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SUNDAY MORNING DREAM.

[Although the following very impressive article (originally published as a tract in England) refers to the usages and observances of a particular denomination of Christians, its pungent rebukes are seasonable for all.]

My first day of returning health, after many weeks of severe illness was a bright Sunday in June. I was well enough to sit at an open window in my easy-chair, and, as our house stood in a pleasant garden in the suburbs of London, the first roses of the year scented the soft breeze that fanned my pale cheek and revived my languid frame. The bells of our parish church were just beginning their chimes, and the familiar sound awakened in me an intense longing to be with my family once more a worshipper in the house of God. I took up my Bible and Prayer-Book, which had been placed ready on the table beside me, intending to begin to read when the hour of the eleven o'clock service should be announced by the ceasing of the bells, and, in the mean time, closed my eyes, and soothed my impatient wishes by picturing to myself the shady avenues of blossoming limes that led to our church, and the throngs that would now be entering it for the public worship of the day.

All at once I seemed to be walking in the beautiful churchyard, yet prevented from gratifying my eager wish to enter the church, by some irresistible though unseen hand. One

by one the congregation, in their gay Sunday dresses, passed me by, and went in where I vainly strove to follow. The parish children in two long and orderly trains defiled up the staircases into the galleries, and, except a few stragglers hurrying in, as feeling themselves late, I was left alone.

Suddenly I was conscious of some awful presence, and felt myself addressed by a voice of most sweet solemnity in words to this effect:—"Mortal, who by divine mercy hast just been permitted to return from the gates of the grave, pause before thou enterest God's holy house again; reflect how often thou hast profaned his solemn public worship by irreverence, or by inattention, which is in his sight irreverence: consider well the great privilege, the unspeakable benefit and blessing, of united prayer, lest by again abusing it thou tire the patience of thy long suffering God, and tempt him forever to deprive thee of that which hitherto thou hast so little valued." Seeing me cast down my eyes and blush with conscious guilt, the gracious being continued in a milder tone:—"Enter thou with me, and thou shalt, for thy warning, be able to discern those among the devotions about to be offered which are acceptable to him, and to see how few in number, how weak and unworthy, they are."

As he ceased speaking I found myself by the side of the angel still, but within the church, and so placed that I could distinctly see every part of the building.

"Observe," said the angel, "that those prayers which come from the heart, and which alone ascend on high, will *seem* to be uttered aloud. They will be more or less audible in proportion to their earnestness: when the thoughts wander the sounds will grow faint, and even cease altogether."

This explained to me why the organist, though apparently playing with all his might, produced no sound, and why, presently after, when the service began, though the lips of many moved, and all appeared attentive, only a few faint murmurings were heard.

How strange and awful it was to note the sort of deathlike silence that prevailed in whole pews, in which, as was thus evident, no heart was raised in gratitude to heaven! Even in the *Te Deum* and *Jubilate*, the voices sometimes sunk into total silence. After the Creed there was a low murmuring of

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the versicles, and then, distinct and clear above all other sounds, a sweet childish voice softly and reverently repeated the Lord's Prayer. I turned in the direction of the sound, and distinguished among the parish children a very little boy. His hands were clasped together as he knelt, his eyes were closed, his gentle face composed in reverence; and, as the angel wrote on his tablets the words that fell from those infant lips, his smile, like a sunbeam, illuminated the church for a moment, and I remembered the words of holy David, where he says, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise."

Presently I was again reminded of a Scripture passage,—the prayer of the publican. A wretched-looking man, who swept the crossing near the church, lounged into the centre aisle during the reading of the lessons, his occupation being for the hour suspended. The second lesson was the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew. Some verses attracted his attention: he listened with more and more seriousness, until at length he put his hand over his face and exclaimed aloud, "What will become of me at the day of judgment! Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." That prayer was inserted on the angel's tablets. Oh, may it not stand alone, but be an awakening of better things! May God indeed have mercy on such poor neglected ones as he, and raise up some to teach them and care for their immortal souls!

After this, growing accustomed to the broken murmurs and interrupted sounds, I followed many an humble Christian through large portions of the Litany; though often, while I was listening with hopeful attention, a sudden and total pause showed but too plainly that the thoughts of the kneeling suppliant had wandered far away, and that he who had appeared so earnest in his devotions had become languid and silent like the rest of the congregation.

"Thou art shocked at what thou hast observed," said the angel: "I will show thee greater abominations than these.—God is strong and patient: he is provoked every day. Listen now, and thou shalt hear the *thoughts* of all these people; so shalt thou have some faint idea of the forbearance God continually exercises towards those who draw near to him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him."

As the angel spoke, my ears were deafened with a clamour which would have been shocking in a public meeting, but which here, in God's holy house, was awfully profane. The countenances remained indeed as composed and serious as before, the lips moved with the words of prayer, but the phrases they uttered were of the world and its occupations.

"How shamefully late Mrs. Slack always comes!" said one woman, who, looking over the edge of her Prayer-Book, saw her neighbour and a train of daughters bustle into the next pew. "What an example to set to her family! Thank goodness, no one can accuse me of that sin." "New bonnets again already!" exclaimed the last comer, returning the neighbourly glance from the other seat, ere she composed herself to the semblance of devotion. "How they can afford it Heaven only knows, and their father owing all his Christmas bills yet. If my girls look shabby, at least we pay our debts."

"Ah! there's Tom Scott," nodded a young man to his friend in the opposite gallery: "he is growing quite religious and respectable, I declare. He has been at church two Sundays running. How much longer will the devout fit last?"

These were shocking and striking examples of irreverence. There were happily not many such; the involuntary wanderings of thought were more common.

I was much interested in a young couple near me, whose attention for a considerable part of the service had been remarkable. From the dress of the young man, I judged him to be a clergyman; the lady wore deep mourning. They were evidently betrothed; they read out of one book. Gradually he forgot the awful presence in which he stood; his eyes wandered from the Bible to her gentle face, and, fixing there, called off his thoughts from heaven. "How good she is!" he began to say; "how attentive to her prayers, as to all other duties! What a sweet wife she will make! How happy I am to have won her love!" By this time the countenance of the young girl wore an expression which showed that she felt the earnestness of his gaze: her eyelids trembled, her attention wavered; and, though she looked at the book some moments longer, she too began to murmur of earthly things, and I heard her say, "Oh, how he loves me!

even here he cannot forget that I am beside him." It was many minutes before either of them returned in spirit to their devotions.

As the service proceeded, the attention of the congregation flagged more and more; the hubbub of worldly talk increased. One man composed a letter he intended to send, and even altered whole passages and rounded elegant periods, without one check or recollection of the holy place where he stood. Another repeated a long dialogue which had passed between himself and a friend the night before, and considered how he might have spoken more to the purpose. Some young girls rehearsed scenes with their lovers; some recalled the incidents of their last ball. Careful housewives planned schemes of economy, gave warning to their servants, arranged the turning of a gown, or decided on the most becoming trimming of a bonnet.

To me, conscious of the recording angel's presence, all this solemn mockery of worship was frightful. I would have given worlds to rouse this congregation to a sense of what they were doing; and, to my comfort, I saw that for the involuntary offenders a gentle warning was provided.

A frown from the angel, or the waving of his impatient wings, as if about to quit a place so desecrated, recalled the wandering thoughts of many a soul, unconscious whence came the breath that revived the dying flame of his devotions. Then self-blame, tears of penitence and bitter remorse, of which those kneeling nearest knew nothing, wrung the heart, shocked at its own careless ingratitude, wondering at and adoring the forbearance of the Almighty, while more concentrated thoughts, and, I trust, more fervent prayer, succeeded to the momentary forgetfulness.

In spite of all these helps, however, the amount of real devotion was small; and when I looked at the angel's tablets I was shocked to see how little was written therein.

"Out of three hundred Christians," thought I, "assembled, after a week of mercies, to praise and bless the Giver of all good, are these few words the sum of what they offer?"

"Look to thyself," said the angel, reading my inmost thoughts. Such as these are, such hast thou long been.—Darest thou, after what has been revealed to thee, act such

a part again? Oh, could thy mortal ears bear to listen to the songs of the rejoicing angels before the throne of the Almighty, thou wouldst indeed wonder at the condescending mercy which stoops to accept these few faint wandering notes of prayer and praise. Yet the sinless angels veil their faces before Him in whose presence man stands boldly up with such mockery of worship as thou hast seen this day. Remember the solemn warning, lest hereafter it be counted to thee as an aggravation of guilt."

Suddenly the sweet, solemn voice ceased, the glorious angel disappeared, and so oppressive seemed the silence and loneliness that I started and awoke. My watch pointed to the hour of eleven. It must have been the stopping of the bells that interrupted my slumbers; and all this solemn scene had passed before my mind in the short space of a few minutes.

May the lesson I learned in those few minutes never be effaced from my heart! And if this account of them should recall one wandering thought in the house of prayer, or teach any to value more highly and cultivate more carefully the privilege of joining in the public worship of our church, it will not have been written in vain.

THOUGHTS FOR SPARE MOMENTS.

“WHERE IS IT?”

“It was here—I had it; but while I was thinking what I would do with it, it fled, and now I cannot find it.”

No, you cannot find it. You will never see it again. A solemn hour is coming when you will hear of it, and will be called to give an account of it; but it will never be in your possession again. *A moment of past time can never be recalled.* Once gone from you, 'tis gone for ever. A moment misimproved, perverted, abused, is worse than lost. As it cannot be recalled, so cannot its work be recalled nor altered. It has gone to the boundless past, but has left its record of evil for an eternity to come. How many moments of your life have been lost—how many worse than lost! Yea, hours, days, months and years—long years have been passed, and they have their record in the great book of remembrance; but they cannot return to you. What is the account which they have registered? Is it an account of penitence? Days, months, and even years, all spent in unbelief of heart and enmity against God. Wonderful perverseness of man! Wonderful forbearance of God! *O sinner, do you think of it as your moments pass, that every one is going to make its report for the judgement day?* Do you look back on a year that has been spent in rebellion against God, and have no fears of the future account? and have you already lived ten, twenty, thirty, even fifty or sixty years, and lived all this time estranged from God? And have you now no uneasiness of conscience respecting the past? Have you no anxieties concerning the endless future? Are you still living in impenitence, and still planning for the pursuits and pleasures of future years, with-

out taking at all into your account the claims of God on your time and service? Care you nothing for the sin, nothing for the danger of living so? Divine patience and forbearance are great; but there are also such things as divine justice and divine wrath. They will not always slumber. You cannot always cumber the ground in this world of mercy. If you do not turn to God by repentance and faith in his Son, the word will go forth, "Cut him down, why cumbereth he the ground?" If you wait for that hour, O think of what must follow! An eternity of woe! Endless and unutterable sorrows and sufferings, and all purchased by a fleeting life spent in the pleasures of sin! Is it not buying transitory and unsatisfying pleasure at too dear a rate? Will a few years of sinful pleasure on earth compensate for the torments of those fires which shall never be quenched? O no; you do not intend to go to those torments. But keep it in mind, *you are going there*, swift as time and your sins can hurry you on. If you delay but a little longer the work of repentance, you may delay too long to be saved. One moment too many will be fatal for ever. If you wish not to perish for ever, repent now.

Professing Christian, one word with you. Where are your moments? Do you notice how they pass away? Are you improving them? You are constantly flattering yourself, that at a future day you shall be more diligent, more prayerful, and more useful. Have you not indulged the same thoughts for years? Has that time of devotion arrived? Do you find it nearer than years ago? Are you now more willing to be wholly consecrated to God than you have formerly been? Are you willing to say, Now I devote myself *anew* and *wholly* to the service of God—I will be more active, more prayerful, more holy, by his grace, from *this hour* onward? Say it, Christian in the fulness and sincerity of your heart: and may God enable you to fulfil the vow!

"TAKE HEED TO THYSELF, AND KEEP THY SOUL DILIGENTLY."—DEUT. IV. 9.

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