remedy when they have come? What remedy, what security, but one alone? If we love our brother not only for his own sake, but for Christ's sake, if the common warmth of our hearts was fed from the fire of Divine love,—that warmth and love are eternal, and cannot die.

“Wreaths of hope for aye to live,  
And thoughts of good together done,”—

these plead with irresistible oratory against the transitory chills of this life of failings and inconsistencies. The cold atmosphere gives way before the penetrating rays of that heavenly love; even while we gaze at it sadly, the shadow passes away from the face of the orb, and there shines from it that unearthly light which is *reflected from the Sun*.

A lonely fireside. I think of this naturally as I sit here, not lonely, but my own companion rather, since a few hours will bring back to me the kindly, familiar faces again. But with some this is not so,—it may be they are not far away, a few hundred yards off, and within call, indeed,—but how deaf to any call but one! In the quiet churchyard, under the sheeted snow, a little way below the ground; but if the lonely heart wearied of the bare fireside, and wandered out into the snow, and called to them, and cried to them in a lamentable voice, there would be neither speech nor answer, nor sign of any that regarded. The dim sky would close in overhead, and the dizzying snow would settle in great soft flakes, and melt upon the upturned face; and indeed they cannot return to us, and we must wait God's time before we may go to them. Sit, then, by the fireside, although its loneliness become almost intolerable—

“Treasuring the look you cannot find,  
The words that are not heard again.”

For there are tender thoughts, and sweet associations dwelling there, and you are there nearer to your dear ones than out in



the eddying snow. Gradually, as the glow grows whiter in the fire, and the shadows steadier on the wall, one after one

“The forms of the departed  
Enter through the open door;  
The beloved, the true-hearted,  
Come to visit thee once more.”



There they sat ; thus they looked ; old sayings and doings come quietly back to the heart, and if the slow tear steals down the cheek, it is not all bitter nor unresigned. They came, and were with you once, and do you say—

“ It would have been a beauteous dream,  
If it had been no more ? ”

Nay, rather echo—

“ I hold it true, whate'er befall ;  
I feel it, when I sorrow most :  
’Tis better to have loved and lost  
Than never to have loved at all.”

For, besides His nearness who has taught you, or is teaching you, that He is sufficient for you, even had you none on earth or in Paradise but Himself,—besides this, what a store of memories and anticipations are left to you that you would not spare if you could. That old love was no dream, and it is now a possession, although its object and its subject be for a little while put apart. The love is still your own ; God has it in His care. When you lost it, then you secured it ; it is removed now from all changes, and chances, and blights of earth ; it is, as it were, garnered in and safe. Death made it sacred and eternal. It also perfected it :

“ That sudden frost was sudden gain,  
And gave all ripeness to the grain  
It might have drawn from after-heat.”

And as it brought it to its perfection, so it removed all defects. Every little jar in Love’s instrument subsides under Death’s master touch, and the music is then first perfect. It is, indeed, at resent set in the minor key, and plaintive even to tears ; but

it shall burst one day into the jubilant and unshaded exultation of an angel's anthem.

Yes, the loved one may have gone, but the love remains on both sides, an unalienable possession. And to learn to come out of self, and love another, is, in brief, the lesson Christ has set for us to learn. "He that loveth not, knoweth not God;" but he that has learned to love purely, unselfishly, has gained a capacity of loving and knowing God. And sometimes God takes up the plant that was lying all about upon the ground, and wedding itself only to dying stems, and in danger to be trampled and marred,—God takes it, and trains it in a loneliness that may soon become fruitful and beautiful, upwards towards Himself. So love becomes eternal, imperishable, and worthy of the holy name of Love. The human love has not been destroyed by the Divine, but included in it, refined and increased by it. The plant could never have borne the nobler fruit it bears for men, unless it had been thus trained upwards towards God.

" God gives us love. Something to love  
He lends us; but when love is grown  
To ripeness, that on which it throve  
Falls off, and love is left alone."

Alone, and yet its very existence is society. The blossom-petals sailed down, in the summer air; but the small fruit is left, and shall develop, and be for ever a possession. The beauty went, but the use remains; and the beauty is safe with God, and shall return hereafter.

We should value fireside unions, and we should value also fireside losses. All that God does is good; and that which is saddest is often happiest at last. And ah, how should we shun

or mend fireside quarrels! We are here too short a time to make it worth while to be estranged. And it will clasp hands more closely now, to think sometimes as we have now been thinking, and to call to our mind sometimes the empty chair by the fireside, and the full grave under the snow. How hands will yearn for the old warm clasp then!—and what a trifle it was that came between them!—and O for a voice to reach to that Unseen Land, and to tell them so!

“Heap on more wood, the wind blows chill.”

Ay, that it does, and so I will;—which makes both rhyme and reason. There, the white ashes fall in soft flakes on this side and on that, and the lights and shadows are set dancing again, and that Parian angel warms into a flesh-glow, and the lines of cherished books reveal their friendly backs, and a giant shadow rears itself to the ceiling, as I stand before the fire. Rembrandt-darks deepen in the corners and behind the curtains: those drawn curtains so more than cosy in the firelight, and which I know burn with a carbuncle warmth out upon the cold, snowy street. How thoroughly enjoyable the fireside becomes by contrast with that chill, sloppy pavement, in the biting cold of this half thaw. What a contrast! and what a great mercy of God is the common one to me of a genial, cheery, warm fireside!

Ah, but here a cold draught comes in to interfere with my comfortable, complacent glow. These luxurious fireside musings lead me to remember how many there are who have no fireside by which to muse. I can scoop out a goodly grate-full of coals, or pile up the ready log; and there are, I know, some tons of

the former in the cellar, and a fair load of the latter piled up in the outhouse, and I need not grudge to call up the friendly blaze. But how different where the little store of coals, the poor hundred or half hundred, have to be regarded almost as though they were lumps of gold!—so precious, and so charily used. And the two or three faggots,—I don't in the least excuse stealing, or palliate sin, God forbid!—still do you, who feel so hard and bitter about your broken fences, etc., take care to render theft inexcusable, by doing your full part towards spreading the warmth of your own fireside into some poor neighbouring cottages? Picture the nursing of that scant spark upon the hearth,—only fire enough to make the cold more felt,—

“Not warmth, but rather cold perceptible,”—

and pile not up that glowing fire in comfort, unless you can feel that its warmth is spreading about you, and making Firesides out of chill, dark recesses, in leaky, draughty rooms. A glorious thing is it to possess such a magic coal-scoop, that it shall pile fodder upon twenty other fires (ay, or one other fire, provided that thus you have indeed done what you could) every time it brings thick yellow smoke, and hook-fingered flames, and a white glowing heart into your own. But more than half the rich and competent world does not think about this; nay, I know well that

“Evil is wrought by want of thought,  
As well as want of heart.”

And more will miss heaven, I think, through criminal carelessness than through malicious and deliberate sinfulness. You do not know of these things? Ay, but ought you not to make

it your business to know?—and since you are not really absolutely ignorant, only careless, and finding it convenient to shelve the unpleasant knowledge, instead of going into the matter and sifting it, do you suppose that you are not guilty More than this:—I am a clergyman, and sad experience shows me that there are many who don't thank you at all for bringing home to them, and pressing upon their knowledge, that which a well-bred respectability would prefer to ignore. Many give their pound, and there an end; duty is satisfied (pretty easily often), and there is not in them that restless love which has never done enough while aught yet remains to do.

So I think by my comfortable fireside of many a fireside that does not gleam cheerily into the room, but which stares, like a blank, sightless eye upon the huddling circle of poor creatures that—foodless, clotheless, all but houseless—shiver miserably about the hollow socket.

And look out further into the desolation which, like a watery halo, spreads round and obscures the bright rays of our own fireside. There are who stand one step below even those who have *no fireside*,—I mean those who have no *fire-place* even. 'Tis sad to huddle in the cold under a cheerless roof, without a fire. 'Tis a degree sadder to crouch under arches, doorways, anywhere,—with not even four walls and a roof to keep the pitiless wind and the searching sleet away from the blue face and numbed limbs. Yet remember,—

“Ye gentlemen of England  
Who sit at home at ease,”—

that such sad experiences, as these which I have sketched, are

not here and there one or two, but plentiful as stars or primroses about you. "*But so much is done.*" Is it? Oblige me by making a rough estimate between the *wealth* of England, or of London, and its *almsgiving*. If the smug self-complacency with which the newspapers are wont to hug themselves



over the dribblets that trickle in, making a great show and patter, at this Christmas season,—if this self-gratulation might not be much lowered by such a calculation, I am much mistaken.

"*But we have it not to give, after all the expenses which the world demands of us are met.*" I don't doubt you for one

moment. Allow me, however, to suggest a remedy. Try setting by God's portion *first*, and not after all the world's demands have been satisfied, were this last a thing possible. Do as a schoolboy with his cake: he cuts off a good slice for the master first, and then divides among the crowding, eager boys. I trow the master would come poorly off, had he to wait till all else were served.

So if each gave, as a minimum, a *teenth* at least of his income, were that little or much,—set it apart, at starting, as sacred to God's service and His poor,—I say that then a transformation would come over this land, and souls and bodies would not be starving, neglected, unprovided with food for this world or the next, while Dives thinks complacently that all must be well now that he has given orders to have his tablecloths well shaken into the streets, that Christ's poor, nay, that CHRIST himself (Matt. xxv. 40), may be satisfied with the sweepings of his superfluity.

Well, I am getting excited. The "*charity*" of the present day, as "*almsgiving*" has come to be called (and hence no wonder at the proverb, "*cold as charity*"), this subject always rather rouses me.

It is well that I hear the expected snow-muffled rattle outside, and the pealing bell, and that my fireside musings have come to an end.

CONVERSATION.







"Iron sharpeneth iron: so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."

IN this word of the Wise King is most pithily and comprehensively expressed one pleasure and profit of conversation. It cheers you up, and it prevents your mind from blunting; it gives an edge to your ideas, makes thought keener and more able to penetrate into a tough subject. You had been worry-

ing and tearing some metaphysical wing, or some leg of casuistry;—a few passes of the steel, and lo, the parts lie neatly sundered. Conversation is one of the choicest feasts of life; real conversation:

"Words learned by rote a parrot may rehearse,  
But talking is not always to converse."

Let this study-chair musing be then upon the

"Feast of reason and the flow of soul,"

that may be either used with profit or abused with loss.

First let me call up a background or two.

I have drawn my chair away from its sedate table companion; it is Winter, and the air takes pains to tell me that so it is. It has been my privilege to lead the prayers and praises of my people to-day, and to speak to them God's message in God's house. The afternoons are dusk now; deepening to dark; and evening hymns may well be used for our earlier than evening service:

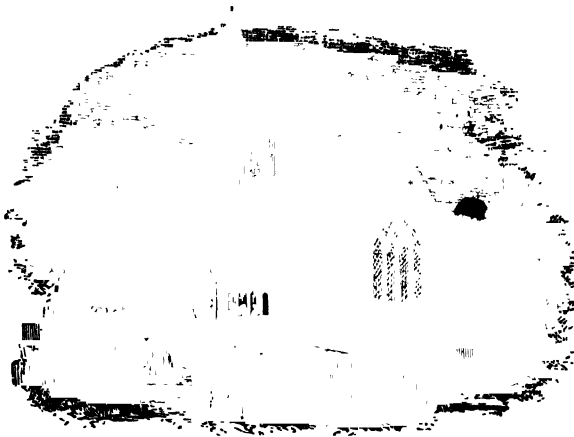
"The sun is sinking fast,  
The daylight dies."

This is only setting out the facts in words. And again—

"Abide with me; fast falls the eventide:  
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide."

There was a delicious breadth of gloom lurking in the corners and in the roof of the Building; and about the long lines of people that were moving gradually towards the doors down the dark aisles, under the lit coronæ that shone out above them like glory-circles against the dim grey arches and columns. Then the church was left empty; the lights were, one by one, being put out; wife and children, armed with coats and shawls and warm gloves, awaited my exit from the vestry, and, some slight matters arranged, I joined them, and we walked forth into the night. A clear starry sky: a frosty mist half-way up the horizon; a red moon rising out of this. Undeniably cold; wife cuddling close to me; the step quick: little feet trotting beside, partly to keep up, and partly to keep warm. Half a mile's walk; a kindly "good-

night" to each homeward wending group or unit as we catch them up and pass them; the familiar chestnuts; the eagle-guarded gates: home. Patter, patter upon the hard road run the little feet, that the little hands may hold open the gate for Father and Mother; the front door is standing wide by the time we reach it; coats and comforters are unrolled in the passage; there is a great show of shuffling upon the mat;



then a peep at the cheery blaze of the drawing-room fire in the yellow room. Only a peep at it, rather tantalizing; then manfully to go up into the cold bedrooms, and make ourselves trim and comfortable for the evening.

And now I have changed my coat, doffed the tiring boots, and donned the resting slippers, and find that I am the first to enter the mellow glowing room. So I draw my chair to its social place near the fire, a little tired, but the mind yet

vibrating with the something of excitement that must attend earnest speaking, and (lighting no candle) enjoy the rest, and the quiet meditative opportunity. The orange light gives a warmer colour and a peculiar beauty to the favourite pictures on the walls; and tall shadows flicker and glimmer, rise and fall, from the carpet to the ceiling. And I meditate, in a delicious, semi-fatigued peace; my unspoken thoughts set to the silent music of the moving quiet shadows and lights,—bass and treble.

Not for very long, however. The door keeps opening at longer or shorter intervals, until the family semicircle is complete. A guest or two, sisters or brothers staying in the house; perhaps the dear Father is filling his peculiar corner by our fireside; possibly, one or two young thinking fellows have looked in (I court such confidence from them) for this quiet hour, to talk to me about some question or difficulty that has arisen in their mind from converse or reading in the week, or from the services of the day. Thus a profitable vein of thought is opened, and ore taken from it, which is gradually worked into more or less valuable metal. Even the children are breathless and interested listeners, sometimes even modest sharers in some topic which is suggestive at least of questions to their young minds. When we are alone, they are (within due bounds) quite important members of the party.

Such is the special hour of Sunday conversation; for in the evening there is, in the winter, mostly reading, or hymns and chants. And both pleasant and profitable is such an hour, bringing together and cementing the lessons of the day,

perhaps of the week. Such converse I love and I encourage ; to such I would train the tastes of those under my influence, not by forcible twisting and binding, but by putting in their way likely and enticing twigs, after which they may of their own accord reach out tendrils. Again iterating my aversion to making Sunday a day of dulness and constraint, and of forced behaviour and conversation, I would yet give my voice against the unprofitable, or worse than unprofitable, *absolute gossip* which is apt immediately to succeed the most solemn services, and, indeed, to reign paramount during the remainder of the day. And this leads to one part of my subject upon which I have some words to say. I have been asked what I think of *religious* conversation ; whether it is advisable, or at least attainable, in any considerable degree ; whether it is not apt to become forced ; the result of effort and restraint, likely to run in certain grooves of absolute formalism ; to become a thing of course, a thing merely of the lips.

Now I muse for a moment before answering. For indeed and unhappily, the paste is so often offered for the jewel, in the "Christian world," that often the distrust and disgust which follow upon the detection of a sham is cast by the enemy in the path of the young, that they may be offended, and become sceptics as to that beauty of holiness which might have attracted them. And yet how often has that word of good Bishop Wilson recurred to my mind : "Strange, that what is every man's chief concern, should be no man's conversation." And that earnest prayer of his : "O Holy Spirit of grace, enable me to speak of the things of God, instead of things vain and trifling ; enable me to overcome

the shame of a degenerate age, which will hear nothing with delight but what concerns this world. O touch my heart with the true love of God, the excellences of His laws, the pleasantness of His service, the wonders of His providences, etc. that I may edify those that hear me. This I beg for Jesus Christ's sake."

I preface my answer with these words, and then I proceed to painful admissions. No doubt religious conversation—easy, natural, beautiful, religious conversation—is a thing not often attained. No doubt that which ought to flow so readily in a glad stream, into the green pastures of thought of God, and of our future, and of the world unseen, avoids that valley, even though it can flash and sparkle glibly enough in many another. It is apt to grow stagnant and to dry up, if it be diverted thither; or, if it flow on, it is, truly enough, within the artificial banks of a formal canal, and not in a natural course. There may be, and often is, insincerity in things least likely to be insincere; and formality in service least tied to form. For it seems right, especially in a clergyman, to have religion at least sometimes on the tongue; and set phrases are handy and often easily caught up; and in time the habit of religious talk is acquired, and in time a speaker not really in earnest may (so weak is poor human nature) really believe himself to be so, from his glib proficiency in the saying of "Lord, Lord." But the mind of the unsophisticated hearer—especially the quick instinct of the young—somehow detects an unreality, an insincerity, a void in that speaking which is not natural, but artificial. And if (as is too often the case) the lips are saying one thing and

the life another, what harm, what huge harm, may such "religious talk" do!

But the abuse of a thing does not forbid its use; nor are we to abjure diamonds because glass glitters for them in some circlets. And who but has, at least sometimes, tasted the refreshment and delight of talk that welled up fresh and unrestrainable, through the (comparatively) barren sand of other conversation? Who has not once or twice been in the society of one whose converse tended instinctively, after all its quiverings and poisonings, to the pole, there being little need forcibly to tie it there? However the talk began, somehow or other, quite naturally and without any forcing, thought and speech veered round soon

"To dearer matters,  
Dear to the man that is dear to God."

I do believe, however, that besides the cases in which religion is actually disliked, and religious talk therefore simply a bore, and the company that which deems

"The God  
That made them an intruder on their joys,  
Starts at His awful name, or deems His praise  
A jarring note,"—

I believe, I say, that besides this silence from distaste, there is also a silence from reserve. Men feel, but doubt whether others do or will feel with them; and they shrink from wearing their

"Heart upon their sleeve  
For daws to peck at."

But in this excess of reserve I think that they are often mis-



taken. Religious thought, like other thought, is freshened up by being poured from vessel to vessel. And quiet godly talk (I like that old word), natural, unaffected, unforced, is surely one great weapon of influence for good ; and be it remembered that we are commanded to "let our light shine before men." And we do not fulfil this command (I fancy) by always putting it under the bushel of *reserve*,—in which feeling, by the way, there is mostly a very strong element of *pride*. Again, the undeveloped craving in the immortal being for some higher thought and conversation than of this world—especially in earlier years, before the trampling feet of many crowding interests, pursuits, pleasures and anxieties have muddied the stream ; this craving is much stronger and more common than we are apt to think. If you *can* talk naturally and genially to a young man, not being offensively assuming in your intercourse, a platform above his experiences and questionings, also without being merely shocked and horrified at his difficulties,—how often you would find him ready enough, even glad, to talk with you. And ought not the elders to, at least, give facilities for such kindly confidences, and, indeed, to court and invite such intercourse ? Should not hearts full of askings be attracted rather than repelled by those who can give right answers ?

Let me give, in one word, the remedy of all the falseness, shallowness, and emptiness of religious conversation : the key to those stores of reality, earnestness, and naturalness which will attract, rather than disgust, where there is any good ground yet to be got at under the growing surface of rock which the world forms upon the heart. The secret is unmasked to us by the Great Teacher :

“ Out of the abundance of the heart  
The mouth speaketh.”

Thus we have the recipe. If we would talk continually, easily, naturally of course, and with a ready finding (not *making*) of opportunities, here we are taught the method. Let our heart be full of the love of God, full of devotion to our dear Saviour, and of kindly yearning for those about us; let such abundant stores be accumulated in the heart, and surely there must from time to time be produced some samples on the tongue. Let the great end of life, and its mighty realities, be indeed, and as a rule, the first thing in our heart; and then they will hardly be always the last thing on the lips. Let us be setting our life daily to the pattern of Christ's life, and assuredly then something of that ever-ready and unforced speaking of Christ concerning His Father's business,—not dragged into, but flowing from the ordinary talk, indeed suggested by it, and growing out of it,—some dim reflections of this ideal of religious conversation, of all conversation,—would be traceable in our intercourse with friends certainly, and even with acquaintance. Thus on Sundays it should not be, if our hearts were in the day, a restraint to talk, but a *relief* to talk—out of the *abundance* of the heart—of the things of Christ and of God. Truly it does seem hardly *natural* that we, waiting upon the shore for the boat to take us off, should preserve ever a discreet silence concerning all but the pebbles and the shells under our feet. The *abundance* of the heart, that will influence the talk; and you can't make the sham at all like the real thing. The abundance of the tongue merely will disgust: I do not think the *heart's* wealth would

ever do this. It might, indeed, rather sadden where the hearer perceived, but could not appreciate, its reality.

“*Always with grace, seasoned with salt,*” our speech should be ; that is, with the love and the fear of God underlying *all* conversation, to keep it pure and wholesome ;—and, at least much more often than common, the spring of direct religious conversation should well up. That it is so uncommon is to be explained, I sadly conclude, by the lack of that abundance in the heart, by the drought and desert there, and the pure wells being allowed to choke with sand. Did we indeed devote our lives to God, there would be no need of any *forcing* our lips into His service. Take care of your deeds, and your words will take care of themselves.

All this hardly applies to coteries from which fashion has decreed that the earnest heart of life should be banished and ignored,—has decreed, as Cowper writes :

“ That heaven and hell, and righteousness and sin,  
Snares in his path, and fogs that lurk within,  
God and His attributes, (*a field of day*  
*Where 'tis an angel's happiness to stray,*)  
Fruits of His love, and wonders of His might,  
Be never named in ears esteemed polite.”

Yet, even here, an indignant protest breaking in from an honest earnest heart might scatter to the four winds the conventionalities, the marvellous littlenesses, and low estimates of society. As thus :

“ Is it incredible, or can it seem  
A dream to any *except those that dream,*  
That man should love his Maker, and that fire  
Warming his heart should at his lips transpire ?”

But dinner is announced ; and our circle must break up ; and

the firelight and shade be left to dance by themselves in the drawing-room, and to bring out and to obscure alternately the paintings with their glimmer and gloom.

Thus much I have noted down about religious conversation, which must be, of all, the highest and noblest. But this life of ours is a mixed life, and it would not be possible, even were it desirable, that the whole employment of either our life or our lips should be made up of direct and simple acts of religion; however, all should be pervaded and sanctified by it. Accordingly I have a few notes to append concerning conversation generally;—just a word about one of its advantages, and two or three of its parasitic evils.

The advantage is one which cannot well be over-estimated. Not only does iron sharpen iron, in the rasp of mind with mind; not only is the intellect for the time freshened and sharpened: a more lasting benefit follows and abides. For how intercourse with other minds may widen individual views, which are always apt to tend to narrowness! How useful to gain other points of view than your own upon any subject! How often intelligent conversation and courteous argument will either modify your own opinion, or show you, more clearly than you had seen before, the grounds on which you hold it, and thus prove to yourself your right to retain it. And this interchange of thought, and mutual explanation, especially if in it Herbert's rule be kept:

“ Mark what another says : for many are  
Full of themselves, and answer their own notion.  
Take all into thee ; then, with equal care,  
Balance each dram of reason, like a potion ;

If truth be with thy friend, be with them both ;  
Share in the conquest and confess a troth ;”

—this wise and well-ordered and friendly conversation, how often does it show people, before afraid of one another, and conjuring up very chimeras and dragons as their idea of each other’s opinions, that they are very often much at one, after all ; still more frequently that they at least have much more in common than they had imagined or thought possible. Thus the plant of love gains, being cleared from the aphides of many narrow and doubting suspicions and distrusts.

But now I find that so long have I dwelt upon the advantages, that I cannot enter, without being wearisome, upon the other view of conversation. I must therefore close the case, or at least adjourn it, for I should like hereafter to complete my say. For the present, then, I will look only on the *sunny side* of conversation.

And indeed some of our sunniest (as well as our most firelit) hours are those passed in sweet converse with friends. The young in thoughtful converse with the older ; on the one hand the “sprightliness and fire”—the charming hopefulness, trust, and confidence which precede the rough discipline of experience, and yet which come in most usefully to temper experience that is in danger of growing soured, over-cautious, and distrustful, and to remind it of those days when

“ All we met was fair and good,  
And all was good that time could bring,  
And all the secret of the Spring  
Moved in the chambers of the blood ;”

and, on the other hand, that advantage of

“Age, by long experience well informed,  
Well read, well tempered, with religion warmed,”

supplying, in a measure, some of the defects inseparable from youthful views : meeting its rhapsodies and ardours, impossible schemes and runaway energies, with a genial kindness, a patient sympathy, and a mild wisdom ; never quenching the glowing iron, only shaping it ; never damming the eager current, only directing its course. How profitable, how delightful, conversation like this !

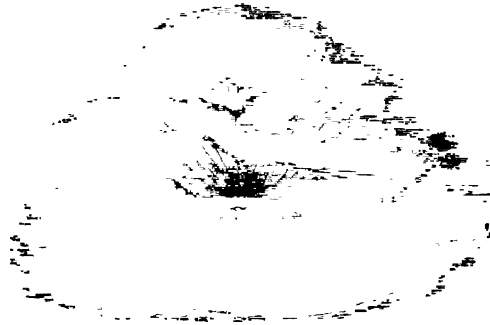
Even more delightful, perhaps, the unfettered, unhushed interchange of thought between equal minds, when the college friend came down, or the brother curate walked over for the afternoon ; and the hours passed in lighter or more serious fencing ; when (at the choicest times) the glitter and rasp of the foils was quick and exciting ; either from the subject, or the occasion, or the general health of the parties. Pleasant and profitable hours of talk—

“When each by turns was guide to each,  
And fancy light from fancy caught,  
And thought leapt out to wed with thought  
Ere thought could wed itself with speech.”

Enough : such cheerful hours, the pictures in life's sometimes dull book, will recur to the memory of all who possess any power of thinking, and love of expressing thought. Let me end with Cowper's carefully-drawn pictures of a veteran in conversation :

“Oh, I have seen (nor hope perhaps in vain  
Ere life go down, to see such sights again)  
A veteran warrior in the Christian field,  
Who never saw the sword he could not wield ;

Grave without dulness, learned without pride,  
Exact, yet not precise; though meek, keen-eyed;  
A man that would have foiled at their own play  
A dozen would-be's of the modern day;  
Who, when occasion justified its use,  
Had wit as bright as ready to produce,  
Could fetch from records of an earlier age,  
Or from philosophy's enlightened page,  
His rich materials, and regale your ear  
With strains it was a privilege to hear;  
Yet above all, his luxury supreme  
And his chief glory, was the Gospel theme;  
There he was copious as old Greece or Rome,  
His happy eloquence seemed there *at home*,  
Ambitious not to shine or to excel,  
But to treat justly *what he loved so well.*"



**WORDS BETTER LEFT UNSAID.”**





“Words better left unsaid.”



REMEMBER seeing the above title at the head of an essay in a magazine. I did not read the paper; but the subject struck me as one full of suggestion, and I venture to borrow the title to head some meditations of my own.

“Speech is silvern, but silence is golden.”

“Honour and shame is in talk: and the tongue of man is his fall.”

“The lips of talkers will be telling such things as pertain not unto them:  
But the words of such as have understanding are weighed in the balance.”

“The heart of fools is in their mouth;  
But the mouth of the wise is in their heart.”

These ancient sayings are surely full of wisdom; and indeed they recall a word from the Fount of the highest wisdom; a warning sent from God against over-quickness in the use of the tongue:

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be *swift to hear, slow to speak.*”

For sometimes do we lightly pull the trigger of the tongue, and some word leaves it, which we would give worlds to recall,

but cannot. To know when to be silent, to remember that the tongue rightly used is the best member that we have, and wrongly used is “a fire, a world of iniquity;” to think twice before we speak once,—well, this is high wisdom—nay :

“If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.”

Our words are like an eager army, impatient for the signal to advance : our judgment should stand on the post of observation, and, unhurried by their ardour, wait the right time to let them loose. There is “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.” And of course, to put silence above speech is but to express with the strongest emphasis the danger of the abuse, and in no wise to undervalue the use of speech. For, in very truth—

“A word spoken in due season, how good it is !”

And—

“The tongue of the just is as choice silver.” “Pleasant words are as an honeycomb ; sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.”

But the Proverbs of Solomon are full of the praise and the dispraise of speech, the antitheta, the pros and cons. Silence, we find, has its virtue and its praise, insomuch that

“Even a fool when he holdeth his peace is counted wise ;  
And he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.”

Still, the praise of silence must certainly be for negative rather than for positive good, and no pains are needed to prove that, however discreet silence be admirable, yet discreet speech bears away the palm from this. Of it we may say that it is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righte-

ousness. Who would care to emulate the exceedingly quaintly eulogized merit of Count Moltke, viz. that he was “silent in seven languages”? And what chance would silence have, weighed in the balance with the oratory of a Demosthenes, or with the preaching of a St. Paul? And how rusty and threadbare our minds would become, but for the taking out their stores and bartering them in the great continual traffic of conversation. How useful is calm, courteous argument, not vapid and un-positive—

“Discourse may want an animated—No;”

but ordered by that humility which those will have who prefer the name Philosopher to that of Sophist: who are in the habit of considering themselves to be rather seekers of wisdom than adepts.

“I count not myself to have apprehended—but,—*I press toward the mark.*”

This (except in cases of distinct revelation, or indisputable authority) should be, even in our conversation, the rule of our search after truth. How unwise is anger in argument! what a blemish in character it proves! such a shallowness of thought, to assume as incontrovertible that, in debateable ground, our own spade and pick have always infallibly turned up the treasure, Truth, instead of supposing it at least possible that another's sharper implements, or stronger arm, or longer and more assiduous labour, *may* have hit upon the reality, which lay deeper than we had penetrated. Is not this fault a common one, in arguing? And does it not prove a great want of that knowledge of self and of others which is the parent of humility, courtesy, wisdom?

And how often, as I before hinted, does the want of more wide and frequent conversation and intercourse lead people who differ, to misunderstand one another, and greatly to exaggerate their differences. Not but that there are real and vital differences: and hence argument must ever be an element of conversation:

“With mean complacence ne'er betray your trust,  
Nor be so civil as to prove unjust.”

But humility and love presiding at this, will prevent candour from becoming discourtesy; and if some beer must be bitter, it needn't turn sour.

Let me insert here one protest against the meanness (too common) which, will he nill he, insists on forcing upon an opponent a meaning or an opinion which he expressly, repeatedly, and positively disclaims. I know it makes arguing easier, to exaggerate or misrepresent your antagonist. But searchers for truth will be generous,—at least just—as well as earnest. And it can't be called fair to hold up a man to opprobrium because of the mud which only your own throwing makes to stick to his clothes.

Silence: yes, it has its advantages, and who has not bitterly had the conviction forced upon him that there are words better left unsaid? Yet we need not act on the principle of total abstinence, cutting out our tongues for fear we should use them ill. Most good things have their possible abuse as well as their use, and *vice versa*. And things most useful and most beautiful have their peculiar blemishes, their peculiar enemies. Examine the waving silk of that wide sheet of barley; upon close inspec-

tion there will be found many a black, smutted ear. Look at the broad masses of that hop-garden, the full bunches of pale-green lightening the dark summer leaves ; the leaning poles, the trailing vines, the graceful converse and intercourse of the spreading bine. But how frequently does it happen that a fly or blight falls upon it, and mars and changes all its wholesomeness, and profit, and beauty. And such smuts and such blights there are to spoil and disfigure the pleasure and profit of conversation ; and hence has silence received its portion, perhaps more than its due, of praise.

Hence it is evident, that to meditate upon our conversation, after we have mixed and interchanged thought with our fellow-men, will be a useful exercise :

“ In thy chamber thou shalt find what abroad thou dost too often lose.”

How often,—especially if habitually we are home-stayers, and do not constantly mix and converse with strangers,—how often does it fall to us to be vexed, on reviewing our evening abroad, to recall a disorder in our speech, a lack of discipline and restraint. On this point and on that, we remember that we spoke hastily, excitedly, excessively, carried away by the impetus of our words, instead of having overruled and directed them. We said more than we should have said, perhaps more than we meant really. And we feel that we may have been misunderstood—may have lost influence—may have even done harm by our want of care. Ah, yes, it does indeed require a perfect man to offend not in word, and to bridle the tongue. And how often, when we seemed to have been making progress at home, are we mortified by finding when we go abroad, from the samples, that the store seems little

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altered. The same quick falling into mere levity, into gossip, into bitterness, into over-hasty assertion or denial. Where is the gravity, the sweetness, the patience and forbearance, that we hoped were gaining ground in our heart? Where is the consistency which we covet earnestly, and upon which we dreamed we had been advancing? I am not speaking of grave faults in our talk, but of those little flies which are apt, we regretfully feel, to make precious ointment to stink; of those little foxes which crept in, when we were off our guard, to steal the tender grapes. Such considerations might be thought morbid, over-particular. But at any rate the trouble is one shared by many other minds. I presume that Seneca had felt it, when he said:

“ As often as I have been among men, I returned home less a man than I was before.”

And Thomas à Kempis, quoting these words, adds:

“ And this we find true when we talk long together. It is easier not to speak a word at all, than not to speak more words than we should. It is easier for a man to keep at home, than to keep himself well when he is abroad.”

Yes; but perhaps this is something the same as though we should say (which is incontrovertibly true), that it is less dangerous to pause in the tents, and hear “ the distant battle flash and ring,” than to enter amid the charges and the ambushes. Watching and prayer, these can avail against the force or craft of our enemies, against the worst of all our enemies—our own traitor heart. However, one caution is taught us by such complaints, viz. that although it be not well to shirk society, it is not wise to seek it cravingly and restlessly. In the reaction against over-

severity, and over-timidity, we have become far too lax and easy. Not all strictness is a scribe's burden ; and a wholesome discipline is happier and freer in the end than utter absence from restraint. What thieves of our liberty are hastily-spoken, unconsidered words ! Very tyrants they may become, from whose cruel bonds we in vain struggle to free our actions in future. Discreet speech is doubtless better than silence ; but oh, how far better would silence be than much of our unguarded speech ! How many words are born every day that the nurse, Discretion, had better have strangled in the birth ! Very wise seems to me the following summing up of certain thoughts of good Thomas à Kempis :

“ No man speaks securely but he that holds his peace willingly.”

I was walking with my brother one Sunday across a high hill in Herefordshire, to one of the two churches which at that time were under his care. A quaint, tiny building was it, nearly overpowered by the big house close by, of which, indeed, it had been a domestic chapel, and from which almost the entire congregation was furnished. The walk to it, however, was lovely, and I well remember that hill path. For some time it had led us between two copses of tall growth ; we had admired these fully : the delicate straggling of rare ferns, or the rich masses of those more common ; the luxuriant vetches, one in particular (*Vicia sylvatica*, I expect), approaching in appearance to the garden everlasting pea, creamy white, with the most delicate and profuse pencilling ; and then tall foxglove sceptres, standing sheer out from the bracken, and draped with the three- or four-

ranked clusters of "dappled bells;"—moreover, we had noted that peculiar gleam, white as moonlight, which the summer sun strikes down upon the taller herbage and into the darker recesses of the copse,—noticing that, in a painting, most people would call this effect unnatural. And so, taking in and sharing, and thus doubling the appreciation of the loveliness that closed our view upon each side, we walked on for a long time in the bounded path and the subdued light. But to present enjoyment was



added the keen zest of anticipation. At the end of this long wood-path, when the brow of the hill was reached, and the veil of copse was withdrawn,—what would be the picture, if the screen had been so beautiful? My enjoyment was that of ignorance, for I had not seen it; my brother's was that which arises from a part-proprietorship in a view that you know and

love, and are now about to introduce to a stranger. And this is, I think, more enjoyable than the seeing it yourself for the first time. What a relish you have in his anticipation ; how anxious that your beauty should be seen in her best dress—that your friend should gain just the exact point for his first introduction. And, your solicitude crowned with success, and the companion set face to face with God’s picture, with what tranquil but intense satisfaction you watch his, for some time, wordless emotion, and leave him to drink in the whole, before (as you are a little impatient to do) you draw his attention to some of the exquisite details, and bring into distinction your favourite bits. Well, all this was so on the occasion from which I have wandered ; and we stood silent for a while upon the brow of the hill, having just emerged from the retiring woods, and looked down upon one of those lovely scenes which in endless variety God has planned and perfectly executed for the beautifying of His youngest creation.

“ How lovely a world this is !” at length I said. “ Do you imagine that Heaven will be more beautiful, or will greatly differ from this ? Surely the difference will be rather one of degree than of kind.”

And then we were naturally led, as we walked, to meditate on the difference, and to consider why Earth was not the happy place that its smile would hint to a stranger angel poised over it ; and why, as we felt this to be, its very loveliness had that in it which caused an indefinable depression as we stood to gaze ‘The *peace* of nature ! ah, must it not bring painful thoughts to the heart of man,—while now it seems to mock him, now to ignore him, now to protest against him ? He stands beholding, he who

should be the key-note of the harmony, and who is, alas! the discord. How lovely, how peaceful, so long as you are alone with the fair inanimate world; but what jars, and jealousies, and envies, and suspicions, and unkindness, when you descend into the society of men! Those clustering cottages, that distant city, those single homesteads—how this one element of want of *peace* and kindness would at once mark the distinction between Earth’s loveliest valley and any spot in Heaven! Hence I take this particular discord,—want of kindness and forbearance—want of charity, in short,—rather than the evil, sin, as a whole, as perhaps the thing whose absence will first strike us in heaven, as perhaps the saddest jar lurking under the most harmonious seemings of earth.

The same feeling appears to have occurred to many another spectator. Thus Wordsworth; on a sweet Spring day, amid harmonies of motion, sound, sight, stillness; straightway—

“ To her fair works did Nature link  
The human soul that through me ran  
*And much it grieved my soul to think  
What man has made of man.* ”

Tennyson, under the new lime-leaves, and looking down on the white sails—

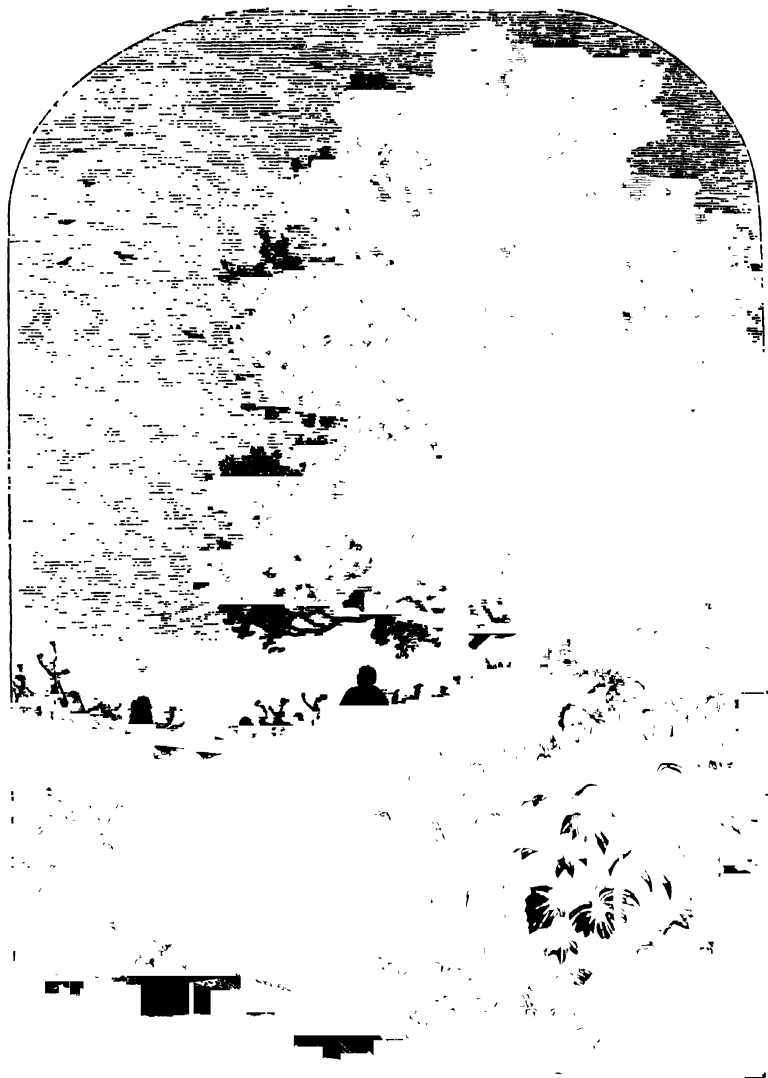
“ Half-lost in the liquid azure-bloom of a crescent<sup>’</sup> of sea : ”

—notice how his thoughts take the same turn :

“ Below me, there, is the village, and looks how quiet and small!  
And yet bubbles o’er like a city, with gossip, scandal, and spito.”

And he laments :

“ We cannot be kind to each other here for an hour;  
We whisper, and hint, and chuckle, and grin at a brother’s shame.”





And the poet becomes bitter at the thought, bitter with the world. For it is this meanness and littleness, and want of charity and kindness, that disgusts us even with the world itself; it gets no compassion from us; it is, in such moods, a “hateful world,” a “base and little world:”—and, O that we had wings like a dove, to fly *away* and be at *rest*! But we have not, and so we brood (at such times) with sickly, half-closed eye, and ruffled plumage; and pine for harmony the more, perhaps, the more the discord is in ourself.

Thus what a revulsion is sometimes experienced when you have gathered a glorious, big, half-opened, delicate rose: you admire, you go into ecstasies, you call Mary and Anna to survey,—when lo! a fat, hairless, dirty-green grub pokes up its black-fanged face from under the globed, fragile, fragrant petals! —“Ugh, disgusting *rose*!” you cry, as you hurl it from you. And such a maggot is this low and dirty spitefulness, which, in place of the sweet breath of charity, pervades and spoils this fair world of ours, and of course (else we should know nothing of it) lurks within our conversation, and incessantly bobs up, marring it often when it was most pleasant, and changing our enjoyment into disgust.

I have come round by a somewhat lengthy way to a wide class of “words better left unsaid;” but, it may be seen, not without method in my wandering. For, as want of love in the world is the disease which underlies and mars its most blooming appearance of health, so uncharitable conversation is the eruption by which the disease, otherwise latent, is betrayed.

And, for any who is but a feeble lover of that old song which



the herald angels sang on earth, how saddening, how disgusting is a huge part of our talk ; ay (worst of all, he feels), even of his own, on after-consideration. Where was the charity that the apostle sings, as though in one of the songs of Heaven,—where, I say, that charity that *hopeth all things*,—ay, as long as may at all be, *believeth all things*? When two constructions were possible, which was most easily and naturally chosen?—to which did the bias tend? And if (*by an effort*, aided and made successful by God’s grace) you have grown somewhat into the way of trusting others where it is possible to do so, and hoping for them where it is not, how it grates against you to find the eager depreciation with which your favourable estimates are met, the contempt poured on your simplicity. Indeed, who does not know that, as a rule, if you would steer clear of a very swarm of disparagements, you must not praise too highly. People generally like to say all that they can find ill-natured of another, before they admit any good points; and you may sometimes out-general them by offering as a holocaust, anything depreciatory in those whom you want them to like; then, naturally mollified with so handsome a concession to their matter-of-course requirements, they will begin to look graciously upon that which would otherwise have been the mark of their jealous suspicion, the object of a watching, not for beauties, but for flaws. Alas, poor human nature!

“ A good man will upon every occasion, and often without any, say all the good he can of everybody; but, so far as he is a good man, will never be disposed to speak evil of any, unless there be some other reason for it besides barely that it is true.”

Say you so, Bishop Butler? Then I fear that good men are rare indeed!

Besides the unloveliness and littleness of this fault of depreciatory and uncharitable conversation, we must think also how unwise it is. How wise, even were this not commanded, to be hopeful about others!

“ After all,  
What know we of the secret of a man?  
That we should mimic this raw fool, the world,  
Which charts us all in its coarse blacks or whites.”

Missing, that is, necessarily and of course, all the half-tints and half-lights, the infinite variety and gradations of shades, the “ delicate differences ” of motives, circumstances, temperaments, antecedents, influences;—but all is set down roughly, darkly, positively; very likely altogether, probably in great measure, wrongly. For we are not yet so all-bad, but that often the more hopeful had been also the juster view. Upon how many occasions we ourselves feel keenly that we have been misunderstood, misjudged; and yet afterwards do not therefore the less hasten to decide positively concerning others, and to judge them. How ignorant, and yet how certain we are, with regard to their motives and actions!

Let the philosopher and divine again speak on this subject. “ It were very much to be wished that this discourse of others did not take up so great a part of conversation, because it is indeed a subject of a dangerous nature. Let any one consider the various interests, competitions, and little misunderstandings which arise among men, and he will soon see that he is not unprejudiced enough and impartial, that he is not, as I may

speak, neutral enough, to trust himself with talking of the character and concerns of his neighbour in a free, careless, and unreserved manner. There is perpetually, and often it is not attended to, a rivalry amongst people of one kind or another, in respect to wit, beauty, learning, fortune, and that one thing will insensibly influence them to speak to the disadvantage of others, even where there is no formed malice or ill design. Since, therefore, it is so hard to enter into this subject without offending, the first thing to be observed is, that people should learn to decline it; to get over that strong inclination most have to be talking of the concerns and behaviour of their neighbours.”

There is good meat, which I leave for digestion. And I take leave of the subject of conversation, with a last glance at its sunny side, in Mrs. Browning’s exquisite description of talk, witty without being untruthful, and light without being vain :

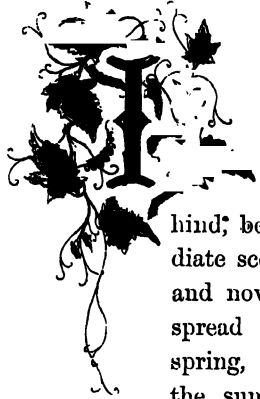
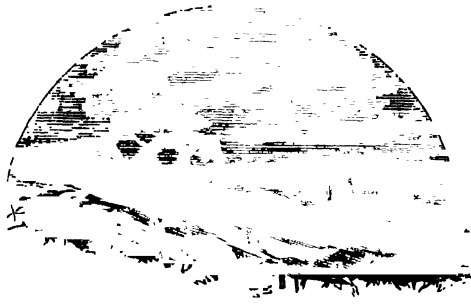
“ In her utmost lightness there is truth,—and often she speaks lightly,  
Has a grace in being gay, which even mournful souls approve ;  
For the root of some grave earnest thought is understruck so rightly,  
As to justify the foliage and the waving flowers above.”

Who would curb such playful conversation, that was yet loving and innocent? The elasticity of some hearts must have scope. Who would frown at them, and try to bind them down? The attempt is vain : the occasion comes, and they free themselves :

“ As the branch of a green osier, when a child would overcome it,  
Springs up freely from his clasping, and goes swinging in the sun.”

MUSINGS AMONG THE PLOUGH-LANDS.





I WAS leaning against a gate a little while ago, and surveying a somewhat unvaried prospect. Wide fields, undivided by hedges, stretched all around me; behind; before, and on either hand. The immediate scenery was anyhow flat and monotonous, and now pretty nearly one uniform tint overspread it. Not the short emerald carpet of spring, nor the tall deep whispering groves of the summer corn, nor the tawny tents of the piled autumn sheaves, nor the later withered stubble, relieved by the spreading green of weed-growth, and the tiny eye of a flower here and there, between its dull yellow lines. None of these garments—in fact, no garment at all—covered the naked earth. In long furrows and ridges it lay all about me, brown and bare, having fallen from the plough in flakes like chocolate. Take a view like this on a misty, dripping day and you have a landscape undoubtedly dreary, if looked at

with a solitary heart. Alexander Smith has drawn truly a forlorn picture, made perfect in its desolation by the single tenant put in to make its emptiness felt, in the lines :

“ I see a cheerless gleam of red-ploughed lands,  
O'er which a crow flies heavy in the rain.”

It was not raining then, however, on the day when I leaned against my gate. Nor was there but one only tenant of the sky



and landscape. On the contrary, some hundred rooks moved with stately stalk—sometimes side by side, like boys in a school—over the chocolate furrows and ridges ; and among them, making the view charming, were about fifty snowy sea-gulls, for my gate was but a mile from the sea. These showed to immense advantage, you may fancy, on the rich plough-land ; yet I could

hardly decide whether the pure spotless rounded white, or the clean speckless jet, looked the more neat and beautiful. Sometimes a little commotion stirred the party, and the air for a few feet above the field was sustaining a canopy of wings, gleaming black, and long dark-tipped, curving white. In this very field was a ploughman with his horses and mate; in the next they were sowing seed in the tidy machine-lines; and in one, close to me on the other hand, they were harrowing the seed sown. An extensive camp, with its low huts, bounded my view, and two groups of soldiers gave a gleam of scarlet amid the more sober hues of the scene. A grey church on a windy hill had caught a spot of gold-fire on its vane.

Flat, at any time, and bare; yet, besides the beauty that may be found everywhere by the student of God's pictures, the scene seemed to me exceedingly suggestive of thought. And the day being that soft growing day, under whose dull canopy there peers out now and then for a time a broad yellow glow of sun—the day being thus still and warm, and favourable for musing, I could have stayed by my post of observation for yet a longer time than I did, plaiting together scene and thoughts into one strand. Such time is not waste time necessarily. Indeed, in this life of steam, and high-pressure, and work—

“ Work—work—work—  
In the dull December light,  
And work—work—work,  
When the weather is warm and bright,”—

more pauses are needed, lest men should become machines. Far from grudging the Sunday pause, employers of their own or of



other people's brains and hands would find it *pay* well to rest the horses now and then that they are urging on up that long slanting hill of life. All is not to be done by movement. The compensating power of work is rest, and the little coral-builders of nerves and forces that live within this wave-beaten body of ours, are active with their trowels and mortar, while we are pausing from life's strain and tug. Thus it is true in more ways than one, that sometimes *our strength is to sit still*. And especially in study, and the gathering in of knowledge, whether human or Divine, it is not the quantity we can hold, but the quantity absorbed by us, that benefits. To take the simplest case: Two or three chapters of the Bible, read through, and then straightway laid aside from hand and mind, are of far less nutritious value than even a few verses followed by a space of quiet meditation, and prayerful self-application. I am always reminded of this way of reading, by watching the kine and sheep lying under the trees so lazily, you might fancy, but really busy chewing the cud. The process which answers to the reading is completed—they have taken in the store of *grass*; it is now by another process to be developed into *food*. Such a homely simile is also suggested by the Collect for the second Sunday in Advent. "Read, mark, learn, and *inwardly digest*." How many of those who observe the first process, quite, or nearly quite, neglect the last. And so, what they gather does not become absorbed into their character—themselves. Often, therefore, it even disagrees with them, as Leighton observes (1 Peter ii. 2), and what should have been their meat turns into gall. For there seem some nowadays, as well as in his time, who "observe what the word says, that they may be the better

enabled to discover the failings of others, and speak maliciously and uncharitably of them." Oh, Martha-lives that ours are in these days! would it not be well to take that old kind hint, and compel some Mary-pauses in them?

I have somewhat at length justified my loitering. But, since I could not very well go through this explanation to the little curtsiers that passed me, wending their way from school, and walking on with their heads backward until a bend hid me; nor to the ploughboy, for whom I had now and then to make way at the gate; nor to the farmer, who rode by towards his men;—there was something of perhaps an over-sensitive grit that marred the smooth run of the wheel of my meditations. Since, however, to write looks more like work than merely to think, let this wheel now glide on without jar or grate.

The bare plough-lands: these were all my landscape. Other fields had been long time carpeted with the infant growth, but these, it happened, lay still naked and barren. I knew, however, that this was not by accident or neglect, but by intention of the Farmer. And so, I thought, wait, and see what he will put in; though it tarry, wait for it. There is much to be done before the harvest shall be reaped from this field, and an inexperienced eye might think the prospect dreary enough. But there is this cheering thought as we look at the dry, crumbling, broken and contrite earth, *that it is now well prepared to receive the good seed.* When the corn is entrusted to it at last, there is no hindrance, and much help for its growing. The road beyond is bare; the field also has, it is true, no more growth upon it than that hard road can show. But the cheering difference in the case of the plough-land is, that it has not been left to itself,

but process after process has passed over it, and changed its hardness, and nurtured and increased its principle of fertility.

“Thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem,  
Break up your fallow ground.”

Well, this order has been obeyed for the field that stretches before me. I can well guess how it was with it. One effort of growth was over, one year of work done ; the corn had been carried, and it seemed time to think of rest. Many feet and wheels had passed over the field, many stones had come to the surface ; itself had settled down to somewhat of hardness and solidity. A crust of stiff earth was gathering between it and the sweet influences of heaven, once so readily welcomed. And, furthermore, a tangled covering of weeds made a web of fibres under the surface, and a profitless growth above it ; and this, in spite of a superficial uprooting and burning of some after the harvest. Then the carts came again, and heaped manure over the field. This seemed well and pleasant enough ; more riches added to a rich soil, and the weeds began to increase in number and vigour. For I have noticed, that when the heart is sinking into sleep, or has never been awake, fresh favours and gifts seem sometimes to be added to it, before the next process comes.

This arrives, however, soon. The keen plough overturning earth's rank weed-growth, and burying it under the broad sullen ridges ; breaking up the hardening ground ;—and then leaving all naked, desolate, bare, ruined. But *we* know that all is thus well ; and now, is it not ready for the sowing ? Nay,—try to harrow that stiff caked soil, and you will see. So heavy rains come upon it, and seem to make it yet more sullenly sodden ;

and keen winds sting it ; and then the clear starry silent nights come—six weeks of them ; and the moon in its changes looks down upon the hard, and bare, and frost-bound field. As bare as ever, hard, and unimpressible, wondering bitterly at this change of the hand of the Lord towards it ; blow after blow ;

“ Deep calleth unto deep,—  
All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.”

Then the frost goes, and a mild tender change comes in the air, and the sun looks out, and lo, the stiff clay crumbles into soft fertile mould, under the foot or the harrow.

We have most of us felt God's plough cutting through the heart's gathering ease and self-indulgence. Life's luxuries and the habits of the world were treading the ground hard ; weeds of worldly loves, and cares, and pleasures, and business, were rankly overgrowing it. Fresh mercies produced fresh selfishness, instead of new energy for God ; and the richer the ground became, the more rampant grew the weeds.

Then came God's keen husbandry, cutting through our quiet dreanful hearts, dispelling their slothful, selfish stagnation of rest, laying them bare and naked and scarred, to the streaming rain and the searching wind, and the iron frost : and then at last, if we would, leaving the ground broken and contrite and crumbling, and ready for the sowing.

I go on, however, from these more particular and individual analogies, to the wider subject that developed from my musings in the plough-lands. This subject was no new one, it will be at once seen. For the broad brown fields reminded me of

the prospect on which I look, many a day, in my church—a sower come forth to sow.

No new subject. How common the illustration in Holy Writ—the Seed is the Word; Christ's Ambassadors are the Sowers; the hearts of men the ground; ground how varied in character!

“Thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.

In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand;  
For thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that,  
Or whether they both shall be alike good.”

“Sow to yourselves in righteousness—reap in mercy;

Break up your fallow ground;

For it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you.”

And then that famous parable of the sower and the four soils had I not plenty of precedent for connecting the idea of the expecting plough-lands with that of the congregation in my church, waiting to hear the word read or preached?

All one field they seem to me, and yet each separate heart is really itself a field. There are road-side hearts, no doubt, in plenty, but it is noticeable that of the four soils in the parable, *three* were prepared at the time of sowing; prepared, that is, in a degree. There was the broken ground with the rock an inch or so under it; the plough-land deep enough, but hiding lurking thorn-roots; and the soils varying in richness, but all really prepared and ready for the good seed.

And so most of the congregation before my mind's eye are in a measure prepared. They are, at least mostly, more or less interested listeners. And the sower sows the seed. And





then in every field the parable begins to be acted. Some one represents this phase of it, another that; in some, all the processes are going on. For busy fowls are catching up the grain here and there, and some of it is lost by a swoop of wandering thought. Anon some word excites, with, however, but a transient impression, and withers ere well started to grow. Then some seed lodges, hereafter to be stifled by thorn-roots left, alas! ungrubbed-up ere the heart came to the sowing. Again, some grain finds a soft well-prepared place in the heart, and abides, and is carried away in safe keeping, and hereafter appears in the fruit of practice, some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred fold.

How different the effect of the same word on different hearts! Consequently the cause of a poor crop, or of no crop, must often be sought not in the sower, nor in the seed, but *in the soil*. The sower, feeling his own inadequacy, may yet sow boldly, because God never gives a command that He does not also make it possible to obey; and He has commanded, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." But how differently even the best seed and the best sowing prosper in different hearts, or in the same heart at different times!

For, I repeat, you need not go farther than the field of one heart to find all the varieties of ground. Perhaps the heart whose open-wounded need is at this time welcoming and treasuring the grain, was not long before hard and unprepared as a trodden path. But God's keen plough has passed through it since, turning its ways upside down, and the sharp discipline of frosts and tears and winds have changed and transformed the stubborn outside of its indifference; and its desolate bareness



craves just now for the tender green clothing of God's own fields. Time will show whether the ground had been indeed prepared; and there is need to remind that long time and many processes yet intervene between the sowing and the crop. Has the seed root to thrive, and not to perish, in the burning sun? The springing growth of worldly cares and pleasures,—shall they yet have vitality enough to overshadow and mar the yield?

The principle, the power of fertility, this was given by God; this was the work of the Holy Spirit moving upon and quickening the dull clay. But this principle may lie dormant for very long, until some one of God's keen ploughs turn up the fallow ground; and some sower, perhaps one seemingly of little power, comes to sow; and some seed, often a very simple, unpretending grain, makes a lodgment, and the principle of fertility is called into action. Then (if it be late in the year) there are instances of very rapid growth. It is true that perhaps as a rule there will be in this untimely growth more stalk than grain; sometimes, however, as in St. Augustine's case, the late harvest is rich and full.

Often a weak sower, often a very simple seed,—often many slight and repeated events, which cannot be particularised or recalled, have caused the field to wave with grain. Sometimes there seems to have been no check to keep dormant the power of growth from the very earliest time; and first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear, began and succeeded with an even and unbroken course. I think we notice in many of these cases, that the harvest early ready is early reaped.

The plough-lands, ah, they give rise to many anxious musings in the earnest sower's heart!—musings in society, musings when

alone, and on his knees; musings when he goeth out, and when he cometh in; when he sitteth in his house, and when he walketh by the way; when he lieth down, and when he riseth up. Musings self-upbraiding; musings heaven-adoring; musings hopeful, cast down (but never despairing); musings sad, joyful, careful, busy, wistful, compassionate, loving. (O dull, stolid ground, our heart is open, our mouth is enlarged to you; you are not straitened in us, but in your own heart!

Well, we are but *sowers* in all our ministrations. It is ours to sow on all ground; we know not which shall prosper: it is for us to *sow*. Yet we know well that our toil will be fruitless but for the previous preparation (sometimes *after*-preparation, so to speak, the seed having lain undetected till some working broke the ground),—but for the preparation, the best seed most earnestly sown must fail. An inspired apostle—such a one as St. Paul—might he dispense with the previous processes? Nay, in the case of Lydia we have a glance given us of the plough-land, and of how it was prepared for the seed: “*Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.*”

And we have seen some of the ways in which God often by long and careful processes prepares the land for the sowing. That cutting plough of sorrow and anguish,—how many a one has blessed its operations upon his dull, and world-trodden, and weed-grown heart!

“ Before I was afflicted I went astray ;  
But now have I kept Thy word.

It is good for me that I have been afflicted  
That I might learn Thy statutes.”

The heart could not *keep* the word, although that fell upon it, until the long furrow had been made in it.

“ Oh deem not they are blest alone  
 Whose lives a peaceful tenor keep ;  
 The Power who pities man has shown  
 A blessing for the eyes that weep.”

Since, however, it is to be God's husbandry that is to prepare the heart, what are they to do who are conscious that their heart is not prepared ; who can guess that it is as yet a caked and weedy waste ? Are they to sit still, and wait idle until God, quite independently of their labour, shall dispose their heart ? Not so. There is at every stage work given to ourselves to be done ; and however we cannot yet *feel*, there are certain things which every one can surely *do*. God must work. But may not—must not we put ourselves in the way of His working, so far as lies in our power ? Must we not be found wherever He has told us there is grace to be had ? If we wait for an earthquake to break up our fallow ground, this may never come. If we try to use now the help already provided, no fear but “to him that hath, shall more be given.” O roadside hearts, can you not at least *pray* that God's plough would break you up ? Can you not at least let no means of grace that you can reach remain unused ? It is God's work, if our hearts are broken and contrite ; but *it is our own fault* if they are caked and hardened still.

So, too, when God *has* broken up the hard soil, let us go carefully over the ground to do our part with watchfulness and prayer. Let us fall to with pick and spade and barrow, to

break up and to carry away the hard rock that we find yet underlying the ground whose crust at least is broken ; and let us bring in fresh earth from where it is to be had for the asking and the carrying.

“ Make you a new heart and a new spirit ;  
For why will ye die ? ”

Again let us watch for every sign of old thorn-roots not yet fully grubbed up,—vices of nature, or of education, or of care-



lessness, sins which easily beset us ; and temptations special to us, whether from this world's cares, or its pleasures, or deceitful possessions. And let us in God's might have them up, not

leaving one fibre of them behind, though they be precious to us as an eye, useful as a right hand, needful as a foot.

“ The dearest idol I have known,  
 Whate’er that idol be,  
 Help me to tear it from Thy throne,  
 And worship only Thee ! ”

Stay not to remember the fair flowers of these thorns, nor their pleasant shade of old. Be it enough to have discovered that they would choke the good seed, and render it unfruitful.

“ Yes, —let them pass without a sigh ;  
 And if the world seem dull and dry,  
 If long and sad thy lonely hours,  
 And winds have rent thy sheltering bowers,  
 Bethink thee what thou art, and where,  
 A sinner in a life of care.”

When God gathers in the harvest, you will discover that all was well,—sharp plough, bitter wind, cruel frost, unceasing watching and toil, heart that seemed for a time bare of all beauty and joy.

“ How wilt thou then look back, and smile  
 On thoughts that bitterest seemed erewhile,  
 And bless the pangs that made thee see  
 This was no world of rest for thee ! ”

I am drawing near the end of these musings. The black rooks and the white-breasted gulls have retreated and still retreated, filling the air with wings and cries, before the labourers in the field. And a great part of it is now

levelled, and by means of the last process made quite ready for the sowing. The heavy long furrows are seen no more; for the harrow has passed over the crumbling mould. And when the seed is sown, if it be sown broadcast at least, the harrow will pass over it again, to hide it in the earth, and keep it from the birds. Shall I be fanciful if I see here again an analogy which I would fain find in the congregation? Just before the sowing, even when you enter God's House of Prayer, you have, or should take care to have, a few quiet minutes for silent devotion. Ere the service begins let the harrow of a few earnest words pass over your heart; a prayer for His help and blessing who alone can make the good seed prosper there, and who may make it prosper more or less according to the earnestness of your preparation. And after the seed is sown, and you are bending again upon your knees, ere you leave God's House for the world, let the harrowing again take place, that the seed may be preserved safe. Let it not be merely a customary minute of decent silence; go not over the ground with the toothless harrow of an unfelt prayer, but be in earnest; the effect of the whole sowing may depend on the carefulness or the carelessness of this last process.

And then go out into the world, and if it be early days with you, let the first Spring months find a starting growth, and each day of God's rain or sun a corresponding increase; and with the advantage of your early start, be not content with thirty-fold where you may yield a hundred. But if it be late with you, and the field yet bare in April, or later yet, carry

then a broken and yearning heart to God ; and oh, when it is sown, though the Summer months have come upon you unawares, put out every energy of your being and of your pleading, that there may yet be found a well-rooted, abundant crop. Starting though at different times, let each be found uplifting a ripe harvest when the Autumn comes, and God puts in the sickle.



**SILENT LIVES.**







THAT time is left far behind us (as much as anything can be far, in the close limit of a year), that time when through January we tried to believe that the days were really growing longer, the mornings lighter, and the afternoons becoming a fact again. And, in truth, towards the end of the month of course there *was* a difference—but not a comfortable difference, not a difference to bask in, to revel in, and to enjoy. That dull chill gloom, more dreary than darkness absolute, which miserably shadowed out the undefined chairs, bath, table ;—how uninviting it

made the plunge into the day appear, if you lay for a minute to think about it! And when—the struggling half-light gaining ground sufficiently to bar the drawn blind, and give it a blue look in the yellow candle-light—you thought yourself in duty bound to extinguish that flame, itself beginning to look ill at ease, sickly, and out of place, and you then drew up the blind, and tried to imagine that daylight had returned,

what a chill, crude, unripened daylight this was—and how difficult to part your hair by it! At eight, just as you were leaving the room, the real thing would sometimes come; and out of some rosy broken bits on the horizon, the sun, made of two halves, bigger below and smaller above, and unnaturally elongated, would emerge, and flood the room with a mellow orange glory. It was then, however, but How-d'ye-do, and Good-bye—you had to go downstairs, and *he* to ascend, into that great bank of cloud canopying the whole heaven, out of that narrow strip of clear sky in which for a quarter of an hour only he should reign gloriously. You could not help staying a few minutes to greet him; but you had just opened the window, and there were some twelve degrees of frost, and your fingers did ache to a degree that awoke a passion for that great good-humoured fire which you knew awaited you in the dining-room. So, until that was reached, animal *enjoyment* of the morning could not be said to have begun.

How different now; now that a quarter of the year has gone, and that sweet April is with us again! How the generous sunbeams are flooding the room when the hour comes for rising! How the first noisy awakening twitter of the birds, the tuning of the concert, has subsided in a measure, and some clear solo voice is giving praise for the thickening hedges and the fledging trees. And every morning makes a difference in the limes and elms which you see from your window; and every day there is some progress to be noted after breakfast in the garden: the curved slender emerald loops of the second crop of peas are breaking the brown loose mould here and there; the dusky green of the ash-leaf kidneys is to be irregularly detected over





the beds ; long parallel bars of mustard and cress please your eye ; the radishes (how those birds get at them !) are appearing under the net ; a narrow examination reveals a dull limp fringe commencing along the onion lines. Pleasant, all this is ; but, when you have indulged the children by going with them "just to look at *our* gardens," you must go in to work.

April days, sweet April days ! in truth, it is difficult to settle to steady work when the first one or two real Spring days are here.

" Make haste, your morning task resign,  
Come forth and feel the sun,"

—thus the opening warmth and brightness and song seem to invite you. But some graver matters demand your attention, and the study chair must not wait for you in vain, nor be vacated till these are dismissed.

However, I have sometimes drawn my chair into the bow-window, and now and then, between the intervals of reading, looked up for a restful space of dreamy enjoyment. This is not a plan to be recommended, if steady reading be your object ; but if there be time to

" Feed this mind of ours  
In a wise passiveness,"

a sweet healthful recreation lurks in thus, for some few quarters of an hour, giving up our minds to

" Drink at every pore  
The spirit of the season."

And this morning I feel a deep interest in watching the birds, and meditating upon their ways.

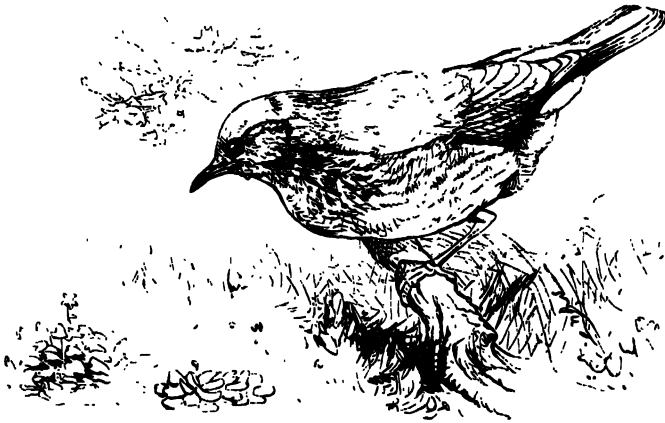
On a former occasion, (some reader with soul akin may remember,) I walked out into the wood, and mused upon the birds of song. It is my purpose now to consider from my window the silent birds, and to gather presently the moral from their less noticed and unremarkable lives. There is an old pear-



tree opposite my point of view, very attractive, apparently, to these busy homely bodies ; also a smooth sunny piece of lawn.

Silent lives, and what they do : Under this head I would pen a few quiet thoughts which may (who knows ?) cheer and aid some heart in need of cheering ; and find their way, like a thin slant of sunshine, into some unknown, unnoticed nest which had begun to seem a little dull and monotonous, under the leaves, to the sitter upon "five blue eggs," which (she some-

times morbidly thinks) will never come to anything, at least to anything of importance. The world is chiefly made up of these silent lives ; the great songsters are the exception, not the rule. You may count on your fingers your store of black-birds, of thrushes, of nightingales, of woodlarks ; but your garden has its hundreds of sparrows, tomtits, chaffinches, green linnets ; and the air is incessantly divided by the multitudes of



fast-cleaving, silent swallows. And so with mankind : the more part by far live and pass away, and the world knows little or nothing of them ; they never make a noise in it, beyond a chirp or a twitter or a little insignificant warble that attracts no notice from any ordinary passer-by. The world is full of analogies ;—this is pointed out to us even by the finger of God. Go to the ant, you are bidden, for a lesson of industry ; consider her ways, and be wise. Learn, from the power and the craft



of the lion, the subtlety and might of the lurking, roaring Enemy of souls. From the bands of locusts, gather polity; from the feeble conies, with their strong houses, learn the triumph of a wise and patient industry: be the horse-leech the type of avarice; the shorn sheep of meekness; the serpent of wisdom. Yes, and to come nearer home to the present subject, how many a beautiful lesson is taught us in the pages of Holy Writ from the birds! Their order and just instinct, how touchingly are these contrasted with the perverseness and unnatural rebellion of man:—

“ Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times ;  
 And the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming ;  
 But my people know not the judgment of the Lord.”

A dozen of such similes will start up to the thought of the reader. The eagle shall show God's care of His people in the wilderness :—

“ As an eagle stirreth up her nest,—fluttereth over her young ;  
 Spreadeth abroad her wings,—taketh them, beareth them on her wings ;  
 So the Lord alone did lead him.”

You remember—the better for the exquisite picture of Leighton's in the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1865—that dark, grizzled-haired king, his crown at his feet, his harp idle beside him, leaning his weary, yearning face in his hand, and watching from the house-top those strong, unwearied wings cleaving the overhanging clouds up towards the blue; you hear his passionate outburst—

“ Oh, that I had wings like a dove !  
For then would I fly away and be at rest.  
Lo, then would I wander far off,—and remain in the wilderness ;  
I would hasten my escape—from the windy storm and tempest.”

And in another mood, of duller, quieter, more morbid sadness :—

“ I am like a pelican of the wilderness :—I am like an owl of the desert :  
I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house-top.”

Could our sickly, lonely moods of perhaps diseased depression and self-banishment from our kind be more exactly matched than by this last image ? I seem always to see the desolate, ruffled heap of feathers, as it sits apart from its chirping mates, its head a little on one side, and all the miseries in its filmed eye.

Yet, further, the Great Teacher takes this very bird as a witness to us of God's care of mankind. Cheap though it might be ; common, and little thought of,—“ not one falleth to the ground without my Father ; and are ye not much better than they ?”

I return, however, to my own humble analogies between the songless birds and many a silent life.

I was reading a description of the Hedge-sparrow, that “ gentle, innocent, confiding little brown bird, which creeps like a mouse through our garden flower-beds, picks up a meagre fare in our roads and lanes, builds its nest in our thorn-hedges, and, though dingy itself, lays such brilliant blue eggs.” True, he is not quite a silent bird : he has his sweet little song, but it is exceedingly quiet and unobtrusive. And I think in the

following account of him we have quite a faithful picture of many and many a homely, unnoticed life which goes on about our gardens and lanes; the monotonous search for a scant but sufficient subsistence; the simple notes of morning and evening praise; the implicit, unsuspecting trust; the cruel awakening from this, and the lonely and desolate brooding for a time, but ere long beginning to build again; the gentle life, unconsciously winning love, and imperceptibly, as it were, aiding and cheering those who hardly remarked the bright eye and quiet chirp, but yet gathered from them comfort and refreshment:—all this I trace in the simple annals of his life, whether fancifully or no, judge ye who read it.

“This bird is one of the few belonging to the tribe (of warblers), who remain with us all the Winter; we should suppose, indeed, that he never wandered far from the place of his birth. At all seasons his habits and food appear to be the same. All day long he is shuffling about on the ground, picking up minute atoms,—whether seeds or insects, who knows? Every day, nearly all the year round, he repairs at intervals to the nearest hedge, where he sings a song soft and gentle like himself; and every evening, when the blackbird rings his curfew bell, he fails not to respond with his drowsy ‘cheep, cheep,’ as he repairs to the bush he has selected for his night’s rest. Very early in Spring, before his brother warblers have arrived from the south, he has chosen his mate, built his snug nest, and too probably commenced a second; for, unsuspecting in nature, he does not retire to solitary places for this purpose, and the leafless hedges but ill conceal his labours from the peering eyes of all-destroying boys. Such are nearly all his ‘short and simple

annals.' He quarrels with no one ; he achieves no distinction, throwing no one into ecstasies with his song, and stealing no one's fruit ; unobtrusive and innocent, he claims no notice, and dreads no resentment ; and so, through all the even tenor of his way, he is, without knowing it, the favourite of children, and of all the good and gentle."

Thus does Mr. Johns describe my little friend, and little guest ; for many a crumb has he had from me during the sharp days of the deep Winter, when the earth was spread with a great white tablecloth, but no dinner at all upon it for the little Sancho Panzas that looked on ruefully from the bushes.

I shall not see yet, from my bow-window, another great ally of mine ; an exceedingly quiet and quite silent little bird, except for his one sharp cry of "e-gýpt," towards the Autumn of the year. For the Flycatcher comes late, about the end of May. It is always a great pleasure to me, the first morning that I see him at his post, quietly and at once beginning his employment, and pursuing it henceforward throughout every summer day. Those short silent flights, and return, time after time, to the same standard rose or the same laburnum branch which he left for his unerring glide (I cannot call it "dart") after some insect : how incessant they are ; again and again that noticeably noiseless flitting ; and lo ! there still he sits on his post as before. But only consider the amount of insects of which he has cleared the air in a long summer's day ; ay, at the end of the whole Summer ; and if you dislike, as I do, gnats in your eyes and throat, own that here is a silent life which the world would miss.

I pass over the cleaving Swallows, busy on the same quest ;

scavengers of the air ; silent, save for a queer broken twitter when, at some rare interval, they get time to meditate on the roof of a barn. Also the Water-wagtails, whose kind offices are directed towards relieving the poor fly-maddened cattle, "running in and out among their legs, and catching in a short time an incredible number of flies." And I proceed to ask you whether



you like caterpillars in your greens, or maggots in your choice rose-leaves ? If not, then you might have noted with interest, as I did, the work of another songless, but busy little pair of lives, from the morning to the evening of many long, burning days. I watched them from another window than this where I am at present sitting ; a window from which, at an angle, stretched a wall

of great grey stones, built to prop up the kitchen garden, which overlooked my slip of lawn. Deep within the interstices of this wall a pair of Tomtits had made their nest; the young ones were in due time hatched, and so far fledged that both parents could leave them. And then, with unwearied love all the long day, these parents catered, or cater-pillared, for the hungry offspring. I suppose every one or two minutes either father or mother appeared, perched for a moment upon a stake close to the nest, and then dived into the hole, bearing always some nasty green or white beast which might have exhibited its horrid row of dead legs, and wrinkled body (after boiling), upon the side of your plate, finishing you off for any colewort for a year at least. Only think of the amount of these soft, cold, even *wet*, maggots and caterpillars carried off and disposed of by those noiseless little workers during even one day!

I might dwell upon other useful, yet scarcely noticed offices performed by these simple, silent lives. I might remind the traveller in the hot dust-piled road in July, of that little yellow bird that keeps him company along the "dusty wayside drear." There is no song, only an ever-repeated plaintive note, (thus justly imitated, "A little bread and butter if—*you*—please,") and a gentle little creature which *must* be flitting along the hedge to keep us company; what else could attract it away from the cool shade? Still, you will hardly notice it, unless you listen and look for it. Or the Chaffinch; he has only the first half of the above note; yet it pleases merely to see his smooth salmon-pink breast, and exceedingly trim plumage, and the clean white bar on his wing: and so he has his use; besides that he aids with the vermin, and assists in keeping the groundsel within bounds. But I have

brought forward instances enough, and I go on therefore to those human analogies towards which all this was to lead.

.Silent lives. How many these are, and how useful! And first I think of the monotonous, unknown, unpretending work of the Mother of a family,—what a sameness of life, what a continual routine of voiceless, seemingly insignificant duties! Little tender services, little watchful teachings, little grave checkings, little gentle guidings; line upon line; here a little and there a little. Little anxious yearnings, little quiet prayers,—and so the life goes on. And if her heart be longing to spend and be spent in her dear Lord's service, perhaps she has her dull hours of depression: she is doing nothing, can do nothing, she fears, for Christ. Nothing? O silent lives, how much, how very much you may do in this world, where so much has to be done! Mere gentleness and kindness, taught by God's Spirit—of this we can hardly overvalue the influence and effect. But to have a nest of Christ's little ones to rear for Him, and this with the certainty of His aid in answer to prayer—what shall we say of this? O work, to undertake which, the sweetest-toned harp in Heaven might be gladly laid down! And the five blue eggs, that you sometimes fear may come to nought,—take courage, who knows? For *you* it is possible that among them may be found a voice for God, to which hereafter the World shall listen.

How unpretentious, again, how silent, the life of a village schoolmaster or mistress! Compare it with—what shall I say?—the career of a Prime Minister, for instance: obscure, insignificant—this you might call it, upon a superficial consideration,—a life making little noise, attracting little attention, this it

certainly is. But oh, what an important life it may really be, and what a voice may sound from it into Eternity! Who knows whether even the Statesman's life shall leave so loud vibrations there? As I go into my school, and see the clean decently clad ranks, from the taller first class, answering my kindly look with a smile of confidence and mutual good understanding, to the



pinafores, naked-armed mites, that stand in a row looking up with timid side-look; as I walk from form to form and survey them, some sixty or a hundred—how vast a charge they appear to my mind to be! And I go to the master's desk, and lean my chin upon my hand, and peruse meditatively the faces, one by



one, while they are singing a hymn, until my eyes have sometimes filled with tears. Not above five or six out of the whole school have faces in which there is not some point of interest to a heart which studies them lovingly; very few indeed are there, I say, which are to my eye positively plain. And there they stand, ductile, malleable, now; comparatively innocent, tender, docile; and it is possible to train them in the way that they should go. And these are the future men and women of the parish. I wonder what the coming life of each will be; what experiences lie before them! what an interesting, perhaps what a thrilling story is just hardly begun in each! Experiences how many and how various, before *Finis* is written on that last page at the end! Bright experiences, some; but how many, if not most, dull and sad! Experiences of disappointment, of distress, of deeper or fainter shadows of sorrow: but all these I could bear to think of, for "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." But experiences of *sin*; ah, this is the mournful augury in my heart, and this thought causes the yearning that brings the tears near my eyes. "God keep you, little ones," my heart prays, and then I consider how sacred a charge (not to speak of my own share in it) is that of the teacher and trainer of these young pliable growths. We cannot keep them from temptation; nay, there was One who, praying for His "little children," prayed "not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." So we may not wish that they shall not undergo their proper trial, their needful discipline; but with regard to those who have the care of them ere they must go out into the rough and evil world, what opportunity, what great power have they, we cannot but think,

to fence and arm them with principles of good which may (by God's grace) bring them unscathed through its temptations! Not, indeed, unmarked with wounds and scars, but grasping the victor's crown at last, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And with these thoughts, I look with almost awe upon the village schoolmaster or mistress by my side. What a charge, in truth, has God, who so works by means that upon the faithfulness or unfaithfulness of His instruments He makes the everlasting interests of His creatures to depend!—what a charge has God committed to them! For you will at once recall that declaration, of how the after-life shall, at least in great measure, depend upon the early training. And, whether backed or thwarted by home influence, yet still what effect upon this after-life, upon the Eternity of these immortal beings, may result simply from the watchful, prayerful, loving, wise and continual supervision and training of the school! Silent, unpretending lives!—busy with scarce seen insects, and tiny seeds of evil; unknown and unnoticed teachers of youth throughout the land, with what an ever-growing loudness and importance may your life's work be daily heard, in the Country where many of the most regarded lives on earth make no music at all!

Thoughts parallel with the above I have found in one of Hawthorne's *Twice-told Tales*. This was of a youth early possessed with the presage of some high destiny in store for him; some position of mighty influence, in which it should be his lot powerfully to sway the mind and actions of his kind. He roams the world in search of this grand work; and, after long years, weary with travel, and somewhat past the flush of youth, he retraces his tired steps to his native village. There, almost at

once upon his arrival, the expected sign is given, the deputation waits upon him, the presage is fulfilled. He accepts the solution, perceives its truth and adequacy, and spends the remaining days of his silent life as master of the village school.

Yes, the offices of the innumerable little birds, that have no ear-arresting song, remind me, cheeringly, how many quiet, faithful-hearted servants of the Lord, unknown to us, there are in the world, and how valuable their lives may be in God's sight. For how much is wrought for Christ by the quiet routine of unobtrusive, incessant usefulness; how much work, of value both in quantity and quality, but known hardly beyond the nest! And even the few simple repeated notes of a gentle, loving life, heard by the dusty hot wayside of a journey so often dull and tiring, what power for consolation, for encouragement, for example, may these slight, insignificant, often unregarded utterances exert at times when they come upon the heart's craving want, or its dull abstraction. Here we have an etching of such a silent life:—

“His life grew fragrant with the inner soul;  
 And weary folk, who passed him in the street,  
 Saw Christ's love beam from out the wistful eyes,  
 And had new confidence in God and man.  
 And so he worked and longed, and lived and loved,  
 Did noble deeds, not knowing what he did,  
 Thought noble thoughts, unconscious of their worth,  
 And lived that greatness he desired in vain.”

And surely this may be an encouraging thought for those with earnest aspirations, but placed in a retired sphere. We cannot all sit high on our bough and sing to an entranced

world, nor is it necessary or desirable that all should do so. But all may have some useful, continual, serviceable work to do for Christ. And it is anything but a good sign if we are restless for notice. It is not a good sign if (in the case, for instance, of a change coming upon a hitherto worldly and thoughtless life) you cannot be content to be an unknown and silent disciple, but must begin to fuss about and try to make a noise, and to usurp the place of the teacher. How commonly I have seen this mistake! Late beginners in the Christian life seem ill-content to be simply unheard learners. Of course, I say to all, if you are a thrush or a nightingale, you must sing; but, under ordinary circumstances, be contented to be a little quiet, unnoticed, unpraised worker. Ay, and if I say, in a case in which you are free to choose,—and in which duty or circumstances do not make it necessary or unavoidable,—escape publicity if you can, I shall be only echoing advice that all have before this laid up in the heart's stores: "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet; when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth; when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast." The silent life seems recommended as safer and better, where possible, certainly not spoken of as being a thing to be deplored. And then comes upon the command the cheering assurance that that of which men never knew was not unnoticed by God. "Thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly."

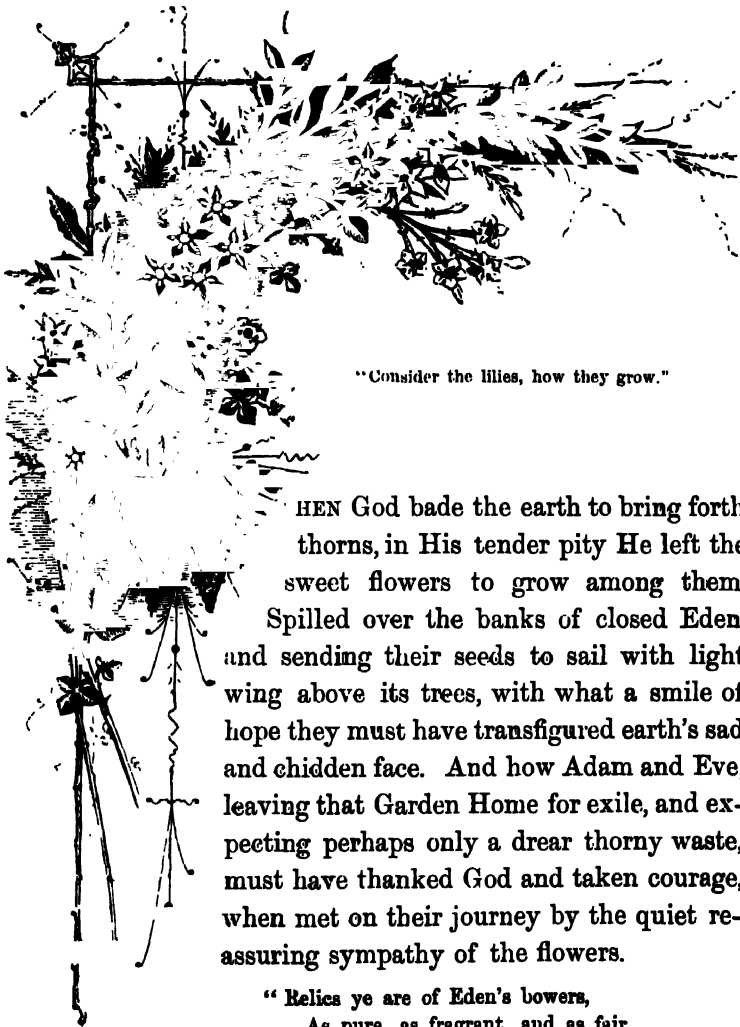
I think the most difficult, and also the most beautiful instance of a silent life will be where great and brilliant powers are just purely laid at God's disposal, and as readily carried to an obscure unnoticed sphere of work, as they would have been to that

in which notice, perhaps praise and admiration, would have been won ; where a gassy coal, that could have given out jets and streams in front of the fire, is well content to be buried at the back, and perceived only by its effects of giving an undistinguished aid to the general heat ; where a bird that could have sung like a woodlark, is happy, if so it be appointed, with the hedge-sparrow's work. Such cases will occur to most memories. The Redwing is the type of these lives. In Norway he is called the Norwegian nightingale for his sweet voice ; but in his sojourn in England he is content to be a silent listener to the thrush, his kinsman. He is never tempted to dispute the palm with him ; here, another bird is God's herald, and he, conscious of his own powers, is content to be silent—can afford to be looked upon as one of the songless birds among us, with the power really of thrilling our hearts with melody. How different from the vain thought lurking in the mind of many of us, that God cannot be served without our own voice, and that His work must be hindered if *we* are set on one side.

Silent lives. One more of them, to supply an ending thought. A tiny flitting bird of slight song may, with careful scrutiny, be seen twisting in and out of the drooping fir-tassels. Many would pass it unnoticed, but the observant eye will detect the gleam of a gold circlet upon the tiny Gold-crested Wren. Thus men will pass unregarded many a noiseless, retired worker for God, in some sphere of seclusion and shade. But they who watch and know will be aware at times of the light of a Saint's glory already haloling the modest head.

MUSINGS AMONG THE FLOWERS.





“Consider the lilies, how they grow.”

WHEN God bade the earth to bring forth thorns, in His tender pity He left the sweet flowers to grow among them. Spilled over the banks of closed Eden, and sending their seeds to sail with light wing above its trees, with what a smile of hope they must have transfigured earth's sad and chidden face. And how Adam and Eve, leaving that Garden Home for exile, and expecting perhaps only a drear thorny waste, must have thanked God and taken courage, when met on their journey by the quiet reassuring sympathy of the flowers.

“Relics ye are of Eden's bowers,  
As pure, as fragrant, and as fair,  
As when ye crowned the sunshine hours  
Of happy wanderers there.”



They followed them out, and their quiet love looked up at them, until Adam might have said to weeping Eve, "All Eden is not lost to us ; we are not wholly shut out from the Garden of God." As a child that cannot understand its parents' sorrow, yet understands that they are unhappy, and will not let curiosity ask, and stills even the wonder in its eyes, and busies itself in some small tender ministry, or stands quietly by, all yearning timid love, until a kindly noticing smile brightens in the sad brow, and satisfies the true little heart—something in this way those innocent Eden companions waited beside the banished pair. And in them earth found words to comfort her child—earnest and crowding consolations and arguments, succeeding in endless succession upon her lips ; and though many might wither and not convince, yet she would not be disheartened, and would cheer by love, if not by logic. "*I share your curse, my children, yet I bid you cheer ; there is hope, there is hope, there is hope.*" So, in a great trouble, an earnest heart will often press arguments of comfort upon us, which, if they do not persuade, at least help us with a grateful sense of the affection that dictates them.

And, both Adam and earth under their curse,—how touched and cheered they must have been by God's tender love, when they saw the very thorns of that curse bursting into flower ! That spiked bush which Adam saw with a shudder at its gaunt fulfilment of the dread sentence, as he left summer Eden for the winter plains ; a little while later he passed it, and, behold, a broad white mass of rose-tinted blossom ! Then might he begin to understand how, even in God's judgments,

Musings among the flowers. Truly the subject ought to make lovely thoughts crowd up over the barest heart, even as naked earth was suddenly clad with these flowers upon her natal day. And if flowers were first invented on that day, what an exquisite treat the angels must have had! One moment ago, a bare sullen waste; and now, one word—and the wilderness is a garden!



What poet, whether in prose or rhyme, but has loved, like the children on May-day, at one time or another, to gather his garland of flowers? Thomson has a well-culled wreath, woven of the Spring flowers first, and then linking in the Summer-wealth:

*Musings among the Flowers.*

" The yellow wallflower, stained with iron brown ;  
 And lavish stock, that scents the garden wide ;  
 Anemones, auriculas, enriched  
 With shining meal o'er all their velvet leaves ;  
 And full ranunculus of glowing red.  
 Then comes the tulip-race, where beauty plays  
 Her idle freaks.  
 No gradual bloom is wanting : from the bud  
 First-born of Spring, to Summer's musky tribes ;  
 Nor hyacinths, of purest virgin white,  
 Low-bent, and blushing inward ; nor jonquils  
 Of potent fragrance ; nor narcissus fair,  
 As o'er the fabled fountain hanging still ;  
 Nor broad carnations, nor gay-spotted pinks ;  
 Nor, showered from every bush, the damask rose.



Perhaps a funeral wreath is ill-sorted with the mention of a  
 May garland ; yet the two are not seldom mingled on earth ;  
 and flowers, like bells, suit either.

" I thought thy bride-bed to have decked, sweet maid,  
 And not to have strewed thy grave."

But for both, flowers would have been exactly suitable. And

so I will add Milton's exquisite gathering of flowers for Lycidas :—

“ Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,  
The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,  
The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,  
The glowing violet,  
The musk-rose, and the well-attired woodbine,  
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,  
And every flower that sad embroidery wears :  
Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,  
And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,  
To strew the laureat hearse where Lycid lies.”

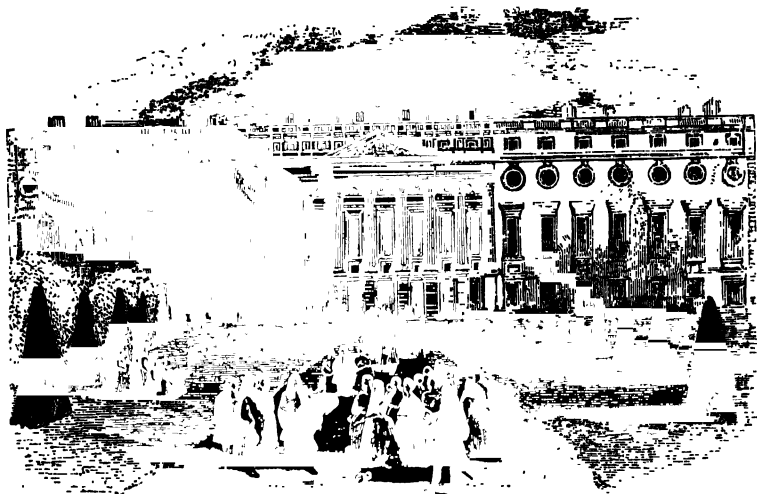
Then I must add Bacon's list of flowers sweet of scent. A very epicure is he in these—witness his notice of the strawberry leaves dying ; and truly there is a world of unnoted sweetness in the scent of dying leaves. He writes :—

“ Because the breath of flowers is far sweeter in the air (where it comes and goes, like the warbling of music) than in the hand ; therefore nothing is more fit for that delight than to know what be the flowers and plants that do best perfume the air. Roses, damask and red, are fast flowers of their smells ; so that you may walk by a whole row of them and find nothing of their sweetness, yea, though it be in a morning's dew. Bays, likewise, yield no smell as they grow ; rosemary little, nor sweet marjoram ; that which, above all others, yields the sweetest smell in the air is the violet, especially the white double violet, which comes twice a year—about the middle of April and about Bartholomew-tide. Next to that is the musk-rose, then the strawberry leaves dying, with a most excellent cordial smell ; then the flower of the vines—it is a little dust, like the dust of a bent, which grows

upon the cluster in the first coming forth ; then sweetbriar, then wallflowers, which are very delightful to be set under a parlour or lower chamber window ; then pinks and gilliflowers, especially the matted pink and clove gilliflowers ; then the flowers of the lime-tree ; then the honeysuckles, so they be somewhat afar off. Of bean-flowers I speak not, because they are field flowers ; but those which perfume the air most delightfully, not passed by as the rest, but being trodden upon and crushed, are three—that is, burnet, wild thyme, and water-mints ; therefore, you are to set whole alleys of them, to have the pleasure when you walk or tread.”

There is so great beauty in flowers, that do but with taste cull for your page a handful of their names, and you have provided pleasant reading. As in the piled basket after your foraging through the garden walks with intent to recruit the vases of your rooms, there is in them an exquisite beauty, even though by a haphazard arrangement ; the materials are so lovely, that they charm even with slight or no art. Indeed, the after-studied care does not always satisfy so well as that easy careless grouping. Thus a heap of flowers plucked as we go from this bed and from that, and gathered into a slight basket of prose or poetry—these will often please. But, both in figure and reality, how frequently a failure follows upon more formal arrangement, whether in the vases, or on the larger scale of a garden ! Set to work to mark out and plan a garden on paper, and whom will your careful dispositions satisfy ? What a most unsatisfactory square has even the great Bacon mapped out in his celebrated garden essay ; and where he failed none, to my mind, has succeeded. Cowper, be it observed, does not lay you out a garden,—walks here and alleys

there, and beds and lawn and pond all ticketed like the numbered stalls at a concert. He wisely confines himself to general praise of a garden, and to certain episodes, incidents, and operations in the management of it. And in this, success may be attained, but not by planning out a whole with stereotyped precision. The reason probably is, that no two gardens can be



exactly or nearly alike; that is, if they be worthy to be called gardens. A thousand nameless circumstances and special accidents make this curve proper for a walk, or fix that slope as the one spot for your purple beech, or suggest a fernery here, there an opening in the shrubbery, and there a circling advance of the laburnums, lilacs, and laurels, hemming in the smooth-shaven,

shadow-flecked, golden green lawn. You are struck by some arrangement in a friend's garden; you would repeat it in your own; a short trial shows that it won't do. And for this reason, that your garden has its own individuality, which differs from that of every other, as much as does the idiosyncrasy of its owner from that of all his fellow-men. More than this; often an arrangement commends itself as beautiful, when you are planning your real garden (a process which of course lasts throughout your ownership of the ground); for which there really is no exact reason to be given in black and white. And all these subtleties and intangible fitnesses are necessarily wanting to the cold, clear-cut, methodical laying out of the merely ideal garden. So you must be content with what you *can* get on paper—exquisite bits, planless sketches, peeps out of window or between two trees. There are plenty of these in most poets and many prose writers. Such vistas open exquisitely through the yew hedge of "In Memoriam." Coleridge is fond of such cabinet pictures; there are in Wordsworth many such vignettes; and here is a sweet coloured sketch from an older hand, of the flower shrubbery that shuts out your kitchen garden from view of the window opening upon the lawn:—

" Laburnum, rich

In streaming gold; syringa, ivory pure;  
 The scentless and the scented rose; this red,  
 And of an humbler growth, the other tall,  
 And throwing up into the darkest gloom  
 Of neighbouring cypress, or more sable yew,  
 Her silver globes, light as the foaming surf  
 That the wind severs from the broken wave;  
 The lilac various in array, now white,

Now sanguine, and her beauteous head now set  
With purple spikes pyramidal, as if,  
Studious of ornament, yet unresolved  
Which hue she most approved, she chose them all."

There is a noticeable word in St. Paul's epistles that, to my mind, seems connected with the culture of a garden, and I will explain why. The word is "more and more." This, under different forms, is always a yearning, often an utterance, in his writings. To increase and abound; to increase more and more; to press toward the mark, counting nothing perfect yet: thus he exhorts. And One before him had said, of His Father, the Husbandman, "Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, *that it may bring forth more fruit.*" And so the gardener is ever pruning, that the fruit may be more and finer; and manuring, that the ground may be the more productive; urging on the simplest flowers until they become choice rarities, seeking for all his plants and trees a perfection which still flies before him; new kinds, new varieties, each distancing the last; and all still far from that harmonious whole which he desires. It is an easier task if he confines his attention to one flower or one family; but the beautiful task is endless, if he aim to have *all* in order, and all at their highest perfection. "*More and more;*" that must be his motto to the end.

I think of this especially when I contemplate a double flower. Take the rose, as the most splendid specimen, holding the place that charity holds in the heart's garden, even as the lily represents its purity, and the violet its humility. Let us group two or three developments of this Queen of flowers. Cloth of Gold, with its pure pale yellow; the warm buff of Gloire de Dijon;



General Jacqueminot, of vivid velvety scarlet; Lamarque, softest snow-white, with lemon eye. That will do; and now hold them beside the sweet simple peasant single-rose in the hedge; not to shame its peculiar loveliness, but only to show to what the Rose has been developed; and yet for all this the cry of the rose-gardener is yet *more and more!* The aster



again. Take the dull yellow disk, with staring scanty rays of pink, white, or purple petals, that we remember in old days, and compare with it the ball of snow, or rose, or black purple, quilled with such exquisite regularity, or with countless petals deliciously curving inwards, to fashion the full globe. Again,

with fruit. Those tiny jewel strawberries, gleaming among the coarse grass on the side of the chalk hill—you notice a difference between them and a plate of Keen's seedlings or Myatt's British queens. Thus the motto that I gather from the labours of the gardener is this, "*The higher the aim the greater the attainment.*" Even graces will be going on, if they be cultivated, from the single flower to the double. St. Paul gives an instance. The ground is first prepared, broken up, and crumbled fine. There is *tribulation*, that is to say, first. Then in this mould is planted *patience*, a sweet single flower. And lo, *patience* worketh *experience*, and *experience* *hope*; and *hope* develops finally into that rare double flower of *love*; and this of many tints and varieties, under the one general name, "*love of God.*"

And none must be content unless this *more and more* is found to be going on in the gardening of his own heart. Such advance is a thing most desirable, nay, most indispensable, since not to advance is to deteriorate, and there is no standing still. Content is no virtue in spiritual things; and we are bidden to *covet* earnestly the best gifts.

But such thoughts as these are only a handful out of myriads that come up and look at us along all the garden-walks, and in all the hedgerows, as we walk through the year with its ministering flowers. How infinite, how beneficent, the Mind that conceived the idea of flowers, and developed that idea into such boundless variety! From the tiny green-eyed weed to the towering pyramid of magnolia, what degrees of beauty! what subtleties of difference! In the scent of flowers, how extraordinary the distinction and the divergence, and yet the

profusion! The rose, the wallflower, the lavender; here are three specimens. Then the tints: how infinite beyond all attempt at calculation! Species, shape, scent, hue; and this in but one ornament in one of God's worlds. From these meditations we get a tiptoe peep at the infinite resources of Eternity. Puzzled, even now, by the myriad musings suggested by the flowers, hovering over them like an undecided butterfly or a perplexed bee, we must yet make a dart at one. And let this one be the constant succession of flowers; their ceaseless march, regiment after regiment, in endless diversity of uniform, through the changing year.

"The daughters of the year,  
One after one, thro' that still garden passed;  
Each garlanded with her peculiar flower  
Danced into light, and died into the shade."

Thus beautifully have the months been pictured: but the flowers of each month "come not single spies, but in battalions."

There is the daisy—the robin of flowers. How much has been said or sung to this simple visitor! How soon we find the "crimson head" gleaming up from the drenched lawn, amid moisture that is as yet undecided whether to be dew or hoarfrost. Dearer at that season than when it sheets our fields with white; for we love it most when it smiles but rarely, and when there is a dearth of gayer flowers to edge our wanderings.

"And oft alone in nooks remote  
We meet it, like a pleasant thought,  
When such are wanted."

Yes, the quiet unobtrusive daisy is the flower of all times: patiently it bears to be neglected, and, though often slighted

or reviled in Summer, it "wears again its willing smile," when the sodden leaves are huddling by the side of all the garden walks :

"Thee Winter in the garland wears  
That thinly deck his few grey hairs;  
Spring parts the clouds with softest airs,  
That she may sun thee ;



Whole Summer-fields are thine by right;  
And Autumn, melancholy wight !  
Doth in thy crimson head delight  
When rains are on thee."

A flower most like the love of God ; easily overpassed and lightly left unnoticed, while the world is all ablaze with flushing colour ; yet content ever patiently to bide its time. The Autumn days will come, the Winter boughs shake and tremble in the cold : then daisy-smiles and robin-songs speak to the scarred heart in the desolation ; and, ungrateful and ungracious as it feels itself to have been, it is fain enough to heed them now. Oh kindness and ineffable condescension of the Spirit of grace, that He will deign not only to plead, and to woo, but even endure to be put on one side, to suffer repulse after repulse, and yet to come again with the same love, when His rivals are all tired and have gone away ! How, in our endeavours to do good, we should learn a lesson from this ; and never let our patient yearning love die, though it be often repulsed and rejected, and so be ready always with gentle, kindly daisy-comforts and ministries, for the time when the Summer flowers are dead, and the heart's garden forlorn ! To this never-absent flower we must add, as with the birds, from the migratory species, one of the very first to return :

“ Pansies, lilies, kingcups, daisies,  
Let them live upon their praises ;  
Long as there's a sun that sets,  
Primroses will have their glory ;  
Long as there are violets,  
They will have a place in story :  
There's a flower that shall be mine,  
'Tis the little celandine.”

Bright little golden stars, running down into the dry ditches in search of last year's dead leaves and withered ferns ; gleam-

ing from under the syringas and laurels in the shrubberies ; spreading over the bare patches beside the barn ; varnished green leaves, and doubly varnished flowers ; we are very apt to slight them, but surely there are those who would miss them were they altogether transplanted from earth. Thus, with some homely love, perhaps owning nothing grand or great in its stores, but always bright and pleasant : we little thought how we should miss the lightly prized, perhaps sometimes snubbed and slighted affection, when God has transplanted it to Paradise, and we look for it in vain. It is something to be merely bright and cheery, and always amiable, in a world that is often overclouded and winterly.

“ Ere a leaf is on a bush  
In the time before the thrush  
Has a thought about her nest,  
Thou wilt come with half a call,  
Spreading out thy glossy breast  
Like a careless prodigal ;  
Telling tales about the sun,  
When we've little warmth, or none.”

And I call this the tiny willow-wren of flowers, for its simplicity, and brightness, and laughter, and glee.

Further on, past hepaticas, and mezereon, and foxglove, and Canterbury-bells, and all the crowding annuals, as nemophila, a bed of blue sky ; Virginia stock, a sheet of lavender-pink ; Clarkia, dwarf larkspur ; on past tulips, and hyacinths, and jonquils, and anemones ; on past all the bright hues that throng the ante-chamber ; on, into the presence of the Queen. The Rose ; is it possible yet to say anything unhackneyed or

uncommonplace about this "theme of every poet's song," and very drudge of all simile-hunters? Well, there is nothing new under the sun, and at this stage of the world all we can aim at is to put old things in a new dress. Mrs. Browning does this, in her lines upon a dead rose:

"O Rose, who dares to name thee?  
No longer roseate now, nor soft, nor sweet,  
But pale, and hard, and dry, as stubble-wheat,—  
Kept seven years in a drawer,—thy titles shame thee.

"The fly that lit upon thee,  
To stretch the tendrils of its tiny feet  
Along thy leaf's pure edges after heat,—  
If lighting now, would coldly overrun thee.

"The bee that once did suck thee,  
And build thy perfumed ambers up his hive,  
And swoon in thee for joy, till scarce alive,—  
If passing now, would blindly overlook thee.

"The heart doth recognise thee,  
Alone, alone! The heart doth smell thee sweet,  
Doth view thee fair, doth judge thee most complete,  
Perceiving all those changes that disguise thee."

It seems strange at first thought,—natural, on reflection,—that the fairest of flowers should seem most readily to suggest decay. Partly it is, that it seems to us such pity that thus it should be; and that which we find exceedingly beautiful we love to have eternal; and in truth, this eternity of joy and beauty will be one of the fresh delights of that Land where everlasting Spring abides, and never-withering flowers. Partly it is that a presentiment in youth, and an experience in age, tell us that many of earth's rarest delights do fade when full blown; nor is

it sentiment, but religion to say so, for by earth's changes and disappointments we are being ever led on to that Love which is immutable, and can never fail.

“ Is't not enough to vex our souls,  
And fill our eyes, that we have set  
Our love upon a rose's leaf,  
Our hearts upon a violet ?  
Blue eyes, red cheeks, are frailer yet,  
And sometimes, at their swift decay,  
Beforehand we must fret ;  
The roses bud and bloom again ;  
But Love may haunt the grave of love,  
And watch the mould in vain.”



Nay, this might have been so, before those words of the Resurrection and the Life, and before that command not to sorrow, as men without hope. Watch the mould if you like ;



even from this the bright flower will burst one day; and are we not yet taught by God's word and God's world, that in the bare Winter time the flowers *are not dead, but sleeping?*

Yet in this world—where all things are evanescent that are but of the world; things sad, as well as things lovely, and pain as well as delight,—it must ever be that

“ The dark and bright will kiss,  
The sunniest things throw sternest shade,  
And there is even a happiness  
That makes the heart afraid! ”

And so beauty must remind us of death, and the rose in its perfection seem to whisper of decay. There will be a time, there is a Land, where all this is, oh, how different!

There were other flowers, other months, other musings, in my mind, if not from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop on the wall, at least from the white lilies to the “ mountain gorses, ever-golden,”

“ Whom God preserveth still,  
Set as lights upon a hill,  
Tokens to the wintry earth that beauty liveth still.”

But I found myself suddenly brought to the halt against the edge of the next article. So I leave my friends who have hitherto accompanied me, to wander on through the rest of the year's flowers alone.

ON COMING BACK TO OLD PLACES.





STANDING for a minute upon the platform after my journey, I watch, while the train puffs away, winding like a long dark caterpillar along the curve, and being swallowed up by a tunnel. I stretch my relieved legs after a three hours' cramped sitting, give up my ticket, and stare about me. I have no bag to carry or to leave, not even a coat to fetter my arm by depending from it, nothing but a stick; and this I call the luxury of travelling. In this happy condition I am an independent man; porters, flymen, they are all of no concern to me, and I feel my freedom and rejoice in it as I saunter out of the Station into the hot white road on a fine day in early June; for I have come down into this part of the country simply for enjoyment, and to take a meditative walk by myself: enjoyment, however, not of that kind which is gay and light-hearted, but of that kind which has a tinge of sadness in its composition; for in this order is to be classed the pleasure that we feel in coming back to an old place after many years' absence.

I suppose the sad element in the feeling is principally that of the consciousness of change—change in the scenery and

the inhabitants, but, most of all, change in our own selves. One of the most touching evidences, to my mind, of our origin from and our connection with the Unchangeable and the Infinite is the exquisite sadness with which the idea and the perception of the constant change and unlastingness of everything in this world seems to shade the mind of man. Change, and passing away ; our earth and our hearts and our poetry are full of it ; youth foreshadows it, and all our early writings have an Autumn background. Manhood realizes it in stern prose, Age takes it now as a matter of course, but has grown weary of it, and longs to take its dim eye from the kaleidoscope of life. Every period is more or less saddened by the contemplation of it.

And so my first impression, as I look about me upon scenes most familiar once but unvisited for twenty years, is undeniably one of sadness. So changed ; all new ! This is my sigh expressed in words. And changed it is indeed ; all this railway, with the Station, and the upstart mushroom growth of houses about it—all is new. I recollect a copse of hazels interspersed with young pines and spruce-firs, carpeted at one time of the year with clumps of primroses and blue masses of the dog-violet, at another time with fallen "thready leaves" or broad yellow-milled foliage, and here and there two or three frail grey hairbells clinging to a mound and trembling in the wind : such a quiet picture as this I recollect to have possessed the site of these new, staring buildings. Thus, about here at least, I find all changed, and the old familiar face of things quite gone.

I pass on, however, leaving the shops and the trim square villas, with as many urns as flowers in their small front

gardens, and the new church, and so find my way into old scenes, and the pleasurable element begins to return upon my somewhat dashed spirits. I strike into the familiar lane between the white massed hawthorn hedges. I come to that grey lichened park-fence, and I could fancy myself a boy again, bowling my hoop along the smooth path, or standing on tiptoe to get just a glimpse at the deer browsing on the other side.

Yes, as I saunter along this path, and look at scenery, the background of my boyhood days, the principal figure seems to come back again into the picture, chiefly in many a slight action, yet brightly coloured and strongly drawn, and no whit faded out from the canvas. I remember to have seen the fact noticed in poetry, that the great and momentous events of life are often most nearly connected in our memory with trifling events or incidents, and most vividly recalled to our recollection by our meeting with these slight things in after years.

“The smell of violets hidden in the green” may bring powerfully and overwhelmingly back some lost delight or past anguish; so may also the fragment of a song; or even the sharpening of a scythe in early dawn outside your window. Twenty years ago, in what agonized suspense you were, when, almost without hearing it, you heard that sound!

“Not in the crises of events,  
Of compassed hopes, or fears fulfilled,  
Or acts of gravest consequence,  
Are life's delights and depths revealed.

e.

“ I drew my bride, beneath the moon,  
Across my threshold ; happy hour !  
But, ah, the walk that afternoon  
We saw the water-flags in flower ! ”

And so, as old events are remembered by little objects in their background, so old scenery, when we return to it, is often apt to recall to us, most clearly and sharply, trifling incidents and small events.



But now I am close to the old park-gate, and all seems very familiar indeed, as I swing it back and enter that quiet untouched abode of old memories. Twenty years have passed

over it, seemingly without making in its sober and calm seclusion any the least change. There watches the old wide red Elizabethan mansion; there stretches the grass, growing barer and scantier under the trees; there sleeps the water with its swans; there stares the white broad walk in the sunlight; there, on each side of it, tower the tall chestnut-trees, crowded with white tinted spikes up to their summit, and holding them down like lamps close to the grass, as though to look for last year's chestnuts by their light; and here and there, straggling on in groups, browse the fallow deer between the dark trunks. How beautiful, how peaceful it all is, so quiet and unchanged in the warm June sun! How fair the flecked blue of this pure sky; and how cool the broad cattle-peopled shadows lying beside the leafy trees! Even that old withered Thorn is still here; a mere stump, but holding up bravely one white arm of May. As I saunter on, I could indeed be a boy again, and spend half an hour in embarking feathers and leaves on the stream, running across the bridge then with eager expectation to see the flotilla emerge, silver daisy-heads, golden buttercup-shallops, feathers that darted and skimmed hither and thither in the least air, and, carrying too much sail, often drove ashore.

I pass on, however, through the park, and out at a small gate into a meadow—a sweet meadow, deep in grass now, but that, from some forgotten association, seems as though it ought always to have haymaking going on in it. Over this stile I used to bound, and there beyond is the small white wicket gate. Now, every step I take seems to bring me face to face with my old self: that familiar, yet strange person! that which



I was, so long ago: it seems, somehow, another, and yet the same. One thing I notice is the sort of freshness which comes



in a measure to my feelings and appreciations, just wafted back to me from long ago, as I pass through these boyhood scenes. Something it seems familiar, and yet unnatural now; much as

though the scent of a hayfield were to surprise you, coming across winter tracts of snow.

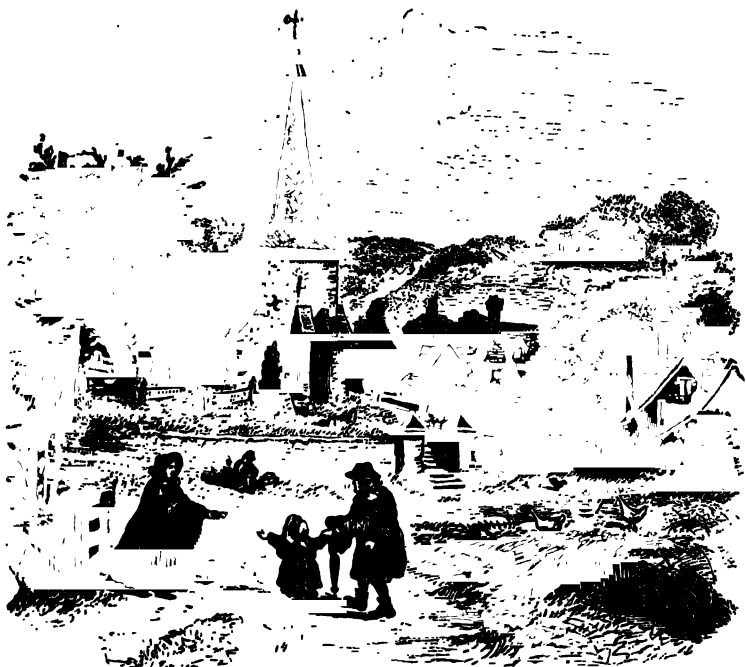
And this gush of freshness, wafted over from those young, undusty days, is that, I imagine, which makes it so pleasant to indulge in a tenderly regretful retrospect, amid scenes familiar in the early years. The world's poet-heart has constantly felt it, and the world's poet-tongue has before now expressed it. Thus quaint Hood, looking back from the summit of years at the playground of boyhood—

“ No skies so blue or so serene  
As them ; no leaves look half so green  
As clothed the playground-tree !  
All things I loved are altered so,  
Nor does it ease my heart to know  
That change resides in me ! ”

The sun is behind us, and the shadows point forward in the first half of life's short day. After that, the retrospective shadows will indeed point back, and we may sometimes pause, and turn, and follow them for a pensive hour. But it cheers us, as we go forward again, braced to pursue life's journey, to see that the *sun* has passed over and transferred his glory to that horizon which lies before us.

Another stile, and I am once more in the road, and close to the village. Oh, the old cottages, and the Common, and the two ponds, with the very same swans and ducks in them, and the island in the midst of one, and the grey long bridge, watched over by the dark, wide-spreading cedar of the Grove. How familiar it all seems ; and yet, after a little closer consideration, how changed ! There used to be two weeping willows

beside the Rectory: others all about the place; they were quite a feature of the village. They are all gone now; and here and there a spindly little wand has taken the place of the grand drooping masses. There is the butcher's shop under the elms, poor things, all whitewashed half-way up, as I remember them, and with hooks driven in them for the meat.



There is not the old genial face, however, to be seen at the door of the shop, nor the portly form, blue clad, and with steel in hand. The faces are mostly very new indeed. As I walk

slowly up the street, I meet, it is true, one or two known, but unrecognising looks; and there is an association with many of them, and a pleasure in having the actors in those old scenes of life present before me again. Here is the old gardener, bent-backed now: what a bugbear he used to be to us! The dread with which we anticipated the days on which he was due in the garden, if, as was often the case, we were aware of a wandering trail of small footprints awaiting him on his smooth-sown beds. And the beating heart with which, at his dinner time, we traced the long furrows, half-way buried in the rank potato growth, if, perchance, we might happen upon our stray arrow or missing ball. I address the old man, who, after a long look, recognises me, and brightens at seeing me. And now I am close to the Rectory, in which some of us were born, and which was the home of all my childhood and of much of my boyhood. It seems smaller than I had remembered it; the garden not so large, the wall not so high. There it is, however, white and familiar, with its one sham window, that used so to puzzle me as a child. Ay, there is the dining-room, the study, the room in which three brothers were born—all the same, and I so different. And the little merry sisters that ought, it seems, to run down the steps to greet me, are far away, with half a dozen children a-piece. One, since this was first penned, ah, how far away! and yet I know not how near. The baby that used to appear with frilled cap and unsteady head at that nursery-window, has now a curacy, in which I have lately been his guest. And there is one that ought to be there with her kind, loving face to welcome me: she is not here, but I shall presently

visit her quiet lodging near at hand. I will, therefore, not speak of her now, only let her heavenly presence pervade the meditations and reminiscences of my heart. See, the side garden-gate is open. Dare I, shall I walk in? Will it not be ill-mannered—rude? I cannot resist the inclination. If I meet any one, I will explain, and apologize.

Ah, how natural it seems to be here again; and yet I seem almost less to belong to the place, the more familiar it looks. Never mind; I knew that other former self, who used to play about these box-edged, thrift-edged walks; and in company with him let me pace them again, thus not without a companion who is native to the place. There is the old mulberry-tree still in its round of grass, but it has lost a large limb. There is the red-apple-tree, in a recess of whose trunk I used to love to sit and read; every other year it bore, and this must be its year of fruit, judging by the masses and scatterings of flushed bloom. That young egg-plum, put in but a little before we left, and bearing but two precious, rich, mellow, golden ovals, watched with deep interest by us youngsters, now it is a full-sized tree, and has altered the look of this corner of the garden. Let me see. Oh, here is what used to be *my* garden: where is the seedling laburnum that gladdened me with just one string of flowers before I left? Gone; cut down, I suppose, or transplanted. There is the jasmined trellis that marks the back entry into the garden; there the dark, walnut walk, mysterious and awful to us in the moonlight; and there the iron gate leading into the fields. How I used to long for one of its spiked rods for my spear! Here we used to feed the cows through the bars; and in these fields our early cricket games were played. Are there any

burnt, worn patches now, or are stumps never pitched in the old ground? The foolish cows stand and stare, and the sheep make unmeaning and irrelevant remarks, as I draw the gate back and pass away through the field into the road again, unobserved.

And now I pass the confectioner's shop—a sort of fairy-land of sweets in old time; and the hybrid draper's and bookseller's, and the shop rich in string, cricket-bats, and smooth red balls, and tops. And so I pass on, and come to the Church.

In some curious way this Church seems more connected, through my child memories, with Palm Sunday than with any other special or ordinary day. Far away from its walls, whenever I recalled that well-known and well-remembered interior, the branches and sprays of palm willow were always there, tufted with their grey or yellow downy balls, up the aisles and along the pews. And always now, when I see the palm willows out, I think of that Church; and when I summon the building to my mind, there at once flourish the avenues of palm. A curious old Church it is; built of red brick, high-pewed, galleried, overwhelmed with ponderous monuments of all styles of bad taste. But there are also in it old memories which endear it to me. It is the Church of my childhood: in that cloth-lined pew I used to sit, my little white-socked feet buoyed up by a vast hassock; on that purple-cushioned seat I used to stand when everybody got up to sing; and there I used to settle down when the sermon began, and nestle close to my Mother, putting my small uncomfortably-gloved hand in hers, and staring hard up at the high pulpit just above, and at last subsiding into a calm sleep against her shawl.

I have wandered into the Church, you see, through that door

that I found open, and am looking about me with thoughts whose woof is of the present, and whose warp is of the past. There is that big stone urn, against that dark niche or cavity. How I used to wonder where the dark hole led to; whether to a subterranean passage, like Sindbad's: also, what the urn held. The sunlight comes in through the open door, and lies



in a great blinding square in the aisle; and now I pass out across its warmth into the hot, still churchyard beyond.

How the population of this great sleeping-place has increased since I last stood here! Ah! I have almost to look uncertainly for a minute, to find the quiet spot that I want—not, however,

for more than a minute. I see it, as it has been well remembered through many years. It looks quite the same; but the old-accustomed track that led to it is altered and stopped now. There it wound, a narrow path, here by the head and there by the foot-stone of a grave. I could have traced it in the dark. But now whole rows and ranks of graves and tombs have arisen between that ONE and the churchyard path, and have obliterated the little track, and taken away, indeed, from the quiet and the peace of the place, so crowded now; and though it be not a crowd of the living, yet a crowd it is, through which I must step to find my Mother's grave. \* \*

I stand by it, or lean my forehead upon the stone, and feel again that old sense of rest, and yet of sorrow. There is much that is changed: there is much that is yet the same. Those tall iron gates looking on to the churchyard, and the Park stretching beyond them far away; a meditative deer standing looking at me through them, unscared, because they are generally peaceable and quiet wanderers who come this way; the grey stained wall, with those full-bosomed trees leaning upon its summit and half-way over it; chestnuts, lit with innumerable tapers, as though a shrine above the sleepers. I see all this, and I feel that I have not till now perceived what a space there is between the man in his prime and the child who used to come here full of childish thoughts and regrets. Dear Mother! is it wrong to say that surely there must have required but little altering to fit thee for Paradise? Angelic already in soul, divine in thy meekness and lowliness, it makes me more hopeful of this weary, wicked world when I remember thou wast of it. I was but a child



when thou didst spread thy wings like a dove, to fly away and be at rest. I know thee almost chiefly from thy letters—"fallen leaves that keep their green;" but to read them is to rejoice that one day I shall greet thee again, and again nestle to thee, and be loved by thee in a House of many Mansions, and a Home that will not change! See, I lay my hand upon the tomb, warm now in the sunshine—a worn, thin hand—nevertheless, still the very hand which loved to be clasped in thine. All day and all night the grave Church Tower tells thee, with its solemn tongue, that another and yet another has passed of those hours that separate thee from earth's great Easter-day. The Christmas morn and the Summer sun flood thee with their beams; the grass dies or grows; the birds come with the Spring, or flit with the Autumn: but, without change or fail, from that solemn Watch-tower which ever looks towards Eternity, the sleepless sentinel Time turns still towards thee with the news when another hour has ended. Most subtly suitable is it that such a Watch-tower, with such a sentinel, should ever be erected amid the silent waiting thousands of the Dead. They have little else to listen to, and little do other sounds and other news concern them. "*A city is taken; a nation is destroyed; a flood has swept away half a county!*" Tell this to them, and there is no flutter, no response. But we may almost fancy a thrill when that iron tongue proclaims "*Another hour has passed, ye Sleepers: there is an hour less for you to wait!*"

"The clock

Tolls out the little lives of men."

Yes, of living men; but it also tolls out the long waiting silence of the Dead. From *our* point of view, *life* is passing as the clock

strikes ; but from *theirs*, it is *death* that is dying, and the hours drip, drop after drop, from his veins.

Well, I have lingered here a long while ; it seemed, indeed, the goal which was to terminate my wanderings among the old places of my youth. And now the clock tells me that I must retrace my steps. So I go back by another way now, to the new Station : another, yet also a familiar way, across other meadows and corn-fields, and by a brimming stream. Everywhere I pass some trifling, yet to me touching, memory of childhood or boyhood ; every point has its interest ; everywhere I meet with something familiar ; everywhere with something that is changed. There I caught my first trout—ecstatic moment ! There used to lie the old tub that, on days “marked evermore with white,” we used sometimes to be permitted to haul out. There—but a truce to this. What is interesting to me is not necessarily so to my reader, and it is time that my soliloquy should end.

Yet, sooth to say, there are few to whom it may not be of some interest to have recalled to their heart, reminiscences that are, mostly, much what themselves have felt, or will feel, or could feel, on revisiting the scenes of childhood, and coming back to the oldest places that we can boast of in this our brief span of life. The background will differ, the feelings will assimilate ; and each can shift the background to his taste.

I can fancy, it pleases me to imagine, my readers thus employed. See, this one is standing—waved thither by my wand—not in country lanes, but with just the same fresh, kindly feelings, in dingy Leicester Square. For him, the light of other days rests upon, and has made lovely, the dreary inclosure, with its sooty statue, the foreigners with their pipes and hats, and,

most of all, some straight blank house—now, perhaps, fallen to be a third-rate eating-house—to which yet clings, in his mind, the sacred name and style of *Home!* He turns up an alley towards Newport Market. The very butchers, calling “What d’ye buy?” touch him with the tenderest sentiment; and his chestnut-trees, lit with tapers, are indeed the flaring lamp-posts, while for the ripple of waters he must go to Trafalgar Square. But he has come back to the old place, and that fact has made it, however really prosaic, yet to him poetic ground.

Yes, there is undeniably a great charm in the coming back to old places. Thus, as a mere matter of pleasure in travelling, who would not choose the same old route again, and perhaps yet again? The remembered familiar points, with their kindly associations, are they not dear as recalling a time in our life full of feelings, of experiences, now, perhaps, for ever of the past? Life is too short to afford this indulgence often; there are so many new scenes to be visited, that there is little time for recurring to the old ones; and the whirr and buzz of the machinery is unfavourable to poetic, abstracted, and dreamy meditations in this busy brief day of work. Still, it is pleasant where it is possible. We may say, however, that, as a rule, youth inclines to new scenes, maturer years to a lingering among and recurring to the days that are no more, and the scenes among which they passed; and that, to the old man, who is yet not quite so old as to be irreconcilably hostile to the idea of moving in the least from his present abode, there are few things more keenly if sadly delicious than a day’s run down to the scenes of his boyhood, and a quiet saunter among the old places of his youth.

SHADOWS.





WHAT strange things to watch are shadows! They have a beauty, but they have also an indistinctness, a mystery; they have a shape, but it is one which may mislead, although, on the other hand, it may suggest. I like to watch the shadows, whether those of firelight, or cast by the warm summer sun, or by the pale moon's mild beam. I like to watch them; and sometimes to lean back in my chair (as I have before hinted) in the Study, tired with a day's work, just at the hour when the veil falling upon earth is silver-grey, not blue-

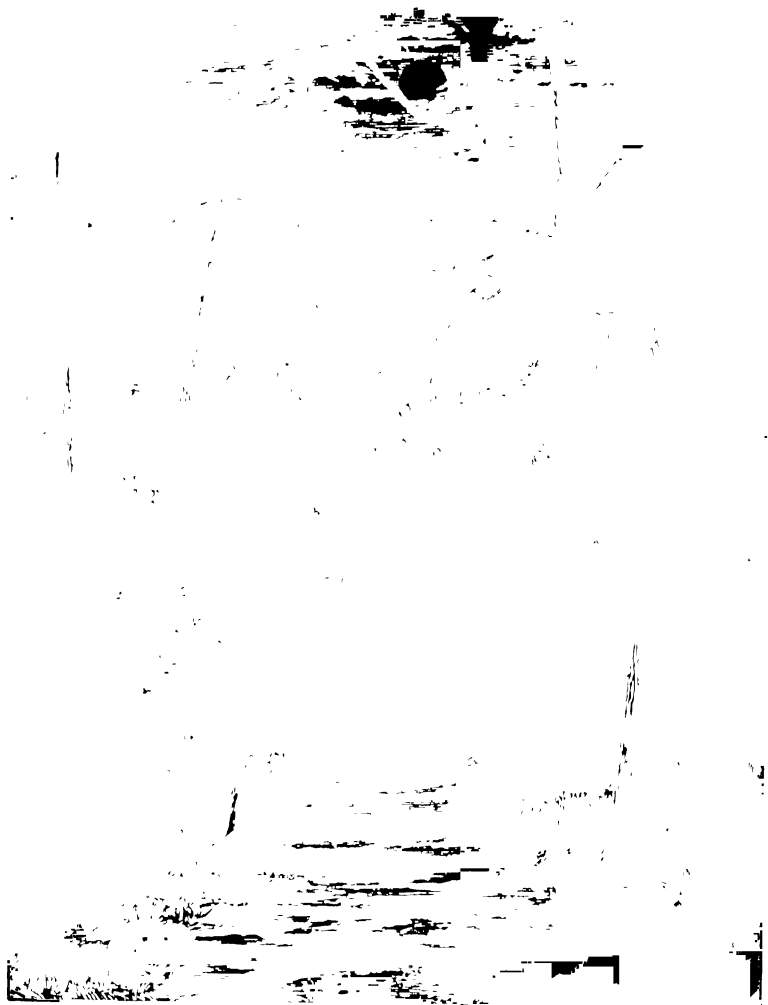
black; to lean back and muse, with no other company than that of the fitful, dancing shadows upon the ceiling and the walls. It is curious to notice how far they reveal, how far conceal, the real objects which more or less clearly, distortedly, grotesquely, they represent: strange coincidences and strange discrepancies are alike betrayed when, after a puzzled study, the substance is at last compared with the shadow. There are shadows simpler, less weird, yet often as misleading, to be found on those days when the hot sun, looking into my study, has frightened away

all the fitful firelight crew until the lengthening evenings again herald Winter's approach, shadows that you cannot have in the town, where all such things are cut out square and clear and formal; but shadows that are pleasant to think of in cities, as you tread the baking pavement, and hug the narrow retreating line of shade.

Yes, the summer sunlight shadows are delicious to watch, for instance, upon the green and daisied lawn. Moving with a gentle swaying motion, in the soft, cool airs that are not wanting to the really pleasant summer's day; moving in cadence, in balanced harmony with the motion of the branches above, apple boughs, crowded with flushed blossoms; sycamore, with jagged leaves; bending laburnum, with trailing yellow fringe; or white-balled guelder-rose, or tasselled Weymouth pine. You cannot guess at what may be the originals which the indistinct, yet not blurred, shadows faintly indicate; you do not greatly care to know much about it. It is enough that the season is Summer, and that you are sitting on the rustic seat in the tranquil, sweet-breathed garden. It is enough that, smoothly mown and kept, so as not to break the shadows, the grass is laid like a vivid velvet carpet all about you, picked out with stars of silver, lush-golden green in the sunlight, and traced at the corners and edges with a pattern of cool grey. This broader mass, amid the jagged, naked branch shadows, may represent a living gathering of pointed foliage and blossom-bunches; this fitting shade may stand for the blackcap which is singing overhead; much may be suggested either to baffle or to direct thought; but you rest content in the contemplation of the shadows themselves, of their graceful motion, their sway and







play; and you care not to speculate upon, or to wonder about, the substance which they attend.

And while I am on the subject, I must say one word about the silver light and lucid grey which alternate upon the ground when the white Moon has risen, and all the landscape is tinted merely, instead of being coloured. Oh, I like to stand at the open door, before I close up the house with bolts and bars, and behold the still shadows in a calm night sleeping under the earnest Moon! Broad masses, lying solemn and mysterious on the grass and over the walks, cast from those Scotch firs, through whose fringe-foliage, as through lashes, gleam the bright eyes of the stars; long veins of shade, slanting from the pollard-ash trees, and making a wide lace-work of the pearly white; faint, yet clear, and supernaturally weird and grave. Sometimes pictured on the snow, and then clear and transparent upon the dazzling sheet, beyond the power of any word-painting to depict. Or again, if I should walk out along the lane, until I come to the avenue, how almost awful the stillness of the sleeping bars of light and shadow there! The watching trees above, so silent, holding their breath; the ticking crack of the pine-cones just marking, and so increasing the stillness; and under them such lurking depths, and indistinct recesses; and such grave, bare, silver sheets of cold light; there is something chilling, unearthly about it all: I feel glad to get me back, and trace the familiar patterns on the lawn about my house. One thing I note in these still shadows of the night, that they seem more clearly to shape out and indicate the realities of which they are the attendants, than do their relations of the noisy, bustling, busy, coloured, garish day.

We shall miss, it seems to me, much of the beautiful meaning of the Bible, the Book of the East, if we dwell in our musings only on the paler and infrequent glare and the abundant shade of our own land. Among us, light is used as the type of joy; shadow rather suggests sadness and sorrow. Thus one, choosing a grave, petitions:—

“ Find me a green and sunny spot,  
For shadow hath ever been over my lot :  
And sunshine would now come too late to save :  
But oh, let it fall on my grave,—on my grave :  
Let it fall there ! ”



So we must recall the great unlidged sun of Eastern skies, the sultry, grassless stretches of rock, the tracts of burning sand, the scant of tree-shade, except from the thin stem of the branchless palm,—the general absence, indeed, of shadow, in a state of things which seem to make its need vastly greater,—we must picture all this to the mind, before we can fully enter into many passages and similes in Holy Scripture. Before we can enter into the joy of Jonah at the growing of his gourd,

and then at his discontent, dismay, and anger, even to death, when the shelter withered from him, and the silent east wind and the fierce sun beating upon the head of the prophet stirred up repining in his mind, and he fainted, and to his undisciplined and sullen heart it seemed better to die than to live. Ay, and before one of the most beautiful similes, in its deepest sense applicable to our Lord, can have for us its full meaning and value, we must change our scenery and atmosphere from Western to Eastern. Then may we perceive the beauty and the suitability of that passage in Isaiah, in which we are told how "A Man shall be—as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." How exquisite the image here! What suggestions of rest and refreshment find place in it! How suitable a description of Him who so lovingly invites to His shelter the weary and heavy-laden traveller across the parching sands of this desert world! The hot sun beats down upon our unshielded head, the frail gourds of earth wither and die even at our extremest need; no soft clouds come, to hush with a tender veil the unmitigated glare; only now and then the dreadful tempest blots out the sky, and the rain descends, and the streams beat vehemently, and the floods come, and the winds blow; and the tent that we tried to pitch is easily and in a moment rent and swept away; and in these fierce alternations of drought and hurricane, whither may we turn, whither flee for shelter and for shade? Ah, yes; we, in this land of tender and abundant shadow, must transfer ourselves in thought to the merciless glare and the black tempests of the East, before we can enter at all adequately into the deep meaning of the description of that sole fixed, abiding, adequate Rest in this our wilderness.

“ And a Man shall be as an Hiding-place from the wind,—and a Covert from the tempest ;  
As rivers of water in a dry place,—as the shadow of a great Rock in a weary land.”

In a weary land. Ay, that is not the first idea, at least, not the first real belief of life ; and it is perhaps only after some years of journeying, some experience of the droughts and blistering heat, and of the drenching tempests, have dulled the first impetus, and quenched the new-lit energy, that the tired, footsore, wind-beaten traveller really understands and values the great and satisfying refreshment of that broad shadow that is able and ready to receive all that will seek it, of the toil-worn pilgrims *in the weary land.*

Shadows as a refreshment, a shelter from the heat ; this was an obvious analogy. Let me recall another random thought belonging to the shadow-family—one to be found in Bishop Bull's Sermon on the Ministry of Angels. It is one that may seem opportune at the present time, in a day when men are found to coquet and play with, at least to undervalue the importance of, errors against which our Branch of the Catholic Church has *protested.*

The Bishop, then, having beautifully indicated the wideness and importance of the Ministry of Angels, in accordance with Hebrews i. 14, goes on to meet the question : If they thus influence us and minister for us, must it not be reasonable, must it not be desirable, to address to them invocations, petitions ? We ask the aid of friends on earth ; why not then directly seek that of these glorious and dear allies from heaven ?

Bishop Bull answers this in divers ways. But the argument which has to do with my present tide of thought, and which appeared to me beautifully, reassuringly, encouragingly, perfectly to answer a perplexity quite conceivable, was the following, proving such invocations to be, at least, *unnecessary*. There could be no necessity for them, because, if we have God to our Friend, His angel servants must needs be zealous in our favour. And, as their knowledge of our wants is exceedingly intimate and deep, so in their perfect state we are sure that it is their delight to keep close to the least movement of His will. Waste not therefore your devotions in the needless endeavour to win their aid: direct all to God, gain Him to your side; and be assured that *where the body goes, the shadow will surely follow*.

I thought that this beautiful illustration showed most clearly most convincingly, the *superfluosity* of addresses to angels and saints, even granting (which can never be granted) the *innocence* of such invocations.

Another shadow-thought. You see that these fancies follow one another, fleeting and succeeding like the purple cloud-bLOTS that on a hot day skim across the flashing glitter of the sun-smitten sea. One passes away over the land, enhancing the emerald of the fields across which it brings a fleeing strip of more sober hue; another dusks the ocean in the wake of its fore-runner; each distinct, and only in this connected, that each is of the shadow-family. And this next thought has nothing to do with angels, whether of the Churches or of the skies. I picked it up in a cottage on my parish round; it was given to me at second-hand, but from what first source I could not

gather. It may, with those to whom it is new, make a sermon of the shadows that attend or precede them in the sunlight or under the moon.

The idea was this. Pursue your shadow, your back being to the sun,—and not the swiftest, most resolute, sustained running can ever bring you nearer to the object of your vain striving. The shadow, if set before you as the object, the prize of the race, will ever elude you, can never be grasped, is as far at the weary end from your attainment as it was at the hopeful and fresh beginning. And so you might continue until night falls, and robs you even of that dream which you were pursuing.

But now reverse the method of proceeding. Disregard the shadow, and set the Sun itself before you as your goal. And mark the result. Even the shadow, which before evaded, has turned also, and now is following and keeping close to you. Disregarded, at least not sought, it attends instead of flying. And so it shall be, until you attain to that horizon where (to the unwise) your sun seemed to dip and to be lost. But your race shall indeed end at last in that land of absolute light, where there is no one weary, and where no shadow is required.

Of course, the lesson of this is one easy to perceive. Happiness in this world, in whatsoever sought, if sought for itself, and as the chief and final end;—if this be the prize we have set before us, ah, how hopeless the race! how weary and disappointed, ere very long, are the runners, however they may still persist in strivings which are indeed all vanity, and which end in despair! What a story of such shadow-hunting we have in the Book of Ecclesiastes! What a pathetic description of the eager unyielding pursuit is given in the second chapter of that

book! The shadow could not be run down. Wisdom, mirth, pleasure, wine, folly, great works, landscapes laid out, vast possessions, silver and gold, peculiar treasures and choice rarities, armies of retainers, voluptuous delights, music, and every joy that wit could devise;—by so many turns and doubles, assaults and stratagems, did the runner (one well qualified to succeed, if any might) pursue the flying shadow



of happiness. But ever with one result; with one summing up, even the sad one, *This is also vanity.*

And how many, before and after Solomon, have run the same fruitless race! How the bitter cry of that (in his time) great worldling and sensualist is echoed throughout Byron's poems, for instance! After a life's vain pursuit of the shadow, the existence even of any substance was denied. All was the



unreal illusion of a dream that had being only, within the mind itself:—

“ — We see too sure  
 Nor worth nor beauty dwells from out the mind's  
 Ideal shape of such ; yet still it binds  
 The fatal spell, and still it draws us on,  
 Reaping the whirlwind from the oft-sown winds ;  
 The stubborn heart, its alchemy begun,  
 Seems ever near the prize,—wealthiest when most undone.

We wither from our youth, we gasp away—  
 Sick—sick ; unfound the boon, unslaked the thirst,  
 Though to the last, in verge of our decay,  
 Some phantom lures, such as we sought at first—  
 But all too late—so are we doubly curst,  
 Love, fame, ambition, avarice,—'tis the same,  
 Each idle, and all ill, and none the worst—  
 For all are meteors with a different name—  
 And death the sable smoke where vanishes the flame.”

Sad, unutterably sad, is it not ? And yet the inevitable end of such a course. Hear also the summing up, when the weary chase was now well-nigh over, the hopeless race all but run. The shadow was never caught.

“ My days are in the yellow leaf,  
 The flowers and fruits of love are gone :  
 The worm, the canker, and the grief,  
 Are mine alone !”

Ah, wreck of a noble mind, would that some kind hand might have prevailed to have arrested that pursuit, hopeless (had you believed this) from the very outset—and to have turned thee with thy back to earth's shadows, and with thy face to the Sun !

For note the difference. Turn to the Sun, *and the shadow*

*follows.* Seek God as the chief good, and quite enough of this world's goods shall follow upon your running, and closely attend you.

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and *all these things shall be added unto you.*”

All, that is to say, that for supply of present cravings and yearnings of mind, heart, body, we do undoubtedly need,—of refreshment here, of food and drink, to stay the hunger and thirst that cannot endure without tangible supply; of temporary clothing and shelter, lacking which entirely we should be pinched and frozen.

Yes; lose the world, and you shall find it; seek it, and you lose it. And that word of St. Paul is felt to be deeply true by those who, by observation or by experience, have tested it:—

“Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

But our whole life is represented in God's Word as a shadow. And this in more than one way. It is like a shadow in its short continuance; in its unreality and vanity; also in its typical character, its perpetual representations, hints, suggestions, outlines, and shadowings, of some substance beyond earth's dreams, and phantoms, and shadows; which indications yet may convey to us some faint idea of that which they attend, and from which they fall.

Like to a shadow in its short continuance.

“My days are as a shadow that declineth.”

Thus as we walk along some hot dusty road all a Summer's afternoon, we may see the lengthening shadows slanting away from the hills, and the trees, and the houses ; yea, from our own selves, and growing longer and fainter, and declining into the distance, to meet the coming night. Or we may watch, as the sun climbs towards noon, the shadows at our feet and about us, shortening, lessening minute by minute, gathered up ever into a briefer compass, hastening to a span-breadth. And thus we may learn the Psalmist's lesson as to the briefness of life,—

“ Man is like a thing of nought ; his time passeth away like a shadow,—”  
and share in his resolve—

“ While I live will I praise the Lord ;”  
and in his wonder and admiration—

“ Lord, what is man, that Thou takest knowledge of him !  
Or the son of man, that Thou makest account of him !”

Life is like a shadow also in its vanity and unreality.

“ All the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow.”

Thus the Preacher-King bitterly describes our passage through the fashion of this world, that passeth away, and is not to be grasped or ever really held and possessed even while it lasts. Shadow-hopes and shadow-joys ; shadow-loves and shadow-hates ; shadow-possession and shadow-losses ; shadow-power and shadow-pomp, and shadow-insignificance and shadow-penury ; all shadows, things mostly evanescent, short-lived, and

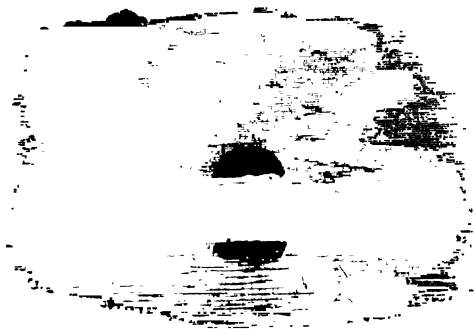
that pass away. Like the philosopher's coloured phantoms, they may seem for a while to be real, to have a body; but if we keenly scrutinize them, we already see through them, and even as we gaze they melt from our sight, and fade as in a dissolving view. Our agonies and our ecstasies, our hopes and dreams of any one time of life; our disappointments and disillusion; these seem to us at the time real, eternal, indelible. But the years move on, and other shadows are cast by the new days, and the distinctness of outline and the force of colour is already blurring and growing dim in the old pictures; and we are half indignant that not only passing pleasures and passing pains, but that deep loves and keenest sorrows, can change and wax so dim:—

“ O sorrow, then can sorrow wane?  
O grief, can grief be changed to less?  
O last regret, regret can die!”

Ah, vain life, we moan—vain life indeed of phantoms and shadows; and strange and sad to see men so eager to possess that which has no being; which is only important because, though the shadows pass, an indelible effect is left upon ourself by our intercourse with them. Wise advice, surely, to men thus liable to be misled and deluded: Set your hearts upon the substance which contains whatsoever of reality is suggested by the shadows; acknowledge an evanescence and unsubstantiality, even in things which must still move and affect us here; accept them as they come, do not with stoic affectation ignore them, yet never let them limit your contemplation, and ensnare your chief attention and desire. The time is short, this scheme of things unreal and fleeting:—

“ It remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none ;  
and they that weep, as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice, as  
though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy, as though they possessed  
not ; and they that use this world as not abusing it,  
For the fashion of this world passeth away.”

And yet again, this life is a shadow, because it indicates, suggests, typifies to us the substance. God teaches us by types, and figures, and shadows of heavenly things, intending to prepare us by shadows for the Land “where all is true.” Obviously so is this in Revelation ; it is also thus in Nature, and in the events



and employments of life. Shadows, in themselves beautiful, are meant to suggest to us the far higher and more perfect beauty of the Substance ; and joined to this substance, that which was by itself a fleeting phantom may secure a share of reality and endurance. Thus human love may become eternal, if wrought into and made part of the Divine ; and even our possessions

here may become treasure in the Heaven that faileth not. Only let the shadows perform their mission of suggesting, shaping out to us the Substance, and leading our thoughts and affections to the things above, from which—if, that is, there be indeed in them real beauty—are cast these fair shadows that lie on the earth. For I have noticed, at the outset, that shadows may delude, as well as instruct; they may mislead, as well as suggest. And whereas God would lead us by shadows to the substance of all that is good, and lovely, and great, the Enemy is ever on the watch to thwart this design by means of these very shadows, making us to take these for the reality itself. Thus shadows may either mislead or guide, delude or suggest, baffle or direct thought. Moonlight shadows, shadows watched alone, when the sun of gladness is set, and the colour and the noise of day have subsided—these mislead least, and the true shapes of objects are most clearly discerned in the sharp pencilling of the colder, graver light. And oh, lonely mourner, whose eyes are filling as you read; be sure that it is when the heart has it most brought home to its knowledge that the shadows *are* shadows, that they are least dangerous and most likely to be useful.

I have noted a passage which may well be reproduced here, as allied to this train of thought, and further developing it:—

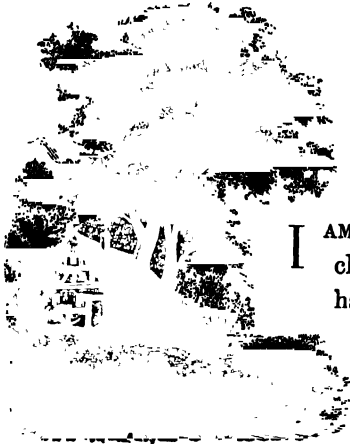
“To those who live by faith, everything they see speaks of that future world; the very glories of nature, the sun, moon, and stars, and the richness and the beauty of the earth, are as types and figures witnessing and teaching the invisible things of God. All that we see is destined one day to burst forth into a heavenly bloom, and to be transfigured into immortal glory. Heaven at present is out of sight, but in due time, as snow melts



**HOME.**







“But time, nor change, can e'er efface  
 This truth, where'er we roam,—  
 That the heart has many a dwelling place,  
 But only once a home.”

I AM not sitting in my own study chair now. Of late, circumstances have caused me to be somewhat of a rover, and several decades of miles intervene between myself and my lares and penates: that is to say, my books; my special writing corner; my writing-table, with its ready drawers; my nursling fruit-trees, my uncurling ferns, my own peculiar emerald rows of peas, my pet strip of lawn, and the familiar landscapes to which each window is the frame. Instead of the bare hills which embrace my home, and the flat tracts which lie before it, the spring days found me (in this decidedly a gainer) environed and closed about with trees. Elm trees chiefly, two-thirds clad with ivy; tall, and interlacing, and edged with a close fringe at the top, and patched ere and there and high up with rooks' nests: above these

quite on the summit, the black builder himself balancing with unsteady wing on the swaying twigs. But the sepia landscape began to gain colour as I watched it day by day: and the thin elm twigs thickened into tender green: and the nurseries of the rooks were soon curtained in and private.

Yes, I must linger for just a page among my old friends the trees: they and I have been for some long time separated now—they and their changes, and their inhabitants and I: dwelling as I do near the sea, in a treeless part; and so I came back to them with the fresh love and glee of a child. I saw the chestnuts light up all along their dark smooth drooping branches as though with festoons of lamps for an illumination, and so develop into wide soft emerald fans, crested with milky spires, splashed with rose and saffron. I saw the hazels in the garden-walk sprinkle themselves with maize-hued buds, out of which the tiny deep-ruled leaves were squeezing, and so develop until they had screened off that path from the rest of the garden. I loved especially a quiet lane, at the end of the grounds, into which I looked over the palings, and on the other side of which there was a private shrubby walk, beginning with a quaint dark yew hedge, against which I need not say it was delicious to catch the extreme yellow tresses of the drooping willows, and the scattering of the vivid hawthorn buds. In this walk it was pleasant to see how the new beech leaves came out to surprise the brown ones which had done their best to keep the twigs a little decent until their new clothing came, but which now, like sentries relieved, gave place, and huddled away to rest. The arums that came some time ago, with their first green, the cow-





parsley, the seedling chestnuts, and sycamores, the bright lesser celandine, with varnished flowers and varnished leaves, even the weed angelica, these contributed their mite of pleasure to my gleaning eye, as the lurking violets and massed and straggling primroses gave of their abundance. And so the beech walls thickened, and closed meditative me quite in from the road. At the bottom of the garden, as I leant over the paling, the welcome "chiff-chaff cheer-notes" announced the return of Spring's first bird; the tom-tits sawed and scraped, the robin, the wren, and the hedge warbler trilled; the wood dove murmured, the diapason of the rooks filled up the pauses, so that we had quite a little concert. Nor was this marred by the harsh but gladly greeted cry of the cuckoo's messenger. And so one by one the birds came back to their summer Home. It was a delight to me, from old associations, and from the quiet of the place, to pace in that shrubbery walk until at last the heart stopped for a moment at the first song of the Nightingale.

I feel that some apology is due to the reader for my thus again "going a-birding" in this fashion. But you see, at any rate, they were all new to *me*; for two Springs I had missed the sweet calendar of the spring buds and birds. Moreover, I did spare to speak of the pink almond sprays against the dark brushwood; nor did I introduce one whiff from the full lilac, or one swing of a laburnum-arm into my page.

Well, the upshot of all is that I have been and am away from home. The very beauties that I have been enjoying reminded me all the while of this, and thus brought in that slight vinegar of regret which just kept the pleasure from being too cloying and luscious. And since we think always the more lovingly of

a dear thing at those times when we have it not, perhaps herein lies one reason why my thoughts tend to this subject, Home.

Home: going home. Yes, and this June also, in which I am writing, is the proper month for thoughts about this. There begins a general breaking-up of school all over the country, and a song of "Dulce Domum." The calendars, also the scores on the walls, with entries (marked out by degrees) of seven—



six—five—four—three—two—one,—no weeks, to the holidays, have narrowed and narrowed, the time which anticipation has over-gilded, the holidays (magic word!) are close at hand. There will be the somewhat less strictness and more desultory work of the last week, then the empty look of the rooms, then the corded boxes; the train, or, still better, the coach; Father, Mother, little sisters, all on the steps; Home!

Ah well, perhaps, after all, the long-looked-for holidays are not quite the perfect elysium which anticipation pictured them; and some grits in the wheel of enjoyment come to teach even the young, if they could understand or would heed it, that lesson which we learn when life has been lived—that here we have no abiding city; that here hope never finds entire fulfilment; that this world is full of shadows, of which the substance is lacking here; that, in this very instance, we through life dream of a Home which we never possess, and meet with a succession of types, of which the Anti-type lies quite beyond these realms of disappointment and change. Here we have no abiding city. How sad this word to the mere worldling!

“Change and decay in all around I see:”

this is the theme of how much beautiful and mournful writing! But the earnest heart that God has taught rests not at this; it goes on through Earth's sadness to Heaven's peace. “Here have we no continuing city.”—What then?—“But we seek one to come.”

“Change and decay in all around I see:”

whence, then, that smile amid a scene so dreary? On what far Horizon is fixed that steadfast, bright look of hope? The answer comes in the next line:—

“O Thou who changest not, abide with me!”

For this world—howsoever we try to make it so—thank God, is not, shall not, cannot be our home. The heart, dove-like,



flies backward and forward over the waters, but finds no safe settling-place save in the Ark. Well if she come there, even at last, after her wanderings : well if she sinks not down, with weary pinions, into the deceitful flood.

I remember hearing one practising Thalberg's difficult piece, "Home, sweet home." I love the air, and, leaning back, I composed myself luxuriously to listen ; but my enjoyment was marred by false notes here and there, as the melody was being patiently worked out : and so I returned to my reading again ; not, however, without having jotted down some thoughts to which the incident gave rise. It seemed to me that in all our home dreams we are, at best, only *practising* here—practising what seems to us poor weak creatures a most difficult piece, and making, alas ! every day, *so many* false notes. A hint of the perfect melody lies in our hearts ; we are wistful after it ; in youth's dreams we seem to hear it ; but indeed it evades us even all through life. Not one, but many opportunities have we : not one only, but many homes, or phases of home, do we pass through before we die ; but there is never a full moon, only more or less broken segments of the Ideal circle. There was Childhood's home. With this how many remembrances might rise of little rebellions, peevishnesses, unkindnesses that marred it. How sadly have I often called to mind one slight disobliging or disobedient act of my own childhood towards my Mother, who fell asleep before I was seven years old ! Slight, but it often made me unhappy afterwards. Then, still worse, the home of Boyhood and Youth : what false notes, words said, deeds done, that were sadly out

of tune, that we would give worlds to recall! Alas, how my own heart says Amen to this! And the home of Married life—is this that which the girl and boy pictured it? Ah, you would have repelled with horror and indignation the prophecy of that snap, that snarl, that cold look, that snubbing manner, in the old time when you looked from far at your Ideal, and watched with that Dante-devotion the face of your Beatrice! And you, whose purpose it was, and whose sweet dream, to be

“Love-loyal to the least wish of your lord,”

how is it with you? how does married life prove the intention (honest, I know, and sincere) to have been carried out? Is that dream of Home still entire; that vision of a perfect unity, of one heart, one will? has this vision become reality; or have you by degrees even drifted apart, and is each following his and her own course, linked but not united? Ah, how often the married home saddens me! I go back in thought to the shy gladness of first love, to the delicious dreamland of courting; to the rapturous ecstasy of the day when the steeple rocked with the wedding bells. And now? Bickerings and incivilities; little courtesies and attentions dropped; a sort of habitual snappishness on both sides; an estrangement ever, though imperceptibly, widening: false notes, false notes, false notes! I know well that there are less utterly disappointing cases; that some, guided by God, do pick out some more consistent melody. Indeed, I have reason to thank God that such cases are not unknown to me. Yet I say that none of us, not the best of us, looking back on our home-practice, will find it bear the test. Little injustices, little irritabilities, little touchinesses, little

jealousies, and little pride—false notes, I say again, that jar the harmony! Would you realize this, O reader? Imagine the separation of death arisen between you and the too-familiar sharer of your home. What a flood of regrets you may thus detect, ready to brim and overflow your heart!

“The festal day recalled to mind  
 That missed the gift that more endears;  
 The word that might have been more kind,  
 And now less fertile in vain tears:  
 The little wrong, now greatly rued,  
 That no repentance now can right.”

And it might be easier, one thinks, to be more gentle, more forbearing, more patient and generous, if that wide gulf of parting were oftener kept in mind and anticipated. Yet, after all, more love to God, more waiting and watching on Him, more self-denial and prayer, and diligent use of all the means of grace,—these are the dew which alone can keep our earth-flowers fresh, and spare us the sad task, in Paradise, of reviving *faded flowers*. God alone knows the full melody: but it has been set to earth-music in the life of Christ. The more we copy that, and set ourselves to practise at that, the less imperfectly shall we produce the melody, the fewer jarring notes there will be. Oh, let us give up ourselves to learn of Him who had not where to lay His head, that heavenly and divine melody of “Home, sweet home!”

Home,—the House with many Mansions,—our Father’s House: thus our Saviour describes it to us. *Our Father’s House!*—why, of course, then, *that*,—that and none other must be our Home. So the ancient hymn-writer:

- “ Ah, my sweet home, Hierusalem,  
Would God I were in thee!  
Would God my woes were at an end,  
Thy joyes that I might see!
- “ O happie harbor of the sents,  
O sweete and pleasant soyle,  
In thee noe sorrow may be found,  
Noe greefe, noe care, noe toyle!
- “ Thy saints are crowned with glorie great,  
They see God face to face;  
They triumph still, they still rejoyce,  
Most happie is their case.
- “ We that are heere in banishment  
Continuallie doe moane:  
We sighe and sobbe, we weepe and waile,  
Perpetuallie we groane.
- “ Our sweete is mixed with bitter gaule,  
Our pleasure is but paine;  
Our joyes scarce last the lookeing on,  
Our sorrowes still remaine.
- “ But there they live in such delight,  
Such pleasure and such play,  
As that to them a thousand yeares  
Doth seeme as yesterday.
- “ Thy vineyardes and thy orchardes are  
Most beautifull and faire,  
Full furnishèd with trees and fruits,  
Exceeding riche and rare.
- “ Thy gardens and thy gallant walkes  
Continuallie are greene;  
There growe such sweet and pleasant flowers  
As noe where else are seene.
- “ Quyt through the streetes, with silver sound,  
The Flood of Life doth flowe;  
Upon whose bankes, on everie syde,  
The Wood of Life doth growe.

“ There trees for evermore beare fruite,  
 And evermore doe springe :  
 There evermore the angels sit,  
 And evermore doe singe.

“ Hierusalem ! my happie Home !  
 Would God I were in thee !  
 Would God my woes were at an end,  
 Thy joyes that I might see ! ”

Here is the one only Home, and the rejoicing thought of it, and the yearning for it. And truly it would be well if we also could realize these glorious things not merely in the excitement of an uplifted hour, but in the stern or common-place business and experience of life, in its great events, in its ordinary routine, beside death-beds, at funerals ; also in the shop, the office, the farm. If we could confess—not with our lips only, but in our lives,—that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth : “ For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.” And truly the glory of that Country, once perceived, though it be very far away, should out-dazzle the brightest homes on earth. Yet how many rest content with the pseudo-home, and leave looking for the True ! How many a soul, meant to soar, gradually loses the use of its wings ! How many a spirit—

“ That might have risen as the skylark erst,  
 Has now no thought beyond his narrow cage,  
 Beats it no more with wild impatient wing,  
 Looks wistfully no more at the blue sky,  
 But sings all day, and rests well satisfied  
 With his low roof and little scrap of turf ! ”

*Content*, we should be, but not *satisfied*, with our lot here.

“ I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.”

But satisfied?—no, not yet.

“ I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.”

And never *need* we let the enemy snare us, and shut us in a cage; we may so order our life here that, while much of our time must be passed in being busy or patient upon the earth, our soarings into the heavens may be frequent, systematic, corrective of earth's influences; and the hours of pure worship sanctify and elevate our hours of earth-love and labour.

“ Far out of sight, while yet the flesh enfolds us,  
Lies the fair country where our hearts abide,  
And of its bliss is nought more wondrous told us  
Than these few words, ‘ *I shall be satisfied.*’ ”

Yes, if we realized that House of our Father more vividly as our only real, enduring, adequate Home, I suppose we should be more like the schoolboys, that do not dread and shrink from going home (unless they have a bad character to take with them), but indeed, count the weeks, and days, and hours, having a desire to depart. We should love the song of “ Nearer home ! ” As each year ended, the thought would be, “ At most, but so many years more ; ” and this a thought of peace or of rapture, not one of pain. Nearer home than we have ever yet been, nearer home by the few steps of each day, nearer home by the long mile of each year, nearer home—

“ Nearer my Father's house,  
Where the many mansions be,  
Nearer the great white Throne,  
Nearer the jasper sea.

“ Nearer the bound of life,  
Where we lay our burdens down,  
Nearer leaving the cross,  
Nearer gaining the crown.”

Nearer Home!--what a calming, restful thought for a quiet hour when the ledger was laid by! What a peaceful theme for meditation, when now the black hair was iron-grey and ripening into white; when God, by deepening the lines, had



stamped upon the face the expression that gradually had grown upon it of tranquillity and love; when the boat did not pull now so much, but answered at once to the least touch of the rudder; and so the mariner, storm-tossed and wind-beaten, could rest a little more, and, gliding on in smoother water, obtain more time for sweet and serene looking forward. The Haven drawing nearer, as Time's waters rush backward from the prow: one more dark rush of clouds and waters; and then, Home! Some have gone home before

us,—at least are waiting hard by it; waiting in the Vestibule of Heaven; waiting in Paradise. How sad to miss them here, as they pass from us one by one! how sweet to think of them there!—

“ There they live in endless being ;  
 Passingness hath passed away ; \*  
 There they bloom, they thrive, they flourish ;  
 For decayed is all decay :  
 That immortal breeze's vigour  
 Ended Death's malignant sway.”

Here we groan on in a half life, in many sorrows, wearinesses, vexations, partings, tossings, and achings. But they are at rest.

“ There nothing can be feeble,  
 There none can ever mourn,  
 There nothing is divided,  
 There nothing can be torn :  
 'Tis fury, ill, and scandal,  
 'Tis peaceless peace below ;  
 Peace endless, strifeless, ageless,  
 The halls of Syon know.”

And so they pass from us, one by one; favoured boys, going Home before us; and what do we? Stand looking through the gate at the receding coach, longing for our turn, and going back to lessons and the routine of school-life, heavily, and with a sigh? Nay; those left at school here, in most of their talk, actually pity and compassionate those for whom their Father has sent. And they overload that journey Home with every accessory of desolation, despair, and gloom. Is this not so? And is it reasonable?

\* “*Nam transire transiit.*”



Yes, school days are necessary; education is necessary; yet (so long as we do not neglect our work, or go about it half-heartedly, through home-sickness) it is surely natural to be looking forward and counting the days to the Holidays. Here we have many a sharp lesson to learn, and many a bitter chastening to undergo. But let us be patient, diligent, earnest, and seek to be proficient. For there is "Dulce Domum!" at last; the song of Home, *sweet* home. And, I urge, the Hearse is not the proper coach for that happy journey. I would that beautiful simplicity and Christian hope were substituted at our funerals for worldly pomp and pageant, and heathen despair and gloom. I wish people would only think about what they are doing.

"And none shall there be jealous,  
And none shall there contend."

(For, you know, the difficult piece will then at last have been thoroughly learned.)

"Fraud, clamour, guile,—what say I?—  
—All ill, all ill shall end!  
The light that hath no evening,  
The health that hath no sore,  
The life that hath no ending,  
But lasteth evermore.  
O holy, placid harp-notes  
Of that eternal hymn!  
O sacred, sweet refection,  
And peace of seraphim!"

These are some of the sweet anticipations with which the saints, in their toil here, have looked forward to the long holidays and to the rest of Home. And the best of it is, that

these anticipations all fall infinitely below what will be the reality, instead of overleaping it.

“ Eye hath not seen, nor ear hath heard,  
 Nor to man's heart hath come,  
 What for those loving Thee in truth  
 Thou hast in Love's own home.”

We may give our imagination free licence to soar to its highest in this theme. Here, with our sips of joy and our short-lived pleasures, how should we be able to imagine the Abode—the Presence—in which there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore? For evermore! Everlasting joy! What a strange word to us, if we really come to think of it, is this! Sorrow and sighing do not flee far from us ever on this side of death. And when joy comes, how imperfect is it! At any rate, thus imperfect,—that it rises to go before we have well made it at home with us. \*And yet we *have* joys in this world, precious, though imperfect; exquisite, if interrupted. And few but have had enough of these in their life to forbid their wishing that life unlived.

But have we ever sat down to try to realize the state of things which will prevail in our Father's House? No sorrow or sighing at all: no night there; and the joy *everlasting*! No check, no change, no fall; no revulsion of feeling; no secret gnawing sorrow in the very heart of that laughter; not any “end of heaviness” to that heavenly mirth; no clinging to the present moment, because the next may have upset all; no breaking up of the happy circle; no school banishment and drudgery, when the holidays are over!

After all, that joy will come upon us as strange, as un-

imagined, as sudden, as surprising, as the gift of sight to a man born blind; or rather, as the sunshine to one whose life had been passed in the candle-light of a mine. Thus our eyes could not bear it now: when it approaches human nature, it overcomes and overwhelms it. There was no strength left in Daniel, when that other world came near him; and St. John, the angelic, the disciple beloved of Jesus, fell at the feet of his glorified Lord as dead.

Well is it for us that in that Home—that House of many mansions—the dear Saviour has gone before to prepare a place for us: we shall not be strange there: we shall have been long expected; all will be ready; there will be a welcome. Now, then, oh now, let us work well; labour with our might; if we would, when God sends for us, enjoy without regret the rest, the sabbath-rest of God; the peace, the long Holiday, the absolute and eternal tranquillity of that everlasting Home!



THE FIRST-CUT CORN.





IT is the burning Summer. I have left off clothes, upper and under, until the customs of society warn me to pause. I admire, almost envy, but may not emulate, the philosophy of that Irishman who walked, on such a sultry day, tranquilly through Hyde Park with his garments on a stick across his shoulder. Little else on but alpaca and linen, I have been sitting in my bow-window (both this and the door being wide open), trying to write.

But no least breath of air has come to reward me, and I have felt like a patient in the Turkish bath, or like a pine in a pine-house. Before I melt, and become a small puddle in my own study, let me rush—no, no, crawl—into the open air; not that I believe there is there relief to be had, for I have watched the delicate fringe of those long arms of the ash-trees, and could not detect the least quiver in the very outermost of the thin leaves. The stillness of hot Summer noon is a thing glorious to imagine and to look forward to from the writhings under the east winds of May; but let us candidly own that the thing is positively no joke when it comes. Perhaps standing up

to your neck in the sea, and eating strawberry ices, becomes your ideal of enjoyment at such a time; but *non cujusvis est*, it is not in the power of every one to command the situation and the refreshment. How simply terrific to think that one's dinner must be cooked on such a day! To say nothing of aiding and abetting the sun in his proceedings, by having any fire upon earth at all, only consider the case of the cook who has to stand over it! And yet we blame these estimable creatures for being cross! Rather let us praise them that they do not drug their master's food to-day, in order to avoid having to prepare another dinner to-morrow. And what could I be thinking of (certainly I did it in bitter May) when I put that bed of scarlet geraniums just in sight of the window? They seem to be slowly roasting me (I suppose mere colour could not really do that) on this day, when the very blues and greens are intolerably hot.

One place is, I suppose, as cool, or rather as hot, as another to-day; so I shall follow the guiding of my fancy, and saunter, by degrees, across the grass-meadows to that broad brown-orange corn-field which I have watched from infancy to maturity. In the Winter it pleased me to see the caked weedy surface turned topsy-turvy, and the long moist furrows of dark, sweet-smelling earth taking its place. In the Spring it was delicious to be surprised, after a day and night of close, steady, warm rain, by the merest tinge of green ruling the field in lines, and growing more and more distinct for me to watch every morning while dressing. In the Summer it had grown into a deep living sea of hoary green; and its billowy motion was so ceaseless, yet so lulling, that it led one to speculate concerning the paradox of how ceaseless movement could give the idea of tranquillity and

rest. You get this paradox from the sea, and from corn-fields and pine-groves.

And now through the past week I have watched the result of all this preparation. For this last week that dark-green hedge has made a frame to a sheet of colour, to call which golden would be a very inadequate description. A rich, vivid, burnt orange, rather suggesting than possessing the hint of a purple wave across it, when a warm air bowed the myriad heavy heads together away from the west : thus, for fault of better words, must my description of it stand. It reached perfection those few days ago, and stood at this point but for a few brief days ; then I missed, though reluctant to own that I missed, a faint tinge of its glory. And now there is no mistake about the matter : that orange-gold has certainly faded into a dull buff-yellow. Even now it is beautiful, but I feel that there is a falling off. How one might moralize on this short duration of perfection, and quick coming on of deterioration ! How much the rule this is, in this mundane state of things ! It is so with the year. All through the first half we have been looking forward to full attainment ; have watched the days growing longer, and still have looked forward to their lengthening ; have watched the fernery being clothed, and have longed for the unfolding of some new fronds, that were still rolled up like snails on the moss ; have watched the *Banksia* rose growing thick with buds, and have wished for the time when it should become a sheet of white or buff ; have watched the hawthorn covered with little white tennis-balls, and have been impatient for the broad masses of the May ; have looked forward through February to March, through March to April, through April



to May, through May to June; but then? The days begin to shorten nearly as soon as they have attained to their longest; the fernery settles down to its dull green very close upon the uncurling of its last fronds; the rose has but worn its glory for a week, when the lawn is powdered with yellow, and the magnificence of the sight is of the past; the hawthorn has set its pink-tinged cup-petals to float, in very armadas of fairy shallops, all over the pond; and June has passed into July, and the year has turned, and the looking forward is over. Attainment is like a handful of dry sand: you no sooner have grasped it, than it begins to run away; and the tighter you clutch it, the more subtly and surely it evades you. Anticipation is almost more of a possession than is achievement, in one sense: you at least have the enjoyment of it longer. How long I have watched that field, hastening it on, in my thought, to its zenith: it has reached it, and I have had a few eye-feastings upon it, and now its glory has passed by for this year, and the decline has come. Yes, I might moralize upon this slight incident; and I may as well humour my thoughts, even though they should run on in a somewhat obvious and commonplace groove, as I wend my way through the second crop of clover towards the first-cut sheaves. I cannot but think of youth's eager looking forward, and earnest pressing on, from the seed sown, to the blade, and the green ear and the ripe—and then? February, March, April, May, June; none of these are fully enjoyed, because a month of yet further and fuller growth lies beyond; this is at last attained, and, again—what then? The summit of our youth's dreams reached; education over, and the man

his own master, and settled in his profession; courtship over, and the wild dream of marriage become a sober reality; in everything towards which youth was pressing, the point of attainment reached; and how long does the glamour of the first ripeness last? Is manhood really the glorious thing that it seemed to youth? and are we permitted long to exult in the attainment of our prime? Or when there is no more advance, does decline invariably succeed? When the sun has touched the zenith, must it forthwith begin to go down? When we have toiled eagerly up the hill, and at last stand upon the summit, is there then always nothing left but just to begin to descend on the other side? Does the glory of life pass when the corn is ripe? and is all over then, until *next year*?

Let us think whether this is so; for, indeed, until we are men, do we not restlessly

“Tease the future tense, and plan  
The full-grown doings of the man,  
And pant for years to come?”

As Hood moralizes, contemplating the playground of his boyhood. He wonders, now that he has attained, now that golden manhood has been reached, and perhaps a little passed, at the remembrance of the impatient anticipations and eager lookings forward of the boy. He is watching one curveting in spirited emulation of a horse—

“Yet he would gladly halt, and drop  
That hoyish harness off, to swop  
*With this world's heavy van—*  
To toil, to tug. O little fool,  
While thou canst be a horse at school,  
*To wish to be a man!*”

“ Perchance thou deem'st it were a thing  
 To wear a crown, to be a king,  
 And sleep on regal down.  
 Alas! thou know'st not kingly cares :  
 Far happier is thy head that wears  
 That hat without a crown ! ”

Yes, the gold glory comes at last on the corn ; it reaches its limit of growth and advance : for a little while the enchantment may endure, but soon the gold will dull into yellow, the yellow into buff, and the newness, and strangeness, and delight of attainment fade into the commonplace. I seem to see, therefore, in the sober-hued field, the period of manhood in this our life—the time when most of life's great epochs have been entered upon, most of its great anticipations attained, and when, if these have not disappointed, they have become familiar and somewhat commonplace ;—the time just following that when

“ The sylvan slopes with corn-clad fields  
 Are hung, as if with golden shields ; ”

—the time that I may call Rehoboam's reign, when the golden shields are replaced with brazen.

Day by day you watch, after that time of attainment has been reached, and, though you are loth and late to own it to yourself, you perceive that a glamour is dying off from life. And this much must be owned as against the period of manhood : the butterfly that you grasp is not quite that which once danced before you over the daisy-fields ; the low purple shore that lay in the distance had a charm that leaves it when the

rattling waters have ceased from your boat, and its keel has grated upon the beach. Yet, if

“ Old Age hath yet its honour and its toil,”

shall Manhood be thought to be really the loser, because from all earth's attainments a glory must depart which in verity never belonged to them, but was cast, like sunlight upon the dull moon, from the immortal within our own heart and mind? Nay, it need not be so; and I will now defend this age of Attainment against imputations which yet I hold to be not all sentimental. If my field had been one of scarlet poppies, I grant you a pitiable loss would have followed upon the fluttering down of their gay banners. But I am now talking of a *corn-field* that has attained and passed its acme of glory; it is, we must own, a little dull now to what it was, and, doubtless, some loss has been suffered. If we consider more closely, however, we find that more gain has been received, and that the dull yellow field ought not to regret that time of emerald freshness, or of full green anticipation, or of unimaginable first attainment; for it is now *ripe*, and at its point of highest value.

“ How poor are Fancy's blooms to thoughtful fruits!”

Yes, assuredly, upon consideration, we perceive how far more valuable is manhood's experience than youth's ardour. What half-views we take when we are young — eager, impetuous, bigoted half-views. But, if we be at all wise and thoughtful, how we seem to have attained the other half of questions when the corn is ripe; and if we are somewhat less vehement and

positive, and less for carrying all with us and before us, are the mildness and forbearance and wider sympathy that we have learnt no adequate substitute for some of those ardours that we miss?

" Youth ended, I shall try  
 My gain or loss thereby :  
 Be the fire ashes, what survives is gold ;  
 And I shall weigh the same,  
 Give life its praise or blame :  
 Young, all lay in dispute ; I shall know, being old."

And before Age comes, even at that turn of life when the first flush of the corn is gone, we have attained a point from which we can look backward and forward, and judge distances, and detect fallacious appearances, and distinguish between things that are and things that seem, in a way which forbids the thinking mind to wish to exchange manhood's attainment for youth's glow.

Again, though in action youth is the more showy, yet how much more sterling usually is the work of experience. How the Recruit dashes on, unrealizing danger, heedless of it; but what General does not rather rely on his Veterans ?

I feel this to be true in my own most high office and ministry. There is something in the first onset against evil, when you are young and just ordained, the like of which you miss in after-life. Evil must give way before you, and men and women shall be in caravans haled and hurried off to follow their best interests. Ah, well! we lose this expectation and this excitement in time, and find that this threadbare world is not on a sudden, and by our single work, to be not only patched up, but





made new. We learn to look at the whole routine of our ministry, with all its varied calls, and opportunities, and watchings, and waitings, and actions, as a sea with many waves. Each wave is to do its mite toward rounding the stones, and then it retires, and another comes, and so on endlessly. Each has, we believe, an influence, imperceptible it may be, but we have learned to work without such feverish expectation of immediate and palpable results. There is a gravity, perhaps even a sadness, upon our work; still, if it be not less earnest, it need not grieve us that it is done in a quieter spirit than before it had gained the full ripening of experience. That ardour of inexperience was a thrilling and exhilarating thing. But experience is better than that was, even if it lack some of the ardour. Our work at forty, even if it be more sober-hued, is, if still as earnest, of far greater value than it was when on the young side of thirty. Many a young man who used to rebel at his father's theories, practices, and cautions, and think him only growing mouldy and behind the times, looks back to acknowledge in after-life that the full ripe corn, although more sober-hued than that hardly ripe, was yet assuredly of greater value.

I have been so long on my way to the field, where the few first sheaves are rising—what with the sitting on stiles, and leaning against gates, necessary on such a day—that I can do little else, now I am in it, than sit in the shade of a hedge and watch the children, left to keep company with each other at this corner of the field while their parents are at work among the grain. Ah, these few sheaves suggest to me how, when



ripeness is attained, reaping begins ; and how, when we cease to grow, we begin to die !

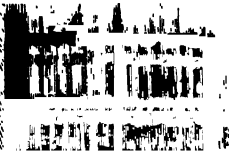
“ When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.”

Yes, it may take some time in the reaping ; but the sickle was put in then. We may take some time in going down the hill, but we begin the descent when we have ceased to climb. And these things also have a sad and a cheerful side. Is it not something to have the corn mature, and cut, and standing there, free from those old threats of mildew and blight ? Oh, well then, if, by God’s help, we have been enabled to set by some results of our life’s gradual growth, in useful and acceptable sheaves for Him ! Well if, as the day falls, and the shadows lengthen, and the field grows bare, there are still rising, and shall still rise, those long rows of goodly sheaves !



THOUGHTS ABOUT READING.





**R**EADING. How delightful to one who loves it, when it may be done uninterruptedly and with a clear conscience! I mean without the consciousness of other things—that are less matters of enjoyment, but more matters of duty—waiting about one's study chair, and claiming attention, pulling conscience by the arm, whispering in its ear, pricking at its heart; taking away the enjoyment of the snatched delight, and leaving dull depression instead of satisfaction at the end of the day. If there be hanging over one a round of visits that *may* no doubt be deferred till to-morrow, but that it is felt *ought* to be made to-day, or some household matter that ought to be attended to, or some long foreign or other letter that ought to be written; or some editor looming from his mysterious den, expecting (you keenly feel) every day some

article already more than due: if these or the like grits be in the wheel of your mind, you may indeed take your afternoon's treat; but even in your enjoyment there will be a secret discontent, and the end of that, however lightly, guilty gratification will be heaviness.

How different if there be no just cause or impediment to hinder the union of mind with mind! A thorough wet day, with no imperative call to face the rain; or the day's leaf blank of special engagements: the chair is drawn to the study table; the thick volume is taken down from the shelf; the narrow breadth of read leaves begins to gain width, the broad unread portion to diminish, as leaf after leaf is consigned from the future to the past. Perhaps it is a new book, and a foretaste of the feast was enjoyed as the lithe paper-knife ran through the complaisant and yielding leaves, and pride in the new acquisition enhanced the pleasure of reading. But, in fact, one seldom does read a new book. You just sip the sweets in that cutting the leaves; and then you place it in the shelves, with due regard to colour and height, and in some point a little conspicuous if possible, in order that your eye may lovingly seek it, and pleasantly rest on it now and then, realizing the presence of the new guest; one, perhaps, long desired. And some months, it may be, afterwards, on some leisure day, the book, now quite at home with you, is taken from the shelf, and seriously tackled with. What a very child's delight one feels in having a new book! There is enjoyment, also, in standing in front of Bickers', or Sotheran's shop, or Bell and Daldy's, surveying the delicious backs of the books, like a hungry boy before a tart-shop. This is next best to being able to buy them. There

is, all book-lovers know, a very pure and uncovetous pleasure in overlooking a good library; when we are turned into a friend's study to wait for him, we always, as a matter of course, go up to the book-case, and pulling this out, and patting that back, find even half an hour by no means hang heavily. And it is of course very kind of people so disinterestedly to put those libraries in their handsome cases looking out upon the London streets; and they may be contemplated with serenity unperturbed by the anxious doubt which last, which first, to buy, if the question be settled beforehand by the clear knowledge that one's income precludes the luxury of book-buying. There is no charge, however, for looking, and this enjoyment is undoubtedly more ethereal, if less solid, than that of the man who can go in and select whole sets of new clean volumes, and then greedily await the parcel from London. Only, I sometimes wonder that it never happens that a millionaire passing the row of hungry curates intent on surveying the ranked volumes, thinks of sending one of them in to taste the good things. The boys regaling their noses outside the confectioner's, do sometimes happen upon such benevolent treatment. Fancy the enjoyment of turning loose a half-famished parson into the shop, and giving him licence to feast, within some cautious and necessary limit! But no doubt the idea does not occur to the affluent. It might not be, at first sight, an obvious one.

But some reader may perhaps complain that I am in a mood for trifling, and probably be inclined to quarrel with my lighter thought. Fear not, the stream need not be really shallow, though there be a few eddying empty bubbles on the surface. One word I have yet to say as to the place

and manner of reading, before we go on to thoughts about the thing itself.

I like, then, to read at a table. I don't therefore often care to draw my chair to the fire to read, unless, indeed, I can arrange that a corner of the table shall jut out so as to hold my desk and book in front of me. It destroys half the pleasure of



reading, if it be needful to hold up the book, just as it does, in listening to music, to have to turn over the leaves for the performer. But I was, I remember, only just now baking in the summer lanes, and I must ask pardon for so much as mentioning a fire in the very next paper. I should do a kinder turn to the reader by placing him at his length on the lawn among

the cool growing grass and the firmament of daisies ; before him some big book, above him some thick-foliaged tree ; and bidding him lie, sheltered from the sun and secluded from visitors,

“ Immantled in ambrosial dark,  
To drink the cooler air, and mark  
The landscape winking through the heat.”

Perhaps, however, such a prospect and such a day are hardly well suited to deeper study, and it is more possible to read out loud, the centre of a semicircle of working wife and sisters,—

“ Oh bliss, when all in circle drawn  
About him, heart and ear were fed  
To hear him, as he lay and read  
The Tuscan poets on the lawn.”

Pleasant duct-excursions we have also had, my wife and I, beyond the garden, into some twilight copse, or to some rising ground, secluded, but overlooking an angle of the road ; canopied by sombre sighing fir boughs, cushioned with deep moss. The little incidents, noteworthy events, for a country place, of a rarely passing carriage or well-habited traveller beneath us, diversified the afternoon's employment of *tête-à-tête* reading and working.

In reading aloud you gain this advantage, that two minds are at the same time studying the matter, and can interchange impressions and thought. I often think that a custom observed by some families within my acquaintance, has much to recommend it : the custom, namely, of reading together, in alternate verses, the Psalms and other Scriptures. Sometimes a hitherto unobserved meaning in the familiar words, seems evolved from them thus read ; and, at any rate, you may obtain the point of



view from which other minds beside your own regard them. Then (to recur to the subject of a former essay), by such reading, religious converse, concerning which even those least restrained on other subjects often feel a reticence and a shyness, is, I think, made easier; it is less forced, flowing naturally from the sacred words which have already broken the ice of constraint. This plan also gives variety to such conversation, which is, perhaps, rather apt to run in certain grooves. Formality does not belong only to forms; there is no doubt that much formality pervades even acts that might seem least likely to be formal. Noticeably about religious topics, dragged into ordinary conversation, does this fungus of unreality and forcedness gather; and often, so to speak, *apropos* of nothing, and with effort, religion is talked to grown people, but especially to children, because there is a feeling (and a just feeling) that it is fit and right to speak to others, above all to the young, of the only Realities of life. But the effect is, too often, to bore and weary, rather than to interest them. Therefore, the wiser way is to watch for, or to make, opportunities, out of which the subject may arise naturally. This, I think, is certainly one use of such a practice of reading as that of which I spake. Much that I have now said is confirmed and paralleled by the case of visiting the sick during a long illness. The conversation might soon become monotonous, forced, constrained, but for the sacred book which we hold in our hand at such times. Out of that mine an endless supply may be drawn of precious metal, which then naturally and without effort can be fashioned into profitable conversation.

So much, then, for reading aloud. I will only r- tice the one

disadvantage which it has. This is, that you cannot well pause to gather up some dropped thread, or to consider some point which was at first not clear, but which the context has lit up. And in devotional reading it is obvious that there must also be found a private time for meditation upon the sacred text, specially with a view to searching the secrets of our own heart. The food will then be taken in small quantities, and the longer period allotted for digestion.

But now I may pass on from thoughts on the manner of reading, to thoughts on *reading* itself. I want to ask some of my readers whether they have ever taken the trouble to arrive at a clear notion as to what reading is. Is it merely the beginning a book or books, and going through page after page until the end is reached, without careful accompanying thought or sufficient previous knowledge; accepting or rejecting what the writer says, merely because it either falls in with prejudice, or with the reader's preconceived ideas of probabilities or improbabilities? Does it satisfy your idea of reading to have gone through a volume, and to lay it by then without having exercised the mind upon it, without having, on some sufficient ground, formed a judgment concerning its subject? Is it enough to be content with "seeing what is said, without going any further?" Take the case of religion to show what I mean, besides as being the most important. How many people choose pamphlets, papers, periodicals (hardly books, this would make too great a call upon their attention), invariably selected in accordance with their own prejudgment, or with the current of their previous education; accept conclusions made for them from premises which they never have taken the trouble to

examine, and thus get their opinions ready made, and without having really exercised their own judgment at all. Indeed, the mind's court did not sit; evidence was not heard; the judge, already biassed and partial, accepted, to save all trouble, and without any trial, the sentence of another court. Thus does Bishop Butler, in his preface to his wonderful sermons, speak on this point:

“Though it is scarce possible to avoid judging, in some way or other, of almost everything which offers itself to one's thoughts, yet it is certain that many persons, from different causes, never exercise their judgment upon what comes before them, in the way of determining whether it is conclusive and holds. They are perhaps entertained with some things, not so with others. They like and they dislike; but whether that which is proposed to be made out be really made out or not, whether a matter be stated according to the real truth of the case, seems to the generality of people merely a circumstance of no consideration at all.”

He goes on to speak with astonishment—which we can well understand in such a man—concerning the general apathy as to the question “Is this or that really true?” For, as Whately says, there is an abundance of people who love to have the truth on their side; but the number is few of those who simply desire to be on the side of truth. And this bias is especially perceptible in the reading the Bible. Men, but, perhaps, especially women, carefully search it, not with a simple childlike heart which desires instruction, but with the purpose of shoring up their own particular views; and it is hard but that every one of any number of opponents can manage to find (by neglecting

this context, and paring off that conclusion) plenty of warrant for his own notions. I think I would undertake, by cutting texts away from their contexts, and chapters away from the rest of the Bible, to make out a strong case for any tenet, however monstrous. So much for that common plan of reading—of reading even the Bible—not for the purpose of learning, but for that of buttressing foregone conclusions. Certainly most readers in their reading take rather the part of the advocate than of the learner or of the judge.

“Not to mention the multitudes who read merely for the sake of talking, or to qualify themselves for the world, or some such kind of reasons, there are, even of the few who read for their own entertainment, and have a real curiosity to see what is said, several—which is prodigious—who have no sort of curiosity to see what is true: I say, curiosity; because it is too obvious to be mentioned, how much that religious and sacred attention, which is due to truth, and to the important question, *What is the rule of life?* is lost out of the world.”

I have been speaking more at this time of those who read not for instruction, but to justify themselves in holding certain opinions, and who thus take some pains to make themselves unwise by reading, to fashion their mind into an unhappy compound of prejudiced credulity and prejudiced obstinacy. On the side of their inclinations walks Pliable; on the side of their distastes struts Obstinate:—and such Christians had nearly best be let alone. They are out of the sphere of calm argument; they look only at your title-page or at your publisher (to speak of you as though you were a book); they prejudge all you can say before you have opened your mouth. Themselves

and their party are infallibly right. Especially, you will find, they alone have a monopoly of all the common sense in the world. The case of these is hopeless. Let them alone. You will find it less heating to go and discourse for a couple of hours to a hedgehog—and your labour will be quite as profitable.

Butler, however, was not dwelling so much upon prejudice as upon a mere idle habit of mind, as being incompatible with reading in its true sense. He detects idleness where many would never think of looking for it. He says, that with some men not a few of their idlest hours are those which they spend in reading. He complains also of the facilities afforded, even in his time, for such idle industry. I wonder what he would think of ours, with the Circulating Trasherics; the numberless papers, periodicals, pamphlets, which deal even with the gravest, profoundest subjects in an airy, amateur sort of way, offensively sneering at, or offensively patronizing, as the case may be, such subjects as the truths of the Bible or the dogmas of the Church, until their readers take for granted that all knowledge is easy, and that a leisure half-hour is quite enough time to devote to the glancing through some abstruse work, the result of long study and deep thought.

“The great number of books and papers of amusement, which, of one kind or another, daily come in one’s way, have in part occasioned, and most perfectly fall in with and humour, this idle way of reading and considering things. By this means time, even in solitude, is happily got rid of, without the pain of attention. Neither is any part of it more put to the account of idleness,—one can scarce forbear saying, is spent with less thought,—than great part of that which is spent in reading.”

And thus the mind, instead of being trained and strengthened, is demoralized and enervated. The reasoning powers become less, instead of more capable and energetic. The less men really *read*, the less able they become to read, or to do more than "just take up a book," or "skim its contents."

"Thus people habituate themselves to let things pass through their minds, as one may speak, rather than to think of them. Thus, by use, they become satisfied merely with seeing what is said, without going any further. Review and attention, and even forming a judgment, become fatigue; and to lay anything before them that requires it, is putting them quite out of their way."

I will notice two instances of the harmfulness of this indolent way of reading, whether with the eye or with the ear. Take the case of reading or hearing the Bible. A difficulty strikes the reader in some passage, or concerning some character with which he meets. Now very often he does not take pains, either by further reading, by study of the context, of the whole argument or the whole history, or by consultation with some one authorized and competent, to have it explained, provided it be within the compass of human explanation;—and the difficulties of which I am now thinking are often of the very shallowest kind, probably only requiring a little close thought and attention for their removal. But such attention is not given, such aid is not sought; nay, more than this, the duty and wisdom of such effort does not even occur to the mind that has been trained into a habit of indolence, and so a thing easily explainable is often suffered to remain as a difficulty, and becomes in a measure an offence and a stumbling-block that mars the profit of at

any rate a portion of the Word of God. Something in the same way you will find men indolently leaving, in a path often trodden by them, a root or a stub against which they invariably trip; rather than take the trouble to go for a pick or a spade and spend twenty minutes in removing it once for all. For want of such thought or asking (to give very simple instances) how many find a stumbling-block in the character of David, the man after God's own heart, and yet one in the whiteness of whose life there is so dark a blot. Yet the thinking mind might find many surface difficulties in this history and character to be easily removeable. For example, there is the consideration of the power, and the common use of the power, of an Eastern monarch, to suggest to us how the sinner, while unrepentant, might have drugged conscience, and justified his sin to himself. There is the noticeable blight in this world, brought by the sin which for the next world had been forgiven, upon the whole of the remainder of the life that had been so glad and happy; and the retribution, fearful indeed, paid in the same kind with the sin. There is this further thought, that "many share in David's sin, but few indeed in his repentance," to caution against presumption upon his forgiveness. There is the reflection of what that repentance was; even the contemplation, in his own utterances, of the anguish of that heart which, when broken and contrite, certainly God did not despise. And there is, to my mind, an inexpressible sweetness in the assurance that even one who had so fallen might yet retain, upon his true repentance, such a name as "the man after God's own heart." It is, to me at least, a comfort to feel that God's look of kindness—yea, that the possibility of even high saintship, is not necessarily and for

ever forfeited by one terrible catastrophe: that though the good man fall, he may not be utterly cast down, because of that dear Hand which did not unclasp itself from that which in better days had sought its support; that even if we have ungratefully and wilfully answered to our Father's behests, "I go not," there yet remain hope and acceptance for those who afterwards repented and went. And so difficulties which to indolent reading and shallow thought seemed great, are removed, at least much modified, if the mind sets itself in earnest and reverently to consider them. I will suggest the history of Jacob, as being another offence to superficial readers, but as wonderfully explanatory of itself if considered with attention, and studied as a whole. And, as to doctrines, I would remind the cavillers, or those honestly perplexed in the consideration of isolated texts, or even of single chapters or books, that each book, especially each epistle or letter, is to be read, and treated, and considered, as a whole; that the Bible, in short, is only properly to be understood as a whole, and with due regard to the proportion of the parts which make up that whole. That, at the outset, holding it to be impossible that God's Word can contradict itself, it is better and wiser to wait for fuller knowledge of truths which appear now irreconcilable, if yet they are stated there, than either to dally with unbelief; or to select one truth to the exclusion of another, forcing the other into agreement with it; or to invent or accept a lame and inadequate explanation. For, as there are certain superficial and removable difficulties which demand only attention and pains to overcome them, so it must never be forgotten that there are deep things, unsearchable counsels, and ways of God past finding out, which are



farther above the highest mounting human intellect than are the stars above the soaring eagle.

My other instance of the harmfulness of indolent reading was to have been (only I find that my limit is reached) that of the mere dilettante reading of dangerous books. Often you will find those who never take the pains to study sound theology, dabbling nevertheless, with much morbid eagerness, in any sceptic trash that comes in their way ; and these have often a sapient look and lofty sneer for this term, "dangerous books." It becomes necessary to explain to them that the books are dangerous only relatively, not absolutely—dangerous *to them*, to the ignorant and unread, not to the student of theology. And then they don't like such plain speaking. But, in truth, ignorance and conceit in partnership so harden the skin, that tact and delicacy have to be almost laid aside if it is to be pierced ; and this slovenly, easy-going style of so-called reading, is a great fosterer of both the one and the other.

I had more to say. I wanted to have given a warning against upstart, untried literature—literature of the day merely,—and to warn, in old Pearson's memorable words, the would-be student, especially the would-be theologian, to tread in the old paths. I meant also to have urged all Christian readers to some sound and systematic reading of Christian authors. They should not be at the mercy of every wind of doctrine. Above all, they should carefully, systematically (as well as prayerfully), read and study the Bible, if possible in the originals. What a difference would such a practice make in the intelligence and appreciative power of those to whom the ministers of the gospel have to speak !

Further, I would fain have jotted something about novel-reading—the pastry of the mind's meal: with a side-cut at the bad tendencies of the sensational, immorality-made-easy-for-young-beginners school. I thought to glance at the delights of talking over a book with a friend, when its last page has been turned; also to have suggested the usefulness of writing in a commonplace-book special passages from our reading, if merely to fix them in the mind. But my space is quite filled; and the reader must be either thankful or sorry to be presented only with the bill of fare, and not with the substantial viands which should constitute the remainder of the banquet.





## CLIMBING PLANTS.





r this time I am contemplating a beautiful picture—a study of trees; elm, ash, chestnut—set in a singularly beautiful frame; for I am writing at a table set in the window of an extempore study, and looking out at the summer landscape, just lately retouched and freshened by the rain. And this painting is shut in and bounded by a frame cunningly carved and rarely illuminated—tracery of the young Virginian creeper, edging all the window. Such grey reflections; such juicy greens; such graceful twinings, bendings, sweeps, interlacings! If I look up, how lovely the network of light and shadow against the soft summer blue, or against the pale silver-grey isles that float across the dim azure depths. If I look at the lower half of the picture, then the fretted and delicately-wrought carving seems overlaid with gilt against the dark air-subdued masses of the trees.

It would be ill managed in ordinary cases that the frame should divide attention with the picture; but the present instance, you see, is exceptional, for both frame and picture are the work of the same great Mind and Hand, and the art is as noble in the one as in the other. So, if you please, we will at present let the picture alone, and confine our attention to the frame.

It will serve to introduce some remarks which I have to make as to climbing plants, a genus under which I shall bring more species than the botanist would probably class. How lovely a specimen of this family is that which I call the frame of my picture! Young, and juicy, and frail, but sending forth its myriad shoots, each with carefully bent head, like a bishop's crozier, in order that it may creep and push on without injuring the new growth of its delicate extremity. Always as it advances, however, it puts out, every here and there, a many-fingered tendril, extending on all sides in search of a support, now closing with firm grasp about its sister shoots, now spreading out flat against the wall, and adhering by a curious process to the bricks. For at the tip of each finger widens a tiny flat cushion, which holds at last firmly to its support. And thus, if the main stem has been guided and secured at first, the new growth may be trusted to take the shape and the direction which was intended by the trainer. Luxuriantly then it hangs, and droops, and trails, and climbs, a mass of flecked gold in the sunshine. And so till Autumn comes; and then what pen shall picture the gorgeous array in which it becomes on a sudden clad? Vivid rose and darkest madder, lights of vermilion, shades of purple, gleams of a pale, bright green; and all shown,

perhaps, on the clear, cool grey of some ancient stone wall or tower. The zenith of the glory is indeed reached, like that of the sun, just at the setting.

But let us look for some other climbing plants. Here, then, is this trophy of blue and pink *Convolvulus*, and not far away, cast in a wreath upon the garden hedge, the unsullied snow of the wild blossom. The pointed buds in diminishing rank may suggest a comparison in shape and folding with a furled stout umbrella of the old school; but every morning some of these are found, in your early turn round the garden, transformed into wide open vases with tapering stems, violet blue, with crimson rays shooting upward from the neck; palest blue; pink; white with purple rays; and white absolutely pure and tintless. So fragile, only lasting the morning; and each morning brings a new interest to see how the decorations are varied. To-day the deep purple cup is near the ground; where it opened yesterday there is a cluster of three, faintest grey, with flushed dividing rays; and to-morrow, in their place, there may be one of clear rose, or a twin vase of blue-rayed snow. It is always a new pleasure to watch these climbers, twined in a pyramid about some hazel branches; one hue to-day, another shall predominate to-morrow. And these frail, clinging growths give themselves up wholly to the thing to which they are trained; they have no tendrils; they twine round their prop with their very being, in endless intricate rings.

A word for the Hop, the queen of English climbers. Behold, then, on memory's camera, the festooned avenues of the hop-garden. One or two poles along the straight even lines are sure to have bent forward, and to have made triumphal arches with



some sister plant. Tied here and there at first, the lithe brownish-green bines glide snake-like about the poles until the top is reached, and the plant develops into a rich, luxuriant mass. And then the full, abundant clusters of—how shall I paint it?—pale straw-green, scale upon scale, cone upon cone, perfectly set off by the layers of darkest leaves in masses underneath—leaves next in beauty of shape to those of the vine. As we fly by in the train through Herefordshire or Kent, how lovely the appearing and disappearing ranks; here a youngling garden, here great piled masses leaning towards the cutting. Now they droop above you; now you look down on the long, curving parallels, and watch how quickly the perspective alters; now the ground is flat, and you get tempting momentary peeps down each long green-roofed vista in turn as you whirl past; and here the ranks are broken, and a group of men, women, girls and boys, and children in arms tumbled on the grass under the hedge, cluster and struggle through the vistas and among the leaning poles, making one of the prettiest pictures in England, or, for that matter, in the world.

I think I ought to allude to one familiar bright ornament of every cottage garden, ere I pass on to the last and choicest of my vegetable instances. Twisted in and out, through lattice-work, trained to climb up strings, up crossed poles, ay, even about town windows, the small scarlet spikes gleam out of the full, drooping, lush-green leafage, and the Scarlet-runner, twisting in close and endless spirals about any provided support, makes no mean show; nor shall it be treated with contempt, for all its kitchen-garden origin; no, not even although we pass on from it to the Vine.

Of course this is the unrivalled Queen of all climbing-plants, if not, indeed, of all fruit-bearers. Besides its exceeding beauty, it has an association which makes it even sacred. "I am the very Vine" (as it was best translated in Wycliffe's Bible), "and ye are the branches." Under this figure is most exquisitely expressed our union with Christ, from the first grafting to the bearing fruit even abundantly, through the virtue of the Holy Spirit flowing into the branches ever more and more fully and freely, by their use of the means of grace, and by the careful, if sometimes painful, tending of the Husbandman. Yes, I cannot but associate with the vine that One whom God planted "wholly a right plant," and into whom being grafted, we, sprung from a "degenerate seed," may produce clusters "meet for the Master's table,"—at least that shall not be refused there. And so the vine, indeed, seems honoured, ennobled, consecrated above all other trees, being thus chosen to symbolize to us the very Tree of Life.

This by the way. We have now specially to do with its climbing attribute. And, indeed, what would become of all its beauty and its sweetness, unless, artificially or naturally, a prop were provided to which it may cling? Where would be the drooping wealth that we prize and admire, if the long branches were left to trail in the dust? Our Lord's perfect Humanity, into which we were grafted (to recur once more to my little by-path)—the Vine-parable is complete even in this property of the plant, for that Human nature left alone, if we could so imagine it, were too feeble to stand, as now it shall stand (and we with it), eternally secure, being twined and intimately interlaced, by the Incarnation, with his Godhead.

The Queen of climbing plants! Truly it would seem to have been expressly fashioned in grace of growth, of leaf, of fruit, to be even perfect, as though with a view to the high honour intended for it. The twining sienna stem, the pale green leaves, unique in symmetry and beauty of form; the graceful reaching tendrils, and the drooping clusters, so exquisite in shape and hue; we do not see these out of doors, in England, to their best advantage, of course, and 'tis stale news to everybody now that the vineyards abroad are disappointing: not much more picturesque than rows of currant bushes. In Italy, however, the vine may be seen, no doubt, not only beautiful in the vineyards, but still more in perfection, cresting and drooping from the stone of some old palace, or clothing some dead and ruined trunk with superb leafage and rich fruit. But in our English hot-houses we get beauty enough; and certainly it is a feast to the eye, to contemplate the trained orderly stems, thinned down to the proper amount of leaves; and out of these at intervals the full ripe clusters drooping, red-purple with grey blooms, or black-purple with blue blooms, or pale transparent green, or pale yellow bloomed with almost white. It seems a pity, when the scissors come and land the ample bunches upon the plate, although there they look such perfect pictures—light and shade, composition, and colour;—if only they would last in their plumpness and juiciness for ever, and not pass off from attained perfection, who would ever have the heart to eat them? So lovely is the vine as an exotic, doubtless lovelier where its growth is native and unrestrained, and in luxuriant freedom stems clasp and twine, and tendrils seek and grasp, and great Eshcol clusters peep here and there out of their tent curtains.

Climbing Plants. My fancy seemed easily and naturally to link them all in a sort of kindred with myself and my brethren of mankind. I considered how God had made none of us as trees to stand alone and apart, but, indeed, as climbing, clinging,



depending, leaning plants. We must have some support to cling to ; we, in our own selves, must twine somewhere, or must trail along the ground ; also we are endowed with tendrils which, even by their knotted writhings and cluttings (often) of empty

air, prove how their normal state was to have been led to that whereto they might cling, and about which we might grow. This, methought, is surely a world of daily, hourly, changes and chances; a world of sudden storms, rough winds, and drenching rains. What prop is there then—if one there be; what sure stay, what everlasting and infallible support, to which we may cling; and so, though we be shaken, escape utter overthrow and ruin from some sharper, more sudden blast for which we were unprepared? It could never be meant that climbing plants should cleave to the dust, should creep along the ground; at least that the nobler sort should thus mar and even destroy their fruit: what, then (if there be one), is the prop provided, clasping which we may undisturbedly grow heavenward; fulfil the deep and real object of our being, and bear worthy—(so to speak)—worthy fruit for God?

Now it seems to me that such a prop, from which nothing external can beat us,—such a prop to which we may safely cling and about which we may securely grow,—is the sense of God's Fatherhood; of His providence; His being with us, close to us, sustaining us, moderating, ordering all. Indeed I find that our kind Master has already considered the case,—and provided for it. He saw the danger,—the valuable shoots of energy and earnestness and careful thought, that were in peril of trailing along the ground and perishing; and He pointed the remedy: He would lift them (if we will let Him do this) from their anxious profitless quest; and guide them towards a sure stay to which they may implicitly cling, and so uninterruptedly go on with healthy growth and abundant fruit-bearing. Why wander over the low earth, He says, after a supply for this, and this and

that, craving of the lower life? Cling, He says, cling to, and tightly embrace the sense of God's Fatherhood, of His actual, incessant watching over you, His unsleeping, unforgetting providence; His ordering of things little and things large, in the life of His children,—of the slight events, the sparrow's fall, the hairs of the head; as well as of things the most vast,—of their sanctification here, and their condition through eternity. Why take ye thought, He says — anxious wearing thought, that is; searchings along the ground;—why take ye thought saying, what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or where-withal shall we be clothed? They who know of no sure and secure prop about which the tendrils of faith and trust, about which their whole being may cling:—these we shall not blame so much if, with them, life's energies be spent in anxious care and eager quest for the present and transitory requirements: but you, you, with a secure support, an everlasting prop; you with the knowledge of God's Fatherhood, of His providence, of His care; might not, should not your energies be spent in growing heavenward—in bearing fruit? “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” He is your Father, and He knoweth: can you not cling to this stay? Need the energies be wasted, the spiritual life dwarfed and stunted, its fruit-yielding faculties lie undeveloped, during a weary search after that which—if indeed the soul's earnest seekings do aspire heavenward—shall be, by God's own promise, the subject of the Father's peculiar care? “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness:” this is necessary, and you are not to filch the *promise* from the custody of the *condition*:—but then “all these things shall be added unto you.”

And so to this prop, this realized sense of God's providence in all and through all and for all, to this support our Lord's words first would tie and bind us, and then we may cling to it, clasp and embrace it, ever more and more implicitly, absolutely, restingly, entirely; and grow, and bear fruit, and die, in peace. Step after step of growth through life; growth marked by God: link after link, tendril after tendril; and each last hold makes the next more a thing of course, as each next makes the last securer, until the tender shoots have become wood; and now winds may indeed shake us, but cannot wrench our trust away. Clinging, through all, and whatever happens, to the certainty of God's kind ordering, His ever watchful providence; whatever befalls us, whatever sunny days, or warm rains, and whatever storms and rough buffets, we still hold by this belief,—and still, through all, climb upward; we learn to pass by second causes, for both sorrows and joys, and to rest, as a habit, and a matter of course, upon the First.

“ There's heaven above, and night by night  
 I look right through its gorgeous roof:  
 No suns and moons, though e'er so bright,  
 Avail to stop me; splendour-proof  
 I keep the broods of stars aloof;  
 For I intend to get to God,  
 For 'tis to God I speed so fast,  
 For in God's breast, my own abode.  
 Those shoals of dazzling glory passed,  
 I lay my spirit down at last.  
 I lie where I have always lain,  
 God smiles as He has always smiled;  
 Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,  
 Ere stars were thunder-girt, or piled  
 The heavens, God thought on me, His child.”

It is not too much to call this vivid, keen, intimate sense and conviction of God's personal, particular, real ordering and providence in every circumstance and event of our life, a prop, to which we may entirely cling (feeling that though God has given us the awful gift of free will, He yet is ever ordering the scenery and objects in which and upon which this may work)—a prop which is *necessary* for our support, for our upward growth and fruitfulness. Other tending is needful, and is provided, varying in individual cases. But this is, for all us climbing plants, an absolute condition of our healthy and profitable growth. Thus, in sad truth, we see some noble vines wasting their rich energy and virtue in gropings and searchings over the ground ; so, when rough weather comes, drenched and bemired, whirled about and broken. Others, again (who have not really laid hold of this conviction), smile upwards for a time, and seem to trust ; but now some terrible storm (which they had concluded God would certainly avert) comes upon them ; and, lo ! they also are found lying drenched and bruised upon the ground ; perhaps—for God is very tender to weakness—raised again, and tied up by the Husbandman ; nevertheless, injured and weakened, and having suffered loss.

Really to grasp this idea, this truth of God's providence—of His particular providence, His ordering of the least and the largest events of life—is indeed a habit whose acquisition is most important, most comforting, and most rare. Let me offer a proof of its rareness :—

“*Providential* :”—This is a word of common usage. But how is it used ? what is commonly intended by its use ? It is used only of some remarkable deliverances or joys, some few special



and notable events of life; used in a way which certainly would lead the hearer to suppose the interference of God with the affairs of earth to be quite the exception, not the rule; that God generally lets things go on in an iron routine, or else by chance, and as they will: and only wakes, as from a fit of absence, to interfere now and then; as though, indeed, He were actuated by something like a spirit of favouritism for this or that person (oftenest the speaker), and extends His care to this particular case, leaving the common horde to fare as chance may have it. Yet how is this or that event *providential*, and not indeed every event that comes to all? Were you hindered from starting on a voyage, in which you afterwards hear that the vessel went down, and all were lost? Well, that was (it is quite true) *providential*. But what if you had gone? And what about those who did go? Was not their going also *providential*?—or did God forget all about them?

Frankly I must say I dislike the word "*providential*." There seems to me so much practical unbelief in it. I love to think that not a sparrow falls without our Father, and that the very hairs of our head are numbered. I protest against the cold distance at which we are placed by this use—common in the lips of really godly people—of a word which seems to indicate His general disregard, His only rare cognizance of our concerns. Nay, for me, His care is a thing present *always*, and in everything, in every accident (so called), in every ordinary event, in every shade or tender gleam, as well as in every blackness and sunburst that is external to me, that is not placed within my own control to avert or to invite; *always*, and in all things: this is the absolute belief, the sure support to which I would cling

with Faith's tendrils, with the growth and habit of my heart and mind. Bound by God's precepts, guided by His love, let me dare hope that He has so wedded me to this stay that no roughest wind can cast me dishevelled and ruined upon the ground. That *all things*—not the rare exception here and there



but *all things*—are providential, and that therefore the word should not be distinctively used: this I would earnestly assert. This lesson Christians might learn from the lips of a pious Jew, one whose character seems to me eminently beautiful, so imbued, so saturated and all-pervaded with a calm, quiet

trust, an implicit confidence. A life whose habit it had become to wait, like the man at the helm, for the voice of the captain ; a mind that at once, naturally, and as of course, looked up, past the lower clouds or stars, to God, believed in His immediate, ever-wakeful ordering ; sought at once His aid, His guidance, in every assault of difficulty, of anxiety. The king asks him a momentous question ; note his instinct (I shall call it) before answering : “*So I prayed to the God of heaven.*” He finds Jerusalem waste, and the gates thereof burned with fire ; he cheers up the people and the princes to the work of building—by speaking of the king’s favour ? Nay, first causes come first.

“ Then I told them of the hand of my God, which was good upon me ; as also the king’s words that he had spoken unto me.”

The enemies of Jerusalem, the unbelievers of that day, would discourage him, and laugh him down.

“ Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, He will prosper us ; therefore we His servants will arise and build.”

These enemies proceed to violence.

“ Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night.”

Neglecting, you see, no prudent means, but *first* seeking His aid without whom the watchman waketh but in vain.

Then in his government. The former rulers had lived in some degree of state, which, in the then condition of the people, was burdensome.

“ But so did not I,” says the simple-hearted saint, “*because of the fear of God.* Think upon me, therefore,” he says—“ think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.”

I might go on, but I refer the reader to the history. Certainly the ordering of God throughout life, with its every event, was an article of the creed of NEHEMIAH. His whole being, it seems to me, had wound itself about this conviction.

And oh, the comfort, the peace, the rest of it! How sweet, having this real and graspable prop, indeed to wind our being round it, to cling to it, to grow by it; not wishing to control and order our own life, with its changes and chances, but—for ourselves and for those dearest to us, and for whom our soul yearns—seeking and praying for God's ordering, trusting to His will, and surrendering our own; never seeking to direct Him; only asking what He would have us to do, what He has appointed for us. A story told by Meffreth (a post-mediæval preacher)\* is to the point:—

“There was once an aged hermit in the Egyptian desert, who thought it would be well with him if he had an olive-tree near his cave. So he planted a little tree, and thinking it might want water, he prayed to God for rain; so rain came and watered his olive-tree. Then he thought that some warm sun to swell its buds would be advisable; so he prayed, and the sun shone out. Now the nursling looked feeble, and the old man deemed it would be well for the tree if frost were to come and brace it. He prayed for the frost, and hoar-frost settled that night on bar and beam. Next he believed a hot southerly wind would suit his tree; and after prayer the south wind blew upon his olive-tree, and—it died. Some little while after, the hermit visited a brother hermit, and lo! by his cell-door stood a flourishing olive-tree.

\* From Baring-Gould's *Post-Mediæval Preachers*.

“ ‘How came that goodly plant there, brother?’ asked the unsuccessful hermit.

“ ‘I planted it, and God blessed it, and it grew.’

“ ‘Ah, brother, I too planted an olive, and when I thought it wanted water I asked God to give it rain, and the rain came; and when I thought it wanted sun, I asked, and the sun shone; and when I deemed that it needed strengthening, I prayed, and the frost came—God gave me all I demanded for my tree as I saw fit, yet is it dead.’

“ ‘And I, brother,’ replied the other hermit, ‘I left my tree in God’s hands, for He knew what it wanted better than I.’ ”

We are, indeed, climbing plants; not fitted to stand alone; not oaks, but vines: we are climbing plants, and God would train us. He directs our clasp; let us not seek to control His training, but rather let us implicitly yield to it. Let us invite, rather than resist, his kind compelling and confining, and cease our over-eager reachings after this stay or that, which He has in His infinite wisdom and love set beyond our scope. All is being ordered, if we wait and watch for it. And we shall understand and appreciate the design of all our present trainings and restrainings when God has converted the growth of earth into the new wine of Heaven.



**COLOURED GLASS.**



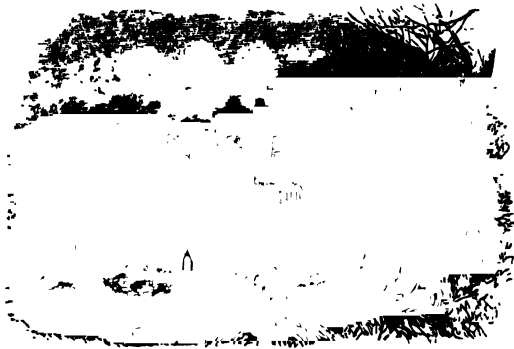


FEW days before the grass was cut for hay I was walking through a wide meadow down to the school one Sunday morning. A quiet morning it was, quiet yet cheerful, well befitting the early hours of the Day of Rest. Some days, especially the mornings and evenings of them, seem as it were cut out for and peculiarly adapted to the idea of Sunday. True, it is our knowledge

of the day that, to our thought, softens sky, and trees, and fields, and gives cattle their languid, restful look; at the same time the fields, undisturbed by the mowing, and the haystacks remaining unscattered, together with a certain consciousness of the day dwelling in the less busy-faced, more quiet-paced people that one meets, and some other outward signs, do exist to mark a difference, and to aid the spirit's instinctive perception. There is more (or rather we are more leisure-hearted to notice it), more of dim tranquillizing haze about the distance: the hills upon the horizon are faint and filmy and hardly to be seen, though there is yet no fog, only air: and the trees



not far away show a blue atmosphere against their dark summer depths of shade. The forge is silent, the flail laid by: the threshing-machine does not obtrude its ceaseless grumble and groan upon the ear to-day: the children, if only because they have on their best garments, do not scamper and shout with week-day vehemence. So the far lulling music of the water-fall, or the low near babble of the brook, and the dreamy



caws of the rookery; these are able to win attention now, and seem indeed, not sound nor silence, but perhaps the twilight of each. There are few bird-voices at all; only in the copse the "tweet-bur-r-r" of the young nightingales with their mother; and possibly and very rarely, the scattered gleaming spray of a pre-autumnal robin's voice from a low dead branch under the heavy leafage.

Ah, well, I find that I am writing as though that quiet day, that quiet scene, were with me still; the silent Summer, the scarce touched hay, the green just-emerging corn, with (only half as high) the flare of its many scarlet poppies:

the dark, little varied trees. But I know that June died, and scarce had July begun to reign before a hint of change gathered: the last young shoots tipped the grave elm masses—loiterers straggling in when the year's Service was half over; the laburnum's upper boughs showed splashes of ochre here and there: some long narrow leaves were eddying with the dust under the drooping willow. And these signs increased through August, while the corn ripened, and the cherry-trees and gooseberry and currant bushes stood bankrupt; but blue-purple and dull orange and bloomed-green spheres grew into notice upon the walls, and certain untidy-looking branches grew black with damsons, or reddish-yellow with bullaces; and freckled pears grew mellow, and apples flushed or streaked into russet, or scarlet, or gold. And chrysanthemums and dahlias, and German asters, and Michaelmas daisies began to obtrude upon the somewhat and at first unwilling eye; and the lessening days slid on, and, unawares, I looked out (from my own study chair, in my own house) upon September. Few trees near me again: but—

“ Before the house the great opaque  
Blue breadth of sea without a break.”

Coloured glass. What has my prelude to do with this? Am I looking through such a medium at the September scene, changing the grass and shrubs and sky into a harlequin show of yellow and orange and blue and crimson? Nay, I love them far best of their own colour. Stain, if you will, windows where you would fain shut out sight and thought of the world; but place no bar, save that the least perceived, between

my eye and the tints which God has used for His landscape. No, my coloured glass is figurative; and you see my meditations concerning that calm day that to me seemed to bear the seal of Sunday upon its brow, may well serve to explain the meaning of the title with which I have labelled these present musings from my Study Chair. For much of its peculiar character was, as I confessed, attributable to the medium through which I regarded it. I knew the day was Sunday, and thus, you perceive, I was looking at everything through coloured glass. I might on a week-day have passed (at dinner time) through a field in which the haycocks were standing undisturbed, the dull pale hay untossed, the bright green edge of still uncut growth waiting unmolested; the dark elms, and the oaks with just a bluer shade of green, motionless, each over its own patch of shadow between which the strips of newly cut meadow gleamed vivid in the sunlight, and under which the dreamy cattle lay and chewed the cud: I might have even met (perchance) two or three peasants in holiday costume, sauntering through the fields on some expedition; and yet I should not have thought of the day at all in connexion with Sunday, nor at all otherwise than as a very lovely week-day, capital for the hay making. But through my coloured glass, everything, both sight and sound, took as it were a hue and tone of tranquillity—of rest from toil.

It is not a new idea, but it is none the less true, that the outward scene is affected by the inward condition of mind: that we look at the landscape about us through coloured glass, and that thus an infinite variety is procured from the

same surroundings. How the very thing which once filled us with joy to behold—how the very same thing, beheld by the same eyes, only through differently coloured glass, may appear inexpressibly sad and saddening.

“Come from the window, love,—come in, at last,  
Inside the melancholy little house  
We built to be so gay with.”

So the poor Andrea del Sarto, sadly convinced now that he was ill-assorted, ill-matched, that his love had been given where it was not deserved: that it had been better far—howsoever it might have seemed hard at the time—better, at least happier, far, for him to have failed than to have succeeded in that eager delicious chase of youth. “The melancholy little house?” Ah, how little would he have credited, looking at it through the coloured medium of those first ecstatic days when he brought his bride home, how little would he have believed it if one standing by him had predicted, “One day this bright little home shall depress your heart to be in it, shall sadden you to return to it, and all through this very success that makes your heart leap to look at it now.” “The melancholy little house!” And yet the house was the same, the eyes the same; only the spirit contemplated it through a different tint.

But I go back to my country home, and to the well-trodden walks and well-learnt scenery there. How different the same scenes will appear at different times; and especially, I think, to the Christian pastor. The first introduction to them, when no associations at all mark the turnings, linger by the gates, lurk in the hedges, even about particular trunks and roots of

trees ; what a Columbus-like feeling of discovery and exploration there is in first coming to a sphere of ministerial labour. This over-arched lane ; that field-walk ; that stile from which you had a surprise, looking suddenly down into the valley with the white river sleeping between the fields and the orchards, or bending away into a wooded concealment ; that path through the blue-bell copse ; or that long thin parting between the poppied, cockled, pimperlled corn, field after field—oats, barley, wheat, canary-grass :—how charming seemed all these at first, what pleasure you anticipated in each, whensoever your visiting-round should take you that or this way. And when you met the large-eyed children, looking up wonderingly and timidly, or the first welcoming warmth of this or that curious though respectful scrutinizer of the new pastor, your heart kindled with warm hope, and you did not so much tremble as rejoice to feel how, as good Robert Evans says, you yourself and your ministrations were to be for the future a part of the history, the eternal history, of these immortal, dying beings. The first glass through which you looked, especially if you were untried in the ministry, was (you see I am using no new image) *couleur de rose*.

How changed after a few years of anxious and necessarily monotonous work ; how changed does the scenery, or rather the medium through which it is viewed, become ! Perhaps that twilight-toned copse path, or that corn-field track which so pleased you at first, bring now a certain undefined and indescribable depression on the spirit ; and the loveliest walk is now that which is almost least loved of any. The reasons are not far to seek. To outsiders, the preacher's life must

(I often fancy) appear a sort of constant recreation; a delightful interchange, in the week, of pleasant study with pretty country walks; and on Sunday the privilege of having his own say to a congregation that is compelled, whether it will or no, decorously to listen, however long the speaker may be, or however much (of course for his own private gratification) he may think fit to scold them. The life has certainly its own holy and divine delight; and I, for one, would rather be the humblest teacher in the homeliest sphere, than win whatsoever fame and success in whatsoever worldly profession. Who would not, if his heart be really in the work of the ministry, say as little as this? Still, to suppose that, in a worldly sense, the life is devoid of much care and anxiety, is to the last degree a mistake. The cure of souls! (as sometimes called,) this is a tremendous matter. (I wish, by the way, that it were talked of and thought of less merely as a "Living.") Ay, the cure of souls; have you thought, my friend, what this means? It means that, besides the charge of my own salvation—a charge bringing much fear and trembling—there is committed to me a share in the everlasting interests of many more undying beings. It means that what you say or what you do (if you be of that portion of Christ's flock entrusted to my care), is straightway of importance to *me*: that your entering upon bad habits, or relinquishment of good, is a burden, a brow-furrowing, back-bending, hair-streaking anxiety to me; that, upon my knees, I must strive for you with a heart troubled lest my fault, my weakness, my shortcomings, may have harmed you, or caused that you failed of receiving aid. It means that I am to watch for you, to dwell on your case when I sit in

my house, when I walk by the way, when I lie down, and when I rise up. It means that I am to seek you out, with trouble in my heart, as I brush the wild-flowers away with



my foot, and hear, but heed not, the merry larks in the sky; —with trouble and harassing thought as to how I am most wisely, and yet firmly and faithfully, to introduce to your heart such a warning, such an advice, such an exhortation,

such a reproof. And of course the mere natural shrinking from the pain of doing this is something; and the anticipation of the offended look, the anger called up, (as though, I often wonderingly muse, it *could* be a matter of personal gratification, and not an act purely faithful and loving, to speak such thankless words:)—of course the process and its result is far from pleasure-giving. But far worse is the anxious fear, poisoning the homeward walk more than the anxious anticipation poisoned the outward:—lest I have been not faithful enough, not earnest enough, too warm; in every way inadequate. But, you will say, it is not you that work, but your Master who is working by you; and having sought His help, and done your best, you should rest fear, doubt, anxiety, on the Lord, and wait patiently upon Him who giveth the increase. Right, I grant you; but, look you, here comes up another hydra-headed brood of cares,—Ah, might I indeed think that my best had been done, that I had fully sought and fully used His aid; were I holier, less carnal;—for it is evident that God, who deigns to use instruments, works most abundantly with those that are in best order;—but, slow—Well, but that I am speaking to strangers, I should not so draw the curtain of my pastoral weaknesses and searchings of heart. Let me add, however, that very likely the object of my visit was frustrated once and again: no one at home, or too many at home; and so the thoughtful walk repeated and repeated:—and from what has been said you may perhaps hazard a guess at the cause of that nameless depression which gathers, as the years go on, about scenes that looked sweet and glad as Eden when they were new to the feet and eye.



Moreover, this walk was perhaps taken once, or more than once, when, do what we would, the world's littleness, or the body's weakness, or some sharp disappointment, or some other of many possible causes, had made the heart to sink low, low; and hard it was to keep under the old heart-sick cry: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." Or, however much we watch and pray against it, and will not give way to it, yet, because we are but human, a certain monotony and sameness in the work, after a while, will weigh the heart down; also the necessity of still carrying on the labour at those times when the brain is tired, the heart dull, the limbs faint, the lips dumb. (I suppose most clergymen have such seasons within their experience.) Then day after day of visiting the same sick-bed, visiting perhaps a case depressing and difficult: evening after evening wending to the night-school or the cottage lecture:—can you not see how a somewhat dull, at least neutral, tint becomes the medium through which one gets to contemplate those three tree-trunks stepping into the path; or that stile with the sweet view; or even the young March green of that bank of larches?

Yes; the clergyman's, the country parson's life, is not devoid of care, of depression, of heart-wearing; nay, if he realize his work and if his heart be in it, I say that he has of these more than many another. "Who is sufficient for these things?" This cry of the Apostle will be often echoed in his thought. Yet let me not be misunderstood. There are, I repeat, sweets within the bitter, happinesses even in the anxieties and depressions. There is a strong support on which to lean, an ever-present con-

solation to cheer us ; even this assurance on which the Apostle rests—" our sufficiency is of God." On, then, on, through weakness and through weariness, through depression and heart-sinking : on, giving offence perhaps, but never taking it ; reprov- ing the sin, but ready to lay down life for the sinner ; speaking the truth, but ever speaking it in love. On—

" *As workers together with Him*, in all things approving ourselves as the minis- ters of God ; in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings ; by pureness, by know- ledge, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report ; as deceivers, and yet true ; as unknown, and yet well known ; as dying, and behold we live ; as chastened and not killed ; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing ; as poor, yet making many rich ; as having nothing, and yet *possessing* all things."

On, deploring our shortcomings, our inadequacies, our lack of all ; but more clinging to, more and more entirely looking to and depending upon, Him who is our Strength in weakness, our Life in death. On, rejoicing in this our rare and ineffably great privi- lege of spending life wholly and singly in His work ; rejoicing,— though it please Him not to cheer us with evident fruit of our labour,—rejoicing at least to be working under His eye, who stands on the shore and watches what seems our bootless toil : ay, if it must be so, rather choosing indeed to toil for Him the livelong night in vain, and accepting this reward, that it has been permitted to us to toil for Him, if it were so that this were all (which yet shall never be) : nevertheless setting this mere barren labour for Him whom we shall see in the morning on the shore, far, unspeakably far above any the most successful, the most profitable other employment which the world had to give !

I have dwelt a little at length upon these confessions or confidences, not without a purpose. If we would impress on our people the greatness and all but overwhelming anxiety of our work, which concerns their eternal destiny, it is not only that they might be more allowing towards us, more ready to save us from unnecessary and easily shareable toil and thought; care for the mere serving of tables, as it were; but it might lead to such a reflection as this: "Shall another feel such anxiety for my salvation; and shall I so lightly let it go?" And yet perhaps this is a vain hope. For after the death of the SON of GOD for man's redemption, what proof remains to be given of its importance?

I have, however, one more change of the glass, after the rose-colour, and after the neutral-tint, to bring to bear upon my meadow walks, and blue-bell path, and river-parted valley, and larch-edged road. There is the leaving them all, and the coming back again after years. Oh, a strange tender hue hallows them then, the old familiar scenes, ay, and those associations also that brought a sadness perhaps, an influence of trouble lying in ambush here and there, coming upon one suddenly at some slight point in some way connected with them: all, I say, are seen now through a weird tint of some nameless hue. The bright rose has gone: this belonged to them when untried, when without a history; since that first introduction they have become battle-fields. You can no more recall that new fresh feeling than you can call back the new tints of Spring when Summer has gone by. And yet, something seems to come back, a tenderness, a beauty; just as—after the sweet short Spring

has died, and the long, monotonous, dusty, toilsome Summer has passed,—you shall see, amid the many pensive autumnal hues and flushes, certain pale sober yet unearthly bright gleams of a green which, while it is not that of Spring, nor like it, yet seems to recall it, as though (to speak over-fancifully) it were its ghost. Kindred minds will detect my meaning. So strange and indescribable is the tint through which we look at the old walks to which we came freshly, which we frequented wearily, weighed upon with the burden of the care of souls; but to which we return with a peculiar pleasure, and about which we roam with a fascination for which there is no name.

But one need not be a clergyman to look through coloured glass. You remember that lovers' quarrel in Tennyson's little poem "The Letters,"—the gloom that dwelt on Church and Churchyard when the bitter-hearted man passed moodily through them,

" Still on the tower stood the vane,  
A black yew gloomed the stagnant air,  
I peered athwart the chancel pane  
And saw the Altar cold and bare : "

—how he passed on, muttering to himself :

" Cold Altar, heaven and earth shall meet  
Before you hear my marriage vows ; "

and the changed colour of all when his glad eye looked on the same yew and the same graves, passing now with light, joyous, homeward step :

" The very graves appeared to smile,  
So bright they rose in shadowed swells.  
' Dark porch,' I said, ' and silent aisle,  
There comes a sound of marriage bells.' "

Let this stand as a graceful instance of this theme, and a relief to my strain of graver thought.

Yes, no fear but every one of us will have had his and her experience of the magic effect upon all objects of the coloured glass through which the mind surveys them. When you sat gloomily, with a secret gnawing trouble, looking out from that cheerful bow-window upon the garden, how could you feel otherwise than depressed by the scene: how could you heed that the sky was blue, the smooth lawn vivid, or hoary with daisies: the air soft, warm, inviting; the leaves young, the birds loud? The medium through which you viewed them marred all: you felt the sadder for their non-sympathy, and could turn away half-bitterly at last:

“How can ye sing, ye little birds,  
And I so wae, and full of care?”

But that other time, when you looked out in that hour of your great happiness, and the trees were bare, and the sky dim, and the snow dancing down in dizzy intertwinings of myriad flakes, and all the birds hiding:—how utterly the coloured glass through which you surveyed it, transformed, and warmed, and brightened the scene into more than the cheerfulness of Spring.

These are slighter instances. There is one of more importance, on which I would say a few words before I leave this vein of thought. How differently God's dealings with ourselves, how differently all the changes and chances of this mortal life are regarded by us, how differently coloured, according to the glass through which we are in the habit of viewing them! If we have gained the instinct of referring all to God's infinitely wise and loving ordering, what a quiet tint is thrown

over all the events, the scenery, the ordinary and extraordinary occurrences of life! A quiet, subdued light, I say, blends all its dark shadows and bright gleams: softening the one, and hushing the other. A soberness that is not sadness sanctifies our joys; a tender light that cannot be gladness, but that has much in common with peace, tranquillizes our anguishes. All is ordered, controlled, moderated, guided, by God; this is the medium through which we look forth at sunshine or at storm. Vivid lights are doubtless subdued; but then ebon shades are toned down. Life's extremes subside into a half-tint. It is that safer state, of neither poverty nor riches.

But now how different a complexion do life and its events take with the mere worldling, or the half-earnest. According to the medium through which they are regarded at the time, of sickness or health, of good humour or bad humour, of a hopeful or a sour disposition, so do they take their tone. Ever shifting, ever variable; now brightest sunshine, now night without a star; now unreasonable hope, now unreasonable despondency. The eye is deceived by the uncertain and shifting medium through which they are viewed. There is nothing certain, nothing consistent, nothing reliable. Life thus becomes a thing of moods, of humours. According to the state of the digestion, or other such unreliable and unascertainable conditions, all is clear amber, or dull ink-hue. Every day brings its risk of dismaying such minds, and throwing them off their balance. Now a mere excitement of gratitude, and now hardness and rebellious feeling, these alternate at haphazard with them. In their thoughts, God is all love to-day, and all harshness to-morrow. Now they are the special charge of Providence,—to-morrow they

are corks, playthings for the waves of luck. Unstable as water, how shall they excel? And what needless suffering do such endure and inflict! How far wiser that looking out through the medium which colours all with the sense of God's wisdom and God's love!

“ He shall not be afraid of evil tidings ;  
His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.”

“ It is the Lord : let him do what seemeth him good.”

Again :

“ Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken.”

And these upon tidings of terror, ruin, dismay. So also, when that which he dreaded had come upon him, and troubles innumerable had compassed him about :

“ The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away :  
Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Better, far better, and wiser too, this stedfast trust, than that quickly-changed hue which comes over things, with those whose faith is only a toy-boat, unable to live in a storm. Notice how the brightness easily and rapidly changes into gloom for such : how they say, after perhaps one spasm of effort,

“ It is vain to serve God : and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts ?

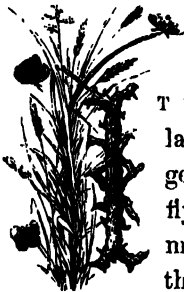
“ And now we call the proud happy ; yea, they that work wickedness are set up ; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.”

Wiser, my friends, to look at all through one glass of implicit trust in God. And yet to which of us shall not the reproof too often have been said, “ Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith ? ”

**UNDER-SIDES.**







T was during the walk which I described in my last paper, that the subject of the present suggested itself to my mind. For it was a Butterfly—or rather many butterflies flitting over the mown meadow—that started the linked train of these musings. But that day, those days, are past; and where are all the gorgeous flashes of jet and scarlet, the resplendent flaunts of brimstone, the rich repose of chocolate and gold dust; where are the butterflies of Summer now? Ay, where are they? “Dust and ashes—” the fairy-land fabric, the tiny plumelets fitted on the gauze wings into such superb effects of pattern and colour; either birds took the choice morsel from between the wide velvet expanses, and let the summer wings flutter away, thenceforth to flap in spiders’ webs; or the gay creatures died a natural death after their few brief hours of life. Anyhow, they are gone, and, with them, the ripe Summer. Still, while the decorations of the year, so cunningly devised, so patiently fashioned, so successful and so admired; while these are being all pulled down and scattered by Messrs. Decay, Storm-Wind, and Co., why may I not, sitting cosily in my chair, turn away from the lashed and vexed

branches, and call up to mind my pleasant summer walk, and the blue days with their butterflies again ?

Before I relate what they taught, I must introduce the reader to one or two of my teachers. Truly, they were not content with a garb of academic black ; nay, these outvied the rich attire of the lady doctors in the " Princess ;" one of whom, by the way, was a lady Psyche. Psyche the Butterfly, and Psyche the Soul : this now commonplace, but never therefore the less beautiful, analogy, one of Nature's most perfect and most exquisite parables is not to be the matter of my musings now. I choose rather to hunt out the quaint, more out-of-the-way suggestions, the more recondite, less obvious teachings, which, for the closer observer of them, lie in the Creator's works. And yet my moral is simple and practical ; one coming home to the experience of common every-day life. I proceed, however, to the introduction to my teachers.

It was the Meadow-brown Butterfly glancing about and beside me, that, upon those days, and in the walk of which I speak, gave this particular bias to my thought. I remember the scene when I left it ; most of the hay cleared, a few grey haycocks, and a strip of uncut grass left : the whole of the rest of the meadow that very vivid pale green which results from the young grass blades coming up above the stubble of the mown growth, and which is intensified to what seems unnatural brightness by the contrast with it of the trees that edge it and stud it, and that are now no longer in young harmonizing tints, but clad in their very darkest summer dress. And these brown butterflies, not single spies, but by twos and threes, kept glancing beside me, settling on the stiff grass stalks, generally with wings closed,

so that I could see only the under-side; I had some difficulty in getting a good view of the upper. The under-side, in this case, was sober enough to the superficial glance; nor was the upper very gorgeous, though of a rich warm brown, streaked with gold.

There was here, however, a hint about which an analogy might be twined; and, as I walked on, many suggestions clung to my



first fancy, as many less bubbles gather like a bead necklace about one larger light bubble that has appeared upon clear still water. Not all butterflies, not the more part, exhibited (I recalled) this correspondence between the sides of the wing. There was, for instance, another little summer visitor, common but lovely, far more showy than my copper-hued friend. By the dusty wayside I have often seen the fairy thing, flitting

about a flowery bank, settling now on the rayed disk of the azure succory; now on the rosed-white of the many-flowered yarrow; resting a moment on the flushed cup of the little wild creeping convolvulus; staying with shut wings (and then not easily first detected), upon the light frail yellow masses of the lady's-bed-straw; hovering, like a pale-blue dancing light, about the orange shoes-and-stockings or the dull pink clover: and glancing away over the tall large white daisies, and the purple knap-weed. Thus have I watched and thus do I remember the little Chalk-blue butterfly; a glad light azure as it flickers about the dry-grassed gay-flowered bank, but quite another insect in appearance when it settles and shows the under-side of the blue—grey now, with silver spots.

Then how well I remember the squadrons of the Atalanta or Admiral butterfly, that in old school-days used to attract the avarice of the boys. On Sunday we were allowed to walk in that long garden, which on ordinary days we could only survey from the playground wall. A straight gravel-walk divided it the whole way up; and old apple-trees with grey gnarled trunks made in the borders a background to the flowers. Upon these trunks, low down, would bask, by fours and fives sometimes, these gorgeous insects:—

“ Showing and shutting splendid wings,”

orange and black, and blue and white. But it was curious to observe the complete transformation which resulted upon the closing of the wings. The velvet black with vivid markings had disappeared, and so, to a casual glance, had the butterfly itself. A closer look revealed the cause of this illusion. The

ash-grounded under-side, variegated and streaked with dim tints of bright colours, seemed as though made on purpose to imitate the hoary lichened trunk on which the insect loved to bask in the hot sun; and thus its hues, when at rest, as its zigzag flight when on the wing, served marvellously to protect it from the foes that were on the watch for its destruction.

I need not spend further pains in describing my preceptors: enough for my purpose has been now said. Time would certainly fail to go through but a very few of the claims for particular notice on the part of these insects of Paradise. I will just put down a little roadside picture from Italy, which has pleased me. So few touches give the sketch:

“ Betwixt the loose walls of great flint-stone,  
 Or in the thick dust  
 On the path, or straight out of the rock-side,  
 Wherever could thrust  
 Some burnt sprig of bold hardy rock-flower  
 Its yellow face up,  
 For the prize were great butterflies fighting,  
 Some five for one cup.”

\* \* \* \*

*The upper and under-side of Character; how often, when admiration had been given to the one, the other disappoints: this was the turn given to my musings as I passed on over the sweet-breathed field. How necessarily uncertain, unprofound, mistaken, are our judgments, whether favourable or unfavourable, of others! How often we have seen only the upper-side; how often only the under—and judge accordingly, but imperfectly, inadequately! How needful was that tender and careful holding back the rash, too-ready hands of the servants, “lest,*

while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them." Not only actual wheat, doubtless, but also possible wheat. How striking the admonition to Samuel, dazzled with the flash of a surface beauty: looking on Eliab, and saying, "Surely the Lord's anointed is here." "But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him; for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

I call the character in society, in public life; the showy qualities, the disposition and the behaviour known to acquaintances merely, as distinguished from that known to intimate friends, to dwellers in the same house—I call this surface-character, as it were, the upper-side. The genius, the public man, the philanthropist, the reputed saint; 'tis comparatively easy to flaunt beautiful wings before an admiring, seldom seeing public, before merely occasional beholders, in whose presence there is as yet little danger of the guard being laid aside. But let the stranger or slight acquaintance become an intimate friend, let him become domesticated with the wearer of those brilliant hues of Paradise; when the wings are closed, and the butterfly has settled upon his homely grass-stalk, let the under-side of those brave colours appear; and often there is a disappointment. The profession of the flight is not borne out by the settled life; the large-mindedness in large things is not matched by large-mindedness in little things: you are surprised and mortified by very dingy hues indeed, when the flashing in the sun is over, and the gay wings are shut. I need not specify these bars and flecks; they are but too commonly to be noted.

Nor am I speaking of mere Brummagem saints, sham philanthropists, hypocrites; *self-deceivers* often, dreaming that they are worshipping God, when indeed it is self that they have placed upon His altar. I am speaking of men who are sincere, but who, being careful when there is least credit due for care, *i.e.* when conscious of human observation, are careless when carefulness is more difficult and worthy of praise, *i.e.* when watched only by invisible eyes, or by eyes which are accustomed to see them in undress. There is a sentinel set over the demeanour, over the words, in public; but this is unconsciously removed when the private life is entered upon. So the under-side often disappoints, where the upper had attracted. With delighted eyes we watch the splendid wings home, and then marvel to lose sight of them at once or soon, and to meet with only dingy brown, or common hues quite merged in, and undistinguishable from the earth-colours which surround us. Often, indeed, the extinguished object of our hero-worship is sadly conscious of the harmful inconsistency, and strives, if with poor success, against it. You shall see him, not settling down with untroubled heart into contented unloveliness; it is a miserable struggle, an unequal and unsustained effort, an ever-collapsing strain; tenderly then you watch that piteous

“Showing and shutting splendid wings:”

and you are glad to augur a time when abortive intention and spasmodic endeavour will give place to even perfection and uniform success. Ay, there are many things that wear and sadden us here and now, many perturbations, much disquiet; and our fiercest cannonades seem hardly to disturb the mighty



earthworks of evil with which we are hemmed in. But no doubt, to the learner of wisdom there is nothing so sad as his own ever-apparent want of proficiency : theories he has mastered, but, when the time comes, they are not put into practice : he stammers and breaks down, when, after careful study, he had fondly looked to speak the tongue with fluency. Fervently, ceaselessly, vainly, he aims at consistency ; he dips and falls and wavers and sinks, when he endeavours at an even flight ; the wings close and the earth-tints come, when he would fain exhibit the glorious hues of Heaven : he shrinks from the thought of people knowing him, of their watching him settled on his branch ; he mourns to think what consistency might have done in such a world, perceiving how even broken and spasmodic endeavours do somewhat affect it. At last, he quiets his heart, that was fluttering impatiently against the wires of his fallen nature, by contemplation of the one Example of human in Divine perfection ; and clings earnestly to the promise held out for His weak followers, "*when He shall appear.*"

But now, on the other hand, some characters are only known to us here, or at present, by the homely under-side. Some quiet, unpretending, home lives, passed in nothing but commonplace service and every-day duties, veil from our eyes noble qualities, heroic virtues ; superb colours at which we had never even a guess. Settled butterflies : you would never have dreamed, what you discover when some occasion has opened them, how splendid the wings beneath that homely garb with which you were familiar. Have we not read and heard of such

cases? A wife, looked upon by the lofty statesman, or the shrewd merchant, or the great genius, unconsciously almost, as in a lower order of being; useful for love and for household service; an element of comfort, doubtless, in the dwelling—of course much more so in degree than the other elements of comfort there; but not different in kind; classed in unconscious thought with the cheerful fire, the pleasant garden, the cosy dinner; the choice book in the easy chair;—a wife hitherto only thus regarded: has not some sudden occasion revealed in her till then unsuspected glories? In her quiet way she went about the valuable unpretending household duties, little noticed, little prized; watchful, thoughtful, forgetting no one, neglecting nothing; but the sober hues of the folded wings were easily overlooked. Then came some overwhelming shock, some crushing dismay, some prostrating calamity;—prostrating, at least, to the stronger mind, which not unfrequently succumbs at once, as huge bodies will to a fever:—and lo, the quiet wings open; and what an unsuspected glory of comfort, of support, of healing, of endurance and strength, of hope, faith, and love; of patience, sweetness; even of thoughtful grasp of the important matter in its every part;—what wonders, I say, do the suddenly expanding wings reveal! A common instance of this, again, is that of an elder son or daughter, when the Father or Mother is called away; how sometimes then the quiet hues of boyhood or girlhood are exchanged for the rich colours that had, until then, lain latent and were never perceived. But this is generally truest of woman; and I recall the old story of how, when the gorgeous wings of promises and professions so boldly flaunted by the strong men that followed Christ had closed, and all the

glow and glory had disappeared, then it was that the quiet wings opened and displayed the bright hues of faithfulness, of strength, of love unwavering; and the daughters of Jerusalem seem to arrest and amaze the eye, when her sons have for a while become dim and obscure.

Yes, I repeat, many times you would not guess, until some extraordinary cause opened them, how splendid the wings, how superb the colours, on the concealed side to you of a homely familiar garb. Ay, and sometimes this remained undiscovered even until the wings were spread for flight! Almost always that last opening of them reveals some radiance, some enhanced beauty, some all-too-late fully perceived dearness, some glory to be remembered now but by that last gleam, something that we never enough realized and valued until it flashed upon us with that departing grace. But sometimes we had never at all suspected the sweetness, the support, the service of a creature that, by its ever-ready ministry to the need of our heart, had become so familiar as to be little thought of; that, by its assiduous, ever-attentive care and observance, had even prevented our perception of little wants and little cravings for sympathies, and our notice of the watchful foresight by which they were supplied; until all that sweetness and support and service open their sudden beauty to our eyes, even as we perceive that the spot in which we had been so accustomed to see it, that we had hardly regarded it much, is desolate, and the highly prized treasure passing away. The life, I say, was so fitted to, assimilated with, and, as it were, lost in, the branch on which it had lit; the homely duties, the unobtrusive usefulness—you passed and repassed it a thousand times without noticing it,

till once it spread its wings, and just revealed its glories as it soared beyond your ken. But this is no new idea ; you will recall Hood's exquisite lines :

“ Farewell ; we did not know thy worth,  
But thou art gone, and now 'tis prized :  
Thus angels walked unknown on earth,  
But when they flew were recognized.”

And Young, in his “Night Thoughts,” has a parallel passage, which the reader may search out and compare at his will.

Some possessors, then, of splendid wings are known to us only by the under-side, as it were, until the wings are opened for flight. But further than this, we may conclude that some have remained undiscovered even altogether by human eye. Adorned with tints of Heaven itself, they lived and died unknown to man. No occasion called for the opening of the modest wings, and there was none to mark a loss when at last, unmissed and unregarded, they left their humble nest. But the rare beauties, and heavenly radiance, and divine lustre that man knew not of, of whose possession their possessor was not conscious—these were noticed all the while by God, these were very precious in His sight, and each tiny glorious scale was even one of His jewels. We passed them by again and again, nor saw, at least heeded not, their presence in the world. We marked not their flight : we passed, and they were gone, and we never knew, nor do we know, how bright a glory earth had lost, and Paradise had gained. Indeed, how many such, all unknown to us, are we meeting and little regarding, as we walk along the highways and byways of life. Some whom we patronize graciously, and who look up and smile, pleased at our

condescension—how, I sometimes think, positions will be reversed in that world in which accidents are stripped off, and only the essence remains. Methinks some quiet sitters on low grass-stalks here, will amaze us, and themselves too, when at last they open their wings in Heaven.

“ Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee ; or thirsty, and gave Thee drink ?  
 When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in ? or naked, and clothed Thee ?  
 Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee ? ”

Then the enrapturing answer :—and then the shining forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

But now I must justify myself in the eyes of entomologists by confessing that, only for my own purposes, and at the guiding of that wayward mind which detects analogies where many would but perceive insects, have I spoken with such laudation of the bright-hued upper-side, and with apparent depreciation of the less vivid, but equally perfect and finished under-side. In the man or woman, the upper-side may dazzle, and the under disappoint ; the under, again, may seem to promise but little, and startle with unlooked-for beauty. But really, *both* sides are perfect in the butterfly. That under-side of the *Atalanta*, how exquisite it is, on a close examination ! What subdued, yet rich tints ; clear ash ground, cloudy bars, toned white, hushed scarlet, dusky blue ! You detect the presence, in the private life (so to speak), of the colours that shone so superbly in the public, only now suitably shaded down ; there they are, the same nobilities, but, from the

nature of the case, not with the same prominence. The qualities that flash forth in the public, enrich the private life. But I have gone back, I find, to my human specimens And, in truth, to be like butterflies, both sides of the character should be perfect in their way. There is a peculiar loveliness in the side which shines before the eyes of men, and which calls forth what is called hero-worship. There is a grandeur, of course, in the heroic virtues. But homely, less showy beauties are not less beautiful. They differ indeed, in degree, rather than in kind. To be a hero at home and in private—a hero to one's valet, as it is said,—this is to be heroic indeed; and, as I have said, home failings and shortcomings mar the value of many a life which is famed as eminently saintly abroad. Yes, there is great beauty, perhaps the greatest, in the under-side, the close observer finds;—in unobtrusive, yet carefully finished excellencies. These, when they are found, the eyes of men may more easily pass over; and yet, when they are missed, the flaunting glories charm no more, nay, even are repelling to some minds. And at any rate, God notices what we overlook, and discovers what we never find out.

It is very noticeable how nothing in God's works is slovenly or slurred over. That which attracts at first sight is no whit more perfectly finished than that which would be overpassed as insignificant or of secondary importance. Whatever is done is done, not well, but perfectly. The old Greeks had found out the lesson from this, when they bestowed upon the back of a statue, which, being set in a frieze, would

never, so far as they knew, be seen of mortal eye, equal labour and care with that devoted to the front; because, however human eyes could see but part, "the gods are everywhere." And in our sacred architecture we should, I think, not show less devotion and reverence than that of those wise and refined heathen worshippers. At any rate, in the fabric of our lives the lesson should be laid to heart. Let that side on which men gaze be indeed carefully finished, but let not that on which, perhaps, God alone looks, be a shapeless block. Let not the upper-side show colours that compel applause, while the under, unlike that of God's works, is slovenly, mean, and disappointing.

And, indeed, some under-sides in the Creator's works surprise with new loveliness. I have digressed from butterflies to statues: let me take another bridle-path from the beaten track, still keeping parallel with it. There are the gold and silver Ferns; the pleasant green of the upper-side quite eclipsed in glory by the tracery of frosted gold, or frosted silver, which a light air easily tosses up. How lovely are these, and the unexhibited side the more exquisite! Again, take the White Poplar, or the Service Tree, studding the foliage in a copse or on a wooded hill. The concealed side is almost the lovelier. Watch a strong breeze gathering and passing across the trees, and see those suddenly apparent among the dark foliage, blown in an instant into a silver-white. Until the storm sped over the hills, you might not have noticed the tree specially, and above the others. But now, in one moment, you might almost fancy that it had burst into pure starry blossoms. Thus (to strengthen with another instance that

which I before said)—thus, not seldom with unobtrusive, overlooked beauties and values: some rough gust comes, and lo, a surprise! The homely green is transfigured into an effulgence of silver.



To recur to my beaten track. Neither way judge, till you have seen both sides of the wings. The under-side may disappoint high ideas: the open wings astonish low estimates. We do not really know each other here. We judge too hurriedly and too roughly. Why, even to our own actions or abstainings, it is very difficult to affix the right label; how then can we so glibly judge others?

“ But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.”



Thus an Apostle, and not the least of the apostles : and yet now consider our own rash and ready judgment. How, looking at the sober under-side, with a superficial glance, we despise ; and how, looking at the showy upper-side, equally unthoroughly, we admire : yet we may be wrong. We judge often by the half ; but God contemplates the whole. And as to ourselves, we arrive, I think, at the climax of folly when we indulge in self-complacence ; when we are (however disguisedly, and perhaps under the veil of self-depreciation,—for the heart is above all things deceitful)—when we are aught but inclined sincerely to smite upon our breasts, with “God be merciful to me, a sinner !” Oh the sarcasm, we must almost feel it to be, the sarcasm—kindly, yet the sarcasm—of that advice :

“ When ye shall have done all things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants ; we have done that which was our duty to do.”

But the chief upshot of these meditations is this lesson, for me and for my readers : Aim at Perfection on both sides of the wing ; in public and in private life ; in things large and in things little. And lest I should appear utopian in giving such advice, let me end with a precept, never here to be fulfilled, but ever here to be the rule of our endeavours :

“ Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.”

For those who, most feeling their faintness, are yet most unflagging in the pursuit of this flying goal, that absolute Perfection, in the participation as well as in the merit of which they shall at last share, shall surely be most welcome and most prized.

**MUSINGS IN THE STREET.**





TO-DAY, I leave my solitary mountain and sea-shore and woodland wanderings, and go out into the city, among the men. I believe that my thoughts of sea, and copse, and garden, have but used these as a background after all, and have dwelt indeed upon human hopes and disappointments, human yearnings and shortcomings, human tears and laughter, askings and answerings, dreams and awakings. But now my very background shall be human, the moving masses of my kind.

An early breakfast, for the Station is some little way off, and I want to have a long day in London; and there are over eighty miles to traverse ere I land upon the platform of London Bridge Station. To us country Parsons, an expedition to London is always something of an event; and a journey of eighty or a hundred miles a thing not to be lightly undertaken. So behold my anxious Wife cramming a square white parcel of carefully-cut sandwiches into my pocket, also a small flask of sherry;

answering my remonstrances by the plea, "You have eaten no breakfast,"—in truth, a not uncommon failing of mine. Next, see her urging me to take an umbrella, a thing I never do. I have acceded to the over-coat, almost reluctantly, this fine October day. The servant waits behind, with an air of deep



interest, and with my small black bag in her hand; at my feet a minute black-and-tan terrier dog wags his tail, with a suspicion of something going on a little out of the common. And they all stand at the porch, as I march off, and watch me out of sight. I am to be away for three whole days.

I walk over the fields towards the Station, in the crisp October air: not without a feeling of exhilaration and enjoyment. There is something in the run to town, in the mere taking a journey, that stirs me up, and pleasantly breaks the monotony of the quiet every-day life. It is good for us all, I think, to have an occasional complete change and contrast; this the Londoner finds in the country, and the denizen of the country in the town. Not only is the ordinary routine of life broken through, but the whole scenery is changed. Here I am now, wending my way along this quiet, narrow, October-coloured lane. My eye is the more pleased to take in its pale-yellow elm-bushes, its burnt bracken, its tall dried grass, linked by long webs, all a-glitter with diamonds; its twisted wreaths of briony coral beads; its few lingering harebells; its gleam of orange or scarlet fungus on an old stump; its sparrows that flit before me, or robin that waits for me and says good-bye with that bright tender song; its startled rabbit that scuds along the path for some little way with bobbing white tail, and then darts into a hole in the bank: all these my eye takes in with the more relish now that I am going to exchange them for a scene so different. I might not note them so enjoyingly were I on my ordinary parish round, wending my way with bent head and anxious, perhaps weary heart, intent on Solomon's problem of making that which is crooked straight, and numbering that which is wanting. But now I am leaving all these puzzles and toils behind me for a time, and in a few hours I expect to have exchanged my quiet lane for the roar of vehicles, and the glitter of shops, and the streams of people; and to be shut in with long rows of buildings, instead of by the autumn-smitten hedge.

I whirl by the low copses, and under the tall pinewoods ; now I dive deep into a cutting, and anon am buried in a tunnel ; again we have reached the upper air, and glide above the bare corn-fields, and past the churches, and through the villages, and over the streams. I have a book beside me ; I have bought a morning paper at one of the larger stations ; but I study neither much ; it is more pleasant to me to look out of my window, and to notice the little points of interest, remembered or new ; and to muse upon the dear old familiar faces that will greet me this evening, after my busy London day is over. I am generally pretty good company to myself, and enjoy greatly the leisure hours of unguilty inaction compelled by a journey. Indeed, I find on this occasion that I have not half gone through the bill of fare with which I set out ; that I am still enjoying the substantial and side-dish musings, enlivened with the occasional champagne sparkle of cheerful anticipations. (Do not fancy me an alderman, from the use of such a dinner-simile ; it came to me at the moment.) I have not, I say, so much as come to the dessert of my thoughts, before we are whirling through Forest Hill and New Cross ; and now the shrieking ponderous train slackens, and so glides, like a child's toy, into the box, within the low dark sheds of the Station at London Bridge.

We stop. Instantly the stream of men begins to flow. In a long line from our own train, pouring out to meet a still longer, denser line from the Croydon and Epsom Station. Each man's brow set, faces that are furrowed, faces that are fresh, alike absorbed, the press of London business-men looking neither on this side nor on that, nor taking notice of scene or actors. So too have I, in my time, pressed on through the city streets ; so

often, in my own domain of hedges and field-paths, may I mechanically push forward careless of the bees in the clover or the larks in the air. But I, to whom now my very business has the pleasure of variety, may saunter on, grasping my small bag, and, with pleased interest, watch the familiar, novel scene.

“ But he looked upon the city, every side,  
Far and wide,  
All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades,  
Colonnades,  
All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts,—and then,  
*All the men!* ”

Not the whole of this description tallies with the scene before me. Ludgate, Holborn, Tower Hill; these will hardly come up to our idea of mountains, nor shall we find them crested with stately temples. But as I stand upon London Bridge, and give way a little to the continuous, close, black stream, I find the latter part of Browning's stanza evidently brought before me, “*All the men!*” Ay, there is something stirring as martial music, to me fresh from the country, in the contemplation of this living tide, this incessant stream, this unflagging succession of toiling units:

“ Men my brothers, men the workers, ever shaping something new,  
That which they have done but earnest of the things that they will do.”

Well can I fancy the feelings of the peasant girl, for the first time brought into London, standing upon London Bridge; and natural seems to me her shrinking back, saying, “*Father, let us wait a little, until they have all passed.*” An incident this within my own experience; very possibly also within the experience of others; for the feeling and the remark seem to

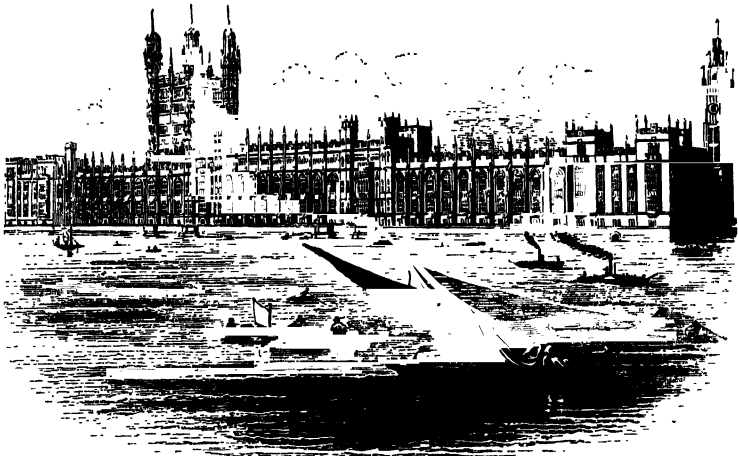


me not unlikely to occur more than once. And, by the way, we are apt to forget, in our sapient and instant setting down of every coincidence as a plagiarism, that human thought is a well-used thoroughfare; and so also is human experience; and that in a street seamed with traffic it would be stranger if our wheels could strike out a perfectly new and particular track than if they sometimes crossed the lines left by other vehicles. There was not necessarily any absurdity in the ridiculed saying, "*Shakespeare and I thought of the same thing, only Shakespeare thought of it first.*" And thus sometimes when we tell an incident that had fallen within our own experience, we need not be surprised to find it already a familiar story to the world.

But I am pausing somewhat tediously on London Bridge. Let me, however, indulge in one contrast before I leave it. Let me compare the quiet Hive with the busy swarms. Let me look over the bridge, in this still early morning, and beholding the tranquil, air-impearled city, call to memory Wordsworth's lines on Westminster Bridge:—

“ Earth has not anything to show more fair :  
 Dull would he be of soul who could pass by  
 A sight so touching in its majesty :  
 This city now doth, like a garment, wear  
 The beauty of the morning : silent, bare,  
 Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie  
 Open unto the fields, and to the sky,  
 All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.  
 Never did sun more beautifully steep  
 In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill ;  
 Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep !  
 The river glideth at his own sweet will,  
     The very houses seem asleep ;  
 And all that mighty heart is lying still ! ”

And from this illusion I turn to my right hand, and lo, the close, bewildering, unstaying press of business-goaded, money-seeking men! On, without pause or stay; on, past me standing here, as rushing waters pass by an idle stranded bubble; on, while I watch the panorama, the kaleidoscope, of faces; watch them lightly, interestedly, earnestly, wistfully, almost tearfully at last. Haggard faces, idle faces; set faces; vacant faces;



anxious faces, very many; merry faces, a few; faces stamped with an anguish; faces shaded by a sadness; faces lit by a smile; holiday faces here and there; faces, as the rule, expressionless—that is, without the constant variety of expression natural to the intelligent face—fixed with the dull mechanical stamp of business. The fresh face of a child comes in now and then, with the laugh of a flower amid the faded, monotonous useful corn; but upon the whole, the heart is saddened, is

oppressed, is crushed, by the contemplation of the tired, anxious, eager, unlit, mechanical faces in the London streets.

*"I do not write as a hermit or a clergyman, but as a man who thinks he knows something of the world."*

Thus, I am here somehow reminded, declares a wise, and kindly-hearted, and thinking man. And, since I am sufficiently distrustful of myself to heed reverently the opinion of competent depreciators, this speech from such a source has that in it which saddens me. I do own, frankly and sadly, that we clergy are inclined to look at the matters of daily life and at its problems from one point of view only; and, because we will not be at the pains to master and to enter into the layman's manner of understanding and considering things, clever laymen are apt to wax impatient with us. And serve us right then, I say; we ought to watch most carefully against this our temptation to become one-sided, one idea'd. We cannot grapple with the world's questions unless we have studied the pros and cons; we cannot prescribe for lay wants, and answer lay difficulties, and quiet lay doubts, if we have never taken the trouble to look at things familiar to ourselves from long custom,—to look at things, I say, from the new and lay point of view. Let us descend from the abstract to the concrete—that is, let us not vent high-sounding platitudes,—

*"Like a tale of little meaning, though the words are strong,"*

that shoot above the head of *practical*, commonplace wants, difficulties, temptations. Let us descend from our platform, and be men among men; find out, by familiar intercourse, the want; and not recoil from it with horror when we have found

it, into our impracticable sky-realms again, but condescend to the domain of common-sense, and deal with things as they are, and not only with things as they should be. Business men will not be caught by mere vapour; if they see you talking high and acting low, they will turn from your words to a good which, however merely temporal, had yet a substantiality, a *reality*, something beyond the mere *ideal*, to recommend it. But show that you have found something *real*; something more real, more enduring, more substantial, than any of the objects of their pursuit can boast to be—show this not by your lips only, but in your life—and your spell is irresistible. I contend therefore that there is a place for clergymen, among the most practical, the least merely theoretical, of busy men, and I protest that it is but the weakness and inadequacy of the messenger that makes keensighted men undervalue and make light of the message of the Ambassadors of Christ. Rightly delivered, *i. e.* practically shown as well as preached, and adapted, with careful, subtle insight, to the particular wants of the hearers, no fear but we—weak and inadequate though we be—should be received in this busy, weary, ever-striving, never attaining world, “as an angel of God, even as Jesus Christ,”—words that I should not have dared to have written, had I not found them in the Bible.

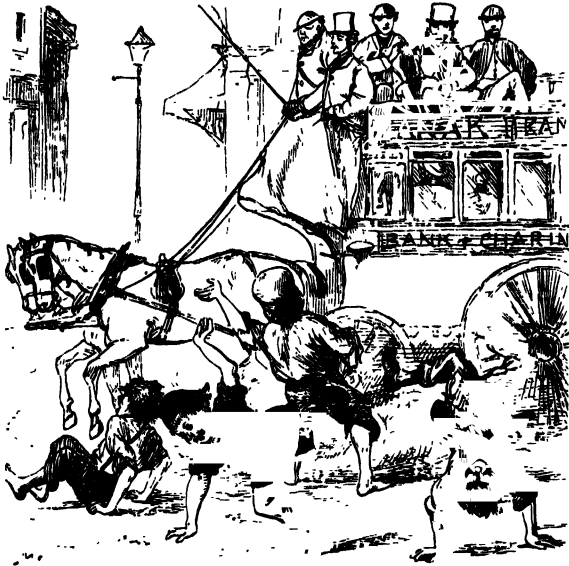
But I go on. The roar of vehicles, the press of men, fills ever the space between the houses; no stay, no pause, backward and forward in a never-ending, never even lulling flow, until the too absorbed and contemplative mind becomes dizzy, tired, with the scene. On into Cheapside, watching from the top of my

omnibus (I mounted one by the Mansion House) the traffic-choked, man-crammed street and pavement. What a contrast, let me here again remark, to the quiet October lane, with its philosophic robin, and flustered rabbit!

And, as I look at the whole scene, I begin to consider it from, I fear, the clergyman's or the hermit's point of view; but, methinks, surely also from a passing angel's point of view; and to wonder at the one intense unswerving purpose amid the continuous masses of this mighty city. I look from the shops of Cheapside, glittering with gold and jewels, to the itinerant board of well-ranged sugar-sticks, and that long-established corner-stand for the vending of copper kettles, coal scuttles, etc., of doll-house proportion; I look from the set faces of business men plodding one after the other upon the pavement, to the eager looks of the cabmen, and of the street Arabs, and in each and all I read one aim, one pursuit, one all-absorbing thought—that of getting money. As a hermit, as a clergyman, as an angel, I confess that this intensity and oneness of purpose cannot but seem surprising. A hundred years hence, and what will their gettings matter? Yet only watch their wrapt eagerness now.

But you answer, This is their time for business; of course they are now absorbed, now intent, now as though possessed by but one idea. They will throw aside this merely conventional, merely accidental, merely temporal garment, when business hours are over. The seamed, dry, hard look will smooth out, and un wrinkle; the absorbed, money-seeking thought will pass away; and these men, created in the image of God, and redeemed from that old Fall—not with corruptible things, as

silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ—these men, I say, that are but pilgrims for a short time in the desert, shall look up, with the light of God's love and of their immortal hope bright upon their faces; shall look beyond these sands of the wilderness, to the blessed distant mountains of the promised Land. It is right, it is intended, that much of their labour should



be, or seem to be, for Time. But is it likely, is it possible, that they should so work for Time, as to neglect Eternity?

Ah, well, all this may be so. Only—though I am only a clergyman contemplating life from the top of an omnibus—I yet have business to do, investments to offer. I press upon

man's attention investments not for Time, but for Eternity. And truly I find that those who will put thousands in the one, will grudge a paltry five-pound note for the other. I offer, as merchandise, the Pearl of great price. But those who have just been giving untold sums for tinsel and gewgaws, button up their pockets, and turn away from my representations.

I pass on, thus musing, into St. Paul's Churchyard, into Ludgate Hill, into Fleet Street, into the Strand. Still the roar, still the bustle, still the dense dark lines of money-seeking men. Busy, busy, wrapt, absorbed, pouring by in a never-staying stream, working for Time, at least, for the things that are temporal. And right too. Right, if while they set foot after foot manfully, persistently, in good earnest, upon the wilderness, gathering the day's manna, pressing on in the day's march, their eyes, their souls' longings, seek, beyond the desert sands or the desert palm-trees, a Land which alone possesses the secret of rest and of satisfaction. Right, if they regard all earth's gettings or losings rather as a means than as an end; and, whether they be rich or poor, keep in mind that riches or poverty are but as it were the accident of the hour, and as the pageantry or the squalor of a dream; and that not what we *have*, but what we *are*, is that which lasts, is that which is of eternal moment. Religion exhibited in common life is above all exhortations persuasive, powerful, attractive, convincing. To do well our duty in that state of life in which it has pleased God to call us, is indeed to turn life's commonplaces into religion.

*"Where a man's business is, there is the ground for his religion to manifest itself."*

Thus writes the author whom I quoted above, and his words should be written in gold, and hung up in our offices, in our shops, in our kitchens, in our nurseries, about our estates. And we all remember how George Herbert, I think, quaintly says that a servant may sweep out a room to the glory of God. There is, in truth, a very world of wisdom in the well-worn rule, so often repeated, so little thought of in our childhood; the words that sum up the list of our duty towards God, and to our neighbour:

“Not to covet nor desire other men’s goods, but to learn and labour truly to get mine own living, and to do my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me.”

So St. Paul: “Art thou called being a servant? care not for it.” No, wish not for any other position: God was the chooser of that you have: be your only care to do your duty in it. Do well whatsoever He has appointed, *because* He has appointed it. This high motive ennoble the meanest sphere of service. And if a man’s days of work are strung on this gold thread, if his very ardour and eagerness in his business is but a steadfast and manful stepping forward in Christ’s service, and towards the bright hills of heaven, then I, for one, will not quarrel with, but applaud this fixed unanimity of busyness, which is the motive power of the endless marching column that I survey from my omnibus.

Let me dwell on this thought a little longer. It is quite possible, I reiterate, for these busy men to be serving God in and through their business. Whether this be so, depends upon their aim, the chief end kept in view. You set step by step somewhat wearily and monotonously upon a bare dull road,



not for the sake of those mechanical movements, but with the idea of arriving at some end of the journey that will repay all the pains you spend in getting there. And the pains are well, and worthy of you, taking in view the high aim. But who would think it worth while to trudge wearily on, setting left foot before right, and right foot before left, merely for the sake of that mechanical motion? Thus the common every-day routine of this busy life's work would be wearisome, unworthy, intolerable, if followed for its own sake. With a noble end in view, however, there is a dignity, a satisfaction, in even the toiling, monotonous, tiresome steps. Each one, you know, brings you nearer to, and in itself helps on towards, the Rest, the success, the attainment that was set before you. Or it was worth while to run the race, not for the sake of the running, but to grasp the crown, and for the plaudits, and then the quiet at the end.

Thus I cannot deny that this incessant toil, this crush and hurry and bustle, this unpausing onset of work, may be yet not ignoble, not unworthy of King's sons. To do well and heartily the work which God hath given us to do will be, if done with the intention of serving Him, a most acceptable part of our service to God; and such a purpose, such a motive, like the glorious sun,

"Doth play the alchemist,  
And turn the dull and meagre clodded earth  
To glittering gold."

Were this not so, monks and recluses would have an immense advantage over busy men—if, that is, religion consisted *only* in acts of worship and pure devotion. Times of retire-

ment for these should indeed be carefully, scrupulously, religiously secured; but from their times of retirement and of secret or public communion with God, men should come forth into the world, and mix with it, the light of God shining clearly from their faces, and the very manner of their acts showing to all men that they have been with Christ. Having braced on our armour, it follows to go out into the battle. Having carefully trained, there is then the race to be run. It would be purposeless enough to be always arming and never fighting, always training and still declining the race. Training is good, is indispensable; retirement, prayer, fasting, may not be dispensed with; but as a means, not as an end. To shut ourselves out from the warfare of life may seem the more safe way. To go out, having first sought and obtained God's help,—to march on through this dangerous country, conquering and to conquer,—this is the more noble and brave,—this is to fulfil the end for which Christ placed His soldiers here.

I wonder if my imperturbable companion on the box-seat of the omnibus has any idea of the course of my meditations. I painfully feel that the stolid driver must think me a heavy and dull companion. I have half an idea that I ought to apologize to him; indeed, I am one of those over-sensitive men who are always troubled with the uneasy feeling that I ought to talk to strangers, a feeling which interferes with the enjoyment of my much-preferred quiet in travelling. There, my fellow-traveller has safely accomplished the intricate descent into the road; the conductor has given his reassuring bang to the hollow ribs of the vehicle; I can retreat to the

end of the seat which overhangs the pavement; and, somewhat relieved from consciousness of my social shortcomings, take up the dropped thread of my thoughts.

A little quiet and unheated meditation will show us how natural was the mistake of the old hermits and solitaries. A life of absolute religion, pure, unmixed; a life of mere unbroken contemplation and worship,—how much, we can see, would such an idea, at first sight, have to recommend it! But this, we may have seen, would be really to miss the purpose for which Christ's soldiers were equipped and sent into the world. Surely they were sent to fight, and not to stand apart merely, and watch the dense battle. And well and needful as it was to retire and to seek strength by acts of worship, by times of contemplation, and seasons of pure devotion, it was manifestly intended that the strength thus obtained should be used. The sword was to be sharpened, and the armour braced on; but to the very end that both should be tried in the rough battle-field of the world.

— There is little fear of our falling into the old error now-a-days. There is scant sign of contemplative inaction in the scene which lies about and beneath me. There is plenty of hard work, plenty of earnest, hearty toil, in this century. Only I ask,—elevated in seat and in thought a little above the hurrying, surging throng,—where is the grand motive that should sanctify and ennoble all this mechanical, dull, incessant monotony of transient toil? Money is good as a means, and we are advised to make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; but do I err in concluding that to get money is the end, the final goal, in the jostling, eager,

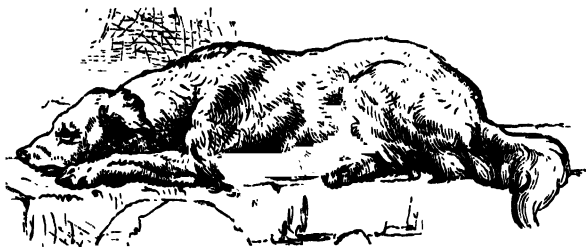
unpausing toil that surrounds me? Is it CHRIST or is it Mammon that is the master in this hearty, untiring, thorough service? Who is the God that rules in this city; and what is the master-motive in the hearts of these busy business men? I speak not of their mere business hours: I would sound the depths of *the purpose of their life*.

— I fear that I am rather lapsing into the angel's, the hermit's, the clergyman's point of view. I fear that the test which I would now bring forward will not give me a reputation, for business capacity with hard business men. But let me yet ask, —from my perch, a little above the sea of hats,—Which is the more important, the loss of one immortal being, or the failure of some great City house? Yet look at the panic in the one case; while every night, in shrewd, money-glutted London, there are haggard girls bidden to let go the last hope at which their sinking hands clutched, to return to infamy, ruin, despair, perdition—for want of TEN POUNDS apiece, to give them a chance of salvation! I feel that my point of view is extremely un-business-like. I feel that I, fresh from my rabbits and my robins, cannot be expected to know much of the world. But—*I wish that there might be a panic about such failures as these.*

When I get down at Charing Cross, the sum of my musings appears to me to be as follows:—Hearty, earnest work in our calling is a thing not to be deprecated, but to be admired, if there be a noble motive pervading it,—a purpose worthy of immortal beings underlying it. Work *in* Time, I say, and that thoroughly,—man doth live by bread. Work *in* time, I say, but not *for* Time; and let this voice come to you amid the noise of the wheels and the hammers, this voice from that Eternity to

which you are drawing nearer every hour.—“Man doth not live by bread alone.” You are to work a while in this dim mine. Work in it, then, thoroughly and well; but, lest that mere candle-light become all that your eyes can endure, lest they become blind to that sunlight for which they were created, come up at intervals from the work below, and contemplate the purer light, and revel in the divine blue of heaven.

My elevated perch was left at this point, and I plunged into the swaying, surging throng of men. I had much to do, and the day has now waned into afternoon. Somewhat tired, but pleased, and with my day's business done, I am wending my way back to Cheapside and Gracechurch Street, and on to the Fenchurch Street Station. All the various phases of the London Streets have their interest to me; and Shoreditch is as suggestive to thought as Pall Mall. But I arrive, with a growing laziness of mind and body, at the most uncomfortable Station in London. I take my ticket, and seat myself, and lean back in the carriage, picturing, with childish pleasure, the home surprise at seeing me, and the cheery bright glow of my Father's drawing-room, and the look, cheeriest and brightest of all, that comes upon his dear familiar face as I step into the room.



MUSINGS IN A CHURCHYARD.





**B**UT a month ago I was in London, musing in the thronged streets, and among the ever-moving lines of anxious busy men—so many, and so busy, I seemed at last almost bewildered and tired with watching the endless and ceaseless progression of the caravan of life.

On, on, ever winding on—no stay, no pause. On, in one long never exhausted march, in one uninterrupted procession ; and whither ? Well, the title of this paper may give us an answer ; and, indeed, we have now left watching the long windings of this unflinching pilgrimage, and have turned aside to look upon and to consider what seems its end.

“ All go unto one place : all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.”

Yes, they toil on, or play on : they advance, each in his partly allotted, partly chosen place in the great procession : the beggar, the benefactor ; the subject, the monarch ; the lover, the hater ; the wise, the fool ; the sorrowful and the happy ; the successful

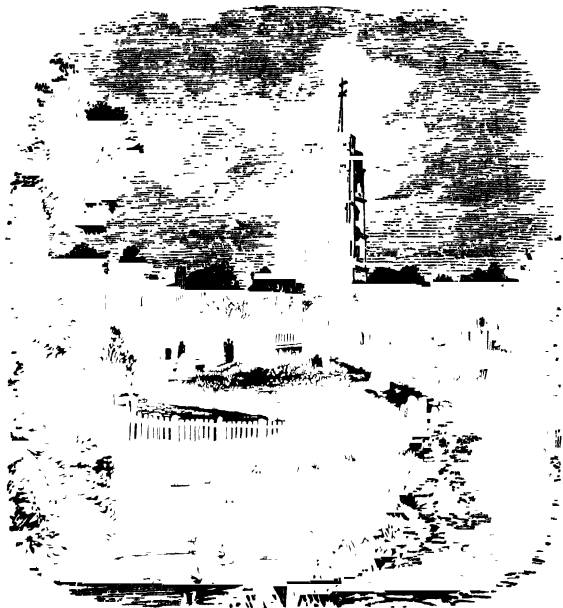


and the disappointed; the generous and the selfish; the sensual and the pure; the striver after holiness and the hardened in sin. They go on, on, in steady, unflagging succession; on, in a long-winding, far-stretching march. But if we take our place just quietly, waitingly, here, they will come to us by and by. This is the end of that long pilgrimage; and however they may wander, and however the path may wind about, they are due here at last. "*Father, let us wait a little, until they have all passed.*" Ah, this is a simple saying, beneath which a deeper thought might lie;—and the peasant girl might have been a philosopher. A little while indeed,—and the place that so long knew them will know them no more. Alike to all, the noble and the base, the toiling and the idle, the bitter in soul and the light-hearted—alike to all; thus the wise man moans:—

"This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all; yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live; and after that they go to the dead."

Yes, those long-winding, dense, incessant, busy crowds,—busy, so busy, so absorbed, so wrapt in the little incidents of the journey:—one event unto all; one event unto all! The eagerness, the jostling, the strife, the emulation, the grasping, the letting go, the love and the hatred and the envy—how it goes on, still on, and new comers continually fill up the gaps in the unbroken line. But I, sitting in this quiet spot, the representative of many more such spots,—I, sitting here, am pensively, with a tranquil meditative heart, waiting for you at the end of that perturbed, eventful journey.—What, is it disappointed love that makes the brow throb so, and beat with such fever pulses,

and that makes you toss sleepless through the weary night? Ah, well,—the brow shall be cool, and the perturbed heart quiet, and the Rest absolute, when you have come to where I sit. Or is it Shares and Stocks, and guilty or hardly innocent speculation, and the all of not only self, but of wife and children



trembling in the balance? Is the hair growing grey, and the back bent, and is the journey exceedingly tiring? But many such a weary pilgrimage has found here its term; and many a troubled doubtful mind has slipped off here its coil of care; and here they lie, with a solemn and awful peace upon them,

and with the seams of care quieted, if not smoothed out, by the sleep into which they fell. The incidents of travel, which still harass and perplex and torture those yet on the march, have ceased to interest them, "neither have they any more a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun."—Or did a sadness slowly darken upon the life of some traveller, and love, that he had believed in, prove a vain dream; and lights that seemed to shine about him, die out from the objects that had caught them, and prove to have been only emanations from his own heart; and hopes that he had cherished, hopes of great deeds to be done, and grand purposes realized;—did these, after a seemingly useless fluttering, come back to the ark, having found no perch amid the blank insincere waters? Probably he was wrong in his morbid view; probably his despair was mistaken; but here he ceased his weak or earnest striving, and fell asleep "like a tired child." And so, removed from that throng of the living, I sit here, where the quick step and the slow must pause, and the laugh and the sob are hushed, and the shout or the whisper die away; where there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom,—only many graves; some very old, and some very new; some cared for, and some neglected; some remembered night and day; and some never called to mind at all, for their inmates long ago dropped out of the march, and the memory of them is forgotten.

Ah, from one point of view, from that of the philosophic, thoughtful sensualist,—the bitter dregs of the drained cup of pleasure steeping his very soul,—from this point of view, can we not fancy the heart-sick, despairing advice, "Live for the brief Summer, and put out of your thought the inevitable iron

Winter that must succeed. Laugh and sing while you may; the louder, the more persistently, in that it cannot be for long?"

"Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white" (*as for a feast*): "and let thy head lack no ointment."

"Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which He hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity; for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun."

But the wiser summing up of such a thoughtful, even if a warped, mind, will be that contained in the words which follow. If this toilsome, weary, important life be indeed so brief, and the pilgrim-crowds so soon arrived at the common end of the journey, then, here is another argument for the wisdom of the precept: *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.*

Friends, you look perhaps wonderingly at me, sitting on the low stone wall of my churchyard, and thus speaking, thus moralizing, as though this scene were indeed the end of all. We have not, you say, we have not wondered to perceive hitherto a shade of sadness, a melancholy tinge, in most of your musings,—because life must be always sad, when one sits down apart to muse on it. But hitherto you have but pointed to the night for the purpose of showing us the innumerable stars, lit with no earthly ray, that grow in it as we gaze. Now, do you sit by the grave, and tell us that our dreams, and hopes, and eternal aspirations, and ineffable yearnings must even end here? Must the soul of man indeed flutter above the narrow house, complaining:

"Is this the end of all my care?  
And circle moaning in the air;  
Is this the end? Is this the end?"

Nay, dear Friends, not so. I am but, at present, contemplating that which is seen and temporal, and pausing there ; not passing on just yet to that which is unseen and eternal. I seem but lately to have left the hurry and excitement of life, the moving throngs of busy men. And now they lie so quiet here ; and if they had but been all busied chiefly about the one thing needful, if the grand business of life had been the seeking first the kingdom of heaven,—if the stores which they had with most pains been accumulating had been treasured there, I do not think I need have lingered and moralized so long at *this* end of the tunnel. But when I muse—and I can't help it—on the anxiety, and the fierce contention, and the crush, and trampling, and heart-ache, and fever, and worry, and weariness that were not directed ultimately to the goal, but lavished simply on the roughnesses or the smoothnesses of the journey,—why, then I cannot restrain a very dreary sigh as I contemplate this spot where they all lie so passive and uninterested ; and, thinking of all that toil after bubbles, and madness after things that were inadequate, and now are nothing, I must ask, in the haunting words of that desolate refrain ;—Then, of all that labour,

“ Is this the end ? Is this the end ? ”

If there were an adequate, a grand, an undying and eternal aim, beyond this life and beyond this death, I have no need to ask this question ; for I am answered, in the clear tones of Revelation, taken up by the mighty chorus of nature, that this is *not* the end, but the Beginning.

It is a November day. There has been mist, I dare say, in the night, and the long grass is wet, and I would advise you to keep

to the trim path if you would wend your way to where I sit. But there is no mist now, far less fog. It might be a clear day in October, but for a few unmistakeable signs here and there that the time of the year is later than that. The trees are growing very bare indeed; the season has been dry and calm, otherwise they would be barer still. As it is, the loftier branches stand out nakedly enough from the leaves that still huddle about them, lower down, and in the more sheltered heart of the tree. Now and then these circle earthward; but most of the leaves are already strewn or huddled on the grass, or in the path.

“Calm is the morn without a sound,  
Calm as to suit a calmer grief,  
And only through the faded lea  
The chestnut pattering to the ground.

“Calm and deep peace on this high wold,  
And on these dews that drench the furze,  
And all the silvery gossamers  
That twinkle into green and gold.”

On one side of my wall lies our garden, with the dead flowers buried till the Spring; or if a late rose linger here and there, or a dew-weighted flower bend across the path, it seems to me that they are staying unwillingly, and are impatient to be gone. On the other side of my wall the sun, sinking in the west, makes the many “shadowed swells” “appear to smile,” and slants away from me the long shadow of the delicate sentinel crosses, or of the unmeaning, often ugly, erections of less earnest times; but that all look peaceful now. The fields seem resting, bare of the reaped and stacked corn; the trees are still, and the sunlight sleeps on the smooth well-kept turf and rounded graves; the sky is of that pale tranquil blue that seems the natural

background for the bare branches and few lingering brown leaves. A robin is describing, in his short, cheery, sad stanzas, the tranquillity that dwells upon the scene and pervades the air.

And that feeling, so natural to any one to whose mind the Christian's view of death is not unfamiliar, is strongly borne in upon me by the quiet scene and the quiet day.

“ They rest from their labours.”

Yes, the quiet churchyard, indeed the whole landscape, now that its excited Spring and feverish Summer is over, seems to be a picture or a poem of calmness and rest. Those who have loved and served God during this life, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger after righteousness which they could not here attain, in thirst after perfection that ever fled the lip as they bent to drink ; in fastings from earth's delights, that in the loneliness God might be nearer ; in cold that came over the glow of their feelings, but in nowise checked the earnestness of their action ; in nakedness, which caused them often to cry out in shame and strong yearning for the raiment of the righteousness of Christ :—these all rest from their labours now. See, the restless world spins on through space, and to them its unrest is but as the rocking of the cradle in which they are laid to sleep ; we are still tossing on the unquiet billows, but they are in harbour. The changes and chances of this mortal life beset us on all hands, and at every step ; and when we rise rich in any possession in the morning, whether it be peace, or innocence, or love, or fortitude, we know not but that some crash may have left us bankrupts before the ending of the day. But *they* are not liable to any failures now : that they are they shall be, and that they have attained is

inalienable ; he that was righteous shall be righteous still, and he that was holy shall be holy still. No more dismays, and shocks, and burdens, and backslidings, and inadequate strivings, and ignoble failures in the fight, and base slumbers in the watch ; no more degradations of the soul through the infirmities of the body ; no more stains, small and large, through irritability, through pride, vainglory, envy, uncharitableness ; no more of those worst anguishes, the anguishes caused by self, the shortcomings, and imperfections, and failings ; also no more anguishes from others.

“ No more false-witness, nor cutting tongues ; no more bitterness of heart, nor iron entering into the soul ; no more burdens of wrong, nor amazement, nor perplexity. Never again shall they weep for unkindness, and disappointment, and withered hopes, and desolation of heart. All is over now : they have passed under the share. The ploughers ploughed upon their back, and made long furrows ; but it is over, never to begin again.”

They are glad, because they are at rest ;—and yet methinks many a one must wish to have laboured more heartily and unflaggingly while the short day of labour lasted, and before the night came, in which no man can work.

“ They rest, we said, their sleep is sweet.”

Oh, yes : this life, as old Hooker sighed, just ere he slipped off all the weight,—this life is made up of perturbations ; and if we have once cut it to the core, and penetrated to the heart of things, we must groan, being burdened. But beyond this toil, and heart-ache, and weariness with evil, most of all in ourself, there is a place and a time

“ Where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.”



We would not wish to be morbid ; we would not leave our post one moment before that is fulfilled for which our Master placed us there ; we would still work while it is day ; ay, of choice, still have day in which to work. But, sitting on the low churchyard wall, with the buried flowers on one side and the quiet Dead upon the other side, we may at such a time look beyond the desert march to the Land beyond the River ; and, as we rise with new energy to go forth to fresh, unflinching, unswerving labour, rejoice to think that, after we have suffered and acted a while, *there remaineth a rest to the people of God.*

I know that this churchyard is only a type of such a rest. I know that this sleep is one of decay,—that it would be unbeautiful if probed. But we need not dive below the surface, like the roots of the yew ; we may be content to catch the sunlight and the shade, like the sombre but beautiful mass of foliage above. I know, and my heart sobs to know, that many here are probably far from resting. But be it enough to take the outside of things just now. It is, at least, the “*κοιμητήριον*,” the sleeping ground :—and life’s fitful fever is past for them ; and under these green counterpanes the patients seem to us to sleep well. For the Christian, if he will have it so, death is now a falling asleep in Jesus. The wearied soul recruiting, and perhaps developing, in Paradise : the wearied body lying, tired out, in the narrow couch, until that glad starting up on the Resurrection Morning, to eternal Life, energy unwearied, strength that weakness cannot touch again. Oh, how little we know about it all ! But this, God’s Word tells us, that it has the peace and quiet of sleep,—that it is Rest.

One word here as to the dearness to us of the spot where we

placed the bulb from which the Flower shall burst one day. I will not rebuke the feeling which bids us cling to it so nearly. We know that the soul is not there; but we know that there we laid what used to be the body. And *that* was what we saw, and what we clasped; and moreover, in this form, and in no other, we knew our friend. When we are spiritual, we may and shall



have the spiritual view and conception of things. However, we are as we are; and being now in the flesh, through this veil, I think, must we be content to contemplate the state of which we as yet have no experience. "That was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual." We shall all be changed. True. But we are not

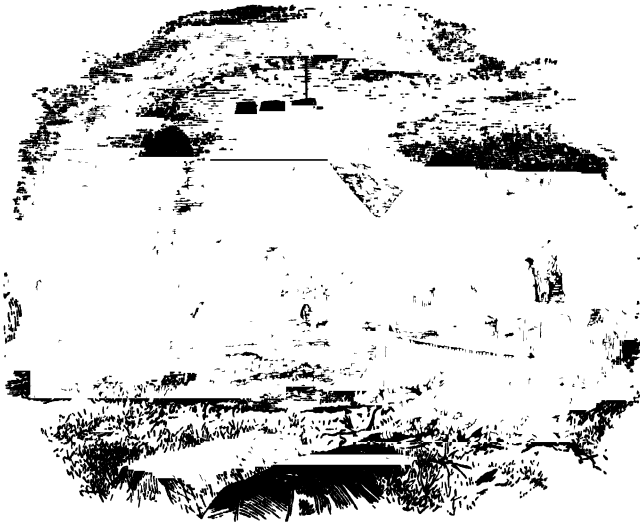
changed yet. And so I suppose we may, unblamed, even go on, in a measure regarding things from the point of our experience, rather than merely from the point of that hope which is not experience yet, and pleading that, as we sit by the mound, half shadowed and half sunlit, it shall not yet be said to us, "He is not here," until it can be added, "He is risen."

This appears to be what is meant by a passage that I have found in an old book,—a passage not without a pathos and a meaning:—

"My thoughts will not stop here. Where is my friend? As to the thinking principle which animated him, I can follow it, by the close deduction of reasoning, or by the suggestions of faith, through the vast regions of space, and see 'the spirit return to God, who gave it.' But this is reasoning and faith; and I am to a considerable degree the creature of sense. It is impossible, therefore, that I should not follow by sense the last remains of my friend; and, finding him nowhere above the surface of the earth, should not feel an attachment to the spot where his body has been deposited. His heart must be 'made of impenetrable stuff' who does not attribute a certain sacredness to the grave of one he loved, and feel peculiar emotions stirring in his soul as he approaches it.

"All this consideration of *hic jacet*, it must be granted, is very little; but such is the system of the universe, that it is all we have for it. It is our only reality. The solidity of the rest, the works of my friend, the words, the actions, the conclusions of reasoning and the suggestions of faith, we feel to depend, so far as they are solid to us, upon the operations of our own mind. They stand, and are the sponsors for my friend; but what the grave incloses is himself."

This is to say, I suppose, the only self that we know, that we can, at least, call up to our mind, when we wish to see the loved one again. Let us therefore keep the turf smooth, and lay flowers there, and hang our wreaths there; and steal away thither alone sometimes, to think of the Past and of the Future; and let none rebuke an affection that is natural, and a reverence



that is becoming, so long as our meditations do not become morbid, and so long as that quiet hour by the bedside of the sleeper rather stirs us up, than unnerves us, for work, while it is our day.

I will not enlarge, here and now, upon what I think a Christian churchyard should be, I will only say that anything more utterly pagan than the appearance, until lately, of our churchyards,

could not, to my mind, well be imagined. Urns, slabs, ponderous masses railed in, tombstones decked with skull and crossbones over the inscription; monuments dreary, suggestive of despair, at best unmeaning; no hint, no symbol of Christian hope; death regarded as reigning supreme, no pointing the fainting heart upwards to death's Conqueror; what wonder that a churchyard had come to be regarded as an utterly dreary, dismal, ghastly place? But things are changed or changing now, and the staunchest anti-Romanists do not contend that every beautiful and hopeful and Christian symbol is the absolute property of Rome, and to be given up to her; and that poor we, as though outcasts, may not have any Banner of Christ set up among our dead. How beautiful a description is there, in "Companions of my Solitude," of the clustered moonlight shadows sleeping across the mounds, in a churchyard from which Christianity had *not* been carefully shut out. And who, in such a Sleeping-ground, so suggestive of suffering over and past, and triumph begun, could feel conscious of no other emotion than that which seems long to have been deemed inseparable from a churchyard,—a shudder, namely, of depression and repulsion, if not of horror and dismay? Fie on us that we make death so dismal; our funerals ghastly processions of despair; our churchyards gloomy registers only of the death of those we loved. God strews the flowers there, and spreads there the smooth green covering of the grass: the warm sunshine is not forbidden the place, and the birds make love there in the spring-time, and the grasshoppers sing on the graves. The very violets that come up after the winter sleep would raise our thought (did we regard their teaching) from all absolute,

unmitigated, unlit gloom. But this has been already beautifully said. I must transcribe the whole of Archbishop Trench's poem :—

“ We walked within the churchyard bounds,

My little boy and I—

He, laughing, running happy rounds ;

I, pacing mournfully.

‘Nay, child, it is not well,’ I said,

‘Among the graves to shout ;

To laugh and play among the dead,

And make this noisy rout.’

A moment to my side he clung,

Leaving his merry play—

A moment stilled his joyous tongue,

Almost as hushed as they.

Then, quite forgetting the command,

In life's exciting burst

Of early glee, let go my hand,

Joyous, as at the first.

And now I did not check him more ;

For, taught by Nature's face,

I had grown wiser than before,

E'en in that moment's space :

She spread no funeral pall above

That patch of churchyard ground,

But the same azure vault of love

As hung o'er all around.

And white clouds o'er that spot would pass

As freely as elsewhere ;

The sunshine on no other grass

A richer hue might wear.

And, formed from out that very mould

In which the dead did lie,

The daisy, with its eye of gold,

Looked up into the sky.

*Musings in a Churchyard.*

The rook was wheeling over head,  
Nor hastened to be gone ;  
The small bird did its glad notes shed,  
Perched on a grey headstone.

And God, I said, would never give  
This light upon the earth ;  
Nor bid in childhood's heart to live  
These springs of gushing mirth ;

If our true wisdom were to mourn  
And linger with the dead—  
To nurse, as wisest, thoughts forlorn  
Of worms and earthly bed.

Oh no, the glory earth puts on,  
The child's unchecked delight—  
But witness to a triumph won,  
If we but judge aright.

A triumph won o'er sin and death,  
From these the Saviour saves ;  
And, like a happy infant, Faith  
Can play among the graves."

The evening has fallen, while I sat here musing, and it is wide moonlight now. How quiet the mounds seem to lie, how peaceful, as the white light and pearly shadow make them stand out sharp as the impression of a seal. The hush that Night is bringing upon the earth seems concentrated and brought to a focus, here. The hoot of an owl, or the clock telling the swift progress of Time, make, by their rare and solitary occurrence, the stillness more profound. Can I fancy myself lying here, in this extreme loneliness, isolation, and chill? O quiet congregation without the walls! the invitations, the warnings, the messages from Christ's ambassadors that, within that grey Building, ring out, day after day, to the living, have nought to

do with you. Whether you heard, or whether you forbore, the day of grace is over, and no sound but the call to Judgment



shall wake you from your sleep. And as we address the living, let us remember this. And as the living assemble, or refrain



from assembling, to worship and to listen, let them recall this to mind: Now is their day of grace, now is their time for hearing and heeding the invitation. One by one they must leave the gathering within the walls, and join the congregation without the walls,—the innumerable, the waiting congregation of the Dead. In the grandeur, and in the humiliation of death, each must lie down, in his allotted space, to await the Judgment Day. A dying man among dying men, I feel that it is well for me to contemplate for a while this awfully passive, apathetic assemblage. That dreadful experience which to them is past, to us is future. How terrible the thought of the actual parting of soul and body, if we try to realize it! How strange the reflection, "I too must die!" How cheering then, amid what might seem a black uncheered gloom, the reassuring words, that may be ours:

"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear  
no evil,  
For Thou art with me."

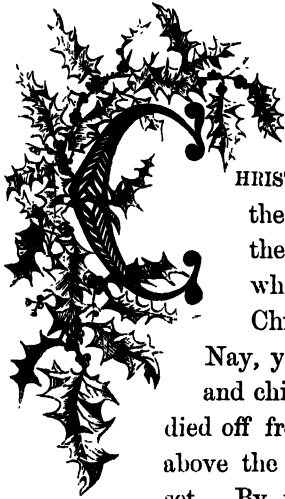
And again:

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee,  
And through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.—  
Fear not, for I am with thee."

Let me turn away from my musings upon the churchyard, leaving this light, brighter than of earth, resting upon the graves.

**CHRISTMAS REMEMBRANCES.**





CHRISTMAS TIME and CHRISTMAS DAY. For the child, there are no other holidays, there is no other day, like this in the whole year. The sweet mysterious joy of Christmas time, do you remember that? Nay, you must be indeed soured, and old, and childless, if the light of memory even has died off from the clouds which gathered perhaps above the far horizon behind which that old sun set. By when the teens have passed into tens that magic glow which lights up Christmas for the child will often have faded, and a sort of blank period has to be traversed before you are revisited with something of that old, as it were fairy-land enjoyment. You cannot grasp it again ever, I dare say, in your own heart, which is now sobered and shaded, less easily pleased and surprised, less ecstatic even when it is happy. Yourself have changed, and life is not now a glittering Fair into which you are but just entering—the gilt all gold, the swings and roundabouts an untasted enjoyment, the booths shrines of unearthly mysteries and glories. You are rather the pacer upon

the despoiled ground some days after. The gingerbread has lost its charm, the swings have made you sick; the wild-beast shows would seem now a sorry caravan, the slatternly girls



that in broad daylight went off in the wheeled house were far other than the lovely forms that charmed you in white muslin last night outside the booth. You have spent your new half-crown, and survey coldly, a rueful bankrupt, the

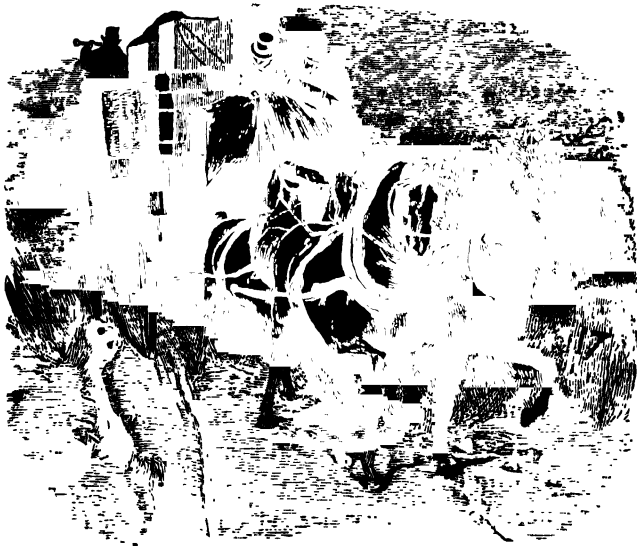
orange-peel, nutshell-littered waste. The glamour of life has gone; I mean the easy surprise, and quick pleasure, and ready belief, the zest of newness, of inexperience, which magnified trifling things into marvels. Christmas and your tenth birthday no longer loom, or rather brighten, out of the infinite vista of months or years that lead up to them, full of a strange and inexpressibly mysterious sweetness. Life's mysteries have been caught up and passed, one by one; the little-great epochs of childhood and early boyhood; then the first going to school; college life; leaving off lessons; divers love-dreams; courtship in good earnest; beginning life in your profession; marriage, fatherhood—only Death remains, an unopened mystery, a problem unsolved, an experience untasted. And it is not that all these disappointed, surely, but that the wonder, the surprise, the incredulous anticipation have died away from each, as the gates unfolded to admit us, and presently we passed out at the other side. Early in life, we remember, the strangeness lingered, nor was exhausted by one draught. And Christmas after Christmas was, as it glowed in the far distance, or as it drew nearer, though still such an immense time in coming, ever made glorious by almost visible angel-wings, and hallowed by its own unreal, indescribable, evanescent fascination. Now it is (as Christmas treads on the heels of Christmas) a time, it is true, of higher, deeper, wider, more intelligent adoration; a time whose holiness has ripened; but a time also whose magic has fled; a time of tender sadness, yet of tender happiness, but no longer of unmixed ravishment; a time, let us hope, of stored fruit, but not of fairy bloom; and its clear bell-music heard across the sparkling moonlit snow has taken up some tolls

of "good-byes" into the peals that raced out nothing but "welcomes" long time ago. Ay, Christmas has ceased its old custom of only adding to our stores—it has passed on to the next rule of arithmetic since then. Home for the holidays! Yes, some have left school for good and all; but your lessons, you find, after all, are not yet done, and these Christmases are passed somewhat wearily in the school-house, which (now that the merry faces and voices have died away from the building and the playground) you find, awaking from your dreaming, to be but the place of your education, having no title to the name of Home. And so a blank of that peculiar Christmas feeling, that Christmas atmosphere of the heart and thoughts,—a blank of this glow comes upon the years which have left childhood and early youth behind, and you sigh that "those old Christmases had thrice the life of these." Nor is the matter mended until you have about you a gathering of children of your own. Then, indeed, something of the old delight comes back; for are there not eagerly-expected Christmas-boxes to give, if there are none to receive? and if there is, for yourself, no rush into the house, "home for the Christmas holidays," no glittering programme of delights mapped out, why see—

"Here's two bonny boys, and here's Mother's own lasses,  
Eager to gather them all!"

And as the Mother darts into the hall, and you (quite as excited and glad-hearted) wait behind on the drawing-room rug, before that blazing fire, don't you feel, when the carriage has stopped and the boys have been blown into the room, and there has been a rush of snow-crueted garments, and a kissing of rosy

cold cheeks, don't you feel, I say, that something of the glamour and peculiar glee of Christmas has revisited you? Yes, we grow young again in our children's amusements, and Cyril and I take turns, with almost equal glee, in shots from his new cross-bow at that oil-flask on the washing-post; and



the old popular entertainments fascinate us again, because of the fascinations they have for those to whom all is new.

“ My football's laid upon the shelf ;  
I am a shuttle-cock myself  
The world knocks to and fro ;—  
My archery is all unlearned,  
And grief against myself has turned  
My arrows and my bow.”



But what matter? When you have Reginald and Austin, eager with their cricket-bats or their bows, and Millicent racing after you with streaming hair; or when you are about to try with them that big kite which you have concocted, or that ship whose rigging you have superintended—is it done *only* to please the children (as you plead), or is there not a pretty thorough entering into the sports themselves? Come, confess, and be not ashamed; you are probably the better for that second boyhood; an autumn crocus that comes up, a little tottery in the stem, falling across the brown beds over which the crowded spring ones blazed in the sun.

“Welcome, old aspirations, glittering creatures of an ardent fancy, to your shelter under the holly! We know, and have not outlived you yet. Welcome, old projects and old loves, however fleeting, to your nooks among the steadier lights that burn around us. Welcome, all that was ever real to our hearts; and for the earnestness which made you real, thanks to Heaven! Do we build no Christmas Castles in the clouds now? Let our thoughts, fluttering like butterflies among these flowers of children, bear witness! Before this boy there stretches out a future, brighter than we ever looked on in our old romantic time, but bright with honour and with truth. Around this little head, on which the sunny curls lie heaped, the graces sport as prettily, as airily, as when there was no scythe within the reach of Time, to shear away the curls of our first love. Upon another girl’s face near it—placider, but smiling bright—a quiet and contented little face, we see Home fairly written.”

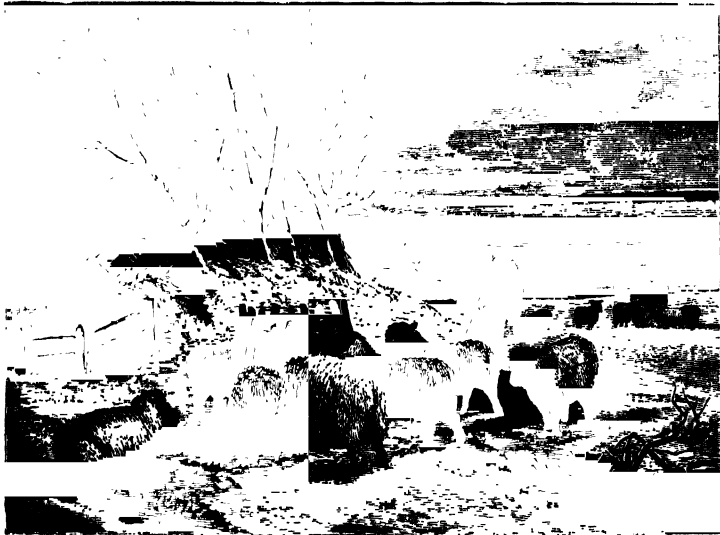
Thus a brother-writer beautifully and touchingly shows how

Christmas can come to a second edition in mature lives about which young lives have gathered.

But let me bethink myself. Christmas remembrances ; what are these to me, and to many another one ? Oh, I recall them easily ; they come back (so to speak) with a tender ghost-like reality to the heart that summons them ; and I am a child again with other children, looking forward to those long holidays of life when all lessons should be over, but which, as I said before, prove more likely *all* lesson-time and *no* holidays.

There is, first, Christmas morning ;—out of bed and hurrying to the window in our little night-shirts, not feeling cold feet, as we shall in a few years' time. What kind of morning is it ? A rare Christmas morning, we perceive, when we have breathed a hole in the frost-tracery of the panes ; the snow has been falling, probably all the night long ; (by-the-by, whence came that unearthly music that, we now recall, woke us in the still, moonlit night ?) the frail white wealth of it clings five inches deep to the window-ledge ; the horse in the neighbouring field looks a dirty yellow ; the black, half-moon-chested powder, and the tail-heavy fantails, strut wonderingly about the open trap of the pigeon-house, then, with sudden panic or vagary, clap off from their perch, scattering the snow, and swiftly circle about the house in the dun air, one or two, as they pass a point wherein the low sun presently strikes them, lit and clear with rosy-white against the slate sky. But the loaded shrubs and trees are the glorious wonder to us ; every dead old stick and familiar ever-green has for us its surprise. How black and bending they all stand under the heavy motionless mass of new-fallen snow ! and

see that ebony blackbird with golden bill, and that warm-breasted robin, and how the snow falls in a miniature storm, as the fussing sparrows collect on the twigs near the dining-room window, within which gleams "bright laid breakfast," and the cheery fire.



But the Christmas bells have begun, out of the dark morning, and at once give the sacred, weird, hallowing tone which belongs to the day. A waft of the old Christmas hymns and Christmas carols and Christmas texts comes with them; there is that cadence of "Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace;" there is the chorus-burst, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given;" there is that ever-fascinating story that, a little forestalled,

is somehow made weirdly real to-day, the story of the silver Star in the east, guiding those grave wise kings to that manger where the Divine Babe lies among the oxen:—

“Cold on His cradle the dewdrops are shining,  
Low lies His bed with the beasts of the stall;  
Angels adore Him in slumber reclining,  
Maker, and Monarch, and Saviour of all.”

Then they undo their bales and offer their gifts; gold and frankincense, and myrrh—

“Sacred gifts of mystic meaning;  
Incense doth their God disclose,  
Gold the King of kings proclaimeth,  
Myrrh His sepulchre foreshows.”

And who else are these pressing near, but with more diffidence, more in the background, yet, we are assured, not less welcome? Oh, that Eastern night! we have often heard of it, but now, on Christmas morning, it seems as though we had seen it; the broad still moon, the piercing stars, the heavy drooping palm-leaves, the grey, stunted olives, the clustered or scattered sheep, the shepherds, some asleep, and some half drowsy. And suddenly that unearthly light, making the moon's bright severe rays turbid, and dull; that sweet and marvelous solo, a voice, in satisfaction and in suggestion infinitely beyond earth's utmost of perfect, speaking for the first time those good tidings, the Gospel, the Birth, at last, of the SAVIOUR of the world. And suddenly—something as the full peal bursts into the air from the solitary bell-voice or two in the tower—suddenly, at the word, the irrepressible angel-legions, the multitude of the angel host, unable, simply unable, to hold back their

ecstasy of congratulation—a gleaming throng, whiter than moonlight, but not so cold, making the moonlight dim—a full radiance on earth—a spiral radiance, lighting up the heaven—a scattered dazzling gleam, flashing down here and there—and then that ecstatic chorus—

“ Peace and goodwill, goodwill and peace ;  
Peace and goodwill to all mankind ! ”

Yes, of all that wondrous Life, the beginning has, naturally, the greatest charm for the child. It is the most easily realized, and they tire not of hearing how

“ Once in royal David’s city  
    Stood a lowly cattle-shed,  
Where a Mother laid her Baby  
    In a manger for His bed.  
Mary was that Mother mild,  
Jesus Christ her little child.”

But we have dressed at last, with blue faces and frozen fingers, and, by ones and twos, have gathered about that roaring fire which makes the room so orange, and the shadows so blue. And now here is the glorious surprise of the Christmas decorations to admire and to examine, all put up, since we said good-night, by elder brothers and sisters. The wreaths about the looking-glass and the pictures ; comfortable holly, thick all up the stem with warm vermilion berries ; dark-fringed yew ; box, with its little cups or boats of leaves ; varnished ivy and berberis ; fir, with silver underside ; orange winter-cherries in their skeleton cage, glowing out of the dark green ; feathery traveller’s joy (picked and saved in Autumn), giving a lightness to the

heavy hues. Then some devices and emblems to examine here and there on the walls ; then off to drawing-room, kitchen, and study, to see what has been done there. But the Father and the Mother have come in to breakfast meanwhile, and there is the rush back to the dining-room, and the eager interchange of "Happy Christmases ;" and then, after prayers, there comes a very important item in the customs of the day. What are the contents of those mysterious parcels on the sideboard ? Ah, *we* know ; that is, we know the species, though not these individuals of it yet. But Father makes us bring them, and they are carefully undone, amid a breathless suspense ; stupid books, with no pictures, for grown-up Reginald—but *he* doesn't seem to think them stupid ; a beautifully fitted work-bag for Kate ; and so down into toys and picture-books—exactly somehow what each seemed to want. And Uncle John, he hasn't forgotten to send his little packet for each—graduated sums, from gold to silver piles, but every coin bran-new from the mint, increasing each year until a maximum shall have been attained. Our increase is to the full what we had hoped, so we are richer than we have ever been yet. Fancy, when it comes to gold ! But, meanwhile, how pretty and white and clean the milled edges of the half-crowns and shillings look ! Then an important conversation, in low tones, and Reginald brings in the combined offering to Father and Mother ; for months the knowledge of some once-expressed want has been hoarded up ; only we feared so that they would have supplied it before. Then smaller mysteries from pockets and drawers, and an interchange of many minor brotherly and sisterly tokens. After breakfast the important exhibition of our treasures to old Cook and Emma ; and

then the piling them up in separate heaps. What a feast lasting on for weeks our "Peter Parley's Annual" used to be!—That was sure to be one of the presents. I don't know anything about it now; but in those days how eager were we to plunge into the continuation of "Neddy Bray," and of "Mosette and her Nine Lives." People in these hurrying days complain of having to wait from month to month for the chapters of a story; but we had been reading these over and over again in the year, and the delight of the new supply was enhanced tenfold by the delay.

But soon it is time to get ready for Church, and the bells begin again, and, well wrapped from the cold, we sally forth into the snow, quite a little procession, with rising incense of smoky breath. We are sorry to see the pure snow piled in yellow banks on this side and on that of the dark paths; we resist not the temptation of setting a little foot in a white, smooth space, to feel the grateful crunch, and to leave a clear impression. And so we go on, and file into the Church, and are soon smothered in the deeps of a huge square pew (they used to exist in those old days), and rather wonder at than admire the artificial shrubbery which has sprouted all along the pews and above the mighty erection of Commandments (black and yellow) under the East-window; and make our necks ache by looking up at the Clergyman, ever so high—three storeys high—above us. But the service seems all Christmas-like, and the Lessons, and the Gospel, seem all to belong to Christmas Day; and the text is that glad chorus of "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill towards men." And we couldn't help watching that bough of arbutus, shaking all the time, as Mrs. Brownrigg







fidgeted, until at last her big bonnet tilted it over into the aisle. And we little ones went home first, and about an hour after Father and Mother and Regie and Kate came, and then we had lunch; and then service again. You must know that we were all to dine together late, on Christmas Day. And this of itself was grand; but when you consider the peculiar dishes (quite the same things in fact are quite different in fancy on other days than Christmas): the noble turkey, with his chains of sausages; the splendid plum-pudding, with (fulfilling our speculations) a dim blue flame about it, and a royal piece of holly towering above; mince-pies; and, afterwards, in the drawing-room, such a log on the fire, and such big round oranges, swelling out of the dark bay-leaves; and such French plums, and such almonds and raisins; and such a cosy evening altogether, with a peep at our presents every now and then; and some music and some stories; and to bed at last, so tired and yet so sorry to go. Ah! it has been a happy day—

“ Christmas comes but once a year.”

I have hinted at the cause of its having such a charm for the child; for, besides the treats themselves—besides the more vivid rainbow—there is a second bow, a halo, faintly ringing them all. There is a fascinating interest in the Christmas Story, even merely regarded as a story; and the festivities of the day are intimately connected with this. It watches over all their strong tints with a weirder, fainter beauty. Festivities on such a day are proper; the share of the body in our present state—ay, and further, in our perfect state through Eternity, is forgotten and lost sight of by those who would refuse to it both

discipline and festivity in connexion with religion. Festivity, within due bounds, is fitting; but, I need not say, this liberty is liable to abuse. Not only are too many apt to transgress the rule of being merry and wise, and to become, as Hood says, "merry and—otherwise," but I can't but think that the festive doings on the day should not be of a character quite to disperse its previous associations, and to dispel that other ethereal glory which includes and dwells above its brightness. Don't let it be a dull day: not this, of all things—not other than a very happy day; but contrive to impregnate every special feature of the day with that day's own peculiar meaning, and, as it were, flavour. Let the thought of this, lie in the day like the bag of lavender in your drawer, which, you know, causes even common things, and those that may seem to have the least to do with a blue lavender field, to bring a whiff of sweet reminding of it now and then. I would have the more noisy secularities of merriment rather spread over the *season* than brought into the *day*. I would expand the usual wish of a "merry Christmas," into that of a *happy* Christmas and a *merry* Christmas season. Let the day, for my part, I would urge, be a holy day as well as a holiday. Is it not a flaw in our theory and in our practice, if thus it be the less, and not rather the more, happy? Our dull hearts make those thoughts and themes dull which thrill angelic and archangelic hearts with ineffable rapture. Let the employments and enjoyments of the day be, then, never antagonistic to, often directly suggestive of, its train of religious rejoicing; and contrive so that Christmas Day, among the other days of Christmas, like Christ among the Apostles, may be known, however human and humane, by a

glory round the head. Give Christmas Day prominently that charm to the young—that one charm of which older years can never rob it; and amid the brotherhood assembled round the fire, shut not out that Brother who, on this day, stooped to be born to the end that none, unless they will, should be shut out from His Father's House of many mansions, whither He is gone to prepare a place for us. Amid the friendly circle, reserve the post of honour for Him who, by solemn words and solemn deeds, has preferred His claim to our love; for truly "greater love hath no man than this, *that a man lay down his life for his friends.*"

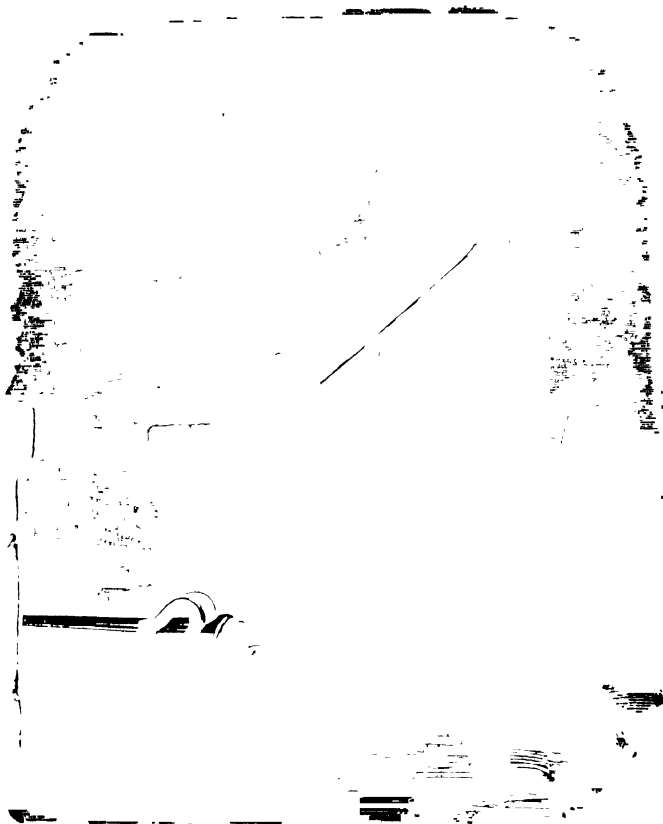
Enough of Christmas when we were young. One word of Christmas when we have grown up. We look at it chiefly as a day of gatherings then. Hardly so in childhood—we *are* gathered; there have been as yet no permanent scatterings; even those at school are home for six weeks; and the elder brother at College is with us for a time which seems long to the young. But the years pass, and, like thistledown, one after one of the ripened seeds sails away; and this one day gathers them together from the four winds. It is well to keep up presents, then, still; it is well to keep up any graceful and innocent ancient customs. Amid the Christmas wreaths

"Twine one wreath more for use and wont,  
Grey nurses loving nothing new."

Be the heart kindly, the furrows softened; let the sad faces tone down their sorrow, the glad faces add light to their joy.

"Let old friends strengthen former loves,  
And let old hatreds die."

Nor fear to add mirth to happiness as the season goes on, nor laughter to smiles, within due measure. Let the old child-feelings be new born at the Christmas time, and innocent merriment go hand in hand with the gladness of Religion.



NEW YEAR'S EVE.

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GAIN. Yes, the bells are chiming again ;  
 sorting themselves, falling into rank,  
 settling into order, to

“Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest.”

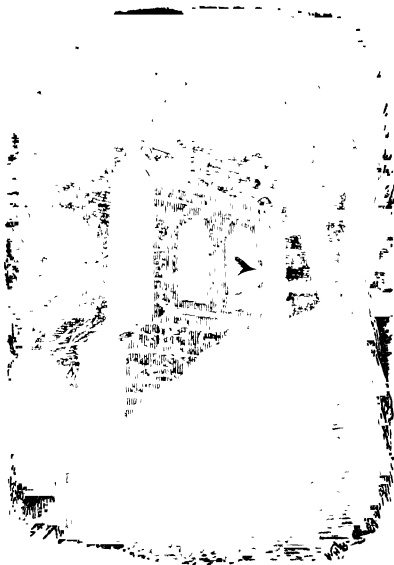
That which was, but the other day, far  
 in the dim Future, is now of the Past ;  
 that which was so lately a blank leaf in  
 the cheque-book of our years, is now filled up and spent ; that  
 at which we fearfully or hopefully guessed, is now well known  
 and growing stale ; and our busy wonders or dreads are turned  
 to another New Year, which,—presto, in a moment,—shall be-  
 come one more among the dry heap of those that are old, and  
 have lost their interest, except in those moments of retrospection  
 wrung hardly out of the reluctant tyranny of the overburdened  
 Present, and the still-more-clogged Future : meditative hours for  
 which, now-a-days, men (unhappily) find less and less time. ’Tis  
 past ; we have become accustomed to its anguishes,—which  
 seemed, at the moment when the white-hot iron touched us,  
 intolerable ; and other interests have hustled on one side and  
 left behind in the onward march even its keenest and acutest



joys. Time, the healer of sharp agonies; Time, the blurrer of bright tints; 'tis well, for men on the march, that we can forget both in a degree. We are bound for another Land; we are pilgrims through the desert; we must on, we must on: no staying, no long lingering, no pitching a tent for a permanency either in a waste or in an oasis. God has so ordered our minds that (if healthy) they recover their balance after however rude a shock, or from however potent an attraction; it were not well that things of time should take a lasting, paralyzing hold upon those behind whom and around whom lies the desert of their pilgrimage; before whom lies—what? The strip of sand yet before us may be a span-breadth; it may be a mile or two in width; but anyhow, what a narrow strip! and narrowing at every step we take. And soon the last inch of desert; the last step across it;—and then? Ay, the days of life's year dwindle; the suns are, for some, what we call few; for some, what we call many. But for each, in turn, the last rises, and New Year's Eve comes round. Again, and again; we say, as the bells begin with a stammer, and at last glide into glib speech in the belfry; again;—the old year is again going, has but a few hours of life; the new year is again coming—is even at the door: and, more or less, these new years repeat to us old stories, and “the thing that hath been, it is that which shall be;” but an entirely new thing lies before us—a perfectly new experience: and what a New Year's Eve, is that earnest one to which all these play-ones, as it were, are leading us!

But now this brief year, one of the poor fourscore or so, at the utmost, that we have to spend, has dwindled to the last

groat; and however we laid up, or however we lavished, the new coin that had to be changed as soon as it came into our possession, it is well-nigh all gone, and we are looking to trench upon our scanty store, and to draw out another. Ah, the pile dwindles, howsoever we may to the end flatter ourselves that there is yet a good column of coin; possibly



there may be but one or two more for us; but half a one; nay, our whole possession may be but one penny out of even this year's remnant that we are contemplating. A truce, however, to far-fetched conceits; let me sober my gadding fancy by bringing it face to face with this fact—that New Year's Eve has come again, and that this is my last fireside

meditation, ere I shall wheel away my Chair, and seek my bed in the early morning of next year. And I am musing on the quickness with which these young years grow now into maturity, and subside into decay, and startle us with their last heavy breathing before we had well made them at home with us. What! New Year's Eve again? How life steals on! How old we are getting! Another sitting up with the young ones, to listen to the bells. Why, *we* were the young ones—was it not even the other day? But the year seems shut in an hour-glass now, and the sand sinks so fast from the upper globe, and 'tis so soon time to turn it afresh.

New Year's Eve again. What is the impression left on the mind as, at such a time, we muse how life's shadow is gathering in, in front, and passing round to lengthen behind us; how our pile of spending or trading money decreases; how these habits of ours are growing threadbare, and must ere long be laid by in the quiet drawer of the grave? What feeling ascends mistily and dimly over our spirit, like the white ghost-sheet from the valley stealing up towards the thoughtful hills? A certain feeling of sadness. Yes, unless it happens that some one or other of the mind's teeth are just now wearying us with an intolerable aching;—ay, and the tooth lulls, you know, when there is question of having it out;—and if there are pleasant faces about us, and dear forms; and a life not upon the whole unhappy or unuseful be ours, there will be a sober tinge over our musings at the thought of change, the suggestion of "passing away," which creeps up over our heart as the new years catch up each other, and race by at each other's heels as quickly as the bells.

The last day of the short Year of Life, this solemn New Year's Eve, seems drawing nearer to us, really nearer to us, when childhood and youth are gone, and mature manhood or womanhood is just grizzling the hair, laying just an autumn finger as it were upon the head, as you see in August a yellow leaf or two burn out of the dark full-foliaged elms. It has been truly said that "not childhood alone, but the young man till thirty, never feels practically that he is mortal. He knows it indeed, and, if need were, he could preach a homily on the fragility of life; but he brings it not home to himself, any more than in a hot June we can (otherwise than with an unreal romantic halo about them) appropriate to our imagination the freezing days of December."

But the power of realizing, and resolving into stern prose, the fact that for us the end of all things here must arrive—is at hand; this power gradually becomes ours when once the meridian is past. And that which appeared as though a dream, not untinged with a certain melancholy beauty, becomes a thing more palpable, more distinct, as we begin to find half our years spent, and the rest surely dealt out of light weight; hardly come before it is time to go; just "welcome," and anon "farewell!" To some the shape that is growing into distinctness is taking the appearance of an Angel; to some it is taking that of a grisly Thing of skeleton outline; to many it assumes a character, not indeed of dismaying terror, but yet of a depressing gloom; something disliked, if not absolutely dreaded; something unpleasant, intolerable to thought, if not absolutely terrific.

Of this shrinking from death, the gloomiest phase is that of

the mere worldling,—of him whose all is here. That is a dreary sadness with which they contemplate the end of this life, and the opening of the great New Year, who not only are using this world, but using it to the full, regarding its solaces and enjoyments, not as refreshments for a journey, but as though the perpetual banquet at the end.

“ Fulness to such a burden is  
That go on pilgrimage :  
Here little, and hereafter bliss,  
Is best from age to age.”

And best to be content with the herb heart's-ease in the valley, expecting cedars of Lebanon in the far lofty land. Even thus you may own to a natural sorrow at leaving your valley ; but how dismal the prospect of change if you have struggled up some hill which seems to you to command sufficient prospect, and have built there a hut which seems home enough for you, and have planted a little garden, beyond whose scanty produce you have lost any idea of further use and beauty. There will strengthen upon such minds, as life draws on to the end, what Lamb calls an “intolerable disinclination to dying.” He says :

“ Whatsoever thwarts or puts me out of my way, brings death into my mind. All partial evils, like humours, run into that capital plague-sore. I have heard some profess an indifference to life. Such hail the end of their existence as a port of refuge, and speak of the grave as of some soft arms in which they may slumber as on a pillow. Some have wooed death : but out upon thee, I say, thou foul, ugly phantom ! In no way can I be brought to digest thee, thou thin, melancholy Privation, or more frightful and confounding Positive ! ”

A sadly eloquent and touching picture, in truth, does Charles Lamb draw for us, in "Elia," of the New Year's Eve musings of such a world-wrapt, time-bounded mind. Such a wedded heart to the present, such a shrinking from the future! The eye has grown content with its surroundings, and has not cared to look, cannot now see, beyond the horizon of Time; the telescope of Faith has not been continually used, and now, if it were pressed into the reluctant hand, the sight has grown too dim to see and grasp the far better, more glorious things,—things not contenting, merely, but satisfying,—which are outlined even now to the earnest, practised looker towards the everlasting hills. The affections have been set (for all those old warnings)—set on things on earth, not on things above: that grave exhortation fell on heedless ears, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." And now they are near leaving behind all they love and value, and there is nothing they care to look forward to beyond, in the Great New Year; nothing from which the thought and heart does not even turn with distaste. Before thirty, death seemed far off; the thought of his advent might be easily laid aside, or worked into poetry. But afterwards, the phantom will press: it is no longer pensive imagery, but a cold Reality drawing near. And now,—“But now” (he says, as the bells ring out the years), “shall I confess a truth?—I feel these audits but too powerfully; I begin to count the probabilities of my duration, and to grudge at the expenditure of moments and shortest periods, like misers' farthings. In proportion as the years both lessen and shorten, I set more count upon their periods, and would fain lay my ineffectual finger upon the spoke of the great wheel. I am not content to pass away 'like a weaver's shuttle.' Those metaphors

solace me not, nor sweeten the unpalatable draught of mortality. I care not to be carried with the tide that smoothly bears human life to eternity, and reluct at the inevitable course of destiny. I am in love with this green earth; the face of town and country; the unspeakable rural solitudes, and the sweet security of streets. I would set up my tabernacle here. I am content to stand still at the age to which I am arrived; I, and my friends; to be no younger, no richer, no handsomer. I do not want to be weaned by age; nor drop, like mellow fruit as they say, into the grave."

And what remedy? "Another cup of wine," and a song to hail the new year, and hence, while you may, dull thoughts of Death and the Hereafter!

"Nunc vino pellite curas;  
Cras ingens iterabimus æquor."

"Begone, dull care!"—let us forget, while we may; "let us eat and drink," and try to muffle that melancholy refrain that still ends all,—

"For to-morrow we die!"

This refrain that still ends all: with what a sad irony would this come in after the schemes and plans that solely occupy many about us,—ourselves too much. "Let us make us great works; let us build us houses; let us plant parks, and lay out gardens and orchards:"—then in a pause of the excited speech you hear the last heavy bell-voice toll,

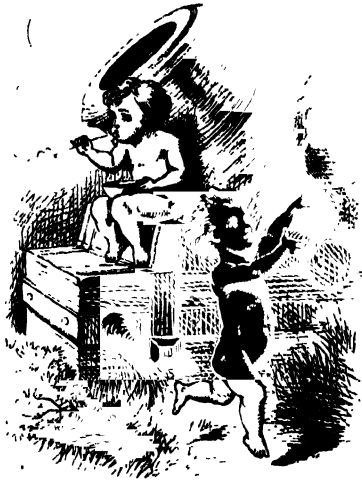
"For to-morrow we die!"

"Let us gather silver and gold; heap up money by fair means or foul; become millionaires, spend nothing, save all."

Yes, most reasonably—

“ For to-morrow we die ! ”

Let us then save nothing, spend all ; let our garments be always white, and our head lack no ointment ; let pleasure, pleasure of the hour, be our *summum bonum* ; let us never be away from jocund company !



No, for if you were, hark at that iron reiteration—

“ For to-morrow we die ! ”

Ring the ten bells of Fame ; strive on the battle-field for the laurel ; in the Academy for the bay ; seek after all knowledge, from the highest to the least, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that groweth on the wall ; aim at the poet's glory, and fill the world with cadenced numbers ; move it with the



golden mouth and silver tongue of oratory; grasp at the statesman's feverish honours; let all nations watch anxiously your utterances or forbearances; yea, lay hold of the diadem of Empire;—but what dull recurrence comes in at every semicolon? Even that former one—

“ For to-morrow we die ! ”

Turning thus with its quiet irony earth's gayest apples into ashes and dust. And oh, if this refrain were indeed the summing up of his history, certainly of all God's created beings in this His world, the noblest were the most miserable!

“ No more? A monster then, a dream,  
A discord. Dragons of the prime,  
That tare each other in their slime,  
Were mellow music watched with him.”

Yes, “ if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” “ But now *is* Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.” And where there is a first-fruits, you know there is certainly a Harvest to follow. And so it proves here. “ As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” Now listen with untroubled heart to this dull refrain that ends all life's plans, purposes, pursuits, loves, losses, gains, sorrows, enjoyments:

“ For to-morrow we die ! ”

And note how a presage from the bells that shall ring in that glad New Year can take out the sting from the melancholy toll that ends all our ringing-out of this old :

“ In Christ shall all be made alive.”

But, alas! the world-absorbed heart finds no melody in this, and so the sorrowful toiling retains, for its owner, all its crushing power. For him Death has yet his bitter sting, the Grave its undisputed victory.

“ Ay, but to die, and go we know not where,  
 To lie in cold obstruction and to rot :  
 This sensible warm motion to become  
 A kneaded clod. . . . It is too horrible!  
 The weariest and most loathed worldly life,  
 That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment  
 (‘an lay on nature, is a paradise  
 To what we fear of death.”

With what terrible power does Shakespeare depict this mad forgetting-while-they-can of the hereafter, and clinging to the present up to the last, in those who have made themselves citizens of this country, in which they should have been only pilgrims and strangers! With what a grim sarcasm does the Hostess' advice read, in her description of the death of Falstaff :

“ ‘A made a finer end, and went away, an it had been any Chrisom child ;  
 ‘a parted even just between twelve and one, e'en at the turning o' the  
 tide ; for after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers,  
 and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way ; for  
 his nose was as sharp as a pen, and 'a babbled of green fields. How  
 now, Sir John ? quoth I. What, man ! be of good cheer. So 'a cried  
 out—God, God, God ! three or four times : *now, I to comfort him, bid  
 him 'a should not think of God ; I hoped there was no need to trouble  
 himself with any such thoughts yet.*”

Here we have reduced to its naked and ghastly absurdity, because expressed in words, that which is secretly and unconsciously the habit and principle of many a world-attached heart. Like trees planted by the sea-side, every inclination and desire turns towards the land, and refuses to contemplate the limitless

vast. They turn from all that would draw their hearts and affections to things that shall endure and that would wean them from things evanescent; they stop their ears, while they may, to God's voice, and make this world to be their god; how, then, can it be otherwise than that there should ever increase and strengthen upon them to the last "*this intolerable disinclination to dying?*"

But, however, putting aside the dreary blank of the worldling, of him whose all of hope and enjoyment is here, we must admit a certain sadness as being common and natural enough to those who themselves at last stand at the close of this old familiar year of life,—familiar, however few and evil its days may have been,—and at the eve of that stupendous and awfully *New Year*. Gray expresses in some measure what I mean :

“ For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,  
This pleasing, anxious being e'er resigned,  
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,  
Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind ? ”

Perhaps we speak too much as though either deep happiness or great terror must be the state of the deathbed. It is not so. There is a middle state of feeling; a state like that of Hezekiah, the state of many men, who, good men though they were, will yet, on hearing the plain and definitive announcement, “Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live,” turn their face to the wall to weep sore, though they be tears not of despair, but of regret. They have a good hope for the better world; they believe it *is* a better world; still they are accustomed to this, and there is much here to which the heart does (innocently) cling. What, must the place which knew them so

well know them now no more? Must their place be (perhaps) in time supplied, so that they shall be hardly missed? Must the heathen gloom of a Christian funeral deform the little home that has long cheerily welcomed their coming in?—and must the bright faces be swollen with weeping, and disguised with masses of black crape, to follow their last going out? Certes, the mode of our burials *does* contribute in no small degree to the dull depression which the thought of death brings to those many who, not regarding it with absolute dismay, are yet content with this life's sunshine and shade, and have not attained that seraphic sight which has almost reached to the shores of the Land lying beyond the vast unknown sea, to that serene faith which has so long learned to rest on it as really "HOME," that at last the heart has a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which it has already learned is *far better*. There are many of a more (as it were) commonplace saintliness, who have a humble, quiet hope for that next year, but who are not unhappy in this; who have dear ones whom they can hardly bear to leave; familiar scenes and employments that they are loth to quit; above all, a state of things to which they have become *accustomed*, and which they are scarce willing to change for an entirely new state. Even St. Paul had a shrinking from this "being unclothed," although willing rather to be absent from the body, that he might be present with the Lord.

This feeling of shrinking from *change*, from setting the foot for the first time into the Unknown, helps greatly to cause the sadness of the heart, the turning to the wall to weep, when the kindly but grave words of the Pastor, or the broken utterance of a friend, announce to the sufferer that it is indeed New Year's

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Eve for him, and that he stands even on the brink of that launch into what seems then the dim and limitless abyss.

But now, were it not well to accustom ourselves much more than we do, every one, to quiet, lonely contemplations of that solemn change? When God sends to us an illness to help us, might we not use this to bring home the idea as a reality, and thus to prevent or moderate that sudden rush of almost appre-



hension when this reality has come upon us? More recesses of meditation we want; more times and exercises of pure devotion; more works simply aiming at God's glory; more pains taken to be setting our affections on things above, not on things on the earth. In truth, we want more love to God towards which time so spent would help,—more dwelling upon our dear Lord's love to us, and anticipating that great and

ravishing joy of seeing Him really, and hearing Him speak. And to combat our natural shrinking from the unknown, and clinging to that which is familiar, we want more faith and implicit confidence in God. How exactly has He who made them, provided the fit supply for our wants, even here, where things are out of order, and a jar has marred the first harmony! Then how much more *there*, in Paradise, and still more hereafter in Heaven, may we count on a perfect correspondence between our desires and their supply. And if our daily bread seemed to content us, and the manna in the desert to be enough, shall we fear disappointment in the Land which floweth with milk and honey, or dearth at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb?

And let those who here are humbly loving God and trustingly serving Him, oppose to the awe of the apprehension of that swoop into the Unknown, sweet, comfortable thoughts of God's love to us, and of Christ's Humanity. Not for one moment, let us be assured, will doubt or terror suspend us; even as the eyes close to these familiar scenes, there are lovely Angel-faces to meet their first look into the vast; yea, perhaps faces of those not lost, but gone before;—yea—I dare not promise this—but *perhaps* at the very moment of parting, that One face, of that Chief Friend, seeing whom we shall cry, "It is enough,"—seeing whom the martyr fell into such a trance of wonder and joy that the crashing stones did but wake him at last in time to pray for his foes, who were, he perceived, madly endangering their share in the One sufficient Delight of Eternity.

Yes, it is strange to fancy ourselves really waiting at that New Year's Eve,—and the announcement of this, no doubt, must, when it really does come, bring a sudden rush to the



heart which no preparation can avert. We shall ask then that which none can answer us, What will be in the untried New Year? But we have few analogies, no experiences; from that bourn no traveller returns to tell us aught of it. Nevertheless be this truth ever kept in mind, That according to our preparation now will be our feelings then. And if the news must come like a stab for a moment, let us rest in the thought, the conviction, that there need be no cause for alarm. The chrysalis might apprehend his change, could he think—but would the event justify the apprehension? And, above all, we will remember that Christ hath trodden the dark way before us, and that *He* is awaiting us in the unknown land. Ring out, then—

“ Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,  
The flying cloud, the frosty light;  
The year is dying in the night;  
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

“ Ring out the old, ring in the new,  
Ring, happy bells, across the snow;  
The year is going, let him go;  
Ring out the false, ring in the true.”

