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MY BEST FRIEND

Floyd W. Tomkins

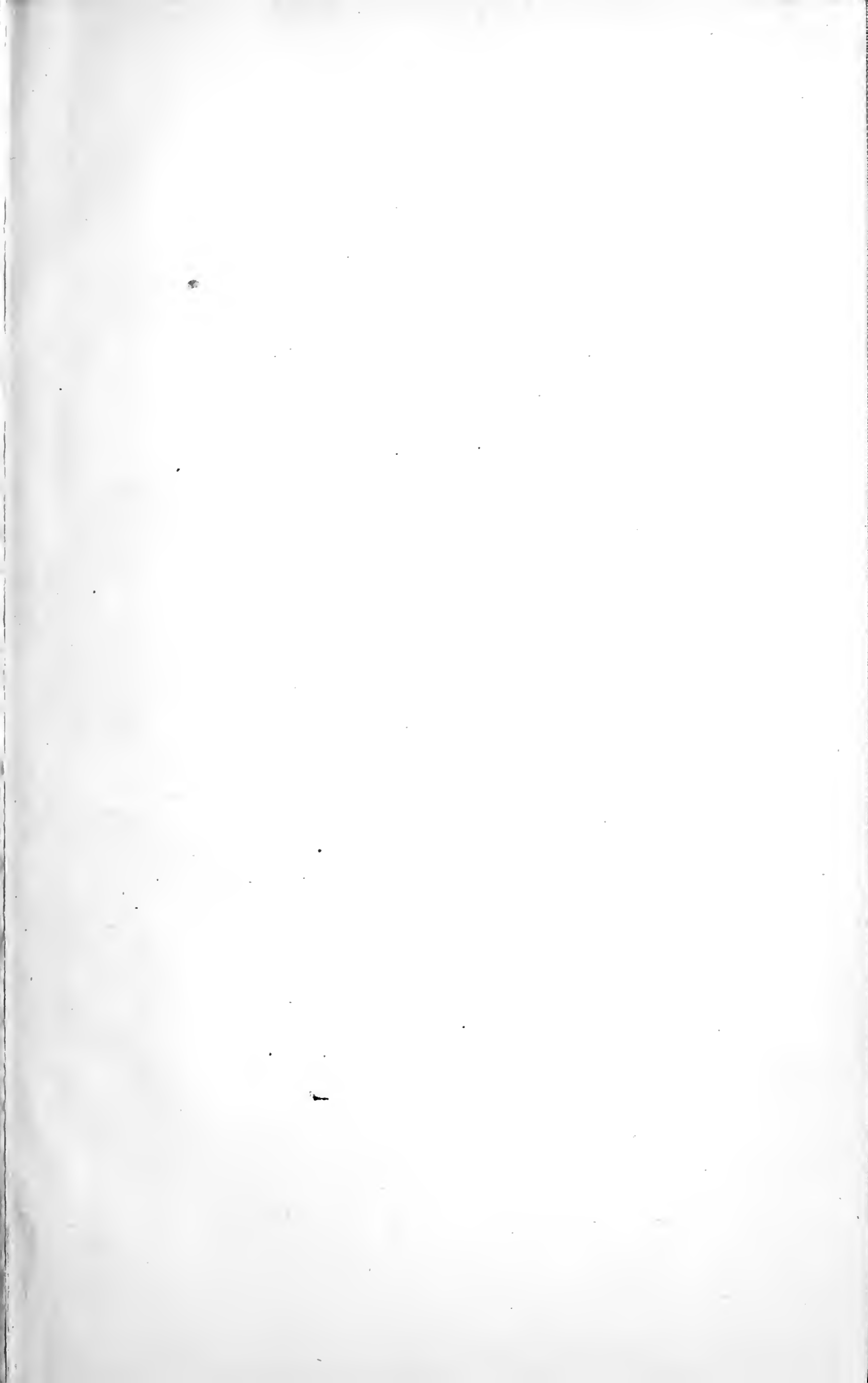


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My Best Friend

Being Six Meditations for The
Quiet Hour

By

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"The Christian Life," etc.



United Society of Christian Endeavor
Boston and Chicago



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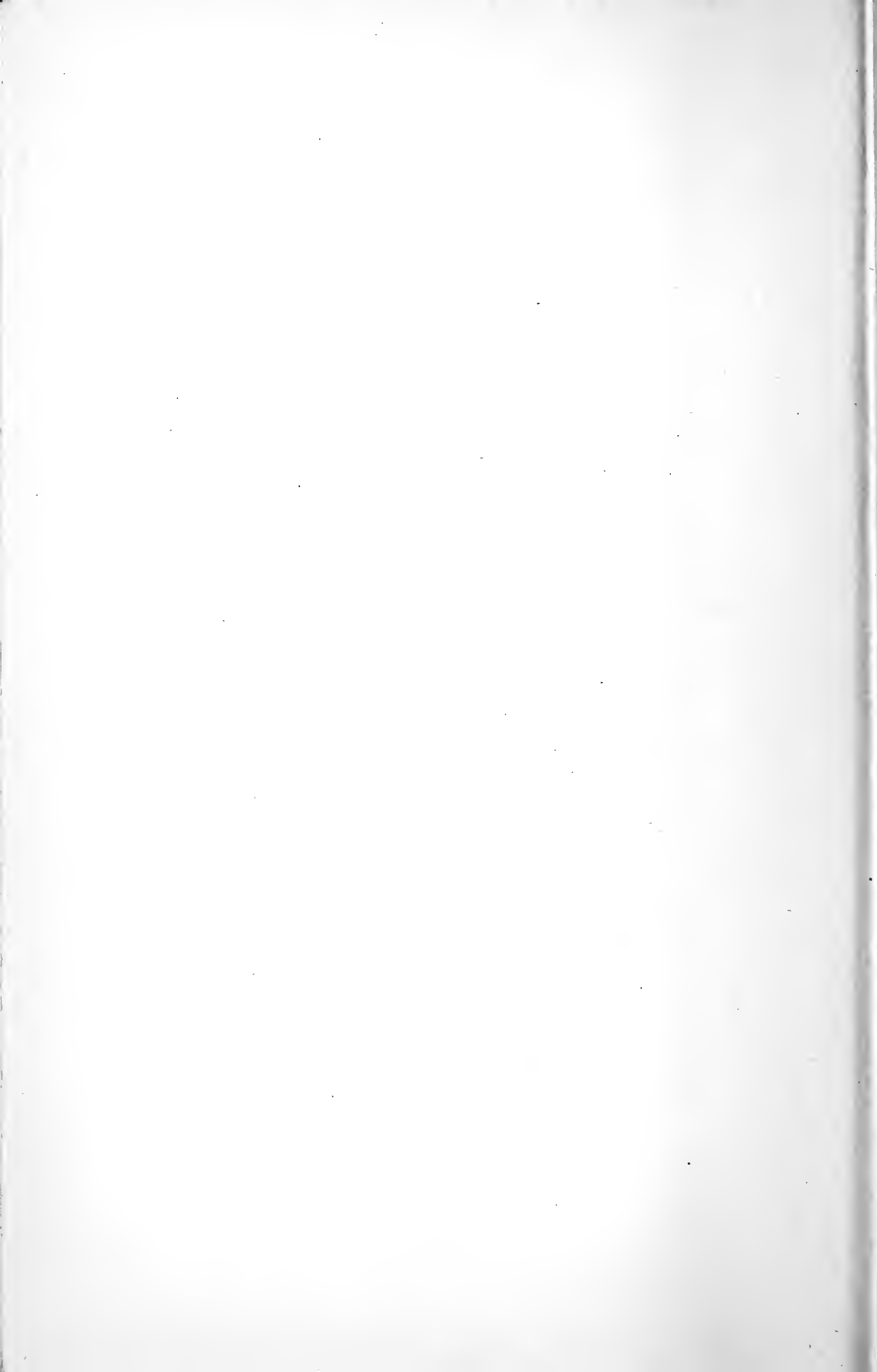
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*Dedicated to my dear friends,
Members of the Young Peoples' Societies*



Preface.

SOME of these meditations were used at the Convention of the Christian Endeavor Societies held in Cincinnati, July, 1901. The substance of them has been used in newspaper articles, particularly in the Philadelphia *Ledger* in months past. They are gathered together here in the hope and with the prayer that they may be aids at the Quiet Hour of the personal Christian.

In the midst of life's hurry and bustle and work, even Christian work, we must stop and look to him, our "Best Friend," our dear Jesus, to gain rest, inspiration, power. It is impossible to be a true man or a true woman, it is impossible to do work well, it is impossible to be happy, unless we thus draw near in stillness and worship, and meditate.

No greater good has come to the Christian world during the past twenty years than this suggestion and use of the Quiet Hour. The public use has grown, and no gather-

Preface.

ing of Christians is now deemed complete without it. The private use has grown; and thousands of Christians, young and old, can testify of the peace which Jesus has given in this silent waiting hour.

But we must be careful now that the hour is made strong. It may easily degenerate into a sentimental and moody thought of self, or else into excited and unreal use of language concerning the Master. We need to think of Christ as altogether lovely and loving, but also as the one whom we follow and serve. Hence our meditations must be manly, honest, and intelligent. We need to know the truth and then to do it.

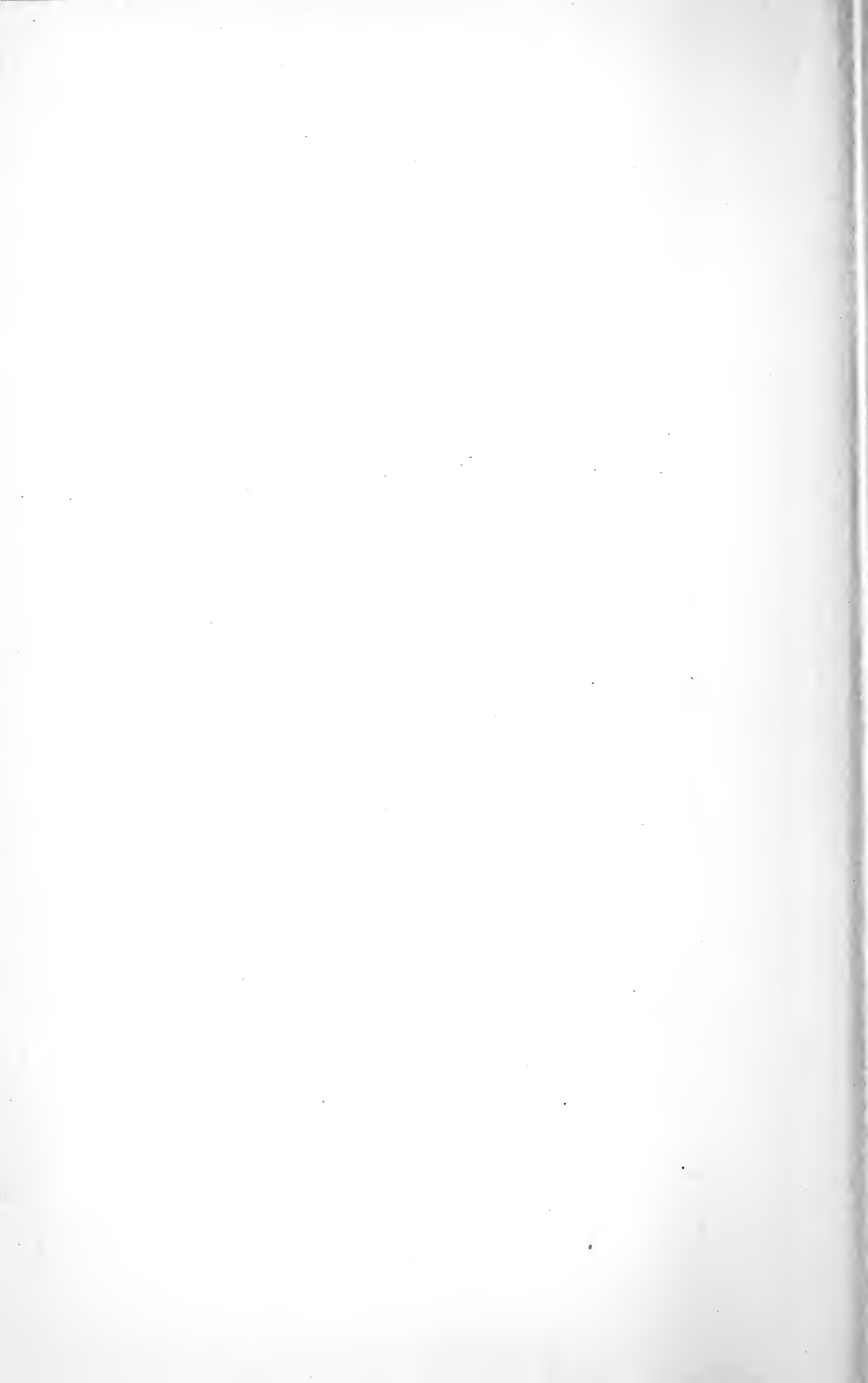
Perhaps these little pages may help to such useful advance of purpose and character in the Quiet Hour worship. May God grant it, for without his blessing all things are vain.

FLOYD W. TOMKINS.

Holy Trinity Rectory, Philadelphia.

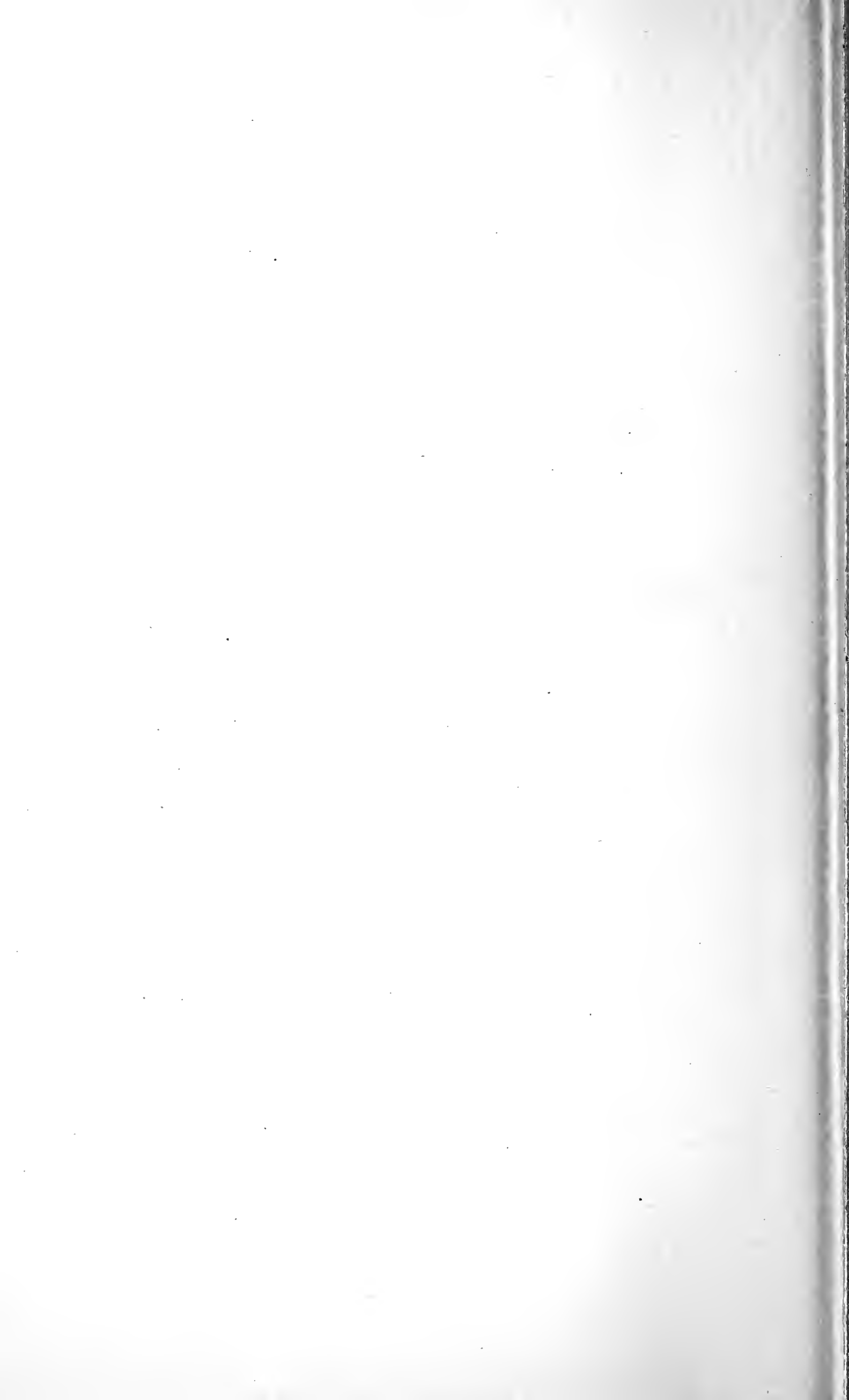
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I.
CONFESSING CHRIST.

SUGGESTED READING, ST. MATT. 10 : 32-39



I.

CONFESSING CHRIST.

Prayer.

O JESUS, I have promised
To serve thee to the end ;
Be thou forever near me,
My Master and my Friend.
I shall not fear the battle
If thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel thee near me ;
The world is ever near ;
I see the sights that dazzle,
The tempting sounds I hear ;
My foes are ever near me,
Around me and within ;
But, Jesus, draw thou nearer,
And shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear thee speaking
In accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion,
The murmurs of self-will,

My Best Friend.

O speak to reassure me,
To hasten or control.
O speak, and make me listen,
Thou guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, thou hast promised
To all who follow thee
That where thou art in glory
There shall thy servant be ;
And, Jesus, I have promised
To serve thee to the end ;
O give me grace to follow,
My Master and my Friend.

O let me see thy foot-marks,
And in them plant my own.
My hope to follow duly
Is in thy strength alone.

O guide me, call me, draw me,
Uphold me to the end.
At last in heaven receive me,
My Saviour and my Friend.

—*Rev. John E. Bode, 1869.*

THE Christian religion takes its name from Christ and depends upon him. He founded it when he came from heaven. And a Christian is one who follows Christ, accepting him as the Leader and the Saviour. A confession of Christ, then, is a following

of him and an acceptance of his teaching. In this sense a great many people are Christians unconsciously. They believe in the teachings of Jesus so far as they know them, and they try to obey his commands. But there is something wanting in their loyalty. For, while it is all very well for a man to feel friendly towards a great cause or a great leader, his adherence has little influence upon himself or upon others unless it is acknowledged. The belief which asserts itself, which is not ashamed of itself, which joins hands with him who is its foundation and calls itself after his name, that is the belief which conquers the world and the individual. Hence we see how important it is that a man should frankly, honestly say, "I am a Christian." It makes clear the meaning of his life; it brings others to study and acknowledge that which he commends; it helps him to be loyal to his Lord's wishes.

What is implied in such a confession? What obligation does it place upon a man? No obligation which does not already rest upon him. As soon as a man knows the difference between right and wrong his intelligence becomes his authority, and he

cannot escape it. No man can slight this responsibility; whether he calls himself a Christian or not, whether he has joined a church or not, every man is bound to live up to the best knowledge he has.

To confess Christ, then, is to acknowledge in a manly way this responsibility, and to receive in return a promised help to bear it. This help God sends to him who confesses, and it is a help which (1) strengthens, (2) comforts, and (3) saves.

THE CONFESSOR'S STRENGTH.

I. We marvel how those thousands of native Chinese Christians could have been brave enough to die without a murmur last summer. We read of the old martyrs of the second and third centuries, and wonder how they could endure. We see the sweet patience of some child of God to-day who is sick, a "shut-in," an intense sufferer; and we ask how she can bear it. No mere enthusiasm for a person or a cause can explain it. No excitement of the moment can last all through hours and days of pain, or give power to refuse the freedom which might come by denying principle and right.

When I see an athlete doing that which it would instantly kill me to try to do, I say his training has given him power. When I see a wise man sit down before the strange hieroglyphics of the Syriac language and translate them, I say his duty has made his mind keen. So when the Christian is brave, self-denying, patient, I say he has got these qualities from the grace of God in which he has exercised himself. He has prayed, and read the Bible, and denied himself; and as a result this heroic power has come.

And it always will come. Christ is true to those who confess him. The very exercise of godliness has made the noblest men and women in the world. What a contrast between Queen Victoria's death and the death of the ex-king of Servia—the one lamented the world over, the other dying alone, and people asking, "Who was he?" But more widely different still were their lives; the one a pure, true woman, loving and serving God; the other a poor, weak creature, serving passion; the one entering upon her reward in the fulness of ripened years; the other sinking away in his prime. What a lesson for the young people of the

world! The man who confesses Christ confesses his love for One who can and will make him a hero, strong, noble, blessed.

A CONFESSOR'S COMFORT.

II. "There is not much comfort in this world," groaned a poor soul whose eyes were fixed upon self. "There is every comfort here," sung the brave spirit whose hands were touching human need while the eyes looked into the face of Christ. It is all utter nonsense to talk about the woes and miseries of life. They are subjective, in the man's own nature, not in the sunshine or the air or the workings of men.

Of course there is sin and its resulting crime, and of course there is the misery which is the child of ignorance and shiftlessness wretchedly yoked together. But there is a bigger vision for the man who has taken as his leader the Son of God. He sees the good to come; he struggles with the black soil of humanity, and minds not that his hands are stained, because he knows that from this battle will come a victory, the flower, the fragrance, the song. His comfort lies not in any poor, cheap luxury of

temporary idleness or indulged passion, but in the lifting of a banner, in the flocking together of an army of lovers and workers for righteousness, in the promises which are already being fulfilled in his own spirit. What are trials to the child of Christ but the hurdles over which he leaps to find himself a better man for the exertion? What are sorrows but the heart singing in minor key the glory to come, whose rich major tones already are sounding far beneath? What are annoyances but the stings of insects to make more energetic his motions towards perfect mastery? Comfort is his because God is his. "All things are yours—and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

THE CONFESSOR'S SALVATION.

III. That word "salvation" is wonderful, because it so interprets life. I am always seeking salvation; my food is to save me from hunger; my clothing is to save me from exposure; my friendships are to save me from loneliness; my religion is to save me from ignorance and weakness and destructive sin. Yes, more; my life means salvation "for" as well as "from"; I am

saved for pleasure, for comfort, for associations of friends, for purity and excellence and power.

Now Jesus says that his followers shall be saved. Their backs will be turned upon sin and darkness and misery, and their faces turned towards goodness and light and happiness, and they shall advance from the first to the last. Ignorance—"What am I and whence came I?"—will find its answer in him who is confessed, "I am thy Father, thy Friend, and thou art my dear child." Heaviness of heart—"Who shall deliver me from this memory of past sin and this stain of to-day?"—will find its rest in the gracious assurance of the Leader, "Thy sins are forgiven; go in peace." Doubt—"Does it pay to struggle? So long is the dawn in breaking, and the years are tedious!"—is swallowed up in the victorious cry of the Christ; "It is finished! I have overcome the world!" And, as we speak our King's name, "Jesus," lo, from the clouds springs out the new earth, the beautiful home which is to be when the days are completed and all are safely gathered in; it is his home, and he brings to it all who love and trust and serve him.

Have you confessed Jesus Christ? Have you acknowledged him as your King, your Guide, your Saviour? If not, will you do so now, just while you read these lines? It will bring a new life to you, and a new joy, and a new power.

DIFFICULTIES.

1. "I cannot see why it is necessary for me to do this publicly; why can I not confess Christ to myself?" For several reasons; manliness, loyalty, the joining of the ranks of men who are battling for good, the courage it gives to hear your own voice and to know you have stood up in the sight of men for righteousness,—these all call you. If you love God and believe in Christ, say so; and the result will be a blessing.

2. "But I am afraid I may deceive myself, and that I really do not believe in Christ." Do you believe anything about him? Do you believe there was once such a being on earth? Do you believe what the Bible says about him? Faith grows. We are not asked to have complete, finished knowledge and trust at first; we come as little children. But, if you know anything

about Christ, if you have any faith in him, confess it, and more knowledge and faith will come. I love those words,—

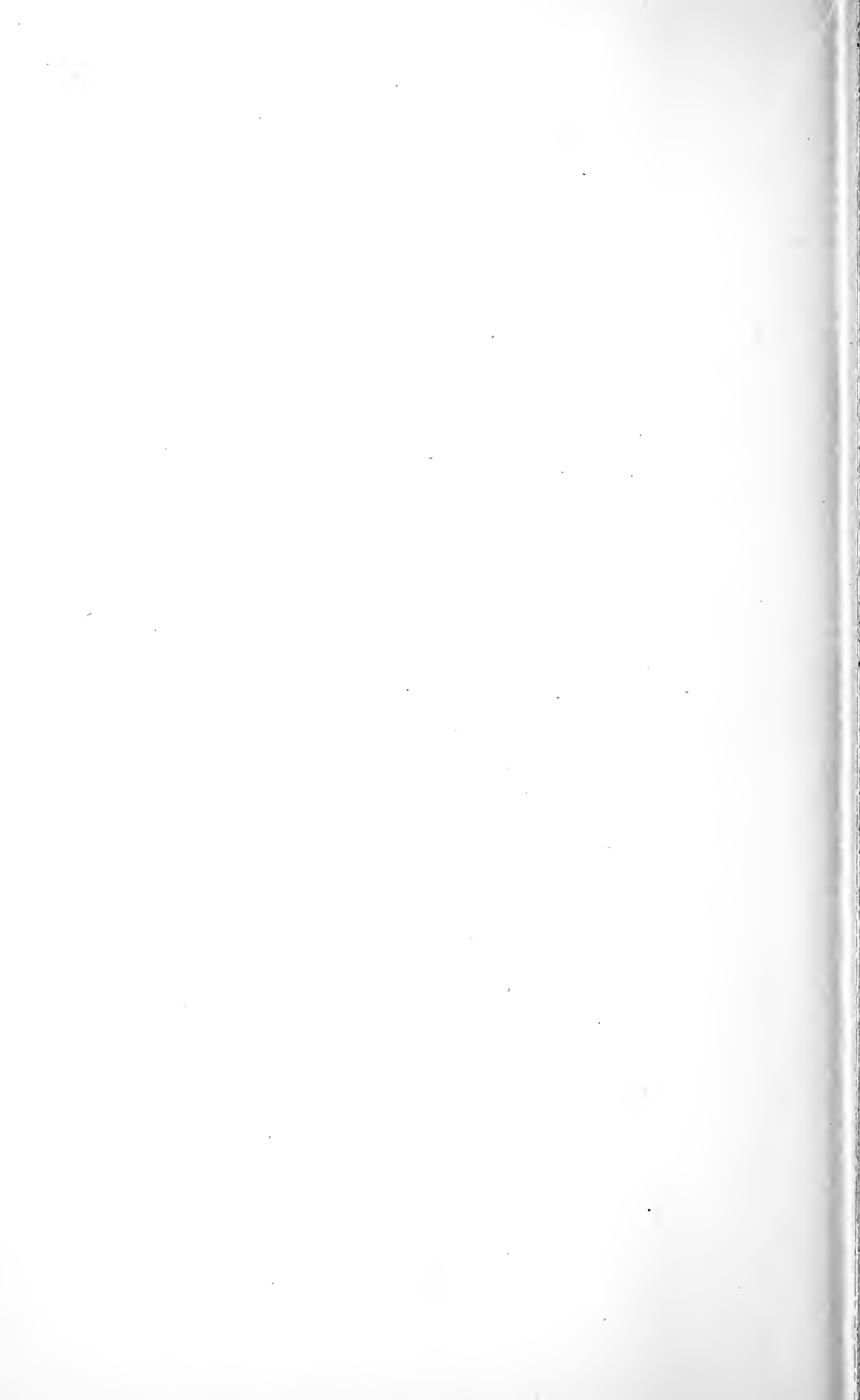
“The Shepherd does not ask of thee Faith in thy faith, but only faith in him.”

3. “I dread lest after confessing him I may sin and so bring shame to Christianity.” If God is willing to take that risk, cannot you? He does not say, “Be sure that you will never do anything wrong, and then confess me.” But he takes you just as you are, with all your weakness and liability to sin. To confess him is to gain strength which will help you master temptation.

4. “I am not sure that I am ready to give up or to do certain things which Christ asks of me.” Your responsibility is the same. If there is anything you know you ought to do, you are bound as a man to do it, whether you are a Christian or not. As I have said, confessing Christ does not increase responsibility, but it gives grace to meet it.

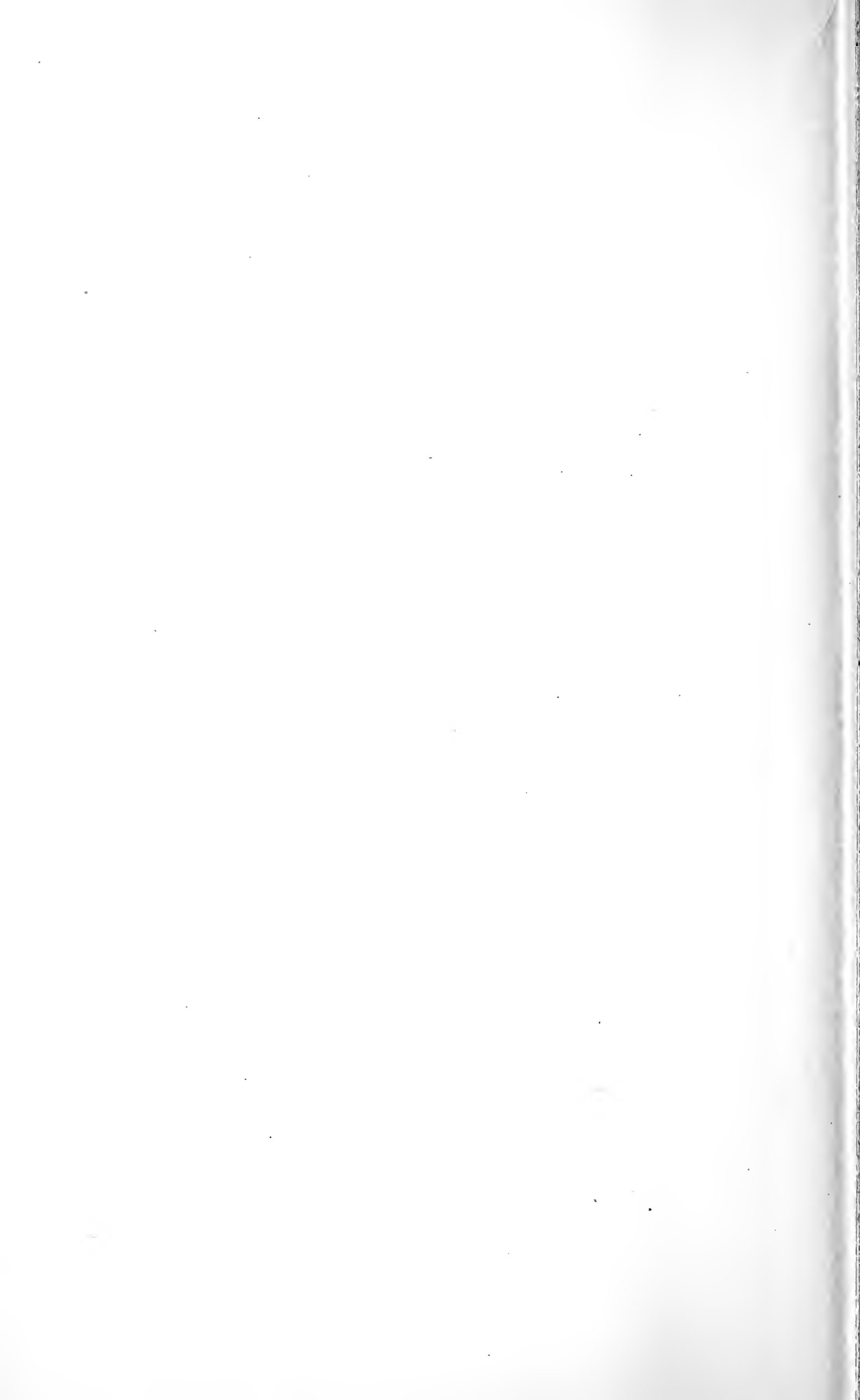
Dear Master, how can I help confessing thee when thou art so good to me, so kind, so loving? I give myself to thee, and confess that thou canst take care of me better

than I can take care of myself. I know that thou art my Friend, and I will try to follow thee. Lead me ; make me like thyself ; bless me ; and at last may I see thee face to face, O my King. Amen.



II.
TRUSTING CHRIST.

SUGGESTED READING, PHIL. 4: 4-13.



II.

TRUSTING CHRIST.

Prayer.

O THOU for whom the strife was strong,
Thou who hast sung the conqueror's song;
Uphold me through the holy war;
Make me a smiling conqueror.

Thy bidding is not vainly sweet;
Thy cheerful soul my soul doth greet;
Thou vanquishest—my foes are down,
For me the cross, for me the crown!

I fight upon thy battle-field,
Thy holy arms are mine to wield:
Against me comes each foe of thine;
Repeat thy victory in mine.

—*Thomas H. Gill, 1848.*

STRENGTH is a necessity if we would live. And because it is a necessity the whole life-struggle is centred upon it. We fight and plan and toil for power, physical, mental,

moral, from the cradle to the grave. And our very zeal in the contest is often the reason why we fail to obtain. We cannot make ourselves strong. If the efforts of the athlete seem to bring force and elasticity to his muscles, we must remember that not his exercise, but some great power working through the exercise, creates the strength. If the heaped-up books and the hours of study of the scholar seem to result in wisdom, it is still some unseen inspiration breathing in the knowledge that we praise rather than the student. If the man gains a high idea of right and duty by prayer and Bible-study and meditation, we ascribe his excellence to the Spirit who has revealed to him the truth. The human effort is necessary to prepare the man for the gift, but the human effort does not and never can bring the gift; it is bestowed by God.

To trust in Jesus is to look to him with an assurance that he will help. It is the constant thought of him as caring for us, the simple belief that he will never fail, the unbroken expectation that what we need will be supplied. It is based upon three great facts which the Bible teaches us and which our own hearts instinctively accept.

GOD'S DESIRE FOR US.

I. God wishes us to be strong, because strength means perfection and happiness, and for these God made us. Just as a father wishes his boy to be physically and mentally and morally developed, so our heavenly Father urges his children to grow. I think we are only beginning to realize this, for in the past religion seemed to discourage any care for the body or the mind. Men were taught to scorn the body and to lash and bruise it with whips. And they were taught that they must not think, because it was irreverent to pry into God's mysteries. And even the godliness to which they were urged was a sickly thing, a refraining from certain bad acts rather than a doing of good deeds. But now we understand why it was that Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God; he came to let us know what God wished for us men and women. He revealed the image of perfect manhood, and bade us reach after it. "Be strong," he taught, "for your Father looks for strength in his children."

It is this consciousness that God desires our natures to be rich and complete that in-

spires us. When I eat and sleep and exercise, I know that God wishes it that I may be strong in body. When I read and study and examine, I know that I am doing my Father's will because he would have me wise. When I fight sin, or go here and there comforting and cheering people, or stand up fearlessly against public wrongs, I know that I am pleasing him who would have me morally and spiritually perfect.

GOD'S METHOD FOR ME.

II. The second fact is that God has made the way for my growth in strength very clear. He never has a desire for us without making it possible for us to reach that desire. If he says, "Be perfect," I can rest assured that there is some way for me to reach perfection. Now see God's way for us to grow strong.

First, He establishes certain laws of life in order that we may do something ourselves and prove our willingness to receive that which he gives. For my body he says: Eat, drink, sleep, be clean, take exercise, use sensible defences against danger; and let the means used be the right means; that is, use the right food at the right time, drink

the right thing, sleep enough, but not too much, etc. How wonderful these laws of health are! And they are God's laws. It is a part of our religion to keep them. Then for my mind he says: Think, read, examine, question, calculate, and in all this guard against falseness, prejudice, passion. Truth is waiting for you; seek it, love it, follow it, and you will grow wiser and better daily. And then for my spirit he says: Love good things, hate bad things, do good to others, be kind, be unselfish, talk to me, read what I have written, worship me with loving heart.

Second, God places us in a position where we have to struggle, in order that he may assure us of his love as we trust him, in order that he may convince us of his power as we call upon him, in order that he may show us how things grow gradually as we cultivate patience. How beautiful it all is! God wishes me to be strong in body, and yet he suffers pain to come. Why? So that I may not think it is my eating and sleeping and exercising that alone bring power, for he sends power, through these if he pleases, or in some other way which he judges best. God wishes me to be wise,

and yet he staggers me with a sight of my ignorance. Why? Because he would teach me that wisdom comes only indirectly from books and study and discovery; it really comes from him, who works through books and study, or may reveal himself immediately. God wishes me to be good, and then he permits me to be tempted, and I fall. Why? Because he would have me know that my doing kind deeds and reading his Word are only means; that God's Spirit is the only goodness, and unless a man has that he cannot be good. These are God's methods by which he makes us strong.

GOD'S ASSURANCE FOR US.

III. In order that we might know all this, the dear Father sent his Son to tell us all about it, and to show us just what life means, and to make the result certain. Jesus came, and he told God's children how the Father loved them and desired their happiness and strength. Then he lived it all through himself, saying, "This is the way your Father wishes you to do." And then he died, and said, "I do this that you may succeed, and that you may know

that power will come from God to help and bless you. When you make mistakes, they may be forgiven; when you fall, you may be lifted up; when you seem to fail entirely, then you can rest in my victory. Because I am strong you shall be strong, for my strength is yours." Could anything be dearer and more comforting than that? God wants us to know that we can succeed through the dear Lord who loves us.

A dear friend gave me a book at Christmas called "Old Chester Tales," and in them all there is a fine old-fashioned minister whose eccentricity is excelled only by his goodness. Old Dr. Lavender never seems to doubt the possible success of any one in whom he is interested. As you read of his experiences, it seems as if he almost knew that God was working with him. "How true," I said as I read the book, "how true to God! He wants us to know that we cannot fail; that if we trust for strength it is bound to come. Weak though we are, he never loses confidence in us." "Of course," the dear Father seems to cry in human fashion out of the fulness of his divine love, "of course I will help you. I sent my Son, your Christ, to tell

you so.” Strength of body and mind and soul, of heart and courage and life,—this is ours if we will love and trust and follow Jesus.

DIFFICULTIES.

1. “But I have asked him, and yet I have been weak.” Yes, you have asked him, but have you trusted him? There is a great difference.

“I think God has been here,” said a minister to his dear friend, as they sat for a while in the blessed church after the service was over.

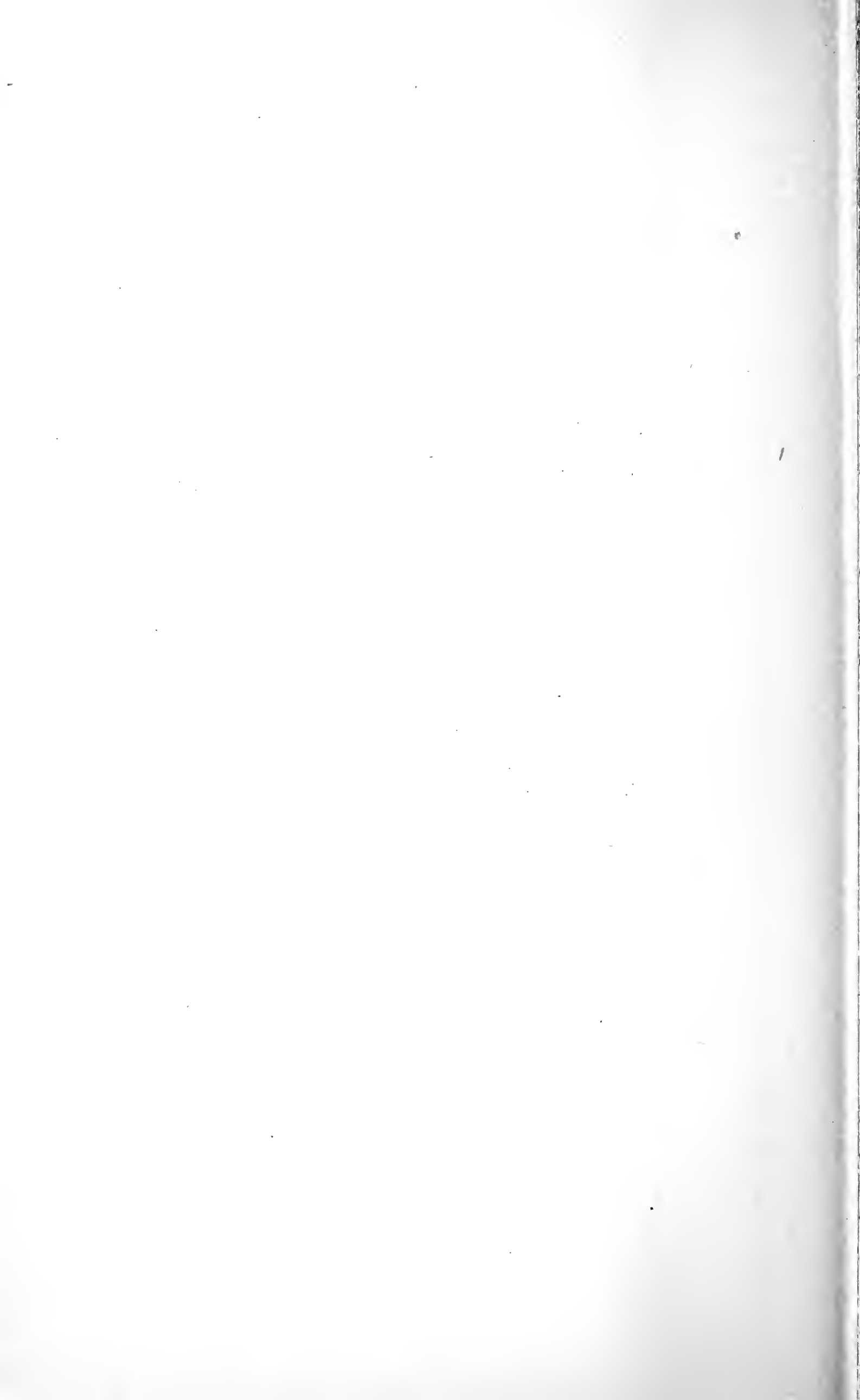
“I know he has been here, for he promised,” said the friend.

If the strength has not been taken, it was your fault. God had it ready for you if you had reached out and seized it.

2. “Must I not make some effort myself?” The effort of using the means, but no other. Sometimes we defeat God’s purpose by getting in his way, intruding ourselves so that he cannot act without injuring us. Trusting God is to leave him to fulfil his promise while we simply obey his commands.

3. "You say God gives strength, and yet how many thousands of weak Christians there are!" It depends upon your measure of weakness. Sometimes God makes the greatest strength out of weakness. I heard of a dear invalid the other day, confined to her room for a long time, who is a power in her little community through her sweet, simple faith and sunshine. I have a letter on my desk from a poor, weak woman in Rhode Island, a sufferer for years, with a sick husband, and hardly money enough to keep the house warm, and she says, "These crosses and burdens keep us nearer him, and we grow in grace." Is not that strength of the right kind, even though the body be feeble and life limited?

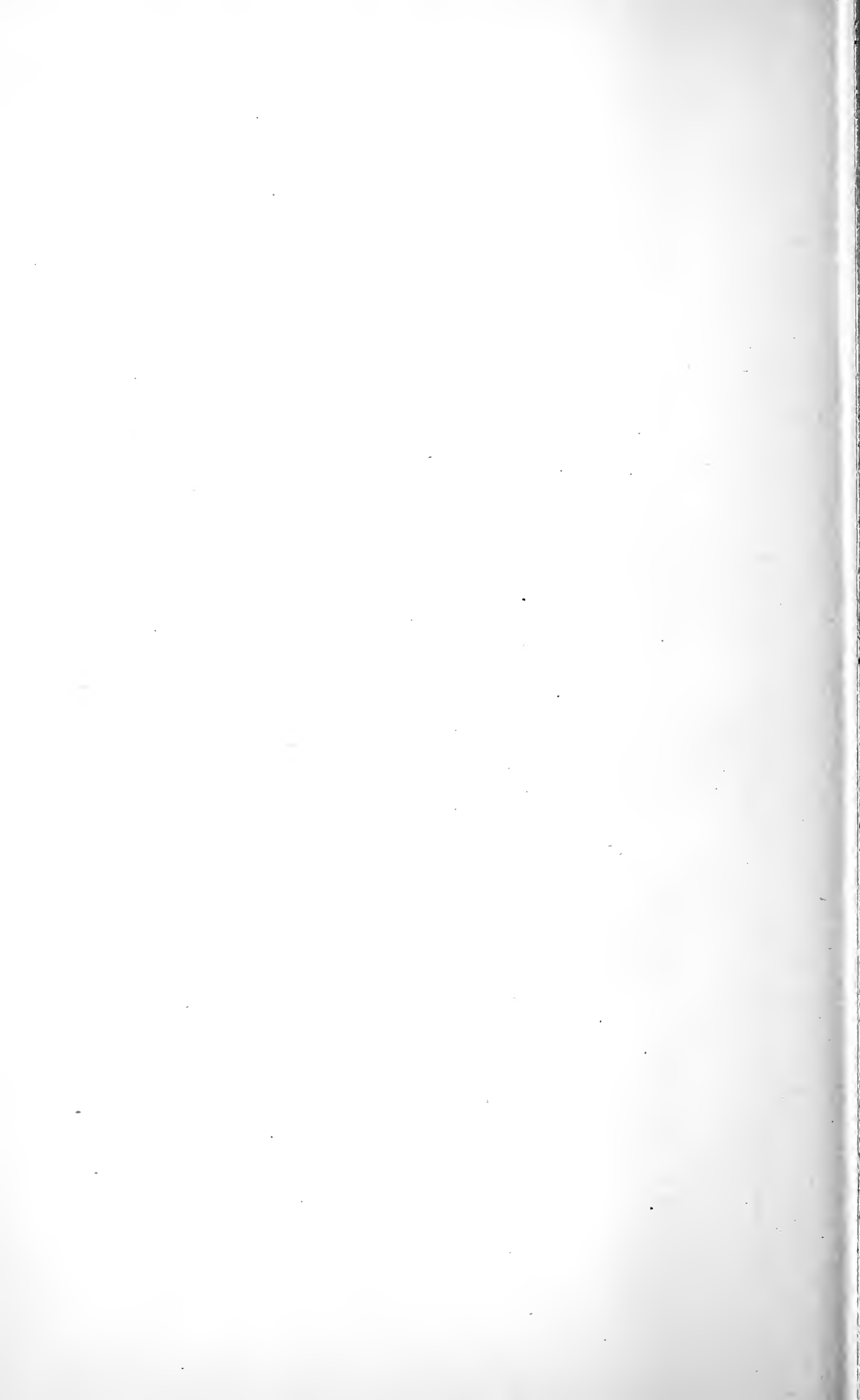
O Lord, grant me such strength. I know thou desirest that I should be strong, and thou hast opened the way and given me the promise through Christ. Help me to go to thee and ask thee; and, when I have asked thee, to obey thee; and, when I have obeyed thee, to trust thee, that out of my weakness may come strength and out of my life a victory for Jesus, my Lord. Amen.



III.

WALKING WITH CHRIST.

SUGGESTED READING, COL. 2: 6; GAL. 5: 16-26.



III.

WALKING WITH CHRIST.

Prayer.

STILL, still with thee when purple morning breaketh,
When the bird waketh, and the shadows flee ;
Fairer than morning, lovelier than daylight,
Dawns the sweet consciousness, I am with thee.

Alone with thee amid the mystic shadows,
The solemn hush of nature newly born ;
Alone with thee in breathless adoration
In the calm dew and freshness of the morn.

As in the dawning, o'er the waveless ocean,
The image of the morning star doth rest ;
So in this stillness thou beholdest only
Thine image in the mirror of my breast.

Still, still with thee ! as to each new-born morning
A fresh and solemn splendor still is given,
So does this blessed consciousness awaking
Breathe each day nearness unto thee and heaven.

—*Harriet Beecher Stowe.*

WE love to think of the privileges of the apostles as day after day they walked literally with the Master. We love to think of the disciples who walked with the Lord to Emmaus that Easter Sunday afternoon long ago. We wish we could have such an opportunity. Our eyes are eager for a sight of that dear face; our ears long for a message; our hearts are hungry for him.

But it cannot be that they had privileges which we have not. God has always been just in his dealings with men. Notwithstanding their ignorant and foolish criticisms of his work, he has never been nearer to one generation of his children than to another. So we may be sure that we can live as near to the Master as did John and Peter.

WALKING IN HIS STEPS.

I. Nothing else brings Christ so near to us as an effort, constant and patient, to do as he did. It is not the mere literal imitation of his ways and methods, for that takes away zest and reverence. But it is the healthy following of the principles which governed his life. A man may blindly follow the example of another, and yet be a miserable

machine without force or vitality. It is not ignorant imitation, but manly indorsement, that tells. To realize the purpose of that perfect life, to study its spirit, to see how its principles can be made applicable amongst men to-day,—that is to draw very near to our Lord. We remember how clearly he grasped the meaning of his life. We recall how he seemed to see the whole way while he was just beginning. Even as a boy of twelve he said, “I am here to do my Father’s business.” Imagine our having a similarly clear and strong knowledge concerning ourselves; imagine our seeing the course stretching out to the sunset with all issues flowing into and becoming a part of it; think of a life having a single object to which all of power, of talent, of pleasure, of pain, was tributary; could any man have a conscious nearness to Christ greater than that? Would it not be more real than the very body of Jesus was to the apostles? For while they saw with their eyes and heard with their ears, they did not know who he was whom they heard and saw; nor did they know life, their own or his. Now we know, or can know, both; and as we strive to be true and strong and

noble and helpful, we can almost seem to feel the presence, and hear his "well done."

WALKING IN PRAYER.

II. Companionship without conversation would be impossible. Of course there is a language or spirit which brings men near to one another, and they can let speech go for a while; but the hearts mutually ache to express emotions and declare ideas and state truths which will not rest unspoken. How we love to talk to a true friend before whom we can let down the bars of reserve and speak with a sure confidence of understanding and sympathy! Prayer is just that. To count God as so always near, as so always interested, as so always loving and so always true, that our wishes and emotions and works are sure, not only of recognition, but of close sympathy,—that is to have an idea of nearness to the infinite which is glorious. How beyond expression is the peace, the power of calm, which comes when the heart pours out in thought or speech before Christ the flood of its story, while the dear Master calms it down into a radiant sea of glass and fire, that is

full of smoothness and force! How near the Lord is when we tell him everything! It is a walking with him beside which the Emmaus journey seems tame; for the disciples were all sad and questioning, and knew who Jesus was only when he left them, while we know always his strength, his power, his friendship.

WALKING IN SERVICE.

III. Life is not emotion, but a struggle, and a struggle not so much against foes as with circumstances. We are here not merely to conquer passions, but to educate, refine, make glorious the earth to men. When I go out, then, with the desire to rise higher and lift up life in general, I am walking with the Master, and very near to him. It is no holiday task. The Master is in the dark places of the earth. Still where loneliness and suffering and sin have unsheathed their weapons to kill, and hearts are ignorantly in misery, there is the dear Lord. And we walk with him when we join him there.

Ah, the grand fellowship of work! We see it to-day as never before. The unions of all kinds are not merely economic; there

is a great deal to be said about their usefulness and helpfulness in the world's advancement. But the power which they represent to the deep thinker is that of brotherhood—that men feel somehow drawn together by the very commonness of their battle with circumstances, by the very eagerness of their souls to reach pure, uncontaminated, honest air and sunlight. So when we remember Jesus we are drawn to him in the same way. He worked; we work; and all for the same end, with the same ideals, in the same world, hearing the same cries, and thrilled by the same agonies of sympathy. This little poem of dear George Macdonald makes it quite clear:—

I said, "Let us walk in the fields."

He said, "No, walk in the town."

I said, "There are no flowers there."

He said, "No flowers, but a crown."

I said, "But the skies are black ;

There is nothing but noise and din ;"

And he wept as he sent me back ;

"There is more," he said ; "there is sin."

I said, "But the air is thick,

And fogs are veiling the sun."

He answered, "Yet souls are sick,

And souls in the dark undone."

I said, "I shall miss the light,
And friends will miss me, they say."

He answered, "Choose to-night
If I am to miss you, or they."

I pleaded for time to be given.

He said, "Is it hard to decide?
It will not seem hard in heaven
To have followed the steps of your Guide."

WALKING IN HOPE.

IV. Jesus saw the end for which he worked. Many centuries would pass before the old world should respond to his touch, but he saw it, as he looked out upon it from the cross, he saw it as it was to be at last. So, when he dealt with the poor and the diseased, they were not to him the wicked fragments of a hopeless estate, but the redeemed parts of a perfect humanity. The ideal was made by him not only possible but real. It was for him not something to be striven after with some possibility of success, but something so sure that time was nothing to separate the result from the struggle.

When a man keeps his eyes fixed upon the same ideal, and when his faith cries not of trust or thought, but of certainty, then he

walks very near to the Master. It is the despairing, blind, fatalistic way we have of working and looking that makes our paths so solitary. Christ never walked in the miserable, experimental paths that so many of us are treading. There was nothing of question with him as to the result of his toil, as to the coming of his kingdom. He saw it finished at the very start when he cried from the cross and when he went home to God and heaven. We are very near to him when such hope holds us, and our eyes are open all the way to the glory of our conquering Companion.

DIFFICULTIES.

1. "It seems vague." That is because you have not tried it. Everything is strange to the man who only looks on. But go to work; do as Christ did; talk to him, serve him in the persons of his children; and be hopeful; and lo, the vague clouds will form into a body and you will recognize yourself and your life.

2. "Practically, as an actual fact, do you believe the same Jesus who was once on earth is or can be near us to-day?" Why

certainly. He said so: "Lo, I am with you all the days." And we are conscious of his power and guidance, and his peace visits us. We do not live by our five senses; seeing and hearing are a small part of life, though rich blessings. The spiritual perceptions, desire for good, love of beauty, the sight of ideals,—these are the real things; and through these Jesus comes to us.

3. "Why do you speak of Jesus as specially amongst the poor and sad and degraded? Does he not love all his children?" Yes, but he goes nearest to those who are so hungry, because he knows how they need him. Rich and educated people have so much of his blessed comfort that he leaves them, so to speak, while he cares for the wanderers. "Son, thou art ever with me," he said to the jealous elder brother. If we would get especially near to the Master, then, we must follow him in this service of lifting up the oppressed, the ignorant, the sinful.

Dear Lord, I will follow thee. Take me, all I am and all I have, that I may walk with thee untrammelled by any earthly

weaknesses or faults. Look upon me, that the brightness of thy face may cheer me and burn out of me all selfishness and sin. And, above all else, speak to me, that I may know by thy dear voice where thou art and may be comforted by thy presence. So may I walk with thee till the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and my work here is done; and then do thou lead me to eternal peace, and open my eyes that I may see thee face to face. Amen, Lord Jesus. Amen.

IV.
SERVING CHRIST.

SUGGESTED READING, I JOHN 3: 11-18.



IV.

SERVING CHRIST.

Prayer.

OUR Friend, our Brother, and our Lord,
What may thy service be ?
Nor name, nor form, nor ritual word,
But simply following thee.

We bring no ghastly holocaust,
We pile no graven stone ;
He serves thee best who loveth most
His brothers and thy own.

Thy litanies, sweet offices
Of love and gratitude ;
Thy sacramental liturgies,
The joy of doing good.

In vain shall waves of incense drift
The vaulted nave around ;
In vain the minster turret lift
Its brazen weights of sound.

The heart must ring thy joyous bells,
Thy inward altars raise ;
Its faith and hope thy canticles,
And its obedience praise.

—*John G. Whittier.*

FAITH and practice have always been recognized as the two parts of life and of religion. Expression and action, theory and fact, emotion and experience, are the balanced sections of all truth and of all character. Emotion without experience is unreliable; experience without emotion is mysterious. Theory without fact is useless; fact without theory is incomprehensible. The man who says he loves me, and yet does not help me, is a deceiver; and the man who helps me, and yet does not express his love, makes me afraid. So with Christianity. It has, and must always have, two sides, the side of faith and the side of service. Service without faith is unintelligent, like the actions of animals. Faith without service is unreal, like the breath of man which goes forth and is not seen. If a man says, "I love God," he must make his assertion good by his actions; and a man who does good must have some reason for doing good, or else his well-doing has no character.

We are to think to-day of the practical side of Christianity. It is all very well, and very necessary, to believe in God, to join his church, to sing his praises, and to pray

to him, but we must do something more; we must work for him.

PERSONAL WORK.

I. The individual Christian must realize that he is in the world to serve God. God our Father made us for a purpose, and the fulfilment of that purpose is the meaning of our lives. This personal work may be the special occupation of my days, the use of my art or my skill. It is a glorious thing when a man recognizes in his profession or his business or his culture the voice of God saying, "I need thee in this." Or it may be that the work lies in some so-called homely duty,—housekeeping, or clerkship, or farming, with its thousand opportunities for helping and cheering. How noble the spirit which counts all things great to which the Father calls his child!

"Who sweeps a room as for thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine."

One has little patience with a human grading of gifts. The ploughman is as noble as the prince in God's sight, if he

does his work well. The street-sweeper and the president have equal opportunities, and a like blessing is waiting for each in return for faithfulness. Or it may be the personal work lies in suffering, in silence, in waiting. Milton, in his poem on his blindness, beautifully and pathetically says,—

“Thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait.”

The noblest workers I have ever known have been “shut-ins,” who not only cheered all by their example, but in little, unobtrusive ways made life to bud and blossom with luxuriant fragrance. We cannot be true Christians unless we are consciously doing something for God.

CHURCH-WORK.

II. Then there is the work to which God calls us through his church, and which it is important for us to do, not only that the church may grow and be a real leaven in the world, but that we may be living, useful members. “This church carries a great deal of dead wood,” said a critic once as he

saw the list of members and then noted the small amount of work done. Yes, "dead wood" indeed, making the burdens of the few heavier, and bringing decay to the whole fabric. Every Christian should do something in his church. The Sunday-school, the various benevolent societies, the brotherhoods, the prayer-meetings, these all call for helpers, and that they so often call in vain but proves the careless way in which we think of Christ and his church. Some time ago there was a grave discussion in one of our religious papers as to whether there was church-work enough for all the members! The very stating of the question showed a fine ignorance of the very meaning of Christianity. As well might a member of some family wonder whether he could do anything to make the family life richer and happier. There is a place and an opportunity for every one, and if he neglects his privilege the loss is his, and the church's also.

GENERAL WORK.

III. But the true child of God cannot stop with personal work and church-work. The world also is waiting for him. Every city,

every village, every country place, has opportunities for good which no one church can meet, and which Christians have to work together to fulfil. Take our Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations, our orphanages and hospitals, our nurseries and prisons, our rescue homes and our missions, and many like charities—O, how they cry for Christian men and women who will give their hearts, their time, their service! Everywhere there are poor people waiting for sympathy and guidance and cheer. Everywhere there are sinners waiting for some voice to call them upward. Everywhere there are fallen children needing a strong hand to lift them up.

Yes, and there are the morals of each community to be toned up by the high ideals and brave struggles of God's people. For only by the righteousness of Christians can life be purified and reformations accomplished. How can gambling and intemperance and impurity be conquered save by the combined and fearless action of the children of God? We must forget our differences, while with a common love of God in our hearts we join ranks and make a united battle against common enemies.

MISSIONARY WORK.

IV. And, finally, no Christianity is practical which does not look abroad and work for the salvation of all men. How foolish for us to pray, "Thy kingdom come," and yet not give a dollar to help tell people of that kingdom, people who would gladly enter in if only they knew what it meant! How unchristian to sing of Christ, and yet send no message to his children dying in ignorance of his love for them! Missions are the very life of the church, and faith in them is a part of our faith in God. To pray, to work, to give, to study, to write, to speak, to live, missions is the very essence of true religion. We all can do something. The widow's mite, the child's prayer, the humble seeking to interest—who cannot practise Christianity by doing these things?

Ah, yes, diligence in service is as necessary as diligence in prayer. To work is to make worship effectual. And, when the Christian heart cries out with sincere devotion, "Dear Lord, I love thee," the hands and the mind echo, "Dear Lord, I will work for thee."

DIFFICULTIES.

1. "But St. Paul speaks as if we were to be saved by faith rather than by works." Yes, for our works cannot save us. But really there can be no faith without action. If I truly love my friend, I cannot help serving him. If I honestly have faith in God, my very soul bids me work for him.

2. "Is it fair to judge of a man's Christianity by what he does?" Christ seems to say so. "By their fruits ye shall know them." And you remember the story of the barren fig-tree which had nothing but leaves. If my Christian life is healthy, it must bear fruit; and men will see my good works, and glorify not me, but my Father in heaven.

3. "But there is so much to do!" That ought to be an inspiration rather than a burden. God asks no impossibilities. But he does open before us the door of opportunity. And, when the man, with his heart aglow with love, looks out, he does not cry, "Alas, how can I?" but rather, "Lord, help me, and I will do all I can."

Blessed Christ, who didst thyself give us an example of noble activity, make my re-

ligion real by inspiring me for constant service. Let me both work and pray, and may my work draw power from my prayer, and my prayer gain fervor from my work. Help me to hate idleness, not only because it leads to sin, but because it robs thee of my service. And in all things, dear Lord, make me eager to practise in my life that which I profess with my lips. For thine own dear sake. Amen.

V.

NOURISHED BY CHRIST.

SUGGESTED READING, ST. JOHN 6 : 26-35.

V.

NOURISHED BY CHRIST.

Prayer.

SHEPHERD of souls, refresh and bless
Thy chosen pilgrim flock
With manna in the wilderness,
With water from the rock.

Hungry and thirsty, faint and weak,
As thou when here below,
Our souls the joys celestial seek,
Which from thy sorrows flow.

Be known to us in breaking bread,
But do not then depart ;
Saviour, abide with us, and spread
Thy table in our heart.

—*James Montgomery.*

It is a dear thought that God feeds us. He feeds our bodies, and that is why we thank him always before we eat. He feeds our souls, and that is why we pray to him and praise him. The food we eat makes us strong to work and endure. The spiritual food makes us brave to resist temptation

and to do good. Food for our bodies is material; we can see it and taste it, just as we can see and feel our bodies. Food for our souls is spiritual; we cannot see it or taste it any more than we can see our spirits. But we must always remember that one is just as important as the other, and that we cannot do without either.

Christ gives us both kinds of nourishment. He loves to "spread a table before us" as he did before his apostles on the seashore that beautiful morning long ago. (St. John 21:9-12.) He loves, too, to give us that "hidden manna," the quietness and comfort of spirit, which he gave to the same apostles when he said, "Let not your heart be troubled." All our food comes from him.

LIVING.

I. But there is this difference between the two foods, that one has no life in itself, while the other is full of life. The bread which I eat has no personal power. It is only a compound of chemical properties, which combine with certain chemical properties of my body, and grant muscular or nerve force. The spiritual bread is nothing

but personal power. It enters into me and becomes a part of me. It is Christ himself. He says, "I am the bread of life." In some way, as we live near to him and love him and obey him, we become united to him; and so he gives us his power and strength. We cannot explain this; we only know that it is a fact which thousands have experienced. Many a man, troubled and discouraged and sinful, has come in prayer, or through Bible-reading, or through worship, to Jesus, and received peace and enthusiasm and a consciousness of forgiveness. It must be that the words of Christ are true; he has entered into that man, and made him strong. He is a living, personal power. Do we know from experience what this means?

HOW RECEIVED.

II. We find this living bread in many ways. God has made it as easy and as possible for us as he has made the securing of common bread. First, there is prayer. We ask Christ to come to us, and we come to him. The reason so many people are starving spiritually is because they do not pray. It is impossible for a man, who

really talks with God to remain unhappy or weak. Then there is Bible-reading, which is the study of God's message to us. Again, there is the Lord's Supper, when we remember Christ's death for us, and are so closely joined to him around his cross that he calls the bread his body. Church worship is another means. People talk about going to church in the strangest way, as if it were a mere gathering of people to look at one another, or to hear some man deliver an oration. "Going to church" is really coming to the family table, gathering together for our weekly or daily nourishment, without which we simply cannot live. Then there is struggle—patient effort to find the highest and best. George MacDonald, in a fairy story called "The Golden Key," beautifully illustrates this, as he tells in the tale how Mossy and Tangle pressed on through all kinds of experience until they came to "the country where the shadows fall," which was the ideal life. In all these ways we can feed upon Christ.

REAL NOURISHMENT.

III. It is only food which really makes bone and muscle; that is, which really be-

comes a part of us, that is healthy. Some things we eat have no nourishing power at all. Possibly it is the same way with some people in regard to religion; it never becomes a part of them. A man may be very orthodox in his belief; but, if his belief does not enter into his very being and make him a purer, happier, more useful man, it is of no more benefit to him than so much bran or dried chips would be to his body. A man may pray—in form, and go to church, and even teach and do church-work; but unless his Christianity is his life, so that he feels it and loves it, he has not really partaken of Christ. I think that is why Jesus used this word “bread” and spoke of “eating it.” He wanted to emphasize the importance of religion and life, the man and his faith, being one. Is your religion a veritable part of you, so that you cannot be separated from it? Could you really live and yet not think of or care for God or God’s children? A missionary to Japan told me lately that what the Japanese people wanted to see was a proof that we really believed what we professed. If we could show, by touching the whole life of man, the social and the intellectual as well as the moral life,

that Christianity meant love, then the people would more readily be convinced. There are many about us here who are waiting for the same thing.

THE ONLY FOOD.

IV. There is only one way to find satisfaction, and that is through Jesus Christ. Men have tried countless things,—money, pleasure, friendship, but they have all failed, and always must fail to satisfy human hunger of heart. Nothing but Christianity could bring the world up to any measure of civilization. Whatever of excellence the world has to-day she owes to the teachings and spirit of Christ. And she can grow better only as those teachings are more universally obeyed. So with the individual. Ah, my friend, as you read this, you know you have

“Still the old unquiet breast,
Which neither deadens into rest,
Nor ever feels the fiery glow
That whirls the spirit from itself away.”

You long for inward peace. You are hungry. Now listen. “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye.” “I am the bread of life. Take, eat.” Give up all else, and come to Jesus. You ought not to have that

unceasing heartache. You ought not to have that restless sense of want. If you are a Christian in name, what is the matter that you are so cold, so formal, so inwardly out of sorts? Does not your religion satisfy you? If not, then there is something wrong. Come directly to Christ, and ask him to feed you. Read on your knees the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. John. This living bread can bless you; and nothing else, no one else, can. I love those lines of Matthew Arnold, of whom it might be said, as some one said of Shelley, that he tried so hard to be an agnostic, and yet was a Christian in his poetry, in spite of himself:

“ ’Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead
Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green;
And the pale weaver, through his windows seen
In Spitalfields, looked thrice dispirited.

“ I met a preacher there I knew, and said:
‘ Ill and o’erworked, how fare you in this scene?’
‘ Bravely!’ said he; ‘ for I of late have been
Much cheered with thoughts of Christ, the living
bread.’ ”

DIFFICULTIES.

I. “ Is not all this mere figure of speech? ”
No. There is a hunger of the spirit just as

real as the hunger of the body. Bread satisfies the latter; Christ satisfies the former.

2. "Does Christ really satisfy?" Yes, if you will permit him and obey the rules he gives you. Food will not nourish the body without exercise. So Christ tells us we must use the power he gives in order to make it effective.

3. "Can we be satisfied here?" Not perfectly, because as we grow new desires ever appear. But life means seeking new food from God for each new longing. "Deep answers deep." (See Phillips Brooks's sermon on Ps. 42: 7, vol. 5 of sermons.)

4. "Is this living bread free to all, or only to holy people?" It is for all who are hungry. There are no holy people. We are all weak, needy, erring children. And as such Christ feeds us.

Ah, dear Lord, thou knowest better than I can tell thee the hunger of my heart. Feed me and satisfy me. I cannot rest till I find rest in thee. Give me my daily bread that I hunger not, and spread thy table in my heart. For thine own dear sake. Amen.

VI.
CHRIST IN ME.

SUGGESTED READING, COL. 1: 21-29; GAL. 2: 20;
ST. JOHN 15.

VI.

CHRIST IN ME.

Prayer.

Blessed Saviour, receive my thanks for this word, "with you." And teach me, Lord, to make it my own in faith. For this end I will set myself in silence before thee, and will wait upon thee. Lord, speak thyself to me these words: "I am with you all the days." Amen.

—*Andrew Murray.*

THE central power of the Christian religion is the presence of God. All other religions have taught that the Creator is far away from his world. The message of God to the Jews was, "I will not leave thee." (Gen. 28: 15.) The message of Christ was, "Lo, I am with you always." (St. Matt. 28: 20.) And Jesus teaches us how all-pervading this presence is. God sees the little sparrows fall. He clothes the grass of the field. He counts the hairs

of our head. And the apostles, following him, tell us that God is in the world reconciling it, that he is in us as a hope of glory, and that he dwells in our hearts. It brings God very near to us, and makes his strength real. If I am simply to obey the commands of a far-off Jehovah, it is hard. If I am near to my Father, touched by him at every point, loved by him, filled with his power, then to live becomes a joy, and the future is sure; "I shall be like him."

REASONABLE.

I. Sometimes people think such an expression as "the indwelling Christ" to be a mere figure of speech. It is impossible, they say. And yet they speak of one man's being inspired by another. The spirit of Raphael entered into his pupils. Certain musicians belong to the Wagnerian school. There is "the age of Shakespeare." Now, if one man can so fill another with his spirit, his love, his ideals, that he is imitated almost instinctively by his pupil, cannot God fill us with himself so that we shall become his followers?

It becomes all the more reasonable when

we remember that God is perfect; that he is a spirit, and possesses powers of which we humans are ignorant. A man pursues sin, and by and by he is so corrupt that we despise him; Satan seems to have entered into him. So a man pursues righteousness, and by and by he is full of beauty; men love him and trust him, and they say, "He is a godly man." The Spirit of God has entered into him.

GOD IN THE WORLD.

II. But the truth is even larger. When God came into the world, he was made man. Notice, he was not only "a man," or "the man," but "man." He entered into humanity and became a part of it. So that at once manhood was joined to Godhood, humanity to divinity. What does that mean? Surely, that in some way God and men are united. "He took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham." (Heb. 2: 16.) "The Son of God became Son of man that sons of men might become sons of God." By Jesus the chasm between God and man, between the Creator and the created, is

bridged. What a magnificent truth! God is here on earth, now, to-day, and that not in a vague way, but in the real power of his presence in the hearts and lives of his children. "Abide in me, and I in you." That is what creates self-respect and leads to victory. I am a King's son. The royal spirit is in me. I am all noble, body, mind and soul. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God." (1 John 3: 2.)

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE.

III. A good man named Brother Lawrence has written a little book called "The Practice of the Presence of God," in which he shows us how we may make this truth very real. Nothing can so surely bring happiness and strength, nothing can so surely drive away sin, as the consciousness that God is near.

This "practising," then, is, first, the thought of God as near. Faber has such a beautiful hymn on the subject; here are two verses of it:—

"The thought of God, the thought of thee,
Who liest in my heart,
And yet beyond imagined space
Outstretched and present art,—

“The thought of thee, above, below,
Around me and within,
Is more to me than health and wealth,
Or love of kith and kin.”

Second, we must talk to him as to one who is near, constantly, naturally.

Third, we must recognize him as everywhere, in flowers, in sunlight, in every beautiful thing. The “immanent God” men are beginning to call him as they realize how near he is; but we must know that, while he is everywhere, he is in a special sense in his children, a life, a power, a presence. “Lo, I am with you all the days.”

And, fourth, we must so recognize him in humanity, however that humanity may be degraded and the dear Christ hidden, that we shall serve it as serving him. That was his meaning when he said, “Ye did it unto me.” (St. Matt. 25: 40.) As we so practise this presence, it becomes intensely real and comforting.

THE HIGHER LIFE.

IV. Of course, then, it comes to this, that the more men have of this presence, the more Christ is permitted to live and grow

and rule in them, the higher their life becomes. A man who believes in Christ, yet only thinks of him occasionally, and does nothing for him, cannot be very full of Christ's spirit. Even as the man who seldom looks at pictures or studies art can never be much of an artist, so the man who seldom looks at God or studies him can never be much of a Christian. We need to emphasize this, because it is only this higher Christianity that can conquer and bless the world, that can comfort and cheer the Christian. "More of Christ!" we cry. Some men say that is a fanatical, an emotional cry. But how can it be, if it is possible to have him with us and in us at all? He is infinite; therefore we can, if we will, have his nature more and more rule our nature. Ah, it is dear to know that he will possess us, if we will suffer him, until we can say, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." (Gal. 2: 20.)

"O hide this self from me, that I
No more, but Christ in me, may live!
My base affections crucify;
Nor let one favorite sin survive;
In all things nothing may I see,
Nothing desire or seek, but thee."

DIFFICULTIES.

1. All this seems so "up in the air," "so unreal." But that is just the trouble, my friend. It ought not to seem so to you if you know and seek the real comfort and power of Christianity. Religion does not consist in being good; that is only a result. Religion is knowing God; and, when you know him and love him, you long for him to come near to you. That is not dreamy or intangible. It is the only real thing in the world, because it defies even pain and death.

2. "But will not this make me too much of a contemplative Christian, like the old monks in their cells?" By no means. It was not their contemplation that made some of the monks stay in their cells, but their lack of contemplation. For all true study inspires and arouses. And, when I really think of God as in me, it fires me to do the work of God.

3. "But how is it possible for me to have this presence and yet sin?" There are two answers. In the first place, St. John says a man cannot sin who is born of God. (1 John 3: 9.) Evidently what he means

is not that man will not, through his weakness, commit wrong acts, but that he will not commit the sin of turning away from God. God will keep him because he is God's son. And, in the second place, though God is in the world reconciling it unto himself, that work is not yet completed. It is not completed in us. "I find," says St. Paul (Rom. 7: 21), "a law that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." It is a battle, but a battle with a sure end. God has patience and will help us if we trust him, so that these breaks and falls will become fewer.

4. "How can I know that I have this presence?" By your longing for it. By your growing love for God and his service. By your growing love for others. In fact, you have it already; the only thing is for you to recognize it and rejoice in it. "I am with you"—just repeat those words slowly again and again, and your eyes will be opened.

I thank thee, Lord, that thou art willing to live in me. I am not worthy, but thy

love breaks every barrier down. O take complete possession of me and make me wholly thine, in love, in worship, in service. Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee. Amen.

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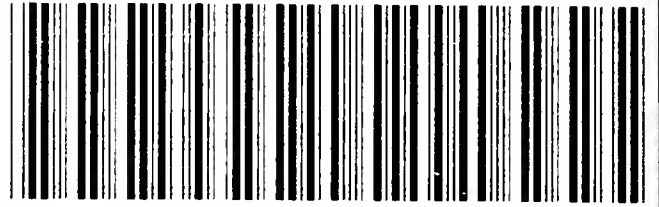
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