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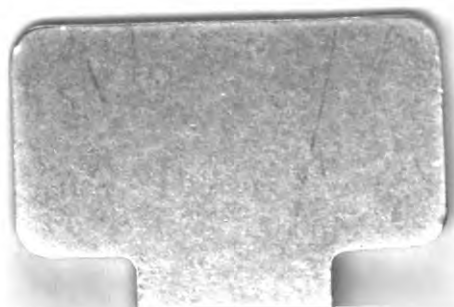
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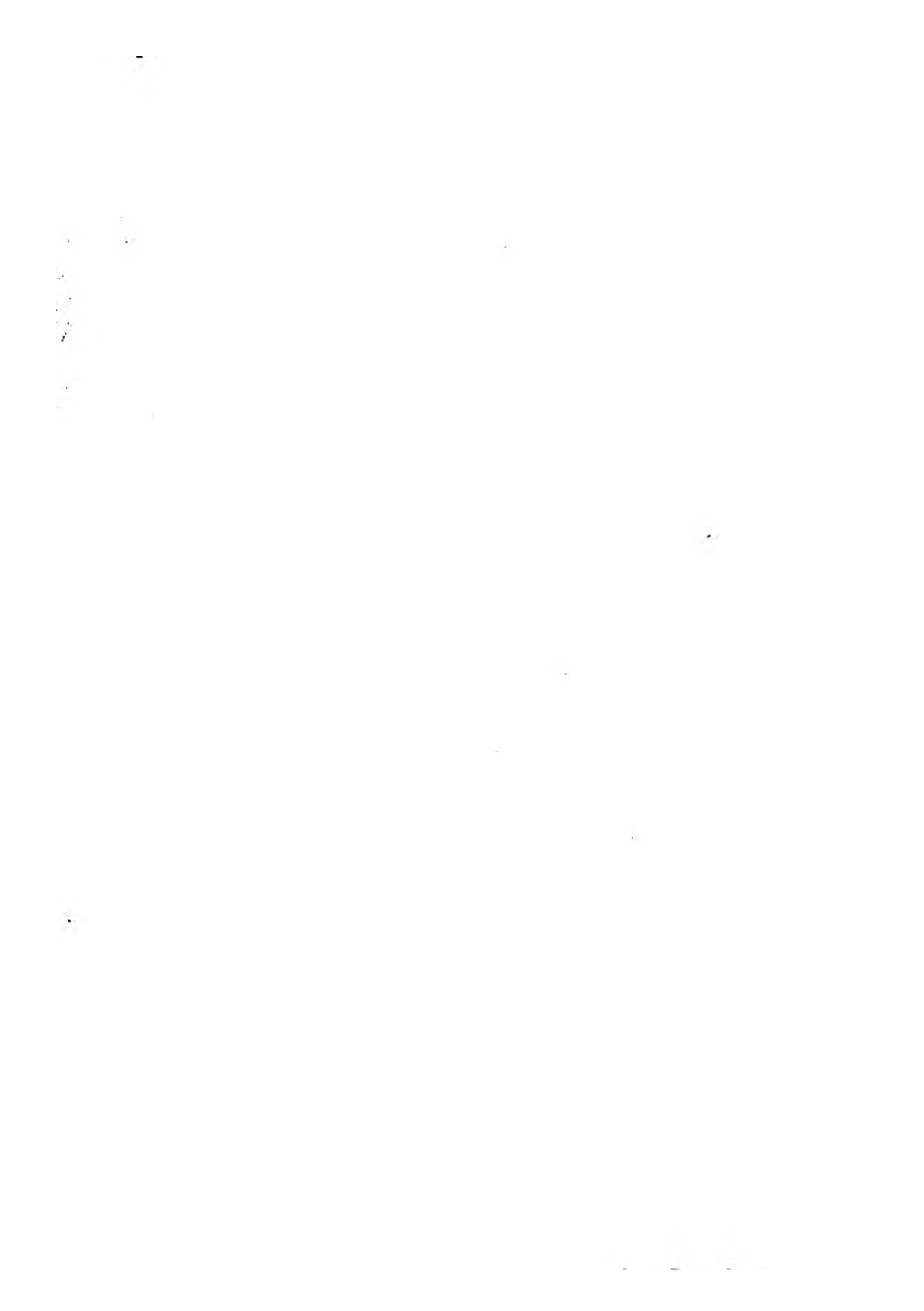


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Making the  
Best of Life

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# THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE OF THOUGHT

BY MRS HORACE PORTER

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**MAKING THE BEST OF LIFE**





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**BY  
MRS HORACE PORTER**



**LONDON: H. R. ALLENSON, LIMITED  
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## INTRODUCTION

How to make the best of life—can there be any problem that concerns each one of us more closely? And yet the fact remains that we do not all set ourselves in earnest to tackle it.

There are quite a number of people who are so much occupied in displaying how bad is the worst that life brings them that they have no energy to spare for finding out how good may be the best. There are others, too, who are content to “take life as it comes,” as they are fond of saying, which means that they enjoy the things which please them and complain of those that do not, without any purposeful endeavour to pick out always *the best* and make it into a source of lasting joy and strength and thankfulness.

And for all of us there is one great hindrance to be overcome in the constant misuse of the familiar phrase. We have to be continually reminding ourselves that “making the best”

of anything does not mean putting up with the worst of it.

There is a "best" in every life and under all conditions, and it has to be *made* out of the passing events and changing circumstances of every day; it does not come into being without effort, purposeful and continued, such as we know to be necessary to the success of every serious undertaking. If one asks how to set about it, the answer must depend, to some extent, upon individual circumstances. We have each a different set of problems to deal with, and different opportunities, desires, and fears. But there are some general principles which are the same for every one of us, some helps we all can use and some hindrances against which we all need to be on our guard, and it is with these only that I can venture to deal. I want to show, if I can, how much we *all* have it in our power to do—far more than many of us have yet dreamt of attempting—towards making, literally and truly, *the best* of life.

It is not easy to make plain to other minds even so much as one has come to see clearly for one's self concerning these vitally important matters which get overlooked just because they

## Introduction

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are so obvious and so simple, and I have therefore ventured to keep to the personal form in which such thoughts as I have to offer were first set down for the use of the friend to whom I now dedicate them.

M. P.

*Michaelmas 1927*



**“Our lives are albums written through  
With good or ill, with false or true ;  
And as the blessed angels turn  
The pages of our years,  
God grant they read the good with smiles,  
And blot the ill with tears !”**

***J. G. Whittier.***

# I

## LIFE'S HARVESTING

THE *best* of life has to be *made*, and the materials to be used in the making are just the commonplace happenings of every day. Whatever these are, there is always a "best" in them for those who take trouble to look out for it, and gather it, and store it up for the enrichment of all the days to come.

The process of making the best of life demands, in fact, a daily harvesting of the fruits of God's love which spring up along one's path, and the richness of a harvest depends upon the gatherer as well as upon the crop. The waving cornfield and the laden apple-tree bring no wealth to their owners if the wheat remains unreaped and the fruit is left on the boughs. Nor is the harvest finished when the gathering is done. The glowing apples and the golden grain will soon lose their glory and go to waste if they are left lying on the ground. There must be carrying and storing before the work of harvesting is complete.

## Making the Best of Life

This is all obvious enough where the fruits of the earth are concerned, but how about the "fruits of the Spirit"—love, joy, peace, and the rest—which do undoubtedly make up the *best* that life has to give? Do we keep a look-out for them along our daily path? and when we find them, do we gather them for the moment's pleasure only, or store them up in grateful memory?

These are questions worth asking ourselves, for life's harvesting is no mere fanciful image but a very practical reality, and it has to be done not so much after the manner of a farmer with his rows of corn golden and close before him, as of the wayfarer gathering his varied harvest of the nuts and berries and other fruits of the earth that he meets with on the day's tramp over hill and dale, by highways and byways, across waste places and through woods and meadowland. The store he carries home at night will depend not only upon what actually grew within his reach, but also upon what he was looking out for and what he chose to gather, and upon the amount of trouble he was willing to take. He may have hurried along too fast to notice the ripe berries and nuts he passed, or he may have been too lazy to reach up to those above

his head, or too proud to bend down to those at his feet. In each case his basket will be not so full as it might have been, although less empty than if he counts none but the rarest and most perfect fruits worth enjoying, while leaving ungathered all the humbler kinds.

Or, again, he may pluck indiscriminately what comes easiest to his hand, ripe and unripe, good and bad alike, in which case he will have a full basket but not a very precious store. Or he may want to prove not what good things but what unpleasant ones grow along his path, and will go home laden with all the weeds and thorns and poisonous berries he has collected to show how dreary and dangerous is the way he has had to take.

These all seem obvious and foolish methods of missing one's harvest, and yet it is by one or other of them that we so often fail to make the best of the blessings and the joys of every day. Sometimes we are in too much of a hurry to notice these at all, or too indolent or proud to claim and to enjoy them. Often we are so eager in seeking some great happiness that we pass by all humbler joys unheeded; and sometimes, alas, we are so bent on treasuring all our wrongs and our sorrows and our grievances that we suffer them to

crowd out the happier memories of kind words and deeds and the many other blessings God has made to spring up along our path. And the result of these various wrong ways of harvesting is always the same—that life has been made poorer and harder and drearier than it need have been.

(1)

The first step, then, is to choose what kind of harvest you mean to have, for you can no more hold in your memory all that you see and think and say and feel in a single day than you can carry home in your basket every fruit and flower that you meet with on a walk through the countryside at harvest-time. You have to be continually choosing what shall be gathered and remembered and what shall be left behind to be forgotten, and the simplest plan is to make your choice definitely, once for all, and keep it steadily before you.

If you really are resolved to store up your own grievances and other folks' wrong-doings, say so honestly to yourself and face the consequence, which will be a starved and gloomy life instead of a full and joyous one. For

your spirit can no more grow strong on grievances than your body can on a harvest of weeds and thorns.

Or if you are not willing to take the trouble of looking out for each blessing that God sends you, small or great, and making it your own with thankfulness, say so, and recognise that your choice is to forfeit some of God's gifts rather than to exercise patience and effort, and possibly humility, in claiming them. But if you do desire, in real earnest, to make your life as rich as God would have it to be in love and joy and peace and power of helping others, then clear all the other alternatives out of the way by reminding yourself continually that they are what you *do not* choose.

You cannot have it both ways ; you cannot fill your basket both with weeds and fruit, and neither can you treasure the remembrance both of your joys and of your grievances. You have to choose between them, and it is a great help to keep in mind the fact that you *have chosen*, and that the grievances have got to go. Then, when some very big one seems hard to part with, you will find strength to sacrifice it in reckoning up the preciousness of the many happy, kindly thoughts it would crowd out.

It is a tremendously important matter this of choosing what the harvest of your daily life shall be, for the more definite your choice is the readier will you be to look out for everything that falls in with it as the day goes on. Just as the person who stores up grievances is continually finding them where no one else would have dreamt of their existence so, if you have set yourself in earnest to look out for every happy moment you meet with on your way, you learn to discover these in most unlikely places.

(2)

Supposing, then, that you have made your choice as to life's harvest, and that your choice, definitely and sincerely, is to gather up *the best* of all that each day brings, next comes the question of how it is to be done. And here there is one way only, and that is by *thankfulness*.

That sounds very commonplace, does it not? but what does it really mean? What is the object of saying "Thank you" either to God or to our fellow-creatures? What difference does it make? These are points worth

thinking out, for it is just because thankfulness means too little to us that the harvest of our lives is often so much poorer than it might have been.

One of the first lessons that every careful mother teaches her child is to say "Thank you." Why? For a deeper reason, surely, than merely that of good manners. The child who is allowed to grow up without any feeling of thankfulness will take all the good things given him as by right, and so they will never help to draw him nearer to the givers. Neither will they ever bring him the double joy of a gift prized not for its own sake only, but for the love which it expresses. There will be something lacking in his whole life, and especially in his fellowship with other people. For it is the sense of dependence one upon another which binds us most closely together, and there is nothing like gratitude to make that dependence real and strong.

To give thanks for anything means that you do not reject or despise it, nor yet take it as a matter of course—as something that is yours by right. It means that you recognise both the value of the gift and also the kindness of the giver; that is why thankfulness has such a magical power to make life



richer and more full of joy and brightness. It not only saves you from overlooking life's treasures and passing them by unheeded, but it also makes them doubly precious by making them into personal links of love and fellowship. The gifts and the joys and the mercies for which we never say "Thank you" gain no personal value, and so they are soon forgotten.

We recognise this in our dealings with our fellow creatures. We *do* say "Thank you" for gifts and help and sympathy, and when we say it from the heart we make fresh links of loving-kindness between ourselves and those who have done us good. But how about our dealings with God? Are we equally alive to the evil of gracelessness towards the "Giver of all"? Or are we like spoilt children, surrounded with gifts which we take so completely as ours by right that we quite forget to be thankful for having them, and only grumble at not having more?

"Be ye *thankful!*" was St Paul's repeated bidding to his fellow Christians. "*In everything, give thanks!*" He wanted to have as many as possible to join in prayer for him, when he was in danger, so that there might be as many as possible to join afterwards in *giving*

*thanks.* He wanted this for a threefold reason, not for his own benefit alone, but also for the good of the intercessors and for the glory of God.

That last is a thought worth working out, and I have a suggestion to offer later<sup>1</sup> as to the exercise of faith needful in order that one may learn, by personal experience, what St Paul meant by "*abounding* in thanksgiving." It is a lesson you have got to master if you want to make of the "joy of harvest" a reality in your own life.

(3)

Thankfulness, then, is the gathering of God's good gifts; but you cannot stop here, any more than the farmer can count his harvesting finished when the corn is cut. It would soon be wasted if he left it lying on the ground, and your grateful feelings will soon fade if you take no step to express them in some lasting form. In words first, of course; to say "Thank you" from the heart is like gathering your corn together into sheaves. But even that is not enough. Each sheaf must be bound round so firmly that none of the corn stalks shall be lost,

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. VIII.

and the farmer will sacrifice a few of them to twist into a cord for the purpose. And in the same way you will need to make some of God's gifts into a "cord of sacrifice" to bind the rest into a harvest sheaf of strength and joy for all the days to come.

In plain words, you must link *thanks* with *giving* if you would keep your thankful thoughts and memories safely stored. Every time that you say "Thank God" for the love, or the help, or the kindness, or the beauty of nature, which has brightened the day for you, you should go on to seek for a practical form in which to express your gratitude. Is there something you can do or say, out of thankfulness to God, to help those whom He sends across your path? Or could you make some new effort, for His sake, to be gentle, loving, kind with those who try your patience? Or is there any piece of work you can do, or any sacrifice you might make, as a thank-offering to the Lord to whom you owe so much?

These are questions you must settle for yourself, for there are many different ways in which we can "show forth" our thankfulness "not only with our lips, but in our lives," and you must make your own choice among them. Only be careful not to neglect the simple and obvious

way of giving *money*, not as a mere matter of duty and custom, but as a direct thank-offering to God for one after another of His Gifts and mercies.

This may sound very commonplace, but it really is of the greatest importance, for each coin that you offer to God in thankfulness gives new value to all those you keep. The richest person is not the one who hoards most, but the one who spends best, and if you want to *spend* well, you must learn to *give* well. And there is no surer way of learning this than by giving to God, in humble thankfulness.

### NOTE

Bishop Lightfoot has some thoughts well worth pondering on this vital subject of thanksgiving.

“Thanksgiving. We do not reflect—or if we do reflect, we do not realise in practice—the prominence which thanksgiving claims in the teaching of the Gospel. It was an instructive appreciation of this truth which led the early Church to call the highest act of Christian worship the Eucharist, the Thanksgiving. Thus the privilege and duty of thanksgiving is vividly brought before us. . . . Our life must be one perpetual Eucharist.

“What an inestimable benefit it will be to ourselves,

if we strive to make it so! Never were truer words spoken than the saying of the Psalmist, 'It is a joyful and a pleasant thing to be thankful.' Why should we not exult in this joy?

"Thanksgiving is indeed twice blessed. It blesses him who receives it, but it blesses him who offers it still more. Thankfulness is the negative of self, thankfulness is love, thankfulness is life. . . . Count it a duty to be thankful. Fall asleep each night with a thanksgiving on your lips, and rise up each morning with a thanksgiving in your heart. . . . By thanksgiving you will enrol yourself in that countless white-robed choir which stands face to face with the Eternal Presence, giving blessing and glory and honour to Him that sitteth on the Throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever."

## II

### LIFE'S HINDRANCES

It sounds all so obvious, this about our daily harvesting and the joy of harvest, that one has to ask why this joy is not a more striking feature in our lives, and how it comes that we so often seem to miss it altogether.

We can usually find reasons to plead for this in the circumstances of our lives ; we can show how heavily we are handicapped by this or that disability or hardship ; but I question whether we always take sufficient account of some common and effectual hindrances which lie within ourselves. They seem somehow to escape notice by wrapping themselves up in certain familiar phrases which we are so accustomed to hear and to use that we forget to challenge them.

#### (1)

One of the most effectual of these concealed hindrances is to be found in the frequently

heard expression "my due." According to what you count "due" to yourself will be the kind of harvest you are looking for, and the measure of thankfulness which you can bring to the task of gathering it. We pass by so many good things in life because we feel that better ones are due to us, or we accept the most precious fruits of love and kindness as a matter of course, with the result that although we lay hold of them they don't seem to enrich our lives. We make them not into a harvest store but rather a miser's hoard, which certainly is not the "best" life has for us.

We waste, too, a good deal of our power to resist illness by taking it as so completely our right to be well that disablement of any kind rouses in us a sharp sense of resentment which disappears for those who have learnt to take health as God's gift, with daily thanksgiving. This does not mean valuing it less, but very much more. It does not mean a faint-hearted "giving in" to all attacks of illness; on the contrary, the less force you spend in resenting these, the more you have ready to resist them.

It is the same with all the trials which come to us either through the force of circumstances, or by the unkindness of other people. The

harder they are to bear the more important it is not to increase the trouble by resenting it. If you have to resist some unjust antagonism, you will do so all the more effectually for not squandering your force in resentment; and if you have no choice but to endure it you make it worse and not better by dwelling upon the thought of how unmerited it is. Unmerited, very likely, from the hand that inflicts it, or for the cause assigned; but how about the humiliation "due" to even the best of us for pride and selfishness unnoticed and uncurbed?

It is wonderful what a help it is in bearing trials—and especially those that come through unkindness—just to turn your thoughts for a moment to the supremely unmerited Agony of the Cross, with the confession of the penitent fellow-sufferer echoing in your mind, "We indeed justly . . . but this Man hath done nothing amiss."

"*My due*": you have got to settle with that little phrase if you mean to make the best of life and its harvesting, for only those good things which you do not count yours by right can you ever value to the full. The "sense of undeservedness," as that great thinker, Bishop Lightfoot, used to teach, is



what enables one to rejoice to the full in every gift and blessing, great or small.

This or that special benefit or privilege is our *due*, we sometimes insist, as a plea for refusing to find comfort or help in any lesser boon, and the result is a continued strain of expectation, intensified by repeated disappointments instead of being relieved by the thankful enjoyment of each little opportunity of relaxation and refreshment that comes our way.

(2)

Then there is that all too common and rather deadly habit of describing one's self as this or that "kind of person."

"I can't help being easily hurt"—or not easily pacified, or whatever the disability may be—we say complacently, "I'm that kind of person." To which of course the obvious answer is that one should stop being such a tiresome kind of person, only, unfortunately, the advice does not go far enough. You need to look a little deeper into the matter to see just why this popular phrase should be so grave a hindrance to life's harvesting.

First and most obviously, of course, because

of the hampering limitations it sets for you. It is as though you were to set about gathering the harvest of woods and lanes with the conviction held steadily in mind that you are the "kind of person" who cannot reach high, or stoop low, or risk scratches for the sake of plucking any nuts or berries beyond your easiest reach. You would condemn yourself beforehand to miss some of the best fruits that grow along your way, and it is just the same with the opportunities of joy and service which each day brings. Some of the richest among them are out of reach of the "kind of person" who counts it impossible to keep calm in face of opposition, or to receive slights without resentment, or whatever the accepted disability may be.

Also you have to reckon with the fact that life, for us human beings, is a condition of progress, not attainment; not of completeness, but continual growth and change. The thing which matters most, at any moment, is not what one *is* just then, but what one is on the way to *become*. To feel obliged to describe one's self, at the time of speaking, as the "kind of person" who finds it hard to be forgiving, patient, kind, or whatever the trouble is, should really be the first step

towards setting to work with new resolve to conquer that particular hindrance to life's progress. For the difficult virtue will not remain permanently at the level of difficulty; sooner or later it will become either possible or impossible.

That, and nothing less, is the alternative which has to be faced by every one claiming to be the "kind of person" who is apt to fail in the effort to be gentle, forbearing, brave, sincere, or whatever is the special trial. To accept that failure as part of the individual make-up of one's personality is to stand self-condemned, to become false, or cowardly, or domineering, or harsh, and the more clearly we face this fact the less easy it is to take a complacent view of our own shortcomings.

(3)

Another heavy handicap we make for ourselves by setting our own definite limits to what can or cannot be "expected" of us. We are ready to forbear or forgive or persevere up to a certain point, we say, but beyond that we really cannot go; it can't be expected of us. We don't always stop to ask

what God expects of us, nor yet what we expect of other people.

This hindrance is linked closely with the last; the one limiting what we are content to be, the other what we are willing to attempt or to endure. Both have the fatal effect of cutting straight across that which is always God's purpose for us, undaunted, steadfast progress "from strength to strength," and it is only in the gradual fulfilment of that purpose can we hope to make *the best* of life. I think it was Phillips Brooks who said that the worth of a man's life is measured by his power of *expectancy*, and this power must be directed upon what life asks of him as well as upon what it has to give.

If you should ever find yourself tempted to refuse some sacrifice or shirk some effort as being beyond what can be expected of you, you would be wise not to make your final decision without taking into account the fact that only by venturing beyond the limits of what is easy and costless can you ever hope to find *the best* life has to offer.

(4)

A hindrance perhaps less common, yet not to be ignored, is to be found in that other familiar phrase in which we speak of "facing" our troubles. It is all the more mischievous because it sounds so brave. "I don't know how I shall ever be able to face" this danger, loss, or any other trial, we say with troubled hearts, which we proceed to strain and disturb still further with brave but ill-directed efforts to brace them for the worst that we can picture. We pray for strength to face these dreaded possibilities, and sometimes it seems to us that the strength does not come, and that it is our fears which are gaining power.

The truth being, all the time, that it is God whom we need to face, rather than our troubles. We never can foresee all the details of these beforehand, and the effort to do so only unnerves us, squandering the power to meet the bad hour bravely when it comes. Preparations, of course, may have to be made, but these belong to the present if you view them in their true light, not suffering care and attention to stray from the demands of the moment to what is yet to come. And when all that

lies in your own hands to do is done, your best wisdom and your strength lie in trying not to look forward, but to look up, even as a child looks up into the face of the father to whose protecting care he clings in face of danger.

The thought of father and child has many a lesson of practical application when pain or anxiety or trouble of any kind have to be "faced." You will find it such a wonderful help to picture yourself, through all the steps you may have to take, as a child in the arms of a loving father who will carry him through the perilous places he could not tread alone.

The more terrifying the dangers are, the closer the child clings to his father, and the more resolutely his eyes are hidden on the father's breast or raised to meet the tender, cheering glance bent down on him. Thus the comfort of the father's love and the certainty of his power and his protecting care take fuller and fuller possession of the child's mind, making it possible to meet the ordeal, when it comes, with courage kept firm by clinging still to that strong hand and looking up into that loving face.

The harder the trial which has to be met the greater is the need of facing not all its terrifying possibilities, but God Himself, our

Father, our Saviour, our never-failing Helper, Guide and Friend. In any needful preparations you can seek His help in what must be done there and then, without the unnerving effort to face what may be in store. If your imagination threatens to betray you, leaping forward to picture all the dread possibilities which you feel you could not "face," the surest way to restrain it is by turning the eyes of your mind resolutely upward once more, away from yourself and your terrors into the light of the knowledge of the unchanging love of God, shining "from the Face of Jesus Christ."

Assuredly the secret of gaining strength to make "the best" even of life's troubles, and to meet them gallantly, is known most fully to the Christian who has learnt to keep the gaze of heart and mind fixed, in hard moments, upon

" . . . the Face Whose beauty  
Wakes the world's great hymn,  
Feel it, one unutterable moment,  
Bent in love o'er him ;  
In that look feel heaven, earth, men and angels  
Distant grow, and dim ;  
In that look feel heaven, earth, men and angels  
Nearer grow, through Him." <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs Rundle Charles.

(5)

But I sometimes wonder whether possibly the worst hindrance of all, in life's harvesting, may not be found in the desire to be doing *something different* from whatever is actually occupying us. Nine times out of ten it is what we *are not* doing, far more than what we *are*, which distracts our minds and makes us restless and dissatisfied, and hinders us from making anything like the best of that passing moment.

It is not the fact that we *are* playing second fiddle which vexes us, but that we *are not* playing first fiddle. It is not because the fruits we gather grow by the wayside, but because they do not grow in hot-house or garden that we find them disappointing. Again and again, when I have been trying to analyse the tiresomeness of some uncongenial task, I have found that it does not lie nearly so much in what I am actually doing as in the thought of some more desirable thing which I am thereby made unable to do. And unless or until I can stop myself hankering after this I am forfeiting what might as well as what might not be mine in the way of achievement.



St Paul's injunction to do the task of the moment "with your might" might be translated "with your *heart*," for it is impossible to put your whole force into an action when your heart is elsewhere; and how to call it back and keep it set upon the thing actually to be done is the practical problem. A very hard problem many of us have found it, yet with one quite simple solution ready for all who learn to bring the thought of *God's will* into it. If this uncongenial job of the moment, whatever it may be, is a part of God's purpose and training for me—and if I have any serious reason for thinking that it is *not*, I ought not to be doing it—then clearly it must be the best thing I can attempt, and all other undertakings, however attractive or important, can safely wait. Nay, more than that, they will gain and not lose in the end by all the heart-work I put into my present task, which means so much the more strength stored for every undertaking.

There are some wonderful thoughts on this point, and some very practical teaching, to be gleaned from one who has been described as "surely the greatest teacher of our time." Baron von Hügel wrote thus to a beloved niece faced with a tiresome task :<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letters of Baron von Hügel.

“ I want this little scribble to reach you on your packing fortnight. I want to put, very shortly, what has helped myself so greatly for now a generation. Well, you are going to pack, pack, and unpack, unpack, for a fortnight. What is it that I would have you quietly set your mind and heart on during that, in itself lonesome and dreary, bit of your road, Child? Why, *this*. You see all we do has a *double-relatedness*. It is certainly your duty to do quietly your best, that these links may help on your own chain and those other chains, by packing well, by being a skilful packer. . . .

“ Yes, but there is also all the time another, a far deeper, a most darling and inspiring relation. Not even a soul already in Heaven, not even an angel or archangel can take your place there: for what God wants, what God will love to accept, in those rooms, in those packing days, and from your packing hands, will be just this little packing performed by you in those little rooms.

“ . . . You understand? At one moment packing; at another, silent adoration in church; at another, dreariness and unwilling drift; at another, the joys of human affections given and received; at another, keen suffering of soul, of mind, in apparent utter loneliness; at another, external acts of religion; at another, death itself. All these occupations, every one can, ought, and will be, each when and where

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duty, reason, conscience, necessity—God—calls for it; it will become the means and instruments of loving, of transfiguration, of growth for your soul, and of its beatitude. But it is for God to choose these things, their degrees, combinations, successions; and it is for you, just simply, very humbly, very gently and peacefully, to follow that leading.”

To see the task of the moment thus, in the light of God’s love, is the surest way to save one from squandering the power to achieve, by expending it in restless longing after something different.

(6)

The habit of centring one’s thoughts upon what *is not*, rather than upon what *is*, enters not only into our doings but also into our dealings with other people, and here again it effectually hinders us from making the best of life. For this must needs include *the best* of every one encountered along its course, and we can only find this by seeking not for what people are not but for what they are.

“So-and-so has not been kind, or just, or considerate to me!” one is apt to complain, and it may be very true, but it is the worst and

not the best of them. That "best" can only be found by registering the good points they do possess and not merely those they do not. It is not always easy and not always attractive to one's pride, for the clear recognition of another person's faults may be needed to justify a sense of dislike or injury which one is perhaps unwilling to give up. If some one vexes and jars upon you, or—harder still to bear!—treads heavily upon your pride, it is far more soothing to self-love to see where *he* is in the wrong than where *you* are; to make the worst of him and not the best. Sometimes indeed this making the best of the people God sends across our path—those we don't like as well as those we do—seems an impossibly hard business; so much so that it is worth taking trouble to gain a real grasp of that "most excellent gift" whereby alone we can attempt it.

**“ O LORD,**  
**Who hast taught us that all our doings**  
**without Charity**  
**are nothing worth ;**  
**Send Thy Holy Ghost,**  
**and pour into our hearts**  
**that most excellent gift**  
**of Charity,**  
**the very bond of peace**  
**and of all virtues,**  
**without which whosoever liveth**  
**is counted dead before Thee :**  
**Grant this**  
**for Thine only Son Jesus Christ’s sake.”**  
**AMEN.**

### III

#### “THAT MOST EXCELLENT GIFT”

WE cannot expect to make the best of life unless we claim and use the “most excellent gift” God has for us. That seems too obvious to need saying, and yet how many even of those who “profess and call themselves Christians” do actually regard “charity” as the most vital of all elements in their true welfare?

Partly, of course, the fault lies in the restricted use which has come to be made of the word in connexion with certain definite and not always very welcome duties. On the material side *charity* stands for the providing of money, or what it can buy, for those in want; on the spiritual side its meaning is apt to be limited to some restraint of unkindness in the judgments we pass upon other people. In either sense there is a certain coldness and impersonality in the ordinary idea of what “charity” does actually ask of us, and no vision at all of what it offers to those who claim and use the power of exercising it as God’s “most excellent gift.”

I suppose this is why the word has been changed to "love" in St Paul's famous encomium upon it; to some advantage, no doubt, yet also with a loss not only of rhythm but of certain vitally important shades of meaning.

Perhaps one can best recapture these by dwelling upon the word in its Latin form of "caritas" or "dearness": the "dearness of other people," as it has been called. The giving of money, etc., in "charity" and the effort after "charitable" judgments are not necessarily identical with "caritas" in this sense. They may express the "dearness" of other people and their concerns, or they may only express the desire for self-justification—the desire to feel that you have done what duty and principle demand, and may therefore be counted, "as touching the Law" of speech and conduct, "blameless."

You have only to read through that wonderful 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, changing the word "charity" into "caritas" in this sense of the *dearness* of other people and their interests, to see what a difference it makes. All those glorious but most difficult achievements which seem sometimes more than one can even aim at, and quite impossible to attain—the long-suffering and the kindness not

## “That Most Excellent Gift” 43

easily provoked, the “envying-not” and seeking not of one’s own, and all the other high, hard triumphs of “charity”—are seen in their true light as the natural and necessary outcome of the “caritas” to which other people’s interests are really dear. You can’t help being patient, forbearing, generous, kind towards those whose interests are dear to you; the *dearness* or “caritas” is the gift to be sought, and then the results are bound to follow.

Among the various common hindrances to making the best of life a place must be found for yet one more, and that is the habit of setting one’s aim upon effects instead of causes. Certainly it works strongly against success in making the best of other people. We are so apt to say “I must try to be more patient, more gentle, more generous, or more just in my dealings with So-and-so,” and then we find our efforts disappointingly poor in their results. The fact being that we have been busying ourselves with the effects we want to arrive at rather than with the cause which lies behind them; and so long as we do this the effects continually elude us. Whereas they begin to follow of necessity as soon as we have learnt to “covet earnestly” that best gift of “caritas,”



the *making dear* to one's self the true interests of other people.

Call to mind for a moment one or two of those whom you find hardest to "get on with." They "get on your nerves" perhaps, or they rouse a sense of resentment or antagonism which calls forth all that is least lovable in yourself. You are conscious of it; you deplore it, and very likely you resolve over and over again to be less critical or more forbearing. You pray, no doubt, for grace to achieve this, and you may be to some extent successful. But it will always be rather a laboured and halting effort at loving-kindness so long as you approach it from *your* side, so to speak, to clear your conscience rather than to benefit the other person.

I expect we all know something, from experience, of the different feelings roused in us by the person who is kind or just or forgiving to satisfy his conscience and the one who does or says precisely the same things, perhaps, but for our sakes, not his own—because he *cares* for us. I remember once hearing an impatient friend say, "I hate the kindnesses people show you out of self-respect, because they are they, and not because you are you!" The difference is one to remember when you

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stand in the benefactor's place. The desire for righteousnesses on your side does not, and never can, produce the same effect as the desire for the other person's true interests which springs from the “*caritas*” that views those interests from their own side, and *cares* about them.

Not an easy matter in many cases; sometimes not possible in your own strength. The power to care for the interests of people not personally known and loved by you is not an attainment but a gift direct from God Himself—His “most excellent gift”—and the way to gain it is first to “covet” it *earnestly*, as St Paul taught, and then to ask for it in prayer. I doubt if there is any surer step towards making the best of life than to use daily the Quinquagesima Collect, not as a mere form, but because you do truly crave and desire a fuller measure of that power of caring for the good of others which you cannot attain to for yourself, and “without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before God.”

Those are strong words; too strong to be repeated without taking the trouble to realise their meaning. Every time you say them you accept the truth that there is no vitality in even the best of words or deeds done or said

out of self-respect and not out of care for those benefited. You acknowledge the necessity of shifting the centre of your endeavour from your side to theirs, and of aiming at their good rather than at your justification.

The great thing to realise here, as in all God's dealings with us, is that it is not a question of arbitrary commands and penalties, but of inevitable cause and effect. You are not threatened that if you fail to claim and exercise God's most excellent gift of "caritas" you will be "counted dead" by Him, as a punishment. You are simply warned that by such failure you will be cutting yourself off from all that makes for growth, expansion, progress in your life; from all, in fact, that saves it from being a living death. God does not say that you must be charitable, or you shall be counted dead so far as His promises are concerned. He says that without charity—the *caritas* which cares for the good of others—it is impossible to claim those promises and to enjoy with them "the life that is life indeed."

And if you want to look into the reason for this, I think you will find it in that which lies at the heart of this human life of ours—*personality*. When God made man in His image, He made him to be a *person*. He deals with us as

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*persons*, and He calls upon us to deal with one another as such; and to fail in obedience to His call is to sin.

It has been said that every sin that we human beings commit against one another is a “sin of impersonality,” because it means some refusal to regard the personality of the one injured. The murderer, the swindler, the seducer, each sees his victim in an impersonal light as an obstacle or an instrument to his desires, or as a means to his enrichment; not as a person with possibilities to be developed, and rights and interests to be respected. The employer who estimates the qualities of those under him by the benefit he can gain through their services may practise justice and even kindness, but if this is solely in order to get better work done for himself, he is not clear from this “sin of impersonality.” Neither is the selfish mother, however great her fondness may be towards the child whom she clings to as *her* treasure, *her* pride and joy, dealing with it not as an independent personality with its own individual urge of development, but rather as a source of pleasure to herself.

In an inspiring book on “What Men Live By,”<sup>1</sup> Dr R. C. Cabot asks the searching question:

<sup>1</sup> Harrap & Co., 1915.

“Is there one of us who has not been guilty at some time of the sin of impersonality?”—the sin, as he defines it, “of treating a person as something less than a person.” It is the sin which lies behind the petty meannesses and unkindnesses of life as well as behind its greater evils, and it militates fatally against the possibility of ever making the best of life, either for one’s self or others. And from this sin our sure deliverance lies in God’s most excellent gift, for the “charity” which *cares* for other people’s interests is the very opposite of the impersonal selfishness which sees them chiefly as helps or hindrances to one’s own desires.

To “covet earnestly” this best gift of *caritas* is in sober truth “no vain thing for you, for it is your life.”

## IV

### LIFE'S CONFLICTS

LIFE is not only a harvest-field ; it is a battleground as well. Some element of conflict seems to be essential to the full development of our human nature, but it must be warfare profitably waged and rightly directed, and this is just where we so often fail. We use the forces at our command so wastefully, and do our fighting all too often not against the real enemy. So that it is worth taking the trouble to do a little clear thinking about the matter, to see if there are any simple ways in which our ordinary practice might be amended towards making a truer and richer "best" of life by means of its conflicts.

One of the great lessons which warfare teaches the nations of the world is to make a practical use of the discoveries of science, and it is a lesson well worth applying to the conflicts of our individual lives. I can only try to point out a few of the most obvious lines along which science can help us in fighting the

battles of life, but just these very inadequate suggestions may serve to show how much new light has been shed upon our everyday problems by the scientific discoveries of the past half century.

It is just over sixty years since Louis Pasteur opened a new era of possibilities in thought as well as in medical science by teaching the world to see in disease a conflict and not a passive condition. A conflict, too, to be decided not solely by the strength of the hostile forces, but also—and chiefly—by the power of resistance which could be called forth at the centre of attack. To develop to the utmost this power of resistance he showed to be an aim better worth striving for than that of merely counteracting the symptoms of disease as they appeared.

This sounds all so obvious now that we are apt to forget what an immense advance it meant in that part of life's warfare which has to be waged with disease, and we also forget to ask what help it has for us in other parts of the battlefield. As to this, three points seem to me to stand out as pre-eminently worthy of attention.

## (1)

First, the possibilities which Pasteur opened up with regard to the development of this *power of resistance* to attacks upon life at its heart and centre. One of the great problems he set himself was to discover why the same forces of disease should be fatal in one case and not in another. His famous experiments with fowls were directed towards proving how far the destructive power of disease could be increased or lessened by the conditions under which the attacks had to be resisted. Having inoculated a number of hens with anthrax germs, he put some to stand with their feet in cold water, whilst others were kept warm and dry and comfortable, with the result that the latter overcame the attack victoriously while the others succumbed to it.

Obviously so! perhaps you will say; yet the truth was not obvious until Pasteur discovered it, and even now, sixty years later, I wonder how far we have brought it practically to bear upon our own everyday conflicts with trials and difficulties of all kinds as well as with whatever attacks of pain and sickness have to be met. I wonder how often we play for our-



selves the part which Pasteur played with the hens destined for disaster, lessening our powers of resistance by condemning our minds to soak in chill thoughts of self-pity instead of gaining comfort and strength in the realisation of God's love.

It may often be easy enough to justify self-pity in your own mind, but unhappily that does not alter its ill effects. All the teaching of science supports this truth with the one elementary lesson, continually repeated in different forms, that the causes you put in action are not hindered from producing their effects by the fact that you intended something different. However strongly you may be convinced that some particular trial is really more than you ought to be asked to bear, or that it has come to you (as it very likely has) through some other person's selfishness, the fact remains that your power to meet it victoriously is bound to be weakened by self-pity. And I think you will find (at least such is my own experience) that temptation to indulge in this luxury loses much of its attractiveness when you picture yourself in the position of one of Pasteur's condemned hens, soaking away your powers of resistance in a cold bath of self-pity, but with this difference, that whereas the hens' sorry plight was forced upon them, yours is of your own devising.

It is surprising how much less satisfaction there is to be found in dwelling upon one's "just causes of complaint" when viewed in this ignoble and rather foolish light. It is foolish, if you come to think of it, to indulge in the momentary solace of self-commiseration at the cost of a permanent handicap, not in one only of life's conflicts but in all that have to be met.

(2)

That is another of the truths which modern science calls us to realise—that the battles of life are not independent conflicts, each over and done with in its turn, but a series of different engagements in one and the same campaign. And the power to win the hardest fights may be developed in encounters with feebler foes. The victories over disease gained by means of Pasteur's inoculations with "attenuated virus" showed how attacks of deadly power may be resisted by forces strengthened through a series of milder combats. He used the period of "incubation"—while the germs of disease were gradually developing within the sufferer's body their full powers of destruction—to train the defending forces to an adequate resistance by

accustoming them to deal with similar onslaughts, mild at first and steadily increasing in intensity.

This is, I know, a very incomplete account of the process of inoculation, but I only want to point out this one practical lesson to be learnt from it by those who do truly want to make the best of life. Two lessons, perhaps one should rather say, since it teaches us both to see life's lesser conflicts in the right light and to use them in the right way.

To see them in the right light ; not merely as painful experiences to be resented, but rather as opportunities of gaining power to conquer in a harder fight. The patient whom a mad dog has bitten is not so foolish as to complain of the pain and discomfort inflicted upon him by the repeated inoculations to which he is subjected. He knows that the very fact that these cause suffering means that his powers of resistance are being called forth and exercised to repel the deadlier attack presently to be met. And so he makes no effort to evade these minor conflicts, but rather welcomes them as his best hope of being able to come out victorious from the big fight when it comes.

There is a valuable hint here for all who choose to apply it to "making the best" of those tiresome little conflicts with inclina-

tion, indolence, ambition, pride, and all the other hidden forces that challenge one in daily life. The battles to be fought with these lose half their power to vex and weary you when once you have come to see in them not injuries to be resented, or hardships to be escaped if possible, but rather opportunities for gaining fuller strength for sterner fighting. There is sound scientific principle as well as gallant courage in Browning's trumpet-call :

“ Then welcome each rebuff  
That turns earth's smoothness rough,  
Each sting that bids nor sit, nor stand, but go !  
Be your joy three parts pain,  
Strive, and hold cheap the strain,  
Learn, nor account the pang ; dare, never grudge the  
throe ! ”

(3)

Side by side with this lesson of the importance of fighting life's battles gallantly there is the warning which psychology has for us as to the dangers of trying to escape the conflict, or of not carrying it to a finish. How grave these dangers are, and how many forms they take, are among the lessons which psychologists have taught with new emphasis during the present

century, and especially since the Great War. They tell us that some of the most disabling sicknesses, both of body and mind, may be traced back to a conflict evaded instead of being fought out.

Sometimes it is a personal weakness, fault, or other source of humiliation, which the sufferer has sought to ignore rather than have to reckon with it. Sometimes the source of trouble has lain outside himself, in conditions of life that he finds hard or distasteful, or in some difficult or dangerous efforts demanded of him, or in his relationships with other people. Whatever the cause may have been, the result is a threatened conflict with his own desires, and his instinctive impulse is to escape from it. So deep down in his nature does the impulse lie, that he may be able to avoid being clearly conscious of it and may believe, with his surface mind, that his sincere wish is to meet his trials like a man. But in the depths of his "unconscious mind" the longing for escape is working all the while, sometimes through the disablement of the body, sometimes even by the unhinging of the conscious mind and will, to raise up a wall of defence against the trouble that is being shirked, or at least to hide it.

In Dr Bernard Hart's well-known book on "The Psychology of Insanity," he speaks of the number of patients in mental hospitals and asylums who have been brought there by the endeavour to escape some conflict they were not willing to fight out. The charwoman who in the intervals of her scrubbing in the wards claims to be Queen of England, the unsuccessful business man who in the shelter of the asylum finds satisfaction in writing cheques for fabulous sums and in proclaiming himself Lord of the World, each has persisted so long in the endeavour to escape conflict with life's actual difficulties and limitations that the power to distinguish between fact and fancy has disappeared.

These are, of course, among the extreme instances of the working out of a principle. But the principle itself applies none the less to ordinary experience, and it is a very practical help towards making the best of life to bear in mind the fact that every refusal of conflict with difficulties and trials that are "all in the day's work" means some lessening of one's power to face realities, and to resist disease, and to "see life steadily and see it whole."

## (4)

There is one other point which must not be forgotten with regard to life's conflicts, and that is the importance of directing our conflicts rightly. We have so much more power here than most of us realise or use. When our fighting forces are called forth by some sudden blow from outside ourselves—it may be an unkind word or action, it may be a shock of disappointment or a mere mischance — to repress them entirely may be beyond our power; it may not even always be the wisest course; but the thing we can always do, and do profitably, is to turn them in the right direction.

The primitive instinct, as we all know, is to "hit back" at the immediate cause of our suffering; to hurt, if we can, or, if we can't, at any rate to complain. It is what every child begins by doing, and we all retain the impulse until we have formed the habit of changing the objective of our fighting forces, and directing them not outwards but within.

It sounds a great deal more difficult than in fact it is. For the real, vigorous force in the matter is the impulse to strike and wound,

called forth by the hurt to feelings, pride, expectation, or whatever it may be. And it is a mistake to think that this impulse can only find satisfaction in working itself out in complaint, resentment, or active retaliation directed against the immediate cause of the pain. It all depends upon the view you have learnt to take of yourself and your "due"—that important point already touched upon. If smooth paths and pleasant happenings and indulgent kindness are what you reckon as your due, you will find it hard to restrain the impulse to "hit back" when these are denied you. But once you have learnt to take every scrap of comfort, happiness, love, that comes your way as God's good gift—unmerited, and therefore calling for the humblest thankfulness—you will find that you view the painful experiences of life in a different light. You will see them less as injustices to be resented and more as blows dealt, it may often be, by unkind hands, yet directed by God Himself against your pride, or your selfishness, or your impatience, or some other enemy within the camp.

And when you do come to see them in this way, it will be against that inside traitor foe that your anger and your desire to wound



will be directed. You will aim, not at finding some words or action which shall "relieve your feelings" of pride, impatience, or whatever form of self-love has suffered hurt, but rather at gaining the attitude of mind which desires the destruction of that particular source of weakness within you. If the attitude of mind is right, your words and deeds will shape themselves to it; not very perfectly, perhaps, all at once, but better and better with repeated practice.

That is the secret of it all—to try, and try, and try again—and until you have done this you have no right to call it impossible. It is not impossible to form the habit of checking the blind impulse of resentment when you are hurt or vexed, and of asking yourself what it is that has actually roused your anger, and how far self comes into it. And if you put the question honestly, trying for the true answer, you will gradually find that you are growing quicker to see when the sting comes from some failing of your own that has had a blow, and that you are less eager to defend that failing and readier to turn your fighting forces against it.

I doubt if it is possible to exaggerate the importance of learning to direct our forces

rightly in the conflicts of daily life, at whatever may be the cost. For the final result of persisting in the wrong application of one's fighting instinct is darkly shadowed for us in the warning, ". . . lest haply you be found to fight against God."

## NOTE

Some valuable thoughts upon the element of *conflict* or *resistance* in life may be gained from the following passages taken from a little book on "Creative Thought," by Sir William Barrett, F.R.S.

"All manifestation, whether of force, or life, or goodness, involves the *overcoming* of some reluctance or resistance. The physical energies of gravitation, electricity, light, heat, etc., reveal themselves to us in the process of overcoming the inertia of matter.

"We know absolutely nothing of the abstract or essential nature of Force, or of any physical Energy, such as gravity, electricity, etc. We do not see electricity in a lightning flash, nor in the electric light. What we see is the overcoming of resistance in the path of some hidden power; we see the glowing particles of air in the lightning, or of carbon in the electric lamp—a resultant jointly due to the resistance encountered and the transit of the unseen power. . . .

". . . The most powerful locomotive ever made, the largest cruiser ever built, would be unable to move

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a fraction of an inch if the *resistance* of the rails or the water were not present. And is not this physical fact exactly similar to the moral problem that is before us ?

“ . . . The life and work of Florence Nightingale (as of many others) afford an illustration of great achievements won by the mental and moral power she possessed of overcoming the resistance she encountered.”

## V

### LIFE'S LIMITATIONS

LIMITATIONS of some kind there must be to every life; upon that point I suppose every one outside a lunatic asylum would be agreed. It is when we come to the question of how to deal with our limitations that our differences begin, both in the ways of thought which we follow and in their consequences.

One way is to see in life's limitations an effectual reason for its failures. "If only my circumstances were different," you often hear the lament (or my family or friends, my powers of mind or body, or whatever the disabilities may be), "I should be able to accomplish this or that; but as things are, just look how I am handicapped!" And then every hampering element in the setting of that individual life is noted and strengthened, and the energy expended over this is just so much lessening of power to make a full use of what scope there is.

It is quite a popular method; oddly so if you come to think of it, seeing that it is so

obviously the wrong way of going to work. The more meagre the harvest, the greater is the importance of gathering up every grain; the weaker the forces and the poorer the weapons wherewith to wage our conflicts, the more needful it becomes to use them to the best advantage. The less we have of time or strength or other means of achievement at our disposal, the less can we afford to waste any part of them in vain rebellion or regret. Again, one of the truths which are as obvious as you please and yet which do succeed in getting continually overlooked. Among all the many and various ways in which we fail to make the best of life I doubt if there is one more common or more effectual than this of wrongly regarding and using its limitations. How can we make the best of what lies within these so long as we spend our force either in deploring how little it is, or in beating against barriers we cannot overpass?

On the other hand, how are we to arrive at the right view of life's limitations? That is the practical question, and the first step towards finding the answer is to see them as a shifting barrier and not an immovable one established once for all. If you want a simile for the factors which restrict your life and limit your

activities you should seek it in the tides of the sea rather than in a stone wall. Possibilities that are closed to you one moment may be open the next, and those now within your grasp may have vanished by the time you have made up your mind to claim them. The true wisdom with regard to life's limitations would seem to lie not in trying to disregard them, nor yet in sitting down passively to bewail their narrowness, but rather in accepting each moment's barriers as effectual *for that moment only*, and using to the full the opportunities they include.

This has so much to do with making the best of life that it is well worth taking trouble to gain a firm hold upon both of the two main truths of the *inexorableness* of life's limitations and of the *possibility of change* ever present in them. They are not easy truths to keep both together steadily in view, each in its true relation to the other, and the temptation is to save trouble by concentrating our attention upon one only instead of both. It is so much easier either to accept our limitations once for all and keep permanently within them, however much we may grumble and protest, or to be perpetually beating our heads against them, or to pretend they are not there, rather than to

accept them unreservedly for the moment and yet be always in readiness to find a breach made at some point and to press through it into a wider sphere. It is so much easier! but it makes it impossible to claim *the best* life holds for us.

## (1)

Perhaps the first of the “easier” alternatives—the permanent acceptance of one’s limitations—is answerable for the greatest amount of lost power and health and happiness. Doctors have made startling discoveries, during the past quarter of a century, as to the amount of “chronic” illness which is due to the patient having accepted as permanent disabilities some of the passing consequences of an accident or disease. Dr A. F. Hurst has given it as his opinion,<sup>1</sup> after wide experience, that “there are few symptoms caused by organic disease which are not liable to be aggravated and perpetuated by suggestion.” He instances what often happens in Rheumatoid Arthritis :

“The active disease dies out eventually, sometimes only after many years. . . . But

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<sup>1</sup> In “Medical Essays and Addresses,” 1924.

patients who have been long confined to bed on account of the pain involved in moving their limbs rarely discover for themselves when the time for activity has arrived.

“ I believe that there are thousands of people bed-ridden in their homes, in infirmaries and in hospitals for incurables, who are really capable of taking up their beds and walking if they only knew it.

“ When the active disease has died out, the fixity of the joints is very rarely due to ” [a few physical causes which he names, going on to express his belief that] . . . “ in most cases it is mainly due to the prolonged inactivity having fixed the idea of incapacity in the patient's mind. His muscles are weak from disuse, but they are not paralysed ; his joints are stiff, but they are not ankylosed. Yet he makes no attempt to move them. The incapacity is, in fact . . . caused by the suggestion of incapacity, developing in the patient's own mind, and afterwards in the minds of those in attendance upon him.”

One of the healing works of psychology is to enable sufferers to realise when the limitations within which they are imprisoned have ceased to exist for them, and thus to set free many who have been keeping themselves within the narrow circuit of barriers that have been broken down. Their own blind acceptance of



the permanence of their limitations has kept them prisoners in an open cell.

Nor is the trouble limited to bodily and mental ills; indeed it probably is responsible for still more loss and failure in the spiritual sphere of life's possibilities, even though we are less quick to recognise it there. I wonder how many of us are suffering from the seeming paralysis of our spiritual faculties—from powerlessness in work and worship, dumbness in prayer, deafness to God's voice and blindness to His Presence—all because we have accepted as permanent every limitation whereof our failures have made us aware. We say, "I am no good at prayer!" or "I cannot make worship real, or the Bible interesting," or whatever our failure of the moment may be, and we settle down to it as a disability there is no escaping.

(2)

Yet the true escape from this continued acquiescence in life's limitations is not to be found in the opposite extreme of refusing to recognise that they have ever really existed. That way some brilliant successes lie, but also many dire disasters. The policy of insisting

that you are not ill, not maimed or suffering in any way, not hampered by past sins, is splendidly effective in so far as it is true; but when unhappily it does not square with the actual facts of the case, the best it can do for you is to encourage you to "bluff" those facts. And although this will result in your making ventures which you would not otherwise have dared, it will result also in your failing to use the help which you need, and for lack of which you are bound to suffer loss of some kind. Nor will the consequences be rendered any less disastrous by the resolute denial of their existence.

That is a truth to remember when one is faced with the attractions of the many modern systems of thought and practice offering escape from life's limitations at the price of a simple refusal to reckon with them. The brilliant results claimed for such teaching, in fettered powers set free and activity called forth in crippled lives, are dazzling enough until you begin to count the cost at which they have been won in loss of power to distinguish truth from falsehood. For "if the light which is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"

And all the while the old, simple Faith of Christ has a "more excellent way" ready for

all who will follow it in the treatment of life's limitations.

(3)

That way is to recognise your limitations as very real for the present moment, but *for that moment only*, and to take them always as a challenge to explore their full extent. Faber has outlined this way for us in his well-known lines :

“When obstacles and trials seem  
like prison-walls to be,  
I do the little I can do,  
and leave the rest to Thee.”

“The little I can do”; yes, but the *whole* of it; and the less it is the more vital is the importance of not missing the smallest possibility. That is the point to keep in mind if ever you are tempted to lapse into the mistake of making the fact that you can't do much a reason for not doing anything at all. The narrower your limitations the more important it is to press right up to them on every side, so as to be sure of missing no opportunity they afford. Also you will be ready then to pass through and beyond them at whatever point an opening may presently appear. We so

often miss our opportunities of freedom by looking for them only in the one direction whence we have made up our minds that they can come.

This applies to every part of life, and very specially to that of health and illness. A far "more excellent way" than that of trying to ignore or deny the limitations of illness is to claim every inch of ground that lies within them, and not suffer them to restrict you more closely than they need.

Again and again, in our troubles, we set up imaginary prison-walls for ourselves, far inside the limits of those that do actually shut us in. Because we are ill we assume that we must be selfish; because we are suffering under some great grief or trial we turn away from the light of every joy; because life has gone hard with us we keep ourselves chained to the hardship, for all the world to see. And all the while the limitations we have been railing against as so cruelly narrow have contained quite a large sphere of possibilities that we never have explored.

It would be a good maxim for every sufferer to bear in mind, that *you have no right to bewail the narrowness of your limitations until you are certain of having exhausted all the possibilities*

*which they include.* And when once you have set to work in earnest to make sure of this, you will find that you have no time left for complaining.

## (4)

This, then, is the way of Christian wisdom with regard to life's limitations; to explore them to the utmost, without either beating your head against them or pretending that they are not there. When you do find yourself literally "up against" them, take the thing that blocks you, whatever it may be, as marking out God's will for you *at that moment*, although not necessarily for to-morrow.

Limitations cease to be prison-walls when you see in them God's plan for ensuring, in His love, that you shall complete one stage in life's training before going on to the next. It may be there are lessons of patience, courage, gentleness to be learnt before you can rise to the fuller possibilities your Father would have you claim. It may be there are powers dormant within you that can only be called forth by putting out of action some of your other powers. It may be that there is some high, hard task which the Lord Jesus would have you share with Him,

and for which you must be made ready. And your preparation may demand—as the highest training so often does—that you shall be cut off from one set of possibilities in order that you may claim certain others to the full.

One can only speculate upon these points, and speculation does not carry us far. The one thing certain is that the surest way of extending the scope of life's limitations is to use to the utmost every possibility which lies within them. It applies to our work as well as to our troubles.

“A dreary job this,” says one person, “not worthy of me or my powers, and so not worth taking trouble about.” And so he goes on reviling it, and taking as little trouble as possible, and grinding away at it more and more drearily, and with less and less hope of exchanging it for anything better.

“A dreary job,” says another, “and therefore all the more need to be sure I am making the very best that can be made of it.” And so he works at it to the outside limits of possibility, and finds in time either that the job is transformed or that it has led on to a worthier undertaking.

## (5)

This possibility of change and expansion in our limitations is an immensely important one to keep in view. I wonder whether it may not hold the solution of some of our hardest problems of illness and healing, especially, perhaps, the "chronic" cases already touched upon. Our difficulties with regard to these are not entirely met by the discovery of medical science, already alluded to,<sup>1</sup> that some sufferers continue to keep themselves prisoners within limitations that have really ceased to exist. For although this may often be the case it is not always so, and we all know how wearing is the strain of expectations continually renewed without fulfilment.

But there is no such strain for the sufferer whose hopes are set anew each day upon the widening of his limitations, not in one direction only but in every way that makes for fuller power and freedom of spirit and mind as well as body. To him each new day brings opportunities of gaining new ground in one direction or another, and in proportion as his love to God grows deeper will he himself be more content

<sup>1</sup> See p. 66.

to leave to God's ordering what those opportunities and their results should be, making it his own sole care not to *choose* but to *use* them to the utmost of his power. Thus he escapes the ill effects which hamper in different ways both the invalid who is certain of being no better to-morrow and the one who is confident of being perfectly well. The former is helping to strengthen his prison-walls, the second risks weakening his powers of resistance by repeated disappointments. Not so the sufferer whose chief concern is to make the best use of the power and freedom left open to him by his limitations, and to be ready to pass through and beyond these when God prepares an outlet, *wherever it may be*.

That last is an important point, for it is just here that we often fail to claim the fuller freedom that might be ours. We are so sure that our only escape into a wider life must be by the way of more health, more ease, more money, comfort, kindness, or whatever we chiefly crave, that we forget to look for the possibility of growing more free by growing less selfish, impatient, proud. And yet it may be that all the health and all the money in the world could not widen our limitations so effectually.



ally as will the breaking down of some inner barrier of self-love. There may be changes to be brought about in ourselves before any changes in our circumstances can make us really happier or more free.

I suppose we none of us find it easy to see just how it is in our own case, so that our best wisdom, when hampered by illness or any other humiliating limitation, is to seek, by the help of God the Holy Spirit, first to see and then to break through every hindrance which lies within ourselves. How to set about this is, of course, the question, in regard to which the few practical suggestions given later on<sup>1</sup> may be of use, together with these two beliefs which I would suggest for careful thought.

First, that God's will for every one of us is that our limitations—whether of sickness or other disabilities—shall not be the same for ever, but shall be made wider, in one way or another, every day.

Next, that it is not for us to choose the direction in which this widening of our limitations is to be sought, because we cannot tell where lies our worst hindrance to power and freedom.

Therefore our best hope of claiming the full possibilities which life holds for us lies in learning

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. VIII.

not to pick and choose too much among its opportunities of service, kindness, joy, but to keep a watchful look-out for each one as it comes, and to seize and use it before its "restless wingéd feet" have passed us by.

## (6)

Nor must the problem of other people's limitations be left quite out of sight, for here also we have so much more power than some of us have ever realised, and we cannot escape using it to help or hinder.

Whether we will or no, we make it harder or easier for those who cross our path to escape from the bondage of their especial faults and failings, and so often, alas, we help to establish these more firmly by viewing them as "hopeless" selfishness, "incurable" vanity, and the like.

That popular story of a generation ago, "Little Lord Fauntleroy," owed its appeal to the picture it gave of the power of a child's trustful love to break through the limitations of an old man's selfishness. Those limitations had come to be accepted as inevitable by the tyrant himself and by those about him, with the result that he grew more and more deeply

imprisoned in his own tyranny. It was the child's refusal to believe in this, and his confidence in the old man's kindness, which drew back the bolts and bars, and set the prisoner free.

It is worth while to remember now and then how much we all have owed, at some time or another, to those who have refused to accept our faults and failings as permanent limitations, and have gone on treating us as able and eager to claim our freedom until, at last—

“ . . . a bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,  
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.  
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,  
And what we *mean* we say, and what we *would*  
we know ! ”

## VI

### LIFE'S GLORY

A LAST thought about life's limitations is hinted at in the words of one who throughout many and hampering trials never failed to find comfort in the realisation that "one's prison-walls have no roof; not even the tallest of them."

They may shut you in on every side, as the Psalmist lamented, but they cannot shut out the heaven above you or the glory streaming down into your narrow little world. You, and you only, can cut yourself off from that by cowering in the shadow of your prison-walls instead of taking your stand where the sunlight falls upon you—"keeping yourself in the love of God." In that radiance the absolute "best" of life is revealed, and even our limitations lose something of their dread.

*Radiance*—that is the word which seems to bring us nearest to the heart of all that glory means. A glorious deed is not a deed of any one kind or description, but a deed that *shines out*, kindling some reflection of its radiance in

answering impulses. A glorious life is not a life lived in this way or that, but one from which light streams forth into other lives. And if you want to know whence that light comes, you will find that the source is always *love* in one of its many forms.

Every one who has known love has known something of life's glory. The knowledge that you are loved makes no change in the circumstances of your life, and yet how completely it transforms the whole world for you! Things which were hard become easy; trials that seemed unbearable are gaily faced; the burdens you have found so heavy cease to gall and press, and all because you approach them in the radiance shining from the love which has glorified your life.

That love did not turn you into a different being, but it called out all that was best in you, all the courage and the kindness and the readiness to give and forgive which were there all the time, only they had got hidden away in dark corners; smothered, perhaps, under dead grievances which you hastened to clear out when love's light showed them up in all their ugliness. And the result was that all that was best in you had room to grow, and the blinding dust of cherished resentments was

swept away, and you gained power to see the beautiful things of life more clearly and to rejoice in them with an intenser joy. You knew then what it was to find that, in the light of love,

“ . . . a livelier emerald twinkles in the grass,  
A purer sapphire melts into the sea.”

It is a revelation that comes to every one who has known love—love, not only in royal beauty, but even in its humblest guise—and if the light has shone but for a moment and the glory has seemed a transient gleam, the fault is in the one who finds it so. For the new possibilities which love discloses and the new powers it calls forth are ours to claim and use for ever after. If they fail us, it is because we have let them lapse when the joy of love turned into anguish or long-drawn sacrifice or aching loss.

It is a strange thing, if you come to think of it, that we who are so ready to complain that life lacks glory should not be readier to cherish every ray of it that shines into our hearts. It is we who rob our lives of brightness when we let the shadow of pain or loss or disappointment cloud a single one of all the gleams, small and great, strong or flicker-

ing, which love has kindled for us. Sometimes, because one great love has failed us, or because our best beloved has passed out of sight, we complain that all the light has gone out of life; we let our own tears blind us to every other radiance. Or perhaps we turn away from all life's lesser glories, simply because they are not the one supreme splendour on which we have set our hearts.

It all comes back to the old question of what we count our "due." It is when we claim as our right the very best love has to offer that we fail to rejoice in each humblest and most fleeting glint of kindness sent across our path,

". . . by love more tender,  
More complete, more divine."

To take all love, in all its forms, direct from God, as His unmerited, most gracious gift, is the way to find the glory veiled by life's shadows, and to claim

". . . our chance of the prize of learning love,  
What love might be, hath been indeed, and is."

It is a prize which, once gained, never need be lost again; it is a glory that can shine through every gloom save that of our own

making. Selfishness and not sorrow is the cloud which hides the radiance that can glorify life even through its darkest hours.

“ Because you found me worthy of your love,  
I must walk worthier through all days to be ;  
Because your presence filled my life with light,  
My lonely hours shall not be dark to me.”

Or, in St Paul's words :

“ I thank my God at every remembrance of you.”

There you have the secret of making the whole of life richer and more glorious for every gleam of love that has ever shone upon it, not from great and lasting affection only, but from each word and act of kindness bestowed upon you, no matter whence it comes. The stranger who has been kind to you on a journey, the child who had a smile and a loving greeting for you, the friend who did you some small, unlooked-for service—each flashed a tiny ray of brightness into your life, and it is for you to choose whether you will just let it die out again or cherish it with thankful remembrance both of the giver and the gift.

“ *I thank my God at every remembrance of you—even though you may have flitted, like a bird of passage, into my life and out again.*



You made it brighter for your passing, and I thank God for this ! ”

Such thankfulness adds most surely to the glory of life and to its power of service, for it sets the light of love to shine outwards and not inwards, in ever-increasing eagerness to share with others the “joy of harvest” gathered from every kindness, small or great, which God’s love causes to spring up along life’s way.

Yes, you may say, this is all very well when you have got to the point of being able to see all love always in this light, as God’s gift, and value it as such ; but how is this point to be arrived at ? That surely is the first question.

And so indeed it is, and the answer is much simpler than most of us are inclined to expect beforehand, for our part in the matter is only to keep close enough to God for Him to do the rest. It is quite true, as people sometimes say, that you cannot *make* yourself love God or be grateful for His love ; but you *can* take that one step towards seeking Him which makes it possible for Him to meet your faltering efforts with the strong grasp of His love. You *can* “keep yourself in the love of God” instead of forgetting all about it, or shutting it out with complaints, just as on a sunny

day you can keep yourself in the sunlight instead of creeping out of it into dark, shadowed nooks. And just as God works His healing works by the sunlight, in ways beyond your ken, so does He with His love.

You will not be able to follow the process or to control it step by step. You cannot always say, at a moment of your own choosing, "Now I am going to gain a deeper sense of gratitude towards God!" or "Now I am going to learn to love Him better, and to value all love more truly for His sake." God works in secret, in spiritual as in physical matters. Our part in a "sunlight cure" is simply to place the sufferer where the sun's rays can fall upon him, and then wait in faith for their healing, transforming power to take effect. Our part in learning to love God is simply to keep ourselves in the light of the knowledge of His love until the thought of it and the power of it take hold of us, and "we ourselves are changed and glorified . . . changed by the purification of our hearts, by the renewal of our lives; changed with an ever-deepening change which is a foretaste and an earnest of the great hereafter."

I quote from one<sup>1</sup> of whom it was said that

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Lightfoot.

he lived and worked in the light of the glory of God's love, and from whom we may glean a simple counsel and a beautiful prayer to help us here.

“Retire from time to time to the Mountain of God, and there stand face to face with the Eternal Presence; there contemplate the majesty of God's holiness and the glory of God's love, as mirrored in the Person and the life of Christ; there gaze and gaze again, that you may be transformed into the same image, from glory to glory.”<sup>1</sup>

That was his practical counsel; now for the prayer he gave, for help in fulfilling it.

“Lord, we beseech Thee, show us Thy glory. This must be our first and last petition. Open our eyes, that we may see: purge our senses, that we may apprehend. Teach us ever more and more to know Thee as Thou art, to see Thy Righteousness, Thy Love, Thy Holiness, Thy Truth. Widen the cleft of the rock in which we stand; withhold Thine hand from our eyelids yet longer; let Thy passing Form rest, if it be only for a moment, on the field of our vision here, so that at length, if it cannot be in this life, yet in the life to come Thou mayest turn Thy face full upon us, and we may gaze with unaverted eye.”

<sup>1</sup> Compare the thought given in Appendix II.

Life's glory : I wonder if there is any risk of possible misunderstanding in linking the thought of it so closely with the thought of love ? Yet the more deeply one thinks it out, the clearer it seems to be that it is just here that the difference between true and false glory lies. It is the difference between a diamond and the picture of it. The one receives light to give it out again, the other absorbs every ray that falls upon itself.

The glory which shines from within is kindled always by that which is love's prerogative, the readiness to give and not solely to receive. Love of family, of friends, of country, of humanity, of truth—of God Himself—each proves its power and its reality by this readiness to give which makes the radiance that can transfigure even the dullest, poorest life. While, on the other hand, that force of selfish desire which we miscall "love" of money, admiration, ease, power, or other forms of personal gratification, is exerted wholly towards drawing in, not giving out. It is the effort to be a centre upon which light is focussed rather than a source from which it shines ; and that makes for admiration, very likely, and dominance and envy and power of a kind ; but not for true glory.

The names which shine out most gloriously from the pages of history are the names of those who have not *gained* but *given* most, culminating in the Name that is above all others. God's supreme glory is the glory of supreme giving; not only that He created this world of ours, but that He so *loved* it that He *gave* His Son to save from destruction the creatures made in His likeness. So that it would seem hardly possible to link the thought of true glory too closely with the thought of true love, which always means giving out and not merely drawing in.

It all leads up to the one central truth which is so simple, and yet which we so often miss—that the surest way of finding life's glory lies in seeking the glory of God. If you know already what this means, you know that these words are true; and if they have an unreal sound to you, you would do well, for your own sake, to take them as a challenge to seek until you find their meaning. If you want to be assured that it is a quest worth all the pains you can bring to it, you need only turn to the Bible to see how the thought of God's glory runs like a thread of gold weaving one continuous pattern through the books of the Old Covenant and the New, from the prayer

of the Law-giver, "Show me Thy glory," to the prayer of the Saviour for His followers, "That they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me," and which is nothing less than the glory of God.

I doubt if there is any exercise which can more effectually help one to realise life's glory than this of trying to follow "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" right through the Scriptures until it shines forth in all its fullness "from the face of Jesus Christ." A matter of time and trouble: true: and repaying both to an extent which only experience can prove.

I have tried later on<sup>1</sup> to point out some elementary stages in this endeavour to learn from the Bible what God's glory has meant to His faithful servants all down the ages, and should mean to us to-day. I can only offer a very imperfect outline that may suggest to any one who has not yet followed out this line of thought and study how abundantly well worth while it is.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I.

“ The true note of God’s service is not permanence  
but pilgrimage.”

*(H. J. Bidder)*

“ Keep me from turning back !  
My hand is on the plough, my faltering hand,  
But all in front of me is untilled land

. . . . .  
The handles of my plough with tears are wet—  
My God ! my God ! keep me from turning back ! ”

*(Author unknown)*

“ Ever aware of defeat, yet ever with zest  
Turning from past defeat to a worthier strife,  
Toiling, with never a thought of satisfied rest,  
Stumbling, but upward, aye, to the ultimate crest—  
Lord, such be my life ! ”

*(Quoted by A. C. Deane in “Rabboni ”)*

## VII

### LIFE'S PROGRESS

No vision of life's glory will be complete without including the element of *progress* also—"the glory of going on," as Tennyson called it—in which I suppose we have the distinctive feature and privilege of this human life of ours. Browning puts it as such in that striking passage in "The Death in the Desert," where he makes St John describe man's position as half-way between the Creator and His brute creation, in virtue of the fact that the fulfilment of our highest human possibilities lies in continual progress. In this, he teaches, is

" . . . man's distinctive mark alone,  
Not God's, and not the beasts' : God *is*, they *are*,  
Man partly is and wholly hopes to be."

And by this "distinctive mark" of imperfection not resting within its limitations, but ever striving nearer to perfection, man is proved to be—



—“ Lower than God, Who knows all and can all,  
Higher than beasts who know and can so far  
As each beast’s limit, perfect to an end,  
Nor conscious that they know, nor craving more ;  
While man knows partly, but conceives beside,  
Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact.”

“ *Man partly is, and wholly hopes to be :* ”  
therefore, “ this one thing I do,” wrote St Paul,  
“ forgetting those things which are behind,  
and reaching forth to those things which are  
before, I press toward the mark of the high  
calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

Familiar words, I know : familiar thoughts,  
I hope ; but how far have we learnt to bring  
them into actual, practical contact with our  
daily life ? That is another of the questions  
challenging those who want to make *the best*  
of all life has to offer.

Again and again we cut ourselves off from  
the best by being so fully satisfied with the  
second best ; we call a halt in our own progress  
by our certainty that we either cannot or need  
not advance any further. We bewail our low  
level of spirituality, the poorness of our prayers,  
the unreality of our worship, but we take it  
for granted that this is as far as we can get.  
Some people apparently can pray well ; we  
can’t. Some gifted souls can find joy in worship,

and can offer it with fervour, but we unhappily are not among the number, we lament, and worship is therefore difficult and often lifeless for us—so much so, at times, that we ask ourselves whether it is worth offering at all. It is odd how often we forget to ask the other question, whether this consciousness of failure in prayer and worship is not a call to set about making them better!

## (1)

Take *prayer* first—our daily approach to God—for that lies at the very heart of the matter. I believe that the greater part of our failures to lay hold of this vital principle of progress in our ways of life, and in our power to make the best of it, may be traced back to the fact that we are not making progress in our prayers, and that we are content not to do so. I suppose there is nothing more deadening to one's faculties than the continued repetition of an effort which is intended to carry one forward, but which does not produce that effect. The treadmill has for this very reason been largely discredited as a part of prison discipline, its place being taken by tasks which

call out a man's powers instead of merely wearying him. And yet I wonder how large a proportion of professing Christians are content to go on day after day, week after week, year after year, with the treadmill routine of repeating the same prayers, in the same short time and with the same lack of concentration and (very often) of any intensity of purpose and desire ?

Forgive me, you who read these words, if you belong not to this number but to the smaller, eager company of those who are continually pressing forward "from strength to strength" in the prayers which they offer each day with the desire to come nearer to God when they pray and to learn to know Him better and to love Him more. Forgive me, and leave this chapter unread, unless, indeed, it may possibly suggest some help that you might offer those who have not yet learnt the secret of progress in prayer. But if you are conscious of being one of these yourself, then I think you may be amazed to find what new and glorious possibilities are opened to you in the whole of life when once you set yourself in earnest to learn to *pray better* and to make your prayers more real every day.

The first step towards doing this is to go right back to the beginning, and to make sure that you are giving prayer its true place in your life, not as one among many activities, but as the mainspring of them all. It must be this, and nothing less, to those who believe in God as the Source of all life, for prayer is the way He has ordained for us to use in order that we may keep in close and vital touch with Himself. The pity is that we have not all been taught to look upon it in this light from the first, and that so many, even among earnest Christians, have bad habits to break and wrong ways of thought to unlearn, as the result of their childhood's training. They have been taught to "say their prayers" as a matter of daily duty and discipline, at the end of the morning and evening dressing and undressing, with no very definite object beyond that of asking God for spiritual blessings not always greatly desired, and for material gifts not invariably received.

In any serious endeavour at learning to pray better many of us start heavily handicapped both by our early teaching and by later years of very imperfect practice, but all this can be overcome when once we are resolved not to rest satisfied with it any longer.

That is the great point ; not to go on saying, " I can't pray well," but to say, " I *will* pray better," and to set about it by learning to think of prayer as something tremendously worth practising for its own sake, and not merely as a means of getting God to do what we want.

" Not for the sake of gaining aught,  
Not seeking a reward :  
Solely because Thou art my King  
And mine eternal Lord ! "

That is the spirit in which to set about your daily prayers if you want to go forward, by their help, " from strength to strength " in every part of life. It does not mean that you will coldly refrain from coming to God, as He bids His children come to Him, with requests for yourself and others, but that these will be the secondary consideration, your approach to God Himself coming first. The lack of time which we are so fond of pleading as the excuse for cutting short our prayers will then not be allowed to crowd out thanksgiving or praise. It will be your petitions that have to suffer from haste, and the nearer they are to your heart the more earnestly will you endeavour to "*make* time " for them, without lessen-

ing the moments spent in drawing near to God.

I think it was Bishop Wilkinson who said that if under any pressure of circumstances you could secure no more than three minutes for your morning prayer, two of them at least would be well spent in realising God's majesty and His love, and in offering Him the reverence and the humble, thankful tribute of responsive love which are His due. Certainly experience proves, beyond all manner of doubt, that the secret of power and progress in prayer is *not* learnt by dashing into God's presence, so to speak, like unmannerly children, with a brief, formal greeting followed as quickly as may be by a string of wants, scarcely finished before one has hurried out again.

Equally certain is it, on the other hand, that not prayer only, but the whole of life, becomes a different thing when one begins to look upon those morning and evening times (however short) of daily devotion as opportunities for coming into closer touch with Him Who *is* "the Way, the Truth, and the Life"; for gaining a firmer hold upon His Hand to guide and help and bless you through whatever waits to be enjoyed, endured, or done; for learning to know Him each day

a little better, so that each day you can love and trust Him more, and for rendering back some fraction of all you owe Him by making the best offering of thanks and praise that is in your power.

(2)

If you should be inclined to ask how this endeavour after progress in prayer can influence the rest of life the answer lies in the thought, already touched upon, of God as the Source of all life. For if you accept Him as such, then prayer—if you take time to see it in its true light—cannot fail to affect every part of your being, by bringing all into closer contact with Him Who *is* Life. It is not merely a question of what special gifts and graces you ask for and receive; the effects of prayer go far beyond “all that we ask or think.” The nearest analogy is that of the bodily healing which God’s gift of sunlight can work in those brought where its rays can fall upon them. Even so, only in far greater measure, does every force of body, mind, and spirit gain in vitality by being laid open, in prayer, to the all-pervading power of the Presence and glory of God.

And as prayer affects all your faculties, so will the habits formed in prayer influence your ways of thought and practice at other times. You will never develop your personality or your life to the full so long as you are content to go on praying without making progress in your prayers; it simply is not possible. You can cultivate special gifts or powers; you may be able to gain some one goal on which you have set your heart; you may indeed achieve a number of successes and form many useful habits; but you cannot make the very best of life, or attain to the whole of what you yourself might be, until the desire for progress in prayer has gone deep enough to penetrate your inmost being and to influence the exercise of every power that you possess.

Once you cease to be content with a low level of achievement in prayer you will find that neither can you rest satisfied with standing still in the other efforts which make up life for you. Your daily routine or work, whatever it may be, will no longer seem adequately disposed of by being got through merely "as well as need be"; you will want to be continuously trying to do it better.

In the ordinary trials you have to meet



—trials of patience, it may be, or of temper or courage or forbearance or sincerity or whatever may be the virtue put to the test—you will find that the desire to face these more bravely springs up with the endeavour to pray better, and grows with its growth. You will cease to be content with saying that you “can’t help” losing patience with this or that person, or failing under some particular strain. You will not even be satisfied with the thought that after all you are trying as hard as you can, and are not able to do better. You will realise that to be always striving to “do better” in all things is the only way of keeping in touch with the Lord Who is for ever leading you forward along life’s way.

Slowly and imperceptibly the impulse of progress towards perfection will make itself felt in every corner of life, even in those little personal idiosyncrasies we are so ready to tolerate, if not indeed to foster with complacent admissions as to its being our “way” to be unpunctual, untidy, forgetful about answering letters, or illegible when we do write, and so forth. The person who has once begun to aim in serious earnest at praying better will realise that every imperfection accepted and not combated is a hin-

drance checking the endeavour to draw near to God. The bad habits and heedless hand-writing cease to be characteristics to be tolerated, and take on the less pleasing aspect of obstacles to be overcome.

“Life’s business,” wrote a great spiritual teacher,<sup>1</sup> is to “seek perfection at any price, in thought, word, and deed.”

A hard doctrine this? Yes, if you look at it in that light; but also, if you choose so to regard it, the most glorious adventure upon which you can embark. There is no quest that can so wholly possess you as the quest after perfection, and none that wins such rich rewards in every region of life, not excluding health of mind and body. I doubt if we have as yet arrived at any true idea of the hidden powers and possibilities within us which can be called forth by the sincere endeavour after progress in prayer, with all that follows in its train.

Only—and here is one of life’s many paradoxes—the quest must be undertaken and the endeavour made each for its own sake, and not as the means to some other end, else they are bound to fail.

<sup>1</sup> Dr W. A. McLaren (Bishop of Chicago).

## (3)

This, surely, is where *worship* comes into the scheme of life's progress, to an extent not realised by all who "profess and call themselves Christians."

Worship is a perpetual call to us to seek God for what He *is*, in His own glorious Majesty, and not merely for what we want Him to do for us. The people who give up worship because they see no direct results from it, and grudge the time taken from more "practical" pursuits, are really robbing themselves by their own act, for the hours spent in true worship make their mark upon every other minute of life. The week's work is better done for the faith which can pause in it to lift heart and thought above the urge of the moment to the eternal goal. Plans and hopes, efforts and longings, the visions of science and the creative work of art, all gain in the end through being put aside now and again for the sake of coming into close and ever closer touch with God in humble worship.

The worker who attains to the fullest development of his highest powers is he who has learnt to look upon worship not as a formal duty but as the opportunity to "lay down in the Presence

of God all his hopes and all his fears, all his successes and all his failures . . . all that he is and all that he might be, content to take up thence just that which God shall give him."

. . . "So will your mind be conformed to the Mind of Christ. So will your face reflect the brightness of His Face. So will you go from strength to strength until, life's pilgrimage ended, you appear in the eternal Zion, the celestial city, wherein is neither sun nor moon, for the Glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." <sup>1</sup>

There we have the ideal; not to be gained without effort, or at a single bound; still less to be abandoned as unreal because we have not yet reached it. Indeed the more remote the vision seems the stronger is the call to "press forward" towards it, step by step.

Progress is just as vital a necessity in worship as in prayer. Those who complain that Church-going is to them lifeless, formal, dull, should give themselves the chance of finding out what a different thing it can be made by the simple resolve to *worship better* every time, with heart and mind more fully set upon the one clear

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Lightfoot.

purpose of "bringing to God the honour due unto His Name."

The first effect may be—it often is—to show how faulty one's accustomed acts of praise are, and how poor, but gradually there steals into these a new zest as the desire to offer them more worthily gains in strength. The quest after perfection achieves no greater triumph than in this region of endeavour, from which assuredly it should not be debarred.

## VIII

### “THE VICTORY THAT OVERCOMETH”

Now comes the final question of how to put in practice these various hints and suggestions as to making the best of life, and the answer may be given in the two words, *by faith*. Or rather, it might be so given if we were accustomed always to think of faith in its true light and to give it its rightful place in our spiritual endeavours as well as in every other part of life.

It seems a strange thing, when you come to think of it, that we so often exercise least faith just in those very acts of praise and prayer that chiefly call for it. We complain that these are “no use,” because we cannot see their effects clearly and at once. We want every prayer we offer to bring us visibly nearer to the end we seek; we expect our efforts of worship to yield some satisfaction then and there, in a clearer realisation of God’s glory, or a keener sense of love towards Him.

We fail in fact to apply here, in the very region of things unseen, the principle of faith

which we know to be essential to success in all the ordinary affairs of life—the principle, that is, of venturing further than we can see. When you go to catch a train or keep an appointment it is in faith that the other people concerned will fulfil their undertakings. Your daily meals are eaten in faith that the food before you has been prepared by persons of good will, with intent to serve and not to poison you. And so you might go on through all that makes up your daily life, including large portions of whatever your day's work may be. Sometimes this may yield immediate results, but very often it does not, especially in the highest undertakings. All great discoveries along every path of science have been preceded by a long and wearying series of seemingly fruitless efforts carried on in faith.

In short, as Bishop Westcott taught :<sup>1</sup>

“ We live by Faith, however we live. Perhaps—it is a sad possibility—we can die without it.”

And again :

“ Faith . . . as applied to our present life, is a principle of knowledge, a principle of power, and a principle of action.”

<sup>1</sup> “ The Historic Faith.”

## “The Victory that Overcometh” 107

When one tries to see how this vital principle of faith does actively influence our day's work and our dealings with other people, three characteristic effects seem to stand out: the power to trust ourselves and our interests in another person's hands, the patience which can go on making efforts that bring no visible result, and the courage to apply these efforts *indirectly*, in ways that seem remote from the end we seek.

Personal trust, patience, courage—these three distinctive marks of all true faith—must clearly not be absent from our faith in God, if it is to be indeed “the victory that overcometh,” and they have got to be cultivated. How this may best be done must be settled, as to details, by individual opportunities, but these are three general rules worth keeping steadily in mind.

### (1)

The first is to make it the chief purpose of every spiritual effort, that it shall bring you into close and living touch with God. Whether you are trying to worship Him, or to ask for special blessings, or to give thanks for those already received, let your first aim be always to realise



His Presence and to remember that you are speaking straight to Himself. The "prayer of faith" which wins the greatest victories is the prayer not of one who is certain of getting just what he wants but of one who, in Bishop Westcott's words, "throws himself with absolute confidence upon a living Lord." And to do this means learning to know and love your Lord so truly that you can trust Him in the darkness as well as in the light.

It is much easier than one is apt to imagine beforehand to form the habit of prefacing every act of prayer with a definite effort to seek God Himself before you seek His gifts; to "draw nigh" to Him as your Father, in confidence that He will "draw nigh to you," through His dear Son, your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. A few simple words spoken straight to Him from your heart will help you here; nothing formal or unreal, but just the call through the darkness which is the natural way of coming into touch with one whom you would speak with but cannot see.

"I am speaking to Thee, my Father, and I know that Thou hearest me." . . . "Lord Jesus, I do believe and know that Thou art near me, and I want to come nearer to Thee. I want to feel and know Thy Presence as I speak to

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Thee, and through Thee to the Father. Wilt Thou help me in this, dear Lord, by Thy Holy Spirit working within my heart and mind to keep them turned to Thee.” . . . Something like this, in whatever words come naturally to your mind, will help you to make a real effort of personal approach to God the Father, through His beloved Son and by the help of the Holy Spirit. And if it should seem difficult at first—perhaps even unreal—remind yourself that this is where faith comes in.

### (2)

To persevere in efforts which yield no immediate reward is indeed the next rule to make for the strengthening of your faith in God, and a vitally important one it is. Only you must be careful never to relax the purpose of your efforts, even if results are slow to appear. Prayer, thanksgiving, worship—if any of these would seem to you of little use, don't be content to go on with it as a mere matter of form or habit, nor yet to say, “I will give it up because it is unreal to me.” Say rather, “I must keep on trying to make it real until I succeed at last.” To keep your true purpose always

before you, through all delays, is what makes the difference between faith and formalism.

Formalism is content to go on repeating an effort merely for the satisfaction of having done so, without asking or caring whether it brings the doer of it any nearer to his goal. Faith keeps that goal ever in mind, however far it may be out of sight. And the result is, in the one case, growing weariness, in the other, growing strength.

This is a thought specially to act upon in learning to give thanks. One great reason why so many Christian people fail here is simply that they let their faith fail them. They can see no reality or joy in the thanksgivings they have been taught to offer, and so they resolve to discontinue these instead of persevering until they find in them what thankful souls have found, all down the ages. They want, in fact, to walk by sight and not by faith in this glorious venture of thanksgiving, which has for its goal the deepening of love and trust from the creature to the Creator.

The secret of learning to give thanks is to keep this goal before you, and to look upon every expression of gratitude to God as a step towards it, even if it be an imperceptible one, not seeming to bring you any further along

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the way. Don't wait always to *feel* thankful before saying “Thank You” to your Father in Heaven, but thank Him when you know there is cause, whether your feelings at the moment are warm or cold. That is where the principle of faith comes in, and it reaps a rich reward.

Once you begin really to look out for causes of thankfulness in the day's course, it is astonishing how continually you find them. A fine day, or the strength that carries you through a wet one; continued health, or the kindness of those who minister to you in illness; the beauty of flowers, the love of friends and of children—or, if these fail you, the thought of God's love to comfort you in loneliness—these and a hundred calls to thanksgiving meet you along your daily path, and to make your response to each *in faith* that you will some day enter into the full joy of thankfulness is the surest way of bringing this to pass.

I have a friend who carries the plan a step further, and has made it a rule to meet every vexatious happening with a silently offered “Thank God!” for some remembered mercies and compassion. She finds it a sure way of blunting the edge of each annoyance as it comes.

In faith, too, we have to learn to make our offerings of thanks not for our own sakes only, but to the glory of God. That is not an easy idea to grasp all in a moment, and so we are apt to put it on one side as unreal, or at least not one that we can be expected to act upon in any practical fashion. Not so thought St Paul when he appealed to as many Christian people as possible to join in prayer, for the express purpose that they might be able to unite also in causing "the thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God."<sup>1</sup>

God's glory spread abroad more widely in this world of ours through our thanksgiving, even as the sun's rays may be flashed into dusty corners of the road by fragments of glass turned at the true angle on the ground—there you have the vision which faith can make into reality.

No beauty or value in the bit of broken glass; no light in itself; yet it spreads the glory of the sun all round about it where it lies. No light or glory belonging to our lives in themselves, and yet when turned by thankfulness towards God they can bring the radiance of His glory into their little corner of the world. A glorious thought, finding its highest expres-

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 15.

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sion in the Eucharistic offering of thanks, where “we all with unveiled face, reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.”

A glorious thought! and the fact that it is not mastered in a moment is surely a call not to give it up as useless but rather to dwell on it, and respond to it, *in faith* that some day God’s Holy Spirit will teach us to understand.

### (3)

This brings us to the rule of *indirect effort*; possibly the hardest and the most repaying method of strengthening faith. The hardest, because our natural instinct is always to focus our endeavours upon the actual point where we look for result; the most repaying, because this very limitation is often a cause of failure. We wear ourselves out, sometimes, by hammering and hammering away at a door that will not open, because we have not faith enough to turn our energies in some seemingly remote direction where lies our real way through. We want to be sure beforehand that not a single one of our precious efforts shall be made in

vain, not realising that we are thereby missing, again and again, the possibility of real success.

This is true of every region of life, and in spiritual matters, especially, do we lose more power than we know by being so unwilling to spend any of it in efforts yielding no direct return. We want all our prayers to make a difference that we can see and measure, in bringing nearer the end we seek. We reckon the value of worship and Bible-reading by their immediate effects, and if these are not readily apparent we are apt to bring forward the familiar plea of "no time." All of which means that in those matters which touch life's deepest mysteries we claim to walk by sight and not by faith, forfeiting thereby the very help which most we need.

Again and again we tire ourselves out with fruitless efforts because we have not faith enough to turn away from them for a little while, to seek from God new vision and new strength. Again and again we fail in our endeavours to help others, or to conquer our own faults, simply because we persist in trying to win our battles by direct attacks. We have not faith enough in Christ our Lord to turn our energies into coming and keeping so near to Him that He who is the "Captain of

## “The Victory that Overcometh” 115

our salvation” can strengthen our efforts and give us victory for ourselves and those we seek to help.

There is no more fatal failure of faith than to demand that all that we do shall yield direct and visible results. It is well to remember this if ever you are tempted to grudge the time spent in acts of worship, devotion, study, which seem to absorb forces of work and prayer badly needed for what we are fond of calling more “practical” activities. A difficult piece of work may often gain more from the faith that has courage to make a pause in it, for the sake of worship, than from even the most persistent efforts to get it finished. It was the experience of that great scholar and teacher, Dr William Bright, that—as he wrote—

“A single Communion, faithfully received, often lets in fuller light upon the spiritual consciousness than long hours spent over books can give.”

The “victory that overcometh” all that hinders us from making *the best* of life is won not by the bargaining spirit claiming a quick reward for every effort made, but by the faith which is willing to make ventures and to wait for results—wait long, if need be, “in the cold



and the rain and the darkness," as Faber says—trusting simply and wholly in the love of God.

"*This* is the victory that overcometh"—not our personal gifts and opportunities, not even our persistence when directed by self-will, but simply—*our faith*.

## APPENDIX I

### THE GLORY OF GOD

Studied in the Bible

It is extraordinarily illuminating to take up one's Bible with the clear purpose of finding out what it has to teach about the Glory of God. The first discovery you make, and the most important, is how large a place the thought of God's glory fills in the Scriptures both of the Old Testament and the New. The revelation of that glory is the purpose which runs like a golden thread through one after another of those most varied writings, and gives them unity.

"Shew me, I pray Thee, Thy Glory," is the prayer we find in the second book of the Old Testament, and the last pages of the New give the full and final answer to it in the glorious vision of the Holy City wherein there is "no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb."

"*Shew me, I pray Thee, Thy glory:*" that is the prayer with which to start upon this particular line of Bible-study. A real desire to find out what

God's glory means—what it means *to you*—is the clue to guide you through the “divers portions and divers manners” wherein Historian, Psalmist, Prophet, Evangelist and Apostle, each in his own way has sought to share with others the vision of that glory which he himself has gained.

I shall not attempt to give the references to all these passages, but only to some of those that seem to point most clearly to the lines of thought best worth following out in this quest after the true meaning of the Glory of God. Those who care to carry it further can easily do so with the help of a Concordance or Reference Bible.

### 1. *God's Glory as the Central Thought of the Bible.*

It is well to begin by giving the thought of God's glory its true place at the heart and centre not of one part only of the Bible, but of the whole “Divine Library” as its Scriptures have been called. The following passages suggest a line of study well worth working out more fully, point by point:—

<i>Exodus xxxiii. 17-23.</i>	} The Quest after God's Glory. God's Glory revealed in Nature and Worship.
<i>Psalm xix. 1; Ezekiel xl. 1-5; Isaiah vi. 1-8.</i>	
<i>Luke ii. 8-14; John i. 14;</i>	} The supreme revelation of God's Glory in His Son.
<i>John xii. 20-28; John xvii. 1-8 and 20-23;</i>	
<i>Luke xxiv. 13-27.</i>	
<i>Revelation xxi. 22-27.</i>	} The final vision of God's Glory no longer obscured by sin and sorrow.

2. *The Personal Revelation of God's Glory to those who seek Him.*

It is encouraging to find how much God has revealed of His glory to souls who have sought Him faithfully all down the ages. Such passages as the following (and others can be found) help one here :—

*Psalm* lxxii. 5–7, and lxxiii. 23–28 ; *Isaiah* xxxv. 1, 2 ; xl. 3–5 ; lviii. 6–9 ; *Ezekiel* iii. 22, 23 ; *Habakkuk* ii. 14 ; *John* v. 44 ; *Romans* xi. 33–36, and xv. 5, 6 ; *1 Peter* v. 10.

3. *God's Glory revealed in Worship.*

*Isaiah* vi. 1–8 is the passage to take again as a starting-point in making a fuller study of this part of the subject. The following references are all worth looking up :—

*Exodus* xvi. 10 ; xl. 34, 35 ; *2 Chronicles* v. 13, 14 ; *Isaiah* lx. 1 and 19 ; *Psalm* lvii. 7–11 ; *Ephesians* iii. 14–21 ; *1 Corinthians* xiv. 24, 25.

4. *The Supreme Revelation of God's Glory in His Son.*

The importance of this most vital part of the subject needs no comment. The following are only a few out of the many passages which should be studied :—

*John* i. 14 ; ii. 11 ; vii. 16–18 ; *1 John* v. 5–13 ; *2 Corinthians* iv. 3–6 ; *Philippians* ii. 5–11 and iv. 20 ; *Ephesians* i. 3–6, and 15–23 ; *1 Peter* i. 3–9 ; *Jude* 24, 25 ; *Revelation* i. 4–6 ; *Colossians* i. 24–29.

5. " *Giving Glory* " to God.

To " give glory " to God is our supreme privilege, our supreme duty, and the only way in which our powers can find their complete fulfilment. It has been recognised as such by God's faithful servants all down the ages, and to learn what it meant to them helps us to see what is waiting for us in our turn to do in actually " *giving* " glory to God both in worship and in the work and joys and trials of daily life.

See 1 *Chronicles* xvi. 28, 29 ; *Psalms* xxix. 1, 2 ; xcvi. ; cxv. 1 ; *Luke* xvii. 11-19 ; *Acts* xii. 23 ; *Romans* iv. 20, 21 ; 1 *Corinthians* x. 31 ; 1 *Timothy* i. 17.

**APPENDIX II****THE TRANSFORMING POWER  
OF GOD'S GLORY****A Simile**

SIR WILLIAM BARRETT'S little book on " *Creative Thought*," from which a passage has been already quoted,<sup>1</sup> has another suggestive simile for us in the description he gives of the transformations wrought in the appearance of certain caterpillars by the colours made to predominate in their surroundings.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 61.

Here again we can borrow from the discoveries of science a thought to help in the quest after spiritual knowledge. In the account of the caterpillars glorified in appearance by the influence of their golden environment one seems to catch just a hint of the far more marvellous change which God accomplishes in lives that are open to the transforming power of His glory.

“ In the lower forms of life, change of environment sometimes appears to have a suggestive effect in producing colour-changes. For the beautiful experiments of Professor Poulton, F.R.S., have shown that some caterpillars can more than once in their lifetime change their colour to suit their surroundings. Thus, if one half of a set of certain green caterpillars have black twigs placed among the leaves on which they feed, and if the other half have some white paper spills placed among the leaves, most of the former will become black and most of the latter white.

“ The nervous stimulus which produces these different pigmentary deposits appears to be excited by the particular colour acting upon the surface of the skin. But through what wonder-working power is the change brought about ? Not, of course, through any conscious action of the caterpillar, for the pupæ of these same caterpillars undergo a like change, changing even to a golden appearance, with a brilliant metallic lustre, when the chrysalis has been allowed to remain on gilt paper !

“ Nothing, of course, occurs if the chrysalis be dead ;

but when living its dormant life, the unconscious within is apparently able to respond to suggestion from without ; the colour of the environment having this suggestive effect."

It is suggestive to compare this with Bishop Lightfoot's hint of the transformation which is bound to follow upon what he calls the "true study" of the Glory of God as revealed in the Gospels.

"The true study is nothing less than the appropriation of the Divine image ; the constant recalling, realising, copying, growing into it, till the Divine fascination of it possesses us wholly. So gazing in this mirror, so studying this image, we ourselves shall be changed. This is the only test of the true mode of contemplation."



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