

JUST A MINUTE!

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MOMENT-READINGS ON SCRIPTURE PASSAGES,
AND A FEW ON THE GREAT WAR

BY

✓
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"The Optimist," Etc.*

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Dedication to

REVEREND ARTHUR S. HOYT, D.D.

Professor of Sacred rhetoric in Auburn Theological Seminary, my boyhood playmate, college chum, and life-long friend,
this book is lovingly dedicated



Introduction

NO other phrase in the daily speech of us American men and women falls so frequently from our lips as "Just a minute."

The telephone girls repeat it a thousand times each day. Mothers utter it in response to the querulous or insistent claims of their children; clerks to impatient customers; nurses and doctors to sick people whimpering for attention; all people to all other people in all the frenzied rush of modern life. "Just a minute, just a minute, just a minute." How different it is from the *Un poco tiempo* of the Spaniard, which, in reality, is "Never!"

We mean exactly what we say, and are straining every nerve to finish up this present moment's task to take the next one up.

A single minute! What prodigious happenings have taken place in sixty seconds! A single minute has decided the destinies of men and nations. They have signed a treaty, read a paragraph, a text, a single sentence, and a door has opened to a larger life.

We do not need to read a book to become wise unto salvation! A phrase will sometimes do.

Literature is created by a double method. In the first place, by expansion, in which we take a truth which has been stated in a single sentence and elaborate it into a volume. In the second place, by contraction, in which we take a book and compress it into an epigram. The former method suits our days of leisure, the latter our hours of fierce endeavor; hours in which who reads at all must do so on the run.

The fragments in this little volume have been prepared for times like those. They are like the tabloid foods which explorers carry with them on their expeditions and soldiers on their marches. It is a book for callers to pick up from a parlor table while waiting for a hostess; or visitors to glance at before retiring in the guest-chamber of a friend.

May it offer the bread of life to some hungry soul in that swiftly-flitting moment which is his only opportunity for reading in one of those frenzied days through which all of us have to pass so often in our high-pitched modern life, when

“We see all sights from pole to pole,
And nod and glance and bustle by,
But never once possess our souls
Before we die.”

Just a Minute!



*Now David was sitting between
the two gates (2 Sam. 18 : 24).*

WHAT was he doing? Waiting,—that was all. He had done everything that lay in his power, —armed the last soldier, perfected the last plan, given the last command. And now there remained nothing but to sit quietly and helplessly between the gates and wait while the great events transpired beyond the reach of eye or ear or hand. Ah! but that is a thousand times harder than action, or even passion. What is more terrible than just waiting? If you have not acquired the art of patient waiting, you had better learn it at once; for you will have to sit much of your lifetime between the gates, waiting helplessly while the forces you have set in operation slowly work out their inevitable results. The merchant must sit between the gates, and wait for the people to whom he has sold his goods to earn the money to pay. The author must sit between the gates, and wait for the publishers to accept or reject his manuscript. The sailor's wife must sit between the gates,

and wait for the winds to blow her husband's vessel home. We all reach a point where we can do no more, and then—we must just wait. Alas! “we usually learn to wait only when we have no longer anything to wait for.” Adopt the pace of nature; her secret is patience. “Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper sprinkle cool patience.” Are you sitting between the gates waiting? Do it with the noble dignity of a David. If the messenger is to bring you sorrow, receive it with submission.



Wrought great wonders (Acts 6 : 8).

DO not say that to “love and help men and God” will enable you sooner or later to heal the sick and raise the dead. I do not say that to “love and help men and God” will even make you work great signs and wonders among the people, like those done by Whitefield, Wesley, and Moody. But this I will say, that, in that little circle where God has placed you, the “grace and power” of a blameless life of love and helpfulness will work wonders beautiful enough for any man. Is it no “miracle” to lift the burdens from the shoulders of your old father and mother? to soothe the heartaches of some unfortunate brother or sister? to bring joy and hope to

the soul of a sorrowing neighbor? If I had my choice, to be a wonder-worker on a great scale but fail as a son or brother, or to be a good son or brother and fail as a wonder-worker, I wouldn't hesitate a minute.



Fulfil thy ministry (2 Tim. 4 : 5).

COMPLETENESS in character is only a little more beautiful than completeness of effort. In fact, it is generally the result of such effort. A life filled full of service! Can anything be grander? I wonder why the man who coined the word "fulfil" couldn't have made it just plain, simple "filfull"! I love to see an honest dairyman fill a quart cup full with milk. He makes it run over. It is very disgusting to see people overflowing with flattery, affectation, or the like, but what do you think of the man who comes up like a bucket out of your grandfather's well, full to the brim, and spilling over at every turn of the windlass? I know people whose every day is pressed down and running over with devotion, goodness, generosity, love. Fill your life up to the brim. It will hold as much as the bed of the ocean. Who can measure the contents of a life like D. L. Moody's, running over at the brim like a perennial fountain? Once, after

traveling a whole day without a drop of water, I came to an abandoned Texas farmhouse, and let a bucket down into a well a hundred feet deep, and heard it strike a dirt bottom. No wonder the farmer abandoned the accursed spot. And there are lives like this. Is it any wonder that people abandon them ?



So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David (1 Sam. 20 : 16).

HOW large a figure such promises cut in human life. Civilization could not go forward without them. They enter into all human relationships. The child promises the parent that it "will be good." Lovers promise each other to be faithful unto death. Men promise to pay debts and to deliver goods. Governments promise each other to maintain peace or to unite in war. Without a high sense of their obligations, business would go to pieces, and society disintegrate. There is little to hope for in the life of a boy or girl who will not keep their word. Your word of honor ought to be as sacred as a most solemn oath. It must be as good as a witnessed bond. Bad promises are better broken than kept ; but good ones must be fulfilled at the cost of property and life. Who doubts that either one

of those magnificent young Jews would rather have died than broken that covenant !



*According as each hath received
a gift (1 Pet. 4 : 10).*

THANK God for that word “according” ! There is one thing that human nature never does, which the divine nature never fails to do,—and that is, to preserve true ratios. God suits the back to the burden, and the burden to the back. From him to whom much hath been given, much shall be required; from him who hath little, little. God never demands a ten-talent dividend from a one-talent man. On that wisdom and justice I pillow my head and heart. But the exaction will be “according to the gift ;” and oh, when we see ourselves as God sees us, how pitiful, how contemptible, shall we seem !



*For I know my transgressions; and my
sin is ever before me (Psa. 51 : 3).*

NO MORTAL man can endure the permanent consciousness of a great sin without either penitence, moral ruin, or mental collapse. It is a fearful dilemma. I believe in teaching children to look their sins in

the face. Harrow their consciences. Make them realize their guilt. If you smooth over their vices and extenuate their faults you ruin them. There is hope for Little Bill if he looks pale in the face and black around the eyes until he confesses the lie he has told. If he cannot shake off the memory of it, if it pursues him like a shadow, if it is ever before him, night and day, thank God and take courage. He will come out all right. It is the boys who can kill birds and not dream about them nights that I despair of. It was the torment of an irrepressible vision of his guilt that drove David at last to penitence.



Encourage the fainthearted (1 Thess. 5 : 14).

I'VE had my share of life's pleasures, and want to testify as to which is the sweetest of them all. It's "putting heart" into people who have lost it. The saddest sight that Nature holds up to God is a boy or girl who has "lost heart." Poor, dispirited, hopeless little folks! What can any one do without "heart"? Not to be able to put your "heart" into a task is to be certain of failure. It is almost as fatal to be only "half-hearted." But how terrible to lose heart entirely! And yet in every group of children you are liable

to find some timid, shrinking creature who has already lost the "courage of life." How beautiful it is to "hearten him up,"—to breathe hope into his empty spirit! And how easy it is—often. Sometimes a single kind word will do it, sometimes even a smile of encouragement. You can do a thousand times as much for child or man by putting heart into his bosom as you can by putting either learning into his head or money into his pockets.



*Having therefore obtained the help
that is from God (Acts 26 : 22).*

THE help that is from *God*. There are many kinds of help,—the help of money, the help of friendship, the help of health, the help of knowledge, the help of experience. But there is also the help that is from God. It is a very peculiar and wonderful help indeed. It is a help that people do not believe in until they are in extremity. They want to help themselves, or have some human being help them, until all else has failed. And then they cast themselves on God. No little boy ever believed that the water in the old mill-pond would hold him up until it actually did so. He will grab at a board, or a companion's leg, or at a straw for support, but never

lay himself out flat on his back on the bosom of the water. The little skeptic ! I have been trying for two years to teach Little Bill that the water is anxious to "help" him to swim, and he is still positively convinced that it is trying to drown him. It is only after men have cast themselves, in some deep desperation, into the "everlasting arms," that they discover their helping and holding power. They are the only safe refuge for the sufferer and the sinner.



*Ministering as of the strength which
God supplieth (1 Pet. 4 : 11).*

IT IS both bad morals and puerile philosophy to forget that strength and wisdom and virtue, and life itself, proceed from God. Do you think it does no harm to the son of a millionaire to spend his father's fortune as if it were his very own, and he had earned it with his hands ? It generates egotism. It fosters pride. It darkens the intellect. It degrades the conscience. You never saw the son of a rich man who forgot that he was using the money that his father supplied, who was not either a fool or a knave. You never saw, and you never will see, men who forget that God supplies their strength, their wisdom, their virtue, and their life, who are not in

some way mentally or morally unsound. The sea must not forget the rivers, nor the rivers the clouds. The fruits must not forget the seed, nor the seed the flower. Man, thou art nothing but a derivative! Make the best of it!



Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15 : 57).

“VICTORY!” That is the battle-cry of our holy religion. “Victory” over sorrow, over sin, over death, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Happiness (in the long run) will return from the battle with sorrow chained to the axle of its chariot; righteousness, with sin; life, with death. Therefore smile at defeat, yes, laugh at disaster, exult at death. If death grins at life in the autumn, life laughs at death in the spring. The grave grinned hideously at life when they laid the dead Saviour in its cold embrace. But after three days life laughed, for the victor tore himself from its arms. Yes, he has brought life and immortality to light. We see it now. It is life, not death, that rules the universe. This is the supreme power. Its final triumph is assured. Victory is written on its banners. The contest for supremacy is long and terrible, but the issue is certain. Listen to Victor Hugo :

“When I go down to the grave, I can say, like so many others, ‘I have finished my day’s work,’ but I cannot say, ‘I have finished my life.’ My work will begin again next morning. My tomb is not a blind alley, it is a thoroughfare ; it closes with the twilight to open with the dawn. It would not be worth while to live at all, were we to die entirely. That which alleviates labor and sanctifies toil is to have constantly before us the vision of a better world appearing through the darkness of this life.” Isn’t that the cry of victory ?



The times of ignorance . . . God overlooked ; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent (Acts 17 : 30).

THERE is no greater difference between any two other things in life than “then” and “now.” The responsibilities of yesterday cannot measure those of to-day. “Then” the opportunities, the knowledge, the power, was so much less than “now.” Yesterday you were a child, to-day you are a youth ; yesterday you were a youth, to-day you are a man. “Then” we could excuse, and even wink at, your carelessness and irresponsibility ; “now” we shake our heads, and frown and condemn. Last Sunday I found a half-grown

youngster hiding in the hallway after Sunday-school had begun. "What's the matter?" I asked. "I've got on my first long pants, and I don't dare go in," he replied. He had passed an epoch. He'll never be a knickerbocker boy again. He is a long-pants boy now, and will be so forevermore. Father, mother, brother, sister, teacher, friends, will expect and demand more of him than before. His knickerbocker peccadillos will no longer be "overlooked" or "winked at." Life was one thing then, it's another thing now. There is the same difference between a boy in knickerbockers and long pants as between a bird in a nest with a mother brooding over it and in a meadow with a hawk hovering above it.



*If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him
with the rod of men (2 Sam. 7 : 14).*

HUMANITY has not yet outgrown the rod. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." Every rational human being instinctively despises a professed moral system in which iniquity is not followed by the lash. Thieves would not dare to live in communities where theft went unpunished. What could hinder them from being stolen from? Ah! It always seems so strange to me that these sentimental

parents who shrink from inflicting pain on disobedient and wayward children are not afraid of being despised for their weakness (as they are morally certain to be) by the young reprobates whom they weakly spare. When Little Bill faces his father (hair-brush in hand), he has such a feeling of awe as when Moses saw God in the burning bush. He beholds the whole moral government incarnate in that single human personality. Do you mean to tell me he does not respect and love it?



David inquired of Jehovah (2 Sam. 2 : 1).

WHAT makes us do what we do? Sometimes it is sheer, blind impulse. We do not stop to question or debate. How would you like to be constituted so that you could do so always, and never have to regret it? Wouldn't that turn life into a holiday! It is coming to forks in the road, and having to choose through investigation and reflection, that makes existence a tragedy. The instant we stop to "inquire" we suffer. Profound mysteries and uncertainties confront us. Of whom shall we ask the way? By what method shall we conduct the search? Sometimes people have consulted the leaves on the floors of caves, or the entrails of sacrificial animals, or

the flight of birds, or the position of the stars, or the grounds in their teacups. Dunces ! But " David inquired of Jehovah." Strange as it may seem, there is no way so sure to find the pathway of life as to make a silence in the heart and consult the divine Oracle who dwells there. Other guides assist us, — history, science, experience, friends. But often, when all else has failed, we find that strange way of inquiring directly of Jehovah, and out of the unknown he speaks. Nothing is so wonderful as this. A flash of light breaks up out of unilluminated darkness. Vague feelings instantly crystallize into clear convictions. A wisdom deeper than our own utters an augury or pronounces a decree, and we feel that it is *ex cathedra*. It is the voice, not of the soul itself, but of the God within the soul. And, after all, that is the true method of attaining wisdom. This is not to scorn or reject other methods. It is to supplement them by the final method.



Go thy way for this time (Acts 24 : 25).

OF THIS present moment only are you sure. No man ever fully grasped that thought without being shaken by it. Now is the accepted time ; now is the day of salvation. Nothing is more fatal than the habit of

procrastination. "Indulge in procrastination, and in time you will come to this,—that, because a thing ought to be done, therefore you cannot do it." "Let's take the instant by the forward top, for we are old [some of us, alas! or getting so], and on our quickest decrees the inaudible and noiseless foot of Time steals ere we can effect them." And yet "there is, by God's grace, an immeasurable distance between late and too late."



So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, that same day together (1 Sam. 31 : 6).

IF WE could only suffer alone! If only these Sauls did not have to drag others into ruin with them! But who ever heard of a man who fell, as an apple falls from a tree, alone? Our lives are indissolubly linked with other lives. When we drop, we pull them with us. Sometimes we pull them into sorrow only. But what sorrow! Do you think a boy can be discharged by his employer, or disgraced in his school, or sentenced to the penitentiary, and not involve his parents and his friends in his pain? And sometimes we drag them into our sins. How few sins we commit alone! Almost every one of them

requires a confederate. These sinful Sauls must have their armor-bearers, and down goes the whole company with the leader. "Saul died, and his three sons, and his armorbearer, and all his men."



Ye once walked according to the course of this world (Eph. 2 : 2).

WHICH, by the way, is the gait of most of the people you meet. They set their pace to that of the procession in which they are walking, and it is "according to the course of this world." They do not seem to realize that there is any other world or any other pace. The children who are reared down in the Alleghany mountain valleys do not know that people anywhere move at a different pace from that of the mountaineers around them. The little pickaninnies down in the "Black Belt" do not dream that there is any other gait than that of the trifling people who are the only ones they have ever seen. Put them down in New York or Chicago, and the streets look like a race-course, and all the people seem on a run. Well, there's another "world" than this we live in. Its inhabitants walk in a swifter, nobler "course." What you need to do, my little man, is to catch their gait. It's too hot a pace for loafers and sinners. You

must lay off every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset you, and run with a sublime patience the race that is set before you, if you keep the gait of goal-winners like Paul.



I cheerfully make my defence (Acts 24 : 10).

IT IS a first-class law of life never to be put on the defensive,—if you can possibly help it. Be aggressive, attack the enemy, do not be driven into a corner. When his pupil complained to the old fencing-master that his sword was too short to enable him to make an attack, he said, “Take a step forward! take a step forward!” And yet there are times in every man’s life when he has to explain his conduct. Circumstances conspire to put him in a bad light, as they did Paul. But how few people there are, comparatively, who can “cheerfully” make their defense! We have not said or done all that we are charged with, but a little word or a trivial deed has compromised us. We are embarrassed, we are confused, we suffer torture. It is torture! What sensations those must be that a politician has to suffer when his enemies get hot upon the trail of some indiscretion or sin! Many a man has been held back from accepting a nomination or an office by that shudder that follows his

remembrance of a still undiscovered crime. "Suppose they should dig it up," he says, and the cold sweat starts on his forehead. Be sure of this : it is only the honest man who can make his defense "cheerfully." If, like the great Apostle, he has a conscience void of offense toward God and man, he can look his defamers and persecutors in the face with a tranquil courage.



The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit (Psa. 51 : 17).

THERE are broken spirits and broken spirits. Do not misunderstand God. It is not a soul emptied of all hope and purpose, willing to be trampled under foot by every trouble and thwarted by every obstacle of life, that God loves. Like your heart, and mine, the heart of the Infinite One thrills at indomitable courage, at a spirit that the combined misfortunes of all time cannot make quail. If God can despise any one, it is the man who surrenders, and grovels and whines before the adversities of life. But there is a second kind of broken spirit. The world despises it as much as the first. Nothing can make this stupid world see the difference ; but nothing can blind God to it. There is no other moment in its whole existence when

a human soul is so beautiful and so lovable as in the moment of contrition. There are hearts on earth that can harden themselves against penitence and contrition, but there are none in heaven. Dives in tears, the tears of penitence, would have found as warm a welcome among the angels as Lazarus appearing in the bosom of Abraham. The key to Paradise is a tear. But it is a tear of penitence, not weakness.



*When I have a convenient season,
I will call thee unto me (Acts 24 : 25).*

DID you ever find a really convenient season for doing a disagreeable task? I have hunted for such seasons, but in vain. There are almost horribly convenient seasons for doing all sorts of meannesses. There seem to me to be always about two thousand agreeable and easy moments in every hour for acts of genuine devilment on my part. But one has to hunt through about two years to find one single second in which it seems as if all nature had conspired to make it easy and pleasant to confess a sin or right a wrong. Other things come, but convenient seasons for penitence — never! This present instant is the best one that ever will arrive.

*But abide thou in the things which
thou hast learned (2 Tim. 3 : 14).*

THE thoughts that we receive from noble men and women ought to become a habitation for our souls. As a matter of fact, every man's ideas are a more real dwelling-place than his own home. I consciously retire into mine a thousand times a day. Sometimes I go into this structure of thoughts (that I have woven as a bird does its nest) for quiet, sometimes for consolation, and sometimes to shut the gates and make a fight, like an old baron in his castle. There are temptations to leave the old abode, of course. There is a wild impulse in every heart to run away from home at times. We get tired of seeing the same old furniture, and the stupid patterns on the wall. We see other houses finer than our own. It is so with our thought-houses. They seem weak, inadequate, and dreary. We sigh for other and looser and more dazzling ideas of existence. But "stay, stay at home, my heart, and rest: home-keeping hearts are happiest." Only we must let our houses grow with our growth, like a snail's or an oyster's. Do not build them too rigid and inflexible, or they will burst. Say what you will, nothing is better about our thought-houses than the "assurance that comes from knowing of whom we have received them."

Thoughts that sheltered Jesus Christ, Paul, Martin Luther, and my parents, are good enough for me.



Behold, I tell you a mystery (1 Cor. 15 : 51).

UNDOUBTEDLY the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul are "mysteries." And, because they are, thoughtless people reject them. Now, if this is a good reason, let us reject everything. For, at last, everything is an insoluble mystery. When we want to express our idea of the absolute simplicity of an idea, we say, "It is as plain as two sticks." But nothing can be more mysterious than those very sticks. Once they were living trees, and you can no more understand what that life was than you can understand infinity and eternity. Mystery hovers over all things here below. All are shrouded in a veil. "Every grain of sand is a mystery; so is every daisy in summer, and so is every snowflake in winter. But upwards and downwards and all around us science and speculation pass into mystery at last." The presence of mystery is no ground for unbelief, it is rather a reason for faith. The commonest facts and laws of nature, the daily providences of life, are as full of incomprehensibility as the deepest doctrines of religion. A

religion without mystery would be as repugnant as a seed without life or a body without a soul. There is no religion without mystery. God himself is the great secret of nature. To me the beating of my heart, the expansion and contraction of my lungs, the ceaseless flow of thought in my brain, are as staggering as the resurrection of my body after death. It is these very mysteries that are the fuel of faith.



*Now therefore let your hands be strong,
and be ye valiant; for Saul your
lord is dead (2 Sam. 2 : 7).*

THERE seems to be a "therefore" to everything. How tired we grow of these "therefores"! How imperative and implacable they are! "Saul is dead, a new king is on the throne, and 'therefore' you must be strong and valiant." You are rich, and "therefore" you must be benevolent. You are poor, and "therefore" you must be economical. You are a master, and "therefore" you must be considerate. You are a servant, and "therefore" you must be faithful. You are a teacher, and "therefore" you must be held accountable. You are a pupil, and "therefore" you must be respectful. "Every why hath a wherefore," and every circum-

stance a "therefore." New duties are involved in new situations, just as plants are involved in seeds, and seeds in flowers. Little Bill, yesterday you were in kilts, and "therefore" you had a right to play from morning till night. To-day you are in knickerbockers, and "therefore" you must go to school and study. To-morrow you will be in trousers, and "therefore" must begin to be a man, and bear "the white man's burden." The whole moral system lies in that word "therefore." The possession of power, or virtue, or knowledge, involves responsibility in its use. You can no more sever the latter from the former than you can detach a quality from a substance.



*Might become such as I am,
except these bonds (Acts 26 : 29).*

IT TAKES a profound conviction that one is right to sustain one in that wish. Could you wish that your dear friends were such as you are? Are your convictions and ideas and faiths so sweet and satisfying that you could say, as Paul did, "I wish that you might become such as I am"? If not, of course you have no power in the advocacy of your philosophy of life. Get right with yourself, get right with your fellow-men, get right with God,

get a clear conscience, get a happy heart, and then you will also get persuasive power. A captain who knows that his boat leaks, puts up a weak-kneed plea for passengers. It is not an easy thing for a father to urge his boys to be such as he is, if he chews tobacco and drinks beer.



Render to all their dues (Rom. 13 : 7).

PERHAPS no man ever yet realized the extent of his obligations. Your obligations are not limited by your appreciation of them. They are limited only by your powers to do good. It is the duty of every tallow dip and of every electric light to throw its beams as far as it can. We know all about the obligations others owe to us. How exacting we are of those courtesies and duties ! pitifully and contemptibly so, I think. How little our Saviour had to say about our "rights," and how much about our "obligations." He did not demand his "pound of flesh" from his creditors, but gave his whole body to his debtors. However much one may sympathize with the wage-earners in their clamorous demands for their "rights," it makes him sick at heart to hear so little from their lips about their "duties." Christianity is a steady and determined will to give

to others what belongs to them, not to exact from them what belongs to us. Good neighborliness does not consist in the determination to keep your neighbor's hens out of your garden, but to keep yours out of his. Duties are reciprocal,—oh, yes! But we have no need of a gospel to teach us to exact our obligations, but only to fulfil them!



*Against thee, thee only, have
I sinned (Psa. 51 : 4).*

I DO not myself know just what sin is against God—alone. All the sins that I know, besides being against God, are also against some other person or our own selves. But it is easy to understand how, in some impassioned moment of clarified vision, all consciousness of any other wrong is swallowed up in that of wrong against God. Mark you, though, that it takes moral natures of the highest order to attain this knowledge, the products of the most thorough spiritual education. What insight, imagination, illumination, are required to trace the effect of our sins on the heart of God! It is like being told that the waves from a pebble break on the farthest shore of ocean. Both waves and sins seem dissipated and lost before reaching their

destination. And yet, as every telephone message passes through the central station, every evil deed and word and thought passes through the heart of God. Every wire runs into his bosom. Little Bill, you are listening to me incredulously. You do not see how your evil deeds can sadden the heart of God. Well, you did not see how they could sadden mine until you saw me break down and weep, the other day. Why should I care what you do? Why should a pang shoot through my heart? I do not know, but it does. And it is no more wonderful that this pain strikes through the heart of your other Father.



Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God. . . . And God smote him there for his error (2 Sam. 6 : 6, 7).

THERE is a skeptical distrust of God's ability to carry his church over the rough places in the journey that results in immeasurable harm ; for, in trying to keep it from falling by the way, men stretch forth their hands to deeds of actual impiety. In this present period many a good man, troubled and scared by the prospect of the church's overthrow, has tried to prop it up with sensational preaching, or questionable methods of business, or alien

institutions. All such things are extraneous. They become a hindrance and drag to the progress of the kingdom. There is a sense in which the church of Christ cannot prosper without the support of the hand of every child of God, but there is also a sense in which it will go forward on its way as surely as the revolving earth itself,—which we *ride* on, and cannot sustain by lifting nor hasten by pushing. Perhaps a good motto for the church of this age would be, “Impious Uzzahs, hands off!”



Inquired who he was, and what he had done (Acts 21 : 33).

SOONER or later we shall all of us have to answer that twofold question, “Who are you, and what have you done?” What have *you* done? This is what the world insists on knowing. It is not enough that you *are* something, you must *do* something. Society wants the man who has sung a song, or written a book, or explored a country, or organized a crusade, or who can do it. In the business world or in politics it is just the same. What work have you done? What word have you uttered? The world needs work done. It judges men, not by their profession, but by their accomplishment. And a great thing it is

to have done something,—won a battle, built a bridge, organized a Sunday-school, cleared a farm, dug a well or even a ditch. How can any one bear to think of dying without having made his mark on the earth somewhere,—having, as it were, written his autograph in nature's album in some task that can never be erased? Then comes the other question, "Who *are* you?" A thousandfold more important in God's sight than the other one, for he "looks not upon the outward appearance, but on the heart." Many a man that has done the greatest deeds in history has no more value in the eyes of God than a puff of smoke, while many a quiet, gentle soul, that has patiently spent its life in bed, is cherished in the heart of the Eternal as a saint.



*For Jehovah will not forsake his
people (1 Sam. 12 : 22).*

NOT so long as there is a single purpose in the heart of man for him to hold on to! I think, myself, that the grip of God on the human soul is like the grip of gravity on matter,—not an atom of which ever gets away. It is ground to imponderable powder; burnt into impalpable smoke; melted into invisible vapor; it is tossed about and hidden and

transformed ; but it never gets away from the grip of gravity. Samuel seemed to feel that way about the souls of men, and I do too. God will never forsake them. So don't get discouraged and let go your hold of him who never lets go his hold of you ! Neither do your true friends ever forsake you. You forsake them,—that is the trouble. You may not believe it, but there are more people in the world like this good old Samuel than you know anything about.



But lighting upon a place where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground (Acts 27 : 41).

THIS is what the doctors call “heroic treatment.” But nobody can deny that, in many of life's most significant ventures, the only way to save the crew is to scuttle the ship or run it on to the shore. Many a man is being dragged down to financial ruin by a bad business location which he hasn't the courage to desert. Perhaps the waters of a river run into his cellar ; perhaps the business center of the city has moved. He hangs on and on, in hope of changes that never come, and finally goes down under the ruin. He had better have run his vessel aground, and begun life

over again. Perhaps he has engaged in a business whose immorality he did not perceive at first,—as so many get into saloon-keeping or distilling when they are young and ignorant. At last his conscience has been enlightened, and he clearly perceives that his business will wreck him morally. But the question of bread and butter for his family paralyzes him when he tries to forsake it. He holds on and holds on, day after day, year after year, until he has grown hardened or discouraged, and the good dies out of his soul. How much better it would have been to have run the vessel aground in the place where those two seas of good and evil met! It's a last resort, a desperate remedy, but it's often the only one. So slip your cable, unship your helm, run your vessel on the rocks; then go and cut down trees and build a better one.



And all went to be taxed (Luke 2 : 3).

EVERY living thing is taxed, and all willing workers overtaxed. The baby overtaxes its mother; the growing brood of children, the father; his parish, the preacher; his business, the merchant; his patients, the doctor; his land, the farmer. Well, that is all right. It is these high assessments that make

life worth while. You were never so much of a man as when you thought yourself overtaxed. We do our hardest pulling under the lash. It was better for Joseph to pay more taxes than he wanted to, and to a government that he did not like, than not to pay any at all.



*Because of the hope of Israel I am bound
with this chain (Acts 28 : 20).*

EVERYBODY in this world is bound with a chain. None are at perfect liberty. We envy the rich their independence. They seem to be able to move about the world with the freedom of the birds, and to do whatever they take a notion to. Do not deceive yourselves. They too are bound with chains. Some earthly limitation is on them all. Their chains are a little longer than yours, perhaps, but they come to the ends of them all the same. Some of them are sick, some of them are sad, and some of them are silly,—with a chain bound round their brains, which is enough sight worse than a manacle on one's leg. No, no! You are not the only one who bears about your ball and chain. I've got mine. But let me tell you this: It's one thing to be bound with chains for "the hope of Israel," or some other great and sacred cause. Fathers are bound

with chains for the hope of their families, mothers for the hope of a little sick baby, ministers for their churches, patriots for their country. They are held down to their tasks like slaves. They cannot leave their little cell. But "the hope," "the hope," "the hope," sustains them day and night. It's quite another thing to be bound with the chain of a vile companion or a vicious habit. On the prairies, the cowboys stake their horses to a post. It is not only to have them ready to mount in the morning, but to keep them from being stolen by Indians or eaten by wolves. You had better be thankful to God for "staking you out."



*Jehovah, the God of Israel, be
witness (1 Sam. 20 : 12).*

THERE is nothing more overestimated than secrecy. How few deeds are ever done without a witness ! We do not know that we are observed, because our deeds are not important enough to be commented on. But let any one of them, for some unexpected reason, be endowed with significance, and witnesses seem to spring out of the ground ! Walls have ears ; stones, eyes ! Vibrations seem to have been solidified in the air, footsteps petrified in drifting sands, ripples

frozen on unstable water. Voices are heard on every hand, crying, "I saw you. I saw you!" Do not presume on secrecy. Nature is as full of eyes as a peacock's tail. And besides, "There is an eye that never sleeps beneath the wing of night." "All things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Jonathan was right. God is witness,—witness of your friendships, of your hatreds, of your jealousies; witness of your deeds and words and thoughts. Truer than the truth "I see myself," is the truth "God sees me."



*Saw his face as it had been the
face of an angel (Acts 6 : 15).*

AN UGLY statue or painting must be always ugly, but there was never a living countenance so hideous that an inner light of love might not transfigure it. The homeliest are sometimes the most beautiful when a religious light shines through the features like the flames of candles through cathedral windows. "Her face is like the milky-way i' the sky,—a meeting of gentle lights without a name," said Sir John Suckling of one of his heroines. How many nameless gentle lights meet and glow in faces like Stephen's! I have seen

lights beam in the faces of some I know that was not the molten matter of any sun, but a scintillation from the burning heart of God himself,—a light divine and inextinguishable.



*And gave him favor in the sight
of the keeper (Gen. 39 : 21).*

WE SOON enough find that there are cruel and relentless forces working against us, throwing us into pits and prisons. What we need is to believe in the forces that are working for us, giving us the kindness and favor of men, and the benefit of the powers of nature. When the wind blows your ship backward, do not think everything is against you. Remember that the engine is for you, the rudder is for you, the buoyancy of the water is for you, and a thousand other things. While you are pegging away at your task (misunderstood, abused, despised), there is a good friend or two saying kind words behind your back. Some one is planning a "rise." Did you ever stop to think of all the forces that were working "out of the sight" of such men as Washington and Lincoln to push them forward and upward? There are more for us than against us. And, at any rate, if the Lord be for us, who can (successfully) be against us?

You and God can defy the universe. Believe in the unseen good more than the unseen evil.



Being moved with jealousy (Acts 17 : 5).

WE CALL the "feelings" of our souls "emotions," because they move us. They are steam in the boilers of these human engines. They furnish driving power. Nothing is more certain than that emotions will move us—to something, to either good or bad. Beware, then, of jealousy. Do not flatter yourself that it will lie dormant in your heart. It is a fierce and terrible energy. It is like a keg of powder waiting for a spark. It will drive you to some dark and desperate deed, as it did those Jews. Jealousy is a fire; extinguish it. It is a snake; scotch it.



The Lord hath need of them (Matt. 21 : 3).

IF WE could have two divinely inspired apostles appear to us and say, "The Lord hath need of this, and the Lord hath need of that, and the Lord hath need of the other," the most difficult element of duty-doing would vanish. There are not a few people in the world who find it much harder to know what

they ought to give up than to give up what they know they ought to. Life, however, must not be made too easy for us. We must learn by experience and insight to know what our Lord demands. Our fathers and mothers and teachers will not always live to tell us. And we must learn, also, that it is none the less true that the Lord hath need of many things that we possess, and can perform, when he does not appear to us himself, nor even send an apostle. God's needs are manifested through the needs of others. All real helplessness is a "sight draft" from the Lord upon every man to whom it is presented.



*His mother kept all these sayings
in her heart (Luke 2 : 51).*

THERE is as much difference between keeping sacred words in the head and the heart as between hanging seed-corn in the kitchen and planting it in the ground, or between keeping coal in the scuttle and putting it in the grate. You may keep the multiplication-table in your head, but the Golden Rule must be cherished in the heart. When we commit things to memory, they may do us as little good as the documents do the tin box to

which we commit them in the safety deposit vaults. But the last words your father said to you, or the prattle from the lips of your little child, went straight to your heart, and there they abode and blessed you, coming up fresh, beautiful, and inspiring day after day and year after year. Isn't it a beautiful mystery? Oh, learn the divine art of committing sayings to your heart!



I will not let thee go, except thou bless me (Gen. 32 : 26).

IF WE should wrestle in that spirit with every incident and every accident, every person and every object, every angel and every devil, we meet in life, we would learn a wonderful secret, and it would be, that in each there is a sublime lesson and an eternal benediction. Try it! You are now facing some great disaster. Grapple with it, analyze it, turn it inside out, ransack its secret, hunt for its concealed meaning. Say to it, as you seize it by the throat, "If it takes me ten years, or forever, I will not let you go until I see the part you were sent to play in my life." You will find it. It will disclose itself at last. As surely as there is fire in every flint, there is blessing in every experience. There are some in which there are curses, and terrible ones at that.

But even those, if a man grapples them as Jacob did, may be made to yield some blessing.



Go, and do thou likewise (Luke 10 : 37).

IT IS very astonishing to know how many people can admire a good deed without feeling any disposition to try and imitate it. There is always some reason why they could not possibly do it. It would be so much harder for them. "It did not cost the person who did it any effort,—don't you know?" For shame! Good deeds do not come easy for any one. If you don't say to yourself, when you see a good deed, "I will do that myself when I get a chance," there is something wrong with your machinery, and you had better have it repaired.



He entered into a boat. . . . And he spake to them (Matt. 13 : 2, 3).

ANY place was a good enough pulpit for Jesus Christ. If there was a synagogue within reach, he went there. If not, he preached from the top of a hill, or a curbstone, or a fishing-boat. Men and boys and girls who are dead in earnest always find a weapon or an

instrument, and, if not, they make one. When Samson found himself without a sword, he snatched up the jawbone of an ass. A ram's horn was good enough for Joshua, and a lamp and pitcher for Gideon. "Give me a lever long enough, and a fulcrum strong enough, and I will move the world!" said the old philosopher. If a little friend of mine had been there, he would have said: "Get your own lever. Don't wait for some one else to find it. Any old thing will do,—if you are stout enough. Don't you know yet that it is not the gun, but the man behind it?" Some one saw the sword of Scandenberg, and said, "That is not much of a sword," and one of the hero's old companions said, "You ought to have seen the arm that wielded it!" Some sermons are better from a stump than others from a carved oak pulpit.



Separate me Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13 : 2).

SOONER or later every individual gets sifted out of the crowd. A man is a unit, not a part of a mass. An apple lies down at the bottom of a barrel, lost in the pile, but by and by its turn comes to be taken out and peeled and eaten,—all alone. A little boy at first cannot distinguish his own identity. He is

swallowed up in the unity of the family; then he is detached, and sent to school. Now he is a part of a throng of happy youngsters; but suddenly he is wrenched out of these relationships, and stuck behind a counter, or into an elevator, or into a street-car, and at last he is an individual! And so the process of separation goes on. We are sifted, culled out, selected, set apart. It is serious business, this "treading the wine-press of life" alone. But God has called us to our own work, and not to another's. All hail the day, then, when he comes and takes us, and says, "Stand here! Go there!"



*Forasmuch as God hath showed thee
all this, there is none so discreet
and wise (Gen. 41 : 39).*

AS THERE is a beauty in character which God's originating spirit alone can account for, so there is a wisdom of the soul which can only be explained by his indwelling light. There is a knowledge, there is a wisdom, there is a discretion, which can be acquired by experience and education. But the world has always insisted that there is another sort of insight which cannot. Humanity has traced it to "inspiration," to a sudden flash of light shot into the soul by the God of all truth.

At any rate, it is certain that the greatest scholars sometimes lack it, while it is often seen scintillating from the souls of the ignorant ; and it is the verdict of all the past ages that "spiritual things" are "spiritually discerned," and that "holy men" have spoken "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." If you wish to know bird lore, you dwell among the birds ; if that of animals, with animals ; if that of children, with children ; if that of sages, with sages. That which is their essence penetrates you. And those who, wishing to know the mind of God, spend much time in his presence, are penetrated by his spirit and filled with his wisdom.



Who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead (Acts 10 : 41).

LET us make an honest effort to bring this marvelous fact home to ourselves. There were men who ate and drank with Jesus Christ after he had risen from the grave. I once saw a man who had seen Napoleon Bonaparte. He was old and poor and ignorant, but when I looked into his eyes, and said to myself, "Those eyes have actually beheld the greatest genius of war the world has ever produced," I felt almost giddy, it made the life of that

prodigy seem so awfully real. It is the sense of reality that we need in thinking of Christ. There is a way of quietly bringing this fact — “that men ate and drank with him” home to the heart, so as to almost stop its beating with wonder. It is not a myth. It is not a baseless legend. No, a thousand times no! He lived, he loved, he died, he rose!



And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him (Gen. 32 : 1).

SOMETHING like that will happen to every man who goes on his own way,—not on the path marked out for Napoleon or Washington, but for him, plain John Smith. Not on the way chosen by himself against the will of God, but chosen by God’s will for him,—the strait, narrow, individual path to the goal of his own personal life. Yes, on that path God’s good angels will meet him! There he will encounter the angels of his household,—his wife and little children. There he will find his true friends. There he will meet his joys and his sorrows, his failures and his triumphs, his losses and his gains. There he will catch more than passing glimpses of the divine presence that hovers about him always. Nothing is so sweet, nothing so satisfying, as to be in

the "way" your feet were made to travel.
Do not leave it for an instant.



*I send you forth as lambs in the
midst of wolves (Luke 10 : 3).*

THERE may be more kinds of animals in the human race than just lambs and wolves ; but these two varieties predominate. I think it is probably right to try to be something else, but, if you are shut up to the choice, be a lamb every time. Be bitten rather than bite. Oh ! I know quite well that is not the kind of advice you will hear in "Wall Street," but I stick to it. Die rather than wrong or rob any one. Patience, gentleness, love, — these are the powers that will save the world. The lambs will "win out" in the long run. I am one of those who think that sometimes the wolves have to be hung up by the heels. I rather think that it may be all right to offer a reward for their scalps. Saloon-keepers must be brought up with a sharp turn. Robbers must be shut up in the "pen." Murderers must be electrocuted. But, after all, it is the lamb, and not the lion, who is to win in the fight against the wolves. It is more often by being eaten than by eating that we bring men to

their senses. We must suffer injustice, if we want to help save the world. It is "heaping coals of fire on heads" that restores brains to reason. Kill men with kindness. It was the unresisting submission of Jesus that at last broke the heart of humanity.



Blessed are the pure in heart (Matt. 4 : 8).

SOME things can be seen through the brain, but others only through the heart. Suppose you had no heart. Do you think you could see your mother? Do you think you see her with the same faculty with which you see the multiplication-table or the rule for cube root? I do not. If you should come home from school some day with your temper all roused, and your heart so full of mad that you could scarcely speak, you would not see your mother at all. You might look at her, but you would not really behold her. You could not even see the baby. The little thing that crawls up to you, and that you feel like slapping, would not really be the baby. It would be something else. The real baby would be invisible to you until you got over being mad. That is why we say, "I was so mad I could not see." Something really blinds the

eye of the soul. When the anger all runs out of your heart, then you can see again, just as when the frost melts from the window-pane. No man ever saw God when he was mad. No man ever saw God when his heart was full of vanity, or envy, or impurity. He sees something vast, awful, ugly, and repellent, but it is not God.



*And he dreamed, and behold,
a ladder (Gen. 28 : 12).*

NOTHING could be more true or more beautiful. Just as every road in the Roman Empire led to Rome, every line erected on earth runs straight to heaven. Any sunbeam, followed to the end, will lead us to its effulgent source. Just as any little Roman lad could step out of his door and strike the highway with absolute certainty of reaching the palace of the Cæsar ; just as his eye may travel on the sunbeam from his own bright eye to the sun, he can find the foot of a ladder on the spot where he stands that will lead him straight to heaven and God. You do not have to go to Jerusalem or Mecca or Rome to find the first round of it. Try it now. Be very still a moment. Close your eyes in order to concentrate your thought. Now lift that thought

to God. Straight as the sunbeam's track, swift as its flight, you are in the divine presence. God has a telephone in the heart of every one, and you need not call a central office to reach him. How like the angels going back and forth are our thoughts and his !



*Every tree therefore that bringeth
not forth good fruit (Luke 3 : 9).*

THAT is a solemn and momentous hour when this conception of life bursts into the sluggish, selfish soul of a man. To every earnest man it comes. He hears a voice saying to him : " The hour has struck when thou must stand forth and show what is in thee. Reveal thyself. Thou canst no longer skulk in the rear. Draw thy sword ! Show thy hand ! Bear fruit ! If there is anything in thee, go forward and upward ; if not, descend, retreat. Make place for better men. You have sat in that professor's chair, or stood in that pulpit, or edited that paper, or headed that party, long enough *without getting anything done*. Step down, laggard ! " When these thoughts thundered in the soul of John, he left the desert for the haunts of men. This is the trumpet call we need. More men need to be *aroused than comforted*.

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts (Matt. 7 : 11).

ALL the love and generosity and bountifulness of a father's or a mother's heart comes from God as surely as all the luster and glory of a diamond or a dew-drop come from the sun. If they are kind, it is only because God is kind. If you trust them, that is the reason for trusting him who made them. But do not forget that love sometimes reveals itself by withholding as well as by bestowing. The eagle shows her love as much by not giving her young ones a fresh rabbit every hour or two as by giving it. Perhaps more ! Perhaps I would rather give my boy ten dollars than see him get down into a ditch and dig it out. But I should show my love more by letting him earn it for himself.



He was moved with compassion (Luke 10 : 33).

WHAT kind of compassion is it which does *not* move a man? What kind of mainspring would it be in a watch which did not move the hands? What kind of steam would it be in a boiler which did not move the piston-rods? All the great emotions of the soul are "motor powers." But in some souls these emotions are about like a little

trickle of sap running out of a maple-tree trying to turn the water-wheel of a great big mill. You say you feel compassion? Well, why doesn't it drive your feet and hands? Feet, hands, heart, head,—everything, ought to commence to jump and whir (just as things do when the motorman turns on the current), if the compassion is genuine. Compassion is a motor power or nothing. Don't ever say you are a kind man unless your kindness *moves* you.



*What God hath cleansed, make not
thou common (Acts 11 : 9).*

HERE lies one of those holy mysteries of the spiritual world, which I, for one, approach with the same wonder and reverence as the blooming of a century-plant, the breaking of the egg-shells when the birds come forth into life, the birth of a little child. The instant that a man obeys a divine command, that moment the duty ceases to be irksome. What a transforming touch hath this sublime virtue, obedience! The dark and sombre tasks of life are flooded with light; the arduous and repulsive ones are made easy and sweet; drudgery becomes beatitude, the common becomes both clean and holy, by a divine magic. I wish I could cram into a single word my profound

conviction that the most common things of life are the most sacred. The tasks we most indignantly spurn,—these possess, in a superlative degree, that holy, blessed element. Dirt is as sacred as sunlight,—is it not? In what respect does the digging of a sewer, to drain off the poisons which threaten human life, fall so far below, in dignity and sublimity, the writing of a book or painting of a picture? The “commonness” is in the mind that scorns.



Thou shalt not kill (Exod. 20 : 13).

EVERY moral obligation rests back finally upon the principle that life is sacred. All life has a certain celestial character, and never ought to be taken without some great and good reason. The lowest forms are the least sacred, the highest the most sacred. Even the life of a weed, of a mosquito, of a snake, ought not to be taken without reason. The increasing sense of this sacredness is one of the great hopes of the modern world. Boys are getting more incapable of killing birds and squirrels than they used to be, thank God! The most sacred thing in the world (because the noblest form of life) is a human being. To rob it of its life is the consummation of evil. And now listen to this: Murder is the logic of all vice.

If you do not wish to be a murderer, do not cherish any vice. Ambition, avarice, lust, jealousy, bitterness,—there is not one of them that has not led to innumerable murders. Give them full scope in your heart, and sooner or later you will find them hurling you in some uncontrollable passion against a fellow-creature. What a mysterious tendency ! Who can explain that infernal gravitation of every vice toward murder ? Little Bill, if you don't control that temper, you (yes, you, dear, sweet little Bill !) may get so mad some day as to kill a man.



Being sent forth by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13 : 4).

TH**ERE** are times in the lives of men like Paul and Savonarola, like Moody and Lincoln, when the sense of being flung forth by the mighty hand of God upon their mission is like that of an arrow's feeling the thrust of the bow-string, or the cannon-ball the impact of the powder. When Livingstone plunged into the heart of the Dark Continent, he felt himself thus sent forth by the Holy Ghost ; and there isn't one of us, from the oldest man to the youngest child, that may not live so conscientiously, so earnestly, as to feel that Holy Spirit speeding us on our way. Just you

do to-day (to the last point of accuracy) exactly what you ought to do, and you will feel like a ship under full sail,—joyous, bounding, exultant.



*Let me cast out the mote out
of thine eye! (Matt. 7 : 4.)*

OF COURSE, there have to be critics in human society, just as there have to be fly-papers and rat-traps in houses. But sharpening the eye to look abroad blunts it for looking at home. The “watch” on the masthead sees other vessels, but not his own. Do not be a critic unless you are called to it by some spiritual necessity, and even then you will need to pray twice as often and as hard as any other person in the world.



*What doth hinder me to be
baptized? (Acts 8 : 36.)*

NOTHING ! There is no hindrance to the performance of duty, outside of one's own soul. Believe that. If a duty is impossible, it is not a duty. God never puts a man in a situation where he cannot fulfil the behests of his conscience. Trust him for always putting water within reach of the man who feels that he must be baptized. The hindrances to

the divine life are always and only in the soul itself. Do not blame your dereliction in duty on other people or on Providence. What is it that hinders you from confessing Christ? Your pride, your cowardice, your selfishness, — nothing else. Do not be deceived. Face the music. “If you are not satisfied with the face you see in the mirror, do not blame or break the glass.”



And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold (Gen. 13 : 2).

HE WAS rich in other and better things, or that would have been little to his credit or his profit. They are but the means, and not the end, of life ; the instruments, and not the objects. Of what value are they to the man who has not the noble purpose to use them for good, and the fine sensibilities to appreciate their true meaning? Of what use would it be to an engine to be rich in wheels and cranks and pistons, if it had no steam? Of what use would it be to a ship to be rich in sails and masts and ropes, if it had no rudder? The frightful danger in the accumulation of cattle and silver and gold is that the man will be swamped under them. “I want money for what it will buy,” says one. “Do not imagine I am toiling and sacrificing merely

for a big bank account. It is because, in my world, commercial supremacy is the measure of success, and I want to make my life a success," says another. That is all right, if you don't lose sight of it. But the love of cattle and silver and gold themselves is a fearful undertow that drags the soul out into the ocean of avarice and drowns it there. Beware of the undertow!



The word of God came unto John (Luke 3 : 2).

AND, it may be fearlessly asserted, it has come to *every* man! This is as certain as that air and water rush into vacant spaces,—for God is *everywhere*. The sea-shell may not be conscious of the continuous roar within it, nor the soul of the ceaselessly resounding voice of God. Some people never hear the birds sing, but there are others who never miss a note, whether the fierce scream of the hawk or the gentle twitter of the sparrows. Mrs. Lordly behind the thick walls of her palace does not hear the merry whistle of little Jack Thimble-rigger, but his widowed mother in the vine-clad cottage catches the first faint note as he rounds the corner a block away. You may not hear the voice of God, but it is sounding in your ears as clearly as in those of Samuel or of John.

*Who can forgive sins but one, even
God? (Mark 2 : 7).*

NO ONE. They were right. Only he can forgive a sin against whom the sin has been committed. When Ben Brown's little friend accidentally killed Ben's bantam rooster, he was afraid to confess it, and so he went to Ted Somers, and asked *him* to forgive him. Ted said he would, and tried to, but somehow he couldn't. Of course. You might as well feed a chicken, and expect a kitten to get fat. Your father cannot forgive you for being saucy to your mother, and the grocer cannot forgive you for running away from school. If you have sinned against God, he can forgive you, and no one else can. The people were right. This was exactly what Jesus was always teaching. But he always asserted that he could forgive sins because he was God manifest in the flesh.



*They therefore that were scattered abroad went
about preaching the word (Acts 8 : 4).*

THE mothers must often push the birdlings out of the nest in order to teach them to fly. In spite of the beauty and glory of the gospel, in spite of the natural impulse of the soul to communicate its joys and its discovery to other men, it is a fair question whether the

religion of Jesus would ever have gotten beyond Palestine if it had not been for its persecutors. It is so easy to stay in the warm nest. But a cruel hand flung the birds far forth, and away they went singing. It is lack of an income that has scattered the younger sons of English noblemen over the earth. It is poverty that has scattered the peasants and lazzaroni of Europe broadcast over the New World. Persecution drove the Puritans and the Huguenots to America. "Let me stay here in the bin!" cries the wheat to the farmer. "Not much!" cries the farmer to the wheat as he flings it into the furrow. Thank God our modern missionaries are going without being driven! But how they are scattered!—from China to Japan and Corea, from India to Ceylon and Africa. We shall have a harvest that shall make the reapers shout some day.



The land that I will show thee (Gen. 12 : 1).

DO NOT be afraid that you cannot find your place in the world! It has been, or is now being, prepared for you. God will show it to you if you live simply, candidly, teachably, and go forward. Sometimes he shows it to your instinct. You know beforehand what you ought to do and be, and

the minute you find your place it fits you. Sometimes you have to be jammed into it, because you won't go of your own accord! Sometimes he shows it by accident, sometimes by necessity; but he shows it! There will be "signs." You will find the burden fitted for your back, the work cut out for your hand. Do not hold back. Do not miss the place assigned you. Do not try to fill another. Go to the spot on the sentry-beat, or the firing-line, or the sutler's camp, or wherever God shows you your place, and stand there like a man! It is the only spot on earth where you can feel an absolute assurance and peace.



For behold, he prayeth (Acts 9 : 11).

AFTER all, that is the mood of spiritual receptivity. When the soul opens to emit its penitential sighs, the smallest aperture is wide enough for God's blessing to enter. It is the open furrow for the falling seed. More blessings worth the having and keeping have come to men in the attitude of prayer than in any other. I may not be able to tell you how to put your hard heart and stubborn soul into that state, but I can offer you the solemn assurance that when it is said of you in heaven, "Behold, he prayeth," help

will be sent you on the instant,—not what help you sought, perhaps, but just the help you need.



*Was not our heart burning
within us? (Luke 24 : 32.)*

GO WHEREVER anything makes your heart “burn” like that. Join yourself to any person that kindles up those flames in your bosom. What these icy hearts of ours need is to be set on fire. Nothing will make them burn like contact with heroes and heroic deeds. Get close to Moses, Elijah, Paul, Savonarola, Luther, Lincoln,—above all, to Jesus Christ. He has made more hearts “burn” than all the rest together.



*At even, . . . and in the morning, . . . ye shall
see the glory of Jehovah (Exod. 16 : 6, 7).*

YES, and that glory is as visible to-day as then. If you do not see it in the dew that sparkles on the grass at daybreak, and in the clouds that glow with opalescent light when the sun goes down, you would not have seen it in the divided Jordan, the bitter waters sweetened by the tree, nor in the falling of the manna, and the quails. This glory is

always in the eye of the beholder. There is as much of the glory of God in the fish caught from a lake, or the kernel of grain raised in a field, or the loaf of bread baked in the oven, as in the miraculous food that fell from heaven. In every drop of water there is the majesty of an ocean, in every star the beauty of a universe, in every child the grandeur of humanity. To the reverent mind the glory of God is seen as clearly in feeding a raven or clothing a lily as in satisfying the hunger or hiding the nakedness of an army.



Repentance and remission (Luke 24 : 47)

THOSE three words contain a mystery and glory of which I, for one, never tire. The second follows the first by a sort of automatic movement. If you can get a mind to repent, remission follows just as sure as sound follows shooting a cannon, or light the striking of a flint and steel. Don't you bother about the *remission* — you just *repent* ! Just as you sow seed and let God bring forth the plant, you have only to hate your sin, and turn from it, and he will bestow the pardon. This beautiful mystery, this marvelous bit of spiritual mechanism, is what Christ came to disclose to us. Forgiving love is the essence

of God's nature. He can no more withhold forgiveness to a penitent than a mother can withhold a kiss from the infant lips that are lifted to hers. To pardon is an irresistible divine instinct. God pardons in the heavens as Christ pardoned on the cross.



And be thou a blessing (Gen. 12 : 2).

ABOUT three times a day, each one of us might profitably pause to ask, "Am I really a blessing to my friends?" Think of the millions who are positive curses to their loved ones! And they are so often unconscious of it! Some of us are neither one thing nor another. It doesn't make much difference whether we live or die. But now and then we find some one who is a positive and unmitigated blessing! Sometimes it is an obedient little child; sometimes a noble youth; sometimes a great-hearted man or woman in middle life; sometimes an old grandfather or grandmother. They radiate light and heat. They shed joy and peace. Every one is happier and better the minute they appear. The canary sings more sweetly; the horse strikes a better gait; the household affairs go more smoothly. Whatever else you are, or are not, try to be a blessing! You can be this even

if you are poor, even if you are lame, even if you are blind. Nothing can prevent you from being a blessing but your own self!



But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him (Acts 10 : 35).

THIS verse is the bed-rock of God's moral system. Before this statement all fine-spun systems of theological ethics go down like cobwebs before a whirlwind. Goodness is goodness in earth or heaven. Righteousness is simply rightness, and God can no more help loving it than you can help admiring beauty. It is "acceptable" to him. It "finds" him. It thrills him. There are not two kinds of righteousness, any more than there are two kinds of straight lines. Do right. God will not reject your deed, whoever you are. Courage, tenderness, unselfishness, truthfulness, purity,—these are as beautiful in the negro or the Chinaman as in the white man. When done because that divine sense of duty welling up from the deeps of the soul impels them, they have a virtue and beauty that are irresistible. They are permeated with the essence of religion. All true morality is at least unconscious religion.

Slow of heart to believe (Luke 24 : 25).

I HAD rather be slow of wit than of heart. Some people do not comprehend an argument until the question is a dead issue. Some do not see a joke until others have had their laugh and forgotten it. Sorry for them? Of course! But it's not a thousandth part as bad as to have a snail-moving heart, slow to respond to love, slow to perceive goodness, slow to accept the divine. Some people's sympathies move like molasses. I like to see them explode like powder. I like to see them catch hold of evidences of God's love and goodness just as burrs seize upon sheep's wool.



*Showing the coats and garments which
Dorcas made (Acts 9 : 39).*

WHAT have you got to "show" for your life? What will your friends have to "show" when you are dead? Many a man and woman lives through the whole cycle of life's glad, sad seventy years, and, after vanishing, "leaves not a wrack behind." If their "works do follow them," they follow so close and swift as to disappear with the doer. It's easy enough to flatter ourselves in hours of vanity that we are of inestimable value to

the world, but sit down with your conscience, and ask yourself, "What would my friends have to 'show' if I should die to-night?" What have you done? Think of all that has been spent and wasted to produce some of the unproductive wretches who live and die on earth. What toil and tears of parents and teachers and friends, what tons of good bread and beef, what miles of rich and valuable clothing, have been wasted on them! And now they are gone, and their most charitable friends are empty-handed; there is nothing to "show" for them. It was something to be able to hold up those little coats and garments, and say, "She did this."



Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness (Matt. 3 : 15).

I N A door-yard an empty well, in a kitchen an empty larder, in a drawer an empty pocket-book, in a nursery an empty crib, in a workshop empty hands, in a bosom an empty heart; or, a hive full of honey, a tree full of fruit, a grove full of singing birds, a house full of children and music, a mind full of knowledge, a heart full of love, and hands full of good works! Which do you like the better, emptiness

or fulness? It is time to stop "fiddling" with life, "scratching" the surface of the field, "dabbling" with a profession, "trifling" with religion. What we need is "to go the whole figure," "fulfil our ministry." Test truth, goodness, charity, duty, righteousness, to the very utmost. Let's see what there is in a life crowded full of struggle, faith, hope, love, and endeavor.



And they turned to the Lord (Acts 9 : 35).

HOW easily and instinctively men "turn to the Lord" in great extremities and great opportunities! Watch a crowd of people when the life-saving service is trying to rescue a man from shipwreck. They "turn to God," as weather-vanes turn to the wind. You can hear muttered prayers on every side. And in great revivals, when the love of heaven is unburdening guilty consciences and cheering saddened hearts, how the multitude "turns to the Lord"! At such times men know that God is everything,—the great magnetic center and soul of the universe; the source of life, of joy, of hope. Only turn. "Turn ye! Turn ye, for why will ye die?" If you were God, would you not feel as he does,—that the sweetest thing on earth would

be the turning of human hearts to you, as the flowers turn to the sun, every hour and moment of its shining ?



Thou hast nothing to draw with (John 4 : 11).

AY, THERE is the rub ! The world, like a bountiful well, is full of good things, but the problem is how to get them. The well is deep, and so many people do not have the rope of money or brains or purpose with which to draw. I am not much of a political economist. The whole present system may be wrong, and need righting,—I don't know. But there is one very simple way of getting things into better shape than they are now. Those of us who have ropes can lend them to those who have not. A helping hand is the longest rope in the world, and will reach the bottom of wells so deep that nothing else can touch them.



And I will bless thee (Gen. 12 : 2).

WHETHER you believe it or not, every man that is born into the world may attain beatitude. Life may become a felicity. Perhaps not one in a thousand really finds it so ; but this is because they do not “get the

hang of it." I solemnly affirm that I have never passed a single day of life at the close of which I could have honestly said, "Peace and felicity would have been impossible to-day." And I have had my share of hard ones, too. Nor do I believe that you could. The most terrible calamities contain secret blessings, as the hardest shells contain hidden nuts. There is "blessing" in life as surely as there is life in sunlight. It is in the nature of God to "bless." The trouble lies in our inability or unwillingness to accept. How few people know how to receive favors gracefully! Fewer still know how to be blessed. It is a fine art.



For God was with him (Acts 10 : 38).

AND he is with every one who goes about doing good. Has that thought no splendors? Think of it! After you trace a good deed (a truly good deed) back through all its subtle, delicate, and often hidden, impulses, you come at last to God. What is it that prompts men and women to those marvels of patience, of devotion, of self-immolation, that starts the blood in our veins and brings the tears to our eyes? You say patriotism, love of offspring, sense of duty, and a thousand other things. But this is like answering the question, What

moves the wheels of an engine? by saying, "The piston rods." Back of everything else is steam. To me it is no more clear that it is sunlight which paints every flower and ripens every fruit than that it is the impact of God's own presence on the soul that produces all good deeds, pure thoughts, and loving words.



We have sinned, because we have spoken against Jehovah (Num. 21 : 7).

WHAT a happy world it would be if repentance always followed sin instantly! Suppose that wrong-doing invariably produced a feeling of contrition, just as over-work produces fatigue, or over-eating nausea. It always does when the heart has been made right by the love of God in Christ. Without that wonderful alteration in the soul the effect of sin is strangely different. It may produce shame and guilt and fear, but always and everywhere it only makes us weaker and wickeder. Take the sin of "speaking against Jehovah." The first oath terrifies the little boy. He trembles. He is afraid that the trees heard it, and will whisper it to his father; that the stars heard it, and will tell it to God. But nothing terrible happens, and he tries it again. This time he experiences a wild pleasure in his courage.

After a while he can swear every time he wants to without fear, and soon must swear, whether he wants to or not. With every oath he grows coarser and more insensible. By and by he glories in his shame. Don't hope that sin will cure itself. Clocks don't wind themselves up by running down, and neither do men. Evil is not in the heart like water in a basin or money in your purse. You cannot empty it by pouring it out or spending it. It is in your life, like the muscles in the arm of a blacksmith, to get bigger and stronger with use.



Well done, good and faithful servant (Matt. 25 : 23).

THE approbation of those we love and respect is the most substantial reward of life. It is better than possession of the treasures we accumulate or the influence we acquire. The smile on the lips of mother, sister, or wife; the hand-shake of father, brother, friend; the spoken or unspoken "well done,"—what can be sweeter than this? Wait! Perhaps consciousness of the ability to do it again is the best of all. It is not the talents, but the power to gain more, that is the noblest fruit of life's endeavor. Is it not worth the struggle? To know that in any sphere of ex

istence to which we may be translated we have acquired the power to do our duty !



As the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2 : 4).

WHAT beautiful words must those have been, thus prompted by the Spirit ! I have occasionally heard such, coming like the richest music, lingering upon the ear in softened echoes, returning to memory long afterwards like the murmur of a distant hymn. Do not believe that such words are spoken without some hard and even terrible preparation. Nothing comes out of the mouth in speech that has not in some way gone in by hard labor through some avenue of the intelligence. Such eloquent speeches as those disciples made, are not "chucked" into the mind by the Spirit of God like ready-made cartridges into a Winchester rifle ! It is true that there come great inspirational moments when thought flashes from the lips of great orators in language that surprises even themselves, but those thoughts were distilled in solemn hours when they burned the midnight oil, or trod the wine-press alone in some great and illuminating experience. When I was a college boy, I used to wonder why I could not debate as well as the other fellows. I found

out at last that, while I was playing ball, they were ransacking the library! What came out of these men at Pentecost had, in my firm belief, been put into them in those long days of humble study when they "companied with Jesus" in his hard travail.



*Only be strong and very
courageous (Josh. 1 : 7).*

THE hardest task I ever tackle is trying to be brave when I'm scared. It's a good deal like trying to be hot when you're cold. But even that is not impossible. There are a great many ways to get hot when you are cold. You can kindle a fire, and, if there isn't any wood, you can run. And if you are too stiff to run, you may be able to find somebody to thump you on the back, and keep your blood going that way. And it is the same with people who are scared. There are a thousand ways to get your heart back. And the best one I know is to "turn not to the right hand nor the left." In the vast majority of cases people are scared because they either know or suspect they are in the wrong. Get right. Get back into the "way," and your "grit" will return. Courage is the assurance of divine approval.

But their eyes were holden that they should not know him (Luke 24 : 16).

NOT "holden" by any outside pressure. All spiritually blinded eyes are "holden" from the inside. It is not surgical operation and magnifying glasses that improve the vision of the soul. It is the steady and persistent use of the inner eye itself. If you should stand for twenty years trying to see through a two-inch plank, you could not do it. The eye in all that time would not add a fraction of a degree to its penetrating power. But, so far as I know, there is not a spiritual mystery presented to the soul into which it cannot penetrate farther at the second glance than the first. If you do not recognize God in Christ to-day, you may to-morrow, by fixing your gaze steadily upon him.



Saul laid waste the church (Acts 8 : 3).

HOW easy it is to tear down the work that others have patiently done ! In every great city there are professional "wreckers." The builder begins at the bottom; the wreckers begin at the top. He builds up, they pull down. How easy it is to be a destroyer : Dynamite is the only instrument, anarchy the only motive, needed. I do not say that there

are no structures erected by human society that ought not to come down. It requires a very noble courage, sometimes, to "lay waste" the works of those who have gone before us. But it is the most solemn, serious, dangerous business in the world. I'll give you the best rule there is : Never destroy a hope, or a custom, or an institution, of human life, until you have a better thing to put in its place. Don't stop people's making candles until you give them petroleum. Don't smash their kerosene-oil lamps until you get their gas-pipes laid. Don't tear out their gas-pipes until you have strung their electric wires.



*And Jehovah hearkened to the voice
of Israel (Num. 21 : 3).*

WE CANNOT say that God accepts every foolish challenge, or takes every man at his lightest word, but he may be counted on as being most awfully faithful to people who put him to these solemn tests. If you are in desperate earnest, if you mean what you say, if you are prepared to stand by it at all cost, then try him. There is some principle in nature (I prefer to say in the heart of God) that accepts the challenge of a man who pledges his life to virtue and usefulness on condition that God

will fit him for them. If you don't believe it, try it. It comes pretty close to being a law of life that God gives us cities as fast as we are able to rule them wisely, and talents as fast as we are able to use them profitably.



*As I was with Moses, so I will
be with thee (Josh. 1 : 5).*

THERE lies one of the most tremendous inspirations of life. No man has to perform any painful task or travel any lonely way as an absolute "novitiate." Some one has always gone before him. He may, if he will, see indubitable proof that God will care for him in the fact that he has been with his predecessors. Does your experience in life seem perfectly unique? You are mistaken. Millions have traveled the same road before, and God has been with them. When Columbus put out on the limitless ocean, from whose distant horizon every other mariner had turned back in horror, even he could not say that he was alone and single in his adventure. Ten thousand other mariners had made attempts as daring, in one way or another. There is no experience of life that is new. Millions have gone through what you are having to endure, and God was with them. Have you

lost your fortune? Are you going blind? Are you about to die? Well, good friend, look about you. See the trials of your predecessors. God was with them. Why not with you?



And the pillar of cloud removed from before them, and stood behind them (Exod. 14 : 19).

IN ALL the imagery and symbolism of human life nothing has ever surpassed that of the "pillar of cloud and fire." The most cultivated imaginations in China, Persia, India, Egypt, and Greece, fell short of this sublime conception. Some of the readers of this marvelous story may doubt, or even disbelieve, that there was an actual mist of fire or dew thus shifting about these wandering slaves. Well, beware, good friend, of losing the majesty, beauty, and import of this immortal symbol. Do not let your incredulity or skepticism blind you to a conception of life sublime beyond exaggeration. There was never yet man or nation born into this world who was not accompanied and guarded thus mysteriously. Through all these glad, sad, seventy years, something (we may not know exactly what) goes shiningly before us in the darkness, and pilots us on our way. And

when the day dawns it retires behind us, and stands between us and our adversaries. Whether you call it God or nature, there it is. You may refuse to see it or to believe in it. No matter ; it never leaves you. While you live, this invisible light leads you, this invisible cloud defends you. Nothing can destroy you until the time appointed. Now, who cannot see that the difference in the spiritual lives of men lies in the perceiving, or not perceiving, these sublime ministrations? The man who is blind to them is nevertheless attended by them, but stumbles wretchedly along his way. The man who is alive to them, and through such marvelous imagery and symbolism brings them within the range of his vision, travels onward with song and gladness.



*I die ; but God will surely
visit you (Gen. 50 : 24).*

THERE you have the ultimate consolation of all reformers and philanthropists. Men think of themselves (and others think of them) that the objects of compassion who lean upon them for support, or the institutions which stand in their benefactions, cannot get along without them. No ; men die, but God abides. Props fall out from under buildings,

and piers from bridges, but gravity never loses its energy. It is gravity, and not props or piers, that does the business. It is God, and not individuals, or even institutions, that keeps human society in order. The greatest Joseph or Washington or Lincoln is only a medium through which the divine power operates. They die, but God continues his ceaseless ministrations. The nurses depart, the Great Physician continues his visits.



And suddenly there came from heaven (Acts 2 : 2).

SUDDEN things seem disconnected and isolated, but they are not. They are the results of long trains of antecedent circumstances. It only takes a second for the lightning to flash, but think how long it has taken to gather. The French Revolution seemed to boil over in an instant, but it had been seething for centuries. This outburst of the divine life, of the Holy Spirit, had been preceded by ages of toil and suffering of the heroes and martyrs of Israel, by the life and death of Jesus, by the silent brooding of the spirits in the hearts of men. There have to be ages of splitting and drying and laying the kindling-wood. Then comes the fire—suddenly. It

would be more pleasant to live when the fire of a revival bursts forth, but perhaps more useful to live when its materials are being gathered.



*All the house of Israel lamented
after Jehovah (1 Sam. 7 : 2).*

THIS fact discloses a law. It is a principle of mortal life that, however well humanity has gotten along without God, for a time, it sooner or later turns toward him with conscious need and passionate desire. This feeling first manifests itself in vague and inarticulate longings, then in bitter lamentations. Vegetation may endure a few days without sunlight, but not forever, and its need is revealed in drooping leaves and withering stalks. The dependence of the souls of men on God is no less vital. It is no less vital than that of little children on their parents, who, if left in their nurseries, may play contentedly for a few moments. Then comes that first uneasy flash of consciousness that they are alone ; then the timidity ; then the fear ; then the agony ; then the loud outcry. It is this same emotional experience through which we "grown-ups" must pass when we discover that we too are playing alone in God's great universe.

Whither thou goest, I will go (Ruth 1 : 16).

PERHAPS, if it were possible to see through what self-denial a genuine friendship must lead us, none would ever be formed. Few of us can tolerate the logic of love, which is, "Where thou goest, lodgest, sufferest, diest, I will be as near thee as thy shadow." To secure and bestow such friendship is to fulfil the highest function of life. Do you want such a friend? Make yourself necessary to somebody. As sure as there must be footholds or trellises or bark on trees for climbing plants and vines, there must be something in you for friendship to attach itself to. Love can live upon itself alone, but friendship must feed on worthiness. Therefore, the way to secure a friend is to *be* one. "He that hath friends must show himself friendly." "A true friend is one soul in two bodies," said Aristotle.



He that is but little in the kingdom of God is greater than he (Luke 7 : 28).

AFTER all, it is not great talents, great intellect, great power, great genius, that God most loves. It is those gentle and noble characteristics inspired by a sense of duty to men and to God. Many a servant in a palace has been greater than the king upon his

throne, many a soldier in the ranks greater than the general on his horse. Many a pupil trembling under the eye of the great professor has been finer, nobler, grander, than his instructor. Specific gravity varies with the elements. Some things that are very heavy in air are very light in water. Some things that are very small on earth are very large in heaven.



*He that overcometh shall inherit
these things (Rev. 21 : 7).*

THE conquering life,—let us live it. There are no absolutely insuperable obstacles along the pathway. If there are chasms, there is also a way to bridge them. If there are lions, there is also a way to slay them. Is there a mountain? Well, when God puts a mountain in your path, it is an intimation that there is a place for you on its summit. It is safe to say that the great masses of mankind go down to the grave with a consciousness of defeat. They have been thwarted in their plans, deceived in others and in themselves. For this there are two reasons : In the first place, they have struggled for impossible ends,—like gaining happiness through wrong-doing. In the second place, they do not appreciate that certain kinds of failure are the most sub-

lime successes. Christ failed, judged from their view-point. The life of a man who keeps pure and sweet and hopeful is a magnificent success, and ought to fill him with irrepressible joy, even though he dies in the poorhouse.



Peace be unto you (John 20 : 19).

THE whole longing of our Lord's life may be almost summed up in those words. Always and everywhere he was impelled by a ceaseless desire to bring peace to harassed men, peace between nations, peace between neighbors, peace in the soul itself. That was his passion. "O troubled hearts, receive this gift of peace!" What a passion! How wide the contrast to ours! And how pathetic that a man so full of peace, so eager to bestow it upon others, should have been the wholly innocent cause of so much strife! It was not his fault. It is not the fault of the sun that dead bodies decay at the touch of its beams. Nor is it the fault of love that its presence arouses and maddens the hearts of the wicked. But the longing of Christ will yet be satisfied. His love will conquer. Peace will be the universal condition of existence. Calm confidence, unbroken repose of mind.—this is the

ultimate attainment of human life in its divinely guided struggles upward.



Whose heart the Lord opened (Acts 16 : 14).

IT'S wonderful to see God open a human heart. There is no other power that can do it. See the rain open a bud, the frost open a burr, a locksmith open a safe. Outside pressure has to be brought to bear on closed hearts, and so God comes with the frost of sorrow, the dew of a new joy, or he winds his way through the intricacies of the wards of the lock by an argument, or an epigram, or a pang of conscience. One after another yields as he stands there knocking. His providence and grace are mighty hammers. They sometimes shatter the hardest hearts, and sometimes melt them.



And the children of Israel set forward (Num. 10 : 12).

“SET forward!” Keep that motto in mind. All true progress is onward and upward. If you are on the wrong track, don't “lay down!” Turn squarely round, and get out headforemost. *Nulla vestigia retrorsa*,—that is, “Never a step backward.” Don't

get into the wrong road. Stop and look for the signs ; ask questions. Make a little sure progress every day. "Get a move on you." "Keep making headway." What did you accomplish last year? Nothing? That's awful ! "Get ahead ;" put a little money in the bank ; add another friend to your list ; earn a "raise" in your salary ; conquer another bad habit ; acquire another virtue ; set up a tall stake to mark your last year's accomplishment, and don't rest a minute until you "go it one better."



Forgive (Gen. 50 : 17).

THOSE mental processes by which "forgiveness" is formed in the soul are the most beautiful in the world. What instinctive admiration we have for a soul that manufactures forgiveness ! It is wonderful to go into a mill, and see them take old dirty rags, wash them, chop them up, soak them to a pulp, and then roll them out into great sheets of snow-white paper. It is wonderful to see a great river receive the turbid waters of drains and sewers, roll them about, tumble them together, throw them up to air and sunlight, and, fifty miles after they have carried them past one great city, give them to another clear as

crystal and fit to drink. But this is nothing compared to seeing minds like those of Joseph and Jesus receive into themselves curses, injustice, insult, evil, and by that marvelous alchemy of love give them out in the form of kindness, sympathy, and forgiveness. I know such hearts. It makes no difference what you throw in to their wheels, nothing comes out but gentleness.



Cleanse your conscience (Heb. 9 : 14).

TO THAT great business Jesus gave his life. Not to inventing machinery to lighten labor, not to discovering laws to explain the mysteries of nature, not to devising new institutions to remodel civil government, but to cleansing consciences, to teaching men how to throw off the burden of guilt, how to live at peace with themselves, their neighbors, God. This is the noblest business in the world. There are no two different feelings more analogous than, on coming in from toil tired, hot, and dirty, to plunge into a bath, and emerge rested, cool, and clean ; and, going to God with the heart full of filthy and wicked thoughts, and rising from the knees penitent, forgiven, restored to terms of confidence and love. To be a teacher of that art,—is it not sublime ?

Let us return into Egypt (Num. 14 : 4).

WHAT? Back to slavery? Never! It is better to die with one's feet on the soil of liberty, and have for one's last breath the sweet air of freedom. When the Spanish messengers found Pizarro and his companions half starved and sick, and commanded them to abandon their foolhardy expedition to Peru, the old adventurer drew a line in the sand with the point of his sword, and told the cowards to return, but bade every hero to cross it with him. They crossed to a man. If you have started out to live the "divine" life,—the life of purity, of peace, of unselfishness,—don't turn back, though death and hell should seem to stand in your way.



And Jacob's well was there (John 4 : 6).

NO OBJECT in nature is more beautiful or more useful than a water source. To dig a well, to open a path to a spring, to pipe a stream to a fountain,—these are among the most noble deeds of human life. Some people are like wells, and have much in them that is useful to their fellows, but it can only be gotten at with a long rope like that at Jacob's well. Some are like those water-soaked fields

on Western prairies, where the horses find drink by stamping with their hard hoofs. Some are like generous springs with water trickling quietly over their green lips. Some are like great copious fountains flinging the sparkling flood high into air. Some are as dry as an abandoned well in Texas, down into which I once let a bucket with a rope one hundred feet long, only to dip up mud ! Whatever else you are, don't be a dry well !



*And they could not answer again
unto these things (Luke 14 : 6).*

THERE are two unanswerable arguments,— absolute truthfulness of word and absolute beauty of deed. Men abuse us, condemn us, suspect us, defy us, but there is something about a truth told with eyes wide open, and a beautiful deed done with a heart full of love, that silences and convicts. Your enemies may rage and froth at the mouth, they may burn you at the stake or hang you on a gibbet, but their words of condemnation die in their throats. Truth and goodness—these were the weapons with which Christ won his victories. And they are as mighty to-day as ever. Recall the calm assurance and the exalted happiness that came to you when you stood up fearlessly

and told the truth, or courageously and did the right, and then acknowledge to yourself that "a boy is a fool who ever hesitates an instant."



God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10 : 34).

BEFORE what earthly tribunal do men stand solely on their merits? In the judgment of what individual do the mere accessories of life, the superficial elements, count for nothing? In spite of ourselves, we base our estimate of character on wealth, money, culture, manners, dress! Ninety-nine out every hundred of us give "the benefit of the doubt" to a woman in a tailor-made suit or a man in a "swallow-tail" coat. Who does not blush at the superficiality, the partiality, of his own judgment of men? Who would not be glad to live in a social circle or do business in a community where nothing but intrinsic worth counted? Fancy the thrill that would shoot through the hearts of honest laboring men, who have all their lives seen people shrink away from their dirty clothes and calloused hands, when they felt that at last their neighbors had taken them at their true worth, and that they were now standing on the simple platform of manhood! Your day is coming, my dear fellow, and it will be when you stand before God. He is no respecter of persons.

Astonished at his teaching (Mark 1 : 22).

OF COURSE, they were, and still are, at the teaching of any man who goes straight to the heart of things as he did. For he was as direct in his teachings as in his doings. Jesus was always looking for the "heart" of the thing. His mind went straight to the mark. He swept away all the mists in an instant, and made his hearers see just what he saw. Now and then we meet a man who talks about things so simply that we say, "Why in the world didn't I say that myself? It lay on the very surface, and yet I overlooked it." Benjamin Franklin and Abraham Lincoln had a way of thus seeing and saying what every one else overlooked in the realm of scientific and practical affairs. Some men are gifted with this power at birth, but any one can acquire something of it if he will only believe that the "heart" of the subject is the thing to look for.



Howbeit the people that dwell in the land are strong (Num. 13 : 28).

OF COURSE ! Was it ever otherwise ? All great prizes are at the top, and not the bottom, of the ladder ; behind barred doors, not open ones. The children of Anak guard every treasure worth the love of man.

Take the pearl, which lies at the bottom of the sea. Take liberty, which is not a donation, but an achievement ; not granted by an easy vote of a legislature, but attained by infinite toil and suffering. Take God, who conceals himself beyond the discovery of every eye but the one which will not take "No" for an answer. "Raise the stone and there thou shalt find me, cleave the wood and there am I." Lift! Cleave! "I will make the salvation of my soul my life work," said Jonathan Edwards. I say this: An easy life is always a bad one. A Canaan without conquest is (ninety-nine times out of a hundred) either a curse or a calamity.



Go . . . tell John the things which ye have seen and heard (Luke 7 : 22).

THE fishes leave no trail in the sea, and the birds leave no trail in the air, but every living thing that creeps or crawls or runs across the surface of the earth leaves the marks of its passage behind it. The lion leaves his footprints and the carcasses of his victims. The snail leaves a slimy wake, and, if our eyes were sharp enough, we could see the marks of the feet of the crickets and the grasshoppers. And so men leave their marks,—the conqueror in

desolated provinces, the statesmen in beneficent laws, the artist in great pictures, the architect in noble buildings. The marks which Jesus left behind him were happy homes and hearts. You could trace him from Nazareth to Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem to Capernaum, by the people whom he had healed of their diseases and lifted out of their sins. These trails cannot be covered up. What are you leaving behind you?



*Is less than all seeds; but . . . becometh
a tree (Matt. 13 : 32).*

NEVER, never, never despise a thing because it is small. I can still remember the vague feeling of wonder in my heart when, as a child, I said over those little old-fashioned lines :

“ Little drops of water, little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean and the pleasant land.”

It always seemed to me that it ought to have been just the reverse. I know better now, and I take off my hat to all little bits of things,— little brooks, little eggs, little microbes, little boys, and little girls, not because they are little, but because of what is tucked away out of sight in their littleness. When some one

disparaged a boy because he was little, Daniel Webster said, "It is out of just such things that men are made." The littlest, puniest child in that class of yours may some time sit in a presidential chair or judge angels. Be careful how you treat him.



And having given thanks (John 6 : 11).

EVEN if gratitude were not a duty, we should still try to cultivate it, just for the pleasure it excites in the soul. The sensations which we feel when gratitude wells from the heart are almost perfect bliss. They are what a rose would feel if it were conscious of its own perfume, or a spring of the pure water gurgling up out of its depths. To me ingratitude is repulsive and horrible. Did you ever watch the keepers feed the tigers in a museum? It is the absence of gratitude that makes the sight horrible. All the eye of the tiger says is "More, more, more!" And I have seen men eat in the same way. How much better than an animal is the man who does not feel gratitude for his daily bread and all his other mercies! How different is the light in the eye of a tiger from that in the eye of a sick soldier when a Sister of Charity gives him a draught of cold water! That light is gratitude,

a light more beautiful than that of the evening star. Are you cultivating it in yourself?



Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy (Exod. 20 : 8).

YOU can judge a man's intellectual, moral, and spiritual attainments by the use he makes of his Sabbaths. If they bore him, it is as certain that he has not achieved true culture, as it is if he is bored by literature and art. If he devotes them to idleness or pleasure, it is like letting a pianola stand closed, or using it to play rag-time music. I should be more ashamed not to know how to make my Sabbath days a supreme joy and blessing than not to know how to spend a thousand dollars to my own advantage. Men need to bathe their souls in Sabbath peace and quiet as they need to bathe their bodies in pure water. It takes time to be holy. Men can no more be holy without quiet hours of exposing themselves to the influence of the divine Spirit than an apple can get mellow without weeks of hanging in the sun. You may be able to keep honest and industrious and faithful by being everlastingly on the hop, skip, and jump, but holy (calm, serene, tranquil, at rest in moral equilibrium) you will never be without your hours

and days of meditation and worship. Men are not polished into holiness by being eternally rolled along the shore of the ocean of life, like pebbles. Don't try to keep *Sunday* holy, but your *self*.



He that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law (Rom. 13 : 10).

YES, love is a "short cut" to the goal of duty. Do you want to be happy? Learn how to love. Do you want to meet every obligation of life? Learn how to love. Everything goes easy to the lover. From what mysterious herb hath God extracted this strange potency by which pain is made pleasure, and the most disagreeable drudgery of life a luxury? If you never learn any other lesson, learn how to love. This is not so easy. It is easy enough to love what you do love, but how are you going to love what you don't love? Ay, there's the rub! What! love disagreeable, offensive, unlovely people? To be sure! There is certain to be something good and sweet in the worst of them. And besides there is that strange and wonderful love of "benevolence"—the power of the soul to wish the worst people well, which, if it is aroused, develops into a love as pure as the love of God. It's hard to get it started, but

the capacity is in you, so rouse it up ! When you can control your affections, and love whom you ought to love, that strangely beautiful and wonderful feeling will fulfil all the duties of life, as electricity seems likely to do all the work of the world. Yes, love is the "short cut" to the goal of duty.



And he could not be hid (Mark 7 : 24).

GENIUS of any kind is like fire. Amidst the combustible elements of human life it will burn itself out into view. There will be many a young fellow who will need to be told this, for there are thousands of them who are already getting embittered at the lack of "recognition." I do not say that merely potential genius—genius which exists latent—will always be discovered ; but I do say that genius which is alive, active, efficient, actually accomplishing things for the enjoyment or betterment of mankind, can no more be concealed than fire. The world will not dig you out of your hole, as boys dig out woodchucks, if you merely have the undeveloped *capacity* to do things. But if you are actually singing a song, or writing a poem, or preaching a sermon, or building a house, or painting a picture, or shoeing a horse, in such a way as to give pleasure or profit to men, they

will find you, even if you are down in a well. If you do not get recognition, ten chances to one it is because you don't play your part to the satisfaction of the audience.



He leadeth me beside still waters (Psa. 23 : 2).

THE soul of man, in one respect at least, shares the twofold necessity of water,— agitation and repose. There are times when we need to be shaken up by the fury of the rapids, and others when we need to be spread out in the calm stillness of the lake. To the young, all repose is stagnation. They love to launch their barks on stormy seas. But there comes a time when the soul longs for still waters—"waters of rest." The final measurement of life values discloses the ineffable worth of stillness and quiet. There is no power like that of silence and repose. The heart that is to be filled to the brim with holy joy must be still. Energy resides in tranquility. The stars and the sun rise in silence, and so do great events. Bees work in silence, and so do thoughts. Trees grow in aphony and muteness, so also do characters. But rest and peace are not products of external conditions. The soul may be tempest-tossed on the most stagnant sea, and yet as calm as heaven

even amidst the breakers. "Diogenes found more rest in his tub than Alexander on his throne." "Weariness can snore upon the flint when rusty sloth finds the down pillow hard." All true peace and rest and quietness are the gifts of God through the consciousness of his presence.



He was much perplexed (Mark 6 : 20).

THERE is a fearful fascination about both evil and good. We are drawn towards both, as men are drawn to the edges of precipices and the tops of mountains. We are pulled both ways like iron filings between powerful magnets. They "turn our heads." We are "perplexed." Herod halted and hesitated between John and his boon companions. When Herodias sang, he thought there was nothing else in the whole world worth his while. But when John transfixed him with his deep-set eye, and thrilled him with the very eloquence of heaven, it seemed to him as if he could throw away his scepter and his crown without a struggle to adopt the beautiful life that he described. And when neither of them were with him, when he was all alone, when silence brooded around him, then he did not know what to do, for he was tormented with a

desire for both. But he had to choose at last, and so do we all. We may put it off and put it off, but finally we shall be compelled to decide. You cannot always halt between the two sets of companions who are trying to claim you for their own. One of them will get you at last. You had better decide before it is decided for you by some terrible mistake you stumble into.



This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world (John 6 : 14).

IT CAME out at last,—the real truth about this wonderful being. Be sure of this,—the secret nature of every one of us will sooner or later be revealed. Our Lord's prophetic gifts "revealed themselves." All real talents are like fire,—they burn out into view. If you have a gift, do not be afraid that it will never be discovered. Do not go around thrusting it into other people's faces. Do not be bragging of it, describing it, calling attention to it. If you have the capacity to stand at the head of your class, or run the business in which you are now only an errand boy, it will leak out. The boss or the superintendent will see it creeping out of every little deed you do.

They were moved with indignation (Matt. 21 : 15).

YOU can judge a man always and everywhere by what angers him. What is it that makes you maddest? Is it injustice? Is it impurity? Is it vice of any kind? That is a noble feeling that flames with a sudden passion at any meanness and at any wrong. But these men (shame upon them!) were angered by innocence, by the recognition of virtue, by the triumph of holiness. If your heart swells with bitterness because of the prosperity of some one who is innocent and good, be sure that it is the abode of an evil spirit, and needs cleansing.



He that loveth his life loseth it (John 12 : 25).

IF YOU get strong, and then try to keep your strength without using it, you will find that every muscle grows flabby, soft, and weak. If you get power, and try to keep it without exercising it, it will do you as much good as steam will do a boiler with no wheels to turn. If you get money, and try to enjoy it without spending it, or giving it away, any pleasure you derive from it will make you selfish, mean, and low. Nature works automatically in this field. When my furnace gets

too hot, a damper closes, and the draft shuts off. Nature operates the machinery of your heart in the same way. If you get a certain amount of this world's goods, and do not divide with others, the damper closes, the sensibility to happiness ceases, the power to enjoy cools.



*If thou wilt indeed deliver, . . . then I
will utterly destroy (Num. 21 : 2).*

IT IS a perilous experiment to offer conditions to God, for the case looks so different when the conditions are met! Many a mother has promised to dedicate a baby to God (if he would only give her one) who has forgotten the promise in the selfish sweetness of its love. Many a man has sworn to give his fortune to benevolence (if God would permit him to make it) who, when he has acquired it, could not resist its fascinations. Many a boy has vowed himself to the ministry (if God would give him an education) who afterward could not resist the temptation to use it for his own aggrandizement. And yet a pledge like this is solemn beyond words. Have you sworn? Fulfil! You may affirm that circumstances have altered, and excuse yourself in a thousand ways. The solemn fact remains that a promise made to the invisible

God has a million fold more sacredness than to an earthly friend. I'll lose my guess if these words do not fall under the eye of some one whose life has been perverted or thwarted by failing to stick to a pledge. *You* know how true they are !



Wherefore didst thou doubt ? (Matt. 14 : 31.)

“ **W**HEN he saw the wind boisterous.”
Well, that is the way with most of us. It is easy to be brave when there is no danger. I too am a fine sailor when I can see my face in the water from the upper deck. It is the whistle of the wind in the cordage, the wild plunge of the vessel down into the trough of the waves, that takes the nerve out of me. Do you know what all fear is? All fear is unfaith. You can no more be afraid when your heart is full of confidence than you can be hungry when your stomach is full of food. There are no two things so much alike, and so unlike, as courage and temerity, and as faith and presumption. In their incipient stages you have to tie a pink ribbon around faith to tell it from presumption, just as the mothers of twins do around the finger of one of the babies to tell it from the other. But when they are full grown the difference is an-

tipodal. Presumption believes that it can do anything it wants to do ; Faith believes that it can do anything that it ought to do. It is a shame and a sin to doubt that you can accomplish anything that is your duty. Plunge into water, dash through fire, defy frost, if a duty lies on the other side. You may burn, you may drown, you may freeze, but nothing can harm you. Do you understand that? If you do, you know the secret of life.



*Choose you this day whom ye
will serve (Josh. 24 : 15).*

TO TRAIN the mind to a swift, free, intelligent, and right choice between the alternatives of existence is to me the sum and substance of our business of life. This business is not to think profoundly, nor to act bravely, so much as to choose wisely, for upon right choice all else depends. Never leave an important matter to accident. Never “flip a cent,” nor “cut a pack of cards,” nor consult a fortune-teller, nor let others choose for you. How the mind shrinks back from the pain of decision ! No matter,—force it on. Make it “take a decision,” as a good fox-hunter compels a reluctant horse to “take” a ditch or a fence. Don’t be a straw in a current, a

leaf in a wind, a boy in a crowd. "Choose her or lose her" is the stern mandate that God has written over the door of fortune, and also eternal life. "Choose me or lose me" he has also inscribed over the portal of his own palace.



Jesus therefore, being wearied (Jonn 4 : 6).

AND so the "divine man" also suffered fatigue. Well, without it, he would never have known the sweetness of rest, and no more would you and I. But full of blessings as hours of fatigue may be, they are dangerous too, and we must look out for the perils of physical prostration. It is through the shadows of these hours that the assassins of hope and joy steal upon us. Most people do not know what is the matter with them when they are tired. They think that the whole world is out of joint, while the real trouble is in their own joints ! I have seen men who always thought that the voices of their children were twice as loud, the coffee three times as weak, and the bread four times as heavy, at night as in the morning. I wonder they never learn that tired eyes and ears see and hear double. Beware of the "tired hours," Little Bill ! Things are never anywhere near so dark and bad as they seem to you when you come home

from a football game with your nose all bloody, your arms all bruised, and your legs and back aching so that you can hardly sit up at the table. Jesus was just as tired as you are, and, no doubt, things looked just as dark sometimes ; but he was never cross, and he always knew that, when he got rested, they would look brighter.



Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies (Psa. 23 : 5).

HERE is a swift, brilliant, fleeting glimpse of another method of God's providence. It is not his idea of the education of men never to give them sight and fight of their enemies. He does not take them to solitary and safe retreats to feed them. He spreads their tables in the very presence of their foes to give them nerve. There was once a general who educated his horses to tranquillity amidst confusion and danger by putting their oats on the heads of the drums and having the drummers beat them while the trembling animals were feeding. Victory is inscribed on the banners of the army that is able to take its rations in the presence of an enemy. The man who can eat and sleep in the face of disaster will never know final defeat.

When they were fully awake, they saw his glory (Luke 9 : 32).

IT IS only when we are wide awake that we see the real glories of life. How different the world and life itself looks to those who are half asleep ! Did you ever notice the difference in the faces of the people when they start for town in the morning, and come home at night ? At night the people are all hunched over, cross, dispirited, and gloomy. In the morning every man thinks he is going to make a hundred dollars before sunset ! How different the country looks to you after you have been fishing all day, and have a five-mile walk to get home, from what it did when you set out, fresh from a long night's sleep, in the morning ! It is just as beautiful in the evening light as in the morning, but it doesn't look so. You are half asleep, and cross. Everything seems ugly and gloomy. Judge life by the morning hours.



Every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins (Acts 10 : 43).

I PUT all other mysteries of the visible or invisible world second to that of the remission of sin through confession and pardon. It is wonderful to see light dispel darkness, to see water cleanse the soil of our garments,

magnetism attract iron filings, electricity propel cars, Röntgen rays pierce solid iron, Marconi receive a message across the ocean without wires ! We are so fashioned that when we open our minds to the full force of these mysteries we are moved to awe. But I am moved more deeply still when I see a little child with a guilty conscience creep into its mother's arms, confess its sin, and feel the pain and anguish die away at her words of pardon ; and to see a man whose life has been base and vile prostrate himself before God in agony, pour out his soul in penitence, and suddenly become so conscious of forgiving love as to rise in a hushed and awful gladness,—this is the greatest marvel of existence.



I shall not want (Psa. 23 : 1).

HOW to hold that sublime faith in providence consistently with a sense of personal responsibility for daily bread and clothing, is a psychological as well as a religious problem. To live tranquilly, like a sheep in a green meadow by a still running brook, and also like a man with grocers' and butchers' and shoemakers' bills to be met at the first of the month, is no child's play. To have struggled heroically until one is fifty without a

dollar in the bank to show for it ; to realize that one's "productive period" will terminate in a decade, and yet to look forward with a sublime faith that we "shall not want," while life gets harder every day and each gray hair and wrinkle shuts another door against us,—this is a sublime achievement. But let us remember that our necessities never equal our wants ; that it is our imaginary wants which are so numerous, while our real wants are very few, and that hundreds of us would have never known want at all if we had not first known waste. And let us remember also that it is easy to exaggerate the importance of all our own fuming and fussing to supply our daily recurrent needs. For, after all, it is God's sun and rain, his wind and steam, his heart and arm, that really keep us from need.



For am I in the place of God? (Gen. 50 : 19.)

VENGEANCE is the prerogative of God. "Vengeance is mine ; I will repay, saith the Lord." Nothing is more presumptuous, nothing more dangerous, nothing more certain to "work backward," to "blow out at the breech," than the effort to stand in the place of God when it comes to the matter of "righting wrongs." Society has to restrain,

but not "vindicate." Only God knows exactly what retribution to mete out to wrong doers. But there is a way in which we may try to stand "in the place of God." It is by doing good. And there is no other joy so profound as the feeling, "I am doing God's work, I am standing in the place of God,"—to this poor little orphan boy, to this widow and her fatherless children, to this poor convict who has just come out of prison, to this traveler who has fallen among thieves, to this prodigal who has come to himself. Every true-hearted man or woman knows by some sweet experience what it is to have that deep and almost awful feeling, as if one were the good God himself, when protecting some poor child of misfortune.



He restoreth my soul (Psa. 23 : 3).

RESTORATION may be said to be the key-word to the philosophy of the Bible. That great book is saturated with the ideas of rejuvenation, regeneration, and recovery. "Repent ye therefore and turn again that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus, whom the heaven must receive until the

time of the restoration (American Revision) of all things." Without attempting to fathom the exact meaning of these words, you may safely enough grasp with whole-hearted enthusiasm the general idea of a vast and illimitably recuperative power in nature, a tendency to return from unstable to stable equilibrium, from miscarriage and frustration to fruition and victory, from death to life, from sin to righteousness. Growth, and not decay, is the law of the universe. Restoration, and not destruction, is the aim of God in this vast scheme of existence. Enumerate (if you only could) the times in which God has built you up from the ground. Reflect on the experiences in which he has set you on your feet, wiped your tears, reanimated your hopes, and from these perceive his method of the moral government of mankind.



*Went every year to Jerusalem at the
feast of the passover (Luke 2 : 41).*

NOT every fifth, or third, or every other year, but every year! With the steadiness of the swing of the planets, and the changing phases of the moon, these faithful, consecrated Jewish people went to the house of God, and performed the sacred tasks of life. It is comparatively easy to do what we have to

do, and go where we have to go, but the supreme test of a man is not so much in the discharge of obligatory as of voluntary and self-appointed tasks. . When a man goes to the store six days in a week because he must, and stays at home from church on Sunday because he can, there is a screw loose in him, and he'd better tighten it. God give us fewer brilliant, erratic, now-and-then men, but more faithful, steady, persistent, every-year-at-the-feast men,—men that go, rain or shine, thick or thin, snow or sun. A man is not half a man who does not do some things with his teeth clenched and his face set like a flint.



Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward (Exod. 14 : 15).

DO NOT imagine that any one principle of life interprets the whole of it. Some one has just said comfortably to himself, "If all there is to life is just standing still and seeing God do the business, I can manage pretty easily." But listen. There comes a time when this won't do. You cannot do much, but what you can do you must do. Wherefore do you stand there mumbling your useless prayers to God? Go forward. Draw

your sword. Open your furrow. Launch your ship. This thing awaiting your activity will not be done for you by God or man. Millions of sunbeams, forces of irresistible magnitude, spirits innumerable, are all around you, but not one of them will lift a finger to do that task. It is yours, not theirs. God will smite the Egyptians with plagues, he will roll back the waters of the Jordan, he will take off the wheels of the Egyptian chariots, but if you do not get a move on you, and go forward, God will not stir a single muscle in your leg. There are multitudes of fortunes being lost and lives being wrecked because men won't "go forward."



He that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much (Luke 16 : 10).

WE GAIN self-confidence and the confidence of others by the discharge of little trusts. What we do with them is a sign of what we shall do with others. A little spark is as hot as a big conflagration, and a little drop of water is as wet as a big flood. What a little chap does with his pennies is a pretty good sign of what he will do with his dollars. God trains us on littles. It was Corporal Tommie's handling his "squad" well that made the colonel think he would make a good

captain. It was handling his "company" well that made the general think he would make a good colonel, and so on away up to the top of the ladder.



I fell at his feet as one dead (Rev. 1 : 17).

SURELY life, death, the universe, God, are overpowering ; if one sees the true terror or the sublime beauty of existence, it is enough to strike him dumb or dead. To live amidst all these dangers and responsibilities and opportunities, to know that one is moving resistlessly forward into the eternities and infinities, that he is absolutely certain to see God face to face, that he will behold heaven or hell with his own eyes, is fearful ! But God says, "Fear not." Live in trust. Exist in hope. Go forward. Yes, let us go forward. We are as safe in his hands as a drop of water in an ocean.



The good things to come (Heb. 9 : 11).

THE good things (yes, the best things) are all "to come." The golden age of the world is not in the past, but the future. The richest blessings of the individual life are not in infancy and youth, but in maturity and old age ; not in this present life, but in the one to

which this is only the vestibule. You get away from Christ and his apostles in proportion as you live in the past, or in proportion as you distrust the future. To-morrow must be better than to-day, or, at any rate, next year than this. "The best is yet to be," and yet (mind this) this great law fulfils itself only to those who love the best, who believe in the best, and who seek the best. The physical eye only perceives the light or darkness which exists. The eye of the soul creates its own darkness and light !



Receive ye the Holy Spirit (John 20 : 22).

TO DOUBT the possibility of receiving the gift bestowed upon those apostles is to question the deepest experience of life. Let others tell you "how" you may receive it. Let me tell you that it is possible. A new spirit really takes possession of men. Call it by what name you will, cherish what theory you may about it, only believe in it, and strive to attain it ! There is a gate that can be opened to the stream of spiritual power that washes against your soul. There is a door through which the divine spirit can enter. Thereby men become stronger, purer, holier ! Stephen received it ; Saul of Tarsus did ; so did Luther, Chalmers, Moody, and millions of

others. Do not measure yourselves by what strength you now possess. The soul is as capable of receiving an outside force into itself as is the electric engine.



This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth (Josh. 1 : 8).

IT WOULD be a grand thing to know intellectually all the ethical and spiritual principles in the world, but it would be far better to know a few of them if they were always in your heart and mouth. Suppose a man simply knew the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes, but never for an instant lost consciousness of them, do you think that he would go far astray? Life is fearfully intricate. No man could ever know too much to meet all the emergencies that might arise in being king, president, or emperor. But every day impresses me anew with the fact that with the two simple laws of Jesus "in his heart and in his mouth," any man could pass safely through life in this world, and probably through the life of any other universe, without so much as stubbing a toe. It is ignorance of the laws of being, it is having to play the game of life without knowing its rules, that makes barbarism so dreadful.

He was passing through (Luke 17 : 11).

WHAT a rare and beautiful nature it is which never loses a chance to do good even when it is "passing through"! Many of us do a few good deeds by making plans a good ways ahead, and become so absorbed in what we are aiming at that we never think of anything that happens on the way or while we are "passing through." Like a cannon-ball we pass by everything else, and go straight to the mark, well satisfied if we hit that. Jesus seemed to be alive to everything which happened on the way. Many of his most beautiful deeds were what you might call mere "asides," like helping Lazarus and the Samaritan woman.



And Saul was consenting unto his death (Acts 8 : 1).

LITTLE BILL came home the other night with his eyes sticking out of his head, and stuttered almost unintelligibly as he told his father how Tom Titmouse had broken into his mother's pantry and stolen dried plums. "Turn your pockets inside out, Little Bill," said his father,—and they were full of plums. "My son," he asked sternly, "don't you know that the partaker is as bad as the thief?"

“No,” said Little Bill in blank amazement. And he really didn’t! Saul of Tarsus found it out to his sorrow when his spiritual eyes were opened. Oh, how little it takes to “give consent” to evil! Holding other men’s clothes does it. Holding our tongues does it. Keeping a secret does it. Sometimes an approving smile does it. We have been guilty a thousand times, when we ought to have spoken out, repudiated, spurned, denounced, some evil deed, and did not do it.



*The word of Jehovah was precious
in those days (1 Sam. 3 : 1).*

THAT is a terrible infirmity in human nature that identifies preciousness with rareness. In reality the most common things are the most sacred. It is only in imagination that the rare possess such worth. Air, earth, and water are of infinitely more importance than emeralds, pearls, and rubies. If we should find a deposit of diamonds that made them as plenty as gravel, we should use them for roads without reluctance. When copies of the Bible were so few that they were chained to pillars in churches, people almost worshiped them like idols. But now, when they exist by millions, they value them as little as news-

papers. For one, I have deliberately set myself the task of appreciating the common things of life. I am trying to give their true value to daisies, buttercups, robins, dogs, and horses. I don't want to despise geniuses like Paderewski and Tennyson and Browning; but I want to love and appreciate common people. I want to feel that it is not only the thought, the emotion, the vision, that visits me on infrequent and rare occasions, but those that haunt my common hours, that I ought to cherish as divine.



Peace be to this house (Luke 10 : 5).

WHAT a crime it is to introduce an element of discord into a human habitation! It is a divine art always to bring peace with us. We shall not do it without the most exquisite care and skill. Homes are full of explosives. The scratch of a cross word is like the touch of a match to a powder-mine. We do not know how we are rubbing people the wrong way unless we watch them closely. We may be innocent of any intention to make trouble, and yet be making it all the time. We had better "examine" ourselves if people grow silent when we come around, or if they leave the room.

He entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day (Luke 4 : 16).

SOCIETY is full of people who repudiate or ignore the obligation of church attendance, and yet insist on retaining the name and privileges of the disciples of Jesus Christ. To me this is incomprehensible, unless the obligation on "the disciple to be as his master" has been annulled. If the great Head of our system of life and worship felt the need and maintained the habit of "entering the synagogue on the sabbath day," by what principle of reasoning can his professed followers escape this obligation? "As his custom was." How the sense of the bane and blessing of "habit" deepens in us with increasing years! Of all evils there is nothing comparable to a bad habit; but of all beatitudes there is nothing so admirable as a good one. Force yourselves into doing good things until you do them either unconsciously or without disinclination. You can succeed at last, and when that end is attained you will have saved yourself infinite trouble. What can be more terrible than having to debate a duty every time its performance is called for? Settle it for good and all. Drive yourself into doing it until it is harder to leave it undone. I can't remember having seriously debated with myself a dozen times in my life whether I should go "into the

synagogue on the sabbath day" or not. It never occurs to me to raise the question. My parents got me so thoroughly into the church-going habit when I was a child that my legs would carry my head to church in spite of itself. Some people will say, "That's slavery, and the man is a victim." Well, let them. Those same people would condemn the habit of a mother's bathing her baby daily, or a man's kissing his wife every morning when he started for his store.



*All the congregation . . . were
with him (1 Kings 8 : 5).*

WHAT could he have done unless they had been "with him"? Any leader is invincible when thus surrounded. But what can a general do on the field of battle with his army asleep in the barracks? What can a minister do with his congregation playing on the golf-links? What can a teacher do with his class in the woods gathering chestnuts? Sometimes it is the leader's fault if he cannot keep his followers "with him." But, unless I misread the symptoms of our modern social infirmities, there are times when multitudes of congregations have been stampeded by the devils of worldliness. There is this curious phenomenon,—that the greatest and wisest

leaders in church and Sunday-school are having about as hard work to keep the people "with them" as the least and feeblest. It's an inviolable maxim that the minister is helpless if the congregation does not "stand by."



*And there ariseth a great storm
of wind (Mark 4 : 37).*

DO NOT think for a moment that the presence of Jesus Christ in the ship of your life will keep the storms from blowing. There are moments of religious excitement when preachers and teachers lay the reins on the necks of their thought-horses and get run away with. We sometimes paint very rosy pictures of the voyage of life "with Jesus at the helm." We are so anxious to get our friends to embark that we call a very stormy ocean a quiet inland lake, and represent the happy voyagers as lolling on the decks and sailing on an even keel. That may be your way of getting to the desired haven, but it has not been mine. I have heard the wind howl through the rigging, and seen it split the sails. I have felt the waves wash over the gunwales. I have been hoisted by them until my ship has hit the clouds, and gone down into their troughs until the keel has scraped the bottom.

And I cannot yet say that I hope I'll never see another storm. I had almost as soon navigate a glue-pot as an ocean that never broke into white-caps. How should we value the haven without the tempest? The disciples never would have heard the "Peace, be still," without the "great storm of wind."



*For thus it becometh us to fulfil
all righteousness (Matt. 3 : 15).*

“LET us perform this deed [distasteful, perhaps, to both of them,—to John, because of his conscious unworthiness, and to Jesus on account of its publicity] to meet the claims of a law above our own desires or wills.” There is such a law for you and for me. There is an eternal fitness in things to which we must subordinate all individual preferences. The great stream of events is flowing in the channel of righteousness toward the goal of holiness. Within those banks we must order the course of our lives. Nothing is so sublime or satisfying as to do a thing simply because it is right! The less you know about the why and wherefore of that rightness, the more profound is the joy of obedience. To go to death against all other inclinations but those of the soul towards duty,

to go in the dark, to go contrary to all apparent reason, evidence, and even common-sense (as a fireman rushes into a burning building to save a deformed and dying child),—this, in spite of all argument to the contrary, fills a human soul with its greatest ecstasy. Whatever is right, do it,—do it all, do it to the last hair's-breadth. Fulfil all righteousness. Do not put a few stingy and regretful acts into the cup, but fill it full to the brim.



*As for me, it was in my heart to
build a house (1 Chron. 28: 2).*

HOW much there is in every heart that never gets incorporated into word or deed! And did you ever notice how men minimize the moral significance of their unrealized evil thoughts, and maximize the moral significance of their unrealized good thoughts? If it is "in a man's heart" to lie or steal or blaspheme or kill, he thinks but little less of himself, so long as his emotions did not become actions. But let a man have the most fleeting and sterile inclination to give a dollar to a cause, or lend a helpful hand to a beggar, or found a hospital for the sick, or build a church for the masses, and he actually thinks he is as good as if he had done it. It was in Little

Bill's heart to help his mama. A look of beatific self-satisfaction was on his face as he asked her, with all the air of a young courtier, "Can't I do something else?" when he had finished a trifling task. But when she said, "Yes, dear ; you can clean the cellar," he humped his shoulders and looked like a thunder-cloud. It really wasn't in his heart. It was only "in his eye." It's very hard to tell what's in your heart from what is only "in your eye."



*We would that thou shouldst do for us
whatsoever we shall ask (Mark 10 : 35).*

EVEN the best of them could not get rid of the desire for personal aggrandizement. It was not the reform of evils, but the advancement of self, that animated them. They restrained these feelings as long as they could, but they finally burnt out into sight. "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and one on thy left hand, in thy glory." Well, how much better are we? We are less frank, but are we any less selfish? Who of us loses sight of the preferment, prestige, and recognition that come through religious and charitable work? There is a story of two colored men in Washington who were appointed a committee to pick out a candidate

for an important political office. After a while one of them came back into the meeting, and asked for an extension of time. "Mr. Chairman," he said very solemnly, "the committee is divided. Mr. Johnson, he's for hisself, and I'm for myself, and we're having hard work to get together!" If we could get at the bottom facts of the failure of many benevolent enterprises, they could be summed up in this naïve confession of the colored man,—“he's for hisself, and I'm for myself.”



And I will establish his kingdom for ever, if he be constant to do my commandments and mine ordinances, as at this day
(1 Chron. 28 : 7).

WHAT we want in manhood is not to spurt like a geyser, but to flow like a waterfall. It is all right to see a man do his task "to-day," but we want to know if he did it yesterday and will do it to-morrow. He must have, not the spasmodic pull of a man drawing corks from bottles, but the eternal pull of gravity holding planets. If it were only certain that every Sunday-school teacher and scholar who was in his place on "this" day would be in his place next Sunday and next year! "Were man but constant, he were

perfect," said Shakespeare. And, speaking sadly after studying human nature through a long lifetime, Confucius lamented: "A good man it is not mine to see. Could I see a man possessed of constancy, that would satisfy me." Most of us have only the constancy of the leech, which lets go at the instant when he has sucked all the blood he can hold. One sometimes longs for men with the constancy of the bull-dog, which hangs on just for the sake of not letting go.



A man having a withered hand (Matt. 12 : 10).

NOT being a physician, I will not attempt to diagnose the trouble with this poor fellow. But the profession of the ministry has brought me into contact with many another withered hand (and, for that matter, withered head and withered heart), which I understand quite perfectly. No fact in nature is more familiar, and no law more demonstrable, than that of the withering up of all disused faculties or organs. It is known to science as atrophy. After a while nothing is left of a disused faculty or organ but a vestige. Vestigial remains are mere tombstones, the pale memorials of powers that have now ceased to be. I know a rich man (many such) who has a withered

hand. He ceased to stretch it out to help his fellows, and now it is only a "vestigial remain." He cannot use it when he tries. I know a woman (oh, multitudes!) who has a withered heart. She would not open it to the sorrows of others, and it has dried up until it rattles around in her breast like a pea in a pod. I know a boy (the woods are full of them) whose brain is withering up like a leaf on an August day. He won't study, and he has already got to a point where he can't think. Instead of the convolutions of his brain unfolding, they are continually contracting upon themselves. If he only knew the terror of it, the last thing on earth a fellow would want to become would be a "vestigial remain."



They found him in the temple (Luke 2: 46).

AND a very good place it was to be found in. Where would you be most likely to be found if your friends should hunt for you? When Little Bill "turns up missing" we can almost invariably locate him in a little ravine back of the church, "building a shanty" out of some old bricks and boards. There is a natural gravitation in every one of us toward some favorite occupation and locality. Every man goes "to his own place"—like Dives and

Lazarus. Some mothers always have to hunt for their boys on the street corners, or in the candy store where there is a slot machine. How many broken-hearted wives there are who make their way by a trained instinct to some saloon, when their husbands have to be hunted up at midnight ! Some have to follow them to the gambling hell. When you come to think about it, it's a pretty sharp test of character to ask a man's friends where he'd *be most likely to be found.*



Make his paths straight (Matt. 3: 3).

TWO of life's noblest occupations are those of the "pathfinder" and the "road-builder." To discover a route through an impenetrable wilderness, and to construct a highway of granite rocks or steel rails for commerce and for travel,—both are very great. But it is still grander to break through a wilderness of superstitions and mysteries, and lay a straight and broad highway to God. Abraham and Moses were road-builders in this sense, and so was John the Baptist. He opened the path over which Jesus walked, and which he widened to a great world highway up to heaven. And he broke it "straight." No crooked, winding, sinuous, serpentine paths

for him. He believed that men must go to God as the crow flies, or not at all. One of the tsars of Russia wanted a railroad constructed from St. Petersburg to Moscow. The engineers brought him a map with a line zig-zagging everywhere. "Why have you made it crooked?" he asked. "To avoid hills and valleys," they replied. "Build it this way," he said, laying a rule across the map and drawing a pencil along its edge. That is the way to build the pathway of a man's life. Make it straight, my boy!



*And they feared as they entered
into the cloud (Luke 9 : 34).*

WHAT a strange influence darkness and shadow have over us all! I was never so scared in my life as when the Mt. Vesuvius elevator car shot right into a big black cloud. Wendell Phillips is authority for saying that "when geese enter a barn door they duck their heads, for fear of hitting the top sill." I know it is hard for us not to duck and crouch when we enter darkness of any kind, and especially a cloud of sorrow. The whole discipline of life is to teach us how to enter every kind of darkness without a tremor. Do not be afraid of the night. Do not be afraid of a

thunder-cloud. Do not be afraid of a misfortune or a sorrow. Don't crouch. Don't tremble. Walk right into it with your head up. God is as near you in the dark as he is in the light. And this is the only real source of safety. You think you can take care of yourself in the daylight. You are mistaken. If God should withdraw from you a single moment, it would be like withdrawing the air from under the bird. It is because his eye never slumbers nor sleeps, because his everlasting arms are everlastingly beneath us, that we are ever safe.



The running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz (2 Sam. 18: 27).

SO, THEN, a man's personality reveals itself in his gait when he is miles away,— does it? Well, it ought to be a good gait, if it is so conspicuous and so distinguishable. Little Bill, "toed out," swung his hands like a pair of signboards in the wind, and carried his head bent far forward and low down like a Cayuse pony in a blizzard. Unfortunately he could not see himself, and the scoldings he had to take before he straightened up were— well, a few. How wonderful it is that you can tell a man by his gait at a mile's distance, or by his footfall on the pavement when he turns

a corner on a dark night ! Self-revelation is the law of life. You cannot hide yourself, Little Bill. What you are will disclose itself to those who are nigh, and even to those that are afar off. By and by your teacher will be able to tell your slovenly writing, and your employer your careless working, just by the look of your job. This morning's paper says that the police have been able to say, with complete assurance, that certain recent burglaries were done by a famous criminal known as "Slick Dick," just from their neatness and despatch. You had better not trifle with the matter of your personal identity, and you had better get a good gait.



We toiled all night, and took nothing (Luke 5: 5).

SIMON was too good a fisherman to complain about his "luck." He had put in bad nights before, and knew he would have to do it again and often. Fishing is an art, but many a time "it goes by favor." There were times when even Isaak Walton could not get a bite. There are bad days for trout, and bad nights for eels. No, no ! the genuine fisherman is not disheartened by bootless hours on the lake. And the genuine hero is not disheartened by bootless days and weeks and

months, or even years, of human endeavor. There are poor "times and seasons" in every business. One good year out of two or three is about all we may expect. But the tide turns. It's not all ebb. There is a flood as well. The greatest trouble with the most of us lies in the loss of faith in the pond. Go back again and again. Try a frog if the fish won't bite at a fly, and do not even disdain a worm. The ocean of life can never be fished out. A fruitless night betokens a fruitful day.



Give thy servant therefore an understanding heart to judge thy people (1 Kings 3: 9).

IN SPITE of a thousand nameless despots, there was never an age in human history when so many governors and presidents, princes and kings, emperors and monarchs, were praying that prayer of Solomon. The progress of the kingdom of God has taught the crowned heads of the civilized world that final lesson of royal wisdom,—that the people do not exist for the ruler, but the ruler for the people. It is this great lesson that has sobered the souls of these men who are "dressed in a little brief authority." "A crown's enough to ripen any brain." On his death-bed Pericles said that he regarded it as his best

title to an honored memory "that he had never caused an Athenian to put on mourning." Men like President Roosevelt, Emperor William, the Tsar of all the Russias, and the new head of the Roman Catholic Church, whatever mistakes they make, and whatever personal ambitions they may have, are finding it impossible to forget that the destinies of millions of people are hanging on their lightest word. Power which used to make kings drunk now makes them sober. The promise of better days for the world lies in the fact that in so many royal closets the potentates of earth are praying the prayer of Solomon, "Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge this people."



We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we (Num. 13 : 31).

WHAT if they were stronger? Beat them with your wits. What if they were wiser? Beat them with your strength. I believe it is a divine law to "take a fellow bigger than your own size," to "aim at a higher mark than you can hit." If you never try to do things that you seem incapable of, you will accomplish no more than a mummy. The more I comprehend the magnitude and beauty

of the very simplest tasks of life, the more I feel my incapacity. One gets to shrink before them ; but he must never get to *slink* before them. Tackle any task that Providence imposes, and any son of Anak that opposes. Believe in God, and believe in your own self as his instrument.

Minute Readings on the Great War



"Somewhere in France."

EVERY great epoch either creates new phrases or lends a new significance to old ones. Among the many which have become the very catch-words of this present era are these: "Somewhere in France," "In the Trenches," "Over the Top," "No Man's Land," "Gone West." Each one, we think, embodies in itself a multitude of those definite conceptions, or those vague and indefinable emotions excited by the profoundest agitation which has ever disturbed the equilibrium of the world.

"Somewhere in France!" Could any other words more fittingly disclose the awful uncertainties of life in this period of upheaval, disintegration and destruction? If any one thing seems absolutely necessary to our feelings of assurance, of stability, of reality, it is to be able to conceive of our loved ones in some fixed and known surroundings in the old homestead, in the little country village, in the store, the shop, the mill. The moment they disappear from view into a different en-

vironment, another village, state or country, they are robbed of a portion of their being and become like ghosts, like wraiths or apparitions. It is this, perhaps, that constitutes the greatest obstacle to our belief in the persistence of our beings after death. If we knew the background and the surroundings of those who had been translated to another sphere it would be a thousand times more easy to regard them as being still alive.

Our sons, our brothers, our lovers, our husbands, enlist, are stationed for a little while near some city which we know in circumstances with which we easily become familiar, and so preserve their full identity. But suddenly they are embarked upon a ship and vanish like stars that have set, like flowers which have faded, like bubbles which have burst. Henceforth we only know that they exist "Somewhere in France!" But where? In Paris, amidst its fierce temptations, in some quiet little village, in a hospital, a trench, a battlefield—a grave?

How hard it is to conceive them now! Such is their unsubstantiality as to seem like nothingness itself. They are "such stuff as dreams are made of," "the baseless fabric of a vision." Dissolved into a sort of phantom, we think about them rather than of them, and wonder whether they are real or not.

There is a modern song which we have often heard at funerals, and always with a sense of unrest and pain—"Beautiful Isle of Somewhere," we think its title is. That "somewhere" seems too much the synonym of nowhere!

It is a military necessity. We cannot but admit that the places where our soldiers are encamped in France should be concealed. We do not want them bombed by aeroplanes, and must possess our souls in patience in their painful and futile efforts to hold them in our consciousnesses as existences real and true, but God speed the day when they may tell us where they truly, really are! Yes, God speed the day when we shall have them home again—Somewhere in America—at their old accustomed places at the table and by the fireside; in our arms as well as in our hearts; visible, audible, tangible, localized realities, and no longer phantoms, flitting about "Somewhere in France."

"In the Trenches."

WE almost dare assert that there is not a lip in the world from which has not fallen again and again that picturesque and pathetic phrase, "In the trenches." Perhaps there has never been another in the history of the race which has been so universal. By a sort of inevitability it has become the very symbol of modern warfare, of discomfort, of loyalty and of heroic endurance. It will probably be the richest and most permanent verbal legacy of the war.

More than any other phrase it reveals the change which has taken place in military science. Without premeditation, so far as we know, the terrible necessities of the deadlock after the Battle of the Marne compelled the armies to dig themselves into the ground for security against the deadly perils of artillery fire. Upon the instant, in the twinkling of an eye, the strategy of war was revolutionized. Armies no longer contended in the open field, but under ground, "in dens and caves of the earth," like the heroes of the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Men were metamorphosed into moles. They retraced the tedious path of human progress from primeval ages, and in a moment of time became "cave men" the second time. Human

beings who had been reared and who had dwelt in houses which were the products of long ages of ever-developing domestic architecture, abodes of comfort and of luxury, descended into ditches streaming with mud and swarming with vermin, without complaint or protest, and adapted themselves to conditions fit only for mud turtles or for swine.

The story of this change of habitat on the part of millions of civilized men is one of the immortal chapters in the book of human life. Their endurance, their patience, their cheerfulness must challenge the admiration of their Creator, even. To wallow in mud up to one's armpits, to lie down to sleep in mud, to eat it, to breathe it, even; to waken suddenly with the sense of slimy creatures crawling over one's face; to have rats for one's hourly companions; to be devoured by mosquitoes; to become the daily breakfast, dinner and supper of more lice than plagued the Egyptians—this is what it is to be "in the trenches," but it is not all. It is, also, to peer through crevices into the night, or to lift one's head a little above a sandbag and get a bullet in one's brain. It is to trip over dead bodies half buried in the ooze; it is to confront horrors which are as unimaginable as they are indescribable, hour after hour, day after day, week after week, year after year.

The pages of human history are crowded with illustrious stories of courage and endurance. In all ages men "have stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight the armies of aliens. Women received their dead by a resurrection, and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had trial of mockings and scourgings; yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments; they were stoned; they were sawn asunder; they were tempted; they were slain of the sword; they went about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and holes of the earth."

They have done it before, it seems! They will do it again if need be! They are indomitable—these men and women. There is nothing they will not do for some great ideal!

By the sides of these trenches we stand with uncovered head. From those heroes wallowing in the mud we derive a new incentive. Covered with slime and ooze, they seem to us more noble than Kings and Princes in purple and fine linen. To such they are a warning and a threat. It is in those trenches that the doom of Kaisers will be written.

"Over the Top."

IN every dramatic movement there must be a crisis. That one which begins "Somewhere in France," and is developed "In the trenches," culminates when the whistle blows and the waiting soldiers, unleashed like tigers in the arena, leap "Over the top" of the trenches. In that brief phrase is compressed more of action and emotion than in any other in the world to-day. There are not three words in all the Babel of languages spoken by the billion and a half of people on this earth a thousandth part so full of all that is bravest, noblest and most daring in the souls of men. However long the soldiers of this great war live, that moment of vaulting "Over the top" will be the supreme one in their mortal lives. Even across an ocean and in the peace and safety of these quiet homes and streets of America we cannot hear the shrill whistle of a policeman, a dog-catcher or a boy calling his companion without a sudden beating of the heart. What must it be to stand in one of those trenches, gun in hand and watch on wrist, awaiting that fateful signal? Those emotions have been described by brilliant writers who have personally endured the tremendous experience, but all of them testify that human language is incapable of convey-

ing anything but the most vague and shadowy conception of the excitement of the soul in that brief interval of time. It must be so. How can feeble words make real the thunderous crash of cannon, the scream of shot and shell, the groans of dying men, the smell of burning powder and suffocating gas, the sight of bloody corpses which just a moment ago were living men, the ghastly strip of territory known as "No Man's Land," the barrage of fire going before the advancing columns as the pillar of smoke and fire swept on before the Israelites of old, the barbed wire fences, men stabbing each other with bayonets—God! it is inconceivable as well as indescribable.

We have read of a delicate English boy who crumpled up with terror and fell flat in the trench when that horrible whistle sounded. His captain, finding him there, and realizing that he would be courtmartialed and shot, threw him bodily "Over the top!" And then he fought! Good heavens, how he fought! Something burst within his spirit and he "saw red."

Other experiences have also disclosed the incorruptible and unconquerable courage of the souls of men—slow crucifixion, exposure to lions in the arena, burnings at the stake. Other adventures of men have been terrible and thrilling. But nothing else has ever

moved us to profoundly as that of these peace-loving sons and brothers of ours pulling their scattered faculties together, stilling the fierce throbbing of their pulses, conquering their wild terror, and with one mad, glorious effort leaping over the top of those trenches into the storm of shot and shell. We have always revered human nature, but it is hard not to adore it now.

Other phrases have expressed and illustrated the courage and devotion of men, but it will be ages before any other will displace from our daily conversation this one as a symbol of the majesty of the spirit which dwells within us in the transcendental moments of our lives.

“Over the top!” Over the top of trenches on the field of battle; over the top of obstacles in the path of progress; over the tops of the waves of sorrow that threaten to engulf us; over the top of the great divide that separates us from the final home of the soul.

Life will be richer and larger for that phrase.

"No Man's Land."

SO far as we have been able to learn, this is a phrase which had never before—or generally, at least—been applied to that narrow belt of land which lay between two armies. Perhaps it is because in other wars it was a rapidly shifting territory, or because it was a wider and less distinctly marked terrain. No sooner, however, had trench warfare been developed and armies begun to dig themselves in and get closer and closer together, until they could speak to each other across the narrow dividing space, then this phrase sprang into universal use.

"No Man's Land!" The territory in dispute, the little belt of open country which neither army could appropriate until it had been drenched with human blood—the few rods or yards or feet for the possession of which hundreds of thousands and even millions of men were ready to sacrifice their lives.

Small wonder that this narrow, open roadway, running for scores and scores of miles (like a farmer's lane over which the cows came lowing home with udders full of milk), between two lines of frowning fortifications (behind which hide two armies thirsting for each other's blood), should have clothed itself with mystery and irresistibly appealed to the

imagination of the soldiers! "No Man's Land!" The land of the unknown and the accidental. The land of contingency, of chance, of uncertainty, where the wheel of fortune hung calmly and silently upon her axle, waiting for the hand of Destiny to give it the fateful whirl.

What scenes have been witnessed in "No Man's Land!" What deeds of derring-do have been done in that narrow lane! Above it shriek the shells of the covering barrage; across it sweeps the hail of shrapnel and of machine guns; over it rolls the wave of asphyxiating gas. It is webbed with barbed wire fencing. It is punctured with shell holes. In the silent midnight heroes creep upon it bellywise like snakes, stealthily seeking information, erecting obstacles, searching for dead or wounded comrades, grappling with foes as invisible as themselves.

In the daytime—heaven help them—by the thousands and hundreds of thousands living men (as sensitive to the joys of life, to light, to love, to beauty, to happiness, as you or I) leap into it over the tops of trenches to shoot, to bayonet, to club each other to the death, tearing and rending one another like the creatures of a primeval world.

"No Man's Land!" Deeds have been done there at which the sun and the moon and the

stars must have shuddered, at which midnight must have paled and angels wept. And there, also, deeds have been done at whose sublimity the eyes of generations yet unborn will shed their tears of wonder and of admiration.

“No Man’s Land!” In every struggle of ideas and of ideals, of opinions and of judgments, there is such an unoccupied and disputed territory. Between denominations, between sects, between parties, between theories, between nations, between races, it stretches itself an object of passionate desire and struggle. There was “No Man’s Land” between Christianity and paganism, between feudalism and nationalism, between abolitionism and slaveholding. There is to-day a “No Man’s Land” between prohibition and the liquor interests, between autocracy and democracy, between Socialism and individualism, between labor and capital.

Gradually, inevitably, intermittently the struggle for possession of the disputed territory goes on and on and on.

And the right is slowly gaining ground!

"Gone West."

WAS it dread of that harsh word "death," or the ineradicable sense of humor, or that supernal consciousness of beauty in the soul of youth which gave birth to that exquisite metaphor of the trenches, "Gone West"?

Death as the setting of a sun, a moon, or star! Nothing was ever finer, nothing ever lovelier, nothing ever more consoling, for they set, to rise again. And so do the souls of heroes. "I believe with all my soul; I know," exclaimed Tolstoi at 80, "that dying I shall be happy—I shall enter a world more real." And Victor Hugo once broke forth in a sort of rapture: "I am the tadpole of an archangel!" Perhaps it was the same consciousness of an indestructible something within these perishable bodies of ours which made these glorious youths of the Flanders front create, or at least give, such wide currency to a phrase that can never die.

Measure, if you can, the spiritual value of that phrase in this ghastly era of destruction and of death! To how many a soldier dying alone in "No Man's Land" it must have given hope. To what multitudes of those who mourn the loss of sons and brothers, husbands and lovers, it must have breathed a heavenly consolation. "He is not dead, but sleepeth." He

is not dead; his star has set to rise again.
"He has gone West!"

If that imperishable hope which animates the heart of all Christendom is based upon reality (and there can no more be a great hope without some actual foundation than there can be a shadow without a substance, or a quality without a substratum of being), it would be a memorable vision to see the ethereal spirits of those young gladiators escaping from their dead bodies, rising into the air and "Going West!"

We have seen in golden autumns, while the breezes shook the tree tops and agitated the grasses in the meadows, myriads of feathery, buoyant, gossamer-like seeds released from their imprisoning sheaths and sailing away upon the wings of the wind, to impregnate distant and sterile fields with their superabundant life.

God has determined for some wise reason of His own to conceal from our eyes a phenomenon infinitely more imposing, the flight of those beautiful souls which He transplants to the gardens of Paradise, but being invisible is no evidence of being unreal. Always and everywhere it is the unseen, the inaudible and the intangible which is the actual and which alone survives.

"He is not dead, but sleepeth!" The seed

dies into a new life, and so does man. The caterpillar withdraws into the chrysalis to emerge a butterfly. The stars set to rise again. It is this sublime faith, or gleaming of hope, or inextinguishable desire in the hearts of these youthful warriors which has translated that grim word death into that brilliant and triumphant phrase, "Gone West," and given inspiration and courage to him who wrote that greatest poem of the war, "I Have a Rendezvous With Death:"

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade,
When spring comes back with nestling shade
And apple blossoms fill the air—
I have a rendezvous with Death
When spring brings back blue days and fair.

It may be he shall take my hand
And lead me into his dark land,
And close my eyes and quench my breath—
It may be I shall pass him still.

I have a rendezvous with Death
On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow flowers appear.

God knows 'twere better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where love throbs out in blissful sleep,
Pulse right to pulse and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear.

But I've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight, in some flaming town,
When spring trips north again this year.
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail my rendezvous.

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