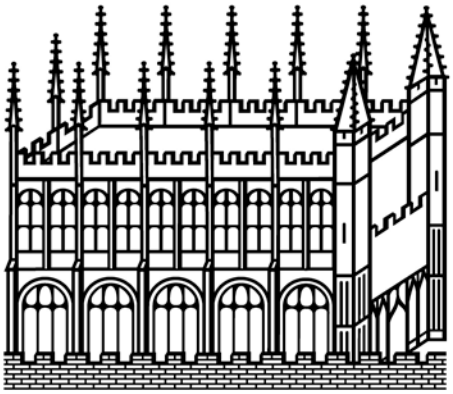
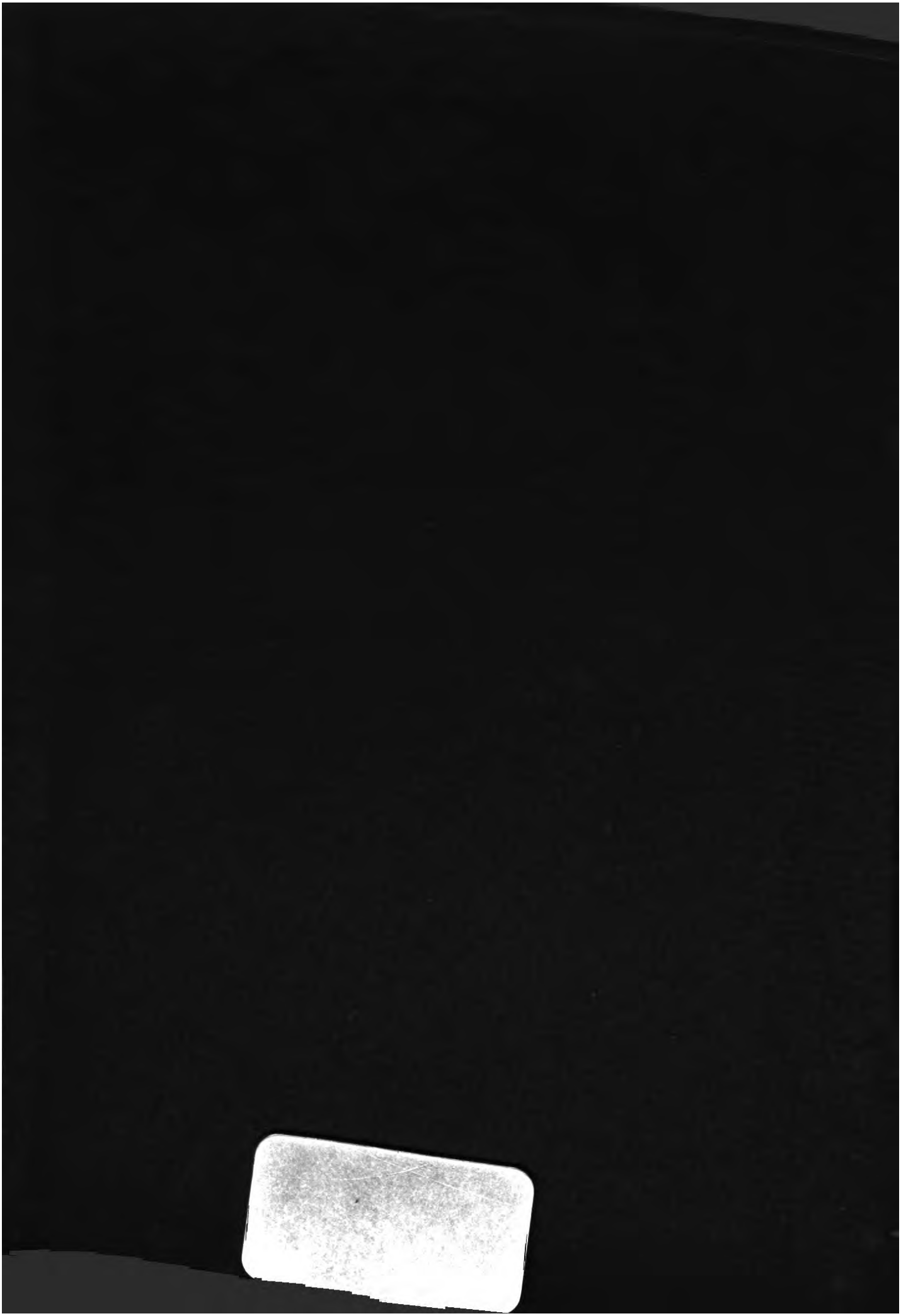


Life's phases, an attempt to present some of the experiences ...

James Stark



LIFE'S PHASES.

LIFE'S PHASES

AN ATTEMPT TO PRESENT AND DEAL WITH SOME OF THE SALIENT EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS OF A HUMAN BEING FROM THE CRADLE TO THE GRAVE.

BY

JAMES STARK,
AUTHOR OF "JOHN MURKER" AND "LIFE'S STAGES."

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At home.

"He who dwells everywhere is nowhere at home."

"A glance of heaven to see
To none on earth is given,
And yet a happy family
Is but an earlier heaven."—BOWRING.

"To Adam, paradise was home. To the good among his descendants, home is paradise."—HARE.

"Ethereal Minstrel! Pilgrim of the sky!
Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound?
Or, while the wings aspire, are heart and eye
Both with thy nest upon the dewy ground?
Thy nest which thou canst drop into at will,
Those quivering wings composed, that music still!
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
Type of the wise who soar, but never roam,
True *to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!*"
—WORDSWORTH, "To the Skylark."

AT HOME.

ON returning by rail after you have been a considerable distance from home, you pass many towns, and come to some halting-places that have a claim upon your attention and perhaps admiration. There is a city of ancient aspect and historic renown, and as you glance at the hoary battlements, the cathedral with its towers, standing out from and above surrounding modern structures, which it will probably survive, there is something in you that goes out in pensive pleasure to those monuments of the past, and the memories and suggestions which they call up. Farther on there is a town full of present-day ideas and industries, and as you hurry past its factories and forest of chimneys, you are interested in the abundant signs of enterprise and progress. By and bye you come to a village where an old and intimate friend resides, and while you look at it with long and earnest gaze, you pass on. But on approaching the next station, your eye kindles, your heart beats more quickly, and *you go out,—you are at home.* The place may in itself be of far less importance than many you passed, and it may have little to commend it to the attention of the traveller, but there *you* are at home, and there is no spot in the wide world, however fair or renowned, that is

the same to you,—*it's your home.* Ah! is it not true that, where the treasure is—wherever and whatever be its casket—there will the heart be also. And do not the warm glow of feeling and the radiance of countenance which come over you as you are nearing home help you to realise the depth of the voluntary deprivation of our Lord, and also give you a glimpse of the instinctive craving of the real, though pure, humanity that dwelt in Him, when He said with such pathos, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head"?

Home is one of the necessary conditions of our finite existence as creatures. We cannot occupy the entire universe. We cannot be at home everywhere. Our horizon is not co-extensive with the system of things. The eye cannot travel over more than a limited space, nor the ear hear more than a few of the nearest sounds. We cannot embrace the whole world, and be the same to all that we are to some—that is God's prerogative. We are only part of a great whole, and have to localise ourselves, the limitation of our nature being reflected in the circumscribed space we call home. Man has his "place." Our Maker, He that dwelleth in the heavens and inhabiteth eternity, hath appointed the bounds of our habitation as His children.

Is it not proof of the marvellous goodness and wisdom of the God with whom we have to do that providentially imposed necessity can always be improved into an advantage? Just as the need for a fire in the home in winter, owing to the rigour of our northern clime, has given us the dear and hallowed

associations of the hearth—the fond familiarity and heart's-ease of the fireside; so this inability, determined by nature, to cover more than a restricted space by our personality, has given us home, which, while enclosed from the wide common of the earth, is the best possible school to prepare us for what lies beyond.

What is it that makes home? Is it place or presence? Both. But what is the primary or root idea of home? Is it not kinship? There is a person or persons who are more to us than all others, and our life lived with them, as closely related to us by nature's ties, constitutes home. The Court is where the sovereign lives. It is no particular mansion or palace that is the Court. It is the presence of majesty. The kingdom of God upon the earth is not so much a visible institution as a spiritual reign. Heaven is what it is because it is the chosen scene of the supreme manifestation of the splendour of the Divine presence. So it is kinship in which the child is rooted and nestled that makes home to be home. The essential idea of home, apart from which all else is accident, is that of fostering love, which opens its doors, stretches out its arms, and spreads its covering.

What a difference it makes to a house when a familiar presence goes from it, not to return. We never know till then how little a place is to us in itself. The house of stone and lime is the same, the various articles of furniture stand as they did before, the pictures look upon us from the walls, the clock ticks, the routine of life goes on, but there is something wanting—all is like a body without the spirit,

like a sky from which the sun has been displaced; and, until feeling recovers itself, what we see is but the painful reminder of one whom we cannot see, the monument of a past that is dead, the light, the radiance, the joy are gone that gave interest and attraction to the home. Ah! it is persons that make home.

But just as heaven, having something distinctive in it which makes comparison possible, is a particular locality, so there is a place which is the seat and centre of the fostering influences, the shelter, the nurture, the love comprehended under the word home. The size or style of the place is of little consequence. Home is home whether it be a lordly mansion or a clay-built cottage. Far less than our vain imaginations lead us to suppose is the essence of life affected by its accident. Life and love are wonderfully independent of circumstances. Material surroundings cannot make or unmake a home; if there be decency and comfort, room for the protection of the occasional privacy of the members of the family, as well as for their meeting together, all else is superfluous. When envy is beginning to steal into our hearts, let us remember that significant sentence in one of our Queen's Journals, where, after recording that they had luncheon in a small cottage or inn in the Highlands, she says:—"Things are sweeter in their taste in small houses."

It is the family life that determines the character of the home, not the cost or splendour of the building reared for its abode. The most interesting objects in a home ought to be the inmates themselves, and if they are of the right spirit their presence will have an exalting and transfiguring effect upon the low-

liest surroundings, lending beauty and sanctity to the roof-tree, whether it be of fir or cedar. The poor man's garden may be very contracted and enclosed with unhewn and unmortared stones, yet every summer there will be an outburst of the Divine power and glory in green leaf and fragrant flower, just as much as there is in nobleman's conservatory. So home may be "sweet home" to every family alike, if the wellsprings of the human heart, sweetened by Divine grace, are allowed to flow without abatement or hindrance.

There is one advantage which the highest in the land have over those who are not of aristocratic birth, and that is in the possession of ancestral homes. A house that has been occupied by the same family for successive generations is a thing of sentiment as well as convenience. It brings the past into the present. Continuity is preserved, and to live in a house that is suffused with noble associations, around which cluster memories of sainted and patriotic men, is a spur to worthy emulation. Home should be to us on a small scale what our native land is on a large one, and in order to that there should be a measure of permanence in the one as there is in the other. Ruskin refers scornfully to the "crowded tenements of a struggling and restless population that differ only from the tents of the Arab or gipsy by their less healthy openness to the air of heaven, and less happy choice of their spot of earth; by their sacrifice of liberty without the gain of rest, and of stability without the luxury of change." He adds, "There is a sanctity in a good man's house which cannot be renewed in every tenement that rises on its

ruins." Let us hope that with a population distributed over the land, and not crowded, as it now is, into our large towns, the time will come when every Briton, like every Hebrew of ancient times, will have his own house and property, however small; and the best estate that a father has to leave to a son will be a house in which human beings have lived as in the presence of the Lord.

What is the particular place and distinctive function of Home in the large scheme of human life? Is it not obviously to give a human being a right start in view of all that is before him? Home should do for children what the nursery does for plants—it should make a good beginning. There is that to be done in childhood that cannot be so well done at any other period, just as the foundations of a house can be much better laid before than after the superstructure is reared. Some homes leave the world and the church to do what they should have done, and could have done with far less trouble and more success. The burden may be shifted, but it must be borne by some one. If home neglect to do its part, what is left undone will have to be done at a later period at a great disadvantage, if it is ever done at all. The employer may have to do for the apprentice what the father should have done to him as his son, and the husband may have to do for the wife what the mother should have done to her as her daughter; and it will not tend to sweeten the tempers of those who are obliged to take up the unpleasant burden, or improve the prospects of those who are under training when training ought to have been completed, to reflect that much friction might have

been avoided and time saved if home had only done its duty.

Home is not serving its designed purpose unless it is fostering the embryo citizen and Christian in each child. Home is the wide world in miniature. It is said that the roots of a tree and the branches subsequently developed go out in the same directions, so that the drip lights upon the parts from which the sap proceeded. Certainly, in a home fashioned upon a broad and enlightened basis there is in germinal form all the activities that are afterwards to be in mature growth and full exercise in the arena of life.

No created object has within itself the power of perfect self-development. A tree cannot evolve itself in branch and leaf and fruit without the ministries of earth and air and sun. So a human being needs home to bring out and set in order what is in his own nature. The school, the church, the business of the world will do much to further the process of education, but home has to begin the work, home gets the human being at first hand.

Home should put the foot of the child on the right road, set his face in the right direction, and secure his future, so far as that can be done, by the implantation of sound principles and lofty ideals. As long as the vessel is in the shipbuilder's hands it is not expected to sail. It has no cargo to carry, no haven to reach, no storms to encounter. But it is the business of the builder to see while the ship is on the stocks that its design is not faulty, that its proportions are such that it shall not capsize when launched, and its timbers so firmly knit or its plates so strongly riveted, that it

shall not fall to pieces when the tempest arises. That is a picture of what home should be to a child. He should get in it the proper basis and bias of his whole life.

A farmer once complained to a visitor that all his sons had betaken themselves to a seafaring life. The observant and shrewd friend, pointing to a picture of a ship in full sail, which had been hanging upon the walls for years, said, "That's the explanation." Take that as a figurative specimen and suggestive example of causes at work in many homes that lead to much graver and more disappointing issues. Oh! how impossible it is to overrate the importance of the work that is done at home, or the need of a spirit of holy vigilance on the part of the workers. It is the home that determines what the world is to be. There is no institution can take rank with it, as the roots of all institutions, civil and religious, are in the home. You go into the busy market place, the noisy factory, the crowded public meeting, but the springs of the life of the nation are not there. They are not in Parliament, nor yet in the Church, but in the home. For there sentiment is fostered, conviction is nourished, and character is formed which makes the work of Church and Senate possible. Most of the life of most persons, especially in earlier years, is spent at home. Home sees more of us than any other place. A great part of our religion must therefore show itself in the family, if it is to have any manifestation at all.

To bring this chapter to a point, home should be the *state* or *kingdom* in miniature. All that is essential to the order and welfare of the larger com-

monwealth ought to have an honourable place in a well-regulated home. Reverence for authority, obedience to law, respect for the rights of others, courteous deference to the opinions of our fellows while maintaining our independence and exercising our liberty, —those virtues and graces should be so inbred in our home life as to be part of our very nature when we go out into the world. The father is the only king young children know, and it will not be for the advantage of the larger kingdom if he should lay aside crown and sceptre.

Paul, in his Epistle to Philemon, alludes to "the *church* in *thy house*." There have been many homes since Philemon's time that have been veritable sanctuaries, as much as any Hebrew temple or Christian cathedral. What is a church? Is it not a society that is a visible witness to the fact that God has come to men to dwell in their hearts and sway their lives? Having such a definition in view, may it not be said that when Christian fathers and mothers rise to the height of their providentially ordered position, they do make a church of their home?

In the Christian home, grace comes in to fortify and beautify nature. Nature's provision for the security of the sanctities and felicities of home is not stinted, and family life, even without the added touch of religion, is often the most beautiful thing upon God's earth. There is nothing that shows forth more strikingly the thoughtful love of the great God who brings us upon the scene of life, than the manner in which He does it. He in His wise tenderness makes one of the deepest and strongest instincts implanted in the human heart responsible for our security and

comfort. No creature is more helpless than a child as it enters upon it, and none has so much love lavished upon it.

But when this overflowing parental affection has conscience, lofty principle, holy aim at the heart of it, what cannot it accomplish for the family? When Christ is in the hearts of father and mother, the home cannot be other than a church. Alive to the moral as well as the physical needs, to the spiritual as well as the mental culture of their children, Christian parents will seek to do for their little company what a pastor does for his larger one. The work of a church—worship, prayer, teaching—will go on from day to day under circumstances most favourable to deep and lasting impression. The father is the priest of the family, and if he is not in the habit of bringing his children together that he may offer with them those sacrifices to the God of Heaven that come from devout and thankful hearts, he is failing in his duty, and must take his place with those who refuse to do all that they ought to do for the little ones who have the strongest claim upon his sympathy and solicitude.

With regard to family worship, nothing could be finer that what Cecil said long ago: "Let the family be met as for the most delightful exercise in which they can be engaged. Let them find it short, savoury, simple, tender, heavenly. Worship thus conducted may be used as an engine of vast power in a family. It arrests every member with a morning and evening sermon in the midst of the hurries and cares of life. It says there is a God: there is a spiritual world: there is a life to come."

Nor should home be without its pleasures other

than those which are distinctively religious. Home should be the most catholic and comprehensive of all institutions. Other societies such as the church exist for specific objects, and lose power the moment they depart from their clearly defined sphere. The church that provides amusements for its members usually ends in having nothing else to give them. But home is all-embracing in its development and culture of germinal human life, and should have a little of everything that is good. Home should be as far as possible an epitome of the wide and varied world.

Happy is he who has some place where he is made to feel that life is bright and attractive, some spot on earth where the harmonies of heaven reach his ear, and its holy inspirations touch his heart, where his spirit is still and at rest, where he appears at his best because he is breathing the atmosphere of love—his Bethel that stirs and exalts him, his temple, his heaven—thrice happy when such a place is his home.

At School.

"The soul of improvement is the improvement of the soul."
—BUSHNELL.

"Our little lives are kept in equipoise
By opposite attractions and desires,
The struggle of the instinct that enjoys,
And the more noble instinct that aspires."

"Take every opportunity to get what the sheriff can never take away."

"I say that man was made to grow, not stop,
That help he needed once and needs no more,
Having grown but an inch by, is withdrawn,
For he hath new needs and new helps to these."
—BROWNING.

A gourd wound itself round a lofty palm, and in a few weeks almost climbed to the very top. "How old mayest thou be?" asked the new comer. "About a hundred years," was the answer. "A hundred years, and no taller! Why, only look, I have grown as tall as thou art in fewer days than thou canst count years." "I know that well," said the palm; "every summer of my life a gourd has climbed round me as proud as thou art, and as short lived as thou wilt be."—PERSIAN FABLE.

AT SCHOOL.

WHEREIN lies the necessity for schooling? Because it is a principle in God's administration that we, His children, endowed with energy and reason, should have an opportunity of co-operating with Him in bringing things in ourselves to perfection. God gives us few things that are ready-made. He leaves something for us to do. He knows that what we take at no cost to ourselves does us little good. God's part lies in providing us with the raw materials; ours in fashioning what is provided into use. What God does is covered by the word *nature*. What we do, speaking generally, is covered by the term *school*.

We do not gather our raiment in the fields. We get the flax, or wool, or cotton, which we dress, and spin, and weave into cloth, and from that we make our garments. We do not find stones upon the surface of the earth suitable for building purposes. We go into the quarry, and blast, and hew, and polish. Men do not rush into the battlefield expecting that ability to manœuvre and handle their weapons will come in an instant by a flash of instinct. There is the drill of the barrack-yard that precedes actual warfare. Neither do men and women get the use and enjoyment of themselves, and become what

they were intended to be, unless there has been previous schooling.

Schooling is essential to perfection. Ability is disciplined power. Beauty is obedience to the laws of harmony. Order is the creation of self-restraint. Culture is the man appearing at his best as the result of well-applied labour and trained deference to law and proportion.

It is only the shallow and childish nature that is delighted with energy that is rude and spasmodic. Who admires the sky-rocket spluttering and flashing, darting hither and thither in a startling and irregular way, more than the steady glow of the sun or the quiet lustre of the star? The horse that has run off, and, under no restraint of bit and bridle, rushes along in a headlong fashion, is not a truer exhibition of power than the same animal under restraint, driver, horse, and carriage so adjusted to each other as to look like harmonious parts of a whole.

Just as there would be no useful force, no motive power in steam, if it were unrestrained and allowed to blow off as it is generated, so a man cannot have possession of his faculties as the power of his manhood until they are brought under control. We do not even possess the earth till we subdue it by tilling. The plough is the emblem of victory and ownership. The ground is a waste that belongs to nature more than to man until the furrow is turned up. When the share passes through the soil, it is "taken in."

What magnificent possibilities are wrapt up in human nature. How much scope there is for schooling. The soil is rich and deep, and can grow either

rank weeds or useful grain. What a rich capability of trust there is in the human soul which may become the credulity that misleads or the faith that exalts. What devotion to the unseen and supernatural which may be degrading superstition, or food, medicine, and cordial to the life. What powerful outgoing of affection that may degenerate into lust. What intense love of truth and zeal for its maintenance that may become fanaticism. All depends upon the schooling to which we are subjected.

Let us take up the leading parts of human nature in succession, and give a few hints as to the schooling that is required.

THE BODY.

The body is a part of our divinely framed constitution, and to be honoured as such. It is not to be trampled upon as an abject slave, nor is it to be deferred to as an imperious master. It is the instrument, the organ, the helpmeet of man's higher nature. Its appetites cannot therefore be a law unto themselves. They are to be under the control of the man who is more than body. The body is to be kept in health and treated with honour, but held under subjection, as the seat of authority lies elsewhere.

THE INTELLECT.

As the body is that which brings man into relation with the physical system, so the intellect is that by which man keeps himself in communication with all that lies outside of his own personality.

The intellect is that by which the interior and exterior worlds of man come into contact. There are some who have no interior life worthy of the name. Their life is one of acts, accidents, events,

They have no hidden reservoirs where knowledge is accumulated, where reflection carries on her processes, and ideas have their home.

The first mark of schooled intellect is the acquired power of concentrated attention. Attention is the basis of intelligence. Memory has been well called the daughter of attention. A living scientist has said that close, patient attention that is engrossingly occupied with what is before it, so as to take it in, and to take nothing else in but what is really before us, is a rare power, and the want of it is the cause of much error. There are some who maintain that attention to a very high degree is what indeed constitutes genius. Attention may, to the superficial, appear to be an easy and simple accomplishment. It is not so. Schooling is required.

Another mark of a schooled intellect is a memory not only that retains, but sifts. Memory should be a sieve more than a locker. There is a great deal we come upon that is not worth remembering. A cultured intellect is discriminating and orderly in what it amasses. Does the present generation train and store the memory as much as our fathers did? I do not refer to gorging the memory to serve a temporary purpose in school or college, but the deliberate committal to the memory of choice lines of poetry and texts of Scripture, so as to have them at command at any moment. Do so, and you are providing the materials for a perpetual feast to the mind, to which you have access at all times and in all circumstances, to brighten the sick-room, to lighten a wearisome journey, to give food and light to the mind at death.

Power of reflection is another evidence of a schooled intellect. It is by thought that man proves his possession of personality. Man ought not to be like the beasts that perish, the mere passive subject of a series of external impressions. He should be able to ponder, to inquire why is this so, to make one thought the reason for another, to look behind and before—to think. Our knowledge is not to be like water in a sponge, given out as it was taken in; or goods put into a warehouse, that remain as and what they were. Our knowledge is not to be like baggage we carry or clothes we wear, but like blood coursing in the veins, in us stirring feeling, vitalising mind, and widening our horizon of interest.

Cultivated reason is the supreme proof of a schooled intellect. How many errors would be avoided if men had a little more trained logical power. One half and more of the heresies that have infected the church have sprung from ill-balanced thinking, confining attention to one side of a subject, taking a part for the whole, making one truth the enemy of another. Patient investigation, comprehensiveness of view, careful induction, orderly arrangement, caution in coming to conclusions—in short, the sane use of reason, is one thing the world needs above many.

IMAGINATION.

Imagination is the realising, picturing faculty—that which brings the distant near and makes it vivid, converting the external scene into an inward possession. There is the historic imagination which men such as Sir Walter Scott and Macaulay had in perfection, that presents the events of the remote past as if they were of yesterday. This is a most invaluable

power in the study of Scripture. Much of holy writ takes the form of narrative, biography, description of person, place, custom, and scene. Now it will make Scripture much more impressive and bring it home if, after reading a passage in history and biography, we lay down the book and try to bring it all before the mind.

There is the poetic imagination which delights in natural scenery and all the engaging forms of beauty, and the suggestions, vistas, and pleasing images and emotions to which they give rise. To cultivate this faculty is to multiply the pure and enduring pleasures of life. Wordsworth, in his lines on Tintern Abbey, most powerfully describes the beneficial effects of the culture of imagination:

> "Those beauteous forms,
> Through a long absence, have not been to me
> As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
> But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
> Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
> In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
> Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
> And passing even into my purer mind,
> With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
> Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
> As have no slight or trivial influence
> On that best portion of a good man's life,
> His little, nameless, unremembered acts
> Of kindness and of love."

CONSCIENCE.

This is the faculty in man which has to do with what *ought* to be in life. It is the witness in him for righteousness, the echo of the divine voice, the guardian of the moral order of the universe, the ambassador from the court of heaven.

The first thing that conscience enables us to do is to distinguish between principle and circumstance, between moral conviction and mere emotional impulse, between duty and liking or self-interest. Principle is eternal, immutable, regal. The man of principle has God in his breast, and righteousness as his goal. He is the representative and servant of God Almighty.

We do not require to school conscience so much as to be schooled by it. The best thing, speaking generally, we can do for conscience, is to let it alone, keep quiet, listen to it, and then obey it.

When we tamper with it, or are dilatory in giving effect to it, we are taking both conscience and ourselves out of school into the wilderness.

The duty we owe to conscience may be summed up thus :—Keep it uncorrupt, pay it honour as the supreme force in man, enlighten it from above so that its judgments shall not become narrow or false, and do your best, by obedience, to make it alert, sensitive, and decisive.

THE WILL.

There is an old baronial residence in Scotland which has this motto inscribed upon its walls—"Will well." Upon our obedience to that injunction depends our character, our future, our all. We can will well, and we can will badly. We are not mere machines, the helpless victims, the abject slaves of inexorable fate, links in a chain of iron necessity. We are not compelled to do wrong. We may find suffering, sorrow, adversity to be unavoidable, but not wrong. We feel ourselves to be free in that respect.

When wrong is done the blame must rest upon ourselves. We are the creators of our own destiny.

We do not will well when we are vacillating. Consideration and time for it are necessary before decision can be arrived at. But life is too short for prolonged suspense, much too short for a change of plan every day of the year. Rashness is to be deprecated. But there are limits to the duration of any council. A time comes for resolute action.

We do not "will well" when we are "wilful" or "self-willed." When a man wills, having no good reason for it, no cause other than his own stubbornness or vanity, he is not "willing well." Will is like the helm of a ship that is turned in obedience to compass and chart.

THE HEART.

The culture of the affections demands our closest and most constant attention. More than any other part of our nature, the heart determines our life and future. What we love goes into us and makes us what we are—actually changes the moral essence of our being.

Moreover, the affections are the principal source of motive power. A man goes in the direction of the object he loves, and goes at no laggard pace. A ship may in its build be a thing of beauty as well as seaworthy, its chart correct, compass reliable, helm strong, but if there be no wind in the sails or steam in the boiler, how uncertain its course.

The first thing that is needed to give steadiness and momentum to life is love. The first thing that is needed to impart elevation and nobility to life is pure love.

We cannot begin too early to bestow our affections upon objects that are worthy of them. We cannot begin too early to check and mortify those affections when they stealthily go out to things that lower and degrade. This is the point at which the schooling of life is most needed. Most men go wrong from the imperfect schooling of the affections. Dr Arnold said that if he had to choose he would rather that a son of his believed that the sun went round the world, than that he should be deficient in the knowledge and love of what is beautiful and good.

To be prepossessed with the good is a precaution, a protection. To have interest aroused, sympathy enlisted, passion directed by Jesus Christ at an early period, is to be forearmed. For a youth to go into the world with a taste for flowers, astronomy, or some such like study, is to be so far strengthened against temptation. Still more is it so when God is his portion. To go out empty and aimless is to court temptation—to lay oneself open to the seducer. When a youth has chosen what is good he is more than himself—he is God and man together. He has the forces of heaven as his body-guard when his heart is fixed on what is heavenly.

What a number of good elements are in the average man, if only they could be pieced together, and all else in him made consistent with them. If the creed and the life, knowledge and practice, his prayers and his pursuits, his visions and his habits, were all compacted into a well-jointed and harmonious whole, what a glorious unity there would be. But the average man of the world is a bundle of inconsistencies. He is not the same in safety that he

is in danger, not the same in the festive chamber that he is on his death-bed. He is not the same in his pleasures that he is in church. Passions and principles, likings and obligations, are not harmonized. He is a thing of shreds and patches, of moods and impulses. There is no continuity, no agreement in his life, no correspondence between his to-day and his to-morrow.

But let his heart go out in supreme devotion to Him who is love and moral beauty and power, and instantly a unifying force is introduced into him, and

> "The elements
> So mixed in him that Nature might stand up,
> And say to all the world,
> There is a man."

At the Divine Bar.

"We must all be *made manifest* before the judgment seat of Christ."—2 Cor. v. 10 (Revised Version).

"He that loses his conscience has nothing left that is worth keeping."

"When God's judgments are abroad, people learn righteousness."

"Thy life, wert thou the pitifullest of all the sons of earth, is no idle dream but a solemn reality. It is thy own; it is all thou hast to front eternity with."—Carlyle.

"Would you have no judgment? Think what you would miss. It would mean that God does not care one atom for you and me, that we are like dust beneath his feet. If there be a holy, living God, He should be eager to know that you are doing right. He has instituted this experiment of our world. He must come and see what the results are, and there must ever be a difference between good and evil. God does not love the dark and retributive side of judgment, but you cannot have light without shadow."—W. Gray Elmslie.

AT THE DIVINE BAR.

THE Divine bar is God's vital and immutable righteousness, protesting, opposing, when we, in the exercise of our natural freedom, do what is wrong. The whole system of things is intersected with Divine bars, to which, in the successive stages of life, we are amenable, each of which is so far the representative of Divine Majesty, each of which, moreover, as we go on, brings us nearer to the supreme tribunal, where subordinates and deputies hand us over to the Divine Judge Himself, who deals with us directly and face to face.

There is first of all the bar of *Parental Authority.* At the very threshold of life God puts His hand upon us, and keeps it there. Putting no bar upon our liberty, He confronts our licence or self-will with a bar. In the first instance, God entrusts the cause of truth and righteousness to parents. He expects them to act for Him. Before moral consciousness is fully awakened, father and mother are witnesses for what is good. When they intelligently say, this is right, that is wrong, it is as the voice of God; and it is a very important part of their duty to aid the child in finding in his own bosom that which echoes the voice.

Conscience is the next bar, which is part of our very nature, and very soon begins to press upon us.

> "Man . . . ever bears about
> A silent court of justice in Himself;
> Himself the judge and jury, and himself
> The prisoner at the bar."

Social or public opinion is another bar of judgment. It is astonishing how far a man can go in the wrong direction, and yet not realize it, so long as the evil is known, or supposed to be known, only to himself. But as soon as he sees his sin reflected in the countenance and censure of his fellows, he wakes from his dream of false security. A man may even commit a crime and not be greatly troubled, as long as it is not known that he is the criminal. But when he, in open day, in the presence of acquaintances, is apprehended by the representatives of law and order, and conveyed to jail, he is alive, painfully alive, to the situation. Truly, he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool. How strange that a man should go on sinning and holding up his head as long as it is not known. But the moment he is detected, discovered, and the moral disapprobation and indignation of the community are expressed, how he cowers and slinks. Think of the terrible significance of the words of Scripture: we shall "all appear" or be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ, *i.e.*, we shall be seen as we are, and we shall see ourselves in the light of the judgment of others. We shall then lie exposed in our whole moral nature to the Divine judgment.

History is another bar of judgment, before which, however, only a very few have to appear.

What a reversal of contemporaneous judgments often takes place before the bar of history. We are not always able to do justice to the truly great men of our time, and, on the other hand, many who are popular in their own generation are found wanting when weighed in the scales of posterity. It is said that the Roman Catholic Church does not canonize any man or woman till fifty years after death. There is wisdom in the delay. Lapse of time tends to give clearness of vision and sobriety of judgment. We cannot see the proportions of a great mountain when we are at the foot of it. We must stand at a distance from it, yet not too far, if we are to take it in.

What history does for the great ones of the earth, mere lapse of time does for ordinary mortals in finding us out. There are characters that improve by keeping and studying. Others that are engaging and prepossessing do not maintain that hold of your esteem which they took by storm. It is wonderful how what *is* comes out sooner or later. Truth has the property of self-revelation if you give it time.

The Bible is another bar of judgment.

The Bible is God's Word about Himself and about us. In its pages we see ourselves as we ought to be, and are aided to discover ourselves as we are. When all the other bars fail to bring us to our senses, the Scriptures often succeed.

One great advantage the Bible has over all other bars is that it changes not with time; it does not lower its tone or accommodate its testimony to the taste and condition of men. It has an inflexible standard and an immovable attitude, immutable prin-

ciples and canons of righteousness. You know where it is, always is, and therefore know where to find it.

There is a certain measure of conformity, and therefore uncertainty and unreliability, in the other bars that have been mentioned. They are not always sufficiently independent and unbiased. They take their hue sometimes more from earth than heaven.

Parents are often more fond than wise, and stretch and twist the bar to make it fit into the child. Conscience, too, can be "blunted," "seared," "deadened," and it can "sleep." When unheeded, its warnings become fainter, until its whisperings are scarcely heard amidst the din of the world and the conflict of the passions. It is instructive to notice how all that is in us can adapt itself to environment. God intended our bodies to breathe an atmosphere very different from that which prevails in the closes and courts of the low parts of our cities. But constitutions, while suffering from the unhealthy air, may become so habituated to it as not to feel it as a person fresh from the country would.

So, too, do we often succumb to the moral atmosphere that surrounds us. Having come down to a lower level, conscience is inoperative, and mingling with society that is destitute of lofty ideas, we have no certain corrective, no effectual and reliable check, but the Bible.

That is how it is to be explained why men who are living bad and selfish lives should have a pleasure in passing carping criticism upon those who are identified with the cause of religion. "Why," said a committee of the House of Commons once to Dr Livingston, "are many traders in Africa so opposed

to missionaries?" "Because," was the answer, "the teaching and characters of the missionaries are often such a rebuke to the lives of the traders." Bad men must either oppose themselves, or oppose those who are opposed to their practice. They usually take the latter course. It is to be expected that they should be hostile to the representatives of the morals and religion they are violating; but what importance should be attached to their scepticism and railing?

How thankful we should be for that book that is in the world, but not of it; that is the most human and yet most divine of all books, ever adapting itself to human need, never to human corruption; that is the most venerable thing in the world, and yet is not at all of the earth earthy. "Now I can breathe more freely," said Adam Smith, when a man, who was apologising for a bad character, left the company. "I cannot bear that man, he has no moral indignation in him." That cannot be said of the Bible. What indignation it has against sin, and yet what tender compassion lies at the heart of the indignation.

But the great aim of the Divine book is to bring us into a Divine presence. Man's judge is his God. Such is the dignity of man's nature, that all he meets is intended only to lead him up to God. It is with Him with whom he has to do. Just as the Roman citizen could appeal unto Cæsar, so it is man's birthright to be tried by his God. God has, so to speak, many local or provincial magistrates, each having his own jurisdiction under the King; but man passes from court to court until he stands face to face with the Supreme One. What is called the "day" of judgment is in the future, but in a sense every day is

one of judgment, as God is asking us to measure ourselves by His revelation, that we may know where we are and whither we are going.

What effect should the Divine bar have upon us as we stand before it and hear judgment pronounced? It should lead to our repentance. Repentance! What has the average man in a civilised country like this to repent of? Sin. What is that? In its essence it is failure in man to rise to the height of the purpose for which he was brought into this world. It could not be better put than in the answer given to the first question in the Shorter Catechism, which Thomas Carlyle characterised as the most comprehensive and sublime answer ever given to a question: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him for ever."

A man may do nothing against his mother, but for him to neglect her is to wrong her. To act as if he had no mother, as if he had no personal relationship to her, is to stand convicted of guilt. Not to love her is to be at fault. No amount of general integrity and amiability can condone his bad behaviour as a son. Now, God made us for Himself. It was part of His plan that we should enter into His thought and feeling, converse, co-operate, walk with Him, in short enter into personal and conscious relations with Him.

If we fail to do that we are sinners, though we should outwardly have kept every commandment of the Decalogue. Not to do what we ought to have done is sin; sin is literally to miss the mark. We are apt to think of impiety as foul, defiant blasphemy, positive dishonour done to God. But impiety is a negation. To have what lies between us

and God filled with proper feeling is piety. The want or absence of that feeling is impiety or ungodliness.

Everyone is a sinner, however fair and pure his life, who does not give God His due. The whole law may be violated though the whole of the law may not be broken. All the other notes in that instrument that was intended to make music for heaven may be perfect, but if one is deranged the harmony is destroyed. Any sin makes wholeness or holiness impossible. It may be gross or it may be comparatively venial, but if it is a wilful departure from the revealed will of God it takes the crown from His head as a holy being. The strength of a rope is the strength of its weakest part. Many of the strands may be sound, but if one is rotten at one part the whole rope is worthless as a cable. So man's character as a holy being is gone, if it could only be said against him that he did not pray. He is not and does not all that is required of him.

One who knows anything of the spirituality of the law will not suppose that a man's moral state before God is to be gauged by the presence or absence of what is flagrant in the life. Many of the respectable Pharisees occupied a worse place in Christ's eyes than the publicans and sinners. Maclaren of Manchester says truly: "Sin has for its co-relative God. If there is no God there is no sin. There may be faults, there may be failures, there may be transgression, breaches of the moral law, things done inconsistent with man's constitution, and so on; but if there be a God, then we have personal relations to that person and His law; and when we break His law it is more

than crime, it is more than fault, it is more than transgression, it is more than wrong; it is sin. And it is when you lift the shutter off conscience and let the light of God rush in upon your hearts and consciences that you have the wholesome sorrow that worketh repentance and salvation and life."

Repentance, then, is the recognition of sin as sin from God's standpoint—viewing it in the light of His countenance,—and no one of us should be ashamed to own that he was in the wrong, which is but saying in other words that we are wiser to-day than we were yesterday. There is no degradation in repentance. It is the sin turned from that brings the degradation. It is noble to throw off the bad. Repentance is feeling turning against sin, and conduct turning from it.

Repentance is not regret.

If regret were repentance, there would not be a single impenitent person in the world. For who is there in the wide world who has found rebellion against the authority of God what he expected it to be? Who is there who has not had his delusions dispelled, his fair prospects blighted, and his sunny skies changed into darkness and tempest, as he trod on forbidden ground. But writhing with pain from stumbles and bruises as we trespass is not always the same as humiliation before God for our declension. The repentance that needs not to be repented of is something deeper than regret.

Repentance is not remorse.

Remorse is not so shallow and partial as regret. It is the recognition, not of the consequences merely, but also of the guilt of sin. It passes by the fruit of sin, goes down to the root, and stays there to bite and

to blight. Remorse is the sinful man turned against himself in severe accusation and bitter reproach.

But remorse does not go far enough. It goes down to man's sin: it does not go up to God's mercy. A man's own bosom is not a suitable destination for conviction of sin; it is the heart of the loving Father. Remorse is repentance without God.

Repentance is not reform.

Reform is the most delusive substitute of true repentance. It is turning from the former sinful self so far as outward ways and habits are concerned.

Every true repentance is of course accompanied by reformation, the heart being broken *from* as well as *for* sin.

But a man's ways may appear to be changed without his heart being touched. There may be reform in which the spiritual and religious nature has no part. Repentance is change. Of what? Of the outer life? No. Of the man with the outward life.

Repentance is not "doing penance," so much sorrow, so much emotion, so much of a sad and painful experience that a man must pass through for his good. *It is turning the face to God and the back upon sin.*

At the Cross.

"The only thing to flee from is sin, the only refuge to flee to is God."

"I am quite sure there is one who is seeking us rather than sought by us, that He will seek and find the earnest, and I am sure that this hidden communion may become an object of actual experience, as soon as the seeking is reciprocal." — F. W. ROBERTSON.

"Jesus met the just claims of God not by satisfying, but by revealing and recognising them. The sufferings He underwent upheld the principle of justice and of judgment: they were an equivalent in quality, not quantity. They represented our own in such a way that we may be spared from undergoing them ourselves, if we profit by His. From this point of view the doctrine of substitution, against which so many objections have been raised, no longer presents anything to offend the moral sense. Assuredly, *one* could without injustice suffer for *all*, if His suffering was not a *compensation* for the lack of theirs, but a revelation made to all of what all would have deserved to suffer, and what those will really suffer who are not brought back to God in penitence and faith, by the spectacle of this expiation." —GODET.

"Oft in my dreams a form I view,
That thinks on me and loves me too;
I start, and when the vision's flown,
I weep that I am all alone."—KIRKE WHITE.

"*Lo, I am with you alway.*"

AT THE CROSS.

YOU have all read in works of romance of men of high birth who had lapsed not only into lowly but low circumstances, who were at the same time utterly unconscious of the fact that things with them were different from what they ought to have been, or could be different from what they are. They lived on from day to day in this degradation, with no thoughts starting up in their minds to disturb their ignoble acquiescence. They took all as matter of course, as belonging to the normal course of things, their sordid condition and vile associations being part of the life which they quietly accepted without shame, or hope, or desire of betterment.

But suddenly a person presents himself who has positive knowledge of the origin and connections of one of these lapsed men of rank. He brings with him legal documents to prove the rank which was his by birth, to give him again the name he had disgraced and the estates which hitherto had been to him as if they were not.

Now, if there was any soundness of feeling in that man, would not the light that was thrown upon his history and prospects sting him with self-reproach as well as fire him with ambition? Life would at once become a broader thing. It would be

opened up to him in a way that humbled as well as exalted.

That is what the cross does to every man who sees it in its significance. He gets a view of himself at the cross such as can be nowhere else obtained. Every other point of view only covers what is partial and shallow in man's condition. At the cross you can take in the whole as it is—the breadth, depth, and height. At the cross you see the worst and the best of man—the worst to which he has descended, and the best to which he may rise—the heaven from which he has fallen, and the heaven to which he may go back—the actual sinner and the possible saint—man as he is and man as he may become—and all this revealed in the light of man's personal relations to God.

AT THE CROSS WE SEE MAN AS HE IS.

It cannot be denied that the cross has something to do with sin. Whose sin? Not the sin of the crucified one. No one worth listening to would affirm that Christ's sin led to Christ's cross.

Whose sin led to the cross? The sin of the priests and Pharisees and others in Jerusalem, who from jealousy and other wicked feelings conspired to put Christ to death? That is unquestionably true, but it is not the whole truth. Christ was a martyr. It can be said that He died on account of His steadfast adherence to the truth.

But there is more than martyrdom in Christ's death. No martyr ever said that he laid down his life. Were he to say it, and he a mortal man, we would say he was a suicide, not a martyr. What martyr ever said that "he had power to lay down his life, and he had power to take it up again."

No; all the circumstances connected with that death upon the cross, all that Christ Himself said of it, all that the most thoughtful men have been constrained to infer from it, point to the conclusion that while it has its human side and can be traced to human action and explained on historical grounds, yet in addition it has a depth and breadth of significance, a solemnity and mysteriousness of import, such as the idea of martyrdom—stretch it as you may—cannot cover.

There is an imperial breadth, a universality, a grandeur in the sweep of Christ's claims, which on His own showing are brought to a head in His death, which cannot be compressed within the bounds of a theory of martyrdom. Christ claims to have a relation to every man, to be the "Son of man." He speaks of His death as having a virtue and efficacy for the benefit of every man. "This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you." The apostles took the same view of the representative and substitutionary view of Christ's death. What did they say? "He was delivered for our offences:" "He suffered, the just for the unjust:" "He was made a curse for us:" "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many:" "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree."

How can any one in the face of such passages deny the objectivity of the atonement — something done apart from us and yet for us in taking away our sin. What is called the moral view of the atonement says that Christ's death had a relation to the love of God, and its design is to subdue our hearts and predispose us to follow a lofty example of self-sacrifice and

obedience. This is truth, blessed truth, truth which the discussions of the last fifty years have brought into much-needed prominence. But it is not the whole truth—it is only one side of the truth of the atonement. Taken by itself, it is miserably shallow and inadequate. You take from the atonement depth, mystery, grandeur, staying power, when you cease to regard Christ's death as a witnessing against sin and a witnessing for holiness, a setting forth of the heinousness of sin and a luminous vindication of the essential and eternal righteousness of God — "God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

It is easy to put up a caricature of the doctrine of substitution, an extravagant and grotesque representation of it, and then pour scorn upon it. A much more reasonable and candid way is to find out what Scripture makes it out to be. It tells us that Christ suffered on behalf of men—*i.e.*, He by the cross gave men an impressive view of God's estimate of sin as well as of the strength of His love.

In this sacrifice of Himself for others Christ was no more than a stupendous example of what is most common in human life. Look at the young men who go to battle instead of the aged parents, and fight for the liberties of a far greater number who remain at home. Look at those missionaries who go as the representatives of the Church to heathen lands and dangerous climes. Substitution! It runs through the whole of life. Sacrifice! It is the very soul of what is most generous and noble in human action. Ah! we are bound up in each other, and we suffer for one another. The parent gives more than

material bounties to his child. He gives himself, his thought, his love, the most precious part of his being. The wrong-doer brings a burden to all connected with him. How they hang down their heads on his account. "O Absalom, my son, my son, would God I had died for thee!" Christ did for the whole race, and in a perfect way what we imperfectly do for each other.

At the Cross we see what we ought to become.

Christ exhibits sin by taking upon Himself its burden, and nowhere does the penitent have such a troubled conscience, such a profound sense of guilt, and such an intense sorrow for sin as at the cross.

That is one half of Christ's work: the other is to present the true life of humanity freed from the corruptions which had come upon the race. It was necessary He should give us a convincing demonstration of the nature and effect of sin by His voluntary sufferings. It was also necessary He should set before us man as God intended him to be, and desires him to become. Christ, by His unworldly life, and unselfish love, by His pure and exalted teaching, by His generous concern for others consummated on the cross, is what each one of us should aspire to be. There was humiliation for Christ on account of sin not His own. That, however, was but a temporary experience. The sin is put away. The permanent fact for every one who has died unto sin with Christ upon the cross, is that he has now to arise with Christ and walk in newness of life with Him. Having his eye upon Christ, he awakes to righteousness, he is alive to the beauty of holiness, he is intent upon becoming as Christ is, his aim and motto is, "for me to live is Christ."

But this also happens, that the more he becomes like Christ, the more importance he attaches to Christ's sin-offering, and the more does he lean upon Christ as his Redeemer. He rejoices in the fact that the ultimate ground of his salvation lies outside of himself. When he tries to ground himself upon the approval of heaven, he finds himself sinking into an abyss that is without bottom—till he reach Christ. "It is above two months," said Augustus Hare, "that I have been looking death in the face, and every hour of that time has made me feel more and more that Christianity is the great remedial measure. But for Christ I could not have borne to have had the great moral eye of God's justice fixed upon me."

At the Cross we see God, who is willing to take us as we are, that we may become what we ought to be.

At the cross we see sin, we see holiness, and we see Divine love. The two extremes of the moral world meet at the cross. The sinner and his God meet there, God having come to meet him. What a meeting-place is this cross! It is the grand centre of the universe.

God has come down in Christ to convince us that He is on our side, that nothing stands between us and His favour but our impenitence. If we will look at sin as He does, and love holiness as He does, there is an end to the controversy through Christ.

I once saw a most powerful warship lying off an important town at the mouth of the Clyde. It was the most formidable sea battery in Her Majesty's navy. It could have reduced the town close by it to ruins in less than an hour. Yet the people in that town

were not disturbed at the thought of the proximity of this magazine of destructive force. They pursued their business during the day, and went to bed at night without the least signs of uneasiness. Why such composure when such terrible possibilities of mischief were at their door? Because that warship was on their side, sailed under the flag of the nation to which they belonged, and was there to defend, not to destroy.

The whole universe is a magazine of destructive force, which is nearer to us than that ship was to Greenock. Men instinctively feel that there is jeopardy here, especially to the law-breaker. Men take the side of fear rather than hope, as they face the terrible possibilities wrapt up in the system by which they are environed. Religion for the most part has had fear as its basis and spring. Man is amidst forces with which he cannot always cope. Fire and flood, the tornado and the thunderstorm, and the earthquake and death, have given him a sense of impotence. He is afraid, and the devil instead of our Father in heaven is set up as the deity to be worshipped.

The Father has come down through Christ to convince us that the dominant forces of the universe are on our side. They are our defence as much as that ship was a guard to the town. By His infinite love expressed in Christ, He tries to beget in us a perfect love that casteth out fear. All the forces that can destroy are owned and wielded by Him who is our Father. He takes us as we are into His house. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or

famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

"By grace are ye saved, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." To be saved by the work of One above us, strong where we are weak, pure where we are corrupt, seems to be the only way in which a being like man could be saved. At the bottom of all evangelical religion there lies this great fact, that what we believe, and what we hope for, and what we become, is not our achievement but the gift of our Heavenly Father, by His grace in Christ Jesus, and by the influences of His Holy Spirit. "The thoughts of men through all ages have oscillated between two extremes—there is and can be no other—viz., between salvation by self and salvation by Christ. In proportion as they have been guided by speculation, they gravitated to salvation by self; to the extent they have submitted to the teaching of Scripture, they have been held by salvation in Christ."

Is it not true, as Lowell sings:

"Earth hath her price for what earth gives us;
The beggar is taxed for a corner to lie in;
We bargain for the graves we die in;
At the devil's mart are all things sold;
Each ounce of dust costs its ounce of gold;
For a cap and bells our lives we pay;
Bubbles we earn with our whole soul's tasking:
'Tis only God that is given away,
'Tis only heaven may be had for the asking."

But God takes us as we are, that we may become what we ought to be. There is no lie that was ever coined by the father of lies more foul than that

Divine grace favours human immorality. The very opposite of that is true. It was in the interests of righteousness that the cross was set up. Anything immoral in the doctrines of the cross! History shows that the more these doctrines are magnified and propagated the sounder become the morals of the people. At the cross the basis of morality is laid more firmly than ever, and the bonds of duty are tightened to an incredible degree. Immorality can no more live in the presence of the cross—intelligently believed in—than darkness in the presence of sunlight.

The father of the present Sir Wilfrid Lawson, in giving an account of his conversion, said that for long he had been trying to make a way by which he could reach unto God. He described himself as like a man who, with much difficulty and labour, was attempting to cross a stream. He tried one point and then another, but he was like to be drowned. It was all too deep for fording. At last a friend explained to him the way of salvation. It was as if he had said, Why struggle to cross a stream that is not fordable? There is a bridge—a Divine-made bridge, a bridge on which Divine wisdom and love had been expended. He walked on it, and crossed to the other side in safety.

At Church.

"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching."

"That which is always alone is never thoroughly alive."

> "He held the lamp of Truth that day,
> So low that none could miss the way;
> And yet so high to bring in sight
> That picture fair, 'The World's Great Light,'
> That gazing up—the lamp between—
> The hand that held it scarce was seen!"

When a certain Greek orator spoke, the people said, "What a fine oration." When Demosthenes spoke, they said, "Let us go and fight Philip."

There is a place in life for the solemn and heavenly. It narrows and impoverishes life to have no difference between the Sabbath and other days of the week,—to make life all of one tune.

Dr Andrew Bonar said he never aspired to be an intellectual preacher, and he never tried to be eloquent. All that he wanted was to be a Bible expositor, to stand at the well, roll away the stone, water the flock, and send them away.

AT CHURCH.

WHATEVER dispute there may be about the original structure and proper organisation of the Church, all who properly appreciate it as an institution are agreed in admitting that it implies the existence of a higher nature in man, and a higher revelation for man. The Church is a witness for the spirituality of man, and the personality of God, and the kinship of both. The Church stands distinct and apart in the world, but not of it, having business on hand that is specific, testifying that there is that in man which neither home, nor civil government, nor the multiplied relations of social life can meet and satisfy.

There is only one word that is needed for the explanation of the nature and place of the Church, and that is Christ. Christ made the Church necessary. He called it into existence. He is its basis, its bond, its goal. Christ is the mediator between God and man, between heaven and earth, and between man and man. Having brought men into fellowship with God, He has brought them into fellowship with one another. The believer sees in every other believer a brother. Hence the society called the Church. The Church consists of those who are called out of a Godless world, and called together that they may

meet and unite in the promotion of those objects in behalf of which Christ entered this world.

At Church means the observance of the Lord's Day.

The Apostles went everywhere preaching the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection was the culmination, seal, and sign of the whole of Christ's work. All was summed up in that event, and brought by it into a focus. The members of the early church met therefore on the first day of the week in celebration of the glorious redemption in which they shared. The first day of the week was the Christian festival. On it they broke bread and held forth Christ to one another. The day of rest, which from the beginning had been heaven's beneficent arrangement for man, became "the Lord's day."

But why hold a day in special honour? What sanctity can there be in times and seasons? None. But there may be a sacredness in the use to which a day is put. The sanctity of the Sabbath is founded upon the sanctity of man, more especially when in Christ. There are great wants in man which are sacred, and these being met by or in connection with the Sabbath, it is thereby made sacred. The sacredness of the Lord's day arises from association, not of course from any intrinsic property. Man needs breathing spaces, intervals of rest, time for reflection, to consider the end and worth of life; he needs the soul to be nourished, the devotional and spiritual nature fed, to be gradually transformed into the image of Christ by statedly looking unto Him, and the first day of the week is the special opportunity provided for that purpose.

But the objection may be raised, why not make every day sacred in the same way? The answer to that is, that setting apart one day out of seven for religious objects, is intended to have the effect of raising the moral level and spiritual value of all the other days of the week. There is wisdom in times and seasons and special occasions. You should ever have the spirit of prayer, but you are helped to that when you now and again bend the knee in conscious prayer. You should always be in God's presence at home, in the street, at business and pleasure. But statedly meeting in a place reared for the worship of God, if done in a right spirit, makes godliness more likely in other places. So the Sabbath properly observed sheds a holy light, an uplifting influence upon the whole week. The saintly Herbert does not exaggerate when he sings :

"O day most calm, most bright,
The fruit of this, the next world's bud,
The endorsement of supreme delight;
Writ by a friend, and with his blood.
The torch of time; care's balm and bay;
The week were dark but for thy light,
Thy torch doth show the way."

At Church means united Public Worship.

We need the lifting up power of an ideal element in life, and the stated weekly worship in church helps to supply that. There are persons who never do attend church, that do not seem to have sunk to a low level of thought and feeling. But before we can know what the legitimate fruit of non-church-going is, we would require to see non-church-goers in the third or fourth generation.

There may be momentum after the impulse that gave it birth is spent. A train goes for a considerable time on the line after the steam of the engine is shut off.

So there are many persons who have divested themselves of religious profession and never cross a church threshold, who are really living on moral capital acquired under the earlier and better conditions of their life. They are like residents I have seen on the bare hillsides which rise from the lochs that branch from a certain river in Scotland. What magnificent mansions and comfortable villas studding those lonely shores. Where do the inmates of those expensive houses get their living? Certainly not on those bleak, heathery hills, nor on the waters of the loch. They got it elsewhere. They brought it with them from the great commercial city thirty or forty miles distant. So there are many now out of the church who owe what is best in them to the church they have deserted. Not on the hard, stony heights of scepticism did they get the moral capital they are now spending.

What is wanted to make our worship so helpful to the better life that men will be slow to turn their backs upon the churches? More reality, deeper sincerity and consecration of spirit, increased warmth and life married to tasteful forms and cultured expression. There is something catching in life. Dulness comes from death. Life is never dull. Each one who comes to church with a heart to praise God is bringing a valuable contribution to the efficiency and attractiveness of the church service.

A truly Protestant and New Testament Church

does not provide sufficient scope and stimulus for the heart and imagination, especially of the young, apart from intense spirituality and burning zeal on the part of the congregation. There is little of an outward or imaginative nature to excite or gratify feeling. The Roman Catholic and Episcopal Churches can rouse and maintain a certain kind of enthusiasm apart from devotion to "the one thing needful." Their forms and rites and "works," their imposing buildings and elaborate music provide scope for a certain exaltation of feeling, even though there is no close walking with God. The other Churches have comparatively little of the æsthetic attraction to compete with the purely devotional and spiritual. The absence, therefore, of life and earnestness in their worship and ministrations means total failure, dulness of the most repellent form.

The worshippers who fast frequently, who attend service before breakfast, who wear an iron cross or hair shirt next to the skin, have something to create an interest apart from the rapture of feeling that springs from intelligent spirituality. If I, for one, had to make a choice between the rich ceremonialism of the cathedral and bare, bleak, lifeless puritanism, emptied of reality and power, I should prefer the former. But we are not so limited in our choice. We can have the inspiration that comes from faith, the interest that accompanies life, the beauty that always shows itself where there is love, the ecstasy of holy aspiration, and the grandeur which descends upon the spirit of him who has a vision of heavenly things.

The Spanish peasant as he enters his church is impressed with the noble proportions and gorgeous

ritual of the cathedral. He obtains a sense of awe-inspiring magnificence as he looks along the aisles and hears the majestic organ and the mystic tones of the priest performing mass.

But the Scotch peasant who comes unto God without priest or ritual may have a grandeur presented to him which eclipses that of the former, as it is purely spiritual. The spiritual is a larger domain than the æsthetic.

This too is the great lesson of Church history—that in proportion as the inner power and meaning of religion are dead and barren do outward forms and ritualistic practices offer themselves as specious substitutes.

At Church means fellowship of the highest order.

In "Faust" we have a description of fellowship of a certain kind on the Sabbath :—

"A motley medley is making its way
Out from the murky, wide-mouthed gate.
Blithely they bask in the sun to-day,
The Saviour's rising they celebrate.
For they have risen themselves, I ween ;
From the close, damp rooms of their hovels mean,
From the bonds of business, and labour, and care,
From the gables and roofs that oppress them there,
From the stifling closeness of street and lane,
From the church's gloom-inspiring night,
They have all emerged into the light.
But see how they are spreading amain
Across the gardens and fields, and how
The river, as far as the eye can note,
Is all alive with shallop and boat.
And look ! the last departing now,
Laden so deeply it scarce can float.

Far up on the hills as the pathways run,
Gay dresses are glistering in the sun.
Hark, now the din of the village—here
Is the people's true heaven."

That is fellowship on the Lord's day which Goethe says is the people's heaven.

Contrast it with a description of fellowship of a different kind; not that it excludes the other at fit season, but takes it and goes farther on and up.

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts." "A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness." "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths." "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations."

How foolish is the wisdom of this world. Not a word can be said against the innocent gaiety Goethe describes. But surely there is a world beyond it and above it. Because the fellowship of a week-day is not bad, does it follow that the fellowship of men of kindred faith and sympathies is not a higher and holier thing?

We need fellowship in the religious just as we have it in domestic and social life. It has been truly said that "Any thought conceived and assented to by any human being becomes to him incalculably

more valuable the moment he perceives that any other human being has thought in the same way." "It is hard to believe long together that anything is worth while unless there is some eye to kindle in common with our own, some brief word uttered now and then to imply that what is infinitely precious to us is precious alike to another."

That applies emphatically to the things we hold in common as Christians. There is no fellowship so sacred, so sweet, so uplifting, as that which we have at church in Christ.

There is not enough made of this fellowship in the modern church. Large churches are apt to degenerate into lecture halls, especially if popular men occupy the pulpit.

I came in the course of my reading upon a description of church fellowship in an unexpected quarter, yet about the best I have seen. The author of "Ecce Homo" says: "Men that meet within the church walls on Sunday should not meet as strangers who find themselves together in some lecture hall, but as co-operators in a public work, the object of which all understand, and to his own department of which each man habitually applies his mind and contriving power. Thus meeting with a clear perception of the purpose of their union and their meeting, they would not desire that the exhortation of the preacher should be what in the nature of things it seldom can be, eloquent. It might then become weighty with business, and impressive as an officer's address to his troops before a battle. For it would be addressed by a soldier to soldiers, in the presence of an enemy whose character they under-

stand, and in a war with whom they had given and received telling blows."

At Church means receiving religious instruction and stimulus.

That is unquestionably one of the objects for which the Church exists. Again and again in the Acts of the Apostles do we read of the apostles preaching the Word on the first day of the week.

That apostolic preaching was direct, simple, experimental. The Christian pulpit has ever been a popular, not a scientific instrument. It belongs to the congregation rather than to the schools. Its sphere is life, not speculation; religion, not theology. Its business is not to solve problems, but to stir and quicken souls, and it does not do so by the development of a philosophy, but by the delivery of a message. "It relieves the pressure of intellectual difficulties not so much by solving them as by superseding them, by placing them on the sure vantage-ground of *tried* and *experienced* truth."

The aim of the Church is not so much to teach godliness, as with the help of its Head to make men godly. It is dynamic rather than didactic. If you look upon it as the main business of the Christian ministry to set forth a catalogue of doctrines and moral maxims, a year would be too long for the duration of such a ministry in one place. In the course of a few months you could exhaust the whole catalogue of truths and duties as abstract things. But if a man make it his business not merely to teach godliness, but to make men godly, then he has work to do as long as he has a congregation in sym-

pathy with him in that work. When truth is for life, and intended to make character and experience, the presentation of the truth can be as diversified as the character and experience. Every chord of the human heart has to be touched, every available argument, every possible appeal, every note of persuasion, every light of illustration—all these have to be used, as men, and not intellectual abstractions, are the material with which we deal. The hearer who says to the preacher, "I know all that can be said," shows that he utterly mistakes the purpose and function of the ministry.

Thomas Carlyle once said that if he were a preacher his sermon would be as follows: "Now, you people know perfectly well what to do; just go home and do it." That was not how he acted as a preacher of righteousness in books. For fifty years he held on his way, expatiating on the same lofty themes, and enforcing principles which his generation needed in various forms of illustration and phraseology, which made him interesting to the end.

But it may be said, few preachers are men of genius. True, but there is another source of freshness. Living emotion is like dew to the commonest truths; it freshens it, and gives it new interest and power. "Give us," said a recent writer, "the preacher of ordinary power who preaches with a thrilling heart; let him preach like one amazed at the glory of the message; let him preach in that tone of wonder and gratitude in which it becomes sinners to receive the great work of redemption, and not only will congregations listen with interest, they

will listen with profound impression." Genius can present familiar things in a fresh and interesting light. There is another thing not so rare that can do so too, and that is genuine feeling springing from the heart-felt realization of that which is declared.

We need our understandings in connection with our religion. "In our present state it is little less than impossible that the affections should be kept constant to an object which gives no employment to the understanding, and yet cannot be made manifest to the senses. The exercise of the reasoning and reflecting powers giving increasing insight and enlarging view is requisite to keep alive the substantial faith in the heart."

The following hints may be helpful:

1. It is easier to be always in church than only sometimes. "A duty regularly performed becomes a pleasure; one only performed occasionally is a task every time it is attempted." Parents who wonder at the irregular habits of their children may find the root of it in the irregularity of their own example.

2. It is a comparatively small matter, so far as a minister is personally concerned, that disrespectful words should be flung at him and his discourse by those who have been at church. If a man's character cannot outlive that, it has little vitality. But think of the harm your thoughtless shafts are doing to the listening ones too young to discriminate.

3. If our presence at church is to be of advantage to us in moral stimulus and spiritual quickening, there must be adequate preparation for both pulpit and pew.

The occupant of the pulpit who brings to his con-

gregation what costs him nothing, only shows that he has mistaken his vocation. It is beaten oil that has to be brought into the sanctuary.

But preparation is needed for hearing as well as for speaking. If there has been prayer and intimate converse with the spiritual world during the week, the soil is prepared for the seed on the Sabbath.

At the Footstool.

"Let faith but climb the tree of prayer, and watch and wait, the Lord will surely pass that way."—MASSEY.

"Communion with God is the very innermost essence of all true Christian life."

"For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
Both for themselves and those who call them friend!
For so the whole round world is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

—TENNYSON.

"I believe that the root of almost every schism and heresy from which the Christian Church has ever suffered has been the effort of men to earn, rather than to receive, their salvation; and that the reason that preaching is so commonly ineffectual, is that it calls on men oftener to work for God than to behold God working for them."—RUSKIN.

AT THE FOOTSTOOL.

IT is the noblest part of our birthright as creatures that we are designed to be on terms of confidential intercourse with the Supreme One. The scriptural conception of the relation between God and man is that of the closest intimacy, every human fellowship, every companionship, every marriage upon the earth being an imperfect figure, a faint shadow of the possible and desired nearness of our approach unto God. God is represented as "looking" upon us, "visiting" us, "dwelling" with us, "showing" Himself to us. Adam heard His "voice in the garden." Enoch "walked" with God. "God spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaketh to his friend."

How frequent and urgent is the injunction in Scripture to seek the presence of God, to "call upon His name," to take Him into our confidence, to petition that His resources should be used for our advantage. "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee." "Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."

From the beginning to the end the Word of God

assumes, both by precept and example, that man and God are intimately related to each other, and that a human life therefore divorced from God is only half a life, a mutilated and perishing life.

Man's own experience confirms the teaching of Scripture. When God is not in the life there is emptiness. Man is a limited creature. He soon comes to the end of himself. If then he does not begin with God, how can he be other than ill at ease?

Not taking enough from God, some try to take more from society than they can get. What are they like? They are like boats on the sea, but moored to the shore, and are driven restlessly to and fro, beaten and tossed with every wave. They would be safer and have a more peaceful existence if they were away from the shallows and out upon the depths. Dissatisfied with the shallows, and not going out to the ocean, they may become misanthropic and cynical, and stand aloof from both God and man, and are like those boats beached high and dry, that are rotting in the sun.

Before bringing forward the practical advantages of frequent attendance at the footstool, let us meet and try to remove some speculative difficulties connected with the subject of prayer.

Why should God, who knows us and our circumstances, not give us at once what we need without our asking? God does not need any information. We cannot add to the sum of His knowledge. Why, then, should we come and tell Him our wants, as if we were addressing one who is in ignorance? Prayer is a work of supererogation; it is a foolish waste of words.

The objection sometimes takes another form, and is based upon the benevolence of God. To importune a God who is more willing to give than we are to ask is surely superfluous. Let us save our entreaties and appeals, and reserve them for hard-hearted men who need to be provoked to what is good.

In rebutting that objection, it might be enough to entrench ourselves behind the Divine command, which meets with a ready response in the instinctive feeling of the human heart. There is nothing more natural than prayer, especially in circumstances of distress. Argue as you may, you have nature against you if you are against prayer.

But reason as well as nature will be found to favour prayer if you go far enough down in your investigation. The objection that seats itself on the Divine omniscience and goodness derives any weight it may have from the supposition that what is of chief moment in life is the supply of our wants as creatures upon the earth. Nothing could be more false. What is of chief importance is the maintenance of right relations and the cultivation of proper feelings between us and God. A vivid consciousness of God, a sense of dependence upon Him, gratitude and love in return for His mercies, are more to us than the bread we eat or the raiment we put on. To get what we need without prayer would not help to all that. It would only deepen our self-sufficiency. The gifts coming without any thought on our part as to their source would hide the giver. By prayer, then, God gets a hold of us, and keeps Himself before us. There is nothing of greater consequence than

that our spirits should be right before God. But we would be in danger of forgetting God were our attention not recalled by our recurring wants. Our needs as creatures are therefore an opportunity for converse with heaven. Prayer is thus a wise ordinance. It makes for the realization and recognition of God. Religion is our nature brought into exercise in relation to God, and thus prayer is of the very essence of religion.

Another objection is founded upon *the vastness of the universe and the comparative insignificance of every creature.*

It is preposterous, it is said, to suppose that the maker and governor of this stupendous universe, with its countless millions of worlds, many of which, doubtless, with teeming populations, should attend to the cry and the care of every child. In the presence of those starry heavens, cease your egotistic pleadings. As if you were of such consequence that the Infinite One should give you His particular attention! Can the monarch on the throne concern himself with the sorrow or care of every subject?

Stay, my friend. Do you remember of whom you are speaking? Do you magnify God by making Him altogether such an one as yourself? Which is the grander conception of God—that of one who is so occupied with the general working of the universe as to be oblivious of the minute and circumstantial, or one who is equal to the requirements of things small and great? Do we not reckon that the most powerful human intellect, which can take a firm grasp of general principles and large measures, and yet allows no particulars to escape its notice. Scripture glorifies

God by presenting Him as whirling the planets through space, and yet counting the hairs of the head of every child. "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names."

Another objection to the possibility of the prayer of the creature becoming a force in the universe—"moving the hand that moves the universe"—is founded upon *the immutability of law, the uniformity of nature's operations.*

God's decrees are not to be revoked, nor His methods altered to accommodate every suppliant. But can it be proved that God cannot meet the case of His children without departure from settled methods? It has not been proved. Hence the objection is founded upon mere surmise. It is, indeed, difficult to understand how God can act in answer to prayer, without interference with ordinary methods. Just so, and you make that difficulty a bar to God. It cannot be demonstrated to be impossible or self-contradictory that a God who is orderly in His action should be able to answer prayer. All that can be shown is the difficulty in apprehending how God can do the one thing as well as the other. But if we had no difficulty in comprehending the ways of God, might we not reasonably suspect whether it really was God we were contemplating. A God comprehended by man would be no God. The Infinite must ever have things belonging to it beyond the knowledge of the finite. Is it incredible that the Great God should be able to find a point of contact and harmony between the ways of His government and the needs of His children?

Can we not conceive of Divine intelligence working along the lines of settled method or law, and yet by its interposition doing what nature, left to itself, could not accomplish. Human intelligence can do it. Launch a boat from any point on the shores of the Moray Frith, and if the wind is blowing from the west it will inevitably be driven away out to the wide sea. Put experienced seamen on board, and they may so trim the sails and regulate the helm that the vessel with the same wind will go across to Caithness. There is a result which owes itself to mind, and yet is not an interruption or suspension of law.

Look at that boy walking along one of the busy streets of London. He goes into an office in the name of the firm he represents. Next day, or perhaps on that very day, huge waggons are laden with goods at the adjoining warehouse. On the waggons go, one after another, to a particular dock. At last a large ship that has taken in their contents sails. What led to all this movement? The message left at the office by the boy, a word, a thought. All is perfectly natural, ordinary. But it could not have been had the word not been spoken. If human intelligence can do so much in connecting means and ends, may we not suppose that Divine intelligence can do a great deal more?

Some, again, who have come under the influence of that wave of naturalism that has passed over the present generation, but is now, I think, almost spent, have practically ceased to pray, for *what they call prayer is no more than a kind of speaking to themselves.*

They admit that prayer has an important place in our self-culture and religious life, but in its effects it ascends no higher and goes no further than our own nature. Prayer has a soothing, calming, uplifting, purifying effect, as it constrains us to attend to the higher aspects of life, and is a kind of preaching to ourselves. Prayer does not reach the ear of heaven, or affect its action, but conveys a reflex advantage.

Now, notice what this belief or unbelief involves? It assumes that the practice of prayer is founded upon an illusion. The teaching of Scripture and the praying habits of thousands of years imply that it rests upon a reality. Which theory is more worthy of acceptance? Let us apply a few tests. You go into God's presence with a petition. He asks you what you want. You reply, "Oh! I want, I expect nothing in answer to prayer; I am only pumping up feeling, getting myself into a right spiritual condition." Does that explanation commend itself to you as reflecting honour either upon you or God?

Take another test — that of intercessory prayer. You pray to God on behalf of a son who has just gone to a distant city, that he may be delivered from temptation. According to the theory I want to demolish, you are really not praying to God on behalf of your son; you are using a circuitous method, a pious device to get yourself into a right state of feeling. "If I cannot act upon another, if I can effect no change upon his destinies, I know not really for what end I should pray for him. From that point prayer becomes impossible: it ought to be relegated to the region of religious illusions; for in interceding for others I shall be only acting in my own interest,

I shall be only developing my own interior life. Selfishness, then, is the last word in this system—selfishness in prayer, where all my outgoings have reference solely to myself."

How can they pray who have come to this? Can it ever be useful or helpful to believe a lie? Ah! is it not true that men's native instincts and divine aspirations are often far better than their intellectual conceptions and theories. The latter are the blundering interpretation of the former. If there are any reading these pages who have been misled and perhaps hindered, if not paralysed, in their spiritual life by this false substitute for real prayer, let them dismiss it for the reality.

In addition to the direct benefits that come to us in answer to specific prayer, let us mention some of the general advantages to be derived from the habit of prayer.

Prayer has an *exalting*, a *rectifying*, a *comforting* effect.

EXALTING.—The quality of life depends upon the kind of objects in whose presence we dwell. If they are great, and by admiration and love on our part are going into us, then we too are gradually becoming great. If they are small, our constant contemplation of them and living with them tend to bring us down to their level.

Our natures make us capable of finding points of contact with objects of all kinds, and life is the opportunity. We can find points of contact with all sorts of things, high and low, mean and noble. We can go up and we can go down in the connections we form.

The poet seeks points of contact between his nature and the beautiful in God's earth, so that what he sees and admires goes into him, and his soul becomes a palace of beauty. The scientist desires points of contact between his understanding and the facts and laws of the universe, so that he in his thought may in some degree reflect the order and grandeur of the vast cosmos.

The avaricious man wants, above all things, points of contact between his soul and the gold that is in the world. The man of God, while presenting a side of his nature to all that is fair and good, wants specially to have points of contact multiplied between him and the heavenly and eternal. Coming often into the presence of God whom he steadily contemplates, assimilates him to God.

Oh! what a privilege to be allowed to come before the great God. You may live in a town, and yet not have access to the best society in it. You have not been introduced. You have no personal connection. You are outside of its refining influences. "Come unto me," says God, "and I will in no wise cast you out."

Prayer has a rectifying effect.

Prayer tends to preserve due proportion and balance in life. If we be not on our guard, one side of life becomes over-weighted to the detriment of the other. The tendency of corrupt human nature in this fallen world is to allow life to ebb from the spiritual and flow in a deluge to the worldly side of existence.

Prayer helps to regulate the currents of life, to

keep them in due measure and in their proper course. By coming into contact with God we recover tone, and are able wisely to distribute energy. Left to ourselves, we lose *freedom, breadth, height* in life. Being much with God gives us these—makes dissipation and excess impossible.

What a power of rectification there is in free communication, interchange of thought and feeling between persons of different stations and types of thought and character. It has a beneficial effect when persons apart from each other in circumstance and attainment come together and look at things from each other's standpoint.

Coming into God's presence and communing with Him, we see ourselves in the light of His countenance, and are humbled, and at the same time filled with desire to be as He is. We take in the Divine ideas. We learn to look at things from the Divine standpoint. We are transformed by beholding.

There is within each Christian a kind of dual being, the antagonism arising from the difference between the "flesh" and the Spirit. Prayer makes the one a yielding and the other a vanquishing force.

"My God, how fierce the strife,
Two minds within me dwell.
This bids me love Thee well,
And yield to Thee my life;
While that, with disobedience rife,
Would from thy law rebel.
This by Thy Spirit taught,
For heaven claims all my love,
And, set on things above,
Counts all below but nought;
While that, with deadly burden fraught,
Earthwards my soul would move.

Oh ! thus at war within,
Where can I peace attain ?
I will—but all in vain ;
Such misery hems me in.
I love the good, but yet abstain ;
I hate, *but do* the sin.
O light of saving grace,
Let me no more be twain ;
Gently my heart constrain,
My rebel will efface,
Give me among Thine own a place,
And break death's heavy chain."

The comforting effect of prayer.

There is a boy away from home, attending school at a distance. He is ill: he pines for home. He says to himself, "If I were only with father and mother I should soon be well again."

We are all at some time or other like that boy in relation to our heavenly Father, and we come to a parent, who is never from home when His children call. You have a friend with whom you were wont to take sweet counsel. You go to the familiar spot that is hallowed by the intercourse you have had. But the presence is gone. The place that once knew him knows him no more. The sun is shining as before, the birds singing, the waves breaking upon the shore —but he is gone.

They that wait for the Lord shall not be ashamed.

The religion of some is like a fortress encompassed and beleaguered, with supplies rapidly passing away, and not far from the point of capitulation. Religion ought to be like a victorious army that has subdued and now occupies a country. Prayer makes the difference.

At Our Wit's End.

"The Bible was not given to teach us how the heavens go, but how to go to heaven."—GALILEO.

"Scripture presents faith generally as opposed to sight, not to reason. Reason helps faith and *makes room for it.*"

"It is sometimes forgotten by us that all perfectly luminous truths are secondary ones. Truths that are primary or ultimate are of necessity dim ; because whenever we pass beyond phenomena, the reality we apprehend is half concealed as well as half revealed."—W. KNIGHT.

A pilot was once asked if he knew all the rocks along the coast. "No," he replied, "*but I know the safe channel.*"

"We need little less than infinity to make us happy, and little more than nothing to make us miserable."—RICHTER.

AT OUR WIT'S END.

"AT their wit's end" is one of those fine old pithy Saxon phrases for which we are indebted to the authorised version of the Old Testament. Taken in connection with the rest of the passage in which it is found, it presents a picture full of pathos and power. They who are represented as being "at their wit's end" are upon the great deep. They are experienced mariners who are skilled in the craft of seamanship, and not blundering landsmen, who are attempting to handle the vessel. They have resources of knowledge and ability which come out when the emergency occurs. But even the most intrepid and ready-witted sometimes feel that they have reached the limit of their power to cope with the tempest. Sails had been taken in, the lading had been lightened, the helm was held with a firm and careful hand; all the shifts of experienced seamanship had been tried, and at last, baffled and exhausted, they felt they could do no more, as the vessel was being driven about like a feather upon the ocean. They were "at their wit's end," and must call in a power that does not dwell within themselves. Against the elements that were uncontrollable and threatening to engulf them, they seek the intervention of heaven: "Then they cried unto the Lord."

Making allowance for the superficial difference of circumstance, how common is the experience narrated in that old Hebrew psalm. Is there any one reading these pages who has never been "at his wit's end"? If so, I venture to affirm he has not gone very far in life. He that has not got to the end of his "wit" has not yet made a beginning as a winner of true wisdom.

There is a man perplexed as to what is to him the path of duty. He has come to a point in his journey where two or three roads open out. All appear to be good and inviting, the inducements seem to be about equally balanced; each one may be a path of righteousness leading to the city above, when his pilgrimage is done. But he cannot walk on the three. He must make a choice, and do it quickly. It passes the wit of man to know what to do. What can he do but call in a wisdom and an authority higher than his own?

Look at that mother tenderly nursing a child that is suffering from an acute disease which is rapidly running its course, that alas, may end in death. She has called in the very best medical skill. She has with scrupulous faithfulness attended to the prescriptions. She has watched the changing symptoms with a sleepless eye by day and night. Not a sigh or moan, or whispered word or feverish toss has escaped her notice. Yet withal, how helpless she feels herself to be. But for faith, how miserable she would be under her conscious limitations. As she looks at her child, and would fondle it into health if she could, she feels there is something required beyond her love and skill—something not under her

command unless prayer can reach it. She is "at her wit's end." Nothing more can she do except to connect herself with the mystery of omnipotence by prayer.

Nothing that human solicitude could do, as impelled by parental urgency, has been spared to reclaim yonder foolish and wayward youth. A father's expostulations, a mother's tears, a sister's tender reproaches, a brother's stern rebuke, have all proved unavailing. He is bound up in his own folly. He is a law unto himself. He has given the rein to self-will and passion. No authority, no influence, no argument, no word has any weight with him as he speeds on to ruin at his own charges. Truly the members of that family are "at their wit's end," and can only wait and pray

There is a commercial firm conducting business on the most approved principles. Enterprise is qualified by caution. Speculation that is not sound and sober in the basis from which it starts is shunned as belonging to the gambler rather than to the merchant. The smallest details where profits can be made and expenses kept down receive the closest attention. All from the head of the firm to the youngest apprentice are at their post from morning till night, endeavouring to deserve and hoping to secure success. The fruits of their application and circumspection soon become apparent. The business is increasing, premises are enlarged, capital is accumulating.

But suddenly a thunderbolt as from a clear sky comes upon them. One of the banks of the highest standing in the country, to the consternation of the

commercial world, comes down through secret and criminal mismanagement. As a consequence, one house after another, in which that firm has a great deal at stake, falls with a crash. Every morning the most ominous communications are received. Credit is shaken. Foresight, painstaking cannot save them. They could not have anticipated or averted the crash. They are "at their wit's end."

In thought, in philosophic speculation, in every attempt to trace the causes and springs of existence, to touch the background and essence of being, we are beset with the same sense of limitation. Our fathoming line cannot reach the bottom of things. Our vision cannot cover the beginning and end. We are obliged to stop at a point which we feel is not finality. That which is ultimate to us as explorers is not always ultimate in the nature and constitution of things.

The ancient investigators who spent laborious days and nights in trying to discover the philosopher's stone, by which the inferior metals could be transmuted into the precious; or the elixir of life, by which human existence could be indefinitely prolonged, were not more baffled than are modern scientists by some of the problems they attack. What is the origin of life? how can the chasm between matter and spirit, brain and thought, be bridged? how can the free action of man and the reign of physical law be harmonised? what follows after death?—to attempt to answer those and such like questions reveals the fact that the profoundest and most original mind soon comes to the end of its wit. Man, with all his ingenuity, could not make a single seed-corn. He

can by analysis ascertain the constituent chemical parts of a seed and their relative proportion. He can put such chemical parts in due proportion together, but it is not a seed, and would not germinate.

The deepest thinkers known to history have been the first to acknowledge this environment of limitation which the boldest intellect cannot overleap.

Goethe says, "Man is not born to solve the problem of the universe, but rather to seek to take account of it—to know where it begins."

Pascal says, "The last step of reason, and one of the marks of its strength, is to know that there is an infinity of things which surpass it."

What a significant sentence is that of Huxley: "If scientists endeavoured to grasp too much they became superficial, and if they were very thorough over a little they became narrow," indicating that there was a depth and breadth in nature that they cannot go down and out to.

The progress of science has not removed mystery, it has only pushed it a little further back. "Those who think that science is dissipating religious beliefs and sentiments seem unaware that whatever of mystery is taken from the old interpretation is added to the new. . . . Science substitutes an explanation which, carrying us back only a certain distance, there leaves us in the presence of the avowedly inexplicable." Science in its proudest development only deepens the mystery.

We may so bury our heads in the little ruts we make in the earth as to fancy that the sides of the ruts are the bounds of the universe. Mechanics and artizans who work among the forces of nature that

they have brought under their control and yoked into their service sometimes become sceptical and materialistic. But did you ever come across a sailor, a fisherman, a shepherd on the hills, or any one who comes face to face with the wilder aspects of nature and has to cope with forces that occasionally overmaster him, who maintained that mystery had been banished from the universe.

You may affect to ignore this mystery, but sooner or later you are made to feel it. You can no more escape from it than the mariner can from the sea in passing from one place to another. It is about you as the atmosphere. It is above you as the heavens. It is beneath you as the earth on which you walk, but cannot explore very far from the surface. What are you to do with this mystery when you come upon it? Are you to dash yourself against it as the bird does against the bars of the cage in which it is imprisoned? Are you to live in a state of perpetual impatience and irritation under this mystery? Or are you to accept it as part of your privilege as children who have a Father so much greater than themselves?

In view of the vast region that evidently and from the very limitation of our natures remains unexplored, would it not be well to cultivate and exercise the virtue of

HUMILITY?

Seeing that our measuring line cannot go to the bottom of things, would it not be wise and becoming in us to refrain from speaking too dogmatically about what is at the bottom, unless it is clearly and fully revealed? Had we nothing else to do we might see occupation for our minds in spinning

speculations and conjuring shapes and fancies, but since there is so much for us to learn within our legitimate domain, should we not let the unknowable alone that we may be all the better able to master and gain the full benefit of that which can be known and ought to be known? "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, the things *revealed* unto us and to our children." We ought to know far more where knowledge is possible, and one reason why we know so little is that we persist in spending precious time upon the pursuit of knowledge where knowledge is impossible.

If, for example, one-half of the time that has been spent in the vain attempt, by abstract reasoning and metaphysical discussion, to reconcile Divine predestination with human free-will, had been devoted to the careful and prayerful study of Scripture, what a richer harvest would have been reaped. If the energy spent on speculation as to the ultimate destiny of the heathen, which has no bearing at all upon the positive duty of the Church, or, indeed, any practical bearing of any kind, had been bestowed upon efforts to convert heathen into Christians, would the state of the world to-day not be much brighter than it is?

We need to call in that we may concentrate our energies, call in from will-of-the-wisp pursuits that we may concentrate upon present and God-given duty. The Church has too often lost its way and missed its aim, and the poor, needy, waiting world has been the loser and sufferer. While members of the Church have been engaged in Quixotic attacks upon windmills, the darkness that is Egyptian has not been diminished,

the tide of sin that is at the full has not been stemmed, and men have been perishing from lack of knowledge. We have been dreaming, guessing, discussing, trying to find scope for our analytical apparatus and dogmatic opinions in that region which lies beyond our ken, when neglected duties lie at our very feet, crying shame upon us for our folly and heartlessness. The spirit of ultra-definition and curious enquiry above what is written is the germ and essence of rationalism. Leave something to God; take what God has given to you. You are twisting passages and straining phrases and overburdening words to make them fit into some pet theory of yours of universalism. My friends, the world does not want your guesses and theories. What it needs is Christ's facts, broad, palpable, glorious, gladdening, clear as the sunlight, precious as heaven itself.

There should be the same humble self-restraint on the practical side of life. When we think of the unknown and unknowable, what we cannot foresee and provide against should not bring a burden of care and fear to the mind. Do not stretch yourselves upon beds of nettles by conjuring up all sorts of fears before they come. Do not cross your bridge till you come to it. There was an inquisition that attained to a terrible notoriety in Spain, where the bodies of men were stretched and tortured. In every country, in every town, in almost every home there is an inquisition for the mind. We rack ourselves by presuming to assume the responsibilities of omniscience when we should be content to see but in part.

In view of the revelation that has come to us from

the land of mystery, there should be under all our limitations

TRUST.

We are so constituted that mystery makes us pensive. Our limitations cast a shade upon us. We are finite, and yet we have a yearning, an irrepressible, indescribable longing for the infinite. You have stood upon the sea-shore watching a ship that was sailing out into the ocean. You followed it with your eye, as it was becoming smaller and smaller, until at last it was lost to view. You felt that the ship was somewhere, but gone from your ken, and a sadness came over your spirit under this sense of limitation, especially if you had a husband or son on board. The sun sinking beneath the horizon, going away into the unknown, does not stir the same feelings within us as when in the morning it springs up to our view as something that is to be with us for the coming day. Who has ever stood beside the deathbed of a friend and watched the flickering light go out without feeling some degree of impatience under the limitation of vision and experience? What an impassable gulf separates us from that lonely spirit setting out on its journey in the night. We would like to bridge the gulf. We would like to see what lies beyond. We would like to stand by that dear one on the other side.

Christ has come to satisfy that longing, to bridge the gulf between the finite and infinite, the natural and supernatural, to be the antidote of what is painful in our limitations, to assure us that it is well for us on the other side if we walk in the light on this side.

What is the difference between agnosticism and Christianity? It is this. The agnostic says, there is awful mystery behind the phenomena that is inscrutable. Our duty is to look upon it with reverence and awe. Christ teaches us to mingle trust with our awe. And He provides us with intelligent grounds for that trust. The agnostic says, what lies beyond the natural is wholly unknown. Christ comes to make the unknown known in so far as we need it to be known. He came to show us the Father, and by an undoubted and impressive demonstration of His love, enables us to trust where we cannot see or know for ourselves. What a sphere and function for faith. *Our limitations are simply an opportunity for trust.* We can no longer people the unknown with direful shades. That unknown is filled with God, and therefore filled with love, for God is love.

The best preparation we can make for the unknown, and the highest assistance we can render to it, is to have vigilant devotion within our own province, our own appointed sphere.

"Banish mystery and you throne distrust." Reduce all things in heaven and earth to the materialistic conception and mechanical theory, and pessimism lifts its head immediately. This present life is emptied of its richest contents if you reduce existence to a fortuitous concourse of atoms.

But while there is shallowness and lightness of character where there is no notion of the absolute and incomprehensible, there is also sloth, ignorance, ignoble acquiescence which breeds fatalism, if there is the want of an adequate sense of responsibility in relation to our own domain as creatures. It is well

that the Infinite should cast its spell upon us. But it is not well that the finite should cease to engage our attention and rouse our energies. The definite as well as the Infinite has its place in human life. There is room for knowledge as well as faith, for science as well as awe. It is no compliment to the unknown that we neglect the known. We cannot expect to obtain the benefit of God's own personal attributes unless we exert what He has put within ourselves. "To know what before us lies in daily life is the prime wisdom."

At War.

"Thine enemies are all around,
And every spot is battle ground,
Where thou can'st watch and pray."

"To be bold against the enemy is common to the brutes; but the prerogative of man is to be bold against himself."

"Obscure seed, remain under the earth. Wherefore burst forth a flower. Thou dreamest of sunlight, of breezes, of dew. Alas! the sun burns, the breeze torments, the dew weighs and sullies. Trouble awaits thee in the daylight—trouble, not peace; and if some glory is promised thee, it will prove vain and brief. Remain under the earth, obscure seed. I will be a flower, I must be a flower. Trial for trial, it is better to suffer in the light than in the shade. For I suffer here. Nor do I find it true that isolation is happiness. Night surrounds me, the earth presses on me, the worm insults me. Above all, desires eat out my life. I must be a flower, I will be a flower."—ROUX.

"When you see a dog following two men, you know not to which of them he belongs while they walk together; but let them come to a parting road, and one go one way, and the other another way, then will you know which is the dog's master. So while a man may have the world and a religious profession too, we cannot tell which is the man's master, God or the world; but stay till the man come to a parting-road. God calls him this way, and the world calls him that way. Well, if God be his master, he follows truth and righteousness, and lets the world go; but if the world be his master, then he follows the flesh and the lusts thereof, and lets God and conscience go."—RALPH ERSKINE.

"All the days of my *warfare* would I wait, till my release should come."—JOB xiv. 14 (Revised Version).

AT WAR.

IN passing through a town or part of a country that is suffused with the sentiment which comes from history or romance, that was the scene of a decisive and renowned battle, or the noble maintenance unto death of the rights of conscience and the cause of liberty, you are struck with the contrast in the picture which imagination draws, and that which the senses now behold. As you walk along the streets or over the field, and the past comes before you like a vision, you almost hear the trumpet call, the word of command, the tramp of soldiery, the clashing of weapons. Memory does its work so well that you can see with the mind's eye the mustering hosts, the floating banner, the deadly onset, the defeat of the enemy that ends in rout and dispersion.

But when you let the past go, and allow the present to possess the eye and mind, do you not feel as if you had descended from poetry to prose, from the heights of exalted and chivalrous feeling to the lower levels and petty affairs of an unattractive and tame routine? Coming back from those stirring times and high-souled endeavours, you feel that all is dull and monotonous under present conditions. There is nothing particular to arrest the attention of the traveller unless it be the monuments erected to

commemorate the valour and self-sacrifice of bygone times. Men are plying their callings in the factory and shop, women are attending to their domestic duties, and children are at school learning their lessons, but nothing picturesque or stirring, nothing to quicken the pulse or bring a flash to the eye is happening. All is commonplace, pitched on a comparatively humble level, destitute of those nobler impulses that come with high occasions and deeds of daring. The sublime and the tragic are surely only words and not things in the life of the nineteenth century. The enthusiasm, the public devotion to a cause that lies outside of shop and home, the fine strains of honour that can count goods and even life as fuel for the altar fire of duty—all that is gone, and we are left with the cold, black dead embers of a glorious past, and have to content ourselves with life on another plane, where struggle and conflict for the higher ideas of life are no longer necessary.

Is it so? No war for us in modern times! What tricks the senses and imagination can play! How easily the accident can be mistaken for the essence. War of the rough and barbarous order happily we have not had in this country for more than a hundred years. But that of which warfare was the clumsy figure,—conflict for an idea, struggle for the right, devotion to a cause, we have as much as ever. The outward circumstance, the pomp and pageantry of war which beguile the senses, are parts, let us hope, of an expiring system; but the war that goes on in the moral sphere, which God and the angels watch

with deepest interest, never flags, and cannot, till the Prince of peace reigns over the whole race.

There is no one who is not now in the battlefield, either gaining or losing ground. That man in whom the flesh is awake and clamorous and the spirit asleep has the enemy at his throat, and if he do not bestir himself, he is undone. That merchant who is in difficulties, and could easily extricate himself by compounding with his creditors, but who from a high sense of honour makes a gallant struggle to pay every one twenty shillings in the pound—that man is at war with the baser feelings in his own bosom. God grant him the victory. That university student, who rather than draw upon the savings of his aged parents for his maintenance, takes engagements as a tutor in addition to his class work, is at war with the lower part of himself. The encounter is, however, still more perilous when companions urge him to join them in scenes of dissipation. There is war then between his conscience and his associates. God stand by the right. There is a street preacher standing on a cold, wintry night at the wind-swept corner, throwing all his energy and fire into an assault upon prevailing indifference and worldliness, and he is as much a soldier as if he were facing the bullets and bayonets of the battlefield. In yonder chamber is a woman nursing the child of a dying neighbour with as much tender care as if it were her own. No sister of charity on the battlefield could be more deserving of praise, though perhaps she would make a better subject for the artist. That young minister, wrestling with speculative doubt, praying against the spectre of scepticism that

is beginning to cast its withering shadow upon his spirit, assailing heaven with agonising and tearful importunity for light and certitude, is displaying finer qualities of valour than did crusader of mediæval times. No war! Rather should you say no peace. This is a campaign that has no end. As long as there is wrong that has not been subdued by right, error that truth has not quenched, passion over which principle has not as yet triumphed, ignorance that has not been rolled back by knowledge, selfishness that has not been extirpated by Christ, the war must go on, and there is no discharge from it except that which death grants. In commonplace homes and under commonplace faces conflicts are going on with evil propensity, with external temptation, with poverty, which make such persons heroic and beautiful in the eye of heaven. There can be devotion to the higher ideas of life without the martyr's stake or the cannon's roar, just as there are other foes besides the invader or the tyrant.

How frequently you hear the sound of war, the cry of battle, as you read the Bible. The favourite Scriptural representation of the life of a godly man in this world is that of warfare. Christ spoke of the world as an enemy that had to be "overcome." In Paul's two brief Epistles to Timothy there are half-a-dozen allusions to warfare in setting forth the duty and work of this young pastor. He is enjoined to "fight the good fight of faith," to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ." In his other epistles he enjoins his hearers to "put on the whole armour of God;" reminding them also that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual principalities and powers."

Even John, the apostle of love, has a great deal of soldierly feeling in his epistles. "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." The whole Bible, from the opening chapters of the book of Genesis, where we read that the seed of the woman is to bruise the head of the serpent, to the book of Revelation, where there are many striking battle scenes, has a warlike note that makes itself heard whatever other notes may be struck.

Whence this warring? What is it that lays upon us the necessity of being at war, at war, too, when we are at our best? It is the fact that we are, or ought to be, at peace where peace is of the deepest consequence to us, at peace with God. Christ brings us to the Father, reconciles us to the Father, and the degree of our oneness with God measures the intensity of the warfare we have to wage with what is ungodly. Alliance with God implies antagonism to what is against the character and will of God. Standing beside God, everything is looked at from the divine standpoint. Taking that position, you are bound to turn your face against what is inconsistent with His friendship. Love means war.

That explains what Christ meant when He said He came not to bring peace but a sword. As soon as a man comes under the power of the gospel of peace he becomes a warrior. You cannot love opposites. You cannot have affinities with objects that contradict each other.

The object which confronts you as that to which you must give an unyielding resistance, is what in Scripture is called the "world." Obviously not the

material globe. Quite as obviously not the persons who inhabit it. What is the "world?" The ungodly spirit prevailing in society, and all the manifestations of that spirit.

At first, when Christianity was planted upon the earth, there was no difficulty in knowing what was the "world." The "world" was heathenism gross and palpable. The Church and the "world" in the old days of dominant paganism stood face to face as two systems or commonwealths diametrically opposed to each other in their fundamental principle and ruling aim. The "world" was paganism and the Church was Christ, as the importation of a new and regenerating force.

But by-and-bye paganism, as an outward system having a worship and institutions of its own, had, in civilised countries, to give way to Christianity. Europe became nominally Christian. The temples and idols are gone. The "world" is no longer that obvious, glaring, notorious thing that it was. You cannot point the finger to any compact mass of avowed paganism in our land, and say that is the "world."

The "world" still exists, alas, strong and stubborn, but it is more subtle in its forms. It is often to be found under a Christian disguise. It takes its place not unfrequently in the church. It surrounds the communion table. It mounts into the pulpit. It appears in missionary subscription lists.

Let us unmask the "world." Let us compel it to declare itself. We are not to be imposed upon by its fair appearances. Though it should assume the guise of an angel of light, we shall discover its true character. Wherein lies the seat of worldliness?

It lies in giving the sovereignty of life to self, in refusing to enthrone Christ as our Absolute Head, and view all things in the light of His mind and purpose. The "world" takes its own way, follows its own impulses, and does not co-operate with Christ in the advancement of His aims. What concerns Christ does not press upon the thought of the "world." When a man's interests and Christ's interests do not run on the same lines, he is of the "world." In short, all that is un-Christlike in spirit, desire, temper, disposition, character, is the *world.*

The Christian, then, is a warrior at the very outset of his career, as he has to fight this "world." To begin with, he finds the "world" in his own heart, and he has to direct his aggressive energy and war-like measures against it, for "out of the heart are the issues of life." He has to fight with unhallowed ambition, selfish impulses, the inordinate love of money, fame, or any other object. He does not become a saint in a day, but he has the aim of a saint, if he is truly converted, which is summed up in the words, "All for Christ."

God, though reconciled to the believer, is not, he is aware, reconciled to his sinfulness of nature. Sin in him, whether as secret feeling or open transgression, is as obnoxious to God as it is when seen in the most abandoned sinner. So it is with him a matter of daily prayer, vigilant outlook, unceasing conflict, that "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life" shall be deposed, and Christ enthroned instead. As Christians we are bound to give effect to Christ and not to self.

The "world" in society, in the usages, habits, prin-

ciples, tastes, pursuits, amusements, that are inconsistent with the mind and character of Christ, is an adversary against which we must set our faces. If we are on the side of Christ, we cannot favour what does not make for purity and righteousness. Whatever tends to enslave and lower it is our business to oppose.

How are we to show that we and the "world" are not of the same mind—that we belong to different hemispheres of thought and feeling—that we are necessarily antagonistic?

Not by hiding ourselves within the walls of our own religious coterie. Think of soldiers fighting for their king by hiding themselves within their fortifications and never going out into the open! The monks who retired within their cloisters and cells, or the hermits who hid themselves within their caves and dens, were no worse than those modern pietists who seclude themselves within their narrow circles.

We are to maintain social, civil relations with men as Christ did, going amongst them as duty calls, and Providence invites, that our light may shine, and there may be a sphere in which the Christianity that is in us can operate for the good of others. Thus there will be full scope for the influence that goes from us, room for the play of the Divine life, and men will see and feel what we are, or rather what Christ is to us and in us; we not being self-conscious, much less ostentatious, but going simply, quietly amongst men, without affectation or airs of superiority, being what we are without thinking much about it.

But whilst there is to be no strutting or parading,

as if we were gods come down amongst men, or at least angelic visitants, there is, on the other hand, to be no unworthy compliance, no compromise of principle, no treason to our Lord. Christ went to the homes of publicans and sinners, but He went as Christ. He did not leave any of his character or principles behind in accommodation to the tastes and ways of those whom He visited. He went there undivided, unbroken, the whole Christ, under no disguise or false pretence, and all who kept company with him knew who and what He was, having much love for them as men, but no congeniality for what was unworthy in their ways and words.

In battling with temptation and seeking to win the world for Christ, there are various conditions helpful to success, and therefore worthy of our attention.

We must be sure that we have the mind of Christ, and be heart and soul on the side we have espoused.

There are many who are overawed by Christ who are not in perfect sympathy with Christ. The conscience within them acknowledges Christ, and does Him honour. But their real desires and secret likings are not His. They have little in common with Christ in the aims they cherish.

Now, before you can fight the good fight of faith, you must be sure that Christ has access to all the springs of your being, and has control of your affections. You and He must be of the same mind and purpose.

It is not enough to have conscience on the side of Christ. You must have the heart also. There were many in Jerusalem who could not refrain from

revering Christ, but they did not like Him, and they ended by crucifying Him. There were thousands in Florence who were overawed by the austere moral magnificence of Savonarola, but not sharing in his aims, they hurled him from their midst. There were thousands during the reign of Puritanism in England who were in it but not of it.

You must choose good vantage ground for the fight.

How much depends sometimes upon the choice of the ground on which a battle has to be fought. Soldiers do not always have such a choice, and have to fight the enemy where he has entrenched himself. There is a sense in which that is true of us. But there is also a sense in which it is the case that the choice lies with us.

I once saw some stunted trees on a bank close upon a part of our north-east coast, and as I looked at their dwarfed forms and stinted leafage, I thought they are not favourably situated for carrying on a successful war with the elements. They are too near the sea, and the wild, overbearing blasts which come from the icy north make it impossible they can thrive where they are.

We need not be reduced to such extremity. It was not necessary that Lot should live on the plains of Sodom. He might have been more favourably placed for the moral health of his wife and children and of himself had he been less greedy of gain. It is not necessary you should be a member of that club where drinking and gambling go on till midnight. Place yourself advantageously for the battle if you want victory and not defeat.

Put on the whole armour of God.

Do not wait till you are in the thick of the battle before you look for and put on your armour. Be ready.

Let the consciousness of the presence of your Leader sustain you in the hour of trial.

When the French knew that their commander, Napoleon, was with them, it made such a difference to them in their fighting. It will make a difference to you if you know that Jesus is with you. "Lo I am with you alway."

. . . . .

What a grand symbol of passive resistance is that rocky headland. It stands there, massive and calm, looking out upon the raging sea with undaunted front. As it rears its lofty head and breasts the impetuous waves with its impenetrable granite, it seems to say to the ocean that would encroach and insult, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." It is one of Nature's bulwarks, and looks as if it were placed there to mark the boundary line where sea and land should meet. That represents men of heroic mould like Luther or Knox. Let us be thankful that the *humble sandbank can serve the same purpose as the lofty rocky cliff.*

At Work.

"The laurel never grows for sluggard brows."

"The three essentials in life are something to *do*, something to *love*, something to *hope for*."

"Pray, of what did your brother die?" said the Marquis Spinola one day to Sir Horace. He answered, "He died of having nothing to do." "Alas!" said Spinola, "that is enough to kill any general of us all."

"Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on itself did lay."

—WORDSWORTH.

"Do the work that's nearest,
Though it's dull at whiles,
Helping, when you meet them,
Lame dogs over stiles."

—CHARLES KINGSLEY.

AT WORK.

A MODERN writer who wields a pen of titanic power has given a most vivid description of the tremendous force that is put into operation when the inhabitants of a large manufacturing city rise in the morning and ply their various avocations at forge, engine, and loom. He goes on to say that the thought of the enormous energy that is guided by human intelligence into channels of useful industry ("ten thousand looms at work at six o'clock in the morning") is more impressive than the falls of Niagara, or any of the other imposing phenomena of nature.

If the question were asked, What was the motive impelling all those operatives to leave their beds and enter the factory? the answer would likely be, that they did it to get a living. Bread is needed, and labour is the price most men must pay for it before they can eat it.

That answer is good, but it does not cover the whole ground. There is generally more than one reason for doing a right thing, and some of the deepest reasons are not always most apparent. There is the obvious one which appeals immediately to man's own intelligence, and constrains him to action, but there are others not so much on the surface that

the constitution of things, or rather God, keeps in His own hands.

Put the matter to a practical test, and you will find it as I have said. You tell the truth and pay your debts because it is right to do so. That is sufficient motive to you. But while that is so, God keeps in reserve other reasons why you should be truthful and honest. For example, there is one which is never uppermost in the mind of the truly good man, but which has its place, namely, that the practice of the homely virtues of truthfulness and honesty is conducive to a man's own happiness and peace.

So while most men betake themselves to some profitable calling that they may earn an honest living and hold up their heads as independent and self-respecting men, yet the claims of industry can be advocated on other grounds.

One reason which cannot be overlooked, is that it would appear that every living thing has its contribution to make to the general good, and it is not to be supposed that man with his brain and hand was not intended to be one of the many useful activities of the universe. Look abroad upon the system of things, and you will find there is not a creature or plant that does not serve some useful function, and if we cannot discover any purpose that is served, we attribute our failure to our limitation of knowledge. So much is that the case that a weed has been defined as "a plant the uses of which have not yet been discovered."

What work has been going on in our world on a summer morning long before man is awake. The

sun has risen and has been flooding the earth with the light which it supplies to the inhabitants free of cost. Even before the sun rose the dew-drops have been forming to refresh every green herb. The clouds, too, are extemporising a magnificent picture gallery in the firmament, with shapes lovely and curious, and delicate tints and shades, which man by his art cannot rival, and all is spread before the inspection of any one who will open his eyes and look. The birds begin a concert, and make wood and garden vocal with their ravishing music, because they are glad and wish to diffuse their gladness. The various plants and flowers are at their daily tasks, busily drinking in dew and sunshine at every pore, sucking up the nutritious particles of soil, and converting all into swelling stalk and expanding leaf. The bee, the butterfly, all the insects and animals, do something which is in the line of their divinely constructed natures, but which all goes to swell the sum of general utility.

"So, too, man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening." We find in nature that the larger the endowment the higher the function. So man being what he is, cannot surely be idle when all around him is astir.

There is this reason also which man has in common with all the other objects named, for activity, that besides being for the general welfare, it is for his own individual good. That reason may be in the background, but it exists. There is no health, no true life, unless there is work. Idleness is akin to death. As soon as a tree slackens its processes of absorbing from without and propelling juices from within to

every branch and twig, it decays and becomes a rotten stump. Man, too, cannot, without injury to himself, go against the law which His Maker laid upon him when He put him into the garden to dress it. How unhappy the lot of those who are placed above the necessity of working, and do not of their own free will take upon them any burden of public duty. How they have to resort to all sorts of expedients, diversions, forced excitements, artificial gaieties, in order to maintain anything like a tolerable interest in life. Their experience bears out what Wordsworth says:

> "If life were slumber on a bed of roses,
> Toil unimposed, vicissitude unknown,
> Sad were our lot."

Look at those fields in the harvest season covered with sheaves. Would it have been better for the owners and tenants of the fields if, without any effort on their part, the sheaves had dropped from heaven? No; the more we think the more are we convinced that the present arrangement is really a beneficial one. When sowing the seed in the face of bitter, biting east wind, or reaping when the sun smites with its heat, the farmer may be tempted to wish that the sheaves came without any toil of his own, but God is wiser and kinder than he is.

The body itself demands that whatever be a man's occupation there should be physical labour of some kind. Those whose profession it is to work with the head may think they can escape the general law, but they cannot, as to keep themselves in health they have to take physical exercise, which is different

from that of the artizan's or peasant's, in that it brings in no money. When will the silly prejudice against manual labour pass away ? It is too strong amongst the working classes themselves, as it is often their great ambition to have sons in a shop or an office, when they might be more useful and happy with the hammer or trowel in hand instead of the pen or yard-stick. America and other colonies are doing much to raise the status of manual labour. The dignity of honest toil with the hand is bound to become more patent as enlightenment spreads. I believe we are making such progress in the right direction that we shall soon be as far advanced as the ancient Hebrews were, who thought that to unite the study of the law with a trade kept away sin, whereas study by itself was dangerous and disappointing. Stories are told of famous teachers who carried their work-stools to their schools. One of them was working as a mason when he was chosen as high priest. "Of the Rabbis in honour in Christ's time, some were millers, carpenters, cobblers, tailors, bakers, surgeons, builders."

If there are any within the reach of my influence evidently called to some kind of work that is esteemed by the world a mean drudgery, remember the words of an ancient when placed in your circumstances, "I will so fill my position as to make it hereafter honourable."

Speaking generally of work, whether manual or mental, a man needs it for his moral health. Apart from the lower reason connected with subsistence which comes so much to the front, there is that higher one that is more in the background like many

of the best things of life. Socrates once asked a disciple if astronomy should be classed amongst necessary subjects of study. "Yes," was the reply; "it is useful for military purposes, also for agriculture and navigation." "But," said Socrates, "it is helpful too in giving us elevation of thought and feeling as we contemplate the heavenly bodies."

So, too, work has its higher as well as lower utility. It is useful as discipline, it is helpful in the formation of character. How significant is that designation of a man's occupation as his "calling." He may be led to devote his life to a certain kind of work by what he terms the pressure of circumstances. An opening occurs, no other appears, he enters where he can. He is "called." The particular kind of work is of comparatively little importance so far as the development of his higher life is concerned. What is of consequence is that he do it well. His character and his future depend upon the temper and spirit he brings into his work.

What man as a workman has to realize is this: Here before me is my God-given opportunity, the providentially ordered occasion. What am I to do with it? In trying to be equal to it, there is, without any undue self-consciousness, developed in me that character which is the spiritual and eternal product. The kind of work is of little importance —whether a man make bricks or shoes, laws or sermons, the essential part is that he take his work from God. In building a house, what is necessary to a happy result is not that one man should be a mason, another a carpenter, another a plumber; what is required, if the house is what it is designed to

be, is that each one take his place for which he is best fitted under the direction of the architect. He may not at the beginning see how his part is to affect the general result, but if he obeys his call there will be rejoicing by-and-bye for him, as well as for the others, when the copestone is put on. The particular field that an army is forced to take is not of vital moment, nor the spot where every individual soldier stands. Whether it be high or low ground, picturesque or otherwise, is not the question, but this—is every soldier obeying orders and doing valiantly for king and country?

What though the material on which a sculptor operates be granite, or marble, or sandstone, if an angel come out of it? What though the platform on which a speaker stands be made of fir or cedar, if upon it the truth be forcibly and eloquently spoken? What though a man be as Christ was, a carpenter, or Paul a tentmaker, or as Hugh Miller a mason, or Abraham Lincoln, who became the American president, a rail-splitter, if he so acquit himself as to have those words addressed to him by the Master: "Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things. I will make thee ruler over many."

There are a few things we need to be admonished to in following our callings.

We must mind our own business.

Concentration is needed in order to success. Distraction is weakness. Frequent change of occupation is a waste of time and energy. We should think well before making a choice of a business, weighing all the considerations, taking into account our natural

proclivities, and not failing to foresee probable drawbacks; and then when the decision is made, the difficulties should be very serious indeed that would induce us to take a new departure which makes years of special training of no avail.

In these days of division of labour and overpressure, concentration is more needed than ever. As a rule in the present day, the "Jack of all trades and master of none" is at least in an old country such as this like "the rolling stone that gathers no moss."

One soon learns that if he is to do any one thing well he must give himself up to it. We cannot take the responsibilities of the world upon us. We must take our little part as if it were the whole to us; it is the whole to us so far as responsible action is concerned.

I once saw a man sowing seed in a field beside a railway. There he was pacing up and down the ground, with his head down and his hands busy, as if he had said to himself, This *one* thing I do. The lark was soaring and singing, trains were coming and going, men were passing on an adjoining road intent upon business. There he was as occupied, absorbed, as if sowing seed were the one thing worth doing in the world, and as if indeed that parcel of earth was the world. He did not take upon him the responsibilities of the lark or the railway guard. He did not run to see if the points were right for the coming train. He had faith that others would do their part. He did his. He minded his own business.

What we should be chiefly concerned about is not the largeness of the sphere, but the greatness of the spirit we bring into it.

Thomas Carlyle imposed this condition upon him-

self as a literary man, that he would never write anything save when specially moved to write by an impulse from within. Also he resolved to spare no labour till his work to the last fibre was as good as he possibly could make it. He was not a mere book-maker. He was an honest toiler in the domain of letters. What he was there his father, according to his account, was as a mason. What a noble tribute he paid to his father. "The force that had been lent my father he honourably expended in manifold well-doing. A portion of this planet bears beneficent traces of his strong hand and strong head. Nothing that he undertook but he did it faithfully and like a true man. I shall look on the houses he built with a certain proud interest. They stand firm and sound to the heart all over his little district. No one that comes after him will ever say: 'Here was the finger of a hollow-eyed servant.' They are little texts for me of the gospel of man's free will." Will the sons of all the workmen in our country be able to say that of their work fifty or even twenty years hence?

The severest punishment that could be inflicted upon some contractors and their subordinates would be to be obliged to stand face to face with their slim, dishonest work, on account of which not unfrequently the health of families has been wrecked, and even death has come in the wake of slipshod and careless workmanship. The blame may be laid upon the demand for cheapness. But the calling that cannot be followed without falseness, cannot be too soon abandoned. In these days of keen competition tradesmen deserve sympathy. It is hard for some

of them to live and be strictly honest. But it can be done, and is done.

Better for us to have a great mind in a lowly sphere, than a small mind in a big sphere. Better to be kingly at the forge or the carpenter's bench, than craven in a palace. The end of life is served if a man is as God would have him to be, whatever his earthly surroundings.

"Our sphere too small!" When it is all over, and our feet will run no more, and our hands are helpless, and we have scarcely strength to murmur a last prayer, then we shall see that instead of needing a larger field, we have left untilled many corners of our single acre, and that none of it is fit for our Master's eye, were it not for the softening shadow of the cross. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men."

But while during business hours a man should give himself up to his work, he should reserve some of his energy and time for that which brings in no pecuniary remuneration, if he is not to become narrow and hard —a mere drudge of the world.

I believe it is not the mere love of money that carries some men on and makes them so intent upon business. It is the energy that is in their natures, which must have an outlet, and has only the one channel provided for it of a money-making business. Men of spirit and purpose naturally like to succeed in anything they put their hand to. They want to make themselves felt, to be of consequence, to be sure that the weight of their personality tells amongst the forces of the world; and so they are in

the shop or the market-place what in other times and circumstances they would have been on the battle-field or the chase. They are not mere hangers-on in life. They will be men, and make their mark as such. They are not money-grubs, but business is what supplies them with interest in life from day to day. They would have no object in life if they did not have the determination to make money. That keeps them up and goads them on. Were it gone, life would be empty, without stimulus, without interest.

I must say I have considerable sympathy with those men, as compared with others who make life a perpetual sunning of themselves. Whether a man be of high or low social position, he should make his personality of some account. He should be one of life's contending and contributing forces, bringing out what is in him, and using it for the acquisition of something which he will be able to call his own, and show as proof that his years were spent to some purpose in this world. There is much of the hunter and soldier in every man of spirit and purpose. *But why not make personality tell in consequences more unmistakably valuable and enduring than money?*

At Leisure.

"Sessions of sweet, silent thought."—SHAKESPEARE.

Thoreau says that a broad margin of leisure is as beautiful in a man's life as in a book.

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

"Our life is only drest
For show; mean handy-work of craftsman, cook,
Or groom; we must run glittering like a brook
In the open sunshine; or we are unblest.
The wealthiest man among us is the best;
No grandeur now in nature or in book
Delights us."—WORDSWORTH.

"But," my lord, "I shall never be able to finish what I have begun, unless I be removed into some quiet, country parsonage, where I may see God's blessings spring out of my mother earth, and eat mine own bread in peace and privacy."—HOOKER.

AT LEISURE.

SITTING upon the top of an omnibus in London one day, I spied a monument that was exceedingly pleasing to the eye. I asked a not unintelligent looking person who happened to be beside me, in whose memory that beautiful statue we had just passed was erected. He replied with politeness: "I am ashamed to say I do not know: I have passed it hundreds of times, but we in London are so occupied with the one thing, so intent upon business, that we look neither to the right hand nor to the left." Trying to be as polite as he was, I was not quite so frank, as I did not say what I thought, that he had given me an excuse rather than a reason for his want of information.

It surely would not in the slightest degree have unfitted him for business or abstracted a single atom of energy for its successful prosecution, if disengaging his mind while being conveyed to and from his office, he had allowed it to go out to whatever was noticeable and fair in the scene spread before his view.

What I have said is no more than a plea for the pleasant and profitable use of leisure, and may be taken as the keynote of this chapter.

Leisure, as the term denotes, is that margin of

time belonging to a man, when the work appertaining to his calling, as a unit in the social commonwealth, is done. His task for the day is over; his neck is no longer under the yoke; he is now a man at leisure, not a toiler, and is free to follow the bent of his own mind.

Men of the present generation have more leisure than their fathers had. The complaint is often heard that the world was never so busy, nor life so full as it now is. But as a matter of fact, is it not the case that most people now have a shorter day of labour than what was common thirty years ago, this being notably the case with artizans? Men may be less in their homes than their forefathers were, but that is owing not so much to the claims of business as the numerous engagements of social and public life. We live more in public than our ancestors did. Meetings of all sorts, public and private, have multiplied enormously within recent years. There are some shopkeepers who, as the victims of evil custom, are obliged to stand at the post of duty till a late hour almost every day of the week, but the great majority of men have leisure. Even those who appear to have little of it, yet as Wordsworth says,

> "Can make who fail to find
> Brief leisure e'en in busiest days."

Leisure then is the ability or power to choose our employment. It is not the same as idleness or vacancy of mind. It is time left to us for occupations other than those which duty with its paramount claims or providential obligations imposes. There is so much business which we must

do, if we are to take and keep a place in society, that occupies the most of our time. What is left after it has received due attention is leisure.

The difficulty which many experience in making a wise and profitable use of leisure, should induce thankfulness for the imperious call of duty, the yoke of Providential appointment, the routine of daily labour. It is good for men, weak and wayward as most of them are, to have their occupations laid out for them. When we have to carve out work for ourselves how many mistakes we make.

There is certainly no part in life where we stand more in need of direction and support than when we are released from the obligatory engagements of our daily calling, and we can do as we please. Liberty is so apt to degenerate into license. There is more danger attending our pleasure than our toil. As long as the steam is on, it is not so difficult to steer the vessel through the troubled waters; but when the steam is off, it is no easy matter to keep the ship's head right. More of our soldiers come to grief in times of peace in our large cities than on the battlefield. Did not the Patriarch Job exhibit much knowledge of human nature as well as parental solicitude when he sanctified his sons, and offered burnt-offerings as their days of feasting came round? There is no test of character more searching than the use that a man makes of a holiday.

A great deal is gained to begin with, when we clearly perceive and freely admit that leisure should not be separated from the rest of our life, but be regarded as an integral part of it, bringing a valued contribution to its enlargement and enjoyment.

The notion cannot be too soon dismissed from our minds that recreation is dissipation. Recreation is that which recreates, furnishing us with fresh energy for duty and work. Our leisure is to be so used that it will be a gain and not a loss to life, not recreating the "old" but the better man. There is a craving in us all for life, rich and full and varied. We are not content that one or two strings of the harp of life should be played upon while others are untouched. Life has more than one note. It needs many to make music. We would bring life up to the diversified aspects and interests of existence. Leisure is given to us for that purpose—to heighten, broaden, sweeten, ennoble life.

One of the most helpful ways in which we can turn leisure to advantage is in wise *companionship*.

> "In still retreat and thoughtful talent thrives,
> But in the stream and current of the world the character grows strong."

The difference between solitude and society is that between still air and a breeze. To be amongst our fellows, hearing their opinions, entering into their discussions, encountering their opposition, is like facing a strong wind when walking, that stirs us, quickens the pulse, and brings colour to the cheek. "Iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."

When men have much work to do, it is well for them generally to be alone. But when released from the post of duty, we naturally go into company. We like to have festive seasons, special occasions for rejoicing, and, if they do not come to us according to the calendar, we make them. The shepherd in the parable was alone when seeking his sheep. So was

the woman searching for the lost coin. But both of them called in their neighbours when they rejoiced over their success. The sower is usually alone; but reaping is social. "Joy needs two."

Among all the contributing forces that go to form habit and life, and determine the future, I do not know one that ranks as more influential than companionship. Oh! how often I have seen the blighting effect of evil companionship gradually, but surely and painfully, revealing itself. Excellent parental training, regular church attendance, are not enough to fortify one against the lowering tendency of frivolous and foolish associates. You may do what you can for a youth till he is fifteen or sixteen, but if after that you allow him to keep company with those whose speech and example are not improving, all your toil and prayer for years are utterly undone. Nothing in this world brings so many to ruin, or to empty, useless lives as those social ties that are often so carelessly formed. Evil communications corrupt good manners. Oh! that every young person could say with the psalmist, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee and of them that keep thy precepts." We like to live in a good neighbourhood, free from every nuisance and bad odour. But are we as careful of the neighbourhood of the spirit, and as anxious to avoid what would poison it? Let this be taken as a test of companionship: "*The influence of a true friend is felt in the help which he gives the noble part of the nature.*" For our warning take this proverb, "He that takes the raven for a guide will light upon carrion." For our encouragement let us also remember that "Two dry sticks will set on fire one green."

Reading is also one of the ways in which we can improve our leisure. What an advantage it is to come into the presence of men of distinguished talent, who have won the admiration and reverence of their fellows by the service they have rendered to letters, religion, or liberty. A college or university is, or ought to be, in the district in which it is placed, a channel by which communication is kept up with the best thought, the wisdom, the culture, and research of the past. It gives breadth and height to life's outlook. It liberates from the imprisonment of ignorance and paltriness.

But we cannot all be university students. It is only on rare occasions that most of us are privileged to see a great man, much less come into his presence and fellowship.

Books are a most convenient substitute for the men who wrote them. Many of the great ones of the earth, the thought-creating and vitalizing forces of society, are dead. Those still alive are far removed from you. But the best of the works of those both dead and alive may be on your shelf. "Books are the track of fled souls and the milky way," as Henry Vaughan sings. To read an original, suggestive book, such as one of Ruskin or Max Muller, is as if you had annexed a new province to the empire of your mind. While we ought to be thankful for the access that we now have through public libraries to the best literature of the world, it is a great advantage to one beginning life to have some choice books which he prizes as his life-companions, and which he can mark at his pleasure. Benjamin Franklin, frugal as he was, said that if a man emptied his purse

into his head it was a good investment. Richard Cecil was accustomed to say, "I have a shelf in my study for tried authors, one in my mind for tried principles, and one in my heart for tried friends."

There is too much reading without plan or aim, and therefore without profit. In taking food for the body we usually select the best that our means can afford. But how often there is no careful selection at all in the nutriment for the mind. We take what comes without inquiring what we are about. Much mischief is thus done, both to our intellectual and moral nature, by such desultory and careless reading. How soon the body would go wrong if those who keep house for us were to make no selection, but took whatever presented itself in shop or market, without any consideration as to what suited or was likely to nourish.

Much loss is sustained, too, by reading books that are not bad, but inferior, second-rate. "Read the great books, and let the little ones take care of themselves," Dean Stanley often said. "There are thousands of readers who quench their thirst for novelty with the trifles and ephemeral publications of the hour, which is but the surf of the edge of the rising tide, but they forget that the treasure-house of literature lies behind them, and that nothing is worthy of a permanent place within its walls, but that which belongs to the records of our race and the creative powers of wise and far-reaching minds."

Is there not too much dependence placed upon the daily newspaper as food for the mind. We need a chronicle of passing events. The daily newspaper, so cheap as to be within the reach of the poorest, containing messages from all parts of the world, as well as keeping us in sympathy with what is going on in

our country and district, is one of the blessings of modern civilisation. The thoughtful reader can learn much of the race, much of life, much of Providence, by his newspaper. There is exaggeration, but there is also an element of truth in the saying that the newspaper is "the Bible of to-day," showing us how our Heavenly Father governs the world.

But he that makes a newsprint the staple of his reading is doomed to a superficial and frivolous existence. There is a great deal in the newspaper that is not of importance for us to know, a little sometimes that it is better we should not know. A celebrated modern writer called the newspaper "gutter water." That is not a true description of newspapers generally in our country. They will, for the most part, compare favourably with similar publications in any part of the world. Still, how few such prints make it their aim to be moral educators. How many are content to provide what will sell, without being very scrupulous as to the moral effect of what is inserted. But even when there is nothing that is questionable on moral grounds, how much there is that is little better than idle gossip. It is no disparagement to the newspaper to affirm that even when it is at its best it is only one of many channels of knowledge which we need.

Art is also one of the favourite resorts of leisure. Life is better than art. Better for us to see a lovely landscape or stand upon the sea shore, than to look at a picture representing what the eye commands. But in the absence of things themselves, the pictures of them are useful as sources of pleasure. "Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying and extending our interest with our fellow-men beyond

the bounds of our present lot." On a dull day, or when we are confined to our room, a bright picture upon the walls is a positive minister of good. But, oh! let us look abroad upon God's world, and take in the magnificence and beauty with which He has dowered it. A good walk in the country is about the best employment of a leisure hour.

What would we do if we had not *Music* to charm and beguile our leisure hours? Listen to John Henry Newman's eulogy of music, one of the finest ever uttered: "As we listen to high music, rapt and uplifted, we learn what it is that we ourselves have been, what it is that we have felt, what it is that we could be, if the call came, if the blow struck, if the light broke in, if the darkness swept down. We are surprised, it may be, to discover all that is possible. We are carried forward to explore new regions of our souls as yet untouched and untrodden; there is much we see to open out, much to free, much to expose and expand; fresh springs of feeling are let loose; the doors and windows of all hidden chambers are flung open. At the hiss of this sweet music all that had slept in frozen silence leaps upward into movement, startled by the touch of joy or the sudden quickening of some tender thrill. We are surprised. Yes; but we are not surpassed; we are not undone; we are not dismayed or disappointed; still we have it in us, we are assured, to be all that the music can ever tell. That huge and intricate life, whose long story it is imaging, is ours, is shut up within our souls. We have felt it stirring, we recognise it all, we understand. This is why it speaks home to us; speaks with such familiar voices, with such intelligible pathos, with such illuminating eloquence; and far as

the musician's imaging may ever reach, still all he can achieve will but continue to reveal the untold depths and heights and length and breadth of those emotions under whose sway we are now moving, of those impulses which we ourselves can even now, in strong, passionate hours, but touch and taste and handle."

Next to Holy Writ, diligently and prayerfully studied, so as to take in the sense and feel the power of God's revelation of Himself, I place the best *poetry* as something that has a special claim upon our leisure. How much we owe to those poets,

> "Who on earth have made us heirs
> Of truth and pure delight and heavenly lays."

How the soul is soothed and uplifted by good poetry. What Milton has said of poetry applies to much that he himself wrote:

> "For if such holy song
> Enwrap our fancy long,
> Time will run back to fetch the age of gold."

If we want something having less of organ-like grandeur, let us take up Tennyson or Longfellow:

> "His songs have power to quiet
> The restless pulse of care."

Every man upon earth should in fair measure have an experience of what the world can do for him and give to him. He should taste its quality and prove its power. It has resources and he has capacity and craving. Why should the two not meet? Why should men have palate, eye, and ear, and why should the world have beauty and melody, if there is not to be a meeting and union? The misfortune is that man too frequently takes this world as if it were another name for the universe.

At Play.

" Sweet recreation barr'd, what doth ensue,
But moody and dull melancholy,
Kinsman to grief and comfortless despair;
And, at her heels, a huge infectious troop
Of pale distemperatures, and foes to life?"—
SHAKESPEARE.

"If your house is set on the sunny side of the hill, do not go and sit in the shade."

" I gazed, and gazed, but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought,
For oft when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye,
Which is the bliss of solitude,
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils."—WORDSWORTH.

" O righteous doom that they who make
Pleasure their only end,
Ordering the whole life for its sake,
Miss that whereto they tend.
While they who bid stern duty lead,
Content to follow, they
Of duty only taking heed,
Find pleasure by the way."—R. C. TRENCH.

" Whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

AT PLAY.

WORK and play have been thus distinguished: —work is activity *for* an end, play is activity *as* an end. Work means an expenditure of energy that has some ulterior good in view. Play is the spontaneous forth-going, the exuberant affirmation of the nature that sees nothing to be desired beyond its own exercise. A man works for wages; he plays, and finds the wages in the pleasure of the play. Play is activity that has impulse and motive within itself. The lark while patiently building its nest in the clay, is working for an end to be realised in its future. When that same bird soars towards the heavens, singing as it soars, it is only giving way to its own rapture of joy, and it may be said to be at play when it fills the air with its rich heart-gladdening melody. The ploughman thrusting his share into the earth and turning the furrow in which the seed is to be sown, is at work. But when in the evening he joins his comrades in competing in athletic feats, he is at play. Throwing the hammer, which brings in no remuneration, and cannot be defended on any merely utilitarian ground, and which, moreover, may take more out of him than his allotted task did during the day, is yet play, as there is no end to be served by it other than the pleasure of the exercise.

There is a legitimate place for play in human life. More especially is this the case when the Providentially appointed work is not of a sort to draw upon the various veins of power, or call forth a man's higher fund of resource. There are some employments which may be almost said to give a man the use of himself all round. But most of the occupations of life leave considerable portions of the man unused. The merchant, the explorer, the navigator, and others who have to undertake duties which do not lie on the beaten path of routine, but have to meet emergencies and cope with unlooked for issues, and thus have the powers of mind and will kept on the alert, do not so much need the excitement of play. The rust cannot gather upon the nature that may thus in its diversified capability be called to give an account of itself any moment.

But the work of most men lies on lower levels, and does not make such generous demands upon native endowment. Industry for the most part is patient, plodding attention to details, which gives no scope for originality or variety of power. Play is thus needed to relieve the monotony of life. Man was not born to be the mere creature of a trade, the slave of a profession, the wheel or pivot of a machine that did nothing but send out so many yards of cloth or thousands of bricks. There is an innocent craving for occasional outgoings from the rut of routine, for the uplifting and exhilaration which come from excursions into the realm of romance and poetry. There is something in the familiar adage "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

Existence and enjoyment should go together, like twins of the same parentage. They are too often

apart. Existence goes out too often alone, companionless and joyless, treading its hard, dull paths, with set and stony expression, as if life were perpetual penance and purgatory. What a poor gift existence is on such terms. Existence is not worth having unless it is regarded only as the bed or channel that becomes the living stream by plenteous showers from above.

God has provided us with the power, if we will only use it, of turning existence into enjoyment. We should get more joy along the lines of nature and Providence. There would be less need for inventions and excitements if we took more pleasure out of the ordinary occasions of life. Nature's own face is pleasant to behold. The changing hues of the sky, the scents of the meadow, the song of the birds, the thousand ministries which come unsolicited to the man of pure and simple tastes, are a cheap and ready means of recreation.

Is it not pathetic to think what a world of treasure and beauty lies alongside every one, that would entrance the imagination and feast the mind? Yet the foot may never stand upon it, nor even the eye see it. The world of letters, of thought and science and poetry, which is far more marvellous than the "Arabian Nights," is unknown to multitudes. No one in early days has turned his attention to such avenues of pleasure and sources of recreation. They have not learned that

> "Nought is vile that on the earth doth live,
> But to the earth some special good doth give."

Among modern methods of seeking play for the mind no one is more popular than *novel reading.*

Not only can no objection be taken to the discriminating use of novels as a recreation, but they

may be, and often are, one of life's valuable reinforcements. The imaginative presentation of truth and duty, when done without any sacrifice to either, is a positive gain to the higher life, besides gratifying that love of novelty which is inherent in the mind. One of the lessons that moralists and preachers have learned from the extraordinary growth and popularity of fictitious literature during the present century, is to give a higher place to the imagination as an auxiliary to the understanding and heart. We are only beginning to realise, as we ought to do, that the imagination is a most precious gift of heaven, that the concrete and pictorial way of teaching is the most vivid and impressive, and comes nearest to God's own method in nature and scripture.

But while that is so, it will of course be freely admitted that the character and contents of the novel ought to be taken into account. The novel is helpful as a substitute for life, giving us views of society and the world that we might not be able to acquire by personal experience, and thus refreshing the spirit; but just as we would never dream of going into company where there was unchaste conversation, and where evil deeds were done, so we should refuse in print what we would not take in actual life. The paper and print cannot make any difference. Evil communications corrupt good manners, whether speech or print be the medium. In the purest novels, such as those of Sir Walter Scott or George Eliot, there are allusions to what is bad, but such novelists do not revel in impurity, and the tone being good, the tendency and effect are not bad. But there are novels which are pollution to the

soul, and many more that are utterly frivolous and on that ground objectionable.

But however excellent the novels that are read, nothing can excuse us for so taking up the time with men's imaginings that there is little left for the great "novel" of history, nature, life. What a grand novel is this wonderful world! How much there is in it novel to us! Why not make ourselves acquainted with God's facts as well as men's fancies?

Many betake themselves to the *theatre* when they wish to be at play. A drama is a "play."

There has been much barren controversy as to the merits of the theatre as an institution, and the effects of theatre-going as a habit. The question has been too often discussed as if it were something that belonged to the world of abstractions. The apologist for the theatre has often tried to overthrow his antagonist with one fell blow by triumphantly asking: Is the dramatic rendering of historic facts and the witnessing of what is exhibited wrong?

The answer to that question is that it is not an abstract or ideal theatre that men attend, and if it can be shown that, speaking generally, the actual theatre is not, and never has been, a school of virtue, should that not be decisive? There are many things which we have to give up which no one would pronounce to be wrong in themselves. The Master called upon His disciples to renounce not only sins, but many things not inherently bad, that they might completely follow Him. It is by the recognised end of life that amusements, like everything else in experience, must be judged. Is it not then wisdom to choose the highest way of life and its truest goal,

and unhesitatingly fling away what retards progress in the right direction? Remember Tennyson's words: "We needs must love the highest when we see it."

The objections to theatre-going may be put thus:—

(1.) From the very nature of dramatic representations regality is given to the passions, to what can appeal to the senses, and elevating thought does not in the circumstances have due emphasis given to it. But what the young chiefly need is not to have the sensuous obtruded and emphasized, is not to have the passions kindled, but the mind schooled.

(2.) Holding up the mirror to the vice that is in human character is not the surest incentive to virtue—

> "Vice is a monster of such horrid mien,
> That to be hated needs but to be seen;
> But *seen too oft*, familiar with its face,
> We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

(3.) The stage, by its fictitious scenes, plays upon the feelings of the spectator, and robs him of energy and fire which he needs for the realities of life. Those who weep most over the sorrows of an imaginary hero or heroine are not the persons you meet with most frequently on philanthropic and evangelistic platforms, or at the bedside of the afflicted, offering sympathy and succour. There is but a certain amount of energy locked up in the human breast, and if it is squandered upon the fictitious, it is to that extent withheld from the real needs of the world.

(4.) Emotion is not only wasted, it is depraved, if it is not used as a spur to useful activity. Sentiments that remain such and impulses that are never realised are a source of weakness, not of strength. If one is moved by a spectacle of suffering and does

not make his flow of feeling a motive to action, his maudlin tears degrade and petrify him. Consider the difference between a regular play-goer and a benevolent physician. Both see suffering every day, only in the one case the cause is imaginary, in the other it is only too real. The regular attendant at the theatre has his sensibilities touched by the misfortunes of the hero of the drama. But unless his theatre-going is balanced by a regular course of benevolent activity, what is the consequence? He becomes more and more selfish and more and more deaf to the cries and calls of the perishing world around him. His emotion during the play is taken as a luxurious indulgence. It is an end in itself. In the Church too, emotion is kindled, but all attending the Church and *in sympathy with the purpose of its existence*, make sentiment the mere seed of practice.

(5.) But it may be answered, the admitted evil tendency in theatre-going to make feeling an end in itself is only one of the dangers in life against which we have to be on our guard. That has to be met with the question, whether we have any right, whether we can afford gratuitously, to put ourselves in such danger? All institutions and relationships that come in the course of nature and Providence, such as family life and contact with men in the business of the world, we must accept with their difficulties and risks. For temptations that come to us in the line of nature and Providence we may expect a suitable provision of grace. But who can say that the theatre and the tavern belong to our divinely appointed lot? He that goes into the dram-shop or theatre goes at his own risk, as

it cannot be maintained that either the one or the other belongs to the Divine order of things.

(6.) It cannot be denied that the associations of the theatre are not generally improving and elevating.

There is a common proverb in which is concentrated the result of a great deal of shrewd observation, "A man is known by the company he keeps." Tried by that test how does the theatre fare? What are the surroundings of a play-house in most towns? Would you choose to live in its neighbourhood? Is it not notorious that the presence of a theatre at once brings down the moral tone and character of a locality? Tried by the action of the law of affinity, the things that cluster around it and seem to be congenial to it, can the theatre be commended?

But it may be said, let an attempt be made to purify and elevate the stage. As there is nothing necessarily bad in the drama itself, in the artistic imitation and representation of life, and as it is well known that good men occasionally attend certain theatres, let the Christian Church come to the rescue and make the stage what it seldom or ever has been, a school of virtue. The attempt has been made times without number with little success. Let me ask the following testing questions: suppose one of us were carrying on missionary work in the east end of any city in Britain, and he resolved to encourage fellow-workers and hearers to go to the theatre, would he not in less than three months be obliged to give up either the theatre or his mission? Would you be willing that a sister or daughter should become an actress, and would you like to see her

taking part in certain plays? Yet the woman who appears on the stage is some other body's sister or daughter. Do you ever hear of enlightened philanthropists investing money in the theatre for the improvement of the manners and morals of the people?

Gambling is a species of play which, while much too common, is yet pronounced to be indefensible by all who have given any serious thought to the subject, and have at the same time a shred of high moral rectitude. The evil of gambling does not lie upon the surface, and is not seen at first sight, and there are thousands who indulge in it without being aware or at least impressed by the fact that they are doing what is wrong. Still he must be ignorant and silly who does not know that gambling in all its forms is a doubtful pastime, and that the best side of the place where it is resorted to is the outside.

Is it not a significant circumstance that all civilized countries, with few exceptions, have such a wholesome dread of its disastrous effects in sapping the moral health of the people, that they have called for special legislation for its regulation, and in its worst forms, suppression? Is it not the case that in certain communities where there is, for selfish reasons, a free hand given to the gambler, scandals and tragic scenes are among the common occurrences of the day? Is it not the testimony of history and observation that where gambling abounds there is a general deterioration of morals?

The challenge may be given to lay the finger upon any specific law of God that forbids gambling. As well expect that any of the vices which belong to the shady side of modern civilization should actually

be named in the category of prohibited things. Is it not enough if gambling can be shown to be bad in its effects? Can a good tree bring forth evil fruit? To any one who professes to have his life governed by Jesus Christ, it is sufficient reason for remaining strange to any practice if it can be shown to be opposed to the spirit and fundamental principles of Christianity. Who can deny that gambling and the commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves cannot by any possibility be made to agree? The transaction that makes you a gainer without any productive labour on your part, or without any equivalent rendered to him from whom the money is taken, surely strikes not only at the Christian law of love, but at the very foundations of our commercial system. To inflict loss on others without enriching the community is neither more nor less than a manifestation of that cursed greed of gain which brings the fiend to the front in man, and puts the kingdom of heaven at the very antipodes of his thought and desire. The joys of the gambler pass through his heart, "as an army of locusts through the green fields of a fertile land."

Let it also be said that if members of the Christian Church desire to be as lights in the world that do not suffer an occasional and unnecessary eclipse, are they not bound in honourable consistency to set their faces against all appeals to "chance"? The object may be laudable, and the sum at stake a mere trifle, but in the paltriest "raffle" there is the admission of a principle which has a most embarrassing and damaging effect when testimony has to be borne against more flagrant developments of the gambling spirit.

At the Altar.

"Drawn wells are never dry."

"Grace to be enjoyed must be employed."

"All from and for God."

"The larger gift was given to be shared."

"Defer not charities till death; for certainly if a man weigh it rightly, he that doth so is rather liberal of another man's than of his own."—BACON.

"Proportionate thy charity to the strength of thy estate, lest God proportion thy estate to the weakness of thy charity."—MATTHEW HENRY.

"A man possesses *only what he is able to use.* A competency is no more nor less than what enables a man to do his duty."

"The needs of every person differ from the needs of every other; we can make no standard of wants or possessions. But the world would be greatly transformed, and much more easy to live in, *if everybody limited his acquisitions to his ability to assimilate them to his life.*"

AT THE ALTAR.

IN times of toleration like the present, when we are at our ease, quietly reaping the fruit of by-gone conflicts and sacrifices in the service of truth and liberty, the superficial observer is apt to imagine that the altar is conspicuous by its absence. Men are not now called upon to do and endure what their forefathers did as persons who are "valiant for the truth." Is not comfort rather than self-sacrifice the leading note of the day? The altar has given place to the well-spread table. Instead of the stake and the scaffold, there is the couch and the easy-chair. Instead of the gloomy dungeon, in which fidelity to conscience immured the Christian, there is now the oft-frequented festive chamber. Should not the cross be hidden out of view now as the symbol of a rude and barbarous age? The hero and the martyr are out of season, are they not?

After reading Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" or the "Scots Worthies," you enter a town such as St Andrews, which may be chiefly memorable to you as the scene of glorious endurance for Christ's sake. But you see no evidence as you look upon the streets that what made the town famous still exists. There is nothing obtrusive, nothing to strike the senses or kindle the imagination, to remind you that the spirit

of self-sacrifice still survives. The burning pile, the testimony delivered in agony, the horrified crowd of spectators—all those may be called up by a vivid memory acting upon history; but there is certainly nothing in what meets the eye of the cursory believer to suggest the stirring times with which the place is associated.

Yet the inhabitants of that town, or at least many of them, may be faithfully working out the ideas and yielding honour and obedience to the principles which brought the historic renown. It is not given to every generation of witnesses for God to have the attractive background and picturesque setting of brilliant exploit and memorable occasion. It is only now and again that you can have high-strung excitement that enlists the imagination in the service of truth. You may have the inward moral enthusiasm every day, but not its outward and historic manifestation. Those grand periods in the history of the Church, when blood was freely shed for Christ's sake, were the outcome of civil and ecclesiastical conditions which happily do not now exist.

Let us endeavour to distinguish the essence from the accident, and not judge by the outward appearance which often leads astray. Let us dismiss the notion from our minds that nothing is being done for God unless we have great decisive occasions that exalt and thrill a people, and are chronicled.

The clock may be indicating progress, though it is not always striking. What strikes us must, from the very necessities of the case, be exceptional. For every day such as that of Marathon, Bannockburn, or Waterloo, there are a thousand days that have no

special record. Nature is not always in festive garb. She puts on her finest garments, her "singing robes," only now and again in the tender flush of spring, the glorious effulgence of summer, and the beauteous tints of autumn. In the landscape there are paradise-like vales and soaring mountains only here and there, the earth for the greater part presenting level plains and long stretches of arable land. The appalling thunderstorm and the superb sunset are not nearly so frequent as the dull, grey, unillumined sky.

It is the same in human life—the good and useful are not always touched with the hues of emotion and imagination. Neither is duty always a tax and strain. There should be reserve power in us all which is ready to be called out on rare occasions, but life could not be healthy were we to attempt to make it all high-pitched. It would not be good for us to be kept in a state of perpetual tension. A speaker or writer cannot be always inditing brilliant passages. All emphasis would be no emphasis. You may stand on tiptoe to look over a high wall, but you cannot walk for a whole day on tiptoe. A man to save his life might leap over a chasm that he would not dream of crossing on ordinary occasions. One may be able to run to catch a train, but it would not be good for him to make running instead of walking the normal pace. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall run and not be weary; they shall *walk and not faint.*" We of the present day can use and manifest our divinely imparted strength in "*walking*" on the path of duty and sacrifice. There may be self-sacrifice

without martyrdom. There may be the dutiful and even heroic in the absence of the tragic.

There is then an altar for us of the present day. But why should there be an altar for any one? Because we are creatures. All we are and have we owe to God, and that we acknowledge by the altar we rear and the offering we put upon it. The altar therefore dates as far back as the entrance of man upon the scene of life. It is the symbol of man's acknowledged obligation to his Maker. Where there is piety there is an altar. Man's instinct in all ages and climes has taught him that when he comes to God he should bring something with him. The altar is the meeting-place between the Creator and the creature—the nucleus of worship.

The natural importance of the altar has been immeasurably enhanced by the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The obligations of nature have been strengthened beyond the calculations of man by the sacrifice our Elder Brother made for us as sinners. It is the cross which gives the altar its true significance. "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again."

The all-important practical question arises—What are we to bring to the altar? What Christ brought to His cross, we bring to the altar—personality. Christ gave us all that He could give, without reservation. Not until we do likewise for Him are we true Christians.

The relationship of Christ to the Christian is set forth in Scripture under the figure of marriage. What is it that husband and wife marry? Not so

much of each other's estate. They marry each other. There is in true marriage mutual surrender, interchange of love and sacrifice, so far as that is possible or desirable as between creature and creature. In the case of the union of the Christian with His Lord the consecration is absolute. Separation of any part from Christ is sin. He gave and He expects a whole burnt-offering. Holiness is the transference of self to God. Godliness is God holding and covering all. Vital Christianity is life in every part identified with Christ. Heaven will be Christ all in all in each one.

But while God in Christ exercises lordship over all that we are and have, it has ever been the practice to separate part of what is possessed, and give it away to uses other than our own, in acknowledgment of God's hallowing claim upon the whole. The bullock or the firstling of the flock that was devoted to God was no more than the sign of a general and complete surrender to the Divine use. But the token had a most important function to fulfil. It reminded the donor whose he was, and from whom all his substance came. It helped to make dependence upon God and gratitude for all His mercies a permanent state of the heart. Every gift laid upon the altar tended to renew the glow of consecration that pervaded the whole life. There was no proof that piety was maintained, no pledge that the man himself was to be God's if the tithe or other test were withheld. It would not do for a Hebrew to make the pious admission that all his flocks and herds were from God and held in His name, while not a single sheep or goat found its way

to the sanctuary. It might fairly be inferred that the spirit was not at all right before God if the required oblation were refused; for if the representative part were wanting, how could the whole be other than estranged from God?

On the same principle that every day of the week is to be spent in the service of the Divine Master, yet there is one day out of the seven we call the "Lord's day," cut off from secular uses, and specially devoted to the honour of His name. All our substance is God's, but there is a certain proportion of it to be laid aside for God, and not to be counted as available for personal and domestic uses.

This idea runs through the whole of the Old Testament. "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase. So shall thy barns be filled with plenty." "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name; bring an offering, and come before Him; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." "Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which He hath given thee."

But you may say this was a mere Hebrew ordinance that passed away with the system of which it formed a part. Yes; in the form and accident, but not in the spirit and principle. We find the same teaching in the New Testament adapted to another order of things. Immediately after that magnificent discourse of Paul's on the resurrection, he urges his readers "to be steadfast, unmoveable, always abound-

ing in the work of the Lord," and then in the next sentence adds, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him."

Paul's exhortation is no more than the application of a great permanent principle and habitual practice among godly people to a specific and seasonable object. The particular need that the gift is intended to meet may change from age to age, from year to year, but the obligation to part with a certain portion of our means for God's sake is as deep-seated in the human soul as is the instinct to worship.

In modern times money is a convenient symbol and ready vehicle of that power which every unit in Christ's Church is expected to exercise, as He stands under the shadow of Calvary's cross. Donations to the missionary cause, to philanthropic objects, to the church for the maintenance of its ordinances, are some of the principal channels for the outflow of that liberality that Christ who was rich, yet, for our sakes, became poor, has begotten in our hearts.

It is to be observed that in the teaching of Scripture on giving no rule is laid down as to the proportion that ought to be given to God. "Every one" is instructed to give "as God hath prospered him." It is left to every man's conscience as before God to determine the proportion which he will give. It is our privilege to belong to an economy that implants a spirit rather than imposes a statute. But then liberty is not to be a cover or excuse for our illiberality. The principle of love ought surely

to do more for us and God than an external commandment.

We are thrown back upon our own conscience and common sense, enlightened and stimulated it may be by the noble example of princely givers, when we ask the question in sincerity of heart, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" No one can be a rule to another in approaching the altar of God. Many give a tenth of their income to God. But while that might suit a man who is earning his hundreds a year, it is obviously too much for a working man with a family to support. There is no requirement which applies to us all except this, that we are to give as we are able, always remembering that poor human nature is more likely to err on the side of giving too little than in giving too much.

Great progress is made, almost all that is needed has been achieved, when the attention of sincere Christian men and women is so turned to the subject of their stewardship, that they are induced to make giving a matter of conscientious concern and intelligent action. Most people give in a haphazard way, without thought or plan. What is the consequence? They miss the joy of giving to God. They put themselves in the position of being pursued and pestered by heaven's agents, and they give grudgingly, as if they had been assaulted by robbers rather than favoured with a visit from the angels of God. Systematic giving enables us to turn "demands" into opportunities. Oh! those frequent "demands," how irksome they are. Life would be so much more enjoyable if those calls for money were at an end!

But the man who sets aside a proportion of his

earnings for God has no "demands" made upon him; they are at once transformed into opportunities, which he can embrace if his judgment and a reference to his cash-book approve, but which he can also decline with a good conscience, and therefore without shame and irritation. How the pleasure of life would be enhanced and our self-respect increased, if we devoted so much to God, just as we allow so much for household expenditure.

Giving, too, would be more a means of grace than it is if more thought and conscience were put into it. It would take its place alongside prayer and worship as something that ministered to the soul. We need all the contributions we can get to the consolidation of the spiritual life; and as every coin given to a good object, with the full consent of our nature, reacts upon the giver as heartfelt praise does upon the singer, we, in the interests of the higher life, cannot afford to be without the benefit that accrues from systematic beneficence. One of the strongest objections to the endowment of religion is that it checks the action of one of the forces of the divine life necessary to its health and expansion. To toss a copper into the "plate" as we pass into the church, in the same spirit as we would pay a toll, is about the worst possible preparation for the other exercises of God's house. But the smallest coin of the realm put into the treasury, because of the feeling in the heart that guides the hand, raises one into a receptive state and heavenly mood, which makes it almost certain that good will be obtained from what is to follow. Do you not think that the widow who gave her "two mites" would be so glad and buoyant on entering

the house of God that even ill-sung hymns would be as wings to her soul, and a sermon not very rich in nutriment would be as angels' food if for nothing else than the text?

Let us dismiss the foolish notion from our minds that methodical giving is a habit only for the rich to acquire. What! is the pleasure of living up to our light to be denied to anyone because he is poor? Are worldly circumstances to stand between us and the sweetest pleasure of life? I cannot believe that, else God would not have allowed any child of His to be so situated. Let the truth be burned into the soul that the virtue lies not in the coin, whether it be copper or gold, but in the heart that makes its free-will offering. No doubt most people, when they turn their attention seriously to the duty, find that they have been giving far too little. We imagine that we have been spending more upon religious objects than we have really done till we make due inquiry. It is just as certain that many who have a struggle in life are in the sight of God princely givers, and an example to those who are blessed with more of this world's goods.

The late Dr Duff, the famous missionary, penned these memorable words, which a Christian merchant in Liverpool kept constantly in his desk: "Man's tendency by nature being to trust in uncertain riches, so as to derive their content and serenity mainly from them, instead of from faith and confidence in the love and promise of Him who has at His command the boundless stores of providence and grace, the only effectual antidote of divine appointment, is freely, cheerfully, and liberally to part with them for

the benefit of the poor and ignorant, and thus to create and cherish a growing sense of perpetual dependence on God, and gradual and ultimately complete severance from all undue trust in the perishable substance of earth, and a continued accumulation of treasure in heaven."

That has been the conclusion of the wisest men in all ages. Spenser the poet says:

> "Good is no good except it be spende,
> God giveth it for no other end."

He tells us also of one "whose wealth was want, whose plenty made him poor." Shakespeare, as might be expected, does not allow this important element in life to escape his eagle eye:

> "For his bounty
> There was no winter in't,—an autumn it was,
> That grew the more by reaping."

What is all this but ringing changes on the old Scriptural sentence: "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to penury." "The liberal soul shall be made fat." A man who is often at the altar may not get his reward in the coinage of this earth, but it will come to him in the currency of heaven.

At the Threshold.

"The heart that is soonest awake to the flowers is always the first to be touched by the thorns."

"There are nettles everywhere,
But smooth green grasses are more common still.
The blue of heaven is larger than the cloud."

—MRS BROWNING.

"No cloud across the sky
But passes at the last, and gives us back
The face of God once more."

"Christians," said Edward Payson, "might avoid much trouble and inconvenience if they would only believe what they profess that God is able to make them happy *without anything else.*"

"They that know God still find him a real useful good. Some things and persons are useful at one time and others at another, but God at all times. A well-furnished table may please a man while he hath health and appetite; but offer it to him in the height of a fever, how unpleasant it would be then. Though never so richly decked, it is then not only useless but hateful to him. But the kindness and love of God is then as seasonable and refreshing to him as in health, and possibly more; he can find sweetness in that even on a sick bed."—ARCHBISHOP LEIGHTON.

AT THE THRESHOLD.

IN passing into an old mansion that has been the abode of successive generations, and looking at the portraits on the walls of ancient sires and their wives, we find it difficult to realize that those paintings represent persons who were, in all respects, of like passions with ourselves. The powdered wig, the closely-shaven face, the frilled front, and the coat coming high up on the back of the neck, give a strangeness and remoteness to those old worthies, that make you almost feel as if they belonged to another race and world. But much of this far-awayness is a mere trick of the imagination, that has nothing more solid to rest upon than the superficial difference of style and dress.

Open some of the tattered and faded letters lying in yonder strong oaken chest, which the originals of those paintings wrote when love was young, when grief was strong, when difficulty overshadowed, when joy shed its radiance, when the tumultuous forces and many-coloured experiences of life were besieging them, and you will find that hearts not unlike your own throbbed under those antique garments. You will come upon many touches of nature that make the ancestors of that house kin with you, notwithstanding differences in times and fashion.

So it is with the story which those old world Scriptures tell of the pathos and tragedy of human life. Those Biblical narratives are often too remote from us. We allow the outward associations which are unfamiliar to divert the thought from the core of the matter, and check the flow of our sympathy. We are so much occupied with the theatre, the scenery, the circumstantial setting and historical background in those Scriptural histories, that we are apt to miss the human touch in what a Jacob or a Job or a David has to say of himself.

When we do succeed in divesting the mind of such obtrusive superficialities, how real, how true, how fresh we find those recitals of human experience in the Old and New Testaments to be. Those biographical sketches lie close to the actual facts of life as we find them. One heart beats in nature and Scripture. A better mirror than those old Hebrew chronicles we cannot find, if we would see reflected what is of most moment in our own life. The lonesomeness of Abraham in leaving his fatherland, the crushing sorrow of Jacob over his dead Rachel, the brave battle that Job waged with adversity that swept in on all sides, the shuddering recoil of Hezekiah when brought face to face with death, the tearful prayer of the Divine Jesus that the cup might be allowed to pass without being put to the lip—all those experiences belong as much to the present as they do to the past.

It is really true that within the confines of that region where the life of life is lived, where experience is of most account, where the flame is brightest and feeling most intense, there is nothing new under

the sun. The passions that burn, the conscience that speaks, the surging motives that assault the will, the pure and lofty visions that float before the soul, the temptations that inflame, the fancies that beguile, the fears that make the coward, the hopes that inspire the saint, are really what make life; all else is but as the small dust in the balance. The Bible being full of all that, it is as full of life as to-day's newspaper, only there is in it greater depth, and breadth, and height.

The shady and pensive side of life, the frailty, mortality, vanity of man are not ignored or explained away in the book by which God speaks to us, but presented in the plainest and most impressive language. Much of the Old Testament is mournful dirge over the limitations of man, the brevity of life, and the insecurity of its joys. One of the recent and one of the most cynical definitions of life is that it is a "struggle against death with the certainty of being conquered." In the Bible the same idea is as emphatically expressed, though not in the same dry and colourless phrase, but with the striking vividness, without any touch of scorn, of a poet's imagination. "What is your life? It is but a vapour that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." "My days are like a shadow that declineth, and I am withered like grass;" and many such like sentences in Scripture sound a note as profoundly sad as anything to be found in secular literature of the most pessimistic strain. The saints of God, of whom holy writ is very much a portrait gallery, were often as much over-shadowed and depressed by life's outlook as you can possibly be. The ailment and loss and

struggle, the vanished joys and perished hopes, the lengthening shadows and chill air which only too surely betoken coming sunset, cannot be felt by you more keenly than they were by those ancient Hebrews whose hearts are laid bare to reflect your own sorrow and privation.

Your most dejected mood will meet with a response and echo in the Bible. There is no book more realistic and matter of fact, calling sickness, pain, bereavement, physical decline, death, by their right names, without any attempt to tone down or colour, to make them appear other than they are. Turn then to the old book if you want fellow-feeling when you are down in the valley. You will get it there, if nowhere else. The strong, rushing world is often to you in your loneliness and grief what a person in robust health is sometimes to a weakly and delicate neighbour, inconsiderately expecting him to be as enduring and hardy as himself, and as able to face exposure. It is easy for the man who has a large account at the bank to laugh at the economical caution of one who is living from hand to mouth. It is easy for the commander of a large and well-equipped frigate to smile at the hesitation of the captain of an old, frail vessel in setting out on a stormy day. Men have an inveterate tendency to look at things through the medium of their own personal condition, and the infirm and disconsolate are not always successful in meeting with those who are in touch with them. But if you want to see others who are what you are and feel as you do, join that procession of stricken and tearful saints of God, who confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon

the earth, who sought a country, the present one not being all they desired.

But the plaintive note that is heard in Scripture, and is so true to the facts of human life as they really are to most persons, never sinks into harsh sounding, bitter despondency. Even in the Old Testament, while there may not be the shout of victory in the presence of adversity and death, their never is the wail of despair. There is a touch of sadness in many of the psalms, yet what assurance there is too, vague yet sustaining, grounded on simple trust in God. The feeling uppermost in the minds of patriarchs of olden times, was that all must be well since God is what He is. His character might not explain, but it certainly enabled them to bear all that came. When driven as fugitives from the wrecks of time, they found a sanctuary in the Eternal One. Nothing could wrest them from God. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." "The Lord God is my strength." "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

The same trust coming more into the light of New Testament revelation is expressed in modern phrase:—

"The heart that trusts for ever sings,
And feels as light as it had wings,
A well of peace within it springs,
Come good or ill;
Whate'er to-day—to-morrow brings,
It is His will."

There is always this feeling in the truly pious heart, that adversity is not allowed to speak the last word. Something more has to be said, and will be said. We are not thrown back upon ourselves in the face of trouble; we are cast forward upon God.

But our trust is not wholly blind. We have a glimmering of the meaning of Providence. We can see for ourselves that pain has sometimes a useful function to fulfil. Taking the very reasonable and generally conceded position that this life from beginning to end is a scene of discipline, and that the moral outcome of all its experiences is of supreme moment, we are not so much taken aback by the presence of a Gethsemane, a Calvary, or a valley of humiliation in a God-made world, as they tend to purification and elevation of character. From what we know of things as they are in this world there are some results, and those of the highest moment, that cannot be brought about by smooth and pleasant process.

It may be said as an objection that such a conclusion seems to favour the notion that evil can become the occasion of good, and that the conditions of the highest moral education and development are more likely to be had in a sinful than in a sinless world. Without staying to discuss this knotty point, it is sufficient to affirm that it is the prerogative of God, and ours through Him, to bring good out of evil. Let us then enumerate a few of the known advantages of being at the threshold, *i.e.*, having an experience of the frailty and vanity of this present life.

The higher life often comes more to the front in affliction.

In the earlier stages of life, when the world around us is smiling and ministering to our every wish as well as want, we are apt to forget that there is a higher life. The benefit that sickness and sorrow often bring to the thoughtful mind is that they induce a man to go *into himself,* and realize as he never did before the true path and end of life. As long as things go well, man is apt to go into *them* and dwell in them, knowing more of his circumstances than he does of himself, and deriving more enjoyment from his surroundings than he does from his soul.

Moreover, being at the threshold, at the ebb-tide of earthly things, gives the higher life its opportunity for growth.

It is bereavement, trial, difficulty, which provide the occasion to which the higher life can rise to, and by rising perfect itself. A disease, lingering and incurable, comes upon a man. There is failure, frustration, total and irretrievable loss, if nothing more can be said than what the material side of things suggests. But if the sufferer bears it with pious patience as from the all-wise God, there is success of the very highest order. Character is the house of life, the edifice that is being reared, for which everything else exists. Everything, therefore, of a material kind about man is the mere scaffolding that is put up or taken down as the progress of the building itself may require.

Sometimes we have too much between us and God. Wealth may make us too independent. So may

robust health. God is resolved to keep up a close personal connection with us, and in order to that other connections have sometimes to be sacrificed.

Sometimes it happens that seeds of various kinds that lie embedded and inoperative in the soil on which a forest is growing, begin to germinate when the trees are burnt or cut down.

So it is when we are at the threshold, and things are at their worst as regards earthly prospects, that the seed is often sown which yields a rich harvest in heaven.

"Why trouble me with your furrow-making share," said the field to the plough one spring day. "Let me alone. What! going to tear up my face once more with that cruel instrument; much have I suffered from you in seasons gone by, and it seems your heart is not yet emptied of fiendish hate." "Come, come," replied the plough, "do not, I beg of you, use such strong language; it only does you harm. True, I turn you up, but what would you be if you were let alone? Is the barren heath or a wilderness of weeds better than the fruitful field? You would never know your own capability, nor would what is best in you be brought to the surface, if the hardness with which you are encrusted were not pierced by the plough. The green blade in spring, the waving stalk in summer, the full corn in autumn, and the merry song of the reaper would be impossible if I did not appear upon the scene. It is only what is worthless that is let alone. Nothing can be *taken in* even by God without the plough share."

We know from experience, as well as observation, that deprivations on the surface of life instead of really impoverishing the man, often tend to swell the

sum of his personal good. It is with men as it is with fruit trees, judicious pruning augments power and enhances value. Lopping off a branch here and there may appear to the superficial observer to be an injury done to the vine, but wait till the grapes come before you attempt to appreciate the loss.

Dante's loss of popularity in Florence cost him many a pang, and put his earthly life into the shade. But was it not a gain to him and to the world, that instead of winning civic office, and doing the work that many could do as well, he should, by his banishment, have become the author of the "Divine Commedia"? If Milton had been to the end of his days a prosperous man of affairs, very probably "Paradise Lost" would never have seen the light. If misfortune and blindness had not secluded him, "Paradise Regained" would not likely have followed. How much do we owe to Bedford Jail, though probably Bunyan's confinement in it was regarded by his family and attached congregation as a mysterious dispensation of Providence? We now have the "Pilgrim's Progress" as the explanation of the mystery. "Rutherford's Letters" owe their existence to the banishment of that saintly man from his beloved Anwoth.

Those are a few examples known to history of disappointment and loss resulting in gain, by following Providence down into the valley. There are such passages in the lines of less gifted men, only we do not always see how one thing is working with another to bring about a desirable result through an unwelcome medium. When in trouble look for the compensations.

Wordsworth the poet more than once pictures himself going out to nature on a fine summer day, and with an almost boyish enthusiasm, feeling in perfect harmony with her as she looks at him. He goes out in glad surprise and joyous welcome to every aspect of the scene before him. He, in the momentary exhilaration, feels as if he were a bit of nature. He is in accord with all that is about him, the sunshine, the breeze, the running water, the grass and flowers at his feet, the warbling lark and fleet hare.

But by-and-bye he feels he cannot be as those mere inanimate objects or creatures of instinct. Thought will come in because he was made to think. Reflection breaks the spell that nature cast upon him. He cannot be like the lambs and flowers that give themselves up to the influences of the hour. He is more than what is warmed by sunshine and fanned by the breeze. He is thought, he is conscience, he is heart; that thought and feeling bring facts and possibilities to the mind that are not present to the senses—mortality, sorrow, and all the ills that flesh is heir to.

But that very power of thought by-and-bye comes to the rescue, and enables him to triumph over his despondency. He can grasp and realize the idea of infinite goodness, and find comfort under that shelter when reflection or experience brings a dark cloud over the scene of life. He can remember that he has a life that is hid with Christ in God.

It is easy to believe in the goodness and wisdom of God when all things outward and physical are in harmony with our senses and agreeable to our desires.

Reason indeed tells us there may be wisdom and goodness dominating the course of our life, even though the sky is overcast with cloud and charged with storm. It tells us that winter, and cold, and rain, and tempest have their useful place and function. It tells us it is childish to think all things are wrong or going wrong, because they are for the time untoward.

But what can reason itself do when its calculations are upset and its expectations frustrated—when youth is smitten with disease and death—when an appalling catastrophe like the Lisbon earthquake occurs—when the righteous suffer—when things are not in harmony with reason?

There is no resource, no balm in Gilead, no staying power. All is given up, despair sets in.

Ah! then has faith its opportunity; it enables a man to hold on, to do what the senses and reason cannot do—believe that all is right, because ordered by God.

At Rest.

" Upon God's will I lay me down
As child upon its mother's breast;
No silken couch nor softest bed
Could ever give me such deep rest."

—MADAME GUYON.

"Strip human life of its connection with a higher scene of existence, and it is the illusion of an instant, an unmeaning farce, a series of visions and projects and convulsive efforts which terminate in nothing."—DR CHALMERS.

Bengel said he did not wish to die in spiritual parade, but in the ordinary way; *like a person called out to the street from the midst of his business.*

"The Christian comes to his last battlefield, and finds his enemy is not there."

" For tho' from our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar."

—TENNYSON.

AT REST.

THE portrait of an old man of kingly character, whose life had been one long, uninterrupted walk with God, was once placed before me. As I gazed intently upon the face of "the happy warrior," so restful, satisfied, serene, the question was addressed to me: "Do you not see imprinted on that face the peacefulness of trust?" The simple remark was as a gleam from above. It opened up a vista of thought fairer than any scene that earth can show.

The peacefulness of trust! Is trust, then, the secret of peace? Yes; trust is the only key which can open the inner sanctuary of life that is removed from the agitations and anxieties of the earth. Even self-trust within its own range gives a measure of assurance and ease. When one attempts to do what he is not sure he is equal to, you see by his flurried manner that he has not the peacefulness of trust. How can one be other than nervous—his countenance betraying him—when he knows or fears that the situation is too much for him? Whereas another, conscious of adequate power, is self-possessed and tranquil.

But self-trust cannot cover the whole extent of self-need. I myself am not equal to all the ends of life. I am not a fit centre for the whole circumfer-

ence of duty and desire. All the interests and hopes of life cannot find their root in myself. I cannot be my own god. If the peacefulness is not to be a delusion, the trust must not lean upon what is a lie and a folly.

If the peacefulness is to be determined by the trustfulness, should not also the trustfulness be determined by the trustworthiness of the object trusted? It is a relief to lean, but before we can lean too hard we must satisfy ourselves as to the stability of that on which we lean. *We have no right to assurance unless we are sure of something.*

That is the wisdom which the most penetrating intellects of the nineteenth century delight to hold forth to the present generation. Those who are too clear-sighted to have illusions admit the absence of restfulness in their lives, as the grounds of religious trust are, it is alleged, crumbling beneath their feet. No thoughtful man can suppose that he was meant to be self-sufficing, that as an object of trust he presents in himself a basement broad and solid enough for the holy temple of peace; hence the weariness, the tension, the pensiveness deepening into despondency sometimes, of the finer and profounder spirits of the present day who are away from God.

Men of shining intellect and colossal learning are often less trustful, and, therefore, less receptive than persons of much inferior intellectual ability. The highest moral greatness is not reached by the soaring understanding, but by the open heart. Receptivity in things of supreme moment does more for us than toilsome effort. A child can open the shutter

of the window in the morning, yet how much that does for the enlightenment of the chamber. The most signal distinction of human life is to have the Divine within it—the Divine that comes if not resisted. But with whom has God promised to dwell? With the acute and logical mind, with him that is of philosophic grasp and critical discernment, with the scientist and scholar? Yes; certainly with such, but only if other qualifications more imperatively demanded are also forthcoming. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

It is the weakness too frequently of men of strong understanding, that they find it difficult to be as the little child, and yet it is only such in spirit who enter the Kingdom. Woman, clinging woman, finds it easier to be receptive when brought face to face with one stronger than herself; and offering less resistance to the entrance of the grace of God in Christ, she has won a generally admitted superiority over man for tenacity and tenderness of trust.

Be assured, however, it is not the excess of intellect, but a deficiency in humility, that acts as a barrier to many minds in relation to what is of supreme importance in life. There are some who, in their pride of heart, act for themselves from the very foundation in dealing with matters which transcend the scope of the human understanding, as if

they possessed absolute knowledge. They walk in the light of the sparks they have struck, and persons it may be of much inferior abilities and acquirements, walking in the full and clear light of God's presence and promise, that comes to all unsolicited if room is made for it, attain to a restfulness to which the self-sufficient are strangers. Truly the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

The first requisite to assurance and peace during life, and when death comes, is the simple acceptance of salvation from God in Christ.

As long as a man is looking and working for salvation that is to come from and through himself, there is no rest to his spirit, for after he has done his utmost there is far more for him to do. The work of winning God's approval is a great work, and one that overtaxes all our powers. The greater our success too, the more our failure, for the more we do, the better do we see what has yet to be done. The farther we go in the right direction, the longer the vista of moral obligation, the wider the horizon of possible righteousness.

An accomplished and finished personal righteousness is impossible to him who knows God's law and his own heart. So found Martin Luther after all his acts of penance and mortification. He never felt that the work was done, as long as he tried to rest in himself. His prayers to the saints, his confessions to the priest, his charities to the poor, his crucifixion of the flesh, his agonies and tears, did not bring the work to an end. The end seemed as far off as ever, after he had worn the very flesh off his bones, and death rather than his merits seemed about to con-

clude the desperate struggle. Not till the counsel was whispered by Staupitz into his ear, "Rest in the Lord," was there any solid ground on which he could stand.

So not until you resolve to accept salvation from God's hands, and lean upon the word of divine promise, allowing the grace of God to take the place of your merit and effort, is there anything ultimate and absolute upon which you can rest the whole weight of the soul. But believing in God, you have now got to the bottom of this matter of salvation. You know the best of it and the worst of it—the worst of yourself and the best of God. Resting upon God's grace pure and simple, you are delivered at once from morbid introspection and presumptuous disregard of personal holiness. You are assured it is something in God and not something in you that is the fundamental part of salvation; and feeling the Rock of Ages beneath your feet, when all things else are falling away, you are freed from torturing anxiety, and at the same time are conscious of a more intense longing than you ever before experienced for that holiness which becometh the house of the Lord. You are not driven hither and thither, seeking the unattainable; you are at rest in God—that God whose most valued gift is His own Spirit.

In order that you may be perfectly at rest in the prospect of death, you must have confidence in the wisdom and goodness of Him in whose hands you are held.

When the responsibility for the ordering of life lies upon your own shoulders you cannot be con-

tented, unless you have the best which your mind can conceive, or this world, as you know it, afford. Less than the best possible will not satisfy you, unless you are inexcusably spiritless. You are so constituted that you cannot without murmuring take an inferior good. Hence professed contentment, when you are poor, sick, forsaken, dying, is a mere pretence, a forced, fictitious, unreal thing, as long as you attempt to base the acquiescence upon your own reason or sense of what is fitting and desirable.

But the aspect of things is completely changed as soon as you substitute trust for reason. What! can trust as by a magical charm transform the worst into the best? Is there to be an abnegation of intelligence in the judgment that is passed upon the things of this present life? No! it is a question between higher and lower intelligence. Trust gives us the benefit of the view that is taken by the higher intelligence. Trust is taking God's reason instead of your own as the gauge of good. Trust is the confession that your own vision is limited and distorted, that your judgment is erring, and the acknowledgment that your estimates must ever be corrected by God's standards, as revealed by His actual appointment.

But it is not difficult to subordinate your conception of what is good to God's, when you remember and are assured that infinite wisdom and goodness were at the birth of His choice for you. You can walk by faith and not by sight without faltering, when you call to mind who is the object of your faith — your Almighty Father. It is security for

the future to be in His hands. Against all misgiving in the most troubled circumstances you have only to reply, "I am in God's charge." Every bitter rind must therefore have a sweet core. Considering who God is as revealed by Christ, death itself can only be the condition of a higher life, and you can say at the end, "Into Thine hand I commit my spirit."

A conscious drawing and outgoing of the nature to Christ is also another cause of encouragement, and helps to give a peaceful death.

The desire, the inclination, or bias of our nature is a more reliable criterion than our character and conduct when scanned by ourselves. We have to examine and prove ourselves, as there ought to be a correspondence between the heir and the inheritance, but it is always unsafe to base our judgment upon what we are or have done. Self-righteousness is so ready to creep in when we look for our credentials among the details of the life we have lived or the work we have done. Or it is just as likely that the opposite effect of self-condemnation may be so overpowering that our assurance is quenched or overclouded.

What then are we to do as persons who are desirous of being put beyond the possibility of self-deception, by giving some satisfactory evidence that we belong to the fold of the good Shepherd? Our entire confidence is grounded in Him who laid down His life for the sheep. But we want to see some mark in ourselves that will clearly indicate that we are of His flock, and at death are going to pastures greener than this earth can present.

What better mark can we have than that which the Shepherd himself gave: "The sheep follow him, for they know his voice." Conscious identification of interest and aim with Christ, and an outgoing of nature in His direction, is an infallible test of character.

It is not so much what we are, as what we are aiming, struggling, and praying to be, that is the true index of our moral and spiritual condition. It is that which marks off man from man. The decisive question is—do we hear the Shepherd's voice, and are we following?

Some persons profess to have a difficulty in admitting any assortment or classification of a moral kind such as that which the prophetic view of the judgment scene given in Scripture presents, where all are to be divided as sheep and goats. They do not deny that there may be some very eminent saints in the world, and as many abandoned sinners; but the great majority of men have good and bad, virtue and vice, strength and weakness so mixed in their characters, that it is presumptuous and hopeless to entertain the idea of anything like moral classification. Look, they say, at many Christians. They are not so amiable and genial as some irreligious men we know.

That may be perfectly true. The Christian may have much that is unlovely in his disposition and manner. He may compare unfavourably in some respects with persons who are altogether apart from Christ and His company. But constitutional defect, inherited taint, natural temperament, rather than character that is the result of personal choice, may

account for the unfavourable balance struck between the believer and unbeliever.

The determining point is, what is a man going out to? Does he act in obedience to mere natural instinct, or is Christ the law and spring of his life? He is a Christian if Christ be the chosen ground, the desired goal and ideal of his life. He is a Christian if he is dissatisfied with himself, and is impelled by a desire for Christ-likeness. He may be naturally irritable, covetous, and ambitious, but if he has deliberately elected Christ as the one who sets life before him as he feels life ought to be, and is daily exerting himself by watchfulness and prayer to extirpate that in him which is not of Christ, he is a Christian. If, on the other hand, he is self-centred and self-complacent, he is *not* a Christian, however numerous the attractions of his manner and disposition.

It is as illogical as it is unscriptural to affirm that evil is distributed; that the black and white streaks run through every man; that as there is no man perfectly good or altogether bad, therefore there are no good or bad men. There are black clouds, dense fogs, and east winds sometimes during the day, but day is day, notwithstanding those drawbacks. At night there is often moonlight and starlight, and yet night is night even when the witchery and poetry of the skies win our tribute of admiration.

Esau had much frankness of manner and generosity of heart, and in some respects contrasted favourably with the cunning and scheming Jacob; and the kindliness of Esau was good, the craft of Jacob bad. But still there was a difference between the

brothers that was radical, and one unfavourable to Esau. Jacob, though not making such a good start as Esau did in the way of natural disposition, had yet, as his life showed, the germ of improveableness in him which his brother had not. Jacob walked with God, with much faltering and stumbling; yet with some degree of constancy he took God along with him. He had faith in God, he kept company with God, and a truer, holier, more loveable Jacob emerged after struggle and prayer and painful experience from the old Jacob. Esau, on the other hand, had no ground and ideal of life other than that which lay within his own natural instincts. In consequence of that fundamental difference, Jacob rose above himself, Esau fell below himself. For "unless above himself he can erect himself, how mean a thing is man."

It may, therefore, be said that one of the most patent and reliable indications of our real spiritual condition is longing, desire which is love in motion. We are always tending in the direction of that which is of chief moment in our eyes. Where our interest is, that is the home of the heart. Watch the current. Notice where the heart has deposited its treasure. What does the mind revert to most readily? Where does it go when left to itself?

"Nothing is truly ours but what lives in our spirits." How can we hope to meet and live with God for ever unless we are so "transformed into His image," that God is at the heart of what is of deepest consequence to us in life; that whilst mourning over unsubdued sin, we are yet conscious of the play of certain dominant affinities that draw

rather than repel, when the things of God are presented to the mind. "He that is joined to the Lord is of one spirit."

It is this that marks the difference between men, not so much where they stand *as whither they are looking and going.* When the soul deploring imperfection is yet looking out and holding itself up to Christ, as the flower does to the sun, is there not an indication of life and the promise of glory? "I stretch forth my hands unto Thee: my soul thirsteth after Thee as a thirsty land." I myself am empty, but empty as the casket for the jewel, empty as the throne for its royal occupant, empty as the sanctuary for the Shekinah. If the anchor of my soul, both sure and stedfast, is placed within the veil, surely I, a voyager, though buffeted with the waves, cannot perish on the earthward side of the veil. If a planet cannot be lost to its orbit because of the presence of the attracting sun, surely I as a child will find my way to my Father at last. My life is bound up in Him; He is its deeper meaning and only worthy end. Life's holiest visions and highest inspiration, its sunshine and power come only as God comes to my soul.

"Stones towards the earth descend;
Rivers to the ocean roll;
Every motion has some end,
What is thine, beloved soul?
Mine is where my Saviour is,
There with Him I hope to dwell,
Jesus is the central bliss,
Love the force that doth impel."

"Blessed are the home-sick, for they shall reach home." There comes a time when we desire to be

at rest and at home. In the morning we feel as if we could dwell for ever amidst the scenes and activities of nature. But when the shades of evening thicken, we think of home and set our face in its direction.

But what of the world we leave behind? We in certain moods are apt to think that in passing through this world, we leave as little impression behind as a ship does in sailing over the sea. There is the track of the upturned water for a little, and then all is as before. It may be replied, What of that? Though no mark is left on the ocean, the ship reaches the haven. More than that can be said. We continue to live in this world, in lives made better by our presence, if we have been living in God.

"When a good man dies
For years beyond our ken,
The light he leaves behind him lies
Upon the paths of men."

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