

The Beauty of Every Day

By

J. R. Miller.

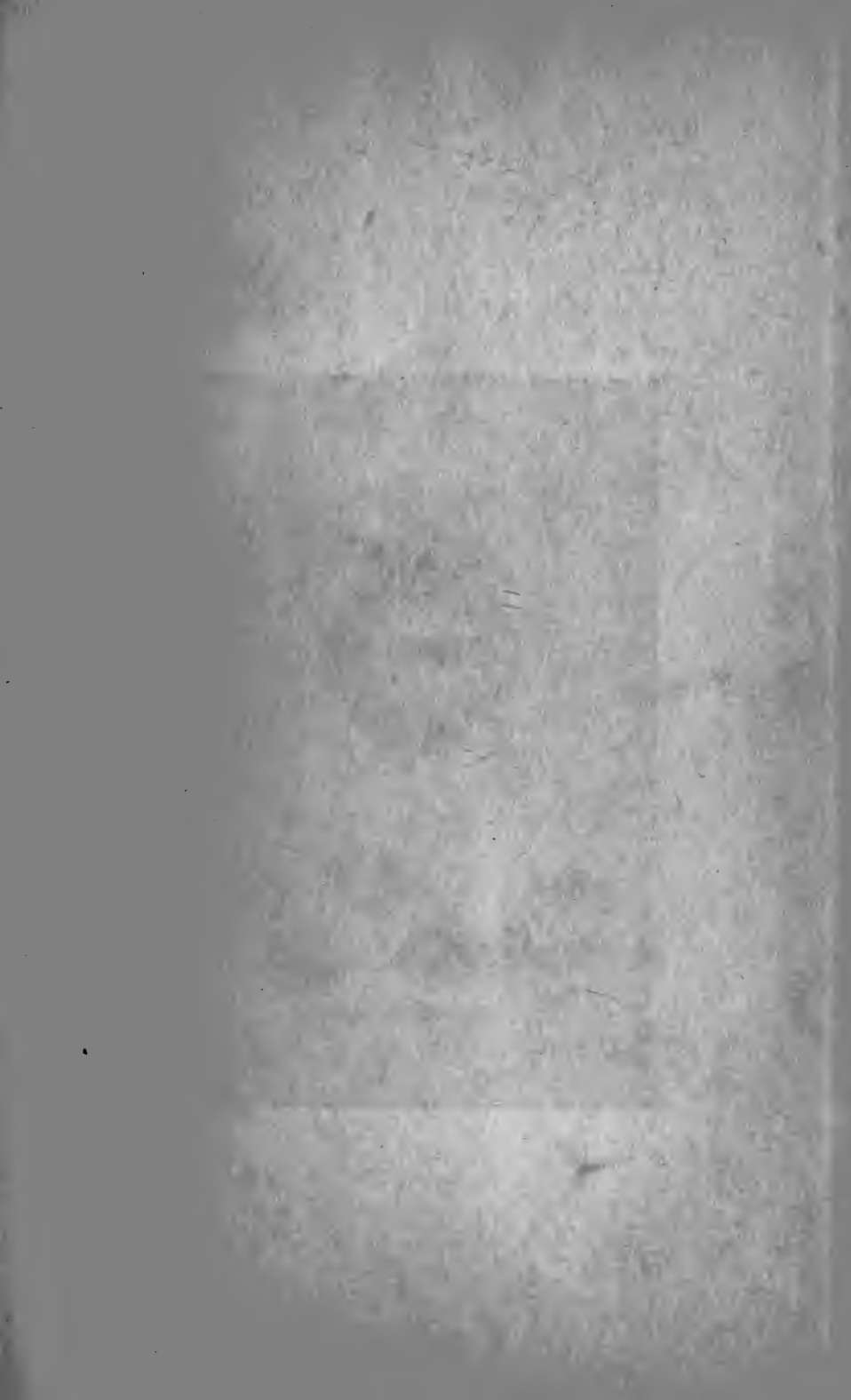


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The Beauty of Every Day

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LIFE	TURNING NORTHWARD
HOW? WHEN? WHERE?	UNTO THE HILLS
IN PERFECT PEACE	YOUNG MEN ; FAULTS AND
INNER LIFE	IDEALS
LOVING MY NEIGHBOR	

THOMAS Y. CROWELL & COMPANY

The Beauty of Every Day

BY
J. R. Miller
J. R. MILLER

AUTHOR OF "SILENT TIMES," "MAKING THE MOST
OF LIFE," "UPPER CURRENTS," ETC.

*"This could but have happened once,—
And we missed it, lost it forever."*

BROWNING

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THESE

THESE *simple chapters may have their messages for new friends and old,—those who for many years have been reading the author's books and those who may pick up this volume by chance. The lessons are not new, yet they may touch lives that need them; and if they do not take away burdens, they may make hearts braver and stronger to bear them.*

J. R. M.

Philadelphia, U. S. A.



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While We May

*"There is a nest of thrushes in the glen;
When we come back we'll see the glad young things,"
He said. We came not by that way again;
And time and thrushes fare on eager wings!*

*"Yon rose," she smiled. "But no; when we return,
I'll pluck it then." 'T was on a summer day.
The ashes of the rose in autumn's urn
Lie hidden well. We came not back that way.*

*Thou traveller to the unknown ocean's brink,
Through life's fair fields, say not, "Another day
This joy I'll prove;" for never, as I think,
Never shall we come this selfsame way.*

I

While We May



ESUS defended Mary when the disciples criticised her anointing of him. They said the ointment should have been sold and the money given to the poor, instead of being used for a mere personal service. But Jesus said to them, "Ye have the poor always with you, and whensoever ye will ye can do them good; but me ye have not always." Whatever they did for him, they must do then. In a little while he would not be with them any more. There would never be a day when they could not minister to the poor, but he would not sit again at Mary's table. If she had not brought her alabaster cruse that evening and broken it, she never would have done it.

If you know that this is the last day you will have a certain rare friend, that to-night

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he will vanish from your companionship, and you will never see him again, you will surround him with the warmest devotion and lavish upon him your heart's holiest affection while you may.

This is a lesson we should learn well. Opportunities come to-day and pass, and will never come to us again. Other opportunities will come to-morrow, but these will never return. The human needs that make their appeal to you now will be beyond the reach of your hand by another day. Whatever kindness you would do, you must do now, for you may not pass this way again. If we realized this truth as we should, it would make the common events of our life mean far more than they do. We are always meeting experiences which are full of rich possible outcome. God is in all our days and nights. Opportunities come to us with the hour, with the moment, and each one says to us, "Me ye have not always." If we do not take them as they come, we cannot take them at all.

There are two kinds of sins, as the old

While We May

moralists put it — sins of omission and sins of commission — sins of doing, as when we do evil things, and sins of not doing, as when we neglect to do the things we ought to have done. One comes to you in distress, needing cheer, some kindly help, or deliverance from some danger, and you let the trouble go unrelieved, the sorrow un comforted, the want unsupplied. The opportunity has passed and you have missed it. There is a blank in your life; you have left a duty undone.

One virtuous and pure in heart did pray:
“Since none I wronged in deed or word to-day,
From whom should I crave pardon?
Master, say.”

A voice replied:
“From the sad child whose joy thou hast not
planned;
The goaded beast whose friend thou didst not stand;
The rose that died for water from thy hand.”

Everyone we meet any day comes to us either to receive some gift or blessing from us, or to bring some gift or blessing to us. We do not think of this, usually, in our

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crowded days, in the confusion of meetings and partings. We do not suppose there is any meaning in what we call the incidental contacts of life, as when we ride upon the car beside another, for a few minutes, or meet another at a friend's house and talk a little while together, or when we sit beside another in the same office day after day. We are not in the habit of attaching any importance to these contacts with others. We do not suppose that God ordered this meeting or that, that he sent this person to us because the person needs us, and that we are to do something for him, or else we need something, some influence, some inspiration, some cheer, from him. But the fact is that God is in all our life and is always ordering its smallest events.

When the older people think of it, they will see that this is true. When they look back over their years, they will find that the strange network of circumstances and experiences that has marked their days has not been woven by chance, is no confused tangle

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of threads, crossing and recrossing, without plan or direction, but rather that it makes a beautiful web, with not one thread out of place. The whole is the filling out of a pattern designed by the great Master of life. Most of the friendships of our lives are made in this way — you and your friend meeting first by chance, as we would say. You did not choose each other. Emerson spoke for all when he said, “My friends have come to me unsought; the great God gave them to me.” All life is thus full of God.

Jesus taught the importance of the present opportunity in the Garden of Gethsemane. He asked three of his disciples to keep watch with him while he went deeper into the shadows and knelt in prayer. A great anguish was upon him and he needed and craved human sympathy. After his first agony of supplication he came back to his friends, hoping to get a little strength from their love, but found them asleep. In his bitter disappointment he returned to his place of prayer. A second time he came back, and

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again they were asleep. The third time he said to them, "Sleep on now, and take your rest." There was no need to wake and watch any longer. The hour had come, the traitor was approaching, the torches were flashing through the trees. There is a strange pathos in the Master's final words. The disciples had had their opportunity for helping him, but had not improved it. They had slept when his heart was crying out for their waking. Now the hour was past when waking would avail, and they might as well sleep on.

We do not dream of the criticalness of life, of the mighty momentousness there is in the hours through which we pass, what blessing and good come to us when we watch and are faithful, what loss and sorrow come when we sleep and are faithless. "Me ye have not always" is the voice of every opportunity to receive good in some form. We miss God's gift because we shut our hearts upon it, and only when it is too late, when the gifts have vanished, are we ready to accept them. Or

While We May

it may be an opportunity to do something for another. We dally, and the opportunity passes. The person perishes, perhaps, because we were not awake.

Opportunities differ in their importance. "Ye have the poor always with you, and whensoever ye will ye can do them good: but me ye have not always." Jesus was defending Mary's act of love to him. If Mary had not brought her precious ointment that night, she never could have brought it. She had wrought a good work on him. We never can know what great good she wrought on him, how much comfort and strength she gave to him. He was carrying then the heaviest load any heart ever carried. We all remember hours of great need in our own lives, hours of anxiety, of sorrow, of pain, when a word spoken to us, or a flower sent to our room, or a card coming through the mail, or some little human touch, came to us as a very messenger of God. We never can tell how Mary's love helped Jesus that night. The disciples said the ointment was wasted, did no one any

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good. Ah! they did not know what that expression of love meant to the Master, how it cheered him, how it heartened him for going on to his cross. If they had known, they never would have said that the ointment would have done more good if it had been applied to relieving the poor.

There would have been times when the poor should have had the benefit of Mary's gift. If the cruse of oil had been broken to honor some unworthy man, it would have been wasted. But Jesus was the Son of God. This particular hour was one when he needed love, when he craved sympathy, when he longed to be strengthened. In all time there never was an hour when a simple gift of love could have meant so much as Mary's meant that night in Simon's house. "Me ye have not always." The blessing which the three hundred shillings would have given to the poor never could have been compared for a moment with the blessing which the ointment, as an expression of love, was to Jesus.

Life is full of similar contrasts in the value

While We May

of opportunities. There are commonplace opportunities, and there are opportunities which are radiant and splendid. There are days and days when the best use one can make of money is to give it to those who need it, or to some institution. Then there comes a day, an hour, when some rare and sacred need arises, which eclipses in importance as day excels night in its brightness, all common needs, — a need which must be met instantly and heroically and at once. A few times in every good man's life there comes a moment of supreme importance, when every other appeal or call for help must be unheeded for one which must be answered at once. There are many things which must be done instantly, or they cannot be done at all. An artist was watching a pupil sketch a sunset scene. He noticed that the young man was lingering on his sketching of a barn in the foreground, while the sun was hastening to its setting. The artist said to his pupil, "Young man, if you lose more time sketching the shingles on the barn roof, you will not catch the sun-

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set at all." This is just what many people do. They give all their time to commonplace things, to fences and barn roofs and sheds, and miss the glorious sunsets. They give to the poor and help them, but have no thought for Christ. They toil for honor, money, and fame, and never see God nor get acquainted with him. There are friendships which never reach their possible richness and depths of beauty, playing only along the shore, while the great ocean of love lies beyond unexplored. They miss the really splendid things in life, while they live for the poor and sordid things.

We do not begin to realize how many of us pay heed only to second-rate things, while we miss altogether the great things of life. We spend hours upon newspapers, never reading a book that is worth while. All the best opportunities of life are transient. They are with us to-day, but to-morrow they are gone. "Me ye have not always." There is a time for forming friendships, but it does not stay always. Miss it, and to-morrow you

While We May

cannot find it. There is a time for making a beautiful home life, but soon the time is gone if it is not improved. Impatience, fretfulness, selfishness, irritability, nagging — you know how the beauty is marred, the brightness dimmed, the sweetness embittered by these. When two young people marry and begin to make a home, they have almost infinite possibilities before them. But the vision must be seized at once, and not a moment must be lost. “Me ye have not always,” the opportunity says to the home-builders. Some years after they find that they have failed, that the vision has faded, and that they cannot get it back again.

To every young person there comes in the bright days the opportunity of living a beautiful life, but it comes only once and it stays only for a little while. The vision will not wait. “Me ye have not always,” it says. There are some things we can do any time, but this is not true of following Christ. We think it is — that we can accept him and take the blessings of his love when we will, but it is

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not true. Delay dulls and hardens our hearts. Delay uses up the moments of his waiting and eats up our opportunity. At our convenience we say, "I will take him now"; we turn and he is gone.

All the best things are transient. George Kingle has written a little poem, entitled, "While We May." The words startle us. "While we may" suggests that there will come a time when we may not.

"They are such fond, frail lips
That speak to us. Pray, if love strips
Them of discretion many times,
Or if they speak too slow or quick, such crime
We may pass by, for we may see
Days not far off when those small words may be
Held not as slow or quick, or out of place, but dear
Because the lips are no more here."

As we gather about our home table let us remember we may not all be there again, and let us make the meal one of sweetness and joy. Let us be patient with one another, kind and thoughtful, gentle, while we may. Soon we shall not have each other.

The Glory of the Common Life

*He had time to see the beauty
That the Lord spread all round;
He had time to hear the music
In the shells the children found;
He had time to keep repeating
As he bravely worked away:
"It is splendid to be living
In the splendid world to-day!"
But the crowds — the crowds that hurry
After golden prizes — said
That he never had succeeded.*

.

*. . . "He was a failure," they compassionately
sighed.
For the man had little money in his pockets when he
died.*

II

The Glory of the Common Life



It was only a scrubby bush that Moses saw in the desert, and yet it gleamed with splendor, as if burning. No wonder the old shepherd turned aside to look at the strange sight. He wanted to solve the mystery. But a voice halted him. God was in the bush. Mrs. Browning, referring to this singular incident says:

“Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God:
But only he who sees takes off his shoes:
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.”

The poet’s thought is that the glory of God is in everything, in every tree, in every flower, in every lowly bush, and that almost nobody sees the glory. Most people see only the

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burning bush or the plant. Only now and then one sees the flame, the splendor of God, and takes off his shoes.

To many people life is all a dreary commonplace. Some see nothing beautiful in nature. They will walk through the loveliest gardens and see nothing to admire. They will move among people and never observe in them any glimpses of immortality, any revealings of the divine nature. They will go through all the years and never see God in anything. It would give us a radiant world in nature if our eyes were opened to see the splendor that is in every tree, plant, and flower.

An artist was painting a picture which he hoped might be honored at the Academy. It was of a woman, struggling up a street, on a wild, stormy night, carrying her baby in her arms. Doors were shut in her face. Nowhere was there warmth, sympathy or love for her. The artist called the picture "Homeless." As he was painting it, imagination filled his soul with divine pity.

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“Why do I not go to lost people themselves, to try to save them, instead of merely painting pictures of them?” he began to ask. The common bush burned with fire. Under the impulse of the new feeling he gave himself to Christ and to the Christian ministry. He went to Africa as a missionary, devoting his life to the saving of the lowest lost. If we had eyes touched by divine anointing, we should see in every outcast, in every most depraved life, the gleaming of every possible glory.

Many of the best people in the world are lowly and obscure. They have no shining qualities, no brilliant gifts. Yet if we could see them as they really are, we would find the thorn bush burning with fire. They are full of God. Christ lives in them. There is a story of a Christian Italian who works with pick and shovel, walking two miles every morning to his task. He lives on the plainest food. Yet he is the happiest man in all his neighborhood. He has a secret which keeps him happy in all his toil and pinching.

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Away in Italy he has a wife and two children, and he is working and saving to bring them to America, where he is building a home for them. His lowly thorn bush of hardness and poverty is aflame with the fire of love.

God is found usually in most unlikely places. When the shepherds went to seek for the Holy Child, they did not go to fine mansions, to the homes of the great or rich, to earthly palaces — they found the Babe in a stable, sleeping in a manger. Lowell's "Vision of Sir Launfal" is a story for all days and all places. As the knight rode out from his castle gate at the beginning of his quest for the holy grail, he tossed a coin to the leper who sat by the wayside begging. Through all lands he rode in a vain search for the sacred cup. At length, old, broken, and disappointed, but chastened, he returned home. There sat the leper as before, by the castle gate. The knight has learned love's lesson. He shares his last crust with the leper. He breaks the ice on the stream

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near by, brings water in his wooden bowl, and gives the beggar to drink. Then the leper is revealed as the Christ and the bowl as the holy Cup.

† Ofttimes it is in lowliest ways that God is found, after men have sought long for him in vain, in ways of splendor. A disciple asked the Master to show him the Father. He thought the revealing would come in some heavenly splendor. Jesus said that he had been showing the Father in all the years he had been with the disciples. He referred to his everyday life of love and kindness. You say you never have seen God, and that you wish you could see him. You could believe in him more easily if you could see him sometimes. That is what the disciples thought and said. "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," was their pleading. Yet they really had been seeing the Father all the three years.

So it is that Christ comes to us continually in plain garb, in lowly ways, without any apparent brightness. We decline tasks

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and duties that are assigned to us, thinking they are not worthy of our fine hands, not knowing that they are holy ministries which angels would eagerly perform. Not one of the disciples that last night would take the basin and the towel and wash the feet of the others and of the Master. Washing feet was the lowliest of all tasks — the meanest slave in the household did it. But while these proud men scoffed and shrank from the service, Jesus himself did it. Then they saw that washing the feet of others in love is divine in its splendor. The thorn bush burned with fire.

Some of the happiest people in the world are doing the plainest tasks, are living in the plainest way, have the fewest luxuries, scarcely ever have an hour for rest or play. They are happy because they are contented. They love God. They follow Christ. They have learned to love their work and do it with delight, with eagerness, with enthusiasm. A pastor tells of calling at a little home in one of the smallest houses in his

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great parish. There is a widow who goes out to work all day, and a girl of twenty who also works. There is a boy of ten or twelve who is at school. It would not have been surprising if a tone of discontent had been found in the little home, or if there had been complaints about their hard condition. But the pastor heard no word that was not glad. The three people in the little house had learned to see brightness in their humble circumstances. All the dreariness was touched with a heavenly gleam. The rough thorn bush burned with fire.

The angels find much of earth's truest happiness in most unlikely places. Many of the sweetest Christians in the world are those who have least of earthly gladness. Their joy is the joy of the Lord, a joy which is transmuted sorrow. Many of the songs which are fullest of praise are sung in chambers of pain. St. Paul had learned to rejoice in tribulation. Many of the most radiant experiences of Christian life are born of pain. Jesus gave a beatitude for sorrow:

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“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.”

The North American Indians have a strange and beautiful fancy. They say that as the flowers fade, their beauty is not lost, but is gathered up into the rainbow, and thus the flowers live again in even richer colors than before. So the blessings that are taken out of our hands on earth are only gathered into heavenly blessedness, where they shall be ours forever. The rough thorn bush of sorrow is made by faith to appear in unfading glory, to glow in the radiance of God's eternal love.

There are certain lives which we are accustomed to look upon and think of with pity. Their condition is always one of suffering. One person is blind and helpless; another is crippled so as never to be able to leave her room; another is paralyzed and cannot use her hands or feet; another is a hopeless invalid. We pity these people, and think their case is forlorn. Yes, but nowhere do you find such trust, such patience, such shining

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as in their lives. The thorn bushes burn with fire and are not consumed.

Many people never have learned to see God in their everyday life. It seems to them their life is not worthy of them, that its splendor is lost in their commonplace tasks. In a little book published a few years since there was a story of a young minister visiting among his people. One day he called on an old shoemaker. He began to talk to the old man, and inadvertently spoke of his occupation as humble. The shoemaker was pained by the minister's word.

"Do not call my occupation lowly; it is no more lowly than yours. When I stand before God in judgment, he will ask about my work, and will ask what kind of shoes I made down here, and then he will want me to show him a specimen. He will ask you what kind of sermons you preached to your people, and will have you show him one. And if my shoes are better than your sermons, then I shall have fuller approval than you will have."

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The old man was not offended, he was only impressed with the honor of his own calling, as God saw it. He was right, too. No occupation is in itself lowly — the commonest kind of work is radiant if it is done for God. We shall each be judged indeed by the way we have done the work of our profession, our trade, or our calling. What we do for Christ is glorious, however lowly it is in itself.

There is an impression that the calling of a minister is more sacred than that of the carpenter, the shoemaker, or the merchant. But the old man was right when he said that his calling was as honorable as his pastor's. They do not have an ordination service for the painter or the grocer; but why should they not have? There really is a splendor, a radiancy, in each one's peculiar occupation, however plain it may seem. St. Paul said to the Corinthians, "Let each man, wherein he was called, therein abide with God." The slave was to continue a slave, with God. The tradesman was to continue in

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his trade, with God. We should not feel humiliated by our earthly condition—we should glorify it. The angels, as they go about, do not recognize rank in people's occupations,—some graded low, some high. We are ranked by the degree of diligence or faithfulness that we put into our tasks. The bright, cheery, good-hearted bootblack, who “shines 'em up,” is far above the useless, way-up millionaire who never thinks of God or man. You can live a noble, divine life anywhere with God. Your humblest thorn bush burns with fire.

One whose life seems lowly writes: “Some of my friends pity me for having to work in a factory, but I feel honored that God should call me to work at something like my Master's earthly calling, and I do not feel that polishing and packing watch crystals is my real mission in this world any more than carpentering was His.” The thorn bush burns with fire.

We go to far-off lands to see the splendors there. Italy is glorious. Switzerland is

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glorious. But there is glory also in every common blade of grass, in every tiny flower, in every bud, in every leaf, in every butterfly. You read biographies of great men and are charmed by what they did, by the noble qualities you find in their character. That is well. But just where you are there are glories too. In your own life there are divine possibilities. You have not yet begun to find them all or realize them.

Perhaps you have been thinking rather discouragingly about yourself. You feel that you have hardly a fair share of comfort, of opportunities, of privileges. You have been almost fretting because you are not getting on or getting up as fast as you want to. You have been discontented, depressed. Ask God to open your eyes and you will see your thorn bush burning with fire. Your everyday life is full of splendor. There is not a single hour in your commonest day that is uneventful. You are thinking that there are no miracles any more. But there really are as many miracles any week as there were in the

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life of any Bible saint. Or, you have been thinking of your troubles, that you have more than your share of them. Tourists come back from their travels and tell us about the lace weavers. Their work seems to the observer a great tangle, a strange puzzle. But out of it all there comes marvellous beauty. Life seems a tangle, a puzzle, to us, as we look at its events, its circumstances, its sorrows and joys. But in the end we shall see that not one thread was ever thrown into the wrong place in the web. God is in all our life.

“I think if thou couldst see,
With thy dim mortal sight,
How meanings dark to thee
Are shadows hiding light,
Truth’s efforts crossed and vexed,
Life’s purposes all perplexed,—
If thou couldst see them right,
I think that they would seem all clear
And wise and right.”

Seeds of Light

*Lord Shaftesbury used to quote a Scotch proverb —
“Be aye stickin’ in a tree.” He would add, “Some
one will rest under the branches, if you don’t.”
That is the right principle. “One man soweth and
another reapeth,” but both shall share “in the joy
of God’s harvest.”*

*“God’s love hath in us wealth unheaped:
Only by giving it is reaped.
The body withers and the mind
If pent in by a selfish rind.
Give thought, give strength, give deeds, give pelf,
Give love, give tears, and give thyself.
Give, give, be always giving:
Who gives not is not living:
The more we give the more we live.
Plant your tree!”*

III

Seeds of Light



IN one of the Psalms we are told that light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart. There is nothing remarkable in the assurance of light and gladness for the faithful, — that is the teaching of the whole Bible. The remarkable thing in the promise is the way the light and gladness are said to come. “Light is sown for the righteous.” The figure of sowing is striking, — light coming in seeds, planted like wheat, to grow up for us out of the soil. Our blessings are sown for us and grow in fields and gardens, and we gather them as we reap the harvests or pluck lovely flowers.

This means that the good things of our lives do not come to us full-grown, but as seeds. We know what a seed is. It contains only in germ the plant, the tree, or the

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flower which is to be. In this way all earthly life begins. When God wants to give an oak to the forest, he does not set out a great tree; he plants an acorn. When he would have a harvest of golden wheat waving on the field, he does not work a miracle and have it spring up over night—he puts into the farmer's hands a bushel of wheat grains to scatter in the furrows. The same law holds in the moral and spiritual life. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which . . . becometh a tree." So a noble life begins in a little seed, a mere point of life. It is at first only a thought, a suggestion, a desire, then a decision, a holy purpose.

God sows light and gladness for us. He gives us blessings as seeds, which he buries in the furrows of our lives, or hides in the soil, so that they may grow and in due time develop into beauty and fruitfulness. When you look at a seed you do not see all the splendor which will unfold from it at length. All you see is a little brown and unsightly

Seeds of Light

hull which gives no prophecy of the beauty which will spring from it when it is planted and dies and grows up. Many of the beams of light, — comfort, strength, joy, and good, that now are so prominent in your life, came to you at first as unwelcome things. They did not shine as beams of radiant light. They were not glad things. They may have been burdens, disappointments, sufferings, losses, but they were seeds with life in them. God was sowing light and gladness for you in these experiences which were so unwelcome, so hard to endure.

There are many ways in which God has sown light in the past. Think of the seeds of light sown in the creation and preparation of the earth to be our home. In the account of creation, we have a wonderful glimpse of the divine heart and of God's love for man, his child. The building of the earth was no accident. It did not spring into being and develop into beauty without thought and purpose. There was divine design in it. From the beginning, God meant the earth to be the

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home of his children, and so we find love-thoughts everywhere. God looked forward and put in provisions, planned conveniences, stored blessings that would make the earth ages afterward a happy home for his children, lacking nothing.

We have it in the Genesis story. There was only chaos. "The earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." A marginal reading is, "The Spirit of God was brooding upon the face of the waters." The picture which the words suggest is that of a hen sitting on her nest, covering her eggs with her wings, brooding over them. So God brooded over the chaos of the world he was preparing, thinking in love of his children to be æons hence, and planning for their happiness and good.

Through all the great ages of world-building, we find evidences of this divine brooding and forethought. Think of all the beauty put into the earth which was to be man's home, of all the good and useful things stored in nature for man's comfort, ages

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before there was a man on the earth. Think, for instance, of the vast beds of coal laid up among earth's strata, that our homes might be warm and bright in these late centuries. Think of the minerals piled away in the rocks, of electricity stored in exhaustless measures and kept hidden until these modern days, to be of such incalculable service to mankind. Look at the springs of water opened on every hillside; note the provision in every clime and zone for man's food and raiment. All this marvellous preparation was made ages before man's creation. It was God sowing seeds of light and gladness, that in due time they might grow and fill the world with good.

Or think of the way Jesus Christ sowed light and gladness for his people in his incarnation. What was he doing in those beautiful years of his, those days of sharp temptation, those hours of suffering? He was sowing seeds of light and gladness, the blessings of whose brightness we are receiving now. Or think of the divine promises as seeds of light, seeds of gladness, sown in the fields of the

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holy word. Wherever they grow they yield joy and beauty. Deserts are made to blossom as the rose, wherever the sower goes forth to sow.

God's sowing was not all in the past, in forethought. He is sowing light and gladness for us every day. Every duty given to us is a seed of light, sown for us. We may not see the shining in it as it first presents itself. Many of us do not like duty. We prefer to follow our own inclinations. A good woman, speaking of something some one was urging her to do and which she was trying to evade, said, "I suppose it must be my duty, I hate it so." Ofttimes our duties at first seem distasteful, even repulsive. They have no attraction for us. But when we accept them and do them, they are transformed. We then begin to see good in them, blessing to ourselves, help to others. Seeds are sometimes dark and rough as we look at them, but when they are planted there emerges a beautiful tree or a lovely flower. So disagreeable tasks when done appear bright and glad.

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One tells of a homely picture which should hearten humdrum life. It shows a poor, discouraged-looking horse in a treadmill. Round and round he tramps in the hot, dusty ring, not weary only, we might say, of the toil, but also of its endlessness and its bootlessness. Yet there is more of the picture. The horse is harnessed to a beam from which a rope reaches down the hill to the river's edge, and there it is seen that the animal is hoisting stones to build a great bridge, on which by and by trains will run, carrying a wealth of human life and commerce. This transforms the horse's treadmill tramping into something worth while. It is not bootless. Good comes out of it.

There are men and women in workshops, in homes, in trades, in the professions, in Christian life's service, who sometimes grow weary of the drudgery, the routine, the self-denial, the endlessness of their tasks, with never a word of praise or commendation to cheer them. But if we could see to what these unhonored toils and self-denials reach, what

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they accomplish, the blessings they carry to others, the bridges they help to build on which others cross to better things, the picture would be transformed. It is in these commonplace tasks, these lowly ministries, that we find life's true beauty and glory.

“God’s angels drop like grains of gold
Our duties midst life’s shining sands,
And from them, one by one, we mould
Our own bright crowns with patient hands.

“From dust and dross we gather them;
We toil and stoop for love’s sweet sake
To find each worthy act a gem
In glory’s kingly diadem
Which we may daily richer make.”

Every duty, however unwelcome, is a seed of light. To evade it or neglect it is to miss a blessing; to do it is to have the rough seed burst into beauty in the heart and life of the doer. We are continually coming up to stern and severe things, and often we are tempted to decline doing them. If we yield to such temptations, we shall reap no joy from God’s sowing of light for us; but if we take up the

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hard task, whatever it is, and do it cheerfully, we shall find blessing. Our duties are seeds of light.

God sows his seeds of light and gladness also in the providences of our lives. They do not always seem bright and good at the time. Sometimes, indeed, we cannot see anything beautiful in them, or anything good. For example, Joseph's kidnapping and carrying into Egypt. No one supposes that the boy saw anything happy or radiant in the things that befell him at the hands of his brothers. There could scarcely have been the slightest gladness in his heart as he found himself hopelessly in the hands of his enemies. Yet that strange experience in the boy's life was really a seed of light. It was only a seed, however, at the time. It seemed then the utmost cruelty in the men who did it. Some people ask about such a murderous piece of inhumanity, "How can God be kind, and permit such wickedness?" Still it was a seed of light and gladness. God used that terrible crime to enfold in itself a great blessing. Twenty

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years or so afterwards the seed had grown into a plant of good and blessing.

Some of the providences in all our lives come to us first in alarming and forbidding form. They are seeds of light which God has sown, but the light is not apparent. They come to us in losses, sufferings, disappointments. Yet they are seeds of light, and in due time the light will break out. At first they seem only destructive, but afterward blessing appears in them. We dread adversity, but when its work is finished, we find that we are enriched in heart and life. We are reluctant to accept painful providences; afterward we learn that our disappointments are divine appointments.

God is ever bringing good to us, never evil. He goes before us and scatters the furrows full of seeds, seeds of light. It is not visible light that he scatters, but dull seeds, carrying hidden in them the secret of light. Then by and by, as we come after him, the light in the seeds breaks forth, just at the right time, and our way is made bright. There is not a

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single dark spot in all our path, if only we are living righteously. There are places which seem dark as we approach them. We are afraid, and ask, "How can I ever get through that point of gloom?" But when we come to it, the light shines out and it is radiant as day.

According to the old legend, our first parent was in great dread as the first evening of his life approached. The sun was about to set. He trembled at the thought of the disaster which would follow. But the sun went down silently, and lo! ten thousand stars flashed out. The darkness revealed more than it hid. So, for every darkness in our life, God has stars of light ready to shine.

We need never dread hardness, for it is in the hard experiences that the seeds of light are hidden. The best things never are the easiest things. The best men are not grown in luxury and self-indulgence. We dread crosses, but it is only in cross-bearing that we find life's real treasures. In every cross God hides his seeds of radiant light. Accept

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the cross, take it up, and the light will shine out.

God wants us to go forth every day as sowers of light and gladness. Whether we mean it so, or not, we are sowers, every one of us, every day of our life, every step of our way. The question is, What kinds of seeds do we sow? The Master, in one of his little stories, tells us of an enemy who, after the farmer had scattered good seed over his field, came stealthily and secretly sowed tares among the wheat. What seed did you sow yesterday? Did you plant only pure thoughts, good thoughts, holy thoughts, white, clean thoughts, gentle, loving thoughts, in the gardens of people's lives where you sowed? It is a pitiful thing for any one to put an evil thought into the mind of another.

God wants us to sow only good seeds. Seeds of light! He wants us to make this world brighter. Seeds of gladness! He wants us to make the world happier. Some people do neither. They sow gloom, discour-

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agement, wherever they go. They sow sadness, pain, grief. If we are this kind of sower, we are missing our mission, we are disappointing God, we are making the world less bright and less happy.

But think of one who, wherever he goes, sows only seeds of light and gladness. His life is pure, for only pure hands can sow seeds of light. He is a sincere lover of men, as his Master was. He never thinks of himself. He never spares himself when any other needs his service. He is anxious only to do good to others, to make them better, to make them gladder. Let us be sowers of light and of gladness always and everywhere. Thus shall we help Christ to change deserts into rose gardens and to fill the world with light and love.

He Calls Us Friends

*The world remembers, In that year
A nation's splendid victory;
The year I first beheld your face
Is all it means to me.*

*Another year. How could I reckon
War, famine, earthquake, aught beside?
My heart knows only one event —
It was the year you died.*

*When, Lord, shall I be fit — when wilt
Thou call me friend?
Wilt Thou not one day, Lord?*

IV

He Calls Us Friends



WHEN Jesus called his disciples his friends, he meant that he was also their friend. Then he intimates something of the meaning of his friendship for them when he says that he called them no longer his slaves, but his friends. There is a vast difference in the two. The slave does not have the master's confidence. He is only a piece of property. He has no rights, no privileges, is never consulted about anything, has no share in the matters considered, no liberty of opinion even regarding his own work. A friend, however, is taken into equality, into comradeship, then into confidence. He is conferred with, is a partner in his friend's affairs. Friendship with Christ gives thus the highest exaltation possible to any man. How commonplace are the loftiest elevations of earth

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compared with the privilege of being a friend of Christ!

But is Christ the friend of his followers in these days? Is it possible for the Christian to establish a personal friendship with Jesus Christ like that which John and Peter had with him? Yes; he died, then rose again and ever lives, walking with us on the earth, our companion, our friend. There is no other one who can be to us the one thousandth part in closeness, in intimacy, in fellowship, that Christ can be. He is the realest friend any of us can have.

Think what Jesus was as a friend to the poor people to whose door he came in the days of his flesh. Perhaps he did not seem to do much for them. He did not build them any larger or better houses, nor give them richer food, nor make softer beds for them to sleep on, nor weave for them finer, warmer garments to wear. He was not what men call a philanthropist. He endowed no institutions of charity. A recent writer says: "The Son of man was dowered at birth above the rest

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with the impulse and the power to love and to minister. . . . His compassion for the multitude because they were distressed and scattered as sheep not having a shepherd, his charity for the outcast, the oppressed, and the weary, his affection for the innocence of childhood, are among the tenderest and sweetest chapters in the history of our race, and seem to have made the profoundest impression both upon those whose exceeding fortune it was to see his human countenance, and upon the ages that came after."

The friendship of Jesus to the common people was not shown in what he did in material ways, nor in what he took away of the common burdens, the hardness, the wrongs they suffered, but in his sympathy for them, in the cheer and courage he put into their hearts, in the peace within which he imparted, which made them better able to go on in their lives of toil and struggle. So it is that to-day the friendship of Christ is at work among people, making them braver to bear their burdens. Nothing does so much to help those

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who suffer as to know that somebody cares. The most that even Christian teaching can do oftentimes is to assure the struggling world that Christ feels and sympathizes.

Think what the friendship of Jesus did for his disciples. They were not great men, wise, or cultured. Dr. W. J. Dawson says of him, "He spent his wealth of intellect upon inferior persons, — fishermen and the like, who did not comprehend one tithe of what he said." This means that his personality was the chief power of attraction in him, — that his gentleness, faith, and goodness were more influential than even his gracious words. The apostles were drawn and influenced, no doubt, more by the man himself than by the greatness of his words. Men who could not understand his wonderful teachings were blessed, comforted, cheered, uplifted by the power of his personality. It was wonderful how they were transformed, made great, by their companionship with this "Poet of Galilee."

Take Peter. When he was first brought to him, Jesus saw a man full of faults, — rude,

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undisciplined, unlettered, rash, impetuous. Nobody dreamed of the rough, blustering old fisherman as having any promise of good, of beauty, or of greatness in him. Nobody thought he would be one of earth's strongest men in future years, with influence reaching all over the world. But the moment Jesus saw him he said, "Thou art Simon: thou shalt be called Peter." He saw in this man of the fishing-boat possibilities of large-heartedness, of noble leadership, of power and influence, of sublime apostleship. We know what Simon was in his rude beginnings and what he became through Christ's making of him. Had Jesus not found him and become his friend, he would have lived and died as a rough, uncultured fisherman, for a few years casting his nets into the Sea of Galilee, then dying unhonored and being buried in an unmarked grave beside the lake. His name never would have been known in the world. All that Peter is to-day is the fruit of the friendship of Christ for him.

Or think what the friendship of Jesus was

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to John. He was one of the first two who came to Jesus. Several hours were spent in an interview one afternoon. What took place in that blessed experience we do not know, but we are sure that John received impressions and impulses that day which changed all his life. It seems that John was originally intolerant, fiery, resentful. But all his fierceness was cured by the gentle and softening friendship of Jesus, which lay about him continually like an atmosphere of summer. John's influence in the world has been marvellous. It has been like a holy fragrance, breathing everywhere, sweetening the air, softening human hardness, making men gentler.

The friendship of Jesus was not always soft and easy. Sometimes it seemed stern and severe. "Think not," he said, "that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." This word appears to break like a false note in a Gospel whose keynote was peace. Yet there is work for the sword even in love's ministry. Hu-

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man friendships sometimes err in over-gentleness. Faithful friendship is sometimes required to speak the word of rebuke, though it should always be in love. Christ loves us too well not to smite the evil he sees in us. His holiness is the enemy of everything in our life that is not beautiful and good. For whatever then there is in us that is wrong, he brings the sword. We are not perfect, and cannot be perfect until every evil element is thrust out. Christ would not be our truest friend if he sent peace to our hearts when they were cherishing pride, self-conceit, and selfishness. Love must come then first as a sword.

There is much mystery in the friendship of Christ. Perhaps no question is asked more frequently than "Why does Christ send us suffering or pain?" In one of the Gospels there is an illustration of the dealing of Christ's friendship, which may help us to see love in the pain and sorrow. It is in the story of the Bethany family. The brother fell sick. Jesus was absent. A messenger

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was sent to tell him, "He whom thou lovest is sick." We would say he would start at once and travel in haste to get to his friend as soon as possible. But the record reads strangely indeed, — "When therefore he heard that he was sick, he abode at that time two days in the place where he was." That is, because he loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, he waited two whole days after hearing of his friend's illness, before he started to go to him. It was not accidental that he did not get to Bethany in time. It was not neglect in his love. It was not want of interest in his friends. The delay was part of his friendship. Nothing went wrong, therefore, with his love, when he did not come for four days and Lazarus died. Nothing went wrong in your home when your prayer was not answered at once and your friend died. It was all love.

We know much about friendship in this world — far more than we think we know. Our friends mean more to us by far than we dream they do. Here is a bit of verse which

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gives us a glimpse of what many a friend means to those he loves:

“The world is not so difficult to-day
As in those far-off days before I knew
I might look forward, all the long years through,
Unto the thought of thee — let come what may.

“The loneliness from grief has gone away
Since now its coming brings thee to my side;
And Pain its sternest secrets seems to hide,
And doubt to vanish, if thou wilt but stay.

“And as the traveller in a desert land,
Longing for shelter from the heat above,
At length finds refuge 'neath some great rock's
shade;
So when life's stress I may not well withstand,
I seek the memory of thy strengthening love, —
And in the thought of thee am unafraid.”

Our friends make us strong. In fear and danger they are a refuge to us. In suffering they comfort us, perhaps, not by what they say to us or do for us, but just by what they are. Ofttimes our friend is a hiding place for us, and this is one of the offices of Christ as our Friend — we may hide in him. Christ's companion-

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ship is a refuge in which we may find shelter in loneliness.

You are in some great sorrow. The words of the people who are trying to console you seem only empty echoes. Then one comes in who has been with you in deep experiences of trial in the past, one who knows you and loves you and whom you love. There is sympathy in his eye, there is comfort in his words. You have found a refuge, and hide away in your friend's presence. So Christ is a hiding place for us in whatever experiences of trouble, loneliness, or sorrow we may ever find ourselves. An old prophet gives a picture of a glorious sheltering manhood: "A man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as streams of water in a dry place, as the shade of a great rock in a weary land." There are some men who are indeed all this in a measure to their fellows. Nearly every one of us knows some one who is a hiding place to us from the fierce winds of life, a covert to us from the wild tempest, like the shadow of a great rock in

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a weary land, like a well of water in a place of thirst. But this wonderful picture is realized in full measure in only one Man who ever lived. We thank God for the human friends who mean so much to us, in whose strong friendship we may hide ourselves in all the bitter hours of life, and who never fail us. But we thank God most of all for the Man Jesus Christ, in whose friendship we find fulness of sympathy, of strength, of tenderness.

What a fearful thing sin is! How it imperils our lives! We may hide our secret sins from our human friends. We would not want to have our hearts photographed, with all their spots and evils, their jealousies, envies, meannesses, suspicions, bad motives, — all our secret life, — and then have the photograph held up before the eyes of our neighbors. We would not dare trust even our nearest loved ones to see all this and be sure that they would still be our friends. But Christ sees this picture all the while, sees all the evil that is hidden in us — sees all, knows all,

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— and is still our Friend. We do not need to try to hide our weaknesses, our failures, from him. Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe, absolutely safe, with Christ, from whose love nothing can separate!

Not Counting God

*Behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow
Keeping watch above his own.*

LOWELL.

*We plan — and plan: “This shall be so — and so.
This shall I do,” and “Thither shall I go.”
Yet, as the hours shape themselves to days,
We tread not in those same self-chosen ways;
Our feet are led ’long paths we had not guessed,
And lo! we find those newer paths are best!*

Not Counting God



Men do not have the last word in this world's affairs. The human hand is not omnipotent. Forty men had bound themselves in a conspiracy to kill St. Paul and they were sure their plot could not fail. But a boy heard of the conspiracy, and the apostle was rescued. By nine o'clock that night he was on his way to Cæsarea, under strong military protection. The forty men had everything in their favor, but — they had not thought about God. If it had not been for God, their plot would have succeeded.

Not to take account of God in our plans is folly. Dr. Howard Agnew Johnston tells of a conversation he had with a well-known manufacturer during a journey to Europe. They were talking of missions, and reference was made to India. The business man said,

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“Why, doctor, it will be ten thousand years before India becomes Christian.” “Do you not think you are drawing a hard line on God?” asked the minister. “Oh, I forgot about him,” was the reply. “Then,” said Dr. Johnston, “you can make it ten million years if you leave him out.”

That is what men are doing all the time. They forget about God in making their plans and calculations. These forty men never thought of God’s interfering in their conspiracy. They forgot all about him. There are people to-day who laugh at our belief in God. They tell us that the hopes we cherish never can be realized, that we are only believing dreams. What they say would be true if there were no God. Human skill, wisdom, or power never could bring these glorious things to pass. If there were no God, not one hope of our Christian faith could find its fulfilment. But there is a God, — a God of love, of power, — and he is the hearer of prayer.

In this incident in St. Paul’s life we see God working silently and invisibly. The

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night before the plot was made the Lord appeared to St. Paul, in his prison, in the darkness, and said to him, "Be of good cheer: for as thou hast testified for me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." This was assurance that he could not be killed by the forty men who had conspired to assault him the next day. When Christ has work for a man somewhere next year, no man can kill him this year. "Every man is immortal till his work is done."

We do not know how St. Paul's sister's son came to be at Jerusalem just at that time. God always finds ways of doing what he wants to have done. His hand is on all events. All things serve him. We say it chanced that the young man was in Jerusalem that day; it chanced that he learned in some way of the plot. We use the word chance because we have no better word to use. It was only chance so far as men knew, but we know that God was in it all. The young man became God's agent in the matter. When he heard of the plot, he hastened to his uncle and in

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great alarm told him of it. St. Paul sent him to the Roman officer. The officer chanced to be a kindly man, and gave the boy courteous attention. At once he set in motion the machinery to get this prisoner away from the city. If it had not been for God, St. Paul would have been killed. But since there is a God, whose plans go on through all human plots and schemes, he was delivered and set one step farther on his way toward Rome, where he was to witness for his Lord.

Earlier in the Acts we have the story of Herod's attempt to destroy the apostles. To begin with, he killed James. He then had Peter also arrested and cast into prison, meaning to have him beheaded after the Passover. The record says, "Peter therefore was kept in the prison: but prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him." Everything in Herod's schedule seemed sure. The prison was strong, a double guard watched the prisoner inside the dungeon. Guards also stood before the door. Peter

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could not possibly escape, Herod supposed; but he had not thought about God.

Some time during the night an angel came, unheard and unseen, into the prison. Peter was sleeping between his two guards. The angel touched him, awoke him, and bade him arise. As he did so, the chains fell off. "Follow me," said the angel; and as he did so, the doors and gates opened silently — the guards sleeping on — and soon Peter was outside and among his friends. He would have been killed in the morning had it not been for God. But when God had other plans for his servant, no prison walls, no chains, no double guard of soldiers could keep him, and no tyrant's sword could touch his life.

We believe these Scripture narratives of deliverance. But somehow we get the impression that the times then were special, different from our times, and that the men who were thus delivered were God's servants in a peculiar sense. We cannot quite realize that it is the same in these times, that God is as active now in human affairs as he was

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then. But there are just as many miracles of protection and deliverance in your life as there were in the lives of Christ's friends in those days. You do not know from what dangers you are sheltered every day. You do not know how often you would be harmed in some way if it were not for God.

It will do us good to get anew into our hearts this fact of God in all our life. Some people are always afraid of the dangers about them. They are afraid of sickness, of trouble, of pain, of the darkness, of accidents, of death. But there really never is any reason for fear if we have God. When evil is plotting against you and the plot is closing, and you are about to be destroyed, God comes in and you are delivered.

What, then, is the true way of living? It is to go quietly on in obedience, in faithfulness, in trust, asking no questions, having no fears, letting God care for us in his own way. This does not mean that we shall never suffer, that pain, sorrow, or death shall never touch us. Not all believers in the New Testament days

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were delivered from the plots of enemies. James was killed, while Peter was led by an angel out of the prison, and lived for many years. Stephen was not rescued from martyrdom, but was left to die. St. Paul himself, saved many times from death, at last was beheaded. While a Christian man's work is still unfinished, there is no power that can strike him down. Back of all men's plots and schemes stands God, and no human hatred can beat down any one of his until he wills it. Jesus told Pilate that he could have no power to crucify him until it were given to him from God. When a true Christian is allowed to suffer, it is because God permits it, because it is God's will, and then it is a blessing. When a faithful follower of Christ meets accident, when in some catastrophe he loses his life, or when he is suddenly taken away, nothing has gone wrong with God's plans. God is not surprised or shocked as we are. No break in his plan has occurred. The man's death leaves nothing unfinished that it was meant he should do. Our plans are broken continu-

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ally by life's changes, accidents, interruptions, and vicissitudes, but God's great plan is never broken.

Never leave God out in making your plans. Never be discouraged when you are faithfully following Christ, though all things seem to be against you. In the darkest hour be of good cheer. God's plan for your life includes these very things which so discourage you, takes them in as part of his thought, and not one of them can mar the perfectness or the beauty of your life when it is finished. Let us meet all the hard things as parts of God's plan. Plots against us shall fail to harm us. This is our Father's world, and there is no power in it which ever gets out of his hand. Everywhere standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.

His assassins thought they were absolutely sure of St. Paul's death next morning, but they had not thought about God. The business man said that India could not be made Christian in ten thousand years. But he had not thought about God. You are dreading

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something to-day, — the passing of some dream that is most dear, the losing of some joy that appears to be slipping away from you. But you have not thought about God. You have left him out, forgetting his might, his love, his wisdom, his power. He can protect you from the danger you are dreading. He can keep for you the joy you fear losing, if this is his purpose for you. He can do for you the things you long to have done. In the silence, unseen, stands God.

You are facing some duty which you feel you ought to do, but when you think of it, it seems so stupendous, so difficult, to require such ability, such wisdom, such self-sacrifice, that you say: "I cannot do it. It is impossible for me. I have not the strength for it. I am not wise enough." You are forgetting about God. With him nothing is impossible.

You are facing a costly sacrifice. It is a question of loyalty to truth and right. Perhaps it is something which concerns your occupation by which you make a living for your family. If you do right, you will give

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this up. If it were for yourself alone, you would not hesitate an instant, but the bread for your wife and children also depends on what you do. Yet you need not question. God is with you.

You are not yet a Christian. You say you never can be a Christian. You hear it said that a Christian is one who loves — loves his fellow-men. You think of what it is to love. “Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own.” You read further that love is gentle, forgiving, patient. As you think of the high ideal of Christian life which Christ sets, you grow alarmed. “I never can reach that sort of life,” you say. “I never can love people that way. I never can be forgiving to those who wrong me. There is no use trying — I cannot be a Christian.” But you are not thinking of God. You have left him out in trying to solve the problem. Of course you cannot change your own heart, you cannot transform your own life, you cannot make yourself

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sweet, gentle, patient, beautiful; you cannot make the ugly things in your disposition, in your temper, in your heart, Christlike. Oh, no; but do not forget about God. He can make your character lovely with his own loveliness. Do not leave God out.

You are standing before some great question, some question which seems to you to involve your heart's happiness for all the future. You are vexing yourself over it. You are rent by conflicting emotions about it. Are you forgetting about God and leaving him out of this problem? He knows what will be best for you. He has a plan for your life, a plan which includes this very matter. Do not try to answer the question yourself. Wait. Nothing is settled right until it is settled in God's wise and best way.

How safe we are from all evil, since God has our lives and our interests in his hands, in his wisdom and love! What peace it gives us in sorrow, suffering, and wrong, and in the enduring of injustice, to know that our times are in God's hands! What comfort we have

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when we realize that God is in all our lives, in all events, in all our circumstances, that daily Providence is simply God working with us and for us, making all things to work together for good to all who love him. We need never leave God out of anything.

Why can we not make God more real in our lives? We have him in our creeds, in our hymns, in our prayers, in our talk. We say God is our Father. We say he will care for us. We say we will trust him. But sometimes in the face of danger, need, loss, or sorrow, we forget that he is with us. We cry out in our distress. We think all is lost. Let us train ourselves to make God real in our lives, to practise his presence. He stands unseen, close beside us. Why should we ever be afraid? We get discouraged when we see chaos about us, — old beliefs disbelieved, agnosticism lifting up its voice, anarchy prating and making its assaults. Yes, but do not get discouraged. Do not leave God out. He holds the winds in his fists, and the waters in the hollow of his hand. The clamor and tur-

Not Counting God

bulence of men are nothing in his omnipotent hand. We are safe even in the most troublesome times.

“The lark’s on the wing,
The morning’s at seven,
The hillside’s dew-pearled,
God’s in his heaven,
All’s right with the world.”

Perfection in Loving

*“ While I love my God the most, I deem
That I can never love you overmuch:
I love him more, so let me love you, too.
Yea, as I understand it, love is such,
I cannot love you if I love not him;
I cannot love him if I love not you.”*

*“ Where am I going to? Never mind;
Just follow the sign-board that says ‘ Be kind,’
And do the duty that nearest lies,
For that is the pathway to Paradise.”*

VI

Perfection in Loving



JESUS taught that Christian perfection is perfection in loving. He said we are to love our enemies and pray for them that persecute us, that we may be sons of our Father, who is in heaven. Then he added, "Ye therefore shall be perfect." He also gave some specific suggestions of the working of this law of love, showing what it includes.

It was the teaching of the times that men should treat others as others treated them. "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," was the way it was put. But Jesus said, "That is not the meaning of love. I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." People say that of course he did not mean he would do this literally. If not, just what did he mean? If

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some one were to smite you on the right cheek, what ought you to do? What would Jesus himself do? It is not in civilized countries in our times that one actually strikes another in the face; but what kind of treatment does face-smiting stand for? It may be regarded as a type of anything of the nature of personal insult, wrong, or indignity. If we would know just what Jesus would do in a case like this, we have an actual illustration in his own life. When he was on his trial, an officer smote him on the cheek with his hand. Did Jesus literally turn the other cheek? No; he asked the officer why he had smitten him. There was no anger in the question — it was not a hot word that he spoke. He did not return the blow. He showed no temper. He bore the insult without resentment, without bitterness, only challenging its justice.

When we study Christ's conduct in all his life and note what he did when he was wronged or insulted, when they spat in his face and buffeted him, we find that he was always most gentle and patient in return. He did not re-

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sist him that was evil. He did not contend for his rights. He endured wrongs without complaining. When he was reviled, he reviled not again. When he suffered cruelty or injustice he threatened not. There are certain trees which, when struck, bathe with fragrant sap the axe that cuts into them. Thus it was with Jesus when he was hurt—it only brought out in him more tenderness, more sweetness of love. When they drove nails into his hands and feet, the blood that flowed became the blood of redemption.

In all this manifesting, Jesus was God, showing how God loves. “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” We are to love as Christ loved. It is said that one day an aide-de-camp of the Emperor Nicolas threw himself at his sovereign’s feet in great excitement and begged that he might be allowed to fight a duel. The emperor emphatically refused to grant the request. “But I have been dishonored; I must fight!” cried the young officer. The czar asked him what he meant. “I have been struck in the face,” he answered.

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“Well,” said the emperor, “for all that, thou shalt not fight. But come with me.” Taking the young man by the arm, the emperor led him into the presence of the court, which was assembled in an adjoining room. He then, in the presence of the highest officers of his empire, kissed the cheek on which the young man had been struck. “The insult has been effaced,” the emperor said. “Go in peace.”

Thus Christ by his example of patience and love teaches us not to take revenge. He himself kisses away the stain of dishonor which the insult left on us. He makes it no longer a dishonor to bear an indignity patiently, without anger or retaliation, but the highest honor, rather, a mark of godlikeness. That is the way God himself does.

For we can find no place in the world where personal wrongs and injuries cannot reach us. People will not always deal fairly with us. There will be some one who is not gentle, some one who will speak words which are bitter and unjust, who slights or cuts us, who wrongs or insults us, who, as it were,

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slaps us on the cheek. As Christians, what should we do? We know what the world's men do in such experiences. Shall we act differently? Men of the world think meekness, patience in enduring wrong, the spirit of forgiveness, marks of weakness. Oh, no; they are distinctly marks of strength. Revenge is characteristic of the world's people, but to be a Christian is to endure wrongs. We are to give love for hate, to return good for evil. Thus only can we be the sons of our Father, and become perfect as he is perfect.

Another duty set down among the laws of the kingdom is, loving our enemies. "I say unto you, Love your enemies." How many of us, who call ourselves Christians, habitually do this? How many of us pray for those who persecute us? Yet that is what we must do if we would be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. It is easy enough to love certain people and be kind to them. It is easy in your evening prayer to ask God to bless those who have been kind to you that

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day, who have spoken affectionate words to you, who have helped you over the hard places, whose love has brightened the way for you. But here is one who was unjust to you, who treated you rudely, who spoke to you or of you bitterly, falsely, who tried in some way to injure you. Is it easy, when you make your evening prayer, to ask God to bless this person and to forgive him, to do him good? Yet that is what he requires. "Pray for them that persecute you."

When we have learned to pray really in this way, — for those who wrong us, treat us injuriously, hate us, — we are Christians. That is the way God loves. If we love as he loves, we shall be perfect. "Love . . . is the fulfilment of the law." "God is love," and to be like God is to love. Wesley said, "Pure love alone, reigning in the heart and life — this is the whole of Christian perfection."

The word perfection frightens some people. They say they never can reach it. It seems an inaccessible mountain summit. But Christ

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never commands an impossibility. When he says, "Be ye perfect," he means to give grace and ability to reach the high attainment. He means here especially perfection in loving, as defined in his own words. No other perfection is attainable. A writer tells of the finding of a human skeleton in the Alps. It proved to be that of a tourist who had been trying to secure an Alpine flower, the edelweiss, but had slipped and lost his life. Many men, in striving to reach some high honor, some great joy, some rich possession, have failed and fallen. Only a few of earth's climbers ever gain their goal. But here is a white flower which all who aspire to reach shall find. "Ye shall be perfect in love as your Father is perfect."

Perfection ever is a lesson which has to be learned. It is not an attainment which God will put into our hearts, as you might hang up a picture in your parlor. Rather, it is something which we have to strive after, which we have to achieve and attain, in experience. If we learn one by one the lessons which our

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Master teaches us, we shall at length become perfect. It may seem now only a far-away vision, but if we continue patiently learning we shall realize it by and by. We cannot attain it in a day, but every day we may take one little step toward it. The day in which we do not grow a little less resentful, in which we do not become a little more patient, tolerant, and merciful toward others, a little more like Christ in love, in gentleness and kindness, is a lost day. "Ye shall be perfect," — that is the finished lesson, that is the radiance of character to which we are coming. Every hour we should draw a little nearer to it. Cherish the blessed vision. Never let it fade from your heart for a moment. Every temptation to be angry is an opportunity to learn to live a little better. Every wrong any one does to you gives you another chance to grow more forgiving, to learn more of meekness and long-suffering, to get into your life a larger measure of the love that beareth all things, endureth all things, never faileth.

One says: "I never can learn this lesson —

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it is too hard. I never can love my enemy, one who hates me and treats me with insult. I never can cease to bear grudges. If this is what the lesson is, I cannot learn to live it." Without divine help we never can learn it. The evil in our natural hearts we never can eradicate. We cannot change black into white.

That is just why Jesus came into the world to be our Saviour. If we could have changed our own hearts, there would have been no need for a divine helper to come. We cannot, without his help, change resentment to love in our own hearts. We cannot, without his grace, learn to love our enemies, to pray for them. We cannot learn to be kind to the unthankful and the evil, unless the Spirit of Christ be in us. Jesus said to the disciples, "Apart from me ye can do nothing." It is not a mere human work we are set to do when we are bidden to be perfect. We cannot too clearly understand this, or too thoroughly remember it. But when we are willing, God will work with us. If we truly strive to be perfect in love, God will help us to reach the lofty aim.

Shut Thy Door

*"Father, I come to thee,
Thou hast a place for me,
Thou wilt forgive the past and give me love.
So rests my heart in thee,
So sings my spirit free,
So may I come to thee, safe home above —
Safe home above.*

*"Now when life's storms are high,
Straight to thy care I'll fly,
There find me rest and peace in thy strong arms.
Thy help forever nigh,
Will banish tear and sigh,
And keep me 'neath thine eye, safe from alarms —
Safe from alarms."*

VII

Shut Thy Door



ESUS gave very definite instructions concerning prayer. We are to enter into our inner chamber and shut the door. This does not necessarily mean that we must actually be in an inner room in a house. We may be out in the field, in the heart of a forest, or on a quiet hillside. When Jesus himself prayed, it was often in a garden or on a mountain — somewhere apart from the multitude. He teaches us to do the same. We need to be alone. The presence of others disturbs our thoughts. We cannot become wholly absorbed in the purpose of our errand to God if there are others about us. The chatter of voices interrupts us.

Prayer is a great deal more than we sometimes suppose it to be. We may have thought of it as little more than a daily routine of

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devotion. We rise in the morning and through force of habit kneel down for a minute or two of what we call praying. We run hurriedly through a form of words, without giving serious thought to what we are saying. We scarcely know when we are through what we have asked God for. Indeed our petitions were mere rote work — there were no strong desires in our hearts, corresponding to the words we used. We say we have been praying. Have we? That is not what Jesus meant when he said, “Enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father.” We may have been in the inner chamber in a literal sense, and the door may have been shut, but we have not been with our Father.

Christ means that when you enter the inner room you and God are alone together. The world is far away. Its noises break not in upon your ear. You have put your business, your ambitions, your pleasures, far from you. No eye sees you. No ear hears what you say. Then God is near and you are alone with him.

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When General Gordon was with his army in the Soudan, it is said there was half an hour each morning when a handkerchief lay outside the General's tent, and the whole camp knew the meaning of the little signal, and religiously respected it. No foot dared to enter the tent while the handkerchief lay there. No sentinels could better have guarded the portals. Any message, however pressing, had to wait until the signal was lifted. Every one knew that God and Gordon were alone together within, and not the most thoughtless man in the camp would dare intrude. No wonder that when the General came out of his tent the glory of heaven seemed to shine on his face, the fragrance of heaven to cling to his garments, and that he had such peace and such power in his life.

We must have the shut door for all the most sacred experiences of life. Love will not reveal its holiest thoughts in public. Sorrow wants to be alone in its deepest moods. We wear masks before the world; only when the door is shut do we reveal our truest selves.

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There are moments and experiences in real true human friendships when two souls are alone and come very close together. The door is shut upon the outside world. No stranger intermeddles. No eye looks in upon the sweet communion. No ear hears what the two say one to the other. No tongue breaks in with any word upon the speech they are having together. Their communion seems really full and close.

Yet not even with the most faithful human friends is the intimacy ideally perfect. Not even our tenderest friends and those closest to us, says Keble, know half the reasons why we smile or sigh. Every human heart is a world by itself. We really understand very little of what goes on in the brain and breast of the friend we most intimately know. You say you are perfectly acquainted with your friend. But you are not. You read his smiles and you say, "My friend is very happy to-day." But in his heart are cares and griefs of which you suspect nothing. The marriage relation, when it is what it

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should be, represents the most complete blending of lives, and the most intimate mutual knowledge, the one of the other. "We tell each other everything," says a happy husband or wife. "We have no secrets from one another. We know all that goes on in each other's mind and heart." But they do not, they cannot. There may not be any desire or intention to hide anything, one from the other. Yet a life is so large that no one can possibly understand it perfectly. We cannot know either all the good or all the evil in others. We cannot comprehend all the mystery there is in any friend's life. We cannot fathom the sorrow of our friend when the tears stream down his cheeks, or his joy when his heart is overflowing with gladness.

These are suggestions of the incompleteness of human communion and fellowship. You and your friend come together in the most sacred intimacy possible, and yet he knows only a little of you. Your life and his touch at only a few points.

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But when you enter into your inner chamber and shut the door upon you and God, you are in the presence of One who knows you perfectly. It was said of Jesus, "He knew what was in men." That is, he looked into the life of every one who came into his presence, and saw everything that was in it. He read the thoughts and feelings, he saw the insincerities, the hypocrisy, the intrigue, the enmity of those who were plotting against him. He saw the heart hungers, the cravings, the shy love of those who wished for his friendship. He knew what was in every man and woman. When Jesus asked Peter, "Simon, lovest thou me?" the answer was, "Yes, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." He knew all.

This brings us to the very heart of the meaning of prayer. You may not find great comfort in communion with even your best human friend, for he does not understand you. He sees too little of your life. But it is your Father who is in the inner chamber with you, and he knows all, understands all,

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and he loves you with a love that is infinite in its compassion and its grace.

“Pray to thy Father.” God seeks in every way to make his love plain to us, to show us how he wants to bless us. Of all the revelations he has made to us of himself, no one means quite so much as the name Father. We know something of fatherhood as we see it in imperfect men, in ourselves if we are fathers. A writer says: “I never can forget the hour when I first became a father. A new feeling swept through my soul and transformed all life and all the world for me. Then a moment later came a vision of God. God is my Father. My new-born love for my new-born child is a shadow at least, a revelation, of the love of God for me.” It is your Father whom you meet in the inner chamber when you enter in and shut the door. No other answer is needed when some one asks you if you believe in prayer. Just say, “God is my Father, and of course I can pray to him.” You cannot conceive of a true father to whom a child cannot come with his questions, his

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difficulties, his dangers, his sorrows, his sins. If God is your Father, there is nothing you cannot bring to him.

Think, too, who God is. Earthly fathers are limited in their knowledge, in their vision, in their power to help. But God is without limitation. He is almighty. He is not little, like you. It is sweet to sit down beside a human friend who is rich in character, in sympathy, in wisdom, in love, in power to help, and to know that he is your friend. Some of us know by experience what it is to have such a person to whom we can go with our weaknesses, our hard questions, our inexperience, and to know that all this friend is and all he has he will put at our disposal. But how little the strongest human friend has power to do for us! He is only human like ourselves.

Then think of the immeasurable greatness, power, wisdom, and love of this Father, with whom you come into communion in the inner chamber when you have shut the door. When Tennyson was once asked his thought

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about prayer, he answered, "It is the opening of the sluice-gate between God and my soul." Back of the sluice-gate is the great reservoir with its pent-up volumes of water. Below it are the fields and gardens to be irrigated, the homes to be supplied with water. The opening of the sluice-gate lets the floods in to do their blessed work of renewal and refreshing. Prayer is the sluice-gate between God and your soul. You lift the gate when you pray to your Father, and infinite floods of divine goodness and blessing — of life — pour into your heart.

Our thought of prayer is too often pitifully small, even paltry. Within our reach are vast tides of blessing, and we take only a taste. Many persons seek but the lower and lesser things in prayer, and lose altogether the far more glorious things that are possible to their quest. What did you ask for this morning when you entered into your inner chamber and shut your door upon your Father and you, and prayed? Did you ask for large things, or only for trifles? for all

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the fulness of God, or only for bread and clothes and some earthly conveniences? for earth's tawdriness, or heaven's eternal things?

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

A writer defines religion as friendship with God. If this be a true definition, what then is prayer? When you visit your friend and are welcomed, and you sit together for an hour or for an evening, do you spend the time in making requests, asking favors of each other? Do you devote the hour to telling your friend about your troubles, your hard work, your disappointments, your pinching needs, and asking him to help you? Rather, if you have learned the true way to be a friend, you scarcely even refer to your worries, anxieties, and losses. You would spend the hour, rather, in sweet companionship, in communion together on subjects dear to you both? There might not be a single request for help in all the hour you are to-

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gether. There might be moments of silence, too, when not a word would be spoken, and these might be the sweetest moments of all. Our prayer should be friendship's communion with God. It should not be all requests or cries for help. When we enter our inner chamber and shut the door and pray to our Father, it should be as when two friends sit together and commune in confidence and love.

“When thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father.” But some one says, “It would be impossible, with the duties that are required of us, in our busy days to spend large portions of time in the inner chamber, even with God.” There is a way to live in which in a sense we shall be always in our inner chamber, with the door shut, in communion with our Father. This must have been what St. Paul meant when he said, “Pray without ceasing.” There never was a more strenuous Christian worker than St. Paul. He certainly was not on his knees “without ceasing.” But we can learn to be in

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our inner chamber with God through all our busiest days. That is, we can commune with him while we are at our work and literally shut our door to pray to our Father. Jesus prayed that way. His days were all days of prayer. He was in communion with his Father when he was working in his carpenter's shop, when he was teaching by the seaside, when he was performing miracles of healing in people's homes or upon the streets, when he was walking about the country. There really never was a moment when he was not in the inner chamber, with the door shut, praying to his Father.

There is a sense in which we all should obey this word of Christ's in the same way. There is no other way in which many of us can obey it. We have our long hours when we must be at our common tasks. We want to give a portion of our time to religious duties, but here also Christian work presses, and we cannot pray long apart. There are duties which must be done in certain hours, even if we stay away from the meetings of

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worship. It is said of St. Francesca, that though she never wearied in her religious services, yet if during her prayers she was called away by some domestic duty, she would cheerfully close her book, saying that when a wife and mother was needed, she must quit her God at the altar, to find him in the duties of her home. There come times in every life when formal prayer is not the duty. Yet we may be really in communion with God while we are doing our plainest tasks. We must make all life prayer, in the inner chamber with God.

Yet while this is true, this is not the only way to read the lesson. Jesus took a great many hours to be in the inner chamber, alone, with his Father. He spent whole nights with God. He would rise a great while before day and go out to the mountain to pray. His command here should be literally obeyed by all his followers. We must get time for prayer. No other where can we get strength. The work we do without prayer is poor work, work without power. The busy day that does

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not begin with prayer is a day without divine blessing. The sorrow that does not go to God remains un comforted. The joy that is not sanctified by prayer is not perfect. The teacher who does not pray before teaching finds even the Bible without power to impress. The preacher who does not enter into his inner chamber and shut the door, with only God and himself within, may preach eloquently, but his preaching will not win souls, will not comfort sorrow, will not edify saints, will not lead men into holy service.

What to Do with Doubts

*Let thy day be to thy night
A letter of good tidings. Let thy praise
Go up as birds go up, that when they wake
Shake off the dew and soar. So take joy home,
And make a place in thy great heart for her,
And give her time to grow, and cherish her.
Then will she come, and oft will sing to thee
When thou art working in the furrows; ay,
Or weeding in the sacred hour of dawn.
It is a comely fashion to be glad —
Joy is the grace we say to God.*

JEAN INGELOW.

VIII

What to Do with Doubts



HE can scarcely think of John the Baptist as ever among the doubters. His faith seems invincible. He introduced Jesus to men as the Lamb of God. He was most courageous and strong in his witnessing. How can we explain the lapse of faith in him?

No doubt the cause was partly physical. Our bodies have more to do than we dream with the tone of our spiritual life. John was a child of nature. He had been brought up in the wilderness, living in the open air. Now he was in a close, foul dungeon. The confinement irked him and made him sick. No wonder he became depressed.

Then John was disappointed in the trend and course of the Messiahship of Jesus. When he spoke so confidently a little while ago, proclaiming that Jesus was the one who was to

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come, he was thinking of a Messiah who should carry the axe and go out with fire and fan. The Messiah he was expecting was to be a great conqueror. Instead of this, what he heard in his prison was of a most gentle and kindly man, who was everybody's friend, who would not set his foot even upon a worm, who allowed himself to be wronged and never resented nor retaliated. "Can this really be the Messiah?" he began to ask.

There probably was a personal element also in John's questioning. He had been the devoted friend of Jesus. Now John was lying in a dungeon, wearing chains, suffering unjustly, and Jesus outside was enjoying great popularity, and seemed to have utterly forgotten his old friend. Why did he not do something for John? Why did he not even come to see him in his prison, to give him cheer? "An Arctic explorer was once asked," says Dr. George Adam Smith, "whether, during the eight months of slow starvation which he and his comrades endured, they suffered much from the pangs of hunger. 'No,' he

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answered, 'we lost them in the sense of abandonment, in the feeling that our countrymen had forgotten us and were not coming to our relief!'" May there not have been some feeling like this in John's mind?

Some of us know how hard it is to pray and count on God's coming with help in some intolerable sorrow, and then not to have him come. From the old crusading days we have this pathetic story. A crusader returning from the Holy Land was seized by enemies and cast into prison. There he lay month after month, hoping that in some way relief might come to him. One day he heard the sounds of martial music, faint and far away, and his heart leaped with joy. The sounds came nearer and still nearer, and soon he caught the notes of old, familiar airs. Then, looking out through the grating of his cell window, he saw the flashing of spears. Closer the column came, and then, with wild emotion, he saw that it was a company of his own men, the same men with whom he had gone to the Holy Land. Right under his window they

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were passing — he saw their very faces and recognized them. He cried out to them, but the music drowned his cries, and they rode on and rode away, their banners passing out of sight, leaving him in hopelessness in his prison.

So it seemed with John in his dungeon. News of the beautiful things Jesus was doing outside came to his windows continually. He was working great miracles. “Will he not come this way?” the chafing lion in the dungeon cried. “Will he not come and take me out of this terrible prison?” But the music died out on the air, and he came not. As we think of this, we can understand why John began to ask questions about Jesus. “Is he really the Messiah, as I used to believe he was?”

Are we patient enough with doubt like John's? Somehow the religious world has always been most unforbearing toward any shadow of doubt, or even toward any questions concerning beliefs which seemed to indicate the least uncertainty. There are

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Christian men who are so impatient of even a child's mere request for light, as to drive the tender-hearted one, hungry for knowledge, back to the world, and almost to incurable skepticism. The Bible is the same in its teachings about God, age after age, but as men see more and more clearly its wonderful revealings, their opinions change, their views become truer. It is said that in the archives of an old church is preserved a manuscript sermon, preached by a clergyman who was pastor of the church for fifty years or more. At the bottom of the title page are the words, "All wrong," signed by the man who had preached the sermon. In thirty-three years the preacher's views upon the subject had undergone a radical change.

Jesus was not fulfilling John's idea of his Messiahship, and John began to wonder whether he was really the Messiah or not. The trouble was that John's early views of the manner of the Messiahship were wrong. There was nothing wrong with the course of the Messiahship — it was only with John's

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presuppositions concerning it. There are good people in these days whose opinions are different altogether from what they were in the past. There has been no change in the truth — only they understand it better now. There are people who, in circumstances of sorrow, almost begin to despair, because they think that God is not the loving Father they used to think he was. The trouble is, however, that they did not at first truly understand his Fatherhood. They did not see how continued pain could be love, how it could be in love that he allowed the suffering to go on unrelieved. Jesus said, “What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter.” We say that John had lost his faith; no, he did not yet understand the Messiahship of Jesus — that was all.

It is instructive to notice what John did with the doubts which arose in his mind. He did not nurse them and brood over them. That is the last thing to do with any doubts or questions. Some people nurse their suspicions of others until they have grown into

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utterly false beliefs concerning them. Some people nurse their jealousies until they become murderous thoughts and feelings. Some people nurse their misunderstandings of Christ and his way with them until they give up Christ altogether and say they cannot believe on him nor follow him longer.

The truest thing for you to do, if you have a friend who seems to have been unkind to you, is not to believe the things some whisperer has told you, or your own interpretation of the things you may think your friend has done; the only true thing to do is to go right to the friend with the matter which is troubling you. Then you will find, in ninety-nine cases in a hundred, that you have only misunderstood him. If to-day you are judging another, feeling that he is not loyal to you, if he seems to have slighted you or failed in tenderness or kindness to you, almost surely you are misjudging him. Do not nurse your feeling, nor let it grow into doubt or suspicion. Do not allow it to influence your relations with your friend, your treatment of him.

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Keep on loving and believing in him. Go to him and talk it over with him, and you will find that you have only misunderstood him.

What did Jesus say when the disciples of John came to him with their master's question? He did not blame John for his doubts. He did not say he was disloyal. He had no word of unkindly criticism. He did not treat John as if he had done something very wrong in seeking for light on his question. Christians who are older and have had wider experience in life, need to practise the utmost gentleness in dealing with younger or less experienced Christians. David in his old age said it was God's gentleness that had made him great. If God had been harsh or ungentle with him in his sins and faults, David never would have been saved. It was said of Jesus that he was so gentle he would not even break a bruised reed, nor quench a dying spark in the lamp wick. He would so help to restore the reed that it would grow into strength again; he would so shield the dying spark that it would live and become a flame. If Christ had re-

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buked John for his questions, we cannot tell what the effect on the discouraged man in his dungeon would have been.

The definite question which John sent to ask Jesus was, "Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?" Jesus gave no direct answer. Instead, he asked the men to stay during the day and see what he was doing, and then go back and report to John. This would be the best answer to his questions. The things the men saw were the true evidences of the Messiahship of Jesus. What are the evidences of Christianity to-day? May we not give the same answer that Jesus gave that day to John's disciples? "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up and the poor have good tidings preached to them." The work of love that is going on in the world is the greatest of all evidences of Christianity. The map of the world tells the story. The missionary map, with its patches of white and black, tells the story. Wherever the gospel goes, love

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goes, and the things that love does are the evidences. Christianity has built every hospital in the world, every asylum for the insane, every institution of charity, every orphanage, every home for the aged, for the blind, for crippled children. These are the real evidences of Christianity. Every sweet home where love dwells, where Christ's name is dear, where prayer is offered, is an evidence. Every Christian mother, with her children about her, is an evidence. Some one says: "There is no human force for good or ill equal to the talk of women. They have listeners who have all power in heaven and on earth, for women chiefly are the ones who talk to God and to little children." Every Christian home, with its teachings, its prayer, and its love, is a shining evidence that Christ is the Son of God.

John was perplexed about the Messiahship of Jesus. It seemed to him that things were not going right with him, that he ought not to have been left in prison if Jesus were really the Messiah. He learned, however, that noth-

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ing was really going wrong, that he was not being neglected. John's continued imprisonment was not in vain. His blood was not shed in vain. The air of the world has been purer ever since. There is no mistake made when your prayers for relief from trouble seem not to be answered — they are answered, though the answer is not the taking away of the trouble, but grace that you may bear it.

The way Jesus dealt with doubt is very interesting and suggestive. He was most patient with it. He pitied men's weaknesses. There are two kinds of doubting. One is skepticism, denial of the facts and truths about Christ and Christianity. The other is only inability to understand; merely questioning to learn. That was the doubt the Baptist had; that was the doubt Thomas had. Christ loves to have us come to him with our questions, our difficulties.

Things that Hurt Life

*"He kept his soul unspotted
As he went upon his way,
And he tried to do some service
For God's people day by day;
He had time to cheer the doubter
Who complained that hope was dead;
He had time to help the cripple
When the way was rough ahead;
He had time to guard the orphan, and one day, well
satisfied
With the talents God had given him, he closed his
eyes and died."*

IX

Things that Hurt Life



THE problem of Christian living is not to miss the struggle, suffering, or hardship, but to pass through life without being hurt by any of its experiences. One of the requirements of pure religion is "to keep one's self unspotted from the world." This does not mean that we are to keep ourselves out of the world's life, to flee away and hide in refuges and retreats, where the evil of the world will not touch us, but to stay where our duty is, to meet life as it comes to us, to face the battles with sin, the struggles and temptations which belong to our peculiar place, and yet not be hurt, not contract any stain, not carry away wounds and scars.

In everything in life Jesus Christ is our highest example. He solved this problem of living for us. He met hard and painful ex-

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periences, but never was harmed by any of them. He endured temptation, being tempted in all points like as we are, yet always without sin. He passed through the sorest testings that any one ever endured, but kept himself unspotted. He met enmity, growing out of envy, pride, selfishness; men hated him, conspired against him, watched him, persecuted him, sought to kill him.

The natural effect upon any man of such enmity, hatred, bitterness, and injustice is to make him grow suspicious, misanthropic, cold, resentful, revengeful. But Jesus was not affected in this way. He was beyond all such effects. He could not be insulted, — his nobility of character lifted him above the possibility of this. He was pained but not harmed by men's cruel words. He never became suspicious. His love never grew less gentle, less magnanimous, less kindly. Through all his three years of opposition, hatred, plotting, treachery, and wrong, he came with the heart of a little child. He passed on to the end unharmed in his own

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life. He was as patient, gentle, loving, and childlike the day he went to his cross, as he was the day the Spirit descended upon him like a dove. The little spring by the sea-side pours out its sweet waters through the salt sands. The tides roll over it and their brackish floods bury it for hours. But again it appears, and its waters are sweet and pure as ever. So it was with the heart of Jesus Christ. The world's enmity left no embittering in him. He loved men at the last as he had never loved them before.

This is the problem for every Christian life. It is possible to pass through this world's sorest temptations and not to be injured by them. It is possible for us, however, to be hurt, most sorely hurt, by such experiences. Sin always works injury. It is something one never altogether gets over. It may be forgiven — God loves to forgive unto the uttermost — but its marks and scars remain. When the bloom of the fruit has been touched, it never can be restored; when the rose has been crushed,

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it never can be made lovely again. So sin's hurt is irremediable. The secret we must learn is to pass through life with garments unsoiled.

There are special ways in which we may be harmed by the experiences of life. Nothing is more common than sorrow. Into every life it comes at one time or another. It comes sometimes as bereavement, taking away one who is dear, whose continued existence seems necessary to our happiness. Again it comes as a grief that hangs no crape on the door, wears no weeds of mourning, and does not break into the outward show of happiness, but which stays as a secret sorrow, without human sympathy or comfort. We usually suppose that sorrow brings always a blessing, that it always helps those who endure it, enriching the life, sweetening it, making it more beautiful. But this is not in every case true. Sorrow often harms people's lives. It does not always sweeten — sometimes it sours the spirit. It does not always soften — sometimes it hardens the heart.

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It does not always give peace and calmness — sometimes it makes one irritable, fretful, selfish, exacting. When we pass through sorrow, we need to be exceedingly careful lest we shall be hurt by it. We need the great Physician then — he only can heal wounded hearts so as to leave no scar.

There is a story of an Indian child who one day brought in from the field a hurt bird. The old chief asked the child where she had found the bird. "Among the wheat," was the answer. "Take it back," he said, "and lay it down just where you found it. If you keep it, it will die, but if you give it back to God, he can make it well again." It is with hurt hearts as it is with hurt birds. They belong to God, and only he can heal them. Human hands are clumsy and unskilful in comforting. If you have sorrow, let God be your heart's healer. No human hands can help, save those that God has trained into something of his own gentleness. When God comforts, there are no hurts remaining in the life, he is so gentle, so skilful.

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Another common experience in life is the wounding of love. Somebody does you a wrong, speaks unkindly of you, injures you in some way. It is natural for you to be angry, to say bitter words in return, to cherish resentful and unforgiving feelings against the person. You are in danger now of being hurt by the experience. The only safety in such a case lies in love — keeping love in your heart. Love says, “Forgive.” Nothing else can save your life from being seriously hurt. If you grow resentful and bitter, and refuse to forgive, you have inflicted upon yourself an injury which never can be undone.

The truth is that no one in the universe can really do actual harm to you but yourself. Others may treat you unjustly. They may take your hard-earned money from you and refuse to return it, may borrow and not repay. They may wrong you in some grievous way. They may falsely accuse you, and thus dim the whiteness of your name. They may injure you in your body, break your

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bones, kill you, but in none of these wrongs or injuries can they really touch you, yourself — the being that lives within you. St. Paul speaks of the outward man suffering decay, while the inward man is renewed day by day. Enemies may tear your flesh in pieces, but they cannot harm you. You will emerge with a broken and torn body, but with the spirit of a little child, if you have kept yourself in love, in peace, in purity, through all the hard experiences.

But if in meeting wrong you have let yourself grow bitter, if you have become angry, if you have allowed vindictiveness to enter your heart, if you have refused to forgive, do you not see that you have hurt yourself, have done grievous and irreparable harm to your own life? A man told the story of a great wrong which had been done to him by another, a wrong involving base treachery. It had been years before, but it was known that his noble life had been nobler ever since the wrong had been done, that he had been sweeter in spirit, that he had been richer in

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helpfulness and service, and that he had been in every way a better man, a greater blessing to others. When asked how it came that that great tragedy had not hurt his life, had not made him bitter, he said that he had kept love in his heart through it all. That was the secret, and that is the only secret of coming through life's wrongs, injustices, cruelties, and keeping one's self unspotted from the world, unhurt by its want of love, by its cruelty.

One wrote to a friend, telling how hard she had found it not to grow bitter toward a person who for years had made life very hard for her father. There is much injustice in the world. It is easy to grow bitter; yes, but think of the hurt the bitterness would bring upon your own life. Yet if you patiently endure the wrong and keep yourself unspotted, your heart unhardened, the experience has not made your life less beautiful. Get the blessing that is promised in the Beatitude for those who are persecuted.

Another of these perils in life comes from

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care. Perhaps no other mood is more common than worrying. Nearly everybody worries. A score of reasons against anxiety could be given, but one of the most serious of all is the harm it does the life. It hurts it deeply and irreparably. It writes fear and fret on the face, and blots out the freshness and the beauty. Worry makes you old before your time. It takes the zest out of your life. It quenches your joy. It makes all the world less bright for you. It destroys faith in God and robs you of the sweetness of your trust. It withers, wrinkles, and blotches your soul. You do not know how seriously and ruinously you are hurting your life, spoiling it, wasting its substance, destroying it, if you are letting care into your heart and allowing it to do its harmful work in your life.

“Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is . . . to keep one’s self unspotted from the world.” That is the problem of Christian life, — whatever the life may have of hardness, of wrong, of injustice,

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of struggle, of sorrow, — to keep the heart pure and sweet, at peace, filled with love through it all. The lesson is hard, you say. Yes, but not half so hard in the end as to have your life scarred, bruised, blotted, its possibilities of love atrophied, its gentleness petrified. There are people no more than middle-aged, who are incapable of any sweet joy, incapable of loving deeply, richly, ardently, incapable of enthusiasm in living and doing good, because they have become a prey to care, or have let themselves be hardened by bitter feelings.

Life is too sacred, too holy, with too many possibilities of beauty and happiness to be so mistreated, so perverted, so irremediably injured. How, then, can we keep our hearts unspotted from the evil of the world? The lesson is particularly for the young. Perhaps the old never can now learn it well, — it is too late, — but the young can do it, if they begin now, living with Christ, in his love, in his joy, in his companionship, in his obedience. God can keep your life

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hidden in the secret of his presence. Scientists tell us of the charmed life of frail things. The tiny flower that grows on the mountain crag is safer than the mountain itself. It bends and yields and remains unbroken, unbruised, in the wildest storms. Its frailness is its strength and its security. How frail our lives are in comparison with the great mountains and the mighty rocks! Yet we have a charmed existence. Our very weakness is our safety.

The superintendent of a hospital in Mexico, a hospital chiefly for workers on a new railroad, writes of her amazement over the way some persons are brought in hurt from accidents, with scarcely a trace of life remaining, and yet how life persists in them. She tells of one man with both arms torn away at the shoulders, of both limbs broken in two or three places, head cut and torn, body bruised, yet living and recovering. How frail we are, and yet what persistent life we have! God loves us and will shelter us from harm and will keep us from being destroyed, if only

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we will let our lives lie in his hands, trusting and obeying him. "We prevail by yielding, we succumb to conquer, like those sea flowers which continue to bloom amid the surf, where the rocks crumble." We have seen flowers growing sweet and fresh in the early spring days under the great snowdrifts. So God hides and protects the gentle lives of those who trust in him, in the very snow banks of trouble and trial which surround them. The least and feeblest of us can keep ourselves unspotted in the sorest perils, if we hide away under the shelter of the divine love.

The secret of coming through suffering and struggle unharmed is to learn that we must endure for the sake of others. It helps us to be strong when we know that others will be affected by our victory or defeat — helped when we endure nobly, harmed if we prove unfaithful. Some one writes: "We shall be glad, really glad of everything that has come to us, no matter if it be sorrow or pain, when we find that our experience fits some one's else need — that some one else

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can build on our lives.” It makes us strong to be true and pure and noble and worthy when we know others will be influenced by the way we stand the test. We dare not fail when others are depending on us.



Getting Away from Our Past

*“Not what we have, but what we use;
Not what we see, but what we choose —
These are the things that mar or bless
The sum of human happiness.*

*The things near by, not things afar;
Not what we seem, but what we are —
These are the things that make or break,
That give the heart its joy or ache.”*

X

Getting Away from Our Past



T. PAUL tells us that he made his progress in spiritual life by forgetting the things that were behind. Remembering is a favorite Bible word. Forgetting is not usually commended. There is peril in forgetting. Indeed we forget altogether too much. Yet there are certain things we must forget if we would make any progress in life. We must forget our mistakes. There are many of them, too, and some of us never get away from their influence. We often sigh, "Oh, if I had not done that foolish thing, if I had not let that bad companionship into my life, if I had not taken that bad advice, how much better my life would have been!" We fret over the mistakes we have made, the blunders of our lives, and yield to their disheartening influence. We think that we can never make

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anything of our life because of one pitiful mistake, one grievous sin; that we can never be a soldier because we have lost one battle; that we can never succeed in business because our first effort was a sad failure. These are things we should forget, not allowing them to check our onward life.

Some people carry the mistakes of all their years with them unto the end, and they hang like chains about them, so that they can make no progress. But this is a fearful waste of life. We grow by making mistakes. Think how many mistakes you made in learning to write, how many copybooks you spoiled before your penmanship became a credit to you! Think how many mistakes the artist makes before he is able to put a worthy picture on canvas, how many mistakes the musician makes before he is able to play a piece of music well! In every department of life there are years and years with little but mistakes, immaturities, blunders, while men and women

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are preparing for beautiful living and noble work. Forget your mistakes, leave them behind, let God take care of them, and go on to better things. Build a palace on your failures, making them part of the foundation.

We should forget the hurts we receive. Somebody did you harm last year. Somebody was unkind to you and left a wound. Forget these hurts. Do not remember them; do not cherish them, allowing them to rankle in your heart. The other day a man's hand was swollen and black, in serious danger of blood poisoning, all from a little splinter which in some way got into a finger and was permitted to stay there until it almost made necessary the amputation of the hand or arm, endangering the life. That is the way little hurts, when remembered, fester and make great distress, and sometimes produce even fatal results. Remember how Cain's envy was nursed and grew into fratricide. Jesus warned men against anger, saying it is murder, that is, the beginning of murder, a

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feeling which if cherished may ripen into actual crime.

There are people who grow jealous of others. First it is only a feeling of which they are ashamed. But they brood over it, think of it day and night, until it grows and at length fills their whole life, and becomes a hateful passion which spoils their days and possibly ends in some great wrong. How much wiser is the oyster! A tiny grain of sand gets under its shell and grinds and hurts and makes a sore. Instead, however, of letting it become an ugly wound, the oyster, by peculiar secretions, makes a pearl. That is what we may do with others' unlovingness or their faults, — change them into pearls of beauty in our character. If any one hurts you by an unkindness, forget it and let the wound be healed in love.

We should forget our past attainments, our successes and achievements. A writer tells of a man he had known for twenty-five years. The first time he saw him the man told of a certain good thing he had done

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many years before, — a really good thing which greatly helped a community. He had seen him occasionally ever since, and every time the man told him the same story of the fine thing he had done long ago. It was a really good story. The thing he did was worthy. But would it not have been better if he had forgotten that one excellent deed of the long ago in doing other better things a hundred times since? We should never regard any noble deed of ours as our best. We should never look back for the climax of our attainment or achievement. St. Paul was quite an old man when he wrote the words about forgetting past things, but he had forgotten all his past sacrifices and achievements, and was looking forward yet for better and higher work to do. However noble and useful your last year was, however good you were, however much you did for Christ and for your fellow-men, forget it all and set about making the next year the best ever you have lived.

We should forget our past sins. In one

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sense we cannot. They will not be forgotten. This ought to keep us humble and make us wary. We should never forget the peril of sin. But sin forgiven should be forgotten and left behind. That is, we should believe in the forgiveness of our sins which have been confessed and repented of. The other day one was speaking of an experience of over fifteen years back, — a sin, — and the black shadow still hung over his life, shutting out the sun and the blue of the sky, hiding the face of God and quenching all joy and hope. That is not the way Christ wants us to do with our sins. He came to save us from them, and when they are forgiven, he bids us go in peace. Put your repentance into songs of gratitude and joy and into new service. If one day has been spoiled by sin, do not spoil another day by grieving over it. Forget your past sins in holy and beautiful living.

We should forget our sorrows. It is not easy. The empty chairs remind us always of those who used to sit on them. The loneli-

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ness stays, and it takes wise and diligent watchfulness not to allow a sadness to wrap itself about us like sackcloth, or to enter into us like an atmosphere and darken our life. But God does not want our sorrows to hurt us, so as to mar our joy and beauty. He wants them to become a blessing to us, to soften our hearts and enrich our character. He wants us always to remember the friends who have been so much to us and have gone from us, but to forget the griefs in the joy of divine comfort. A lost sorrow is one of earth's sorest losses. Every grief should leave a blessing.

These are suggestions of St. Paul's secret of noble life,—forgetting things that are behind. We should never leave behind or throw away, however, anything that is good and lovely. We are to keep all our treasures of experience. All the good impressions, influences, lessons, and inspirations that we receive, we are to cherish. We should hold fast every good thing that comes to us. Not a good thing that is ever ours should we

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lose. A writer says, "I desire no future that shall break the ties of the past." What a serious loss it would be if there were no remembering, if we could not keep ever as our own the joys, the delights, the precious things of the past! We do not begin to know what treasures we may lay up for ourselves if we live always beautifully and have only sweet and sacred memories. "Make yourselves nests of pleasant thoughts," says Ruskin. "None of us yet know, for none of us have been taught in early youth, what fairy palaces we may build of beautiful thoughts, proof against all adversity, — bright fancies, satisfied memories, noble histories, faithful sayings, treasure-houses of precious and restful thoughts, which care cannot disturb, nor pain make gloomy, nor poverty take away from us — houses built without hands, for our souls to live in."

We should keep all that will enrich our character, that will sweeten our memory, that will make music in our hearts in the after years, but things that will vex us and

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worry us as we think of them we are to forget.

“Let us forget the things that vexed and tried us,
The worrying things that caused our souls to fret;
The hopes that, cherished long, were still denied us
Let us forget.

“Let us forget the little slights that pained us,
The greater wrongs that rankle sometimes yet;
The pride with which some lofty one disdained us
Let us forget.

“Let us forget our brother's fault and failing,
The yielding to temptations that beset,
That he perchance, though grief be unavailing,
Cannot forget.

“But blessings manifold, past all deserving,
Kind words and helpful deeds, a countless throng,
The fault o'ercome, the rectitude unswerving,
Let us remember long.

“The sacrifice of love, the generous giving,
When friends were few, the handclasp warm and strong,
The fragrance of each life of holy living,
Let us remember long.

“Whatever things were good and true and gracious,
Whate'er of right has triumphed over wrong,
What love of God or man has rendered precious,
Let us remember long.”

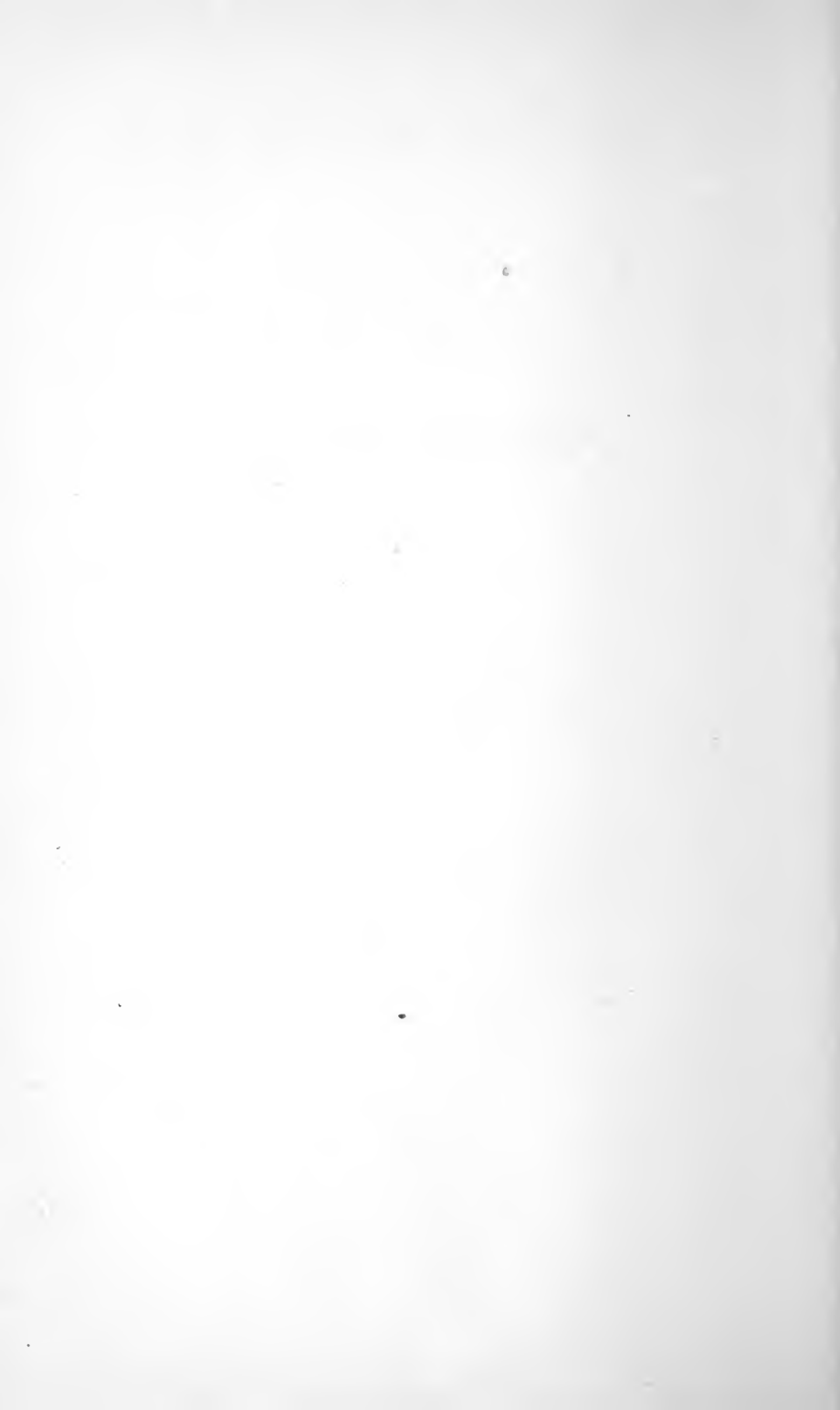
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We are to win the high altitudes in life by leaving and forgetting the things that are behind. Oh, if we could only get away from our past! It holds us in chains. It enmeshes us, so that we cannot get disentangled from it. "Remember Lot's wife," how the poor woman could not get free from her past, how it dragged her back when the angels were trying to rescue and save her, so that she was whelmed in the salt tide and perished.

Many people are lost by clinging to their past. They have allowed it to be unworthy. When Cardinal Mazarin was near to death, it is said a courtier in his palace saw him walking about the great halls of his palace, gazing on the magnificent pictures, the statuary, and works of art. "Must I leave it all? Must I leave it all?" he was heard to murmur despairingly. These were his treasures, the accumulation of a long life of wealth and power. These were the things he had lived for, and they were things he could not take with him. He must leave

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them to the moth and rust. We must beware of our earthly entanglements. We should forget the things of the past by having our hearts filled with the glory of things to come.



Thomas's Mistake

*A wasted day! no song of praise
Wells up from depths of grateful heart,
Yet others long to hear our lays,
The souls that dwell in gloom apart.*

*A wasted day! no kindly deed;
No cup of water, cool and sweet,
We bear to other souls in need,
Nor lead some pilgrim's straying feet.*

*A wasted day! no victory won,
The sword lies idle in its sheath,
If deeds of valor be undone,
How can we wear the conqueror's wreath?*

XI

Thomas's Mistake



THOMAS was not with the other apostles when Jesus appeared to them the evening of the Resurrection. Through his absence he missed the revealing of Jesus when he came that night and stood in the midst of the little company alive, and showed them his hands. The other apostles went out from the room with hearts full of joy. They had their Friend again. We have no record of what happened that week, but we are sure they were wondrously glad. A pastor tells of one who came to him with a great spiritual burden and whom he helped and led out into the light. The person said, "I have seemed to be walking on air all the week." This must have been the experience of these apostles after Jesus had appeared to them that night. But think of Thomas all that week. He had missed see-

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ing the risen Jesus. His sorrow was uncom-forted. There were no songs in his heart.

Do not many people have the same experience? Have you thought what you may miss any time you are absent from a religious service? There is a story of a colored man in the South who walked several miles to his church, and never failed to attend. One week he was noticed by a white neighbor trudging every evening through rain and slush to his meeting. "Why do you go so far to church these stormy nights? I should think you would stay at home when the weather is so bad." The old man took off his hat in the cold rain, and said with deep reverence, "You see, we are praying in our church for a blessing, and I would not dare to stay away for one night, for that might be the very night the blessing we are seeking would come, and if I were not there I should miss it."

Church services are God's appointments. Christ asks his people to meet him. He always keeps his appointments, and comes with

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a blessing. If we do not keep our appointments with him, we shall miss the good, the cheer, the help we need, and which he came to bring to us.

Thomas was not with the disciples when Jesus came. Those who came saw the risen Lord and received his benediction. A great joy came into their hearts. But Thomas missed all this blessing. We do not know what divine message may come to the worshippers in our accustomed place of worship any Sunday morning. You may be in sorrow. The word that day may be a word of comfort, just the word your heart needs. Those who hear it thank God and go away with a song; but you, sitting in your home, nursing your grief, brooding over it, miss the message and go into another week unhelped, to walk all the days through gloom and shadow.

You are a young person, discontented, unhappy, not knowing what to do with your life. You did not feel like going to church, so you were not there. That day the preacher spoke of life's meaning and purpose, — every life

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a plan of God, — and showed with unusual plainness and clearness how to live so as to fulfil the divine plan for it. He answered the very question your heart was asking. But you were not at the service and you missed the lesson which might have changed the course of all your after life.

You were greatly discouraged because of the hardness of the way. The week had been a difficult one, — things had gone wrong, you had not done well in business, there had been tangles and misunderstandings in your friendships. Saturday you were sick at heart. Sunday you were in gloomy mood and did not attend church. The service was an especially uplifting one, telling of God's love, full of cheer, encouragement, and impulses to joy. If you had been present, you would have been greatly helped by the services, the prayers, the Scriptures, the hymns, the sermon — toward gladness and victoriousness; you would have lost your discouragement in new spiritual courage, your weariness in magnificent enthusiasm. Others who were

Thomas's Mistake

present that morning carried away with them thoughts and inspirations which made all the week glad. But you, hiding away in your self-pity or your disheartenment, missed the message and the blessing, the kindling of hope and joy, and went into another week of weary struggle and toil unhelped.

Thomas's mistake was that his gloom kept him from being present that night with the other apostles. Many people yield to discouragement, and discouragement hurts their lives. Discouragement is a sort of mental and spiritual malaria. It poisons the blood. Much of certain forms of sickness is only discouragement darkening the sky, putting out the stars, quenching all joy and hope. It was discouragement which kept Thomas away from the meeting with the apostles that night. We see how that mistake almost wrecked everything for him. If Jesus had not been so marvellously patient with his gloomy, doubting disciple, giving him a second chance a week later, Thomas would never have recovered himself and got back into the

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apostolic family. But if he had been present at the meeting, he would have seen Jesus when the others did, and his discouragement would have been changed into faith, hope, and joy.

We should lose no chance to see Christ. We should seek the places where he is most likely to come; we should be ready to hear every word that might reveal him. We should keep ourselves always in the light of the truth, in the shining of God's face. Christ is always coming to show us his hands with the print of the nails, to prove to us that God loves us. If we are always present when he comes, we shall never miss the blessing which he brings, and our lives will always be full of gladness. But the trouble with too many of us is that we are not present when he comes. He comes continually in manifold ways. He comes in every flower that blooms, in every blade of grass that waves in the breeze, in every bird that sings, in every beautiful thing that grows. He comes in the sweet love of your home, in the laugh of your little child, in the kindness of your friend. He comes in

Thomas's Mistake

all the blessings of the church, in the holy places of prayer.

A good man said that the evening family worship had saved his home and its love. The days were full of little frictions and irritations. He was a man of quick temper and hasty speech, and often was the home music jangled. The close of the day was unhappy. But the evening prayer set all things right again. The father and mother knelt, side by side, with their little children, and as they prayed, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," they were drawn close together again in love. The little strifes were healed, and their wedded joy was saved. The sun was not allowed to go down upon their differences. This is one of the blessings of family prayer. Christ comes and appears to us alive beside the sacred home altar and shows us his hands and speaks his word of peace.

In every part of true home life Christ is always coming in little kindly, beautiful ways. In all pure friendships he comes continually with words and acts of cheer. Human kind-

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ness is simply God revealing himself, Christ showing his hands. The world and all life are full of lovely things. In the darkest gorges among the mountains men find lovely little flowers blooming, which brighten the ruggedness; so the tender things of divine grace make beautiful the most painful experiences.

All this is meant to keep our lives cheerful. The joy is to dispel the sorrow. The sweetness is to overcome the bitterness. Jesus comes in a thousand ways, with cheer and comfort, to make us brave and strong, to keep us from despair. But how often do we miss the beautiful things, the pleasure, the happiness, the comfort that God sends to us. We always find the thorns, but we do not always see the roses. We feel the pangs, the sufferings, but do not get the pleasure, the joy, the cheer. We miss seeing Jesus when he appears alive, shows his hands, and speaks his words of peace, but we always see the cross, the grave, the darkness.

Shall we not learn the lesson which Thomas

Thomas's Mistake

had not learned and avoid making the mistake he made? Life is full of opportunities of blessing, but too often we miss them. Shall we not learn to accept them every one? The room was chill and uncomfortable, for it was midwinter. Presently a beam of sunlight stole in through a crack in the shutter, and fell in a patch of brightness on the floor. The little dog had been lying in the cold and gloom. But the moment he saw a spot of sunshine on the carpet he got up and walked over to it and lay down in it. The dog teaches us a lesson. Wherever we see a spot of light in the darkness of our condition or circumstances, let us hasten to it and appropriate it. Whenever we find a comfort or a pleasure, however it may have come to us, let us accept it. Whenever there is any beautiful thing along our path, it is for us, it was put there expressly for us; let us take it into our heart and enjoy it as we go on our way.

Let us miss no opportunity to be where Christ may be, to stand where he may pass

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by, to go where he may come. The mistake of Thomas was that in his gloom and discouragement he was not in the company of the apostles that night. He lost the opportunity of seeing the Lord living and of having his doubts and griefs swept away by the light of faith and love. Many of us continually miss opportunities of gladness and beauty. We nurse our sorrows and turn not our faces toward the comforts of God. We stay in our little dark rooms with the shutters closed, and go not out into the blessed sunlight. We are not as happy Christians as we ought to be. We miss blessings we might enjoy. We live in the mists and fogs of the valley, when we might be dwelling on the clear mountain tops. We neglect opportunities of receiving divine revealings, and then say we cannot believe. Let us open our hearts to the beauty and grace of Christ, however it may come to us. Then we shall have no more doubts and fears, but shall find light and joy everywhere.

Friends and Friendship

*I shut my casement 'gainst the murky night.
The morning dawned. The world was bathed in
light.*

*So, bent to shield my heart from pain and grief,
I lost the joy that comes from pain's relief.*

RICHARD S. HOLMES.

XII

Friends and Friendship



THE need of friendship is the deepest need of life. Every heart cries out for it. Jesus was the perfect Man, also divine, and he needed friends, craved friendship, and was disappointed when his friends failed him. Perhaps no shortcoming in good men and women is more common than the failure to be ideal friends. Too many follow their impulses only. To-day they are devoted in their friendship and in their expression of friendship; to-morrow something happens and they forget their ardor and abandon their friendship.

There is no limit to the extent and devotion of true friendship. Peter thought if he would forgive seven wrongs and still keep on loving, he would do well. But Jesus said, — not seven times, but seventy times seven. The

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love of a friend should never be worn out.
“A friend loveth at all times.”

Many times, however, friendship balks and fails. So long as it is easy to do the things that need to be done, there is no wincing, no reluctance. You have only to entertain your friend, and he is genial and courteous. He never imposes on your kindness. He does not exact hard service, nor take your time needlessly. He does not expect you to go out of your way to do things for him. Indeed, he is so thoughtful and pleasant that you are delighted to entertain him. But the case may be different. For instance, he is not a pleasant person to have with you. He expects a great deal of attention. The friendship becomes burdensome. What shall we do? Here is the test, — “A friend loveth at all times.” That is, your friendship does not fail when there is a call for large service, costly help, painful self-denial. Friendship requires us to turn aside from our own pursuits, if necessary, to oblige another who needs our service. The friend is willing to give up his own plans, drop his own

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work, and at great inconvenience go with his friends to help them. This is the law of service. The friend who loveth at all times must be ready to do for his friend whatever the friend needs, perhaps whatever he demands, as far as it is in his power, not considering the cost. If asked to go one mile, he goes two.

The proverb reminds us also that a friend is "born for adversity." The very heart of friendship implies this. Friendship is not merely for times of trouble, — it is for bright days too. We need our friend's cheer in our happiest hours. "At all times" includes the sunny days. But it is for our days of adversity that our friend is born. Then it is that we need him most, and then it is that the richest and best of his love for us reveals itself. Adversity tests him. He may never have had an opportunity to do anything for you when all things were going well with you. There was no need in your life then to appeal to his sympathy. He was your friend, and shared with you the sweetness of his love, but the

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depths of his heart were not stirred. Then one day trouble came to you, — sickness, sorrow, loss, or danger, perhaps dishonor. Instantly his love grew stronger. Its grip tightened. Its loyalty strengthened. The best that was in it came out. You never knew before that he loved you so much. All he had was yours, for whatever service he could render to you.

This is the test of friendship. Is it equal to the day of adversity? Does it shine out all the more brightly, the darker the night grows? Does your love become deeper, stronger, more ready for service and sacrifice, the greater your friend's need? It may be physical need, or it may be need of a mental or spiritual kind. Your friend may have fallen into temptation, and there is a shadow on his name. What should your friendship do then? "A friend loveth at all times; and a brother is born for adversity."

"His lamps are we,
To shine where he shall say,
And lamps are not for sunny rooms,
Nor for the light of day,

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But for the dark places of the earth,
Where shame and wrong and crime have birth;
Or for the murky twilight gray,
Where wandering sheep have gone astray;
Or where the light of faith grows dim,
And souls are groping after him;
And as sometimes a flame we find
Clear shining through the night —
So bright we do not see the lamp,
But only see the light,
So we may shine — his light the flame,
That men may glorify his name."

What are some of the ways in which friendship should reveal itself? It should not help unwisely; it should not overhelp. One of the truest words Emerson spoke concerning friendship is this, — "This is the office of a friend, to make us do what we can." At no point is there greater need for giving firm, urgent counsel to those who would be true friends than just here. In the warmth of your love you are apt to think that it never can be possible to be too kind. Yet true kindness is wise as well as tender. It must know how to restrain itself. You could do no greater harm to your friend than to teach him to be selfish, or to make him weak by an

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excess of help to him when his burden is heavy. Your highest duty to him is to make him unselfish. You are also to make him strong, self-reliant, and self-dependent. You are to bring out in him all the best and manliest qualities. This you never can do by coddling, petting, and babying.

A distinguished botanist, exiled from his native country, found a position as under-gardener on a nobleman's estate. While he was there, his master received a rare plant with which no one on the estate was familiar. The head gardener, supposing it to be a tropical plant, put it in the hothouse to protect it from the winter's cold. He thought the plant needed warmth. It did not thrive, however, — indeed, it began to droop. The new under-gardener, knowing the plant, its native place, and its nature, said: "This is an arctic plant. You are killing it by the tropical atmosphere into which you have introduced it." He took the plant out into the frost, and to the amazement of the gardener piled ice about it. Soon it began to recover its freshness and

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vigor, and its drooping life became vigorous and strong. It was being killed by summer heat when what it needed was the cold of winter.

Friendship makes the same mistake with many lives. It coddles them, indulges them, treats them softly, with over-kindness. It tries to make all things easy for them, instead of making strong, brave men of them. This is a mistake that is made by many parents in dealing with their children. They try to save them from all hardness, from self-denial, from work and struggle. They bring them up in hothouses, not knowing that they are arctic plants, and need the snow and ice about them instead of the warm air of the conservatory.

One finds the same mistake made sometimes in the way young wives try to bring up their husbands. They pamper them and coddle them, instead of helping to make stalwart men of them. Too many wives do not think of the higher moral good of their husbands. "And often a man who starts with a great many

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lofty and disinterested aspirations, deteriorates year by year in a deplorable manner under the influence of a sufficiently well-meaning and personally conscientious wife.” A young wife will prove her husband’s best friend by trying to make him do his best, do what he can, become a man of heroic mould, a self-denying man. Every true wife wants her husband to take an honored place among men, to become a useful, influential man in his community, and to do something, in however lowly way, to make one spot of the earth brighter, better, more wholesome. The only way she can be that sort of a friend to him is to be his inspirer, finding the best in him, and calling it out. This she can never do by pampering and by holding him back from hard work, from heroic struggle, from noble sacrifice. She is his best friend when she makes him do what he can.

The lesson applies to all friendships. If you are a friend who loves at all times, you will seek always to be an inspiration to every one in whom you are interested. You will

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ever be an encourager, never a discourager. That is the kind of Friend Christ is to all. He is ever calling us to something better, nobler, worthier, and truer. He does not tell us we are worms of the dust, as some of our hymns make us say we are, — he tells us we are children of God, heirs of glory, immortal beings, and calls us to live worthily. We should be such friends to men that we shall ever be striving to make them do what they can.

The culture of friendship is most important. No friendship begins perfect. At first it is very imperfect. It is like the sculptor's block of unhewn marble. The angel is in the block, but it has yet to be dug out and polished into perfect beauty. No truest friendship which men admire ever has reached its perfect attainment easily, without struggle, without self-repression and much painful discipline. We all start with a large measure of selfishness in our nature, and this must be mastered, extinguished, for no selfish man can be a worthy friend.

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We must practise the Beatitudes, — humility, meekness, hunger for righteousness, mercifulness, purity of heart, the peace-making spirit. We must practise the Thirteenth of First Corinthians. A student in the Academy may master all the principles of art, but until he has practised art and acquired the technique and is able to put his beautiful conceptions on the canvas, he is not an artist. A music student may study the principles of music till he knows them all, but until he has learned to sing or play, he is not a musician. So one may know all the maxims and rules of friendship, but if he has not practised being a friend, he is not yet a friend, and may fail in some of the most important qualities of friendship, — patience, kindness, gentleness, thoughtfulness.

The matter of expression is also important. It is important in music. It is important in speech. It is important in friendship. Many people love, but they do not show their love in delicate and fitting ways. Many homes are loving in a sense, but lack the fine

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and gentle expression of love which would transform them into places of almost heavenly happiness. A writer says: "When we look on this life from the heights of the heavenly world, we shall marvel that the dearest friends who would have died for one another, if need be, should consent to give each other so much pain with their little unkindnesses. How strange it will all seem then that we were so exacting in matters so unimportant; that we were so careless of the sensitive places in a fond heart and touched them so roughly; that we were so ready to answer an impatient word with a more impatient one; that we were so forgetful of the little ministries of love that are worth so much more when unsolicited."

Nothing in this world is more important than learning to live the friendly life. It is the highest reach in Christian living. The young people who are going together these days, talking about friendship, beginning to taste of its sweetness and dream of its richness, should learn well what friendship means.

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“A friend loveth at all times” — suffers long and is kind, envies not, does not act unbecomingly, is not provoked, seeks not his own, is patient, trusts, serves to the uttermost. We all need friends, but we must put first being a friend, and in this our hearts will be marvellously fed with friendship’s best bread. In blessing others we shall be blessed ourselves.

We must not forget that the only friendship which will fully meet any of life’s deepest needs is friendship with Christ. You may have all the joy and help of the sweetest human friendships, but if you have not Christ’s friendship, you still lack that which is essential, that without which you never can know perfect peace. Thomas à Kempis says, “Love him and keep him for thy Friend, who, when all go away, will not forsake thee, or suffer thee to perish at the last.”

The Poke and the School

*Just a little every day,
That's the way!
Children learn to read and write
Bit by bit and mite by mite;
Never any one, I say,
Leaps to knowledge and its power;
Slowly — slowly — hour by hour,
That's the way!
Just a little every day.*

XIII

The Poke and the School



VERY heart longs for rest and seeks it. The world cannot give it. It is not found in the paths of pleasure; pleasure's flowers have thorns among them. It is not found in honor's rewards; men chase fame, but when they seek to clasp it, it is only a bubble which bursts in their hands. It brings no rest. Money is one of the coveted prizes in this world. If only they can gather and amass money, they will be happy, men think. Money will supply all their wants. It will build palaces and fill them with the splendors of art. It will gather from all lands the luxuries that will load their tables and leave nothing to be desired by the daintiest appetites. Money seems to be able to meet all human needs. But there are some things which money cannot supply. It cannot give rest to the human

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soul, cannot quiet the conscience and impart peace to a heart. Nothing earthly can. Then Jesus says to the whole race of men, to all weary ones, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Then he says again, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls." It is important that we understand just how this prize of peace can be got.

First of all, we must come to Christ. There he stands, looking with love and compassion upon the whole world, with its needs, its sorrows, and its sin, inviting all to come to him. He is the Friend of friends. He is not a tyrant, to make gain of men; he comes to help them, to comfort them in their sorrows, to enrich them in all noble ways, to lead them into the best possibilities of character.

To come to Christ means to accept him as our Friend, to come into companionship with him, to take all the good he would give. We know what it is to come to a friend. We trust him, we love him, we give ourselves to him. A young girl hears the invitation and

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wooing of love, and she comes to the man who offers her his affection, believes in him, confides in him, entrusts the happiness of her life to him, and becomes his. This is like what it is to come to Christ. This is the first thing in becoming a Christian.

The next thing is to take Christ's yoke upon us. Yoke is not an attractive word. In the olden days it meant subjection. A captive nation came under the yoke of the nation conquering it. Christ speaks to those who come to him as taking his yoke upon them. This means voluntary acceptance of Christ as Master. He never compels us to become his, to be his friends, to do his will. We must take our place willingly with him. He has no slaves among his followers. They must offer themselves freely.

Jesus says that his yoke is easy. We do not usually think of any yoke as easy. Submission to any one is not to our mind. We like to be our own master. We do not like to be anybody's slave. Yet the yoke of Christ, he says, is easy. He means, for one

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thing, that he does not lay any unnecessary burden upon those who take his yoke. He is not a cruel master. He does not exact more than is right. He is very patient with our weakness. He sympathizes with our infirmities. He knows how frail we are; he remembers that we are dust. His commandment is not grievous.

The weight or comfort of a yoke depends much upon our feeling toward the master we serve. It irks you and makes you chafe to serve one you dislike, but love makes any yoke easy. An old man, used to working with oxen, told the minister he could have helped him with his sermon. Then he said: "Jesus meant that his yoke fits well. It is made to suit the neck, so as not to hurt it." A badly fitting shoe hurts the foot. A yoke which is rough or badly shaped is not easy,—it chafes. An easy yoke is one that suits the neck, that causes no friction. The yoke of Christ is easy because it suits the soul. It is natural to accept it and wear it. Sin is not natural. It means missing the mark.

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Sin is failure. It is violation of law. Obedience is natural; disobedience hurts, jars, breaks the harmony, interrupts the peace. The yoke of Christ, as God made it, fits the soul. Hence it is easy, brings happiness, gives peace to the conscience. "The soul of man was made for God and never finds rest until it rests in God." We talk about God as the home of the soul. We never are really at home until we accept God's will; but when we do this, we soon begin to find joy, peace, and comfort in it. There is no truly happy life but the Christian's. The reason some Christians do not appear happy is because they do not really take the yoke of Christ. They do not love to obey. They do not completely give themselves up to Christ. They do not absolutely trust their lives, their affairs, to him. If we truly take Christ's yoke upon us, we shall find it a yoke of love and it will give rest to our souls.

Then we are to enter Christ's school. "Learn of me," is the word. We begin as little children in the lowest grades. The cur-

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riculum of this school includes the whole line of study, from the merest beginnings until we reach perfection. Christian life is not something we attain in fulness at once, that we finish in a single act. At first it is only a decision, a choice, a determination. We then have everything to learn. We enter the school at the lowest grade. For example, the whole of Christian duty is love. Love is the fulfilling of the law. Jesus said we should be known to the world by our love one to another. Because our natures are jangled and perverted by sin, we are naturally selfish, envious, jealous, unforgiving, uncharitable. It is not natural for us, with our evil hearts, to be kind to those who are unkind to us, to return good for evil, to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us. Therefore the whole wonderful lesson of love has to be learned. And we will not master it in a day — it will take all our life.

There is something very interesting in thinking of life as a school. There will come to you to-morrow a sharp temptation. When

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God permits it, he does not mean that you shall be overcome by it, that you shall sin. Neither does he want to make life hard with struggle for you — he wants you to learn to meet and endure temptation victoriously. He wants you to become strong, and you can be made strong only by exercise. One cannot become a brave and skilful soldier by studying drill books — he must enter the battle. Jesus himself learned to be victorious in temptation by experience. Every temptation is a lesson set for you; it is an opportunity to grow. It is a part of the school of life.

A new duty comes to your hand, something you have never had to do before, — a new task, a new responsibility. God is setting you a new lesson. The first baby came the other day to the home of two young people. They are very happy, but happiness is not all. They have a new lesson set for them now, one they never have had before, — fatherhood, motherhood. The Christian virtues are lessons set for us to learn. They

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are not put into our hearts full grown, when we first become Christians; we have to learn them as lessons. St. Paul said he had learned contentment, and he seems to have been a good many years at it. In the same way we all have to learn patience; patience does not come natural to any of us. So meekness is a lesson to be learned. To be meek is to be gentle, mild of temper, self-controlled, not easily provoked, overcoming evil with good. Browning has it —

He feels he has a fist, then folds his arms
Crosswise, and makes up his mind to be meek.

We have to learn meekness, and it takes most of us a long while. Forgiveness is a lesson. We are taught to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Perhaps some of us have been conning the lesson for many years and have not yet got it well learned. We have to learn unselfishness. Probably this is one of the hardest lessons in our whole course. Selfishness is ingrained in the very fibre of our nature.

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We know how it persists, how it keeps coming up again and again at every point, no matter how you think you have it vanquished. It is very hard to forget self in our contacts with others, to honor the other person, to take cheerfully for ourself the second place, to deny ourself, that the other person may have the better portion. Unselfishness is a very long and hard lesson, and one of the latest of Christian life's lessons to be mastered, but it is one we must learn if we are ever to be a beautiful Christian.

The same is true of all the sweet details of love. We are to be kindly affectioned. We are to be thoughtful and gracious. We are to love people that are disagreeable. That is, we are to be gentle to them, patient with them. We are to serve them if they need our service, to relieve them if they are in distress. We are to be kind to those who are unkind to us. We are to go miles to do some gentle deed to one who has treated us ungently. These are all lessons in Christ's school.

"I never can learn these lessons," says

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one. "If that is required in being a Christian, I must give it all up. I never can cease to be jealous; I never can be kind to one I despise; I never can pray for one who does me an injury; I never can return good for evil." Not to-day perhaps, but perfection cannot be reached at once; it is the attainment of all one's years. We have to begin with little more at first than a desire to be kind, gentle, patient, a desire growing into a decision. You are a Christian the moment you really begin to learn, but a Christian only in the lowest forms. Then you are to continue in the school, learning every day, until at last you are graduated and receive your diploma and your degree.

There is comfort in the form of the Master's words. His life is our lesson-book. "Learn of me," he says. Every lesson was perfectly learned and practised by him, in his own actual experience. Patience, humility, meekness, gentleness, kindness, unselfishness — he learned them all, learned them just as we have to learn them. They did

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not come to him in a miraculous way. Being with him, living with him, we shall see every lesson mastered and perfectly lived out in his life.

Then "Learn of me" means also that Christ himself is our great Teacher. And he is a wonderfully patient Teacher. He never chides us for our slowness and dulness in learning. Nor is that all — he helps us with our lessons. Other teachers can do little more than set the lessons for us, and then encourage and inspire us, but our great Teacher can do more. He can give us skill and will even help us, will do the work for us or with us, when the lesson is hard. One tells of an artist's pupil who tried his best to paint his picture, but could not do it well. After trying hard he grew discouraged and weary, and then sank to sleep beside his easel. While he slept the master came, and seeing the boy sleeping, and knowing he had done his best and was disheartened, he took the brush from his limp hand and completed the picture for him in most beautiful way. That

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is the way our Teacher does with us. When we have done our best, he takes our poor picture and finishes it for us.

Let no one ever be discouraged in the school of Christ. Let no one ever say he cannot learn the great and hard lessons of Christian life. We never can, — alone. We cannot even make one hair of our head black or white ourself. We cannot give up our jealousy, our envy, our bitterness, our selfishness, and put sweetness, generosity, kindness, and love in their place, — we cannot alone. But Christ and we can, and that is the lesson.

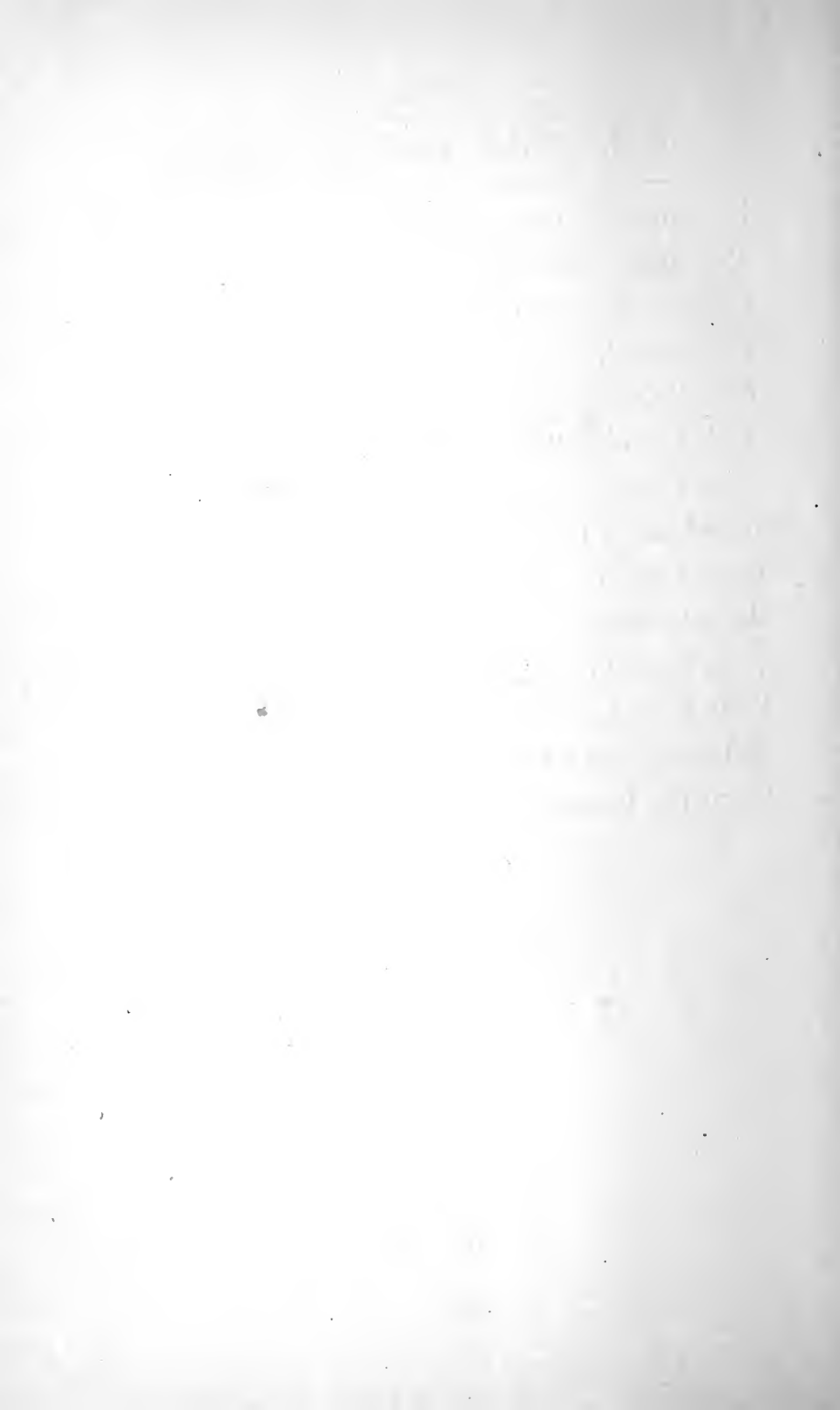
We are told that love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness — the very things it is said we must learn as lessons — are the fruit of the Holy Spirit. That is, the Holy Spirit alone can produce these graces in us. You cannot make yourself loving — it is the Spirit's work in you. Let the Spirit into your heart, give him charge of your life, and he will produce all these new and beautiful graces in you.

We have seen also that the first thing in

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becoming a Christian is to come to Christ. We come into his companionship, we live together, henceforth, — our Lord and we. Being with a lovely human friend transforms our life, makes it like our friend's life. Being with Christ will transform us into his beauty.

Let no one then say it is impossible for him to become a Christian, to learn the things that Christ wants us to learn. In Christ you can do all things. Enter Christ's school, therefore, join his classes, and let him teach you, help you, transform your life, and then you will grow into his loveliness. Then you can learn the lessons.



The Weak Brother

*If any word of mine has caused one tear
From other eyes to flow;
If I have caused one shadow to appear
On any face I know;
If but one thoughtless word of mine has stung
Some loving heart to-day;
Or if the word I've left unsaid has wrung
A single sigh, I pray
Thou tender heart of Love, forgive the sin.
Help me to keep in mind
That if at last I would thy "well done" win,
In word as well as deed I must be kind!*

XIV

The Weak Brother



T. PAUL had a good deal to say about the weak brother. The substance of his teaching is that those who are strong ought to be careful not to harm him who is weak in any way. They should be willing for his sake to make sacrifices of personal rights and privileges. We must modify and adjust our own life to bring it down to the level of the weak brother. We may not ignore him in the asserting of our own liberty. The great ship in the channel may not go ploughing on its way with no regard for the smaller ships pursuing their course in the same channel. The great man in pursuing his course must think of the little men that are in his way. We may not live for ourselves alone. If you are one in a company of men travelling together, and are strong and swift-footed, you

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may not set the pace for the party; you must hold your strength in restraint and accommodate your speed to the weak and slow-stepping members. The strong must help the weak, must be gentle toward them, patient with them.

A little story poem tells of a race. A number of runners were on the course. There was one who at first seemed destined to outstrip all the others. The way was long, and the goal far away. Still the favorite kept in the lead. But those who were watching the race saw this man stop by and by to lift up a little child that had fallen in the way and take it out of danger. A little later, a comrade fainted and he turned aside to help him. A woman appeared, frail and inexperienced, and he lingered to help her find the way. The watchers saw the favorite again and again leave his race to comfort, cheer, or help those who were in distress or peril. Meanwhile he lost his lead, and others passed him; and when the winners reached the goal he was far behind. He did not re-

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ceive the prize for the race, but the real honor was his. Love had ruled his course, and the blessing of many helped by him was his. The only true monument any one can have is built of love. John Vance Cheney writes in "The Century":

If so men's memories not thy monument be,
Thou shalt have none. Warm hearts, and not cold
stone,

Must mark thy grave, or thou shalt lie unknown.
Marbles keep not themselves; how then keep thee?

There are men of ambition who harden their hearts against every appeal of human weakness, frailty, or suffering. They pay no heed to the needs that come before their eyes. They never turn away from their strenuous course to help a brother. They run their business on lines of strict justice, perhaps, but justice untempered by love or mercy. They demand always their pound of flesh. They put no kindness into their dealings. They pay small wages and exact the utmost of toil and service. They never turn aside to help a fainting one. They tell

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you there is no place for sentiment in business. They reach their goal — they become rich and great, but they have crushed the weak under their feet. There are other men who turn aside continually to help the feeble and the fainting, to be a comfort to the weak. They may not get along so well in the competition for power, money, or fame, but no weak brother perishes through their ambition; no sufferer is left unhelped because they have not time to answer his cries. They leave no wreckage of little boats behind them in the water as they move on their course.

There are a great many weak brothers in the world. There are those who are physically weak. Some are lame. Some have feeble health. Some suffer from the infirmities of age. What is the duty of the strong to the weak? Should they hold themselves aloof and refuse to accept any burden, care, interest, or sympathy? A strong man may say, "I cannot take time from my business to do anything for this weak brother." But is not the strong man strong for the very

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purpose of helping the brother who is weak? The mountains in their majesty and strength minister to the plains below, to every little valley, to every flower and blade of grass, to every beast and bird. "The Alps were not uplifted merely to be gazed at and admired by pleasure-seeking tourists, but to feed the Rhine, and to nourish the teeming cities on its banks." But God does not give certain men strength and position, fine personality and great influence, merely that they may stand up high among their fellows, towering above them, to be admired and honored. They have their strength and their abilities that they may be a blessing to those who are less highly favored.

In almost every community there is one who is intellectually weak, a foolish boy or man, or a girl or woman who lacks ability to take her place among her sisters. Sometimes such a person is made the sport of neighbors, of those who are bright and talented, laughed at, even treated rudely, cruelly. It is a piti-
able sight to see one who is feeble-minded,

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who has not wit enough to take his place among others. It is pathetic to see one buffeted and abused by those to whom God has given good mental abilities. It is beautiful to see a bright, manly boy become the champion and friend of another boy who is almost imbecile, protecting him from the sport of others. It is told of Edward Eggleston that in his boyhood he and his companions were forming a literary society. The membership they determined should include only the best boys and young men of the place. None who were undesirable should be admitted. There was one boy in the neighborhood who was mentally deficient, who greatly desired to join the society, that he might learn to "speak pieces," he said. Most of the boys laughed at the suggestion that he should be admitted. But young Eggleston, with a manly earnestness, favored receiving him. "We have no right," he said, "to keep all our good things to ourselves. This poor boy will do us no harm, and it will please him and it may do him good." He pleaded for the boy

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so earnestly that he was admitted. It made him very happy, and he became fairly bright.

This was a Christly thing to do. Jesus would have treated the boy just as Edward Eggleston did. He never broke even a bruised reed, so loving was he toward the weak. We should seek to get the lesson into all our conduct. If there is a bashful girl in the neighborhood, or a shy, retiring boy, these are the ones to whom Jesus would have the young people show the greatest attention in their social life. Those for whom most persons do not care are the ones for whom Jesus would care the most tenderly if he were here. Those who need the most help are the ones Jesus himself helps the most.

“All honor to him who wins the prize!”

The world has cried for a hundred years;

But to him who tries and fails and dies,

I give great glory and honor and tears.

Some people are weak in their character. The Master was infinitely patient with those who stumbled and fell. On his ears, as he stood in the place of trial, wearing the crown

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of thorns, fell the words of bitter denial from the lips of his chief disciple, and they must have pierced his heart like thorns. But he spoke not one condemning word. He only looked toward Peter with grief, not with anger, winning him back to loyalty. Then when he returned from the grave, he sent his first message to Peter, — “Tell the disciples and Peter that I am risen.” A little later he appeared to Peter first of the apostles. With wonderful love he surrounded this sinning, fallen disciple, that he might save him. Think what would have been the result if Jesus had not been thus loving and patient with Peter in those terrible hours. Peter never would have been restored. Think what a loss it would have been to the church in all ages if he had perished.

We think we are strong, that we cannot fall, and so we condemn those who stumble. But we do not know that we are really strong. We dare not say we could not fall. When another Christian falls, it becomes us to be most watchful over ourselves, lest we also be

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tempted. We do not know how a harsh or severe word may imperil the weak brother who has slipped or stumbled. If we treat him in a severe and condemning way, we may cause him to perish. We must be as Christ to him. Let the Master find genuine love in us. It is well to tell him of the love of Christ for him, of Christ's patience, gentleness, and compassion, but if he does not find these qualities of love in our treatment of him, what we have told him about them will make small impression upon him.

Some men claim they have a right to drink moderately, and that it does not hurt them. St. Paul would say to these men: "Very well; I grant all you say, at least for the sake of argument. You are strong and are never going to come under the power of appetite. You have liberty to have your wine on your table every day. Yes, but what about the weak brother who is influenced by your example, yet who has not your strength and cannot withstand the temptation of appetite, as you think you can do? What about him?"

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‘Through thy knowledge he that is weak perisheth, the brother for whose sake Christ died.’ ”

Some men say: “I cannot care for my weak brother. I cannot like him. I cannot have any patience with him. He is narrow and bigoted and has so many scruples that there is no getting along with him. Or he is not bright and I cannot enjoy being with him or doing anything for him. Or he is rude and low in his tastes. I cannot be the weak brother’s friend.”

“For whose sake Christ died,” seems to answer all these difficulties. Since Christ loved the weak brother enough to die for him, I ought to love him enough to be kind to him, to be his friend, to do him good, at least not to cause him to perish. This is a tremendous motive. The fact that Jesus died for the weak brother suggests his worth in the sight of God. There is a story of a woman who made her house a home for crippled and diseased children. Among those gathered under her care was a boy of three who was a piti-

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able object. He was covered with blotches. The good woman could not love him, he was so repulsive, although she was always kind to him. One day she was sitting on the veranda with this boy in her arms. The sun was warm and in the perfume of the honeysuckles she slept. She dreamt of herself as having changed places with the child and as lying there, only more repulsive in her sinfulness than he was in his physical condition. And over her the Lord Jesus was bending and looking into her eyes with longing, saying to her, "If I can bear with you who are so full of sin, and love you in spite of it all, can you not for my sake love this innocent child who is suffering not for his own sin but for the sin of his parents?"

She awoke with a sudden start, and looked into the boy's face. He had waked, too, and was looking intently at her. The passion of love came into her heart, and in her new emotion she bent down and kissed him as tenderly as ever she had kissed child of her own. The boy gave her a smile, so sweet she had never

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seen one like it before. From that moment a wonderful change came over the child. Love had transformed him from peevishness and fretfulness into gentle quiet and beauty.

This is the vision we have in St. Paul's words, — "The weak brother perisheth for whom Christ died, — perisheth through thy strength, thy goodness." He is weak and perishes for want of your love, he for whom Christ died. How the picture startles us! Surely we cannot think unkindly, harshly, or neglectfully any more of the weak brother when we remember that the Son of God gave himself to redeem him. There are lives all about us which seem to have lost their beauty and their splendor. They appear dull and lustreless. Yet in them sleep glorious possibilities. They need only the touch of love to bring out in them the divine loveliness.

They are all about us, — these weak brothers. They have not our strength. They are unable to stand in the front rank to do great things. They are weak in their disposition, — full of scruples, not easy to get

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along with. They are weak in their character, — easily tempted, falling back readily into the old, bad ways. They are weak in their business life, never getting on. We need more and more to become helpers of the weak, whatever the form of their weakness may be. We ought, with our disciplined power, to be a home, a shelter, a refuge, for all weak or weary ones who come under our influence. Let them find love in us, for they have never found it in any one else. Let the weakest find love in us, though no otherwhere have they had any welcome. The sweetest and the strongest should be the gentlest. Let us go slower because the weak brother cannot go fast. Do not get vexed with the weak brother's scruples or unreasonable ways. Be sure that no weak brother shall ever perish through your superior strength and knowledge. Remember always that Christ died for the weak brother.

The Lure of the Ministry

*For me—to have made one soul
The better for my birth;
To have added but one flower
To the garden of the earth;*

*To have struck one blow for truth,
In the daily fight with lies;
To have done one deed of right
In the face of calumnies;*

*To have sown in the souls of men
One thought that will not die—
To have been a link in the chain of life,
Shall be immortality.'*

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VERY worthy human occupation has its glory. Not every man should be a lawyer, not every one a physician, a teacher, a journalist, a statesman, or a minister ; some should be carpenters, some shoemakers, some stone masons, some painters, — to each one his own work. Every one who does his duty after the will of God, in whatever calling, is pleasing God. Every man should find zest and joy in his work, should think of it as noble and worthy, and should put his best life into it. In speaking of the attraction of the ministry, we must remember that in every calling, even the lowliest, there is room for beautiful life, for hallowed service, for great influence.

Somehow there is an impression in many quarters that the ministry is not an attrac-

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tive calling. The number of young men who choose it for their life work is small and seems to be growing smaller every year. Half a century ago many Christian fathers and mothers hoped that one or more of their boys would become ministers. Many a mother gave her first-born son to God with intense longing and much prayer that he might some day preach the gospel. Over his cradle she breathed this prayer continually. Perhaps the mothers do not now so much desire that their boys should become preachers. The attractions of the ministry do not win people's hearts as they did formerly. Indeed, there are many Christian parents who even seek to dissuade their sons from choosing this calling. It does not offer much in the way of money — other callings offer more. The commercial and financial world holds up its attractions and allurements. The other professions present opportunities for more brilliant careers. A lawyer may become a great jurist, a great statesman, or even may reach the presidency. The physician may

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attain high rank among men, may become celebrated all over the world for his skill in his profession. Over against all these attractions the minister's life seems to suffer in winningness. The minister is not likely to become rich. It is said the average salary for ministers in this country is from seven to eight hundred dollars a year. This means oftentimes plain and close living, even pinching. It means also, in many cases, obscurity, with little chance for fame. Then the ministry has its hardships, its self-denial, and sacrifice.

But in spite of these conditions the ministry has its attractions which should draw resistlessly upon the hearts of worthy men. The minister is an ambassador of Christ. "We are ambassadors therefore," says St. Paul, "on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us." The minister brings to men the good news of the love of God, and calls them to accept that love. Can there be any earthly honor so high, any calling so sacred as this?

The minister himself is a representative of

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Christ in the saving of the world. We know something of what Christ did for the community in which he lived, for the homes into which he was received, for the individuals into whose lives he came. What he was to the community, to privileged households, and to the people who enjoyed his personal friendship, that the minister of Christ is to-day to the households and to the men and women to whom he ministers.

Dr. John Watson (Ian Maclaren) in one of his lectures to theological students speaks thus of his own boyhood pastor: "People turned to him as by instinct in their joys and sorrows; men consulted him in the crises of life, and as they lay a-dying committed their wives and children to his care. He was a head to every widow, a father to the orphans, and the friend of all lowly, discouraged, unsuccessful souls. Ten miles away people did not know his name, but his own congregation regarded no other, and in the Lord's presence it was well known and was often mentioned. When he laid down his trust, and arrived on

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the other side, many whom he had fed and guided and restored and comforted, till he saw them through the gates, were waiting to receive their shepherd-minister, and as they stood round him before the Lord, he, of all men, could say without shame, ‘ Behold, Lord, thine under-shepherd, and the flock thou didst give me.’ ”

This picture is not overdrawn, although perhaps not many pastors in the rush and hurry of these strenuous days get into such close and tender relations with their people. This, however, is the ideal relation, and in many parishes, both in city and country, ministers do indeed become all this and more to their flocks. Old and young love them. The people welcome them to their homes. In times of joy they come, and their presence is not a restraint to gladness, but an inspiration. In times of sorrow they come, and their presence, their sympathy, their love, and their prayers bring Christ himself near, and even seem to bring heaven down into the sad home, with its benedictions of joy. When the baby

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is born, when birthdays are marked, when the girl becomes engaged, when the wedding is celebrated, when the boy is graduated or takes an honor, when the silver and the golden anniversaries of the old people are observed, when sickness comes and all walk softly in the house, when death comes, and crape is on the door, and the funeral service is held, the pastor is there, — the friend, the sharer of joy, the giver of loving greetings and congratulations, the sympathizer, the comforter, — in his own lesser human way, just what Jesus was in the homes of the people in Galilee and Judæa the true minister is to his people in all the experiences of their lives.

We are thinking of the attractions of the ministry, that in it which should draw young men into it, should lead them to choose it as a calling in which to find the deepest joy and the widest opportunities for service and helpfulness. Is it not something worth while, something worthy of the noble life, to come into such relations with people?

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Perhaps we do not appreciate the sacredness of this part of the minister's life and work. He is the confidential friend of thousands of people who come to him with their anxieties, their perplexities, their questions, their disappointments, their failures, their fears and doubts, their sorrows and their sins. His study is a confessional. Protestants do not require the confession of people in their churches, and yet there are times in the life of every one of us when we need to go voluntarily to a trusted pastor and tell him the burden that is on our hearts. To many persons this is one of the most sacred privileges of life. Ofttimes hope would die if it were not possible to find some one to whom to speak, to find human sympathy and wise counsel in days when the burden is too heavy to be borne alone, or the way cannot be found without a guide. Even the strongest people need sometimes a friend who will stand by them, who will be gentle, patient, and forbearing with them when they have stumbled and sinned. Thousands go down when they

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have failed because no love comes and no hand is reached up to help them to start again.

Ofttimes people need advice. They do not know what to do or where to go. In such times a wise, sympathetic pastor may save a life from doubt, a soul from despair. People are inexperienced. They lack wisdom. They are dazed and confused by their circumstances, and need a friend who understands life better than they do. It is not material help they require, — it is guidance, inspiration, direction, encouragement. Two persons have fallen apart through some misunderstanding. A wise, gentle, and tactful pastor can bring them together and make their lives one again. A man has some trouble in his business, and his minister cheers him and makes him brave to overcome his discouragement and go on to success. One falls into a bad habit which is sapping his life and ruining his career. The minister comes, not with reproof, but with love and grief and strong help, and saves him. One fails and falls and

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is almost in despair, and the minister is like Christ to lift him up, to save him.

These are mere glimpses of some phases of the personal work of the minister, the part of his work the world knows nothing about. He is priest as well as pastor. In one of St. Paul's epistles, where he is speaking of the strenuousness of his own work, he says this: "Besides those things that are without, there is much that presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches." If any one is in trouble, he is troubled too. If any have sinned, he is grieved, almost to heart breaking. If any are suffering, he suffers too. "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is caused to stumble, and I burn not?" The minister's heart-burdens are his heaviest. People do not begin to know how their minister enters into their experiences, their sicknesses, their struggles, their sorrows, their temptations and falls, as well as their joys. When their home is shrouded in gloom, his heart is breaking.

Is there nothing in this part of the min-

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ister's calling to make it sacred and holy? There is higher honor in being such a friend to men and women, in entering into the inner experiences of their lives, and in standing as priest between them and God, than there can be in the most distinguished position the world can give to any man.

The work of a minister is sacred also because of its essential motive. It is all a service of love. The lawyer does not need to love his clients. The physician may not love his patients. The teacher may teach without personal affection for his pupils. But the minister must love his people, or his work will avail nothing. Though he speak with the tongues of men and angels, if he does not love, his eloquence is but sounding brass. St. Paul's epistles are full of love. You feel the heart-beat in every chapter. For example, "We are gentle in the midst of you, as when a nurse cherisheth her own children: even so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were well pleased to impart unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls,

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because ye were become very dear to us.”
There is no true ministry without love.

The name minister means servant. He is his people's servant for Jesus' sake. The people of a true pastor do not begin to know how deeply and fully he lives for them, how devotedly he serves them, how tenderly he loves them. He never wearies of doing for them. There is a story of St. John, the beloved disciple, which illustrates the minister's love for his people. A noble youth was once committed to him by his parents. St. John was obliged to go away on a long journey, and left his ward in the care of others. When he returned, he was told that the youth had fallen into evil ways and had joined a band of robbers and had become their leader. St. John was filled with grief and self-reproach. He hastened to the stronghold of the robbers' band, seized the young man by the hand, kissed it, and calling him by his familiar name, brought him back home again to his old faith. Thus does the true minister love souls and seek to save them.

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The minister is also a man of prayer, a man of mighty intercession. The ancient high priest carried the names of the twelve tribes on the twelve stones on his breastplate; the minister carries the names of his people in his heart. He prays for them, not as a congregation only, but as individuals, one by one. His church roll is his rosary. He is the personal friend of every member of his flock. He is the lifter-up of those who faint or fall. He is an encourager, a strengthener. In all the world there is no opportunity for such service of others as the ministry affords.

No true-hearted young man seeks for ease, for self-indulgence, whatever his calling. There is nothing noble in such a life. Worthy men want an opportunity to give their life for men, as their Master did. They want an opportunity to be the friend of others, to do them good, to lead them upward. This is the highest life possible. They will find scope for such life in the ministry.

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*"I saw him across the dingy street,
A little old cobbler, lame, with a hump,
Yet his whistle came to me clear and sweet
As he stitched away at a dancing pump.*

*"Well, some of us limp while others dance;
There's none of life's pleasures without alloy.
Let us thank heaven, then, for the chance
To whistle while mending the shoes of joy."*

XVI

Narrow Lives



SOME people seem to live narrow lives. Their circumstances are narrow. They are hemmed in, as it were, and it appears to them they never can make anything of themselves. In their little, circumscribed environment they dream of a larger world outside, with its beauty, its opportunities, its privileges, its achievements, and they wish they could climb out of their close, cramped place and enjoy the wider world, the freer air, the larger room for living, outside. And some young people fret in the limitations in which they find themselves.

But we should never chafe,—chafing spoils our lives. It is ingratitude to God. We should accept our circumstances in life, our condition, our providential environment, with love and trust, in the spirit of content-

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ment. We are not, however, indolently to accept our limitations, as if God wants us to stay there forever, and make no effort to get into larger conditions. Usually we are to be led out of them at length into a larger place if we do our part and are faithful. Contentment with our lot is a religious duty, and yet we are never to fret about our small chance, not trying to better our condition, and blame God for it, complaining that if we had had the larger opportunity which somebody else had, we would have made something worth while of our life.

God does not want us to be contented with insignificance if we are able to hew our way out to better things. Ofttimes narrowness of this kind is really a splendid opportunity rather than an invincible hindrance. God puts us into a small place at the beginning that in the very narrowness we may get impulse and inspiration for larger things, and in the effort and struggle grow strong. A young medical student was speaking of the hampered early beginnings, — poverty, neces-

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sity for hard work, and more struggle to get an education. A friend said: "Do you know that these very experiences were God's way of blessing you? He gave you the narrow circumstances that you might make the effort to grow. If you had had money, easy conditions, and affluent circumstances, you never would have been where you are to-day, — about to enter an honored profession."

In one of the Psalms there is a word which tells not only the writer's own life story, but that also of countless others. He says, "He brought me forth also into a large place." He is referring to troubles and dangers which had encompassed him, shut him in, made what seemed an invincible siege about him. But the Lord delivered him from his strong enemy and brought him out into a large place. Many people have had similar deliverances. We remember times when there appeared to be only disaster and calamity for us, and trouble, shutting us in, entangling us in the wilderness, with no hope of

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escape, when God, in some way we had not dreamed of, brought us out into a place of safety, of joy, of peace, of enlargement, of prosperity.

But in still greater way David's word was true of his life. He had been brought up in lowly circumstances, but the Lord led him out into a large place, making him king of a great nation, and giving him opportunities for wide usefulness. The same was true of Joseph. Through thirteen years of what seemed adversity and calamity, God brought him to honor, power, and great success. Nearly all who have reached noble character and great usefulness have been led forth from limiting circumstances into a large place by a divine hand.

Some people, however, permit themselves to be dwarfed in their hampering conditions. They allow the narrowness of their circumstances to get into their souls, and every noble aspiration is smothered, the wings of hope are cut, the fires of enthusiasm are quenched. There are stories of men who

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have been buried alive, sometimes built into granite walls. So these people allow themselves to be buried alive, in their narrow circumstances. Far more people than we know make this mistake. They have not wealth with its luxuries to give them a soft nest. They have not influential friends to open doors for them, to lift them into places of comfort and favor, to give them opportunities for a great career. So they conclude that their lives are doomed to littleness and failure. But really, if they only knew it, what they consider disadvantages are meant for advantages. What they regard as hopeless handicaps are meant to be wings on which they may rise. The narrowness which makes some people despair, is really a condition full of great possibilities. It needs only courage and persistence to turn it into a blessing. One writes :

Misfortune met two travellers, and swelled to twice his size;

One, cowering, groaned, "Alas, this hour!" and fell,
no more to rise.

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The other climbed the ugly shape, saying, "It's well you came!"

And made Misfortune serve him as a stepping-stone to fame.

Look at Christ's own life. We know how narrow it was in its early conditions. He was brought up in a peasant village, without opportunities for education, for social improvement, for training for life. When we think of the bare circumstances in which Jesus grew up, we wonder how his life developed into such beauty, such nobleness, such marvellous strength.

The secret was in himself. The grace of God was in him. At the end he said, "I have overcome the world." He always lived victoriously. His circumstances were narrow, but no narrowness from without could cramp or dwarf or stunt his glorious spirit. The narrowness never entered his soul. His spirit was as free in the hardest days of his earthly life as it was in heaven's glory before he came to the earth. He found in the Nazareth home, with all its limitations, room

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enough in which to grow into the most glorious manhood the world has ever known. We need not say that it was the divine within him that enabled him to triumph over hindrances and disregard limitations. He met human life just as we all must meet it. Temptation and struggle were as real to him as they are to us. He showed us how we may overcome the world.

Whatever our conditions may be, however bare, hard, and invincible they may seem to be, Christ can enable us to live in them just as he lived in his barer, harder conditions, and to come out at length into a wider place. We are not clay, dust. We have in us an immortal life which ought to be unconquerable. We should laugh at our limited conditions; they cannot bind or limit us. Some one, or perhaps it was a bird or a squirrel, dropped an acorn in the crevice of a great rock. It sank down and was imprisoned in the heart of the stone. But moisture from heaven's clouds reached it, and it grew. It must die in its dark prison, you would have

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said. No; it grew and burst the mighty rock asunder and became a great oak tree. So we should grow in the severest conditions, and then we shall come out into a wide place.

Truth is mighty. It may not manifest itself in a strenuous life. It may be quiet, making no noise, and yet it has all the power of God in it. A noble girl was engaged to a young man who was in business with his father — the brewing business, although they did not say much about this, — with fine prospects of wealth and prosperity. When the girl learned the fact, she talked it over with the young man and then told him very frankly that she could not marry him unless he abandoned the business in which he was engaged. She said that she was a Christian, and believing that the business was wrong, she could not be the wife of a man who was engaged in it. She could not live in a home which the business maintained. She could have no blessing in it. The young man was astounded. He saw nothing wrong in the business. His father was honorable. Yet

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he loved the girl, listened to what she said, and considered seriously the possibility of doing what she asked. After much thought he became satisfied that she was right, and decided to give up his place in the business — for his father was immovable. He went to the bottom of the ladder and began life anew. His friends talked of the unreasonableness of the girl in demanding such sacrifice, and of the young man's folly in accepting her guidance. They called it bigotry and intolerance.

But the narrowness was really in the circumstances in which he was already bound in his father's business. He was held a prisoner there. Christ now led him out into a larger place. His manliness developed into splendor of character. It took half a dozen years of hard work, severe struggle, and pinching economy, but he came out at length a man of strength. If he had remained in his old environment, he would have been only a rich brewer, unrecognized among men, unhonored, even cut off from men of noble rank.

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But in this new free life he became a power among his fellows, a moral force in the community, building up a home which became a centre of beauty, happiness, and good. He was accustomed to say afterward, "My wife's principles made a man of me." Here was indeed the gentle hand of Christ, sent to lead him out of his narrow prison into a wide place.

Sin stunts life wherever it touches it. Selfishness cramps and dwarfs. Envy and jealousy bind the soul in a wretched environment. Love enlarges the tent. A Christian woman tells of the kind of friend she used to be. She would choose a girl friend and would love her intensely. But she was so insanely jealous of her that the girl must be her friend and hers only. If she called on another, or walked with another, or even spoke kindly to another, her friend's anger knew no bounds. There was no happiness in such friendship for either of the two. It was a miserable prison in which the woman herself was bound, and her passionate friend-

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ship made only bondage for the one she loved.

Then the woman tells of giving her heart to Christ, and learning from him the secret of true friendship. The old jealousies had vanished. When she had a friend, she was kind and loving to her, and wanted everybody to love her. God had led her forth into a large place. She had a thousand times the joy she used to have in the old-time narrow, exacting, suspicious friendship. She had enlarged the place of her tent. It was no longer a little place for our thin canvas walls, with room only for herself and one; it widened out until it was as wide as the love of Christ.

We cannot let Christ into our hearts without becoming broader in feeling, larger in interest, wider in hope, more generous in all ways. We have no right to be narrow. We should pray to be delivered from all narrowness in our friendships, — in our heart life, our church life, our neighborhood life, our school life, our social life. Look at Christ

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himself as the perfect One. He enlarged the place of his tent until it became as wide as the blue sky. Under its shelter all the weary, the lonely, the homesick, the suffering, and the sorrowing take refuge.

The True Enlarging of Life

Soul that canst soar!
Body may slumber;
Body shall cumber
Soul-flight no more.

BROWNING.

XVII

The True Enlarging of Life



SO the external eye there is no great difference in men. Some are tall, some are short, some are heavy, some are light, some are slow, some are quick of movement. We soon learn that the real size of men is not measured by their height or their weight, or the alertness or slowness of their movements. A physical giant may be a very little man in intellectual or in moral quality, and a man of very small stature may be great in the things which make real manhood.

The actual measurement of life is not therefore determined by the weigher's scales or by the tailor's patterns, but by qualities of mind and heart. When we are exhorted to enlarge our life, it is not meant that we shall increase our stature or add pounds to our

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weight, but that we shall grow in the things that make character, that give power, that add influence. There is always room for such enlarging. The possibilities are simply immeasurable. No man is ever so good that he cannot be better. No one has ever attained so worthy a character that he cannot be worthier. No one is ever so noble a friend but he can become nobler. Richard Watson Gilder puts this truth in a beautiful way in a little poem:

Yesterday, when we were friends,
We were scarcely friends at all;
Now we have been friends so long,
Now our love has grown so strong.

When to-morrow's eve shall fall
We shall say, as night descends,
Again shall say: Ah, yesterday
Scarcely were we friends at all —
Now we have been friends so long;
Our love has grown so deep, so strong.

The same is true of every noble quality. All life is immortal. Its reach is infinite. Yet few of us begin to make of our own per-

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sonal life what we might make of it. We do not live as we could live. We touch only the edges of possible attainment. The call of Christ to us ever is to enlarge our lives. He wants us to have not life merely, but abundant life. Yet many of us are satisfied if we have life at all, even the smallest measure of it. We live only at a "poor dying rate," as the old hymn puts it. Our veins are scant of life. We are not living richly. Our cheeks are thin and sunken. We are spiritually anemic.

Men are looking after their bodies now a good deal more than they did formerly. We are taught that we ought to be well, that we ought to bring our bodies up to their best. Athletics may be overdone in some of our colleges, where some young men seem to think they have no minds, no souls, have only bodies. But true education thinks of all parts of the life — body, mind, and spirit — and seeks to make full-rounded men. That is what Christ means when he calls for abundant life. It means enlargement in all phases

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and departments of our being. We are not living up to our full duty if we are not taking care of our bodies. We are always in danger of over-indulging our appetites. Plain living and high thinking belong to the true life. Men talk about the mystery of Providence when their health is poor or when they break down early. They wonder why it is. Perhaps it would be more fair to put the responsibility on their own neglect of the laws of life and health.

The heart makes the life. This is true of the physical life, — its health and fulness depend on the working of the heart. It is true also of the spiritual life. “Thy heart . . . shall be enlarged,” is the promise to those who are called to live the life of divine grace.

A larger heart makes a larger man. Love is the final measure of life. There is just as much of life in a man as there is of love, for love is the essential thing. Not to love is not to live. Love is the perfect tense of live. St. Paul tells us that though we have the eloquence of angels, the gift of prophecy, and

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though we have all knowledge, and faith to work the most stupendous miracles, and the largest benevolence, and have even a martyr spirit, but have not love, we are nothing. We are empty. When we say that our heart is enlarged, we mean we are growing in love, becoming more kind, more long-suffering, less envious, less irritable, seeing more of the good in others and less of things to blame and condemn, having more patience, more gentleness, more sympathy.

We must also make sure that what seems to us to be enlargement of life is really enlargement. "Getting is not always gaining." A man may be growing in certain ways and yet be really dwindling. He may bulk more largely before the eyes of men, and yet in the sight of heaven be a smaller man than when he seemed least. Writers distinguish between possessing and inheriting. In one of the Beatitudes we read, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." The meek are the unresisting. They are not the strenuous among men. Ordinarily they

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do not grow rich. They do not add field to field. They are not generally regarded as successful. They are not shrewd, and are easily imposed upon. Ambitious and unscrupulous men often take advantage of them. They do not contend for their rights. They give to him who asks of them, and from him that takes away their goods they demand them not again.

It seems strange, therefore, to read of the meek that they shall inherit the earth. But note the word that is used, — inherit. They do not possess the earth. They do not have its millions in their own name. A writer, speaking of the Beatitudes, says: "The men who leave behind them much hoarded wealth, rarely leave anything else. Their names are not known in religion, in education, in social reform. The scholars, the thinkers, the poets and saints, the men who raise the moral stature of mankind, usually die poor." Yet the Master says of just such as these, that they shall inherit the earth. What does he mean? There is a world-wide difference between get-

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ting and gaining, between possessing and inheriting. A man may acquire power and may amass millions of money. That is, he may put his name on the millions. He may own railroads, banks, mines, houses, but his vast wealth really means nothing to him. At the heart of it all, there is only a poor, miserable, dwarfed soul. Then when he dies, he is a beggar, like the rich man in our Lord's parable, — owning nothing. He takes none of his money with him. He possessed millions, — he inherited nothing. He made nothing really his own. No part of his wealth was laid up in heaven. No part of it was ever wrought into his own life. No part of it was put into the lives of others.

There is no true enlarging of the heart and life in such acquisition as this. A man may increase in money-possession until the boy of poverty has become a millionaire, and yet be no wiser, no greater in himself, no more a man, with not one more worthy quality of character. He may live in a great deal finer house, with richer furniture and rarer

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pictures and costlier carpets, but the man in the midst of all the splendor is no better, no greater. He may have a large library in the part of his house where the library ought to be, but the books have done nothing for him, have been nothing to him; the pages are uncut; he has not taken any of them into his life. He was told that a rich man ought to have a fine library and he bought one, but never read a book.

He may have lovely gardens on his estate, with rare plants and flowers, but he knows nothing of any of them, and they mean nothing to him. They have put neither beauty nor fragrance into his life. He may have great works of art in his house, purchased for him by connoisseurs at fabulous prices, but he knows nothing of any of them. All the costly things he has gathered about him by means of his wealth are but vain bits of display. They mean nothing to the man. They represent no taste, no culture, no vocation of his. He is no greater, no more intelligent, no more refined, because of owning

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them. His life is no more beautiful, no more gentle or useful, for any or all of them.

There is no true enlarging of life in all this. Acquisition is not gain, possessing is not inheriting. The way the meek man inherits the earth is by getting the beautiful things of the world into his life, not merely by having them added to his estate. It is not by owning mountains, but by having the mountains in his heart that a man is really enriched. Dr. Robertson Nicoll, in speaking of owning and possessing, says: "I occasionally go out on a Saturday afternoon along a Surrey lane. Who owns that lane? I do not know. But I possess it. It belongs to me, for I can appreciate its beauty of color and contour; I go through it with a rejoicing heart, and I care not who holds the title-deeds."

A man who is seeking to enlarge his life may continue poor all his years in an earthly sense, but he receives into his life qualities of character which make him a better and greater and richer man. St. Paul lost all his

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money, all his earthly inheritance, in following Christ. But think what a glorious Christian manhood he built up meanwhile for himself! Think of the way he blessed the world by his life, by his teaching, by his splendid self-sacrifice, by his influence! Think of all he gave to the world in his words! He scattered seeds of truth, plants of beauty everywhere. Think how the world has been blessed and enriched by what he said and did. His heart was enriched and his life grew into marvellous ardor and influence. Jesus said, "No man . . . hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for my sake, and for the gospel's sake, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren . . . and lands." Whatever we part with in following Christ we shall get back again, in our own lives, in real possession, in rich blessing.

When we speak of the true enlarging of the life, we must think of such enlarging as this, — not of a man's property, but of him-

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self. You have grown richer, perhaps, these years; you have a great bank account, a bigger and finer house, more property, are more widely known among your fellows, occupy a more conspicuous place; but are you a larger man, are you truer? Have you more peace in your breast? Is your heart warmer? Do you love your fellow-men any more? Are you giving out your life more unselfishly to make others better? Are you making yourself more continually a bridge that others may cross over life's chasm; a stairway on which the weak, the weary, the struggling, the lowly, may climb up to better things? The enlarging life is one that is growing more Christlike every day, that has more of the fruits of the Spirit in it, — love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, self-control.

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Through the Year with God

*“ Whichever way the wind doth blow
Some heart is glad to have it so;
Then blow it east or blow it west,
The wind that blows, that wind is best.*

*“ My little craft sails not alone;
A thousand fleets from every zone
Are out upon a thousand seas;
And what for me were favoring breeze
Might dash another, with the shock
Of doom, upon some hidden rock.
And so I do not dare to pray
For winds to waft me on my way,
But leave it to a Higher Will
To stay or speed me; trusting still
That all is well, and sure that He
Who launched my bark will sail with me
Through storm and calm, and will not fail,
Whatever breezes may prevail,
To bring me, every peril past,
Within his sheltering port at last.”*

XVIII

Through the Year with God



IN ancient heathen religions there were deities for times and places. The gods were local. In passing through countries the traveller would find himself passing from under the jurisdiction and protection of one deity to-day to the sway and shelter of another to-morrow. But where the one true God is known and worshipped we have no such perplexity in finding divine care. We do not have to change Gods as we pass from place to place. Our God is the God of the mountains and of the valleys, of the land and the sea, of the day and of the night. He is the God of all nations and wherever we journey, to the remotest parts of the world, we are always in his kingdom. We never can get away from beneath the shadow of the wings of Jehovah.

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There is something wonderfully comforting in this truth of the universality of God and his care.

Then God is also the God of all time. "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations. . . . Even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." Two friends set out, side by side, at the beginning of a year, hoping to walk together to the year's end, but they are not sure that they will. Their fellowship may continue, but many set out together who do not complete the year in company. One is taken and the other left. We are sure, however, that nothing can interrupt our walk with God. The great Companion cannot die. Though our earthly life ends, we still shall be with God. Nothing can separate us from him.

This is a sweet thought for a new year, that we go through it with God. The sentiment is devout and fitting. Whether we do it conscientiously and reverently, or without thought, unconsciously, we shall certainly go through the year with God. We

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cannot help it. We cannot get away from him. The atheist thought to teach his child his own negation of belief and wrote for her, "God is nowhere." But the child spelled out the words, and in her own simplicity made them read, "God is now here." We cannot get away from God any hour of the year, whatever we may do. It is better, however, that we go through the year consciously with God. Then we shall experience continually the joy of his presence, the inspiration of his love, and the guidance of his hand.

We write in our letters, Anno Domini, "In the year of our Lord." There is something very beautiful and suggestive in this. Our years are all really years of our Lord. We should make them so indeed, — years of Christ. This means that we should remember they are his, — not the world's, not ours, but Christ's. Only he should be permitted to direct us; all the work we do should be for him, and all our life we should live to get his approval. Thus we shall make the years,

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in fact as they are in name, years of our Lord.

We want to give our whole year to God, but we can do this only by giving him the days one by one as we begin them. An English clergyman says that one of the most influential memories he cherishes of his father is that every morning, as he went out from his home to his work, he would say solemnly in the presence of his family, "I go forth this day in the name of the Lord." God breaks up our life into days to make it easier for us. We could not carry at one load the burden of a whole year, — we would break under it, — so he gives us only a day at a time. Anybody ought to be able to get through a single day, whatever its duty, its care, or its suffering. The trouble too often is that we look at a whole year at one glimpse, and it dismays us to think that we have all its accumulated burdens to bear and tasks and duties to do. We forget that we have only one thing to do for any minute, and we can easily do that.

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“One step and then another,
And the longest walk is ended;
One stitch, and then another,
And the longest rent is mended;
One brick upon another,
And the highest wall is made;
One flake upon another,
And the deepest snow is laid.

“Then do not look disheartened
On the work you have to do,
And say that such a mighty task
You never can get through;
But just endeavor, day by day,
Another point to gain,
And soon the mountain which you feared
Will prove to be a plain.”

One of the secrets of a beautiful life is found in this simple rule, — living day by day. We can go through one little day with God, whatever its path may be. When we rise in the morning, we may give ourselves to him just for the day. We do not know what it will have for us, — joy or sorrow, ease or hardship, — but no matter; what God gives or sends we must accept and do sweetly, faithfully, the very best we can. The day may have interruptions, and our own plans

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may have to be set aside. But such interruptions are only bits of God's will set into our schedule in place of our own thoughts of duty. If we are going through the day with God, we need never trouble about not getting all our self-imposed tasks finished, if only we have done God's will each hour. What we could not do was not ours to do, that day at least. What of our own planning was set aside by God's plan, we need not fret over, for God's allotment is better than ours.

If we are going through the year with God, we need have no fear for the difficulties or the hindrances of the way. The path will be opened for us as we go on, though it be through mountains, and the seeming obstacles will not only disappear as we come up to them, but will prove to be stairways or stepping-stones to higher planes, gates to new blessings. As Peter followed the angel, his chains fell off, the doors and gates opened of their own accord, and he was led out of his prison into the free air and back to his

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work. In every faithful and obedient Christian life hindrances become helps.

“Yet this one thing I learn to know,
Each day more surely as I go,
That doors are opened, ways are made,
Burdens are lifted or are laid,
By some great law unseen and still,
Not as I will.”

Making the journey with God is assurance that every step is a real and true advance. Some people come to birthdays regretfully. They do not like to confess that they are growing older. But there is no reason for regret, if only we are living our years as we should live them, as we may live them. Empty years are a dishonor. Years filled with sin are blots in the calendar. We should be ashamed to come to a birthday at the close of a year of idleness, indolence, neglect, or unfaithfulness. Jesus said we must give account for every idle word we speak. It will be an unhappy reckoning that we must make after an idle year or for idle hours and days in a year.

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But there need never be a shadow of regret in coming to a birthday or to a new year when we have lived our best through all the days. If we go through a year with God, we shall come to its close with enlarged life, with fairer character, with richer personality, in every way a better man or woman. Growth is a law of life. When growth ceases, death is beginning. Men count the age of trees by the circles which the years make. God counts our age, not by the date in the old family register, but by the accretions his eye sees in our inner life. If a man is put down as threescore and ten, and has lived only one year with God, he is really only one year old, not seventy.

Growth, too, is not marked by height or weight or by accumulations of money or property or earthly honor, but by character. You may be more popular at the end of a year, people may know you better, you may be more in the newspapers, but these are not the real measurements of life. You may be a really smaller man at the heart of the noto-

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riety you have achieved than you were without fame. Ruskin says, "He only is advancing in life whose heart is getting softer, whose blood warmer, whose brain quicker, whose spirit is entering into living peace."

The journey through the year with God should be joyous from beginning to end. A life of praise is the ideal life. No other is beautiful. Yet praise is by no means universal even among Christians. Somehow many people do not train themselves to see the glad things. There are a thousand times more things to make us glad than to make us sad. A writer tells of cycling in England with a friend. They were flying down a hill, through a woods. The friend stopped and jumped off his wheel, and they both stood and listened. From the woods on either side came songs of nightingales, — one, two, three, four, five, six. It is marvellous how much music God can put into a little bird's throat. The forest seemed filled with song. The loneliest places in life are thus filled with music if we have ears to hear

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what the myriad voices say. The trouble with too many people is that their ears misinterpret the sounds that fall upon them. They hear only sadness, while they ought to hear songs. If we would learn to find even the thousandth part of the good there is in the world, we would sing all the way. Thus we would have all our life transfigured. One of the Sunday afternoon songs the British Weekly gives its readers teaches somewhat severely, yet in unforgettable fashion, a good lesson:

If you wish to grumble, go
Where there's no one nigh to hear;
Let the story of your woe
Fall upon no mortal ear.

Store your troubles far away,
Hid within some jungle deep,
Where nobody's like to stray,
Or to hear you when you weep.

But if joy hath come to you,
Shout it, spread it far and wide;
Share with others all the true
Happinesses that betide.

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Joy and pain contagious are.
Smiles evoke their kith and kin.
Tears will travel fast and far
If you fail to hold them in.

Who is blest the better? He
Who hath filled the world with cheer,
Or the man of misery
With his ever-ready tear?

To go through the year with God is the noblest, divinest, blessedest thing any one can do. It will lead the feet on an upward path every step of the way. Though the outward life waste, the inward life shall be renewed day by day.

The Remembers

*" The day was dull and drenched and cold,
Full half a year from June —
Was this the garden where, of old,
The birds sang late and soon?"*

*" Gray mists, more desolate than rain,
Hung low o'er borders bare;
Would ever roses bloom again,
Or sunbeams linger there?"*

*" But, sudden, from a laurel spray,
There came a gift of cheer —
A robin's joyous roundelay,
Full, sorrowless, and clear:"*

*" ' His will be done! God's will is love,'
He sang, ' and love is rest;
Through mist below or cloud above
His ways are always best.' "*

XIX

The Remembers



ONE of the secrets of a happy life is the memory of past favor and good. Some people forget the pleasures and kindnesses that made yesterday glad, and to-day, when there are only unpleasant things, are overwhelmed and cannot find one thing to make them happy. But if we remember how bright last night's stars were, to-night, when not a star can be seen, ought not to dismay us. Mr. Charles G. Trumbull tells a beautiful little story which illustrates this. It is an incident of an Austrian watering place:

“‘Ah! but I have the remembers,’ said the young Austrian doctor, with a happy smile. The day was gloomy and dismal, for it was raining hard. The great Kaiserbad, with its white steps and handsome architecture, that shone so gleamingly beautiful under

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a noonday sun, now looked a dirty yellow as the rain beat upon its sides, and trickled down the ins and outs of its masonry. Few people were to be seen on the streets or in the music-gardens and open-air cafés of the usually lively little Bohemian resort. Even the peaks of the surrounding Austrian Alps could be seen but dimly through the clouds and fog. If one was ever to be depressed by the weather, it seemed as though the time had come.

“ So thought an American visitor, who, on ascending the steps of the Kaiserbad for his customary Swedish gymnastics and bath, had met one of the little physicians in attendance. But only yesterday the Prince of Bulgaria had completed his stay in the village. He had conferred an honorable order upon the chief physician at the Kaiserbad, and had given each of the lesser lights a princely fee as a parting token. No wonder that the spirits of the young doctor were not to be dampened by a mere rainy day. So, in response to the American’s ‘ Good-morning: what disagreeable weather!’ came quickly in broken Eng-

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lish, 'Ah! but I have the remembers.' The words and the lesson stayed with those to whom they were afterward repeated, and the thought of the gloom-banishing power of the little doctor's 'remembers' had been more effective and far-reaching than perhaps he or the Prince of Bulgaria ever dreamed of."

If we all would keep in our hearts the "remembers," the memory of the beautiful things, the cheering things, the happy things that come to us in our bright, pleasant days, we should never have a day of unrelieved gloom. The weather is the cause of a great deal of unhappiness. A cloudy or rainy day makes a great many people wretched. You go out on a dripping morning in a mood like the weather, and nearly everybody you meet will greet you with a complaint about the miserable day. The Kaiserbad tourists were not sinners above all people, though, possibly, being invalids to some degree, they were more excusable than most others who grumble about lowering skies and dripping mists. The trouble with many people is that

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the gloom of the weather gets into their hearts and darkens their eyes and makes them unhappy. Ofttimes whole days are altogether spoiled for them in this way.

The Kaiserbad doctor's philosophy ought to come in with fine effect on every such day. "Ah, but I have the remembers." To-day may be gloomy, but remember what bright sunshine you had yesterday. There are few people who do not have many such remembers in the story of their lives, if only they would recall them in the days when they are discouraged; and if only they would recall them, their gloom would be lightened.

The Bible is full of exhortations to remember: "Thou shalt remember all the way which Jehovah thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness." "Remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life." "But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." The memory of past goodness should shine in the present darkness, however deep and dense it is.

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Once you were in great perplexity. You seemed hopelessly shut in. You could see nothing but danger and loss. Then in a marvellous way God led you out into a large place. In your present gloom and fear, whatever it is, remember this former deliverance. Yesterday's mercy ought to be a guarantee for mercy to-day. Yesterday's kindness should keep our hearts warm in spite of to-day's hardness. "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." Those were glorious years. They were full of sunshine. They were full of love. There were no troubles then. Everything was bright. The air was full of bird songs. The paths were strewn with flowers. All was prosperous. Now all is changed. The birds are not singing to-day. The flowers have faded. The friends are gone. Prosperity has given way to adversity.

But have you forgotten the past? Ought not the memory of the goodness of other blessed days to shine through the clouds of to-day and to touch them with glory? "I

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will remember the beautiful years that are gone, and remembering them will bring them back again."

"Thank God for friends your life has known,
For every dear departed day;
The blessed past is safe alone —
God gives, but does not take away;
He only safely keeps above
For us the treasures that we love."

Why are we so fickle in our faith and gladness? We are on the mountain top one hour and next hour we are away down in the dim valley. We have all the great and essential elements of happiness on a dark, rainy day that we had on the bright day a week ago. We have God, we have hope, we have love. Why should we let a little drizzle, a gust of wind, and a flurry of sleet darken our mood and make all things seem hopeless for us? Why should one dreary day make us forget whole weeks of bright sunshine and fragrant air? Ought not the 'remembers' to save us from such gloomy feelings?

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We ought to keep always the lesson of the "Remembers," as the Kaiserbad doctor taught it. Yesterday had been a glorious day for him because the king had put a decoration upon him. The honor had so impressed him, so filled his heart with gladness, that no unpleasant weather could make him forget it. What did a little rain amount to while he wore the decoration and remembered the great favor the king had bestowed upon him? "A miserable day," other people said to the doctor when they met him. "Oh, no; I have the remembers!"

If to-day is gloomy and cheerless, remember the past days that were glorious in their brightness. Let their splendor strike through to-day's clouds. In the old Psalm we read, "This is the day which Jehovah hath made." This is true of every day, — not only of the rare days of June, so marvellous in their splendor, but just as really of the sombre days of November and the wintry days of January. The aspect of the dreary

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days is only a thin veil, behind which always are blue heavens, glorious sunshine. God made the days, and he made every one of them beautiful. If to-day is dark and misty, it has divine beauty in it nevertheless. If things seem adverse, God is still God, our Father, still love, and nothing is really going wrong.

God's in his heaven —
All's right with the world.

Even Luther, heroic as he was in his faith, sometimes lost confidence in the long and hard struggle of the Reformation. Once it is said he seemed to have given up utterly, and was almost in despair. No one could revive his hope. In the morning his wife came down to breakfast in deep mourning. Luther noticed her garb and in alarm asked, "What is wrong? Who is dead?" "Why, don't you know? Did n't you hear it? God is dead." Luther rebuked her for her words in saying that God was dead. God could not die. Then she told him that God must be

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dead or he would not have become so hopeless. Her reply brought back to the great reformer the old trust.

We sometimes need to be reminded that God is not dead. He lives, he always lives; he loves, he always loves. The fluctuations in our experience are not fluctuations in the divine interest and care. "I, Jehovah, change not," is an Old Testament assurance. Then in the New Testament we have it thus: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever." This faith in the unchanging God should bridge over all the chasms of earthly trial and keep ever in our hearts a joyous trust.

There are many people who find their trouble not in the actual experiences of to-day, which may be kindly, but in dreading to-morrow, which may bring gloom or disaster. All is well now, but they see a dark stream just before them, and they fear its floods. But the memories of the past in which goodness has never failed should teach us never to be anxious about any to-morrow.

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“There’s a stream of trouble across my path.

It is black and deep and wide.

Bitter the hour the future hath

When I cross its swelling tide.

But I smile and sing and say:

‘I will hope and trust alway;

I’ll bear the sorrow that comes to-morrow,

But I’ll borrow none to-day.’

“To-morrow’s bridge is a crazy thing;

I dare not cross it now.

I can see its timbers sway and swing,

And its arches reel and bow.

O heart, you must hope alway;

You must sing and trust and say:

‘I’ll bear the sorrow that comes to-morrow,

But I’ll borrow none to-day.’”

Count your blessings. Do not forget the multitude of your benefits in the recollection of the few disappointments and discomforts you have had. Let the many joyous remembers blot out the marks of the lines that stand black in the record. Even your sorrows are seed-plots of blessing. When you get to heaven and look back, you will see that the days which now appear draped in mourning have been your best days,—the fullest of good. Where the plough has cut deepest,

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tearing up your garden of happiness and destroying the flowers of gladness, you will find loveliness a thousand times more wonderful. God never destroys, — he only and always fulfils. Out of sadness he brings light. Out of pain he brings health. Out of disappointments he brings appointments of good. Every year is a harvest growing out of past years, each one better than the one left behind.

“Why do we worry about the nest?

We only stay for a day,
Or a month, or a year, at the Lord's behest,
In this habitat of clay.

“Why do we worry about the road,

With its hill or deep ravine?
In a dismal path or a heavy load,
We are helped by hands unseen.”

One was speaking of a friendship that was wondrously sweet, but lamented that it was given only for a short while. A year after marriage the loved one was gone. “I could almost have wished I had not had the friendship at all, — it was so soon ended,” grieved

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the lonely one. Say it not. It is blessed to love and be loved, though it be only for a day. One of Richard Watson Gilder's sweetest poems runs :

Because the rose must fade,
Shall I not love the rose?
Because the summer shade
Passes when winter blows,
Shall I not rest me there
In the cool air?

Because the sunset sky
Makes music in my soul
Only to fail and die,
Shall I not take the whole
Of beauty that it gives
While yet it lives?

It is sweet to have had your friend if only for a few days, for then you will have the memory forever, and this remember will cast its soft radiance down over all the years to come.

A good woman wrote that she had found the secret of getting joy out of every sorrow. When the grief comes and begins to seem more than she can bear, she goes out and

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finds some other one in suffering or need, and begins to minister, to comfort. Then her own grief or trouble is gone. Try it. It will prove true for you too. Put your pain or sorrow into some service of love and it will be changed into a song.

Caring for the Broken Things

*"I will go and work for my King," I cried,
"There are so many ways on every side."
But my feet could not reach the open door,
And I heard a voice whisper, "Try no more,
Rest quietly on this bed of pain,
Strength for some other day to gain."
And my heart was filled with dark despair,
For how could I serve my Master there?
While I lay idle day by day
Those chances to work would slip away.
Then slowly the darkness lifted, and lo!
Again came the whisper, soft and low,
"When they cease to murmur against their fate,
They also serve who only wait."*

Caring for the Broken Things



IT was after the feeding of the five thousand. There was much bread left over, and Jesus bade the disciples gather up the broken pieces, that nothing be lost. The incident suggests our Lord's care for the fragments. Our lives are full of broken things. Indeed many people seem to leave nothing after them but broken pieces. They begin many things, but finish nothing. Life is too short for us to do more than begin things. It is said even of Jesus in his earthly life, that he only began to do and to teach.

Think of the broken things in our lives, — the broken threads of our dreams, the broken hopes that once were brilliant as they shone before us, but now lie shattered about our feet; the broken plans we once made and expected to see fulfilled, but which have not been

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realized. Most older people can recall lost dreams, hopes, and plans, cherished in the earlier years of their lives, but which seem to have come to nothing. Some of the men with whitening hairs supposed once they were going to be millionaires. But somehow the dream did not come true. Many of us think of our career as strewn with broken things like these, and say that we have made a failure of our lives. Perhaps so, and perhaps not. It all depends upon what we have made of our life instead of what we once thought we would make of it; of what the broken things are that lie about us, and what the shining splendor really was which we have not attained. Carlyle describes success as "growing up to our full spiritual stature under God's sky." If that is what we have been doing instead of becoming millionaires, as we once dreamed we would, we have nothing to vex ourselves over.

There is supposed to be a good deal of tragedy in the broken things of life, but there is a great deal more and sadder tragedy in

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very much of what the world calls success. Some one wrote under the name of a man who had achieved phenomenal success in business, this description, "Born a man and died a grocer." He became a great grocer, but the man was lost in the process. He was only a grocer now. It might have been better if his dream had been broken, — it certainly would have been better if the grocer had been a failure and through the failure the man had reached up to splendid spiritual stature under God's sky.

Some people have lying about them broken dreams of social success. Some tell of disappointments in other ways, in scholarship, in art, in music, in friendship, in love, in happiness, in intellectual development, in popularity. Whatever these shattered dreams may be, Christ bids us gather up the broken pieces. They are of priceless value or the Son of God would not set his eye upon them and so earnestly call us to gather them all up. There is oftentimes far more value in the broken things of life, things men weep over,

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things they regard as only the wreckage of failure, than there is in the things they pride themselves upon as the shining token of their greatness. God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts and his ways than our ways. When he touched your brilliant dream and it seemed to fall to nothing, he built something better for you instead. When your plan was shattered, he substituted his own far nobler plan in its place.

It is said that when a cathedral was building an apprentice gathered thousands of broken pieces of stained glass, chippings from the glass used by the artists in making the great windows, and with these made a window of his own which was the finest in all the cathedral. Christ can take the broken things in our lives, our broken plans, hopes, joys, and dreams, and make perfect beauty, perfect truth, perfect love for us. You are discouraged by the losses you have had in business, the flying away on wings of the riches you were toiling for and trying to gather, but, as God sees, you have been

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piling away in your soul riches of spiritual character while losing earthly possessions. You think of your sorrows and count your losses in them, but some day you will find that you are richer rather than poorer through them. What seems loss to you is gain.

“That nothing be lost.” This word ought to encourage us in all our life, in our Christian work, and in our efforts to gather up the broken pieces that nothing be lost. We would say that when such a wonderful miracle had just been wrought, there was no need for pinching economy in saving the broken bits. Why should the disciples be required, each one of them, to carry a great basket of broken bread, to feed his hunger for days to come, when the Master could, by a word, make bread for him anywhere?

For one thing, we know that God, with all his mighty power, never works the smallest unnecessary miracle. He will never do for you what you can do for yourself.

For another thing, the Master wanted to

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teach his disciples, and he wants to teach us, to be economical. Waste is sin. To have gone off that day, leaving those good pieces of broken bread lying on the ground, bread of miracle, too, would have been a sin. One of the stories told of Carlyle is that one day when the old man was crossing a street he stopped half-way over, amid hurrying traffic, stooped down and picked up something lying there, brushed off the dust, then carried it to the curb-stone and laid it down gently as if it had been something of rare value. It was only a crust of bread, but he said in a voice of unusual tenderness, for him, "My mother taught me never to waste a particle of bread, most precious of all things. This crust may feed a little sparrow or a hungry dog."

But bread is not the only thing that men waste. Time is valuable,—do we never waste time? Every hour is a pearl. Suppose you saw a man standing by the sea, with a string of pearls in his hands, and every now and then taking off one of them

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and flinging it into the waves. You would say he was insane. Yet how many hours of time, God's priceless hours, of your last week did you throw away into the sea? Life itself is wasted by many people. Judas said Mary had wasted her ointment in pouring it on the Master. A little later, however, Jesus spoke of Judas as the "son of perdition," that is, son of waste. Judas wasted his life. He was made to be an apostle, and he died a traitor.

Jesus was most solicitous for broken lives, always trying to save them. Nobody else ever had seen any preciousness in the world's broken lives before. Nobody had cared for the poor, the blind, the lame, and the palsied, until he came. The lunatic was bound with chains and turned out to wander wild where he would. The fallen were despised. Jesus was the first to care for these broken bits of humanity. He saw the gold of heaven gleaming in the débris of sin. He saw the possibilities of restored beauty and blessedness in the outcasts of society. "Gather up

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the broken pieces," was his word to the disciples, "that nothing be lost." That is his word to the church to-day. There is not a wreck of humanity anywhere, along life's rocks and shoals, that it is not the will of Christ that we should try to gather up and save.

Those who are laboring to gather up the broken pieces should never be discouraged. Christ is with them wherever they go. They are his, these broken lives. No particle of matter ever perishes. Life is immortal and imperishable. No soul shall ever cease to be. Then no work for God is ever lost.

"There is no labor lost,
Though it seem tossed
Into the deepest sea.
In dark and dreary nights,
'Mid stormy flash of lights,
It cometh back to thee, —
Cometh not as it went,
So strangely warped and bent,
But straight as an arrow new.
And though thou dost not know
How right from wrong may grow,
From false the true, —

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Thou mayest confess ere long —
Sorrow hath broke forth in song,
That life comes out of death,
The lily and rose's breath
From beds where ugly stains
Were washed below by earthly rains.
Fear not to labor, then,
Nor say, 'I threw my time away!'
It is for God, not men,
To count the cost and pay."

The broken pieces of bread were part of our Lord's miracle, and therefore were sacred. The broken things in our lives, if we are living faithfully, are of Christ's breaking. They are his way of giving us what we have longed and asked for, of letting us do the things we wanted to do. It will be well if we accept them as such. The disappointment we had was Christ's appointment. One tells of a broken day, nothing done that in the morning was put into the schedule for the day, but countless interruptions instead, — the coming of others with their needs, to be helped, until all the hours were gone. In the evening the day was deplored and grieved over as a lost one, but the answer of comfort

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given was that these interruptions were bits of the divine will coming into the human programme. They seemed only broken bits, but they were the best of all the day's work. We may gather up these broken pieces in faith and love. Not one of them shall be lost.

There are broken pieces, however, in our lives which are not part of God's plan for us, but failures to do our whole duty. At the end of a year there are in our records many broken things, — broken pledges, broken promises, broken intentions, lying among the débris. Have there been tasks not even touched? Have there been duties of kindness left undone day after day? "Gather up the broken pieces." But can we? Can we make up for past failures? Yes, in a sense. Because you have been carrying a miserable grudge in your heart against a neighbor, treating him coldly, selfishly, unchristianly, for eleven months and eighteen days, is no reason why you should continue to keep the grudge in your heart, the unloving coldness in your treatment of him, the

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remaining thirteen days of the year. Because we have been haughty and proud and self-conceited, spoiling all the year thus far, must we spoil the little that yet remains of it? We cannot undo, but the people we have harmed and neglected will forget and forgive a very unkind and even cruel past, if we come now with genuine kindness and flood all the bitter memories with love while we may.

It is a beautiful arrangement that Christmas comes in among the last days of the year. Its warmth melts the ice. Everybody gives presents at Christmas time. Dr. Robertson Nicoll, in a happy suggestion for Christmas, says that giving presents is not always the best way to help the joy. Most of us do not need presents, he says. But what will do our hearts far more good is to write a batch of kind, affectionate, and encouraging letters. We can readily call to mind friends and acquaintances with whom life has passed roughly during the year. Let us write to them. Write to the friend far

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away, who is fighting a hard battle, and tell him what you think of his constancy. Write to the sick friend who fancies herself of no use in the world and tell her that her life matters much to you. Hugh Price Hughes, Dr. Nicoll says, kept very few letters, but in searching through his desk one day his wife came upon one from a special friend which Mr. Hughes had not destroyed. He had been passing through a serious trial, and this friend had written him a letter of encouragement and strong affection. This letter he had preserved. Then Dr. Nicoll says, "If I were to covet any honor of friendship, it would be this,—that some letters of mine might be found in the desks of my friends, when their life struggle is ended."

There is no way in which we can half so successfully gather up the broken fragments that we find strewn along the stories of our friendships, our associations with neighbors and business companions, as by doing a great deal of thoughtful letter-writing from

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time to time. Write to the person you think is not your friend, does not like you. Do not say a word about your past difference or quarrel; just tell him that you have been thinking about him and want to wish him happiness. Write to the man who did you a marked unkindness during the year. Do not remind him of what he did, and do not tell him you have forgiven him. Just tell him that you wish him all the joys of the blessed days. Write to the discouraged person, to the one who is suffering, to the shut-in. To have a warm, sincere, encouraging, and cheerful letter on almost any morning will mean more to thousands of people than any gift you could have sent them.

“Gather up the broken pieces which remain over.” Do at the end of a year, as far as you can, the things you have been leaving undone through the year. Go and say in the right place the kind words you have not spoken, but ought to have spoken. Do the duty that for a good while you have been neglecting to do. Gather up the broken

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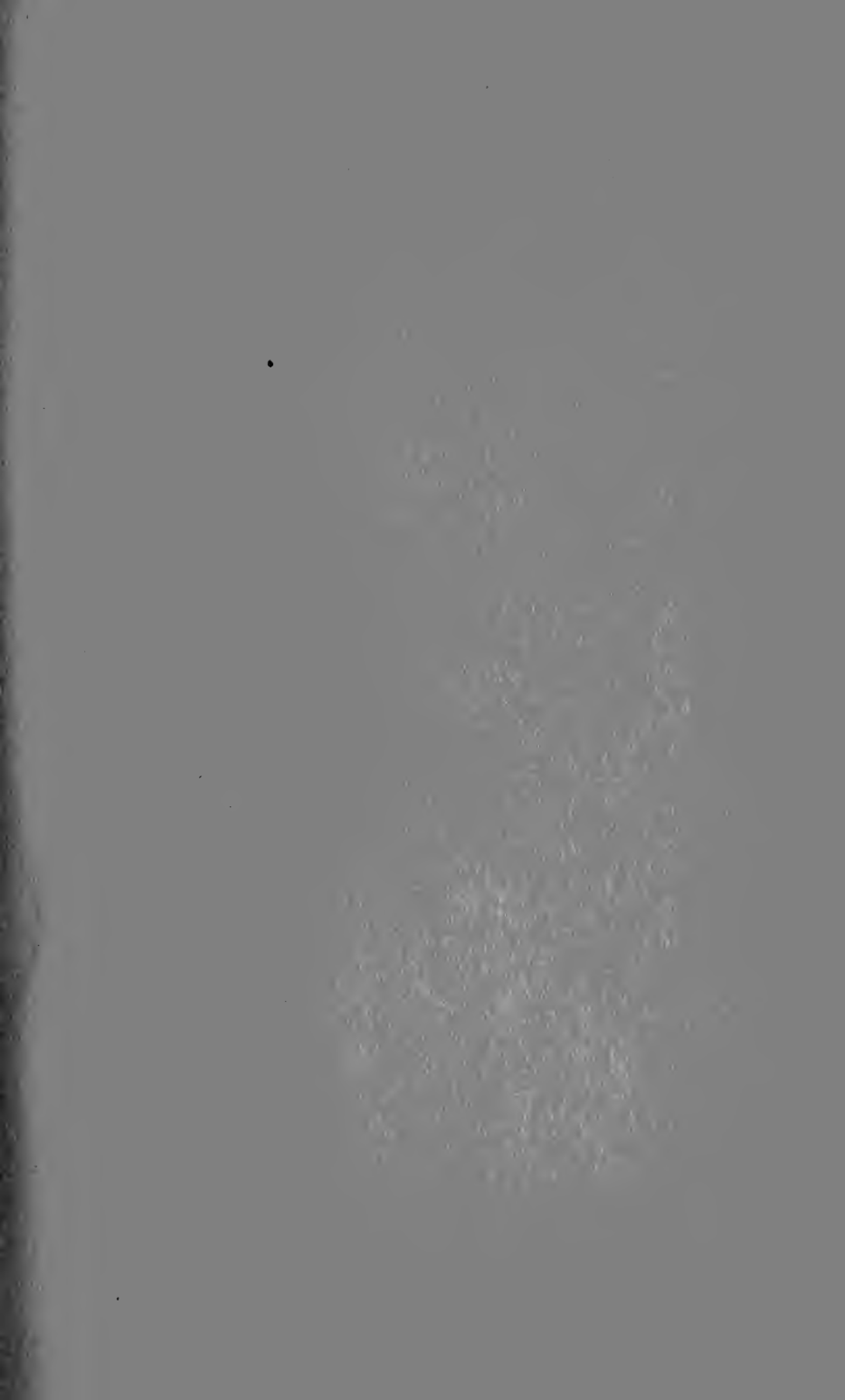
things, whatever they may be, as far as you can possibly do it. Finish up the unfinished things. Do the things that have been left undone.

Time is short, and when the end comes, no hustling or hurrying of ours will enable us to go back and do neglected things of past years. It is said in the legend that Father Ventura died before he had finished writing his life of St. Francis, and so heaven let him come back for three days to finish the work. Dr. Watkinson suggests that if men could come back and complete what they have left unfinished, it would be a strange lot of workers we would find among us. "There would be preachers coming back to preach their unspoken sermons, and what sermons they would be! Sunday-school teachers would come back to repair scamped lessons, and rich saints would come back to complete their giving, and what church collections we should have!"

But we are not going to come back, any of us, to finish up the work we have neg-

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lected along the way. "Night cometh, when no man can work." Whatever we do for God and for man, we must do now, as we go along the way. What we get into the year's story, we must put in in the three hundred and sixty-five days which make up the year.





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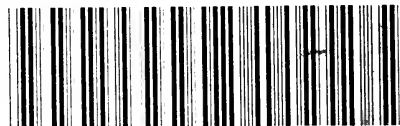
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