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The Christian Life

WHAT IT IS, AND HOW TO
LIVE IT



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Tomkins

The Christian Life

WHAT IT IS, AND HOW TO
LIVE IT

BY

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"Beacons on Life's Voyage," etc.



NEW YORK

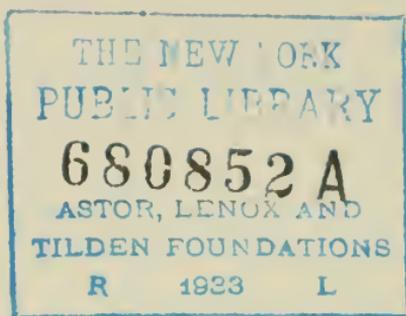
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DEDICATED
TO THE PARISHIONERS OF GRACE CHURCH
PROVIDENCE, R. I.

PREFACE.

THESE chapters, substantially as now published, appeared as a series of Lent papers in the *Congregationalist* during the Spring of 1896. They are gathered into a more permanent shape in response to many requests, and with the hope that they may reach and help a larger constituency than even that most excellent paper in which they first were published could supply.

The writer has long felt, in his work as a minister, the need for some very simple devotional guide to the helps which God gives us in our efforts to live as Christians. Young and old Christians alike need again and again to be reminded of the lights on the path, which, if followed, make it a joy

to serve the Christ. To make an attempt to fill this want has been my desire for long, and this little book is the result. If it may be blessed by the dear Master and made the source of comfort and help to any, I shall be humbly thankful.

GRACE CHURCH, Providence, R. I.,
July, 1896.

PREFACE TO THE FOURTH
EDITION.

IT is a great happiness to know that this little book has been found helpful. May God's blessing continue to rest upon it.

PHILADELPHIA, 1905.

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I.
LIFE.

I.

LIFE.

“For me to live is Christ.”

WHAT is life? What does it all mean, this rushing, pushing, nervous existence which seems at times so entrancing and at times so strange and hard? “What does my life mean?” How many of us have asked that question, and yet the clear, peace-giving answer has not come! There must be an answer. We cannot for a moment believe that it is a bit of chance that has placed us here, and a bit of chance that at last is to take us away again. Mill’s pathetic epitaph, after all, is more of an unconscious assertion than a crying prayer: “What am I?”

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Whence came I? Whither am I going?" The very asking makes positive the assurance:

"For I *must* be immortal,
Not doomed to die, but surely called to live
Here and hereafter by His loving will
Who placed me where I am."

For the common desire and judgment go out to meet the message of Christ, and, together, the human longing and the divine assurance, give us peace.

"Let me not cast in endless shade
What is so wonderfully made,"

sings Tennyson in the "Two Voices," and we echo the cry. Some being must have made me, for nothing makes itself. If the cliff huts of Arizona claim builders, if the book I hold in my hand, though anonymous, proves an author, how much more does the fact that *I am* prove that I am from some creative hand! And this creator must be wise, for no foolish, unintelligent power could shape a

man. Work is generally inferior to the workman who has wrought. What we do is less noble than our ideals. The maker must be greater than that which he makes. Hence, out of His wisdom this Being made me.

He must love me, for the maker loves that which he has made. The artist half caresses the canvas from which he cannot bear to turn away, even after the last touch of his brush. The author lingers over the last pages of his story, hesitating to send a part of his very self flying out amongst men. So Dickens speaks in that pathetic preface to *David Copperfield*. Even the school-girl holds affectionately her first essay, and the carpenter looks with something more than pride upon the first house he has built, and the sculptor loves his marble out of which he has chiselled, with almost mysterious force, the vision of his soul. If the father and the

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mother love the babe, then He who made us must love us.

And He must have made us for some definite purpose. Such a work as the human could not have been a throwing off of chance particles, useless to the Centre whence they came, to live or die, prosper or fail, as may be. If the watchmaker makes his watch to keep time, and the lens is skilfully cut to magnify, and the locomotive is fashioned to draw, and the painting is made to create emotion, can it be possible that the Creator of man had less purpose, not merely for the race but for the individual, in His work? Surely I am forced to answer the arising doubts with the assertion: The intelligent, loving Being who made me must have made me for a purpose. My life must mean something; short or long, strong or weak, here or there, my personality has a character which I must discover and develop.

There is yet another step. I cannot believe for a moment that such a being as man is, with his mind reaching so high and including even the things beyond knowledge in its calculations, and his soul so full of lofty emotion, and his heart so pressed by the throbs of love—I cannot believe that he is only for these few days or years which we call life. What chance has he to fulfil the purpose of his creation? Even the picture lasts for centuries, and we stand before a Raphael or a Da Vinci and drink in that which for very many years men could not appreciate at all. We read our Homer and delight in our Juvenal, works of men which have endured. Can the men themselves have been made to endure only for a breath, while their thoughts and their ideals continue? Should a book outlive the man who conceived its truth, or a cathedral the architect and the builder who gave it shape?

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Man must have been made for lasting years; and while his earth sojourn is the beginning of his life, and while he starts here in the formation of that character which is unlimited, before him is eternity, into which he enters more and more even now as he grasps the greatness of things, into the fulness of which he enters at last, eclipsed from our sight by the radiancy which surrounds him.

All this, of course, is pure reasoning, what the man must think for himself, if he thinks at all, calmly and frankly. But, as he takes the next step, he touches the spring which opens reason into the realm of revelation. Has this Being, intelligent and loving, who has made me for a purpose and has given me immortality for the fulfilment of that purpose—has He never revealed Himself to man? Has He never been Himself where men

could hear His voice and see His face and listen to His assurances that human hopes are not vain? "It must be," the man reasons, "it must be that the Maker will, in some way, show Himself to that which He has made."

And then, before him, not on the pages of history only but on the earth as a great fact of human interest, stands Jesus Christ. There He is, once in all the ages, a Being who proves His super-human character not by His miracles only, or by His teachings, but by His life. He was sinless. He was perfect—even His enemies being judges—and, therefore, He was divine. From His lips flow the gracious words satisfying the thirst of man for knowledge. From His hands comes the healing touch for which the poor human body was aching. He shows what it is to live, and tells the purpose of living by Himself granting a perfect example. He

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speaks of the unknown Maker and calls Him the Father. He claims that this Father longs to have His children know Him and, therefore, has sent His own Son Jesus to reveal Him. He urges the wisdom and the love of this Father, and His purpose in every man's birth. He declares the continuance of life beyond the mortal limit, and "opens the kingdom of heaven to all believers."

Not one longing which the intelligent man has known but this Jesus promises sure gratification. Not one aspiration but this dear Christ claims there is a reality to meet it. He makes plain the duties and the struggles. He declares the advance of knowledge under the unceasing care of God the Holy Spirit. He proves that death is nothing but an incident by calling back from its mystery three who had entered, and by rising Himself by His own inherent

Life

power and coming out of His tomb and mingling forty days with His friends, yet apparently unseen by His enemies (for the heart which cares not for life cannot know life).

Oh, that blessed visitation of God to His earth, which must stand through all days as the signal redemption of earth and man alike! What a meaning it has, because it makes clear all the dark doubt of life, and in the light of the Christ leads us to see light.

This, then, is life, as Jesus says, that we may know Him who made us.* Yes, this is the Christian life. You are not a Christian because you have "joined" the church. You are not a Christian because you are "trying to be good." Going to church, reading your Bible, "saying" your prayers, receiving the Holy Communion—these are not the parts or the proofs of true religion. They are

* St. John, xvii: 3.

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helps, blessed helps, means of unceasing and much needed grace; but back of them and as the user of them must stand the man who has learned to know God, learned to know his Father, and to love Him.

There is the interpretation of your life and mine. I know it is all so strange at times. We are perplexed, tired, lifted into ecstasy only to react into dead despair. Things are not real, and do not, apparently, follow any rule. And into the midst of the struggle death comes, before any light has shone on the problem or any ease has come to the years, and laughs at our amazement. What shall we say? That we cannot know? That we must wait? That life is probation in which man's patience is tested? Surely it is a rest to find something deeper and surer. Not a hope only, not a faith only, not a system only; no, but a *life*, whose beginning we know, whose

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meaning we know, for we can read through all the contradictions and find the harmony, whose continuation we know because the Father has prepared for us many mansions.

And so, if I can look up all the while to God as my Father, and talk to Him, and grow to understand Him more and more, then I am in the truest sense a Christian, a follower of Christ. Out of this will flow loving words and deeds. From my face, which has been looking into my Father's face, will beam the reflected sunshine to make the world happier and weary hearts lighter. I shall learn gentleness from His voice, bravery from His strength, wisdom from His truth. But my dearest and best part will be the daily communing which shall make me more and more like Him, and bring my life nearer to the purpose for which He made it.

II.
RESPONSIBILITY.

II.

RESPONSIBILITY.

“ He hath shown thee, O man, what is good.”

JUST as soon as a man knows the difference between right and wrong he is bound to act upon that knowledge, to do the right and to resist the wrong. No religious profession can increase this responsibility, no failure to make such a profession can diminish it. It cannot be thrown off upon another's shoulders. Almost as bad as his disobedience was Adam's cowardly attempt to shift his responsibility upon his wife. It cannot be evaded through the claim of ignorance. “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest,” said Christ to

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Paul. It cannot be rejected through fear. "I was afraid," said the man of one talent. The Lord answered: "O thou wicked and slothful servant!"

And this is only common wisdom, the wisdom upon which all our life experiences and duties rest. The mind, the judgment, and the will are as necessary parts of the clerk, the tradesman, the banker, and the physician as the hands and eyes and ears. You rely upon them constantly, and if you could not rely upon them economic relations would cease. We proceed daily upon the assumption that men will do what they know to be right, and where there is suspicion and doubt we bring in the law to enforce their doing it. But the law does not create any responsibility, it only enforces it.

We find, however, that this realm of right is large. Though we may be able to meet the little responsibilities, because they ap-

Responsibility

peal to our lesser, and sometimes selfish, powers, when we enter the large field where complications and heavy burdens await us we are confused and often fall. We start in the morning with high resolves to fulfil every demand of right; long before night courage and endurance fail, and when, as we kneel by our beds, we look back upon the hours we find them full of omissions and commissions—

“Sins committed while conscience slept;
Promises made and never kept.”

Nor is the future any more hopeful. Away stretch the years of our life, every hour of them crowded with claims and dangers, responsibilities which must be truly met for righteousness' sake, and in the face of them we falter. Either a dead and hardened conscience, a life of *laissez faire*, or else a trying warfare in which he it often woefully defeated—that is the story of every man. He may know that God, a wise, loving

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God, made him for an eternal and definite purpose, but when he comes to fulfil that purpose he is overwhelmed.

“ See, in the rocks of the world
Marches the host of mankind,
A feeble wavering line.
Where are they tending? A God
Marshall'd them, gave them their goal.
Ah, but the way is so long ! ”

Yet why should reason and faith fail here? If God is wise is it likely He would demand of His children impossibilities? Would He give visions of right and reveal on every side their glories only to mock us? Place mountains for us to climb upon whose slopes we must sink exhausted? Open fields for us to reap of their wealth in the very midst of which we must die? If He provides for our bodies the food and the clothing and the sleep necessary for their strength, will He neglect the character, the moral nature, the soul hungering and thirsting for

Responsibility

power? Most certainly not, else were He not a father. I deal not so with my child. A God deals not so with His children. There must be helps, means of grace, simple methods of sustenance by which I can draw from Him sufficient strength and save my life from failure.

And then what do I find? Exactly that which I expected. God has the helps all provided, and very simple, so that a child can use them. There is a book full of His wisdom, so that when I am ignorant I may learn. There is prayer, so that I can talk to God and draw into myself some of His dear power. There is church worship, by which, in His presence and with my fellows, I may adore my God and gain refreshment and courage. There is the Holy Communion, by which I may be assured that my failures are forgiven and forgotten, and through which my body and soul may be

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nourished by His dear love. There is work for others, help given to lead weak ones to strength and tired ones to courage and erring ones to the right. And I sum them all up and call them religion, the rebinding of my life to God, the glorious means whereby "I perceive and know what things I ought to do, and also have grace and power to fulfil the same."

Religion, then, is for man, not man for religion. It is the great summary of truth, indeed, but truth revealed for man's sake. It is the great flood of worship, adoration, prayer, but a flood for the satisfaction of human thirst and longing. The church exists, divinely gathered, as a kingdom; but man enters it, not because by such entrance he assures to himself salvation, but because therein he finds, with his fellows, the blessed, sustaining food which shall make him strong. Christ

Responsibility

died, not that all might live through the mere fact of His death, but that men by partaking of His life, for their sakes laid down, might enter into the new, high life of victory.

What a glorious revelation that is, and how it makes clear the natural hungerings of men after the ideal! "My responsibility—how can I fulfil it in the face of all these obstacles!" And the answer comes, "Through Jesus Christ and His truth." He told us of the means and became Himself the way. From His sacrifice flows the assurance of failures atoned for. From His teachings appear the simple means whereby failures may become fewer and successes more constant. From His life as a grand ideal of mastery made real, for He was *the only man*, throbs the courage to make us know that we can be conquerors.

Let us remember, then, that

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while responsibility cannot be increased by any vows or pledges, or diminished by any neglect or weakness, it can be met. The helps from our Father are like lamps guiding the vessel through a dangerous channel to the harbor. Sevenfold are they: prayer, Bible study, meditation, church worship, holy communion, work for God's great world, and work for some individual whom we can lead to the right. If a man sincerely uses these he must be able to meet his responsibilities, he must safely come to the haven of mastery where he would be. And for all falls he has the assurance of the Father's mercy, and forgiveness through the Elder Brother, in whose completeness he can be made complete.

And let us remember that religion, Christianity, the church, are for our help. The faith they hold is only the revelation of this help. The graces they offer are

Responsibility

offered for us. The promises they
lift up are for our inspiration.

“ And the width of the waters, the hush
Of the gray expanse where he floats,
Freshening its current and spotted with foam
As it draws to the ocean, may strike
Peace to the soul of the man on its breast—
As the pale waste widens upon him,
As the banks fade dimmer away,
As the stars come out, and the night-wind
Brings up the stream
Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea.”

III.
PRAYER.

III.

PRAYER.

“ Pray without ceasing.”

IF God is our Father then there must be communication between Him and us. The vision of Jacob's ladder, with angels ascending and descending, is but an expression of the human seeking the divine and the divine seeking the human. We seek God because we are conscious that He is our Father and we wish to know Him. God seeks us because He loves us and longs to help us. The most striking feature in Sargent's wonderful paintings in the Boston Library is that of the Hebrews appealing with crying and tears to the Almighty for help, while

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from the ineffable glory in which his person is hidden comes forth the great hand to save. So prayer is not the endeavor to wrest from a heartless monarch the necessities of life, but it is rather the coming together of the Father and His children, a mutual seeking.

Prayer is friendship between the divine and the human. How do I deal with my friend? Suppose there is some person of whom I have heard much and whom I long to know. What steps do I take that I may know him? First of all, I am always interested to listen when his name is spoken. I read and hear all I can about him. I try to read something he has written or to see something he has done. By and by I meet him, I look up into his face, I hear his voice, he takes my hand. And as I grow more and more into this sweet intimacy the delight is just to be with him,

Prayer

to commune with him, to hear his experiences and opinions and tell him mine. So exactly is it with our relationship to God. We wish to come as near to Him as possible, to hear of Him, to read of Him, to look into His face, to hear His voice and feel His peace rest upon us.

At once we must see how that banishes the old idea of prayer. "Asking God for what we want"—that was our childhood's definition of prayer. As if God were simply a great supply-station, a bank, a power to be drawn upon in necessity! And it is undoubtedly that conception which lies at the root of much of our poor religion and even of our atheism. What a lowering of God! What would I think of my child if he simply came to me when he wished for something, and loved me for what he could get out of me—back of all his words and smiles and caresses a plea for

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some gift? Would he not be false in his show of affection, and so kill absolutely any love between us? It is my pleasure to give. Love, as Robertson so grandly defines it, is the desire to give and the desire to bless. But love which is based upon the giving and receiving of temporal or even spiritual advantages cannot endure. There must be something deeper. There must be that joy in companionship, that delight in seeing and hearing, which forgets needs and demands. "Now let me die," cried the dear old patriarch Jacob to Joseph his son; "now let me die, since I have seen thy face." What I can get is of small consequence.

"To be near thee, to be near thee
Alone is peace for me."

Must not the lover's cry be the real cry after all, if our relation to God is to be true?

I. How, then, can we commune

Prayer

with God, or pray to Him? First, surely, by adoration. How full the Bible is of praise! How full our hearts are of adoration! We stand before the sunset clouds and cry, "How beautiful!" The snow-capped mountain, the vast rolling blue of the ocean, the myriad stars gleaming long-coming messages from far distant worlds—before them all we stand in admiration, almost forced into silence. We cannot speak. The joy is almost akin to pain.

" I sometimes hold it half a sin
To put in words the grief I feel ;
For words, like Nature, half reveal
And half conceal the soul within."

So Jesus must have prayed, in silent adoration, as He passed countless nights on Olivet's brow or on Galilee's wave. "Not words, but breathless praise." Ah, how God must love it! I am glad to give my precious boy all he asks for if I can. And when, after my absence, he comes run-

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ning and cries, "What have you got for me, papa?" the pockets are willingly emptied. But there is a deeper longing in my heart, which is only met when sometimes, without asking me for anything, the dear little arms are thrown around my neck and the little lips whisper, "O papa, I *does* love you!"

Is not the human at its best an index of the divine? And must not the great heart of God often wait in divine hunger (ah, what hunger that must be!) to hear us say, not "give me," or "forgive me," but just "O Father, I do love Thee!"

Yes, we do not adore our perfect Father enough, and so our prayers rebound in cold selfishness and we are not bettered by them. Yet we are taught in the Lord's Prayer to adore first. Not a petition is found till the middle of the prayer, only adoration, longings, meditation. "Hallowed be thy name!

Prayer

Oh, for the coming of thy kingdom!
Oh, for such union of will and service as the angels know!" We cannot speak sometimes. We are weary and we can only gaze, as the artist pictures the Pilgrims gazing on the ocean which separates them from the old land. Like Christ, we can only sigh, but the sigh is adoration, a resting in His great arms, where it is so good to be.

" And I smiled to think God's goodness
Flowed around our incompleteness,
'Round our restlessness His rest."

So praise brings God nearer to us and makes us stronger, though we ask for nothing. It is Himself we want, for we often need God more than anything God has. Better far for us, at such times, to ask nothing, but just to rest there and look at our Father!

2. Then we commune with God by meditation or contemplation. Close the eyes and think of Him. Do not we often think so of our

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dear ones? At the twilight hour I sit alone in the absence of wife or child, and how run my thoughts? Instinctively upon the characteristics of the dear ones. I recall my wife's carefulness, her thoughtfulness, her long, patient faithfulness through all the years. I think of my child's affection, his quick thought and ready wit. They become real to me through their attributes.

Need it be otherwise with God? Sit, or kneel, and with closed eyes think: "How infinite God is! From everlasting to everlasting! Never a time when He was not! How strong God is! He can do everything. The little sparrow nestles amidst the leaves, hidden by His hand, and the same hand shakes the mountains. How loving Thou art, O God! Nothing can separate us from Thee, not even sin, save as it clouds our eyes so that we cannot see. Every little insect, every little flower is dear in

Prayer

Thy sight; how much more man!
And Thou art everywhere. 'Above,
below, around me and within,' for
Thou livest in my heart. How
all-knowing Thou art, dear God!
Nothing in past or future hidden
from Thee, and yet Thou dost
calmly wait and work till the
right time comes for each deed of
mercy or storm of rebuke. Thou
lookest into eternity and knowest;
Thou lookest into my poor heart
and knowest." Could any prayer
be nobler and more life-giving?
Oh why do we linger over long pe-
titions and minute supplications,
when we might so calmly rest our
littleness and ignorance and sinful-
ness in His omnipotence, omnis-
cience, and eternal purity! From
such hiding we come out, like
Moses as he descended from Si-
nai, with face aglow!

3. And then it is time for con-
fession. Now let the tired, sad
heart flood out its trouble before
a God so ready to hear. Tell Him

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everything, for overburdened nature needs relief. Be fearlessly frank.

It is well to take some order in this confession. Tell of the sins of the thoughts, then of the affections, then of the tongue. Confess how the family life, the business life, the social life have all failed to reach a pure standard. Take the commandments and note how you have broken them, one after the other. There is enough to make the heart speedily sick in such confession.

Yet—and here is the truth never to be forgotten, the Christian truth—remember that you are telling your errors to a loving Father, whose forgiveness is absolute. “I believe in the forgiveness of sins,” we say in our Creed, and that means not final forgiveness only, so that we can enter heaven, but forgiveness here and now. We rise from our knees *forgiven*; sins and their stains all gone, be-

Prayer

hind His back, buried in the sea, so that we have no right to think of them any more, for we are "as white as snow." Yes, we are *bathed* once, but we must wash frequently to clear away the daily stains (see St. John xiii: 10, revised translation). Each night we may lie down to our rest as little children, pure and holy. To keep cleansed, never to let the errors accumulate unforgiven, that is the Christian's part.

4. And finally, there must be intercession. We must pray for others, else our prayer is not real. For how can we come to God and forget His world, our fellows, our common humanity? He who so separates himself is an infidel, and worse. If the Lord's Prayer says *our* and *us*, so must we. Oh, the comfort of it all! Here we can speak the dear name of husband or wife, brother or sister, child or friend, and know that we are heard. Here we can bring our

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pupils, our servants, our parishioners, our rulers, one by one, as the mothers of old brought their children, as Monica brought Augustine, and they are blessed. So is our prayer made the human expression of divine love, for as God cares for all, so must we.

We have not spoken of family prayer and grace at meals; or of that dear union when parent and child kneel side by side. Ah, the subject is so rich, so inexhaustible!

Adoration, contemplation, confession, intercession—these are the parts of our communion with God. If we use them sincerely we rise from our knees to meet the responsibilities of life strong and full of courage.

“ Then on Thy grandeur I will lay me
down ;
Already life is heaven for me ;
No cradled child more softly lies than I—
Come soon, eternity ! ”

IV.
BIBLE READING.

IV.

BIBLE READING.

“ Search the Scriptures.”

THE Bible is God's message to us. Not the only message, for we must never think that we honor the Bible by making it the sole medium of communication between God and His children. God speaks to us through prayer and all the other means of grace. He speaks to us through history and the voices of the past, and in this age we are learning that He speaks to us through nature and all her wonders. The Psalmist knew this when, long ago, he sang: “The heavens declare the glory of God. Day unto day uttereth speech.” And our Lord taught it when He

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said : " Consider the lilies." And the great dramatist said :

" Our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running
brooks,
Sermons in stones and good in everything."

We are to learn God's lessons wherever they are found. But the Bible is pre-eminently the book of revelation, because it means just one thing—Christ. Jesus is the centre. The Old Testament looks forward to Him, and He is the interpretation of its history and laws and customs. The New Testament looks back to Him, and makes His life and words the bases of all conduct and truth. Nature only indirectly proclaims a Redeemer. She suggests redemption through evolution and through human invention and discovery and mastery, but she does not centralize it or make it personal. Through the Bible we know that Christ is the great Redeemer through whom all lesser

Bible Reading

redeemers work, because He leads in all redemptive advance. We must keep this truth in mind, then, in all our Bible study. It is impossible to understand the book, it is impossible to gain from it the true help we need, unless we find this kernel, this dear centre, sometimes hidden but always there—the Christ.

There are three especial ways in which the Bible helps us. (1) It tells us of God. (2) It tells us of ourselves. (3) It reveals the future. 1. It tells us of God as He was progressively revealed. It is a wonderful study to mark how a personal God comes out of the midst of uncertainty—first as suggested in Genesis, where we find the crude conception of His being simply a man with great powers; then in the Hebrew history, as He revealed His might and truth in experiences and laws; and finally in the prophecies, as He became the Jehovah, the Guide and the

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Guardian of His people. And then in the New Testament Christ revealed Him as the Father, the Friend, the Healer and Comforter. If any man doubts God or wonders who and what He is let him intelligently study the Old and the New Testaments and see how plainly He who made us is revealed.

2. Then the Bible tells us about ourselves, again with graded step. At first men are children seeking pleasure, curious, afraid, discouraged. Then they come to youth, aspiring, daring, even impertinent and hating restraint. Then in maturity they recognize themselves as God's sons with great longings to be satisfied and great victories to be won. And side by side with this the Bible gives the laws of growth, the plan by which man is shaped into perfect sonship, from the A B C of the Old Testament law, "thou shalt," and "thou shalt not," to the rich culture and art of the New Testament where

Bible Reading

one word, love, opens all secrets and breaks down all obstacles.

3. And, finally, having told us of God and of ourselves, the Bible opens—not widely lest we be blinded by the light, but widely enough for us to see and believe—the gates of the future. Life, once thought to be a probation, becomes an education for something higher and better. Work, once hated as the part of a slave, becomes the sharing with divinity of the power of creating and blessing. Friendships open into the fulness of joy never to be broken; and death, from the horror of a dark river, becomes the jewelled gate opening into God's full glory.

Everywhere, from Genesis to Revelation, these are the messages: God, Man, Eternity. Oh, the rest in finding here these enigmas solved! From their united clearness life steps out before us as a brave, beautiful, strong, significant thing. We can live high

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and noble lives because we know God and ourselves and our destiny!

Before suggesting some ways of using the Bible, let me say—and it is timely to say it—that we must not be disturbed by the treatment which this book is receiving now at the hands of critics. There never was an age when interest in religion was as great as it is to-day. But with the interest has come a spirit of examination and dissection which is very bold and fearless, and a great many old ideas and opinions are being overturned. We need not be afraid. God's truth will stand. And if any dress in which that truth has appeared before us is changed, it will only result in the truth itself becoming richer and dearer and more beautiful in its new adornment. Real faith is not afraid of any examination or discovery; it wants only the truth.

Bible Reading

And now let us think how we can study the Bible. There are two kinds of Bible study, intellectual and devotional. The former is good. It leads us, as good Bishop Hurst said years ago in my hearing, to find all we should know as educated men and women, of persons and places, dates, doings, doctrines, and duties, in this most interesting book of the ages. But the devotional study is the more important.

1. First, then, we must not begin with Genesis and read through to Revelation chapter by chapter. We can gain no real benefit for our souls and lives in that way, for the chapters and verses are arbitrary divisions, and so is the present chronological arrangement of the books. But we must open our Bible to any part we will and read a few words, or many words, as we please, and then think of them and apply them to ourselves, for they are a message from God.

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Suppose, for instance, that I am about to read my Bible at the time of my evening devotions. I open to Isa. lv—"Ho, every one that thirsteth." Perhaps I stop just there. I have my message and I apply it: "The dear God calls me, hails me in the very onrush of my life! Ah, the joy of His love! And not to me only, but to all He calls. And knowing our desires He appeals to them. He knows how thirsty we are!" So I think what God means as He speaks His message to me. Or I turn to the 121st Psalm in the morning, and carry the thought of aspiration with me all through the day. Or I read St. John xv, and learn the lesson of strength through Jesus.

That is what we mean by devotional reading. It is the taking and the applying of a word from our Father. And to make this the more real it is always well before reading to hold the unopened

Bible Reading

Bible in our hands and with closed eyes ask God to show us His will: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." And after we have found and pondered upon the message again we should utter a little petition: "Bless this Thy message to me, O God, and may I live by it to-day," or "rest in its comfort to-night." How real that makes it all! It is just like a talk with God or a spoken message from Him. Don't question the number of verses or the minutes. Sometimes your devotion must be very brief; sometimes it can be continued. Don't wonder whether you ought to read the Old Testament or the New. But just open to any book you please and read. You cannot fail of help, and help is what you need and what the Bible should mean to you.

There are, of course, certain parts of the Bible to which we instinctively turn. The Psalms

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and Isaiah in the Old Testament, the gospels, especially Christ's own words, and the epistles of James and John in the New Testament — these never grow too familiar. But the whole Bible is good.

I have no doubt the dear old woman who said her favorite text was, "at Michmash he hath laid up his carriages," (Isaiah x:28), found a message of comfort even in those words. If ravens fed Elijah, may not strange words sometimes feed us?

2. It is well to know by heart certain parts of the Bible. What a great joy to be able to repeat verses or chapters at times—when we cannot sleep, when we are ill, when travelling or walking, or when talking to a sick person! It is good to take the morning's verse or verses and repeat them all through the day, letting them be the "secret strain" of that day. For, as Keble says:

Bible Reading

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

In this particular it is one of the dearest plans to have a Scripture Calendar with a text for each day. When you tear off the old date in the morning, how often a rich sweet message comes to meet you with the new date ! And it speaks all through the day. I remember so well a day of trouble in my life when all seemed lost. Work was a failure. I was disappointed in a friend, and the way was dark. And I said : “ Shall I go on ? ” Then I looked at my little calendar, and the text was : “ Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.” What an inspiration ! At once I seized my hat and ran to see a sick person who needed comfort,

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and a poor woman who wanted food, and a lad who was in trouble; and when I came back the old burden had vanished. The way was clear. It was "doing the next thing" that drove away the clouds and brought the sunshine.

" From an old English parsonage, down by
the sea,
There came in the twilight a message to me.
Its quaint Saxon legend, deeply engraven,
Hath, as it seems to me, teaching from
heaven ;
And all through the hours the quiet words
ring
Like a low inspiration—' Doe ye nexte
thyng.' "

3. The Bible has help for all needs and conditions. We must accustom ourselves to go to it as a book of God's words. I need comfort? Then I go to the Bible, and wherever I turn there is the message of peace. My desire brings out new phases of old truths. I need strength, and in the words I read there rests the assurance of God's power. I can come here in

Bible Reading

sorrow, and there is consolation ; in doubt, and there is wisdom ; in joy, and there is sympathy. We are inclined to laugh at the habit which some old-time Christians had of opening the Bible at random, and taking the first word they read as a message. Yet I am inclined to think such use was not so far astray. For if we look for help we will not have to read very long before the help will speak. And we do need—yes, we strong, intelligent, nineteenth century men and women, do need the help which thus comes.

Fewer mistakes would be made by public men, fewer failures would shake the business world, fewer experiences of awful despair would startle humanity with that fatal, suicidal cry, so often heard since Shakespeare made it real—“Drown'd ! Drown'd !”—if we humans used this Book of comfort and help more constantly. A dear friend, now in Paradise, had on

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her desk, always facing her, a sweet motto, "What would Jesus do?" If His life was the model for us all, then, surely, only as we find from the Bible story an answer to the question, "What shall I do?" as often as it comes to us can we hope to walk aright.

4. If prayer is communion with God, then Bible reading must be listening to God. Now we need to listen to God all day long. Like Jesus, we must meet temptation with, "It is written." So we must have a message always near. We cannot always have a Bible in our hands, but as we walk, as we work, as we wait for a moment in the "pauses" of the heated day, we can bring the morning's reading, or any other word which God speaks to us, to meet the exigencies of the time. Ah! here is where, sometimes, we find our greatest help from the Bible. Like great pearls the words come, and before them temptation flies.

Bible Reading

Like piercing rays they show the way, and we walk on without doubt. Like sweet waters they make green the barrenness of duty and toil, and the very desert of struggle blossoms and is fragrant.

God give us grace and wisdom to use this dear Book constantly. It can never fail to help and cheer us. And the more faithfully we read it the clearer and the dearer will its messages grow.

“ O precious, holy book of God,
There are no words like thine ;
The tones that angels bend to hear
Breathe through these lines divine,
And come with love's own melody
From the King's heart to mine.”

V.
CHURCH WORSHIP

V.

CHURCH WORSHIP.

“Where two or three are gathered together
in My name, there am I.”

WE miss much of the help which might come to us from worship, because we have such a faulty idea of what true worship is. We have always heard of “going to church,” and our early experiences have given a certain color to the Sunday gathering of which it is difficult to rid ourselves. Formality has led to unreality, and that, perhaps, to unbelief in any strength to be derived from worship. We ought to worship, not from any obedience to the law of propriety, not because we were taught to worship, not even because we

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think God asks it of us, but because *we need it*, and the satisfying of need creates a true, healthy love for that which grants the satisfaction.

Before thinking of the parts of worship let us remember that the church building and Sunday are simply incidentals in our worship. That is, the building where we gather, and which is consecrated to God and so called "God's House," is to make our worship convenient and fitting, but it is not an essential; we can worship God without it. And Sunday is chosen, not as the *only* day but as a *special* day for worship. When men realize that the scientist, who talks of the field, the wood, and the river as places for adoration and uplifting meditation, has a great truth at the foundation of his independence—for

"The groves were God's first temples,"

then the material building of man's

Church Worship

erection will not grow less but more important, as being the emphasis of God's presence on earth everywhere. And when men think of every day as God's day then Sunday will only be dearer as declaring the truth of the sanctity of all time. We must not grow narrow and try to confine God and His love within four walls or twenty-four hours. The spire and the cross declare that God is on earth to meet us, and the rest and quiet of the "first and best of days" make us know that

" God breathes His peace through all
the days."

Perhaps, sometime, when our churches are always open and the rushing man of business can mark the sanctuary inviting him to "come in, rest, and pray," and the tired woman of many cares can remember that one door to quiet is never closed, worship will become a more real thing. Nothing is a

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more evident sarcasm on the sincerity of our modern Protestant Christianity than a great building opened once a week for a few hours and then shut, locked, barred, gated, and padlocked, as if God had gone away and would not be back till the next Sunday. Of course the man thinks God has no interest in him if the place specially built to emphasize His presence is kept shut against His children 313 days of the year! Nothing so biting in the way of practical unbelief is found, even in this nineteenth century, as a week bounded by Sundays, but left without a call to worship except, perhaps, a "mid-week" service, and that in a "second-hand," week-day place called a "vestry" or "chapel." Let us pray and work that all our churches may be kept open throughout the seven days, with frequent services. We cannot make much headway against careless living, loose thinking, and fee-

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ble believing until we shall accomplish this simple, common-sense reform.

The parts of worship are three, namely, praise, prayer, and instruction. If any one of these is wanting the worship cannot be complete. We are meeting God. (Hence the good old term "meeting house," which means a place not where man meets man, but where man meets God.) So we praise as we see the King in His beauty; we pray as we see the King in His might; we listen as the King in His wisdom speaks.

1. Praise and thanksgiving lift the soul upward. Most of us have very low ideals in life. Money, pleasure, power—these are the little hillocks we try to climb, and when we reach the top we feel ashamed, for we are still so low. To lift eyes and feet to the mountains is to see God. I suppose the reason we sing so feebly (if we sing at all), and sometimes even sit

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down while we sing, is to be found in our lack of real healthy enthusiasm; and there can be no real enthusiasm where we do not glory in some great vision, some noble hope. "My God, gracious, good, eternal, I love thee!" Who can say such words intelligently and not feel a thrill? We feel it when we praise a friend. Not long ago I listened to a great pianist. He held his audience at first, then he inspired them, and finally he aroused them, and they crowded forward, clapping, waving handkerchiefs, tears in eyes, throats swelling with suppressed emotion. Is not God greater, and His harmonies, are they not richer than any human can bring from strings or pipes? We think of history, and God is there in a divine symphony. We think of nature, and God is there in one unending yet ever varying song. We think of our lives, and God is there again with strange harmonies which grow richer and

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sweeter as their tones ring in after years. Ah, and we think of Jesus, that life, that personality, that voice calling all through the troubled centuries, "Come unto Me," and words fail to sing His beauty, the fairest of men, the bright and morning star!

2. Of prayer we can hardly say enough, it forms so full a part of all true worship. We come empty, and must be filled; tired, and must be rested; anxious, and must be calmed; troubled, and must be comforted. But we must not forget that we worship not selfishly but as a family; it is "common" worship.

" We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear."

Hence the importance of repeating in concert our petitions, happily so much more frequently done than formerly. How real the dear Lord's Prayer becomes when "Our Father" is said not by

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minister alone, nor by each in the silence of his own heart, but by all "with one mouth." So, too, we pray for common blessings. There would be fewer church quarrels and fewer heart-broken ministers if the people prayed for each other, for their church, for their pastor. It used to be the custom once for the minister to guide the united, though silent, petitions of the people by giving subjects for prayer, while all knelt before God, thus: "Let us now pray for our church, that we may be united, spiritual, earnest." And then, after a pause: "Let us pray for the sick and the afflicted." And then, again: "Let us pray for parents, brothers, children not yet serving Christ." One can readily imagine such common petitions arising as would make heaven full of joy. The most helpful "mid-week" meeting I have ever heard of was thus made an opportunity for common prayer

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by each praying for his neighbor who lived next to him, and then for his neighbor in the seat by his side, and then for the servants at home or the business companion. We may be sure there was little bitterness left when that service was over, for bitterness cannot live in the face of prayer. But if there is no such custom in my church or yours, still there is opportunity enough for common prayer if only we will use it. How much time we lose in church, "waiting for the service to begin!" Why, it has already begun as soon as we are there. And the precious moments before the minister enters may be made the best part of the worship.

3. Instruction is commonly thought to lie only in the sermon, but that is a great error. God's minister indeed speaks to us, if he is true, the message God has given him. But we must know that in worship God himself speaks directly by the Holy Spirit. He

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speaks through the Bible as it is read to us and we learn so of his will. He speaks to our hearts as that quiet motion touches us, so strange and yet so real a motion, calling to duty or restraining from wrong. He speaks in the peace which follows prayer, in the inspiration which a hymn gives, in the longing which comes from a thought of our need; and, if we are quick to learn, we can have no difficulty in comprehending the lesson.

I would not minimize preaching. There is a quick response to earnest, sincere sermons spoken as man to man. A sermon which has been thought out on the knees and prepared in God's sight and by His grace must do good. But after all it is the human element which enters into the speech, and we are bound, in listening intelligently, to judge, taking what we need and leaving the rest. The great difference between modern and mediæ-

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val Christianity is that now men do not act because some one tells them to act, but because they are impelled by a nobler guiding. Then faith and action were simple obedience to what the Christian leaders said. It was necessary then because men were not generally educated. But it can never be in this era that I will accept, without examination and judgment, that which another declares. Sermons can persuade, they can instruct if they lead, through persuasion, to truth in practice, but they can never compel, and it would be well for some young ministers to realize this. Only when God speaks do we listen, even though our understanding cannot follow.

Perhaps as we grow generally wiser we shall have in our worship less and less of preaching. It is a comfort, sometimes, to worship when only God speaks; in the quiet church when all alone, or in the wooded path, or under the

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stars; or else when only hymns and prayers and the Bible form the order of service.

What can we do to make our worship more really helpful? First, we can believe in it. Never speak of it as a mere "going to church," or a "preaching service," but as a meeting with God. Second, we can accustom ourselves to bring our burdens here and give them to Jesus. Sometimes men and women are told to leave their business and their household cares behind when they enter the church. I think Christ would say, "Bring them with you that I may give you strength and wisdom to bear them." The reason there is so much godless business and such fretful household service is because people have left them outside, as our fathers used to tie their horses in the shed back of the church, and after the service they are taken up again until the next Sunday. Worship means consecration,

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that is, asking God to bless everything. Third, we can join more heartily in the worship. Our voices, as well as our hearts, God asks for. "When my mouth praiseth Thee with joyful lips," sang the Psalmist, and Miss Havergal phrases it in modern poetry :

" Take my mouth, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King ;
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee. "

And, lastly, we can be reverent. If God is in church to meet us, let us meet Him reverently, not as afraid, but as overcome with honor and love. "The Lord is in His holy temple." "This is the house of God." So with uncovered head if men, with bowed head and gentle step if women, we will come to worship. It is not reverent to sit upright with eyes open during prayer. It is not reverent to look about or rest at ease while a hymn is being sung. If we are afraid to kneel in Church as we kneel at our

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bedsides at home, let us at least bow before our Holy Father, and worship Him in our hearts.

God grant us the spirit of true worship! Then we shall find ourselves stronger men and women, and love to "go to church" because we are helped by it.

VI.
CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP.

VI.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP.

“ I must work the works of Him that
sent Me.”

GOD being our Father, it must follow that we are all brethren. This should never be forgotten by the true Christian. While we stand as individuals before God, responsible each for himself, there is also a responsibility as regards others which cannot be evaded. The *Heresy of Cain*, * “Am I my brother’s keeper?” is apt to be perpetuated by Christians who think that they are in the world simply to care for their own souls

* See a book with this title by Rev. Geo. Hodges, D.D.

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and to keep themselves pure. "Where is thy brother?" is the ringing question which contradicts the heresy and makes it impossible for a man to save his own life unless he has first lost it, used it and worn it out in the service of men.

Christian fellowship is a necessity. If we love God truly we must love God's children. We serve God in serving them. The cry to Christ as He hung upon the cross was, and must ever be, a divine truth applicable to the servants as to the Master: "He saved others; Himself He cannot save." "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

For us nineteenth-century Christians this fellowship finds its sphere in three particulars: (1) in church work, (2) in general philanthropic work, and (3) in missionary work. Let us see how the Christian is to meet these three calls.

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I. When we enter the Christian family, the Church, through Christ who is the door, that family is represented to us by the parish, the branch of the Church which, for the time, asks our allegiance. There the first call for our service is to be heard. For God is a God of order. If every man worked as he pleased, in independent effort, chaos would result, and harm rather than good would follow. The Church is like an army ; it has its sections, its divisions, and each soldier must fight where he is placed.

Churches to-day are doing more work than ever before in Christian history. Parish houses, parish societies, rescue missions, and all kinds of ministering agencies are felt to be as necessary a part of church life as praise and prayer. Worship and work are the balanced parts of parish life as they are of the personal religious life, and rightly so. For Christ has

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placed the Church in the world as a regenerating power. With her faith, her worship, her ministry, she must help men everywhere to believe, to pray and to work righteousness.

What, then, are we as Christians doing in our church? How much, how little? Are we Sunday-school teachers, missionary workers, pastor's helpers, daughters of the King, members of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, or of the Brotherhood of Andrew and Philip? If not, why not? Perhaps we answer, that we are not fitted for such work, or we have not the time, or there are more workers than there is work. But we would not give such answers to Jesus if he asked us face to face. Blessed ourselves, we must try to bring a blessing to others. "Our sufficiency is of God." We need not rely upon our own fitness. If we are busy at home, so much the more reason why we should

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be busy also at church, for at least a part of our time is God's. And if there seems to be no place for us we must make a place. Every minister is only too glad to provide work for his people if they will follow his leadership and do their best where he places them.

And now how real our Christianity becomes! We are workers with God, partners with the dear Christ in redeeming the world, using what He has given us to bless others. Worship means to us strength for work. Prayer inspires, praise exalts, truth directs. So that we go out of the church full of the spirit of ministry. That is real Christianity. Not getting, but giving; getting, in order to give. Building up the kingdom of Christ in the world, not dreaming of a kingdom somewhere else. The kingdom is here. It is being established now. Read our Lord's parables and see how He makes the kingdom a part of the earth life.

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Leaven hidden in meal, a grain of mustard seed growing, talents used, a care for the thirsty, the hungry, the sick, the imprisoned—those are the pictures Jesus gives of the kingdom, everywhere working righteousness, destroying evil, strengthening the weak, healing the diseased. The Christian life is a battle, but a battle not for our own safety, for who ever heard of a soldier trying to take care of himself regardless of the enemy or of the field he is to win? A battle to keep others, to save men—that is the Christian life. Hence, every Christian must be a worker, not only praying: “Thy kingdom come,” but bringing that kingdom with all his might. An idle church member is an impossibility. If you and I are Christians we must work in our church, and work hard.

2. But because of our unhappy divisions, and because, too, the Church and the life about us (sometimes called secular) are

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somewhat distinct, we have opportunities calling us outside of the Church. We must always count these as secondary calls, but they are most important and cannot be neglected. Our city or town has great demands upon us. Schools and hospitals and orphanages and nurseries—how many helpers they need! Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations, temperance societies, reform leagues, industrial societies, these all must rely upon Christians for their strength. Men, as a part of their religious life, must take an active interest in civic reform and pure politics, and women must look into the question of social purity and rescue their fallen sisters and bring the light of their own culture to cheer the poor through healthy entertainments, loan exhibitions, summer-rest work and similar methods. Girls can touch girls through girls' clubs, boys can help

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boys through boys' clubs. There is work for all in every town and hamlet.

And there is this also to be remembered, that though the Church ought to undertake this work, yet cannot because of divisions, nothing so surely hastens true union as united work. Christians working side by side grow to understand each other better, separations are seen to be faulty, and loving and serving the same dear Lord, they grow nearer to each other in the bond of peace. I am convinced that Church unity, under the Holy Spirit's guidance, will come in no other way. No laws or agreements or conferences will make us one, but working and weeping side by side, through tears and drops of toil, the radiant truth will be seen by us all. The poet pictures a great fact when he brings together over a child's grave an estranged wife and husband :

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“ O, there above the little grave
We kissed again, with tears.”

When the estranged and sadly separated parts of Christ's dear family meet over the wounded, suffering, dying children of God, then they are led to “kiss again, with tears.”

3. And then there is missionary work. The field enlarges from parish and town to the world. “The world for Christ”—nothing short of that satisfies the Christian. “But what can I do? It is such a big world!” Yes; but Christ has been patiently working all through the years, and so must we be patient workers. And we can do much if we will. First, we can believe heart and soul in missions. Few of us do. We have a general interest, but it is vague. “Charity begins at home,” some say. Yes; it begins there, but it does not end there. “Their sound is gone out into all lands; and their words unto the ends of

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the world." "Go ye into all the world." Christ tells His ministers to preach and to baptize everywhere. We have no business to question and ask why. Here are our marching orders and we must obey. No man can be a true Christian and not believe in missions. Second, we can refuse to draw any line as to places. I wish the words "domestic" and "foreign" could be dropped as regards missions, for we have no right to discriminate. "God has made of one blood all nations of men." Third, we can pray. Ah, a little petition every night and morning would not take long, and, fervently offered, it would mean so much. "God, please bless and help all missionaries and their work." Suppose every Christian prayed simply that every day, how long before the multitudes would come in? Fourth, we can give. And as we give, our interest will grow.

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That admirable tract, "Mrs. Pickett's Missionary Box," tells how closely our daily life may be brought to that of those who know not God. "A penny a blessing"—do we give that?

These are the parts of fellowship. God grant us grace to work together in our church, in our home, in missionary effort, for the coming of the kingdom.

VII.
THE HOLY COMMUNION.

VII.

THE HOLY COMMUNION.

“ Abide in Me, and I in you.”

IN this dear feast we have the highest and best of all the helps of the Christian life. For Jesus instituted it Himself, and asked us to continue it in remembrance of Him. And He instituted it at the time of His suffering, so that we always associate it with His agony and bloody sweat, His cross and passion. And then, above all, as He gave the bread and wine He spoke such wonderful words: “ This is My body which is given for you ; this is My blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” It must be a very important service which Christ at the most solemn mo-

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ment, His last night on earth, asked us to observe. It must be a service full of deep significance since our dear Lord called the bread His body and the wine His blood.

It is sad to remember that the hottest controversies of the centuries have raged about this service. But is it not wonderful that, notwithstanding all the trouble and distress occasioned by these discussions, and notwithstanding the divisions amongst God's people, this request of Jesus Christ, "Do this in remembrance of me," has been always and everywhere observed? We have here the one link binding us all together, and binding us to Him.

We must think of the Holy Communion in the simplest way. Whatever meaning Christ's great words may have, He certainly did not mean to make us afraid of the service He asked us to observe. It should be kept as simple as it was when He instituted it, and

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those who come to it must have the simple faith and love which the eleven apostles had as they gathered about their Master and ate and drank as He commanded them. It is our Father's table, and we, His children, come as His guests. He clothes us in the garment of Christ's righteousness, so we need not be afraid because of our sins. He asks us to come, so we need not wait for any further invitation.

Many names have been given to this service. It is called most commonly the Lord's Supper, which carries us back at once to that dear upper room, and makes us realize the simplicity of the feast. It is called the Holy Communion, which teaches that we are very closely drawn to the Lord and to each other at this service.

“ Angels and living saints and dead
But one communion make ;
All join in Christ, their living Head,
And of his love partake.”

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So sang Isaac Watts, and the significance of his words brings a great comfort—that in this service we are brought nearer to the dear ones gone before, whom we call dead, but who are in the truest sense living. They are with Christ and we here meet with Him, so we must be drawn nearer to them.

Then, this feast is also called the “Eucharist,” which means a service of thanksgiving, because we thank Christ and praise Him for all He has done for us, as we do this in remembrance of Him. Some Christians also call it a sacrifice, because we commemorate or celebrate that great sacrifice of the cross, where Jesus died that we might live. And our fathers in America used to give it that old name of “the Sacrament,” because it is the great testament or pledge between God and His children. As the blood was of old sprinkled on the houses in Egypt where the children of Israel

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were, and so the destroying angel passed over them, so this service tells us how we are marked by the blood of Christ and saved by His love.

But none of these names, though they each teach a special lesson, must keep us from that simplest and most natural view of the Holy Communion which is gained from the time and circumstances of the institution. In the "upper room" Christ and his apostles, the infant Church, were reclining at the table, a quiet place, a quiet hour, a simple home gathering. And then, taking bread and wine, by His words He associated them with His death, gave to His apostles, and bade them continue the custom till He should come again. Spiritual food, food for our spiritual hunger, an assurance that as our bodies are sustained by nourishment so by Christ our souls are fed, because he died for us—must not that ever be the real message, including

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all the other messages in this service?

How shall we prepare ourselves to receive the Holy Communion? St. Paul gives many directions, which may be summed up in these: repentance, love, and obedience. We must be truly sorry for our sins, and that we may be sorry we must know what those sins are. So we must examine ourselves honestly during the week, for we want to tell our Lord, when we come to do what He has asked us to do, how sorry we are that we have done what He has asked us not to do. We must love everybody, for how can we come to this feast of the Christ who so loved the world as to die for it if there is some one whom we hate? And while it is impossible to love all alike, we can at least pray for all, even our enemies. And there must be the determination that we will do better, live purer lives, speak and act more kindly in the

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future, trying hard to follow the example of our Christ. Isn't it a comfort that these are the things which are asked of us as the preparation for the Holy Communion, rather than any hard questions which we could not answer, or any great deeds which we could not do? And yet we must not trust too much even to this preparation. For, after all, we come, just as the eleven came long ago, in that upper room, poor, hungry, tired children, to our Father's table, and we must not think of ourselves, but of Him.

“ The bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear bridegroom's face ;
I will not look upon myself,
But on my King of grace. ”

The blessings of the Holy Communion become very real as we think of them. There is, first, the blessing of forgiveness. What a comfort to have this sure pledge, this sacrament, this divine oath, that our sins are pardoned! We

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can feel certain every time we come to this feast that we are made as clean and pure as little children, not by the eating and drinking but by Him who bade us eat and drink. And then there is the blessing of being brought especially near to Jesus. If we can draw nearer to Him at one time than another it must be in this Lord's Supper. He asked us to keep it for His sake. He longs for us as much, nay, more than we can possibly long for Him. As Ian Maclaren so beautifully says: "Jesus careth little for monuments; He craveth for hearts. He is only satisfied when the doors are shut to the world, and, in a quiet place, His friends meet to keep His commandment. Whether it be in the shadow of a cathedral, where the hushed multitude kneel at the lifting of the Host, or in some Puritan meeting-room, where the elements of the Sacrament are passed from hand to hand, or on

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the mountain side, where Scottish Covenanters keep the feast, or in the dreary catacombs, where early Christians show forth the death they may to-morrow share, it is the same to Him who is above all rites, who lives for love." * And, again, here we find strength for every need. When we have a special work, or a heavy burden, or a crushing sorrow, we can come and find in this divine nourishment the force we need. Even our bodies may be strengthened. We ridicule the superstition of men in the Middle Ages who thought the "Mass" a cure for evil, but may we not have lost something by going to the other extreme and not thinking of any real power as coming from this service of love? Where such rest for a tired, weak frame as here at the dear Lord's feet fulfilling His request so pathetically made!

A more frequent service of the

* *The Upper Room*, by Ian Maclaren.

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Holy Communion than was formerly the custom is advisable. How often we ought to come must rest with each individual. But as our hearts grow hungrier for the heavenly food which this feast signifies, will we not desire "to sup with our Lord" more frequently? In the apostolic days they seem to have had this service every Lord's day. If it is really a blessing left to us by Christ, and left with a request that we receive it, is once a week too often?

It is a precious time at this service to pray for our loved ones. As Jesus offered His great prayer on that Thursday night long ago (St. John xvii), in which He prayed for us all almost as it were by name, so may we, in His Name, plead for our friends at this Communion.

" And then for those, our dearest and our best,

By this prevailing presence we appeal ;
O fold them closer to Thy mercy's breast !

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O do Thine utmost for their soul's true
weal !
From tainting mischief keep them white and
clear,
And crown Thy gifts with strength to perse-
vere."

Yes, let us never come without
bearing our dear ones on our
hearts and their names on our lips.

Thank God for this great means
of grace! For nineteen hundred
years it has been observed in all
parts of the world, and yet it is as
dear as ever. Here at our Father's
Table we are all one; rich and
poor, learned and ignorant, young
and old, we kneel side by side.
Here our Elder Brother meets us,
welcomes us, ministers to us, for-
gives us, strengthens us. And
then He promises us something
even better at last. "Behold, I
stand at the door and knock: if
any man hear My voice, and open
the door, I will come in to him,
and will sup with him, and he
with Me."

VIII.

JOY IN THE HOLY GHOST.

VIII.

JOY IN THE HOLY GHOST.

“ The kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

IN a few concluding words I wish to emphasize two great truths: 1st, that in all our life we have the unceasing presence and help of the Holy Spirit of God, and 2d, that this holy companionship gives us a joy which not only endures but grows richer and deeper all the time.

We say in our dear Creed, “ I believe in the Holy Ghost.” Do we know what that means? To have God speak to us directly in our hearts; to have in all we do, the wisdom and strength from above which can never fail or

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mislead ; to be "inspired" in the highest sense of that glorious word, filled full with noble enthusiasm, seeing new truths, doing new works ; that is what God grants us, if we would but know it and realize it.

The Holy Ghost is working everywhere in the world. Every advance in civilization, every new discovery and invention, every great picture, or poem, or musical composition, or good book, they all come through Him. It is not a mere influence, it is not a feeling only, but it is a direct personal working amongst men of that Spirit who long ago "moved upon the face of the waters" and brought order and beauty out of disorder and ugliness. And He will work in us, if we will let Him ; and through His power we may become daily more beautiful, happier, wiser.

Therefore we ought to be joyful. It is a great mistake to think

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of life as sad and miserable. It ought not to be so, it is not so for him who has this power of the Holy Ghost. Many of our hymns and books contradict God in speaking of the world as a "wilderness of woe," and of life as an exile, a dreary journey through darkness, full of tears and grief. It is simply our own fault if it seems so to us. For this is God's world, not the devil's; and He rules, and He works, and He is near. If there comes sorrow it is only an incident, like the cloud which for a moment hides the sun, but from which the sun soon bursts with greater brightness than before. Pain is only the proof of a stream of happiness which refuses to be impeded and soon rises up and floods over the obstacle in its way. The sad things we see, while they make the heart ache with sympathy, are only the puzzles on the wrong side of the great tapestry of beauty which

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God is weaving, with us, to last forever. If the Holy Spirit is working then life must be coming, not death, since He is the "Lord and Giver of Life." So we must think of life, not of death, of righteousness rather than of sin, of Heaven here and now, rather than of desert and darkness and desolation. Life is not probation, but education. And the true Christian is always joyful because he knows that life is more powerful than death, that goodness is stronger than wickedness, and that God is here in the midst of us, working in us and through us.

We must cultivate happiness. The Christian must refuse to be sad. He must smile, and shed sunshine about him. In the darkness he must see light. In the storm he must make peace. In the turmoil about him he must feel and spread the "calm of faith." If once we can realize that to be gloomy and sad and despondent

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and complaining is to sin, and to sin in the meanest way because it is a doubting of God's power and love; if we can learn that the Holy Spirit calls us to gladness and joy and hopefulness and contentment, then the Christian life will be for us what God intended when He called us to it. A good French writer, Monsieur Godet says: 'Ce n'est pas dans le ciel qu'on trouve Dieu; mais c'est en Dieu qu'on trouve le ciel.' "It is not in Heaven that we find God, but it is in God that we find Heaven." If then we know God we have heaven; and the better we know Him the happier and dearer, and more real our heaven becomes.

"Rejoice," said the Sun; "I will make thee gay
With glory and gladness and holiday;
I am dumb, O man, and I need thy voice."
But man would not rejoice.

"Rejoice in thyself," said he, "O Sun,
For thy daily course is a lordly one;

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In thy lofty place rejoice if thou can ;
For me, I am only a man."

" Rejoice," said the Wind, " I am free and
strong ;
I will wake in thy heart an ancient song ;
Hear the roaring woods, my organ noise !"
But man would not rejoice.

" Rejoice, O Wind, in thy strength," said he,
" For thou fulfillest thy destiny ;
Shake the forest, the faint flowers fan ;
For me, I am only a man."

" Rejoice," said the Night, " with moon and
star ;
The Sun and the Wind are gone afar ;
I am here with rest and dreams of choice."
But the man would not rejoice.

For he said—" What rest is to me, I pray,
Whose labor brings no gladsome day ?
He only should dream who has hope behind.
Alas for me and my kind !"

Then a Voice that came not from moon or
star,
From the sun, or the wind roving afar,
Said, " Man, I am with thee—hear my
voice."
And the man said, " I rejoice."

GEORGE MACDONALD.



