

The
Book of Comfort

BY
J. R. MILLER

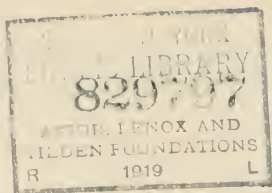
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"SILENT TIMES," "UPPER CURRENTS," "A HEART GARDEN,"
"THE BEAUTY OF SELF-CONTROL," ETC.



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The Book of Comfort

DR. J. R. MILLER'S BOOKS

A HEART GARDEN	JOY OF SERVICE
BEAUTY OF EVERY DAY	JOY OF THE LORD
BEAUTY OF SELF-CONTROL	LEARNING TO LOVE
BETHLEHEM TO OLIVET	LESSON OF LOVE
BOOK OF COMFORT	MAKING THE MOST OF LIFE
BUILDING OF CHARACTER	MINISTRY OF COMFORT
COME YE APART	MORNING THOUGHTS
DR. MILLER'S YEAR BOOK	PERSONAL FRIENDSHIPS OF JESUS
EVENING THOUGHTS	SILENT TIMES
EVERY DAY OF LIFE	STORY OF A BUSY LIFE
FINDING THE WAY	STRENGTH AND BEAUTY
FOR THE BEST THINGS	THINGS TO LIVE FOR
GATE BEAUTIFUL	UPPER CURRENTS
GLIMPSES THROUGH LIFE'S WINDOWS	WHEN THE SONG BEGINS
GO FORWARD	WIDER LIFE
GOLDEN GATE OF PRAYER	YOUNG PEOPLE'S PROBLEMS
HIDDEN LIFE	

BOOKLETS

BEAUTY OF KINDNESS	MARRIAGE ALTAR
BLESSING OF CHEERFULNESS	MARY OF BETHANY
BY THE STILL WATERS	MASTER'S FRIENDSHIPS
CHRISTMAS MAKING	SECRET OF GLADNESS
CURE FOR CARE	SECRETS OF HAPPY HOME LIFE
FACE OF THE MASTER	SUMMER GATHERING
GENTLE HEART	TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW
GIRLS: FAULTS AND IDEALS	TRANSFIGURED LIFE
GLIMPSES OF THE HEAVENLY LIFE	TURNING NORTHWARD
HOW? WHEN? WHERE?	UNTO THE HILLS
IN PERFECT PEACE	YOUNG MEN: FAULTS AND IDEALS
INNER LIFE	
LOVING MY NEIGHBOR	

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FOREWORD

THE manuscript of "*The Book of Comfort*" was nearly ready for the press when Dr. Miller was called to his reward, July 2, 1912. He was busy revising some of the chapters not long before his death; the original manuscript is filled with interlineations and corrections in his trembling handwriting; to the last he wished to use his failing strength in perfecting the messages that would make his readers better acquainted with the Friend to whom his life was given.

Every chapter gives hints of the ripening for heaven of a life that had always been so like the life of the Master that a friend said of him: "The sweetness of his presence in our home was just like what I think the presence of Jesus must have been in the home of Mary and Martha." Thus the chapter "*When We Are Laid Aside*" was written when

Foreword

the infirmities of years kept him from many of the activities in which he had always delighted; while "The Christian View of Death" was the expression of his own attitude as he waited for the summons of the King.

It has been a labor of love to complete the preparation for the press of this year's volume in the series of Dr. Miller's marvelously helpful devotional books.

JOHN T. FARIS.

Philadelphia, August 6, 1912.

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Speak Ye Comfortably

*Remember, three things come not back;
The arrow sent upon its track—
It will not swerve, it will not stay
Its speed, it flies to wound or slay;
The spoken word, so soon forgot
By thee, but it has perished not;
In other hearts 'tis living still,
And doing work for good or ill;
And the lost opportunity
That cometh back no more to thee—
In vain thou weepest, in vain dost yearn,
Those three will nevermore return.*

From the Arabic.

CHAPTER I

Speak Ye Comfortably



HERE is need always for comfortable words. Always there is sorrow. Everywhere hearts are breaking. There is no one who is not made happier by gentle speech. Yet there is in the world a dearth of comfortable words. Some people scarcely ever speak them. Their tones are harsh. There seems no kindness in their hearts. They are gruff, severe, querulous. Even in the presence of suffering and sorrow they evince no tenderness.

“Speak ye comfortably” is a divine exhortation. That is the way God wants us to speak to each other. That is the way God himself ever speaks to his children. The Bible is full of comfortable words. We would say that in view of the wickedness of men, their ingratitude, the base return they make for God’s goodness, the way they stain the earth with sin, God would be angry with them every

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day. But instead of anger, only love is shown. He is ever speaking in words of loving kindness. He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and the unjust. Every message he sends is love. All his thoughts toward his children are peace. The most wonderful expression of his heart toward the world was in the giving of Christ. He was the Word, the revealer of the heart of God. He never spoke so comfortably to men as when he sent his Son.

Who can measure the comfort that was given to the world in Jesus Christ? Never an unkind word fell from his lips, never a frown was seen on his brow. Think of the comfortable words he spoke in his mother's home. He was a sinless child, never giving way to angry words or violent tempers. His youth and manhood were without a trace of unlovingness. Then we know what he was during his public ministry—having all power, but gentle as a woman; able to call legions of angels to defend himself, but without re-

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sentment, returning only gracious love for cruelty and bitter hate.

Think of the comfortable words he spoke to the sick who were brought to him for healing, to the mourners sitting beside their dead, to the weary ones who came to him to find the warmth of love in his presence. The ministry of his gracious words as they were uttered by his lips and fell into sad and discouraged hearts was marvelous in its influence.

In his life Christ set an example for us. He wants us ever to be speaking comfortable words. We shall not meet a man to-morrow in our going about who will not need the comfortable word that we are able to speak. The gift of speech is marvelous in its possibilities. Man is the only one of God's creatures to whom this gift is given. This is one of the qualities that makes him Godlike. It is never meant to be perverted—it was intended always to be beautiful and pleasing. Dumbness is very sad—when one cannot speak. But would not one better be dumb than use his divine gift of speech in anger

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to hurt others? Yet how many are those who never speak but to give pain? The hurt that is done any fairest day by words is incalculable. War is terrible. Who can describe the ruin wrought by shot and shell rained upon a city of homes, leaving devastation everywhere. Words may not lacerate, mangle like the missiles of war, but they may be almost as deadly in the cruel work they do. God wants us to use our speech to speak only and ever comfortably.

When this message was first given to the prophets, it had a definite meaning. The people were in sore straits. They were suffering. They were in sorrow because of the judgments visited upon the land and upon the holy city. "Jerusalem lay in ruins, a city through whose breached walls all the winds of heaven blew mournfully across her forsaken floors. And the heart of Jerusalem, which was with her people in exile, was like the city—broken and defenseless. In that far-off, unsympathetic land it lay open to the alien; tyrants forced their idols upon it. the

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people tortured it with their jests." It was to these people in sorrow and distress that God bade his heralds go with divine comfort. The words were remarkable for their tenderness. The heralds were to go to carry comfort to these broken-hearted ones.

The words, "Speak ye comfortably," have in them therefore a divine sobbing of love. God cares that men and women and children about us are sad. He knows their distress and pities them. He would have us go out to them in his name, carrying in our hearts and upon our lips the echo of his compassion and yearning. It is our privilege to represent God himself in our relations with people about us. How can the gentleness of God be passed to those who are being hurt by the world's cruelty and unkindness, if not through us, God's children? Who will carry God's sympathy and impart God's comfort to those who are sorrowing and broken-hearted if we do not? God needs us to be his messengers, his interpreters. If we do not faithfully and truly represent him, how will people in their

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suffering and distress know his gracious interest in them and his compassionate feeling toward them? If we fail in showing kindness to those who are in need, if we treat them with coldness, withholding our hands from the ministries of love which we might have performed for them, we are not only robbing them of the blessing which we ought to have given them, but we are also failing to be true to God, are misrepresenting him, giving men false conceptions of his character and his disposition toward them. Men learn what God is and what his attitude toward them is only when his own friends are faithful to all their duties and responsibilities.

When one in trouble receives no kindness, no help, when one in sorrow receives no sympathy and comfort, it is not because God does not care, but because some child of God neglects his duty. A story is told of a child sitting sadly one day on a door-step when a kindly man was passing by. "Are you God?" the child asked. The man was struck by the strange question. "No," he answered. "I

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am not God, but God sent me here, I think.” “Weren’t you a long time coming?” the boy asked. Then he told the passer-by that when his mother had died a little while ago, she told him that God would care for him. The boy had been watching for God to come. Too often not God, but those he sends are long in coming to speak for God or to bring the relief or comfort God sends by them. People in distress, who have learned to believe that God will provide for them, are oftentimes compelled to wait long, until their hearts grow almost faint before the blessing comes. Sometimes they begin to wonder whether after all God really hears prayers and keeps his promises while the delay is not with God, but with us who are so long coming.

“Speak ye comfortably.” We need to train ourselves to remember that we are God’s messengers, that it is ours to be attent to any bidding of our Master and to go quickly with any message of relief or cheer, or comfort he gives us to carry. We must not linger or

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loiter. The need may be urgent. The person may be near death. Or the distress may be so keen that it cannot be endured a moment longer. What if the sufferer should die before we reach him? We are sent to give comfort to one who is in the anguish of bereavement. We hesitate and shrink from carrying our message. Meanwhile the bereft one has come back from the grave to the desolated home and the emptiness and silence. God's heart is full of compassion and he has blessed comfort for his child, but there is no one to go with the message. There are Bibles in the sad home, but there is no human messenger to speak the comfortable words. It needs a gentle heart to bring in tender and loving words and in warm, throbbing touch the comfort that is needed. We fail God while we do not hasten on his errand to our friend who sits un comforted in the shadows. We try to excuse ourselves by saying that we ought not to break in on our friend's sorrow, that we should make our condolences formal, that it would be rude and could only add to

Speak Ye Comfortably

the pain if we were to try to speak of the sorrow. This may be true of the world of people in general, but there is always one to whom God gives the message, "Go and speak comfortably," one who will fail God if he does not carry the message, leaving the heart to break when God wanted it to be relieved and comforted.

The Ministry of Comfort

*I am so weak I hardly dare to pray
That my small light may bless yet farther still;
That weary ones, the lone, the far away
Even I may help to show thy love and will.*

*And yet I know the weak are strong in thee,
And knowing this I would, in thy dear name,
The greatest of all blessings that can be,
This precious gift, this crown of blessings, claim—*

*To be a blessing in this world of woe.
"And thou shalt be a blessing"—'twas thy word.
This is the greatest gift thou canst bestow;
Give it, I pray, to me, even me, O Lord.*

CHAPTER II

The Ministry of Comfort



DISTINGUISHED clergyman said, in reviewing his ministry at its close, that if he were to begin over again, he would preach more comfortingly. There always are in any company of people many who have sorrow, many at least who need uplifting and cheer. There is always a place for the comforter. And there are few who really understand the art of giving comfort. Many who seem to think they do and who are ready on every occasion to seek to console others who are in trouble fail in their efforts. Job said that the friends who came to him in his calamity and spoke to him so volubly concerning his afflictions were only miserable comforters. Those who have passed through experiences of trouble and have had their friends and neighbors come and sit with them and give them what they considered words of consolation have found

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ofttimes that they gave but small help. The burden of sorrow was not lighter after they had gone. No new light broke through the clouds upon those who sorrowed as they listened to the words of their friends. Their hearts were not quieted. They had learned no new song of joy.

It is worth our while to learn what true comfort is and how we can speak comfortably to others. No ministry is more needed or finds more frequent opportunity for exercise. No men, in any community, become so highly esteemed and loved while the years go by as those who are wise in giving comfort to others. The sad and weary turn to them for cheer and help. They always have a word to give which imparts strength.

Those who would be wise in comforting must be sympathetic. They must be patient with even the smallest griefs of others. It is not easy for the strong to sympathize with the weak. They cannot understand how little sufferings and troubles, such as those which seem so hard for others to bear, should really

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cause any distress. They are disposed to laugh at the complaints of those who seem to have so little of which to complain. No doubt there are many people who make altogether too much of very small cares and difficulties. They fret over every imaginable inconvenience or discomfort. No matter how well they are, they imagine they have many ills and can never talk to any one without speaking of their ailments. They magnify the minutest sufferings and sorrows. It seems to be their natural disposition to think themselves particularly unfortunate. They find their chief pleasure apparently in having others commiserate them and sympathize with them.

It is not easy for persons of strong, wholesome spirit, used to look with contempt on little trials and sufferings in their own life, to have patience with those who are really weak and unable to endure, or with those who so magnify their little ills and troubles. But if the strong would become real helpers of the weak, they must learn to be patient with

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every phase of their weakness and to condescend to it. Indeed, weakness of this kind needs comfort that will cure it and transform it into manly strength. Sympathy, to be truly rich and adequate, in its helpfulness, must be able to enter into every form of suffering, even the smallest, and to listen to every kind of complaining and discontent, to every fear and anxiety, however needless. It was thus that Christ condescended to all human frailty. He never treated any one's trouble, however small, or any one's worry, however groundless, with lightness, as if it were unimportant. He bade to come to him all who were weary, receiving graciously every one who came. He was infinitely strong, but his strength was infinitely gentle to the weakest. Nothing in this world is more beautiful than the sight of a strong man giving his strength to one who is weak, that he may help him also to grow strong.

Another class who find it hard to sympathize with sorrow are those who never have any sorrow of their own. They have been

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reared in sheltered homes, with love and tenderness all about them. They have never had a want unmet. They have never known hardship. They have never watched by the death-bed of a loved one and there has been no break in their home circle. They have never had a bitter disappointment in their life. What do they know of the experiences of suffering, of pain, of anguish, of struggle, of want, which comes to such multitudes in some form or other in life? These cannot sympathize with their fellows in their trials, in the things that make their life so hard. They do not understand what these experiences mean.

An artist has painted a picture which represents the scene of the crucifixion after it was all over. The crowd has gone. The cross is empty. The thorn-crown is lying on a rock, and an angel is looking at it, with his finger touching one of its sharp thorns wondering. He is trying to learn what pain is. He had beheld the anguish of the Son of God on the cross, and could not understand

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the mystery. The angels cannot understand our suffering, for they have never suffered. Nor can men who have never had pain or sorrow understand these experiences in us. They may pity us when they see us enduring our sufferings, but they cannot sympathize with us. Before we can be true comforters of others, we must know in our own lives the meaning of the things that give us pain or distress. If we do not, we cannot help them by any words we may say to them. There is nothing in our experience to interpret to us what they are suffering. If we would help those who are in trouble, we must know what comfort really is. Many people do not. Many think that if they weep with those who weep they have comforted them. There is a measure of help in this. It does us good when we are suffering to know that another feels with us. It brings another life into fellowship with ours. We are not alone—somebody cares. This makes us stronger to endure. We can bear our pain better if a friend holds our hand.

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This is the only way some people think of giving comfort. They sit down beside us and listen to our recital of grief. They let us tell it out in all its details. They encourage us to dwell on the painful incidents. They give expression to their pity, entering with us into our suffering as if it were their own. They dwell on the bitterness of our trial, emphasizing its sharpness and poignancy, thus adding to our pain and distress. Then they rise and go their way, leaving us just where they found us when they came in. They have shown their interest in us, their sympathy with us. But they have not given us the best comfort.

The word "comfort" is from a root that means to strengthen. In our modern use of the word we have almost dropped this thought of its original sense. But we would better recall it. To comfort is to strengthen. When we would give comfort to others, we are not merely to let them know we are their friends and are sorry for them. We are not just to try in some way to alleviate their pain.

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It is not enough that we in some measure relieve their distress. We are to seek to have them grow strong so that they can endure the trouble and rejoice in it.

This should be our aim in our ministry of comfort to others. We have not finished our work with them, therefore, until we have brought them some divine truth which will cast light on their sorrows, which will inspire them with hope and courage.

The comforter needs gentleness, for a harsh word would make the sorrow deeper. He needs patience, for grief yields slowly even to most faithful love. He needs tenderness like a mother's. God says to his afflicted ones, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort thee." A father's comfort is different from a mother's, and if we would be like God we must learn from mothers how to comfort. He who would give comfort must have faith. He must believe in God, must know him, must be sure of God's love. Then he will know how to sustain with words him that is weary.

How Christ Comforts His Friends

*Not so in haste, my heart!
Have faith in God and wait.
Although he lingers long,
He never comes too late.*

*He never comes too late,
He knoweth what is best;
Vex not thyself in vain;
Until he cometh, rest.*

*Until he cometh, rest,
Nor grudge the hours that roll;
The feet that wait for God
Are soonest at the goal.*

*Are soonest at the goal
That is not gained by speed;
Then hold thee still, my heart,
For I shall wait his lead.*

Bradford Torrey.

CHAPTER III

How Christ Comforts His Friends



THE little Twenty-third Psalm is the most familiar portion of the Bible and is oftenest read. It has comforted more sorrow than any other composition the world possesses. Next to it the Fourteenth Chapter of John is the best known of all the Scriptures. It is a chapter of comfort. How many tears it has dried! To how many sorrowing hearts has it brought peace! Its words were first spoken to a company of broken-hearted friends who thought they never could be comforted. It is well to study how Jesus, the truest comforter the world ever has known, consoled his friends.

Look at the way Jesus comforts his disciples. First of all, in that saddest of all hours he bade them not to be troubled. Yet they were about to lose their best friend. How

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could they but be troubled? He comes to his friends to-day in their bereavement with the same word: "Let not your heart be troubled." This is not mere professional consolation. As Jesus saw it that night, there was no reason why the disciples should be troubled. As Jesus sees it, there is no reason why you should be troubled, even though you are watching your dearest friend pass away in what you call death. It is only the earth side of the event that you see, and it seems terrible to you. The friends of Jesus thought they were losing him and for ever. He had been a wonderful friend. He had a rich nature, a noble personality, power to love deeply, capacity for unselfish friendship, and was able to inspire us to all worthy life. The disciples thought they were about to lose all that.

You think you are losing all friendship's best in the departure of your friend. Yet Jesus, looking upon his disciples and looking upon you, bids you not to be troubled. Death is not an experience which harms the believing one who passes through it. The Christian

How Christ Comforts His Friends

mother who died this afternoon is not troubled and in sorrow where she is to-night. Dying has not disturbed her happiness—she never was happier than she is now. Leaving her children behind has not broken her heart nor filled her with distress and anxiety concerning them. As she looks upon them from her new point of view, on death's other side, there is no cause for grief or fear. They are in the divine care which is so loving, so wise, so gentle, and so far-reaching, that she has not a shadow of uncertainty regarding them. The children are in distress because they have lost their mother who has been so much to them. They cannot endure the thought of going on without their mother's love and tenderness, her guidance and shelter. Yet the Master says to them: "Do not be troubled." He means that if they understood all that has taken place as he understands it, if they knew what dying has meant to their mother, and what the divine love will mean to them in the days to come, they would not be troubled. What seems to them calamity would appear

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perfect good if they could see it from the heavenly side.

Jesus told his disciples what they should do. "Believe in God, believe also in me." They could not understand that hour why all was well, why nothing was going wrong, why good would be the outcome of all the things that then seemed so terrible. They could not see how their loss would become gain when it was all wrought out to the end, how what appeared the destruction of their hopes would prove to be the glorious fulfilling of those hopes. Yet they were to believe. That is, they were to commit all the broken things of their hearts that night into God's hands, trust him, and have no fear, no anxiety, no doubt. They themselves could not bring good out of all this evil, but God could, and faith was committing the whole matter to him.

"Believe in God." Jesus had taught them a new name for God. He was their Father. A whole world of love-thoughts was in that name. The very hairs of their heads were numbered. Not a sparrow could fall to the

How Christ Comforts His Friends

ground without their Father, which meant that the divine care took in all the events of their lives, all the smallest incidents of their affairs. We are to believe absolutely in the love of God, and trust him though we cannot see. We do not need to understand, we do not have to know—the eternal God is caring for us and nothing can ever go wrong in his hands. “Believe in God.”

“Believe also in me.” They had been believing in Jesus Christ, thinking that he was their Messiah. “Thou art the Christ,” Peter had confessed. But they were now in danger of losing faith in him when they saw him sent to the cross. He called them to keep their faith through the terrible hours just before them. We are always in danger of losing faith in Christ in time of great sorrow or of trouble that sweeps away our hopes. Again and again Christian people in grief and loss are heard asking, “Why does Christ let me suffer thus? If he loves me, how is it that he allows me to be thus troubled?” The trouble is that our vision is short-sighted.

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We are impatient and cannot wait. The going away of their Master left the disciples in despair. They thought they were losing him. They did not know that his going away was part of his love for them, its highest expression, that none of the things about him they had believed had failed. We need to continue to believe in Christ though everything seems to have gone from us. His way is always right. One comfort comes through abiding trust in him.

Jesus went further with his disciples. He told them more. He told them where he was going and what his going away would mean to them. "In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you." On this earth there is no place so sweet, so sacred, so heart-satisfying as home. It is a place of love. It is a place of confidence. We are sure of home's loved ones. We do not have to be on our guard after we enter our home doors. Home is a refuge in which we are safe from all danger, from injustice, from unkindness. Home is the place where

How Christ Comforts His Friends

hungry hearts are fed on love's bread. Mrs. Craik, in one of her books, has the fine picture: "Oh, conceive the happiness to know some one dearer to you than your own self, some one breast into which you can pour every thought, every grief, every joy; one person who, if all the rest of the world were to calumniate or forsake you, would never wrong you by a harsh thought or an unjust word; who would cling to you the closer in sickness, in poverty, in care; who would sacrifice all things to you, and for whom you would sacrifice all; from whom, except by death, night or day, you never can be divided; whose smile is ever at your hearth; who has no tears while you are well and happy, and you love the same. Such is marriage," says Mrs. Craik, "if they who marry, have hearts and souls to feel that there is no bond on earth so tender and so sublime."

This is a glimpse of what ideal home love is. We may find the picture partially realized in some earthly homes, but in the Father's house the realization will be perfect. The

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New Testament paints heaven in colors of dazzling splendor, its gates and walls and streets and gardens all of the utmost brilliance, but no other description means so much to our hearts as that which the Master gives us in these three words. "My Father's house,"—Home. One writes:

"Life changes all our thoughts of heaven:
At first, we think of streets of gold,
Of gates of pearl and dazzling light,
Of shining wings and robes of white,
And things all strange to mortal sight.
But in the afterward of years
It is a more familiar place;
A home unhurt by sighs and tears,
Where waiteth many a well-known face.
With passing months it comes more near;
It grows more real day by day—
Not strange or cold, but very dear—
The glad home-hand, not far away,
Where none are sick, or poor, or lone,
The place where we shall find our own.
And as we think of all we knew
Who there have met to part no more,
Our longing hearts desire home, too,
With all the strife and trouble o'er."

"My Father's house." That is the place where those we have lost awhile from our

How Christ Comforts His Friends

earthly homes, falling asleep in Jesus, are gathering. That is the place to which the angels have carried the babies and the old people, our mothers and fathers and friends who have passed out of our sight. That is the place where the broken Christian life of earth will find its perfectness, "My Father's house," Home. Is there any comfort sweeter than this in the sorrow of our parting from the dear ones who leave us in the experience which we call dying?

The Master said further in his comforting that he would come and receive his friends to himself. Dying is no accident, therefore. It is merely Christ coming to receive us to himself. Do not think something has gone wrong in the ways of God when you hear that a friend is dead. Your friend passed away the other night. You were expecting that he would be with you for many years. Has Christ any comfort? Yes, in all this experience one of God's plans of love is being fulfilled. The end is home, blessedness. One said, "Yes, but my friend was with me such

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a little while. I could almost wish I had not let my heart fasten its tendrils about the dear life, since so soon it was torn from me." Say it not. It is worth while to love and to let the heart pour out all its sweetness in loving, though it be for a day.

"Because the rose must fade,
Shall I not love the rose?
Because the summer shade
Passes when winter blows,
Shall I not rest me there
In the cool air?"

"Because the sunset sky
Makes music in my soul,
Only to fail and die,
Shall I not take the whole
Of beauty that it gives
While yet it lives?"

* * *

"Ah, yes, because the rose
Doth fade like sunset skies;
Because rude winter blows
All bare, and music dies—
Therefore, now is to me
Eternity."

Be of Good Cheer

*Spin cheerfully,
Nor tearfully,
Though wearily you plod;
Spin carefully,
Spin prayerfully,
But leave the thread with God.*

*The shuttles of his purpose move
To carry out his own design;
Seek not too soon to disapprove
His work, nor yet assign
Dark motives, when, with silent tread,
You view each sombre fold;
For lo! within each darker thread
There twines a thread of gold.*

*Spin cheerfully,
Not tearfully,
He knows the way you plod;
Spin carefully,
Spin prayerfully,
But leave the thread with God.*

Canadian Home Journal.

CHAPTER IV

Be of Good Cheer



IN the story of his voyage and shipwreck, we find St. Paul not only cheerful himself, but a giver of cheer to others. The storm had grown fiercer and fiercer. It had simply laid hold of the ship, torn it out of the hands of the officers and seamen, and was forcibly bearing it along in its teeth. There was nobody in command. The record says, "After no long time there beat down from the shore a tempestuous wind, which is called Euraquilo; and when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven." No wonder the long hope of being saved was gone. The people on the ship were in despair.

Then came St. Paul with his inspiring word, "Be of good cheer." That was a splendid message, and it was not a mere idle or

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empty word. Some people's optimism has no basis. Some people's "Don't worry" is only meaningless talk. But when St. Paul said, "Be of good cheer," he had reasons for saying it. "I believe God," he said. And it was not an empty faith he cherished. God had sent an angel to him that night, assuring him of deliverance from the storm, both for himself and for all on the ship. So his words had power over the panic-stricken men on the ship. He besought them to take some food. They had been so terrified that they had eaten almost nothing for fourteen days. He urged them now to eat, and said that not a hair should perish from the head of them. Then, to encourage them by example, he himself took bread, and having thanked God before them all, he broke the bread and began to eat. Then they were all of good cheer, and took some food.

Note how the one man lifted up a despairing company of nearly three hundred men, and gave them cheer. There is no mission of faith and love that is more important and

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Christlike than that of being encouragers, of giving cheer. Every one needs cheer at some time. Life is hard for many people—for some it is hard at all times. Some are always bending under heavy burdens. Some are in storm and darkness many a night. I am not justifying worry. A child of God never should worry. St. Paul said: "Be anxious for nothing." Jesus himself said: "Be not anxious for to-morrow." Discouragement is unbelief, and unbelief is sin. None who love God should ever worry.

Yet there are many who have burdens, cares, sorrows and trials, who always need encouragement, and to whom we should ever be saying: "Be of good cheer." There is scarcely a person you will meet to-day or to-morrow who will not be helped on the journey by the hearty word of encouragement which you can so easily give. Jesus told his disciples, when he sent them out to preach, not to stop to salute any one by the way. Their mission was urgent, and there was no time to lose in mere courtesies. He did not mean,

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however, to forbid us to show kindness even on our busiest days, or to speak a word to the lowly and suffering ones we meet on the way, even when we are most hurried.

The example of St. Paul on this ship is full of beautiful and inspiring meaning. We cannot know what those two hundred and seventy-six men would have done if it had not been for his earnest and faithful cheer. There was no other person to say a brave word to them. Think how he lifted them up and made their hearts strong. Let us take the lesson. To-morrow we may be in some panic, may find ourselves in a home of distress, or in the presence of men who are discouraged or cast down. Even if there should be no special trouble, we shall meet people whose hands hang down, whose knees are feeble, to whom no one is giving encouragement or cheer.

Have you ever noticed how many people were perpetual discouragers? They make life harder for every person they meet. They tell you you do not look well. They remind

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you of your paleness or sallowness of complexion. If you are sick and they call to see you, they talk ominously of your condition. They seem to think you like that kind of sympathy. When you have had some sorrow or trouble, they appear to think it kind to dwell upon its painful features. They talk pessimistically about your affairs, about religion, about everything. It is hard to speak patiently of this miserable habit of discouraging others, which is so very common. Thousands of people who love you and mean well by you, unintentionally become hinderers of your progress, dishearteners, and make life harder for you.

They tell us in mountain regions that avalanches are oftentimes hanging poised so delicately on the crags that even the reverberation of a whisper on the air may cause them to fall with ruinous effect upon the homes and villages in the valleys. The guides caution tourists at certain points not to speak or sing, lest they cause disaster. There are human lives bearing such burdens of sorrow

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and trouble that one disheartening word may bring them despair. We should learn never to give discouragement. It is a crime against humanity. Beware that you never speak dishearteningly to any one. Only love can save the world. No matter how the person may have sinned, only gentleness can save him.

A newspaper writer makes the suggestion that for men like himself some kind of league should be formed by which those who join should bind themselves to say some kind word or do some kind act daily. The editor suggests, however, that only one kindness daily is too formal, and altogether too meager. There is need for kindness not once a day to one person, but a thousand times a day, to a thousand persons. There is need for cheer continually. If you can truly say, "I believe God," you cannot but be an encourager. God himself is a God of cheer. Religion is simply love and kindness. Washington Gladden says that "religion is friendship—friendship first with the great Com-

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panion, on the Godward side. Then on the manward side the same is true." To be friends with everybody; to fill every human relation with the spirit of friendship; is there anything more than this that the wisest and best of men can hope to do?

So let us seek to make cheer for others wherever we are. You cannot possibly estimate the lifting power of such a life as St. Paul's, moving among men. You cannot possibly estimate the lifting power of your own life in the community where you dwell. Let us live so that every one may go away from us heartened and brave. Let our message ever be, "Be of good cheer, for I believe God."

"Let us be kind;
The way is long and lonely,
And human hearts are asking for this blessing
only—

That we be kind.

We cannot know the grief that men may borrow,
We cannot see the souls storm-swept by sorrow,
But love can shine upon the way to-day, to-
morrow—

Let us be kind.

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“Let us be kind;
This is a wealth that has no measure,
This is of heaven and earth the highest treasure—
Let us be kind.

A tender word, a smile of love in meeting,
A song of hope and victory to those retreating,
A glimpse of God and brotherhood while life is
fleeting—
Let us be kind.”

Does God Care?

*In the bitter waves of woe,
Beaten and tossed about
By the sullen winds that blow
From the desolate shores of doubt
Where the anchors that faith has cast
Are dragging in the gale,
I am quietly holding fast
To the things that cannot fail.*

*And fierce though the fiends may fight,
And long though the angels hide,
I know that truth and right
Have the universe on their side;
And that somewhere beyond the stars
Is a love that is better than fate.
When the night unlocks her bars
I shall see Him—and I will wait.
Washington Gladden.*

CHAPTER V

Does God Care?



ABOUT the beginning of this century an unbeliever was reported to have said that the mission of the twentieth century would be to discover God, and when God should be discovered, it would be found that he does not care. It would be a bitter sorrow for the world if this prophecy were to come true. Into countless homes and hearts it would bring the darkness of despair.

The secret of hope in believing souls everywhere is that God does care. This is the one great truth that God has been striving through all the generations to have men believe. This is the whole gospel of redemption. The Bible presents it on its every page. It is the message that Christ came into the world to declare—that God loves all men, every man. The world's condemning unbelief has

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always been its refusal to believe that God cares.

But does God really care? Is there anywhere an ear that hears the world's cries of pain and gives attention to them? Is there anywhere a heart that is touched by the world's sorrows, that feels with those who suffer, and that desires to give help and comfort, care? The veriest stranger when he is passing along the street and sees one suffering, in pain or distress, cares, pities him? A tender-hearted man feels even with a beast, or a bird that has been hurt. Some great calamity occurs,—the destruction of a city by an earthquake, a volcanic eruption pouring its lava streams over homes and villages, an explosion in a colliery, burying hundreds of miners, and a wave of pain sweeps over the world. Human hearts are sensitive to every shade of need and experience in others. When we see crape on a door, telling us that there is death within, that a family is mourning, though they be utter strangers to us, our hearts are touched, we walk softly, laughter

Does God Care?

is hushed, loud speech is restrained, we speak more quietly. We care. Is God less compassionate than men are?

Some one tells us that God's care is general, not individual. All things in creation and providence are planned for the good of the race. The movements of the earth are so guided as to bring day and night, the seasons in their order, cold and heat, winds and tides and all the changes which bring health, comfort and fruitfulness. God is good to all. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." Nature is ready with gentle service in all its attributes and forces. But it is the same to all. There is no love in all this, no care for any individual, no discrimination. The providence of God is kindly, benevolent, helpful, but is no more so to the weak than to the strong, to the sick than to the well, to the distressed and broken-hearted than to the happy and rejoicing. There seems to be no special divine tenderness shown among the homes of a town to a home where there is

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suffering, or where there is great need or bitter sorrow.

Life appears no more kindly to the blind man, to the cripple, to the helpless, to the bed-ridden, than to those who have the use of all their powers and faculties and are well and strong.

Is there ever in God any discrimination? Does he care for us as we care for each other? Does he give personal thought to any of us,—to you, to me,—according to our condition? Does pain or trouble in us cause pity in his heart? Does God care? Does he see the individual in the crowd? When you are passing through some great trouble, enduring pain or adversity, does God know it and does he care? Does he have any thought or feeling for you different from that which he has for the person living in the house next to yours who has no trouble, no suffering?

We know how it is with our human friends. Love discriminates. Its interest in us is sympathetic and varies with our condition and our need. When we are happy, without painful

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condition, our friends love us, but feel no anxiety concerning us. To-morrow we are sick or are suffering from some painful accident, or enduring some loss. Then they love us no more than before, but their hearts are rent with sympathy. That is what it means to care.

Is there any such experience as this in God? When we suffer does he suffer too? Does he know that we are in any particular need, and is his feeling toward us affected by our experience? A mother was speaking to a trusted friend about her daughter. The child had had a bitter sorrow, a sore disappointment. She had not spoken of it to her mother, but was enduring it herself, bravely and quietly, trying to be strong and cheerful. Yet the mother knew just what her daughter was passing through. Her love for her child entered into and shared all the child's experiences. The mother cared.

Is there ever anything like this in the heart of God as he looks upon his children and knows that they are suffering? In one of

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the Psalms the poet says: "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me." There was wonderful comfort in this assurance. For a man, one man, in the great world of millions,—poor, needy, surrounded by enemies and dangers, and with no human friend or helper, to be able to say: "Yet the Lord thinketh upon me," was to find marvelous strength. But was the needy and beleaguered soul justified in its confidence? Was it indeed true that the great God in heaven thought upon his servant on the earth in his loneliness and suffering? Or was it only a fancied assurance, with which to comfort himself? Did God really care for him? And does God care for us and think upon us when we are poor and needy?

When we turn to the Bible we find on every page the revelation that God does care. The Old Testament is full of luminous illustrations of the truth. A great crime has been committed, a brother slain by a brother, and God cares. A woman is in distress because she has been cast out; heaven cares.

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“The Lord hath heard thy affliction,” was the message sent to comfort her. All the Bible story shines with records of like divine care. The Psalms likewise are full of assurances of God’s personal interest in men. Christ teaches the same truth. He speaks over and over of the Father’s thought and care. He told his disciples that God clothes the grass-blades and the lilies, amid all his care of the worlds finds time to attend to the feeding of the birds, and in all the events of the universe notes the fall of a little sparrow. He assured them further that the very hairs of their heads are all numbered, meaning that God personally cares for all the minutest affairs of our lives.

Not only did Christ teach that God cares for his children, but that he cares for them as individuals. His love is not merely a diffused kindly sentiment of interest in the whole human family, but it is personal and individual as the love of a mother for each one of her children. The Shepherd calleth his sheep by name. St. Paul took the love

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of Christ to himself as if he were the only one Christ loved. "He loved me and gave himself up for me."

God's love is personal. His heart lays hold upon each life. He cares for us, for me. He enters into all our individual experiences. If we suffer, he suffers. In a remarkable passage in the Old Testament, the writer, speaking of the love of God for his people, says: "In all their affliction he was afflicted and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." How could the care of God for his children be expressed in plainer or more positive way? In their afflictions he was afflicted. When they suffered he suffered. In their sorrows he sorrowed. We know how Jesus entered into all the experiences of his disciples. Their life was his. It is the same to-day. In heaven he is touched with the feeling of his people's infirmities. If you are weak, the burden of your weakness presses upon him. If you are hurt, the hurt is felt

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by him. If you are wronged he endures the wrong. There is no experience of your life that he does not share. Whatever your need, your trial, your perplexity, your struggle may be, you may be sure that he knows and cares and that when you come to him with it, he will take time amid all his infinite affairs to help you as if he had nothing else in all the world to do.

“Among so many, can he care?
Can special love be everywhere?”
I asked. My soul bethought itself of this,—
“In just that very place of his
Where he hath put and keepeth you,
God hath no other thing to do.”

God cares. His love for each one of us is so deep, so personal, so tender, that he shares our every pain, every distress, every struggle. “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” God is our Father and his care is gentler than a human father’s as his love exceeds human love. Much human care has no power to help, but when God cares he

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helps omnipotently. Jesus said that when his friends would leave him alone, yet he would not be alone—"because the Father is with me." When human friendship comes not with any relief, then God will come. When no one in all the world cares, then God cares.

“You Will Not Mind the
Roughness”

*Grumble? No; what's the good?
If it availed, I would;
But it doesn't a bit—
Not it.*

*Laugh? Yes; why not?
'Tis better than crying a lot;
We were made to be glad,
Not sad.*

*Sing? Why, yes, to be sure.
We shall better endure
If the heart's full of song
All day long.*

*Love? Yes, unceasingly,
Ever increasingly;
Friends' burdens wearing
Their sorrows sharing;*

*Their happiness making,
For pattern taking
The One above,
Who is love.*

Motherhood.

CHAPTER VI

“You Will Not Mind the Roughness”



OMETIMES there is inscrutable mystery in the hard experiences through which good people are led. A few years ago a happy young couple came from the marriage altar, full of hope and joy. Their home was bright with love. A year later a baby came and was welcomed with great gladness. From the beginning, however, the little one was a sufferer. She was taken to one of the best physicians in the land. After careful examination, his decision was that her condition is absolutely hopeless. Till that moment the mother had still hoped that her child might sometime be cured. Now she understands that how long soever she may live, she will never be any better.

“What shall I do?” was the mother’s question when a friend listened to the story of the

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visit to the great doctor. "What can I do? How can God help me?"

What comfort can we give to such mothers as this? First, we can assure them that their child is quite as dear to God as if she were strong and bright. The weakest and most helpless are nearest to him. God is like a mother in his tenderness and in his yearning love for those who are suffering. This child has his gentlest sympathy. Then some day, too, she will be well. Her condition is only for earth. Heaven is the place where earth's arrested growths will reach perfection, where earth's blighted things will blossom into full beauty. This child will not be sick, nor blind, nor imperfect there. The hopelessness of her condition is only for the present life. Some day the mother's dreams of beauty for her, not realized here, will all be fulfilled, and her prayer for her child's health will be answered.

But meanwhile? Yes, it is hard to look upon the child's condition, so pathetic, so pitiful, and to remember the great doctor's

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words: "Absolutely hopeless!" Is there any comfort for this condition? Can this mother say that God is leading her in the path of life? Is this experience of suffering part of that path? Does God know about the long struggle of this mother? Does he know what the doctor said? Yes, he knows all. Has he then no power to do anything? Yes, he has all power. Why, then, does he not cure this child?

We may not try to answer. We do not know God's reasons. Yet we know it is all right. What good can possibly come from this child's condition and from the continuation of this painful condition year after year? We do not know. Perhaps it is that the child may be prepared for a mission in glory which shall surpass in splendor the mission of any child that is well and joyous here. Or perhaps it is for the sake of the mother and father, who are being led through these years of anguish, disappointment and sorrow. Many people suffer for the sake of others, and we know at least that these parents are

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receiving a training in unselfishness, in gentleness, in patience, in trust. Perhaps this painful experience in their child is to make them richer-hearted. The disciples asked the Master for whose sin it was, the blind man's, or his parents', that the man was born blind. "Neither; no one's sin," Jesus replied, "but that the works of God might be done in this man." May it not be that this child's suffering finds its justification in the ministry of love it has called out in the father and mother? They are being prepared for a blessed service to other suffering ones. Perhaps in the other life they will learn that they owe to their child's suffering much of the beauty of Christ that will then be theirs.

In one of the lace shops of Brussels there are certain rooms devoted to the spinning of the finest and most delicate lace patterns. The rooms are left altogether dark save for the light that comes from one very small window. There is only one spinner in each room, and he sits where a narrow stream of light falls from the window directly upon

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the threads he is weaving. "Thus," says the guide, "do we secure our choicest products. The lace is always more delicately and beautifully woven when the worker himself sits in the dark and only his pattern is in the light."

May it not be the same with us in our weaving? Sometimes we must work in the dark. We cannot see or understand what we are doing. We cannot discover any possible good in our painful experience. Yet, if only we are faithful and fail not, we shall some day learn that the most exquisite work of our life was done in those very days. Let us never be afraid, however great our sufferings, however dark life is. Let us go on in faith and love, never doubting, not even asking why, bearing our pain and learning to sing while we suffer. God is watching and he will bring good and beauty out of all our suffering.

We must remember that it is "the path of life" that God is showing us. He never leads us in any other path. If we are prompted to go in some evil way, we may be sure it

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is not God's way for us. He leads us only in paths of life. They may be steep and rough, but the end will be blessed and glorious, and in our joy we will forget the briers and thorns on the way.

“Oh, you will not mind the roughness nor the steepness of the way,
Nor the chill, unrested morning, nor the seariness of the day;
And you will not take a turning to the left or to the right,
But go straight ahead, nor tremble at the coming of the night,
For the road leads home.”

There are days when you do not know what to do. You have perplexities, doubts, uncertainties. You lie awake half the night wondering what you ought to do. Something has gone wrong in your affairs, in your relations with a friend, in your home life. Or, one near to you is suffering and you want to help, but you do not know what to do. Your days are full of questions. Instead of vexing yourself, just go to Him who is infinitely

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wise and say: "Show me the path," and He will.

There is something else. It is told of Saint Wenceslaus, king of Bohemia, that he was one night going to prayer in a distant church, barefoot, over the snow and ice, and his servant, Podavivus, following him, imitating his master's devotion, grew faint. "Follow me," said the king; "set thy feet in the prints of mine." That is what our Master says when we grow weary in the hard way, when the thorns pierce our feet, or when the path grows rough or steep: "Follow me. Put your feet into my footprints. It is but a little way home."

“Why Does No One Ever See
God?”

*"Lonely! And what of that?
Some must be lonely; 'tis not given to all
To feel a heart responsive rise and fall,—
To blend another life into its own;
Work may be done in loneliness; work on!*

*"Dark! Well, and what of that?
Didst fondly dream the sun would never set?
Dost fear to lose thy way? Take courage yet;
Learn thou to walk by faith and not by sight;
Thy steps will guided be, and guided right."*

CHAPTER VII

“Why Does No One Ever See God?”



HERE are many sincere Christians who are longing for clearer revealings of God. An earnest young Christian wrote to her pastor: “I find myself ever asking, as I read the New Testament, ‘These things are very beautiful, but do we know that they are true?’” Several years since a writer told of two girls who were overheard one evening talking as if in perplexity, and one of them said: “Yes, but why has no one ever seen God?” This was all that was heard of the conversation, but that single sentence revealed the questioner’s state of mind. Evidently she had been talking about the apparent unreality of spiritual things. Why had nobody ever seen God? She had heard a great deal about God, about his love, his care, his interest in human lives,

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his kindness. But she had never had a glimpse of him. How could she know that all she had heard about him was true? How could she know that the things of Christian faith and hope were real?

Such questions will arise with all who think. Does God indeed love me? If he does, why must I suffer so? If he does, how can I explain all the accidents, calamities, and troubles of life? It is not surprising if sometimes we cannot understand the mysteries of Christian faith. All life is full of things we cannot comprehend. Can you understand how, on the bushes in your garden, which in March were bare and briery, there are coming masses of glorious roses? In the most common things there is mystery. A great botanist said that there was enough mystery in a handful of moss to give one a lifetime's study. There really are but few things we can understand. How do your eyes see? How do your ears hear? How does your mind think? Shall we refuse to believe these things because we cannot explain them?

“Why Does No One See God?”

We have read how the cry of the wireless went out from the wrecked ship, and was heard far and wide over the sea—a prayer of distress—and how help came swiftly. No one doubts this pathetic experience of the sea. Why, then, should we doubt that when a mother sat by her suffering child the other night, and pleaded with God, her prayer reached the ears of her Heavenly Father? Why do we question that God loves us, when we believe that our human friends love us? You cannot see the love in your friend’s heart any more than you can see the love in God’s heart. You say that your friend is true, is patient, is kind, that he is a tower of strength to you; but you cannot see these qualities in him. Your friend is much out of your sight, and you cannot set spies on him to know that he is always faithful. Yet you never doubt him. How can you not in like manner believe in the love of God, which you cannot see?

A sorrow breaks in upon you. You cannot understand it. We would be far happier sometimes if we did not try to understand

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things. Sir Robertson Nicoll says: "There are some very devout people who know far too much. They can explain the whole secret and purpose of pain, evil, and death in the world. They prate about the mystery of things as if they were God's spies. It is far humbler and more Christian to admit that we do not fully discern a reason and method in this long, slow tragedy of human existence."

But really God does show himself to us, and we do see him oftener than we think. There is a picture of Augustine and his mother which represents them looking up to heaven with deep earnestness and longing. One is saying: "If God would only speak to us!" The other replies: "Perhaps he is speaking to us, and we do not hear his voice!" Philip said to Jesus: "Lord, show us the Father;" and have you noticed what Jesus said to him in reply? "Have I been so long time with you, and hast thou not known me? He that has seen me hath seen the Father." What Philip had in mind when he

“ Why Does No One See God ? ”

said: “Show us the Father,” was some outshining of majesty and splendor, a theophany, a transfiguration. That was the way he thought God must appear. When Jesus said: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,” he referred to his common, daily life with his disciples, not to his miracles. Only a small proportion of the things Jesus did were unusual, supernatural. Ninety-nine hundredths of his acts were simple, common things, that did not need deity to perform. He wrought only one recorded miracle in the Bethany home, but in his frequent visits,—sitting with the family by the hearth, or at the table, talking with them in the evening, walking with them in the garden, showing them the gentle things of friendship,—there were a thousand kindly words and acts which made his name forever sacred to them.

It was so in all Christ’s life. There were a few miracles, showing divine power; there were countless revealings of gentleness, sympathy, thoughtfulness, encouragement, which were as full of God as the miracles. It was

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chiefly to this part of his life that Jesus referred when he said to Philip: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." His miracles awed them. Mary could not have sat at his feet and listened calmly if he had appeared transfigured. John could not have leaned on his breast restfully and quietly, if supernatural glory had been shining in his face. God is love, and wherever there is love, God is revealing himself. Jesus showed the disciples the Father in all the sweetness and compassion that they saw in him continually.

Do we not see him in like ways? Does he not reveal himself to us in a thousand familiar things that we do not think of at all as divine revealings? A writer says that most men are religious when they look upon the faces of their dead babies. The materialism which at other times infects them with doubts of God and immortality drops from them in this hushed hour.

"There's a narrow ridge in the graveyard
Would scarce stay a child in his race;
But to me and my thought it is wider
Than the star-sown vague of Space."

“Why Does No One See God?”

People see God only in the unusual. “If we could see miracles,” they say, “we would believe.” But the common things are likewise full of God. Moses saw God in one bush that burned and was not consumed. Yet God is as really in every bush in the woods for those who have eyes to see as he was in a special way in that little acacia at Horeb.

Have you never seen God? If you think of God as only burning majesty, shining glory, you will answer: “No, I never saw God.” But splendor, Sinai clouds, and flaming fires are not God. You have seen God a thousand times in love, in peace, in goodness, in comfort. You see him daily in providential care, in the sweet things of your home, in friendships, in the beauty of little children. You have been receiving blessings all your life in manifold ways. Do not call it chance, luck, or good fortune. The heart-hungry girl asked: “Why has no one ever seen God?” Yet she had seen God every day, every hour of her life, in the goodness and mercy which had followed her from her infancy.

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You have seen God a thousand times. You were in danger, and there came a mysterious protection which sheltered you from harm. You called it chance; it was God. You had a great sorrow which you thought you could not possibly endure, and there came into your heart a strange, sweet comfort. You thought a friend brought it; but God sent the friend. There was a tangle in your affairs which seemed about to wreck everything, and then in an inexplicable way it was all straightened out by invisible hands. The hands were God's. Your years have been full of wonderful providences, strange guidances, gentle comforts, answered prayers, sweet friendships, surprises of goodness, help, and care. All your life you have been seeing God. Do not question it, but rejoice in the vision, that you may see him still more.

The One Who Stands By

*“Let nothing disturb thee
Nothing affright thee;
All things are passing;
God never changeth;
Patient endurance
Attaineth to all things;
Who God possesseth
In nothing is wanting.
Alone God sufficeth.”*

CHAPTER VIII

The One Who Stands By



ESUS spoke to his disciples of the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete. The word used in our translation is Comforter.

We think of a comforter as one who gives consolation in trouble. There is much sorrow in the world, and there is always need of those who understand the art of comforting. There is constant need for true comforters. Barnabas is called, in the Common Version of the Bible, a "son of consolation." No doubt he was a sunshiny man. No other one can be a consoler. When Barnabas went into a sick room, we are quite sure his presence was a benediction. It is a great thing to be the son or daughter of consolation. Christ himself was a wonderful comforter. The Holy Spirit is a comforter. He brings the gentleness and healing of divine love to hurt hearts.

But the best scholars agree that "com-

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forter" is not the word which most adequately gives the sense of the original word which our Lord used. It is Paraclete. It is used only a few times and only by John. In the Fourth Gospel it is translated Comforter. Then, in John's First Epistle, it is translated Advocate. Advocate is perhaps the more accurate translation—not merely a comforter who consoles us in trouble, and makes us stronger to endure sorrow, but one who stands for us. The word Advocate means one who stands by; strictly, one called to the side of another.

The thought "stands by" is very suggestive. This is one of the best definitions of a friend. He must be one who always stands by. He may not always be close to you, always manifesting affection in some practical way, always speaking words of cheer. He may be miles away in space, but you know that he is always true to you, your real friend, wherever he may be. He always stands by you. He may not be able to do many things for you. Indeed it is but little that a friend, even your best friend, really can do at any

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time for you. He cannot lift away your load. Each one must bear his own burden, meet his own life's questions, make his own decisions, endure his own troubles, fight his own battles, accept his own responsibilities. The office of a friend is not to make life easy for you.

But he always stands by you. If ever you need him in any way and turn to him, he will not fail you nor disappoint you. If you do not see him for years, nor even hear from him, and if you then should go to him with some appeal, you will find him unchanged, the same stanch, strong, faithful friend as always. Though your circumstances have changed, from wealth to poverty, from popular favor to obscurity, from strength to weakness, still your friend is the same, stands by you as he did before, meets you with the old cordiality, the old kindness, the old helpfulness. Your friend is one who stands by you through everything. Such a friend the Holy Spirit is.

Jesus said the Father would give "another Comforter," that is, one like himself. He was an advocate for his disciples, who always

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stood by them, their comrade, their defender, their shelter in danger. His friendship was unchanged through the years. His disciples failed him, grieved him, disappointed him, but when they came back to him they found him the same, waiting to receive them.

Jesus said they would receive another comforter when he was gone. He was not really going away from them. They would not see any face, would not feel any hand, but he would be there, as he always had been—ever standing by. They would lose nothing by his going away. In the Paraclete he would still be with them and would still be their Comforter, their Comrade. Think what it was to them to have Jesus for a personal friend. There never was such another Friend. Think of his gentleness, his tenderness, his sympathy, his kindness, the inspiration of his love. Think of the shelter he was to them, the strength, the encouragement. Then remember what he said—that the Holy Spirit would be “another Comforter,” one like himself, and that it would be more to them to have the

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Spirit for their friend than if Jesus had stayed with them. He is everything to us which Jesus was to his personal friends. He is our Advocate. He always stands by, and for us.

We speak of the love of the Father. We are his children. He comforts us with his wonderful tenderness. We talk and sing of the love of Christ. We do not speak or sing so much of the love of the Spirit. Yet the Spirit's love is just as wonderful as the Father's or the Son's. For one thing, he loves us enough to come and live in our hearts. Does that seem a little thing? We speak a great deal, especially at Christmas time, of the condescension of the eternal Son of God in coming to earth, to be born in a stable and cradled in a manger. Is it a less wonderful condescension for the Holy Spirit to make your heart his home, to be born there, to live there as your Guest? Think what a place a human heart is. Think of the unholy thoughts and desires, the impure things, the unlovingness, the jealousy, the bitterness, the

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hate, all the sin of our hearts. Then think of the love of the Spirit that makes him willing to live in such a place, in order to cleanse us and make us good and holy.

The love of the Spirit is shown in his wondrous patience with us in all our sinfulness, while he lives in us and deals with us in the culturing of our Christian life. We speak of the patient love of Christ with his disciples the three years he was with them, having them in his family, at his table, enduring their ignorance, their dullness, their narrowness, their petty strifes, their unfaithfulness. It was a marvelous love that never grew weary of them, that loved on in spite of all that so tried his love, and endured the hate of men, their plottings, their treacheries. We never can understand the depth of the love of Christ in enduring all that he endured in saving the world. But think also of the love of the Holy Spirit in what he suffers in his work with us.

A young Christian had a friend whom she had long loved deeply. She had regarded this

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friend as like an angel in the truth and beauty of her life. She never had had a shadow of doubt concerning her. Then she learned that this girl had been leading a double life for years. The discovery appalled her. At first she refused to believe it, but the evidence was so unmistakable that she could not but believe it, and it almost killed her. She wrote: "I understand now a little of the bitter sorrow of my Saviour in Gethsemane, as he drank the cup of his people's sins." If a human friend can be broken-hearted over the sin of a friend, how the Holy Spirit must suffer in his cherishing of us, in his wondrous brooding over us. How he must grieve when we fall into sin!

After Bereavement—What?

*"I lift my head and walk my ways
Before the world without a tear,
And bravely unto those I meet
I smile a message of good cheer;
I give my lips to laugh and song,
And somehow get me through each day;
But oh, the tremble in my heart
Since she has gone away!"*

*"Her feet had known the stinging thorns,
Her eyes the blistering tears;
Bent were her shoulders with the weight
And sorrow of the years;
The lines were deep upon her brow,
Her hair was thin and gray;
And oh, the tremble in my heart
Since she has gone away!"*

*"I am not sorry; I am glad;
I would not have her here again;
God gave her strength life's bitter cup
Unto the bitterest dreg to drain;
I will not have less strength than she,
I proudly tread my stony way;
But oh, the tremble in my heart
Since she has gone away!"*

CHAPTER IX

After Bereavement—What?



HERE is something in bereavement which makes it mean a great deal in a woman's life. It is a sore disappointment. Dreams of love's happiness are shattered. The beauty which had only begun to be realized in her home, in her wedded joy, in her social life, in the development of her plans and hopes is suddenly left to wither. Very great is the sorrow when one of two lovers is taken and the other left. Widowhood is very desolate and lonely. When she has been a wife only a brief time, there is special loneliness in her case.

The experience is particularly perplexing and trying. For one thing, she has probably had no training in the affairs of life. She has never learned self-reliance. Her husband, in the gentleness of his manly love, has sought to spare her from everything hard and rough.

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He has never permitted her even to know of the struggles and perplexities of his daily business life. He has sought to carry home in the evening only the bright things, the cheerful things, with not a breath of anything that would give pain. He has not permitted his wife to know the smallest things of business. She had no bank account. She did not know how to write a check. She never knew how much money she might properly spend in a month. She had no more idea of business than a child. The day after her husband's funeral she saw herself utterly unprepared for the duties and responsibilities which she found suddenly devolving upon her.

Just how shall she meet her perplexities. She is a Christian. She knows that her husband was God's child, and she is comforted by the thought that he is not dead, but has only passed into the immortal life. She is comforted also in her own grief by the truth of the divine love, that her sorrow was no accident, that her bereavement was not

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the plan of God to break up the goodness and beauty of her life, that nothing has really gone wrong in the plan of Christ for her. But the question presses itself upon her mind—I am sure it has done so a thousand times—How am I to go on in this broken life of mine? What am I to do in my shattering and bereavement? Her life is not finished. She is only a girl in years. She may live—she probably will live—forty years or more. What does Christ want her to do with her life? What does he want her to do with the broken dreams that lie shattered about her feet?

These questions and questions like these are coming to her every day and every night. This is the deeper meaning of her sorrow. Sometimes women in her position see no brightness, find no hope, think the story all written out to the finis, their dream only shattered, and sink away into despair. But that is not the way to meet a sorrow like this. The story of her life is not finished. God's plan for her was not spoiled when her sorrow came and interrupted everything, leaving her in

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darkness. The sorrow was only an accident in the plan. It was not a surprise to God, and his plan for her life runs on to the end of her years. What the remainder of the plan is she does not know for the present. She must not know. It is not best that she should know. Her faith must not fail, she must not despair. She must go on in trust and confidence.

What then is her part? First, faith in Christ. Believe that all these broken things are in his hands. Let her remember what he said after the miracle of the loaves—"Gather up the broken pieces that remain, that nothing be lost." That is what he is saying to her to-day. Let her gather up the broken pieces from this miracle of love and happiness. Let nothing she has had these days of joy, of blessing, of experience, be lost. Let her keep all the fragments.

The next thing is for her to recommit her life, with its grief, its disappointments, its desolation, its broken things, all to Christ. She must not herself undertake to rebuild it.

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She must not make plans of her own for the years to come. She never needed Christ more than she needs him now, and will need him in the days and the months before her. She must let him lead her, let him plan for her, mark out the way. He must build the life for her. He must have much of the love she has to give.

Bereavement is common. No family long misses a break in its circle. Let the break be met with courage! Courage and unselfishness are developed by great sorrow or suffering. In times of overwhelming danger and disaster people rise to unusual heroism. George Kennan tells of the remarkable exhibition of courage and generous characteristics shown by the people of San Francisco during the great earthquake and fire. The behavior of the population after the disaster impressed those who witnessed it. One thoughtful and undemonstrative man said he was glad he had lived to see the things that happened the first ten days after the great catastrophe. Those days were the best and most inspiring, he

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said, of all his life. Religious people talked about the kingdom of heaven. "Cowardice, selfishness, greed, and all the baser emotions and impulses of human character practically disappeared in the tremendous strain of that experience, and courage, fortitude, sympathy, generality, and unbounded self-sacrifice took their places. Men became and for a short time continued to be all that we may suppose the Creator intended them to be, and it was a splendid and inspiring thing to witness.

A like display of the finer and nobler qualities of human nature was witnessed that terrible night on the sea when the *Titanic* went down. The majority of the passengers and crew behaved with the most remarkable courage, and the most noble unselfishness.

Let God—through your bereavement—bring out the finer and nobler qualities in you.

Comfort through Personal Help-
fulness

*“When I have time, so many things I’ll do
To make life happier and more fair
For those whose lives are crowded now with care;
I’ll help to lift them from their low despair—
When I have time!”*

*“When I have time, the friend I love so well
Shall know no more these weary toiling days;
I’ll lead her feet in pleasant paths always,
And cheer her heart with words of sweetest praise—
When I have time!”*

*When you have time, the friend you hold so dear
May be beyond the reach of all your sweet intent;
May never know that you so kindly meant
To fill her life with sweet content—
When you had time!*

*Now is the time! Ah, friend, no longer wait
To scatter loving smiles and words of cheer
To those around, whose lives are now so dear;
They may not heed you in the coming year—
Now is the time!*

CHAPTER X

Comfort through Personal Helpfulness



VERY true Christian desires to be helpful. He longs to make his life a blessing to as many people as possible. He wishes to make the world better, his neighborhood brighter and sweeter, every life he touches, in even casual associations, somewhat more beautiful. It is worth while that we should think just how we must live if our lives would reach this ideal.

We cannot come upon this kind of a life accidentally. We do not drift into a place and condition of great usefulness. Every man has his secret, something that is the keynote of his life. The secret of personal helpfulness is love in the heart. No one can be a blessing to others if he does not love. Nothing but love will make another happier, will comfort sorrow, will relieve loneliness, will give cheer.

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You never can be of any real use to a man if you do not care for him, and you care for him only so far as you are willing to make sacrifices to help him, to go out of your way to do a favor.

It is never by chance, therefore, that one finds himself living a life that is full of helpfulness. Such a life comes only through a regeneration that makes it new. That is what it meant to become a Christian. The secret of Christ was abounding personal helpfulness. We say he gave his life for the world, and we think of the cross. But the cross was in his life from the beginning. He never had a thought or a wish for himself. He never pleased himself. Ever he was ready to give up his own comfort, his own ease, his own preferment, that another might be pleased or helped. With this thought in mind, it will be a most profitable piece of Bible reading to go through the Gospels just to find how Christ treated the people he met. He was always kind, not only polite and courteous, but doing kindly,

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thoughtful, obliging things. His inquiry concerning every person was, "Can I do anything for you? Can I share your burden? Can I relieve you of your suffering?" The Good Samaritan was Christ's illustration of love, and the illustration was a picture of his own life.

Ever that is the one answer to our question. There is no other way of personal helpfulness but this way, and there is no other secret of attaining it but his secret. You cannot learn it from a book of rules. It is not a system of etiquette. It is a new life—it is Christ living in the heart. It is personal helpfulness of which we are thinking. A man may be useful in his community, may even be a public benefactor, may do much for the race, and yet may fail altogether to be a real helper of individual lives he touches in his daily associations. A man may do much good with his money, relieving distress, founding institutions, establishing schools, and may not be a helper of men in personal ways. People do not turn to him with their needs. The sor-

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rowing know nothing of comfort ministered by him. The baffled and perplexed do not look to him for guidance, the tempted for deliverance, the despairing for cheer and encouragement. It is this personal helpfulness that means the most in the close contacts of human lives.

Jesus never gave money to any one in need, so far as we are told. He did not pay rents for the poor, nor buy them food or clothes, but he was always doing good in ways that meant far more for them than if he had helped with money. There are needs that only love and kindness can meet. Countless people move about among us these days starving for love, dying for loneliness. You can help them immeasurably by becoming their friend, not in any marked or unusual way, but by doing them a simple kindness, by showing a little human interest in them, by turning aside to do a little favor, by manifesting sympathy, if they are in sorrow. A little note of a few lines sent to a neighbor in grief has been known to start an

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influence of comfort and strength that could not be measured.

It is the little things of love that count in such ministry—the little nameless acts, the small words of gentleness, the looks that tell of interest and care and sympathy. Life is hard for many people and nothing is more needed continually than encouragement and cheer. There are men who never do anything great in their lives, and yet they make it sunnier all about them and make all who know them happier, braver, stronger. There are women, overburdened themselves, perhaps, but so thoughtful, so sympathetic, so obliging, so full of little kindnesses, that they make the spot of the world in which they live more like heaven.

How can we learn this lesson of personal helpfulness? It is not merely a matter of geniality of disposition, a matter of natural temperament. A selfish man can learn it if he takes Christ for his teacher. Then self must be displaced in the thought and purpose and affection by “the other man.” If love fill

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the heart every expression of the life gives out helpfulness. A young woman, speaking of the way different people had been a comfort to her in a great sorrow, said: "I wish some persons knew just how much their faces can comfort others." Then she told of an old gentleman she sometimes sat beside in the street-car. He did not know her, but she was always helped by just being near to him and seeing his face.

There is a great deal of this unconscious helpfulness in the world. Indeed many of the best things we do we do without knowing we are doing them. If we are full of love we will be helping others wherever we go, and the things we do not plan to do when we go out in the morning will be the divinest things of the whole day.

Not only is the life of personal helpfulness most worth while in the measure of good it does, in its influence upon others, but no other life brings back to itself such rewards of peace, of strength, of comfort, of joy. What of love you give to another you have not really

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given away—you have it still in yourself in larger measure than before. No gain one gets in this world is equal to the love of hearts that one receives from those one serves in unselfish love.

“My dear, the little things I did for you
To-day have brought me comfort, one by one,
As through the purple dark a shaft of sun
Strikes far as dawn, and changes dusk to blue;
The little things it cost me naught to do,
Remembering how slow life’s sands may run,
To-day a web of purest gold have spun
Across the gulf that lies between us two.”

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*“Shut in. Shut in from the ceaseless din
Of the restless world and its heat and sin;
Shut in from its turmoil, care and strife,
And all the wearisome round of life.*

*“Shut in with tears that are spent in vain
With the dull companionship of pain;
Shut in with the changeless days and hours,
And the bitter knowledge of failing powers.*

*“Shut in with dreams of days gone by,
With buried hopes that were born to die;
Shut in with the hopes that have lost their zest
And leave but a longing after rest.*

*“Shut in with a trio of angels sweet,
Patience and grace all pain to meet;
With Faith that can suffer and stand and wait
And lean on the promises strong and great.*

*“Shut in with Christ—Oh glorious thought!
Shut in with the peace his sufferings brought;
Shut in with the love that wields the rod;
Oh company blest—shut in with God.”*

CHAPTER XI

Christ and I Are Friends



IF we ask what was the beloved disciple's religion, we may put the answer into phrase—Christ and John were friends. It was a great, all-absorbing, overmastering friendship that transformed John. This friendship began that day when the Baptist said to two young men, as Jesus passed near: "Behold the Lamb of God." The two young men followed Jesus and were invited to his lodgings, spending the afternoon with him. What took place during those hours we do not know, but we do know that a friendship began between one of the two—then scarcely more than a boy—and Jesus, whose bonds have never slackened since. For three years this friendship grew in sweetness and tenderness, and during those years it was that the wonderful transformation took place in the disciple.

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We know a little about the power of a strong, rich, noble human friendship in shaping, inspiring, uplifting lives.

“Oh friend, my bosom said,
Through thee alone the sky is arched,
Through thee the rose is red;
All things through thee take nobler form,
And look beyond the earth;
The mill-round of our fate appears
A sun-path in thy worth.
Me too thy nobleness has taught
To master my despair;
The fountains of my hidden life
Are through thy friendship fair.”

There are many lives that are being saved, refined, sweetened, enriched, by a human friendship. Here is one of the best of the younger Christian men of to-day who has been lifted up from a life of ordinary ability and education into refinement, power and large usefulness, by a gentle friendship. The girl he loved was rich-hearted, inspiring, showing in her own life the best ideals and attainments, and her love for him and his love for her lifted him up to love's nobility. She stayed with him only a few years and then went home,

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but he walks among men to-day with a strength, an energy and a force of character born of the holy friendship which meant so much to him.

George Eliot's Silas Marner was a miser who hoarded his money. Some one took away his hoard, and his heart grew bitter over the wrong to him. Then a little child was left at his door. His poor, starved heart took in the little one and love for her redeemed him from sordidness, bitterness, and anguish of spirit. God has saved many a life by sending to it a sweet human friendship. A church visitor climbed the rickety stairs to the miserable room where a woman lay in rags on a pile of straw. She bent over the poor woman, all vile with sin, said a loving word and kissed her. That kiss saved her. Christ comes to sinners and saves them with love. That is the way he saved the prodigals of his time. He came to them and became their friend.

It is to a personal friendship with himself that Christ is always inviting men. He does not come merely to make reforms, to start

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beneficent movements, to give people better houses and to make the conditions of life better. He does not try to save the world by giving it better laws, by founding schools, by securing wholesome literature. Christ saves men by becoming their friend. John surrendered his heart and life to this friendship with Jesus. He opened every window and door to his new Master.

The basis of John's friendship with Christ was his trust. He never doubted. Thomas doubted and was slow to believe. This hindered the growth of his friendship with Jesus. We cannot enter into the joy and gladness of friendship unless we believe heartily. Peter was one of Christ's closest friends, but he was always saying rash words and doing rash things which interrupted his fellowship with Christ. Such a spirit as Peter's, however loyal and courageous, cannot realize the sweet and gentle things of the holiest friendship. But John loved on in silence and trusted, and his friendship was deep and strong. At the Last Supper he leaned on

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the Master's breast. That is the place of confidence—the bosom is only for those who have a right to the closest intimacy. It is the place of love, near the heart. It is the place of safety—in the secret place of the Most-High. The bosom is the place of comfort too. It was the darkest night the world ever saw that John lay on the bosom of Jesus. But he found comfort there. Then trust is the secret of peace. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee."

That is what leaning on Christ's breast means. Do not think that that place of innermost love was for John only and has never been filled since that night. It is like heaven's gate—it is never closed, and whosoever will may come and lie down there. It is a place for those who sorrow—oh, that all who have known grief knew that they may creep in where John lay and nestle there!

John's transformation is the model for all of us. No matter how many imperfections mar the beauty of our lives, we should not be discouraged. But we should never consent

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to let the faults remain. That is the way too many of us do. We condone our weakness and imperfections, pity them and keep them. We should give ourselves no rest till they are all cured. But how can we get these evil things out of our lives? How did John get rid of his faults? By letting the love of Christ possess him. Lying upon Christ's bosom, Christ's sweet, pure, wholesome life permeated John's life and made it sweet, pure and wholesome.

So it is the friendship of Christ alone that can transform us. You are a Christian, not because you belong to a church, not because you have a good creed, not merely because you are living a fair moral life—you are a Christian because you and Christ are friends. What can a friend be to a friend? Let us think of the best that earth's richest-hearted friend can be to us and do for us. Then lift up this conception, multiplying it a thousand times. If it were possible to gather out of all history and from all the world the best and holiest things of pure, true friendship, and

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combine them all in one great friendship, Christ's friendship would surpass the sum of them all.

Even our human friendships we prize as the dearest things on earth. They are more precious than rarest gems. We would lose everything else we have rather than give them up. Life without friendships would be empty and lonely. Yet the best earthly friendships are but little fragments of the friendship of Christ. It is perfect. Its touch is always gentle and full of healing. Its help is always wise. Its tenderness is like the warmth of a heavenly summer. If we have the friendship of Christ, we cannot be utterly bereft, though all human friends be taken away. To be Christ's friend is to be God's child, with all a child's privileges. This is one essential in being a Christian.

“Behold him now when he comes!

Not the Christ of our subtle creeds,
But the light of our hearts, of our homes,

Of our hopes, our prayers, our needs,
The Brother of want and blame,
The Lover of women and men.”

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We could not say that Paul is our friend, or John, but Jesus is living, away past death, and is with us evermore. He is our Friend as really as he was Mary's or John's.

“We may not climb the heavenly steeps
To bring the Lord Christ down;
In vain we search the lowest deeps,
For him no depths can drown;

“But warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is he;
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love is Galilee.

“The healing of his seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain;
We touch him in life's throng and press,
And we are whole again.”

Christ is our Friend. That means everything we need. No want can be unsupplied. No sorrow can be uncomforted. No evil can overmaster us. For time and eternity we are safe. It will not be the streets of gold, and the gates of pearl, and the river and the trees, that will make heaven for us—it will be the companionship, the friendship of Christ.

But we must not forget the other part of

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this friendship. We are to be Christ's friends too. It is not much we can give to him, or do for him. But he would have us loyal and true. One writes of the influence of a human friend's life:

“Each soul whispers to itself: 'Twere like a breach
Of reverence in a temple, could I dare
Here speak untruth, here wrong my inmost
thought.

Here I grow strong and pure; here I may yield
Without shamefacedness the little brought
From out my poorer life and stand revealed
And glad, and trusting, in the sweet and rare
And tender presence which hath filled the air.”

If a sacred human friendship exerts such influence over a true life, surely the consciousness that Christ is our friend and we are his should check every evil thought, quell every bitter feeling, sweeten every emotion and make all our life holy, true and heavenly.

More than Conquerors

O Lord, I pray
That for this day
I may not swerve
By foot or hand
From thy command,
Not to be served but to serve.

This, too, I pray
That for this day
No love of ease
Nor pride prevent
My good intent,
Not to be pleased, but to please.

And if I may
I'd have this day
Strength from above
To set my heart
In heavenly art
Not to be loved, but to love.

Maltbie D. Babcock.

CHAPTER XII

More than Conquerors



IT is better that we should not sing of sadness. There are sad notes enough already in the world's air. We should sing of cheer, of joy, of hope. This is what St. Paul did when he said: "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us." We do not need to be defeated in our battles, to sink under our loads, to be crushed beneath our sorrows. We may be victorious.

We all have our struggles. Life is not easy for any of us; or if it is, we are not making much of it. Good life is never easy. It must be from first to last in the face of opposition. Jacob saw life visioned as a ladder, its foot resting in the earth, its top reaching up to heaven, into God's very glory. That meant that man could go up from his earthliness, his sinfulness, into nobleness and holiness of character, gaining at last likeness

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to God and a home with God. But it meant also that the ascent never could be easy. A ladder bids us to climb, and climbing is always toilsome. It is slow, too, step by step. It never becomes easy, for heaven is ever above us and the climbing cannot cease till we enter the pearly gates.

St. Paul constantly pictured life as a battle, a warfare. We are soldiers with enemies to fight. The enemies are strong, not flesh and blood, but evil angels, spiritual foes, wicked spirits. They are invisible. They lurk in the darkness. They hide in ambush. Too often they nest in our own hearts. They take forms of good angels, to deceive us. The battle is terrific, and it never ends until we overcome the last enemy and pass within the gates of blessedness.

Every life has its cares, its duties, its responsibilities. There are sicknesses and sorrows and pains and losses and a thousand things that make it hard to live victoriously.

It is possible for us, if we are Christians, to overcome in all these struggles and trials.

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“In all these things we are more than conquerors.” To be more than conquerors is to be triumphant conquerors, not merely getting through the battle or the trouble, but coming out of it with rejoicing, with song and gladness. Some people bear trial and are not overcome by it, but bear it without any glad sense of victory. Others endure their sorrow, and all through it you hear as it were the notes of triumph. Paul himself was this sort of conqueror. His life was one unbroken series of struggles. It never became easy for him to live nobly. He gives us glimpses sometimes of his experiences. He was beaten with rods. He was stoned. He was shipwrecked. He was in perils of robbers, in perils in the wilderness, in the sea, among false brethren, in watchings, in fastings, in cold and nakedness. He spent years in prison. Then he had enemies in his own heart—read the seventh of Romans to find what it cost him to live right. But in all these things he was “more than conqueror.” Some one compares St. Paul’s life to one who goes along the street in a dark

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stormy night singing sweet songs; or to a whole band of music moving through the rain and darkness, playing marches of victory. That is the way we should all try to live as Christians, not merely enduring our trials and coming through our struggles, but doing so enthusiastically—"more than conquerors."

Not only may we be conquerors, but if we are Christians we must be conquerors. We dare not yield. We believe that we should be conquerors in temptation, that we should not sin. We know that the evil in us and the evil around us should not be allowed to overcome us; that appetites and base passions and bad tempers should not be permitted to rule us. But this is not the only phase of life, in which we meet resistance and opposition, and must be conquerors, if we would live nobly. This is true in physical life. Health is simply victory over disease and weakness. It is true in mental life. It is never easy to have a trained mind. It can be gotten only through long and patient study and severe discipline. It is so in all experiences in life. We should

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never yield to discouragement or depression, for there is no reason that we should. In the description of the good man, in the first Psalm, where he is compared to a tree planted by streams of water, we read: "And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." There is no real failure possible in a true Christian life. There may be seeming failure; indeed oft-times there is. Christ's life failed, as it appeared to men. St. Paul's life failed. Henry Martyn's life failed. Harriet Newell's life failed. But you know what glorious successes all these lives were in the end. If we are truly Christians, in Jesus Christ, it is impossible for us to fail. Hence in all adversity, in all loss, in all feebleness of health, in all persecution, injustice, wrong, we have but to remain true to Christ, and we cannot fail. "Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Hence we should never yield to discouragement. We should be more than conquerors.

The same is true in sorrow. Sorrow comes into every life. We cannot shut it away. But we can be conquerors in it. When the

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snows melt away in the springtime, I have often seen under them sweet flowers in bloom. The very drifts were like warm blankets to keep them safe. So it is in sorrow. Under the cold snows of grief the flowers of the Christian graces grow unhurt. We can overcome in sorrow; we ought to overcome. This does not mean that we should not shed tears in our sorrows. The love of Christ does not harden the heart; it really makes it more sensitive. The grace of Christ does not save us from suffering in bereavement. Yet we are to be conquerors. Our sorrow must not crush us. We must go through it victoriously, with sweet submission, and joyous confidence.

In the same way must we meet worldly losses and adversities, the failures in our human plans and hopes, the fading of our human joys. "More than conquerors" is the motto that is written upon our crown.

But do not forget the closing words of St. Paul's statement: "In all these things we are more than conquerors, *through him that loved us.*" The text would not be true if

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these last five words were left off. We cannot leave Christ out of life and ever in anything be true overcomers. The Roman Emperor saw the symbol of the cross blazing in the sky and over it the legend: "By this shalt thou conquer." Before every young soldier of the cross, as he goes out to begin life's battles, shines the same symbol, with the same legend. "By this shalt thou conquer." "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us." It is only through Christ that any of us can overcome sin or sorrow or trial.

Some of you may be asking, with deep eagerness, in what way Christ helps us in our battles and struggles. How can we overcome through him?

One part of the answer is, that he has overcome all things himself. He came in the flesh for us. He was the captain of our salvation. He entered into life for us. He met every enemy that we have ever met. And he was more than conqueror in every struggle. He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet

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without sin. That is, he conquered all sin. Then he met poverty, and was victorious in that, living sweetly, patiently, trustingly, in it, without discontent, without envy, without repinings. He wrought as a carpenter, but he never chafed at the hardness of the work or the smallness of the pay. Later, he had not where to lay his head, even the foxes and the birds being better homed than he; but he never complained. When the people scattered off to their homes in the gathering shadows, leaving him alone, he quietly climbed the mountain and spent the night under the stars in peace. Thus he was more than conqueror in poverty. So he was victorious in all the wrongs he had to endure. From enemies and from friends he suffered wrongs. His enemies pursued him with hate and persecution which at last nailed him on the cross. His own chosen friends did many things to pain and try him, one of them at last betraying him for money, another denying him in his darkest hour. Enmity and hate and wrongs cannot hurt us unless they rouse us to resentments,

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to anger, to bitter feelings, to acts of revenge. But Jesus was victorious in all his endurance of injury. His love never once failed in any of its sore testings.

Then he was conqueror in his struggle with the last enemy. It did not seem so at first. Death overcame him on the cross, and bore him captive into its dark prison. But it could not hold him. He burst the bars of death and triumphed over the grave. He came forth a glorious conqueror, out forever from death's power, with all the radiancy of life.

Thus Christ is universal conqueror. There is no enemy we shall ever have to meet that he has not met and vanquished. If we are in his train, he will lead us also to victory. We cannot overcome ourselves, but he will fight the battles for us. We are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

But again, he does not merely fight our battles for us; he helps us to become victorious. "We are more than conquerors *through* him." We must not get the impression that Christ merely wraps us up in the

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folds of his mighty love and carries us over the hard places in life. When we are in the presence of temptation he does not with his divine hand smite down the adversary; we must fight the battle and he will strengthen us. There is a verse which says, "The Lord will bruise Satan shortly," but that is not all of it. "The Lord will bruise Satan under your feet shortly." You must tread down the enemy beneath your feet, but the Lord will bruise him. We must become the conquerors through him. He wants to make us strong and therefore he does not do all things for us, and fight all our battles. He sends us out to meet the enemies, the trials, the oppositions, and then he goes with us to help us. He does not take the burdens off us, but he sustains us in bearing them.

What then is our part? It is implicit, unquestioning obedience. Do you remember those cases in the gospels when persons were healed as they obeyed? The man with the withered arm was bidden to stretch it out—an impossible thing, in a human sense; but as he

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sought to obey he was enabled to do it. Health came into his shriveled arm. The ten lepers were bidden to go away and show themselves to the priest. "And as they went they were cleansed." Obedience made them overcomers. So it is always in the receiving of divine help. We stand in the presence of some opposition, some hindrance, some trial. We say we cannot go through it. But we hear the voice of God commanding, "Go: and lo I am with you." If we quietly and believingly go forward the difficulties will melt before us; the sea will open and make a path for our feet; the mountain will remove and be cast into the sea; the enemy will flee as we advance. Christ never gives a duty but he will give also the strength we require to obey.

There is a blessed secret in this very simple teaching. If we do God's will we are invincible, and shall always be more than conquerors. You stand face to face with a sorrow or a discouragement or some adversity. The problem of Christian faith now is to overcome in this experience—not to get rid

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of the experience, but to meet it and pass through it victoriously, so that it shall not hurt you, but that you shall get blessing out of it. Now, how can you do this? Never by resisting and rebelling. You cannot by doing this repel the trial or evade it. You might as well try to fight a cyclone and by resisting it turn it back. Your resisting can only hurt and bruise your own life. But if you sweetly and quietly yield to the trial or the sorrow and bow before it, it will pass over you and you will rise again unhurt.

Such meeting of trial changes the curse in the cup to blessing. He who overcomes in temptation gets new strength out of his conquest. He who is patient and submissive in the sick room gets a benediction out of the pain. He who overcomes in adversity and keeps faith and love bright, has changed its loss into gain. So it is in all things. To be conqueror in the battles and struggles of life is to climb ever upward toward glory and blessedness.

God so shapes all our life's events and ex-

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periences that in every one of them there is a blessing for us. We miss it if we resist and rebel and thus fail of victoriousness. But if we let God's will be done in us, some good will come out of every cup he puts into our hand.

So we shall go on conquering and to conquer, overcoming in all life's sorrows and getting blessing out of them; victorious over sins and rising into sainthood out of them, as lilies spring up out of black bogs; putting the old nature under our feet more and more as the new nature grows in us into strength and beauty; triumphing over all the ills of life, over all adversities, until at last, rising out of death, we shall stand before God, without spot or blemish, wearing the image of Christ.

Reaching for the Mountain
Splendors

*It is well to live in the valley sweet,
Where the work of the world is done,
Where the reapers sing in the fields of wheat,
As they toil till the set of sun.
But beyond the meadows, the hills I see
Where the noises of traffic cease,
And I follow a voice that calleth to me
From the hilltop regions of peace.*

*Aye, to live is sweet in the valley fair,
And to toil till the set of sun;
But my spirit yearns for the hilltop's air
When the day and its work are done.
For a Presence breathes o'er the silent hills,
And its sweetness is living yet;
The same deep calm all the hillside fills,
As breathed over Olivet.*

CHAPTER XIII

Reaching for the Mountain
Splendors



CHRIST clearly stated the purpose of his mission to the world when he said: "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." We do not begin to understand the possibilities of our lives in the hands of Christ, what he will make of us if we truly submit ourselves to him. There are enemies about us. The thief comes to kill, to destroy. Christ comes to give life and to give it in fullness. When the English laureate was asked what Christ was to him, he replied by pointing to a rose bush, full of glorious roses, and said: "What the sun is to this rose bush, Christ is to me." Think what Christ was to John, the disciple, whom he found resentful, ungentle, whom he made into a disciple of love, and whose influence fills the world to-day like a holy fragrance. Think what Christ has

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been to believers in all the Christian centuries, what he is to the saints who to-day are living in the world.

“He that hath the Son, hath life.

The life of the Son is love, is goodness,
is spirit of kindness and gentleness.”

Think what it is to have the life of Christ in you. One of St. Paul’s remarkable words is, “Christ liveth in me,” and the words mean a literal indwelling of Christ. That is what it is to be a Christian. Think what they are missing who are not letting Christ live in them.

Christ wants us to live richly, abundantly. He is ever calling us to something larger and better. Looking back over our life at the close of a year, we see how often we have failed. But failures, if we are faithfully following Christ, are not final. They are but beginnings which are left for completion in the future. Browning’s lines are suggestive:

“The high that proved too high,
The heroic for earth too hard,

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The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the
sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that he heard it once;
We shall hear it by and by."

We say that we find these high things unattainable and that we never can reach them. No; we shall reach them if we continue to strive. We are at school, only learning, and learning is always slow. We try to get the lesson and we fail, but that is not defeat. We will try again and again, and at last we shall master the hard lessons. Nothing we can think of is beyond ultimate possible attaining. Last year's failures were not final; they were only things we tried to do and did not quite master. Some day we shall finish them. We are immortal. Our failures now are only immaturities; some day they will reach maturity.

St. Paul gives us a good lesson for progress when he counsels us to leave the things that are behind and to stretch toward the things that are before. Some things, of course, we are not to forget. It would be a sin to forget

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our mercies—the kindnesses we receive, the self-denials and sacrifices others have made for us. We should cherish with most sacred regard and gratitude the memory of friendships that have meant so much to us.

But there are some things which we should resolutely and determinedly forget and leave behind. We should forget our worries. We see afterward how foolish they were, and how useless. Some of the things we fretted about a year ago, and allowed to vex and harry us, we now thank God for. They were among the best things of the whole year. We should forget our sorrows. “No,” we say, “we never can. They were too bitter.” Yes, but they brought blessing in their bitterness. It may be too soon yet for us to give thanks for them, but some day we shall. At last we shall see that the greatest good to our lives has come out of the things which at the time seemed disastrous.

We should forget the sins of our past. Should we indeed? Should we ever forget our sins? Not until we have confessed them

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and given them up. But when they have been forgiven, we should forget them in the love and praise of our hearts. We must not make light of sin—it is an exceedingly bitter thing. Sin has filled the world with ruin. It blots and stains and spoils everything it touches. We need to make very sure that we have repented of our sins and that they have been forgiven. It will never do merely to forget them, to cover them up and leave them uncanceled and pass them by. Only God can safely cover sins. Sins which only men themselves cover will plague them afterward. But the sins which God has blotted out and ceased to remember, we may forget while we go on in the joy of our new life.

We should not drag our old habits with us. There are habits which marred last year which we should leave behind amid the rubbish. There are companionships which we should give up positively to-day. Only at our soul's peril can we continue them. Our friendships, if they are pure and good and uplifting, we should cherish—they are making our lives

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rich, strong, true, beautiful. But if they are unholy, if they are corrupt in their influence, if they are hurting us in our character, drawing us toward evil, the only true thing to do is to break them off, not to carry them with us into the new, bright, clean life of the new days.

One is grieving over a lost friendship. Once it was everything to you. It was in all your thoughts. You built no dream fabric, but this friendship was in it. You made no plans for the future, but this friend and you were close, side by side. How can you go on with this friendship out of your life? How can you begin the new year and know that it has forever passed away? Let Christ answer your questions. Let him take your life, and he will give you a joy that will fill your heart. He will be better to you than all the earth. You ask "How?" I do not know. Trust the way with him. He came to give you life abundantly.

Another class of things we should not carry forward into a new life is our quarrels, if we

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have any, our angers, our resentments, our grudges. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath," ran the old teaching. We may not live over night, and we may never have a chance to ask forgiveness, if we do not do it before we sleep. Most positive is the Master's teaching that we must forgive if we would be forgiven.

"When you stand praying, forgive." Then the prayer the Master taught us is, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." If it was wrong to carry the unforgiveness for one day, and through the night, it must be still worse to carry the resentments, the quarrels, the angers, over into the new year. We should carry nothing but love with us into any to-morrow. Bitterness is most undivine; only love is divine. If any one has wronged you, and a bitter feeling has lingered in your heart toward him, forgive the wrong and let love wipe out the bitterness. If you remember before God that you have done an injury to another, spoken some angry word, spoken anything unloving, hurt a life by anything

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you have done, do not enter the new year without seeking forgiveness.

“If fault of mine, or pride, or fear,
Has cost one soul, or far or near,
May the hurt die with thee, Old Year.”

These are suggestions of what Christ means by life. He came that we may have life and that we may have it abundantly. Have you noticed that to live and to love seem to be parts of the same verb? To live is to love. Loved is the perfect of live. Christ is love. Abundant life is abundant love. A new year calls us to better life, that is, to love better. When Jesus bids us to be perfect, he means perfect in living. “For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye?” Even the publicans loved that way. “And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?” The Gentiles go that far. “Ye therefore shall be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

You say, “I never can be perfect.” True, the lesson is hard, and it will take you a long

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time to learn it. It is hard to learn to love unreasonable people. It is hard to love your enemies. It is a long lesson to become perfect in loving; nevertheless, there the lesson stands—"Be ye perfect." And it must be learned,—not in a day, or in a year, but like all great lessons, slowly, to-day a little, and to-morrow a little. Some one writes among New Year's lessons:

"Speak a shade more kindly than the year before;
Pray a little oftener; love a little more;
Cling a little closer to the Father's love;
Thus life below shall liker grow to life above."

This is the way in all our learning and growing. It is thread by thread that makes the web. It is note by note that makes the thrilling music of the great oratorio. It is block by block that builds the majestic temple. It is touch by touch of the brush that paints a marvelous picture. It is line by line that makes the beautiful life. "Speak a shade more kindly" until you have learned always to speak kindly. "Pray a little oftener," till your whole life becomes a prayer. "Love

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a little more," until you have learned to love every sort of person, and can give your life in loving, serving the worst.

We must remember that it is not in any easy or self-indulgent life that Christ will lead us to greatness. The easy life leads not upward, but downward. Heaven always is above us, and we must ever be reaching up toward it. There are some people who always avoid things that are costly, that require self-denial or self-restraint and sacrifice, but toil and hardship show us the only way to nobleness. Greatness comes not by having a mossy path made for you through the meadows, but by being sent to hew out a roadway by your own hands. Are you going to reach the mountain splendors?

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*"Cast out all envy, bitterness, and hate;
And keep the mind's fair tabernacle pure. -
Shake hands with Pain, give greeting unto Grief,
Those angels in disguise, and thy glad soul
From height to height, from star to shining star,
Shall climb and claim blest immortality."*

CHAPTER XIV

Life's Open Doors



IFE is full of doors. A door is a very simple thing. It may be only a plain, unadorned piece of board. Its significance is not in the material of which it is made or in its costliness or its artistic beauty, but in the fact that it is a door which opens to something. One may open to a noble gallery of pictures; enter, and you stand amid the finest works of art. Another opens into a great library; enter, and you find about you the works of the wise men of the ages. Another opens to a school, a great university; enter, and you are listening to distinguished teachers whose learned teachings will enrich your mind. It is not the door itself that matters, but that to which the door is the entrance.

Life's doors are not shut and locked. They may not be gilded and they may not invite to ease and pleasure, but they open to the

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truest and best things, to the finest possibilities of character and attainment, and to the noblest ultimate achievements.

There are doors that open to good. They may not invite us to easy things. The best things do not offer themselves to us as self-indulgences. Some one says: "I fought something out myself, once, and I won. It was hard, but I did it, and I'd do it again—I wouldn't be coward enough to run away. When things hurt you, you don't have to let anybody know. You can shut your lips tight, and if you bite your tongue hard enough it keeps back the tears. I always pretend I'm a rock, with the waves beating against me. Let it hurt inside, if it wants to—you don't have to let anybody see." The doors may not be attractive that we ought to enter, but they open to the truest and best life, to the finest possibilities of character and attainment and to the noblest ultimate achievement.

There is the door of education. All life is a school. Young people are graduated by

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and by from college and university, but their education is not finished. This should go on in the occupations and struggles that follow. It is there we learn the real lessons of life.

There is the door of hardship and pain. One of the papers pays tribute to one unnamed man who died recently after years of intense suffering. He never asked pity or any concessions because of his suffering, but grew more and more devoted to his work. There are many people who permit their pain and misfortune to make constant appeal to human sympathy instead of bearing these burdens quietly and heroically as a soldier wears the marks of his profession. Suffering, properly endured, develops power and adds to usefulness. The school of hardship and pain is where we learn many of the finest things. "The man who wins its real successes is not he who has the most perfect health, but he who bears disease and misfortune with silent courage and gains from them a more daring spirit; who meets failure as if it were veiled victory; who challenges death by ignoring

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its fearful aspect, tearing off its mask, and meeting it with a smile.”

Another of the doors which opens to us in life is the door to kindness. Many people think of kindness as only a kindergarten lesson, but one who accepts the task finds it very long. Kindness begins in unselfishness, the crucifying of self. It is sacrificial in its every feeling and act. Wherever self stays in the heart there will be unkindness in the life, in some form. To be kind is to be gentle. Kindness will not break a bruised reed nor quench the smoking wick. Kindness is thoughtful, so sensitive in the consciousness of others' condition that it refrains from every act, word or look that would give pain. Kindness is sympathetic, touched by suffering and quick to give comfort. It is a great door, this, that opens into the school of kindness.

Another of life's doors opens into the school of helpfulness. When we begin to be like God we begin to be helpful. We think we love each other, but the love is only a mere sentiment until it has been wrought into

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sacrificial act, into service which costs. Personal helpfulness is the test as well as the measure of the quality of the mind of Christ that is in us. Evermore people need to be helped. This does not mean that we are to carry their burdens, pay their debts, do their work, fight their battles. Such helpfulness does evil rather than good. We help others truly when we make them strong and brave, that they may carry their own burdens and meet their own struggles. Helpfulness should cheer, encourage, inspire, impart larger visions and greater hope and confidence. There are men everywhere who are pressed, beleagured, ready to sink down and perish, whom strong brotherly sympathy would save. They are in sorrow, disappointment has staggered them, or they have been defeated in their purposes. To be able to help these is the highest service we can render to the world. "To be a strong hand in the dark to another in the time of need," says Hugh Black, "to be a cup of strength to a human soul in a crisis of weakness, is to know the glory of

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life." There would seem to be no limit to the possibilities of this higher helpfulness. The true Christian life is reached by the emptying of self and the filling of the emptiness with Christ. When Christ is in us, we are able to help others with his strength.

It is a wonderful door which opens into a noble Christian life. Men are trying to make us believe that there is nothing in Christianity, that taking Christ into one's life does nothing for one. But what has Christ done for the lives of his friends along the centuries? What did he do for John and Peter? What did he do for Paul? What is he doing continually for those who follow him in faith and consecration? Dr. Robertson Nicoll, in a recent address, referred to John G. Paton's work in the New Hebrides. "His wife died when he and she were laboring in a savage island and had made practically no converts. The missionary had to dig her grave himself and to lay her there with the dark, hostile faces round him. 'If it had not been for Jesus,' Dr. Paton says, 'and the

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presence he vouchsafed me there, I should have gone mad and died beside that lonely grave.'” If it had not been for Jesus the world would never have seen the glorious ministry of Dr. Paton. Nor is that splendid life singular in its story. Say what we may about the failures of Christians which so sadly mar the beauty of the Christian life, we know that thousands of believers have realized wonderful things, which if it had not been for Jesus they never could have done.

By and by in even the best life we come to a door which opens into old age. Many are disposed to feel that this door can lead to nothing beautiful. We cannot go on with our former tireless energy, our crowded days, our great achievements. But there is altogether too much letting go, too much dropping of tasks, too much falling out of the pilgrim march, when old age comes on. We may not be able to run swiftly as before. We tire more easily. We forget some things. But old age may be made very beautiful and full of fruit. This door opens into a period of great

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possibilities of usefulness, a true crowning of the life. Old age is not a blot, if it is what it should be. It is not a withering of the life, but a ripening. It is not something to dread, but is the completion of God's plan.

“Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which the first was made;

Our times are in his hand

Who saith, ‘A whole I planned.’

Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid.”

Last of all we come to the door of death. Into what does this door lead? Is there anything beyond—anything beautiful, anything glorious? Our Christian faith tells us that death is not a wall, but a door. We do not in dying come to the end of anything beautiful and good, but only pass through into blessedness and glory. We are immortal and shall never die. All the lessons we have been learning in earth's schools we shall go on practicing forever. We shall enter into the joy of Christ when we pass through this last door of earth.

**Some Lessons on Spiritual
Growth**

*“Lead me, yea lead me, deeper into life—
This suffering, human life wherein Thou liv’st
And breathest still and hold’st Thy way divine.
’Tis here, O pitying Christ, where Thee I seek—
Here where the strife is fiercest, where the sun
Beats down upon the highway thronged with men,
And in the raging mart. O! deeper lead
My soul into the living world of souls
Where Thou dost move.”*

CHAPTER XV

Some Lessons on Spiritual Growth



ESUS loved nature. He saw in it the tokens and expressions of his Father's love and care. What could be more exquisite, for example, than the thoughts a little flower started in his mind, as we find them expressed in the Sermon on the Mount? He was urging people never to be anxious. Just then his eye fell on a lily growing in its marvelous beauty by the wayside, and he used it to teach a lesson about the care of God. God cares even for the smallest flower, and his hand weaves for it its exquisite raiment. "And why are ye anxious concerning raiment?" Thus our Lord saw in every flower that blooms something his Father had made and beautified, something he cared for with all gentleness. And of whatever other use the flowers are, he at least wants us to learn from them this

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truth of trust, so that we shall never be anxious. The flowers never are.

One of the most suggestive of our Lord's parables of growth is given by Mark only. The kingdom of God is likened to a sower's seed cast upon the earth and growing the sower knows not how. In our modern agriculture we are losing much of the picturesqueness of the farmer's life as it was in our Lord's day. Still the lesson of the seed is the same whatsoever way it may be planted. It is a very little thing, but Jesus notes in it and in its mode of growing a picture of something very wonderful, a picture of the kingdom of God. The same laws prevail in things natural and things spiritual. "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth." We are all sowers. We may not be farmers or gardeners, yet everywhere we go we are sowing seeds. We talk to a friend an hour, and then go our way, never giving thought again to what we said, but years afterward something will grow up in the friend's life and character from the seeds we dropped

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so unconsciously or without purpose, that day. We lend a friend a book and he reads it. We never think of the book again; our friend never tells us whether he liked it or not. But many years later there is a life moving about among other lives, and leaving upon them its impress, which was inspired by the book we lent, something in it which influenced the course and career of the life.

Seeds are wonderful things. There is mystery in the secret of life they carry in them. Diamonds or pearls have no such secret in them. Men do not plant them. They never grow. We do not know what marvelous results will come from some slightest word of ours spoken any day. It may not always be good—it may be evil; all depends upon the seed. The farmer sowed good seed, expecting a rich and beautiful harvest. An enemy came one night, while the farmer was sleeping, and sowed tares, and the tare seeds grew and spoiled the harvest. We need to watch what we are sowing lest a trail of evil and unbeauty shall follow us. We need to watch what we

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say in our little talks with the people we meet through the days, or in our influence over them, lest we leave stain or hurt behind.

But it is of the growth of the seed that our Lord speaks in his parable. "As if a man should cast seed upon the earth; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow, he knoweth not how." He does not stay out in the fields and watch his seed growing. He only casts it into the ground and lets it grow as it will. When the seed is once in the soil, it is out of the sower's hand forever. Good or bad, it is gone now beyond his reach. You may write a letter full of bitter words. You were angry when you wrote it. Your conscience told you you ought not to send it, for it would only cause bitterness. You went out to mail it. All along the way as you went toward the post box the voice within you kept saying, "Don't mail it." You came to the box and hesitated, for still there was a clamorous voice beseeching you, "Do not send it." But the anger was yet flaming and you put the letter

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in the box. Then you began to wish you had not done so. You began to think of the unlovingness in the bitter words. It was too late, now, however, for the cruel letter was beyond your reach.

So it is when one drops a seed into the ground, whether it be good or evil. The die is cast. The seed is in the ground. There is no use to watch it. So it is when one has dropped an evil influence into a life. Until the word was spoken or the thing was done, it was in your own power and you could have withheld it. Till then you could have kept the word unspoken or the deed undone. But now it is out of your power. No swiftest messenger can pursue it and take it back. The seed is sown, and you can only let it stay and grow. A man goes on with his work, busy in a thousand ways, and the seed he dropped is growing continually, he knows not how, or into what form; the word he spoke, the thing he did, is in people's hearts and lives, and its influence is at work, he knows not how. And no power in the universe can

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arrest it or get it back. You may pray, but prayer cannot get back the regretted word or deed.

There is something startling in this thought of how what we have once done passes then forever out of our hand, beyond recall, and how it goes on in its growth and influence in the silence, while we wake and while we sleep. The time to check evil things, to keep them from forever growing into more and more baleful evil, is before we cast the seed into the ground. We need to think seriously of this truth, that there is a line beyond which our power over our words and deeds and influences ceases forever.

There is a marvelous power, too, in the earth, which, when it receives the seed, begins to deal with it so as to bring out its mystery of life. If the seed is not cast into the ground it will not grow. Its life can be brought out and it can grow only through being cast into the ground. The planting is all we have to do, all we can do. "The earth beareth fruit of herself." We cannot help the soil take

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care of the seed, and we do not have to help God take care of the good words we speak to others. The seed is divine, and the influences that act upon it are divine. So all we have to do is to get the truth into the hearts of those we would save and build up; God will do the rest. We are not responsible for the growth of the seed, for the work of grace in a human heart. Great is the mysterious power in the earth which touches the seed, enfolds it, quickens it and causes it to grow. But this only illustrates the power that works in human hearts and lives, the power of the divine Spirit. This holy life receives the heavenly truth that is put into the heart, and brings out its blessed possibilities, till we see a new life like unto God's own life, a Christ life, blessing the world with its beauty and its love.

The Thanksgiving Lesson

*"It's O my heart, my heart,
To be out in the sun and sing!
To sing and shout in the fields about,
In the balm and the blossoming.*

*"Sing loud, O bird in the tree!
O bird, sing loud in the sky!
And honey-bees, blacken the clover seas;
There are none of you glad as I.*

*"The leaves laugh low in the wind,
Laugh low with the winds at play;
And the odorous call of the flowers all
Entices my soul away.*

*"For O but the world is fair, is fair!
And O but the world is sweet!
I will out in the gold of the blossoming mold,
And sit at the Master's feet.*

*"And the love of my heart would speak
I would fold in the lily's rim,
That the lips of the blossom more pure and meek
May offer it up to Him.*

*"Then sing in the hedgerow green, O thrush!
O skylark, sing in the blue!
Sing loud, sing clear, that the King may hear,
And my soul shall sing with you."*

CHAPTER XVI

The Thanksgiving Lesson



LADNESS may not be thanksgiving. It certainly is not all of thanksgiving. One may have a heart bubbling with joy, without a note of thanksgiving. The task of happiness is one to which we should all firmly set ourselves. To be miserable in this glorious world is most unfit. We should cultivate joyousness. But our present lesson is a larger and deeper one.

Thanksgiving implies thought of God. One may be glad all the day and never think of God. Thanksgiving looks up with every breath and sees God as Father from whom all blessings come. Thanksgiving is praise. The heart is full of gratitude. Every moment has something in it to inspire love. The lilies made Jesus think of his Father, for it was he who clothed them in beauty. The

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providence of our lives, if we think rightly of it, is simply God caring for us.

Our circumstances may sometimes be hard, our experiences painful, and we may see nothing in them to make us glad. But faith teaches us that God is always good and always kind, whatever the present events may be. We may be thankful, therefore, even when we cannot be glad. Our hearts may be grateful, knowing that good will come to us even out of pain and loss. This is the secret of true thanksgiving. It thinks always of God and praises him for everything. The song never dies out in the heart, however little there may be in the circumstances of life to make us glad.

Thanksgiving is a quality of all noble and unselfish life. No man is so unworthy as he who never cherishes the sentiment of gratitude, who receives life's gifts and favors and never gives back anything in return for all he gets.

“There is one thing I fear—
Not death, nor sharp disease,

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Nor loss of friends I hold most dear,
Nor pain, nor want—not these,

“But the life of which men say:
The world has given him bread;
And what gives he to the world as pay
For the crust on which he fed?”

Until we think seriously of it we do not begin to realize what we are receiving continually from those about us. None may give us money, or do for us things which the world counts gifts or favors, but these are not the best things. Our teachers are ever enriching us by the lessons they give us. Those who require hard tasks of us and severely demand of us the best we can do are our truest benefactors. “The man who gives me a new thought, enriches me. The man who puts iron into my blood, puts health into my blood. The man who in this world of snow and sleet keeps me moving, saves my life; and if the movement be an upward and onward movement, every step is so much nearer the kingdom of heaven.”

Sometimes we complain of the hardness of

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our lives, that we have had so little of ease and luxury, that we have had to work so hard, bear so many burdens, and sometimes we let ourselves grow bitter and unthankful as we think of the severity of our experience. But oftentimes it has been in these very severities that we have got the richest qualities in our character. If we are living truly, serving God and following Christ, there is no event or experience for which we may not be thankful. Every voice of our lips should be praise. Every day of our years should be a thanksgiving day.

He who has learned the Thanksgiving lesson well has found the secret of a beautiful life. "Praise is comely," says the Hebrew poet. Comely means fit, graceful, pleasing, attractive. Ingratitude is never comely. The life that is always thankful is winsome, ever a joy to all who know it. The influence of an ever-praising life on those it touches is almost divine. The way to make others good is to be good yourself. The way to diffuse a spirit of thanksgiving is to be thankful

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yourself. A complaining spirit makes unhappiness everywhere.

How may we learn this Thanksgiving lesson? It comes not merely through a glad natural disposition. There are some favored people who were born cheerful. They have in them a spirit of happiness which nothing ever quenches. They always see the bright side of things. They are naturally optimistic. But the true thanksgiving spirit is more than this. It is something which can take even an unhappy and an ungrateful spirit and make it new in its sweetness and beauty. It is something which can change discontent and complaining into praise, ingratitude into grateful, joyful trust. Christian thanksgiving is the life of Christ in the heart, transforming the disposition and the whole character.

Thanksgiving must be wrought into the life as a habit before it can become a fixed and permanent quality. An occasional burst of praise in years of complaining is not all that is required. Songs on rare, sunshiny days, and no

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songs when skies are cloudy will not make a life of gratitude. The heart must learn to sing always. This lesson is learned only when it becomes a habit that nothing can weaken. We must persist in being thankful. When we can see no reason for praise we must believe in the divine love and goodness and sing in the darkness.

Thanksgiving has attained its rightful place in us only when it is part of all our days and dominates all our experiences. We may call one day in the year Thanksgiving Day and fill it with song and gladness, remembering all the happy things we have enjoyed, all the pleasant events, all the blessings of our friendships, all our prosperities. But we cannot gather all our year's thanksgivings into any brightest day. We cannot leave to-day without thanks and then thank God to-morrow for to-day and to-morrow both. To-day's sunshine will not light to-morrow's skies. Every day must be a thanksgiving day for itself.

The Indispensable Christ

*“To stretch my hand and touch Him,
Though He be far away;
To raise my eyes and see Him
Through darkness as through day;
To lift my voice and call Him—
This is to pray!”*

*“To feel a hand extended
By One who standeth near;
To view the love that shineth
In eyes serene and clear;
To know that he is calling—
This is to hear!”*

CHAPTER XVII

The Indispensable Christ



THE closest of all relationships is that of Christ and the believer in him. Our Lord himself used the vine and the branches to illustrate this relation. The branch actually grows out of the vine. It cannot exist apart from it. There are some friends whom we might lose and be a little poorer. But to lose Christ out of our life is the greatest of all losses.

There is a story by Henry van Dyke called "The Lost Word," which, in most striking way illustrates the irreparable loss of one who parts with Christ. It is a story of one of the early centuries. Hermas had given himself to Christ. He belonged to a wealthy pagan family. His father disinherited him and drove him out of his home when he accepted Christianity.

In the Grove of Daphne one day Hermas sat down by a gushing spring, and there came

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to him a priest of Apollo, who saw his unhappy mood and began to talk to him. In the end the old man made this bargain with Hermas. He was to assure him of wealth, happiness and success, and Hermas was to give him only a word; he was to part with the name of Him whom he had learned to worship. "Let me take that word, and all that belongs to it, entirely out of your life. I promise you everything," said the old man, "and this is all I ask of you in return. Do you consent?" "Yes, I consent," said Hermas. So he lost the word.

Hermas went back to Antioch to his old home. He found his father dying. The old man received his son eagerly. Then he asked Hermas to tell him the secret of the Christian faith he had chosen. "You found something in that faith that made you willing to give up your life for it. Tell me what it is!" Hermas began, "Father, you must believe with all your heart and soul and strength in — —." Where was the word? He had lost it.

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Happiness came. Sitting one day with his wife beside him and his baby on his knee, he thought of his old faith, and longed to thank Christ and seek his blessing. Going to an old shrine in the garden, he tried to pray, but could not. He had lost the Name in which alone prayer could be offered. One day his boy was terribly hurt and he wanted to pray for his life, but again, the Name was gone.

Thus in three great hours of need, Hermas, forgetting that he had given up the blessed Name, turned to seek the help that could be got only through that Name, and found nothing but blankness and emptiness.

This is only a little story, but it is one that has become true in actual life thousands of times. People have given up the name of Christ, sold it for money, pleasure, power, fame or sin. Then, when times of need came, and they turned to find help, they received no answer to their cries.

“Without me ye can do nothing.” Of course, there are certain things that men can do who are without Christ. There are people

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who are very useful, benefactors to others, yet who never pray, who do not love Christ. One may be an artist and may paint lovely pictures which the world will admire, and yet not believe in Christ. One may be a writer, and may prepare books which will interest others and enlighten, cheer and inspire lives to noble deeds, and yet utterly disregard Christ. A man may be a good father, kind to his family, making his home beautiful with the loveliest adornments, providing for his children, and not know Christ. When Jesus says, "Without me ye can do nothing," he does not mean that we cannot live a moral life, cannot be good merchants, good lawyers, good physicians, good teachers, good fathers and mothers—what he means is that we cannot bear spiritual fruit.

No friend can say to any other friend "Without me ye can do nothing." A mother cannot say it to her child. It is a sore loss when a mother is taken away from her little child—how sore a loss cannot be explained. Even God cannot twice give a mother. No

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other woman, however loving in spirit, however wise in guiding the young life, can be to it all its own mother would have been. Yet even the best and holiest mother cannot say to her child, "Without me ye can do nothing." The child may live, and live nobly without its mother.

There are other human friendships that seem to be really indispensable. The trusting, clinging wife may say to her husband, who is being taken from her: "I cannot live without you. If you leave me I will die. I cannot face the cold winds without your shelter. I cannot go on with the duties, the burdens, the struggles, the responsibilities, without your comradeship, your love, your cheer, your strong support, your wise guidance." So it seems to her, as she stands amid the wreck of her hopes; but when he is gone, the strong man on whom she had leaned, and the sorrowing woman takes up the tasks, the duties, the burdens, the battles and walks alone, courage comes into her heart and she grows in heroic qualities. "I never dreamed

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that I could possibly get along as I have," said a woman the other day, after a year's widowhood. Then she told of her utter faintness when she realized that he was gone. He had been everything to her. She had wanted for nothing, had never known a care. But as she turned away from his grave, it seemed to her that everything was lost. What could she do? But Christ was with her. Peace came into her heart, calmness came, then courage began to revive. She grew self-reliant and strong. She was a marvel to her friends as she took up the work of her life. She showed resources which none ever imagined she had. The problem of life in such cases as hers is, not to be hurt by the sorrow, but to grow strong in it. This woman's bereavement made her. She lived, and lived grandly, without the one who had seemed absolutely indispensable.

We learn at least that no human life, however close it has been, whatever its strength, however much it was depended upon, is actually essential to any other life. To no one

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can we say, "I cannot live without you." The frailest prove oftentimes the hardiest. The broken are often the strongest. Some one says, "The soul is never more magnificently strong and safe than when tribulation, shutting it up to simple love and trust, causes it to behave itself like a weaned child." Sorrow, if it be received as it should be, wakes up our lives to their best. After the bitterest blows have fallen, and apparently have left you nothing but frailty, you can still go on. No other human life is actually necessary to your continued existence. The taking away of the human reveals God. That perhaps is sometimes why God takes our earthly trust—that we may find him and learn to trust him.

"Without me ye can do nothing." But we do not have to do without Christ. We have him. We are not severed from him. We live because he lives in us.

In That Which is Least

*“The work of our hands—establish Thou it,
How often with thoughtless lips we pray,
But He who sits in the heavens shall say,
‘Is the world of your hands so fair and fit
That ye dare thus pray?’
Safely we answer, ‘Lord, make it fit—
The work of our hands, that so we may
Lift up our eyes and dare to pray.
The work of our hands—establish Thou it.’”*

CHAPTER XVIII

In That Which is Least



ONE of the secrets of a full and rich life is in being always watchful of the little things. We could accomplish marvels in the quarter hours we are wasting. We hear of men who have learned a language at their dressing-bureaus, or have read volumes in the minutes they have had to wait in reception rooms of friends they were calling upon, of others who have memorized poems in walking about the country. Notable achievements in the way of study and research have been made by men with only minutes of leisure, little interstices of time between their absorbing occupation in great tasks. There have been men with feeble health, who could work only in little quarter hours, who have achieved amazing results in a short lifetime, or men with poor eyes, who could read only a few minutes at a time, but who have amassed great stores of knowledge

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and attained distinction, even eminence, in years of masterful diligence.

The way we use the fragments of our time, what we do with the moments, determines largely what we will make ourselves in the end. Hurry is a dreadful waste of time. A great surgeon said to his assistants when he was beginning a serious operation, "Do not be in a hurry, gentlemen; we have no time to lose." We never can do our work with celerity, and we never can do it well, if we hurry. We must have full possession of all our powers if we would do our best. "He that believeth," wrote the great prophet, "shall not be in haste," and one rendering by scholars is, "He that believeth shall not fuss." Some one says: "Energy is not mere fuss. It is often a high achievement of energy to say 'Peace, be still!'"

In recent years few words have been so much in use and few have come to mean so much as the word conservation. It means stopping the waste, utilizing every particle, whether of material or energy. In certain

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lines of industry a great deal is made of by-products. A by-product is something produced in addition to the principal product. In making gas, for instance, there is a large waste in what is called coal-tar. Coal-tar is now used in the process of dyeing and is very valuable. Thus the waste is turned to profit. In the refining of oil the by-products, such as benzine, naphtha and paraffin, are captured from the waste and are very important.

The same conservation should be practiced in life itself. Most people employ but a fragment of the capacity of their life and then allow great measures of capacity to lie undeveloped, and in the end to atrophy. A volume could be filled with a description of a human hand, its wonderful structure, and the things it can be trained to do. Yet how many hands ever reach the limit of their possible achievements? Think of the powers folded up in a human brain and of the little of all these powers most of us ever bring out in life. Now and then a man starts in ignorance and poverty and reaches a greatness in ability and in

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achievement which amazes the world. Doubtless thousands and thousands who never attain anything beyond mediocrity have just as great natural capacity, but the splendid powers of their life are allowed to run to waste. They are lacking in energy and do only a little of what they might do.

In Christian life and character the same is true. Jesus came to give his disciples not life merely, but abundant life. We know what he did with his first disciples, what wonderful men he made of them and what they did with their lives. Is there any reason to think that these men were capable of greater things than the men whom the Master is calling in these days? They were not beings of a different order from the mass of men; the difference was in the way they used their gifts. Not a particle of power in them was allowed to waste. There is capacity enough in every little company of Christian people to transform the community in which they live into a garden of the Lord. It is to such consecration that we are called. We are letting

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our powers and abilities run to waste instead of training them and using them to bless the world. We are not making the most of ourselves.

There is a great waste of power also in our failure to appreciate our opportunities. "If I only had the gifts that this man has I would do the large and beautiful things that he does. But I never have the chance of doing such things. Nothing ever comes to my hand but opportunities for little commonplace things." Now, the truth is that nothing is commonplace. The giving of a cup of cold water is one of the smallest kindnesses any one can show to another, yet Jesus said that God takes notice of this act amid all the events of the whole world, any busy day, and rewards it. It may not be cabled half round the world and announced with great headlines in the newspapers, but it is noticed in heaven.

We do not begin to understand what great waste we are allowing when we fail to put the true value on little opportunities of serving others. Somehow we get the feeling that

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any cross-bearing worth while must be a costly sacrifice, something that puts nails through our hands, something that hurts till we bleed. If we had an opportunity to do something heroic we say we would do it. But when it is only a chance to be kind to a neighbor, to call at his house when he is in trouble, to sit up with him at night when he is sick, or to do something for a child, we never think for a moment that such little things are the Christlike deeds God wants us to do, and so we pass them by and there is a great blank in our lives where holy service ought to be.

When the great miracle of the loaves had been wrought, Jesus sent his disciples to gather up the broken pieces, "that nothing be lost." The Master is continually giving us the same command. Every hour's talk we have with a friend leaves fragments that we ought to gather up and keep to feed our heart's hunger or the hunger of others' hearts, as we go on. When we hear good words spoken, or read a good book, we should gather up the fragments of knowledge, the sugges-

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tions of helpful thoughts, the broken pieces, and fix them in our hearts for use in our lives. We allow large values of the good things we hear or read to turn to waste continually because we are poor listeners or do not try to keep what we hear. We let the broken pieces be lost and thereby are great losers. If only we would gather up and keep all the good things that come to us through conversations and through reading, we would soon have great treasures of knowledge and wisdom.

The Master and the Children

*"In the House of Too Much Trouble
Lived a lonely little boy;
He was eager for a playmate,
He was hungry for a toy.
But 'twas always too much bother,
Too much dirt and too much noise,
For the House of Too Much Trouble
Wasn't meant for little boys.*

*"And sometimes the little fellow
Left a book upon the floor,
Or forgot and laughed too loudly,
Or he failed to close the door.
In the House of Too Much Trouble
Things must be precise and trim—
In the House of Too Much Trouble
There was little room for him.*

*'He must never scatter playthings,
He must never romp and play;
Every room must be in order
And kept quiet all the day.
He had never had companions,
He had never owned a pet—
In the House of Too Much Trouble
It is trim and quiet yet.*

*'Every room is set in order—
Every book is in its place,
And the lonely little fellow
Wears a smile upon his face.
In the House of Too Much Trouble
He is silent and at rest—
In the House of Too Much Trouble,
With a lily on his breast."*

CHAPTER XIX

The Master and the Children



WE who are working for the children cannot too often remind ourselves of our Lord's words to Peter about the lambs. He speaks of them as "my lambs." So the little children belong to Christ. Then he makes definite provision in his church for their care. He bade his apostle to feed his lambs. Feeding is a large word, however. The care must cover the whole life,—the body, the mind, the spirit.

This is mother's work, first of all. No teacher can be substituted for a mother. It is God's ordinance that the mother comes first in shepherding the child. If she does her part faithfully, according to her ability, her hand never slacking, nothing will go wrong with the keeping of her child. There is no miracle of beautiful result in the bringing up of children who turn out well. That is the

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divine way when the home care has been what it was ordained to be, and it cannot fail.

Next to the mother comes the teacher. The mother cannot do all. Her part is large and essential. God and the mother do the first work in the training of the child. Not God only—God and the mother. You cannot leave the mother out. God does not make men without mothers. You cannot substitute prayer for a mother—some one praying for the child instead of being a living mother to it. The human link may not be left out. It must be God and the mother.

Then the teacher. Here another heresy sometimes creeps in. Too much is left to God. The teacher depreciates his own work. He thinks he can do nothing. This is true of the teacher alone. "Apart from me ye can do nothing." But this does not mean that all the work is done by Christ and nothing by the teacher. God's plan is that we shall be coworkers with him. It is God and you. The weakness of a great deal that is called Christian work is that it has in it an

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abundance of dependence upon the divine power, but the human part is lacking. If the teacher does indifferent work instead of his best, there will be a blank instead of splendid, Christ-made men and women. Christ still calls Peter to feed his lambs, and if Peter's hand slacks, the lambs will go unfed.

The teacher's work is essential. It is like the mother's, yet different. A great deal has been done in recent years to exalt the importance and widen the scope of the teacher's work. We have thousands of training classes in which students are drilled in the knowledge of the Bible, in child study and in matters which make them more skillful in teaching. There cannot be too much preparation and we must do our best. What Jesus had in mind and laid on Peter's heart was feeding his lambs. We know quite well the outcome our Lord desires to have from the work done by the church for the children. He wants them shepherded until they are full-grown.

It is enough to say here a little in general of the way the teachers should do their work.

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It must be more than intellectually educational; it must result in character-building. We are to bring the young people to Christ and then train them for Christian life and service. Christ himself is their Shepherd. He knows them by name. He leads them out. He shelters them from dangers. He gives his life for them. It is our part as teachers to make the love and ministry of Christ real to those we teach. As nearly as we can we must be Christ to them.

No name of Christ means more to us in the interpretation of his life and love than Friend. We are not only to tell those we teach of the beauty of the friendship of Christ, we must interpret that friendship in ourselves. What Christ was to those to whom he became a personal friend we must be to those we make our friends. He did not seem to do many things for them. He did not greatly change their condition, he did not make life easier for them. It was in a different way that his friendship helped them. He gave them sympathy. They knew he

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cared for them, and then the hard things meant less to them. It is a great thing for a boy to know that a good man is his friend, is interested in him. To many a lad it is the beginning of a new life for him. "If you will be my friend I can be a man," said a pupil in a mission school to his teacher who had spoken to him the first really kind word he ever had heard. The greatest moment in any one's life is when he first realizes that Christ is his Friend.

One of the most winning and impressive pictures one sees is a Christian teacher in the midst of a company of young girls, who gather about her to hear her words. They open their hearts and her words enter their lives and leave lasting impressions there. No doubt it is the woman herself who is the vital element in the problem. The same result will not be attained without regard to the personality of the teacher.

But there is also the problem of the lesson. The woman must have the good and the beauty in her, or her friendship will build up

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nothing in the lives that wait on her words. It is a great thing for a worthy woman to be the friend of a group of girls, but the question is, What is there in her friendship for these girls that will help them? What has she to give them that will make them better? There are trivial women who can fascinate a group of girls, and do nothing for them. What had Jesus to give to Mary when she sat down at his feet and heard his words? We may be sure he did not talk of trivialities—he spoke of God and life and things that are above.

The teacher must be in living contact with Christ—there is no life but his that will give her the power she needs, and will make her work really effective. Then her influence upon her class will be Christ-inspired. Her love for her girls will glow with Christ's love burning in it. Then all her teachings will be divine teachings, whether given as set lessons from the Scriptures, or in pleasant social conversation, without any formal religious teaching. It is first the woman's personality,

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with her genius for friendship, with her gift for impressing, interesting and helping. Then it is the woman filled with the word of Christ and with his Spirit. One writer puts it thus: "Given the right person in vital union with the living God, and we shall get conversions, and build up Christlike character, through the instrumentality of the word, selected and applied by religious instinct and experience."

Portions for Those Who Lack

*Our lives are full of odds and ends,
First one and then another—
And though we know not how or when
They're deftly woven together.*

*The Weaver has a master's skill,
And proves it by this token—
No loop is dropped, no strand is missed,
And not a thread is broken.*

*Not e'en a shred is thrown aside,
So careful is the Weaver,
Who, joining all with wondrous skill,
Weaves odds and ends together.*

Aubrey de Vere.

CHAPTER XX

Portions for Those Who Lack



AFTER eating the fat and drinking the sweet of the feast in their own homes the returned captives were bidden by Nehemiah to send portions to those for whom nothing had been prepared. "For this day is holy," was added to the exhortation. Part of the holiness of worship is loving service. We are never to eat our bread alone; we are to share it. "It is better to be lost than to be saved all alone," says Amiel. In Job's self-justification, when his friends had spoken bitterly against him, he says among other things:

If I have withheld the poor from their desires,
Or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail,
Or have eaten my morsel alone,
And the fatherless hath not eaten thereof,
* * * * *

Then let my shoulder fall from the shoulder-blade,
And mine arm be broken from the bone.

We may never eat our morsel alone while

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others are hungry. This lesson was taught thus emphatically in the Old Testament and still more earnestly in the New. In the Lord's Prayer we are bidden to pray not for our own bread alone, but for bread for others as well. "Give us this day our daily bread." While we are feasting at our own table we must remember those who are hungry outside, and send portions to them. The days are holy—all the days are holy, and no day set apart for God must be stained by selfishness.

The direction that the people, after eating the fat and drinking the sweet of their feast, should send portions to those for whom nothing had been prepared, is in keeping with the teaching of the Bible throughout. The poor were always to be remembered. The stranger was never to be forgotten. He who let the needy go hungry when he had plenty on his own table were severely condemned. In the New Testament the lesson was taught with marked emphasis. Generosity is a quality of all true Christian character. To think

Portions for Those Who Lack

only of ourselves and give no thought to others is contrary to the Spirit of Christ, who teaches us to share our plenty with those who lack. Meanness is always condemned. Generosity is always praised. It is a large word. It has a root which means excellence, goodness. It is a word of rank. Its first definition in the dictionary is "nobility: the order of nobles." A Prussian order of distinction, founded in 1665, bears the name, The Order of Generosity, later changed to The Order of Merit. The word was applied only to the good, the brave, the noble. Christ was generous. He had largeness of heart, magnanimity. He taught his followers to be generous. The lack of generosity in one who calls himself a Christian is a blot on his name. It marks him as unworthy. It dishonors him as cowardice dishonors the name of him who calls himself a man.

The brightest deeds that shine in the story of humanity are the deeds of generosity. History records that when Nero was dead, some one came secretly and spread flowers on his

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grave. Dr. David Smith, in "The British Weekly," tells of the strange devotion:

Nero, the bloody emperor, was dead;
And Rome, like one who waketh suddenly
Out of an evil dream, lifted her head
And wondered. Presently one strong, fierce cry
Burst from unnumbered throats, and swelling high,
Rang to the hilltops—the wild jubilation
Of bondsmen who had gained their liberty
After much wrong and bitter sufferance.
No voice lamented: had no heart a thought
Of ruth? Ay, as each season came and went,
An unknown hand, belike a woman's, brought
Sweet flowers and strewed them on his monument;
Fond tribute of a clinging love that yearned
For the dead tyrant whom an empire spurned.

It was a splendid generosity that strewed the flowers on that grave. Once, perhaps, amid all his cruelties and tyrannies the emperor had done a kindness, and thus it was remembered. Generosity does not merely return good for good, does not merely measure its giving by what it has received. Like Christly love, it blesses the hand that has smitten, it repays cruelty with gentleness, it serves most unselfishly those who have done the sorest wrong.

Portions for Those Who Lack

Generosity is the perfect flower of love. It does not think who it is that needs, but gives and serves the unworthiest. It thinks only of the fact that there is one for whom nothing has been prepared and sends a portion to him that he may share love's fat and sweet.

It is this spirit that glorifies true Christmas keeping. Christmas is a wonderful day. It works miracles of love all over the world. Its feast is kept with joy and song in countless Christian homes. But the true glory of Christmas is seen in what it is doing among the poor, in prisons, hospitals, orphanages and refuges of all kinds, where it brings its portion for those for whom nothing has been prepared. Love is very sweet when it pours out its gifts for those who love us; but it reaches its sweetest and divinest when it brings its blessing to those who do not love us, perhaps, who will never thank us, nor remember what we have done, nor return gratitude for our kindness.

Let us cultivate the spirit of generosity, thinking ever, in our enjoyment of God's

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goodness, of those who lack the blessings we enjoy, and sending to them love's portion. Thus shall we continue the work which our Lord began in this world. Thus shall we enlarge our own hearts and the ministry of love we have been sent here to perform. Thus shall we come nearer and nearer to those who need us and more and more able to be a blessing to them.

This is a lesson we cannot learn too well, nor fix too deeply in our hearts. We sometimes forget that nothing is given to us for ourselves alone. When abundance of blessing or prosperity in any form comes to us, we may not shut ourselves in with it and use it only for ourselves. We are to think of those outside who have no such blessing or favor as we are enjoying and are to send portions to them.

“Bow thy head and pray
That while thy brother starves to-day
Thou mayest not eat thy bread at ease;
Pray that no health or wealth or peace
May hold thy soul while the world lies
Suffering, and claims thy sacrifice.”

Slow and Steady Advance the
Best

“*How wrought I yesterday?*” *Small moment how,
To question with vain tears, or bitter moan,
Since every word you wrote upon the sands
Of yesterday hath hardened into stone.*

“*How work to-morrow?*” *'Tis a day unborn,
To scan whose formless features is not granted.
Ere the new morning dawns, soul, thou mayest wing
Thy flight beyond to-morrow, disenchanted.*

“*How shall I work to-day?*” *O, soul of mine!
To-day stands on her threshold, girt to lead
Thy feet to life immortal; strive with fear;
Deep pitfalls strew the way; take heed! take
heed!”*

CHAPTER XXI

Slow and Steady Advance the Best



ANY young men are impatient of slow success. In their enthusiasm, they expect to advance rapidly and without hindrance in their chosen career. The young physician is eager to find at once a large and remunerative practice. The young aspirant for literary honors is disappointed if immediately his work is not accepted and his name written high in the list of popular writers. The young business man expects to have success from the day he begins. The artist thinks that the excellence of his work should win fame for him the day his pictures are shown to the public. The same is true in all professions and callings.

The fact is, however, that, with very few exceptions, beginners in every occupation

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must be satisfied for a time with but meager recognition and slow results. Many young men who know that this is true in general have the feeling that their own case will be an exception. We like to think ourselves a little different from other people. We may as well make up our minds, however, to the fact that there are few exceptions to this rule. The only genius that counts is the capacity for hard work. The men who have achieved the greatest success in the various callings have had to struggle for it most intensely.

Robert Louis Stevenson, for example, is thought of as a genius. We would probably think, from reading his masterpieces, that literary work was always easy for him. But he has told us what it cost him to attain success as an author. He says: "I imagine nobody ever had such pains to learn a trade as I had; but I slogged at it day in and day out, and I frankly believe (thanks to my dire industry) I have done more with smaller gifts than almost any man of letters in the world." He writes further: "All through my boy-

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hood and youth, I was known and pointed out for the pattern of an idler; and yet I was always busy on my own private end, which was to learn to write. I kept always two books in my pocket—one to read, one to write in. As I walked, my mind was busy fitting what I saw with appropriate words; when I sat by the roadside, I would either read, or a pencil and a penny version book would be in my hand, to note down the features of the scene or commemorate some halting stanzas. Thus I lived with words. What I thus wrote was for no ulterior use; it was written consciously for practice. It was not so much that I wished to be an author (though I wished that, too) as that I had vowed that I would learn to write.”

There are reasons why it is better that young men should not get on too rapidly or too easily at the beginning. No matter how gifted they may be or how well prepared, they are not ready at once for full responsibility. At the best, their preparation is theoretical, not practical. They need to learn by

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experience, and it is better that they should do so leisurely, without too great pressure. A young physician who should have the responsibilities of a large practice thrust upon him at once could only fail. A young business man who, immediately after leaving college, should take sole charge of a large establishment would find himself unable for its management. It is better that every young man should begin in a quiet way and grow up with his growing practice or business.

It is also better for a young man's personal development that his progress should not be too rapid. Easy success is the bane of many a life. It is struggle with difficulty and hardship that brings out the best that is in a man. Those who rise quickly, without much effort, too often fail to grow into noble character meanwhile. The object of living in this world is not to make a brilliant career, but to build up a worthy manhood. To have large worldly success and not to grow into strength of character is a great misfortune.

In putting up tall buildings, a great deal

Slow and Steady Advance

of work is done on the foundations. The workmen dig down deep until they find rock or solid ground. They will spend weeks in work below the surface of the ground, and all this is covered up and hid out of sight. It is necessary to have a strong and secure foundation, if an imposing and durable superstructure is to be reared upon it. In the building of character, it is the same. The foundations must be strong and secure. There may be a mushroom success, without any really worthy character, but the end can be only failure. A one- or two-storied man may be built on a cheap and flimsy foundation. But a twenty-story man, who is to face the storms and stand

“Foursquare
To all the winds that blow,”

must have strength of character, principles from which nothing ever can swerve him and almost infinite power of endurance; and these qualities can be got only in life's common experiences. While a young man is struggling

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to get a foothold in his profession or occupation, he is meanwhile building up in himself the qualities of a noble manhood which will endure the severest tests.

What to do with Our Unequal
Chance

*Never in a costly palace did I rest on golden bed,
Never in a hermit's cavern have I eaten idle bread.
Born within a lowly stable, where the cattle round
me stood,
Trained a carpenter in Nazareth, I have toiled and
found it good.
They who tread the path of labor follow where my
feet have trod;
They who work without complaining do the holy will
of God.
Where the many toil together, there am I among my
own;
Where the tired workman sleepeth, there am I with
him alone.
I, the Peace that passeth knowledge, dwell amid the
daily strife,
I, the Bread of heaven, am broken in the sacrament
of life.*

Henry van Dyke.

CHAPTER XXII

What to do with Our Unequal
Chance



SOME people feel that they do not have a fair chance in the world. They look at others who seem to have more advantages and fewer hindrances, and they conclude that the allotments of providence are not just and equal. Some young people let their minds run in this unwholesome channel. They have to work hard and live in the plainest way, without luxury, not enjoying opportunities for pleasure and for education that they long for. They see other young people in easy circumstances, wanting nothing, with no hardships to endure, called to no self-denial, living in ease, with every opportunity for study, travel, and recreation. It is not easy for them to avoid a feeling of envy in such circumstances. Nor is it easy to accept the limitations of con-

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dition complacently, without any feeling of being unfairly treated.

Yet the problem to be worked out by those who appear not to have an equal chance is to accept their place with its disadvantages and its inequalities, and to live just as sweetly and cheerfully as if they were in the most luxurious circumstances. The danger always is that we may be hurt by life in some way. Yet nothing can really hurt us so long as we keep love and peace in our hearts. No hardship of any kind can do us actual harm if we meet it victoriously. But when we allow ourselves to chafe and fret because things are hard, or to complain because things seem unfair, or to grow bitter because we do not have a fair chance, that moment life is hurting us.

The worst mistake anyone can make in such a case, is to brood over what seems to be unfairness in his lot in life, indulging the feeling that he has not been justly dealt with. The result is that his heart grows bitter and hard, that he begins to pity himself and to look upon others, more highly favored, with

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envy, which soon grows into hatred. Nothing but harm can come out of such a feeling. It does not reduce the inequalities in any degree. It does not make it easier to get on. On the other hand, it spoils the life, turning its sweetness to bitterness. It also lessens the heart's enthusiasm and diminishes its power to live nobly.

The only worthy way to meet such a condition is with courage and purpose to master disadvantages. One who does this disarms life of all its power to do him harm and makes even the hardships and disadvantages elements in his success. A hindrance conquered makes us stronger. When one accepts his place in life and makes it a school, he is going to get out of it lessons which will fit him for worthy and noble living. Handicaps become uplifts and occasions for fine attainment and achievement when they are faced with courage and determination.

There is a good philosophy here for him who is wise enough to carry it out in his life. It is well known that the men who have risen

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to the loftiest heights of excellence and have done the most for their race have not come as a rule from the ranks of those who have been reared in luxury, but from among those who began in lowly ways, with few advantages and many hindrances. The very struggles they had to make to overcome the obstacles, lifted their feet higher on the stair. The efforts it cost them to get an education made men of them. Thus they easily found compensation for the hard things in their lot in their early days.

The least worthy thing any young fellow can do with an unequal chance is to allow himself to be disheartened by it and give up. Nothing really noble or valuable is ever got easily. One does not find gold lying about on the streets. One does not get any place of honor in the world as a luxury. We have to dig our way through rocks to get to earth's treasure-houses. We always have to work hard to achieve anything worth achieving.

An unequal chance, as it seems to human eyes, oftentimes proves to be the very pearl of

Our Unequal Chance

chances. It wakes up in men's souls sleeping possibilities of energy which never would have been awakened in the experiences of ease. We are not put in this world merely to have a good time, to enjoy ourselves, to eat and drink and dress well, and move about in paths of pleasantness. We are here to grow into the nobleness and strength of the best manhood we can attain. He who misses this, though he live in luxury all his days, has missed all that is really worth while in life.

Young people should always remember, too, that in their school of life they must do their own toiling; nobody can do it for them. There are some who like to dream of fortunate surprises by which they shall find themselves lifted to positions of ease and prosperity without struggle or effort of their own. It is not often that such surprises come, nor is it always really "fortunate" when they do come. A few years since, a young man, struggling with peculiarly hard conditions, became suddenly the possessor of a large sum of money. Instead, however, of being a

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good thing for him, the money proved the end of whatever hope there was of the young man's making anything of his life. He dropped the work which was in a fair way to train him into manliness and usefulness, and entered upon a course of ease and extravagance which in a brief time left him penniless and with all the high ideals of his early days of struggle shattered.

The best thing one can do with hard conditions is to depend upon himself, to take up his own burdens courageously and bear them. Then in carrying them he will grow into noble manhood.

“If Two of You Shall Agree”

*"'Twas long ago, .
When I was young. Alas! I did not know
A better way. I said, 'It must be so,
Or God cannot be good.'
Alas! alas! weak human pride;
How differently would I have quickly cried
If I had understood.*

*"And now I bear
A thankful heart for that unanswered prayer,
And so I think it will be when, up there
Where all is known,
We look upon the things we longed for so,
And see how little were they worth and know
How soon they were outgrown."*

CHAPTER XXIII

“If Two of You Shall Agree”



WHY two? Would it not be the same for one? Is not the gate of prayer open to every one? May not a lonely soul anywhere call upon God and be sure of answer? Why then does the Master say two—“If two of you shall agree the prayer will be granted?” Certainly he did not mean that God does not hear one who prays alone. Jesus oftentimes prayed by himself. He went apart from his disciples up the mountain, into the depths of the Garden. Yet there is a special promise when two agree.

For one thing, when two pray together each is drawn out of self to think of something besides his own needs. We are naturally selfish. We easily form the habit of thinking only of our own things, of seeking only our own good, of looking only after our own interests. One of the tendencies of praying alone is to seek

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only things we need or desire for ourselves. "Forgive my sins, prosper my affairs, heal my sickness, bless my daily bread, make me holy, give me joy," our prayer is apt to run. To pray only thus is to allow ourselves to narrow our life into sheerest selfishness. We may pray alone and yet train ourselves to think of others, to reach out to the needs and experiences of others. Only thus will we make our secret prayers spiritually wholesome.

When we pray together the selfish tendency is corrected. We think of the other and his condition. We are trained to sympathize with him in his trouble, to reach out our hand to strengthen him when he is weak. We forget our own danger in thinking of his. His needs seem so much greater and more pressing than ours that we plead for his deliverance and altogether forget our own; we beseech God to lift away his crushing burden and cease to think at all of our own lesser load. Our own sorrow, which, if there were no other one suffering by our side, would seem immeasurably great, seems too small even to

“If Two of You Shall Agree”

mention in the presence of our friend's overpowering grief, so we pray for his comforting and only thank God that our affliction is so light.

Another good that comes from two praying together is in the influence of life upon life. We need the impact of others. We cannot reach our best alone. It is a happy thing for one child in a home when another child comes to be its companion. A child living alone is in danger of growing into selfishness and all undiscipline. It never learns to share its possessions, its happiness. When two children are brought up together they are trained to think of each other, each to give up for the other, to seek to make the other happy. One of the blessings of marriage is that the two learn to live for each other. Then they inspire each other. The woman who thinks only of what she can get from her marriage has not begun to learn the real secret of love. Wedded love reaches its true splendor only when it thinks of what it can do for the other.

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When we pray together the one quickens the other and both become better Christians. When two love God and then talk about him the love of both grows warmer. One stimulates the other. We need companionship in our Christian life. It is not good for us to be alone. Jesus had a wise purpose in sending out his disciples two and two. They would have been lonely if they had gone out singly, and would not have done their best work. Thus the one supplemented the other. Two together did more than two apart. They had their limitations of capacity and one supplied the other's lack. But perhaps the chief advantage in going out two and two was that each kindled and inspired the other. We do not know how much we owe to each other. Our unconscious influence on the life and actions of those close to us is immeasurable. Dr. Bushnell has shown us how Peter's rugged force acted on John's sensitive nature at the empty tomb. John hesitated to enter until Peter came up and went in boldly. "Then entered in therefore the other disciples also."

“If Two of You Shall Agree”

We do not know how often or in how many ways the older disciples quickened the younger. Soldiers say that the hardest of all experiences in battle is to stand or fight alone. Two together make each other brave. We do better work and live our life better in every way, two and two, than we would do separately.

“A log will not burn alone!

The flame grows less, the hearth is dark,
Low sings the sap in crooning tone;
The room grows chill, and cold, and stark,
One's heart holds back, as if to hark
For ghostly sobs and eerie moan,—
A log will not burn alone.

“A life will not glow alone!

The smile seems sad, the senses start,
The will lies useless, limp and prone;
Unchallenged and uncheered the heart;
And one by one the stars depart
From all one's sky, to darkness grown,—
A life is death alone!”

Again, when two pray together they will be more likely to widen their intercessions. We may not appreciate the value of prayer for others. Jesus prayed much for himself.

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He lived with his Father in unbroken communion, but we are sure that the burden of his prayer was for others, for his disciples, for the need and suffering ever about him.

The best work we can do for those we love usually is prayer. Of course there are things love should do—acts of kindness, ministries of good; we must never withhold help that is needed. But ofttimes we cannot tell what really is kindness to another. Perhaps the effort we make to help only harms. The taking away of a friend's burden may only interfere with the plan of God for making the friend strong. Much of our helping is over-helping. We would better let our friends struggle through themselves without relieving them. When we see people with their loads, their cares, their difficulties, their hard tasks, we really do not know what we ought to do for them, or whether we ought to do anything but cheer them.

But we may always pray for them, and perhaps this in most cases is all we can wisely do. At least prayer is always a safe way of

“If Two of You Shall Agree”

helping. We need never be afraid that it will do them harm, for we only ask God to give the help that is wise and that will make them better, nobler, stronger and truer. We may not ask God to make all hard things easy for them—we may ask only that he will watch that the burden is never too heavy for them, the temptation too sore, the sorrow too great, and that they never faint or fail. Always, prayer is love's great duty. “Pray for whom thou lovest.” Not to pray is to sin against one's friend and against God. People always need our prayers. Those need them most who seem to have least need. We pray readily for those in trouble—but those in no apparent trouble are in greatest peril.

When We are Laid Aside

*"They also serve who only stand and wait.
Yea, Lord, and many such perchance there be,
Who, unawares, in patience serving thee,
Stand all day long before some fast-barred gate.*

*"Beyond, there lie sweet dreams yet unfulfilled,
Or hope deferred that sickens the stout heart
And makes it far from gladness dwell apart,
While faith yet keeps its clamorous outcry stilled.*

*"Some wait with wistful faces ever set
With eager longing toward the distant prize;
And some, whose hope is dead, yet lift their eyes,
Waiting and praying still with lashes wet.*

*"So few that wait with smiling, hopeful cheer!
Yet these serve best, for that they seem to say:
'Waiting is blessing; those who wait must pray,
And praying brings the kingdom even here.'"*

CHAPTER XXIV

When We are Laid Aside



WE do well when we let God shape our lives. He “writes straight on crooked lines.” He has a plan for every life, and his plan goes on without interruption through all the ambitions, the mistakes, the failures, of our aims and strivings. The problem of faith is to accept God’s will when it breaks into our will, and believe that always it is right, and that there can be no mistake and no failure when it is his way we take.

It is here too often that our faith fails. A Christian man was telling how hard it is for him to maintain the peace and joy of his life in the experiences through which he is passing. For long years he had been in Christian work of great importance. He had devoted his best energies to the development of this work, and seemed about to see all his hopes realized. Then his health gave way, and for

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months he has been compelled to lie on his bed unable to do anything. It is by no means certain that he can ever again resume his work and carry to completion the plans and schemes upon which he has been so long engaged. He was speaking to a friend of his condition. It is very hard, he said, to remain quiet and be at peace in all this uncertainty. It is hard to be still and do nothing while there is so much yet to be done. It is hard, after having wrought so long in the work, to lie still in a sick-room, inactive, not taking any part in the work to which he has given his strength all his years, letting others carry it on.

In varying forms this is a problem of faith which very many people are meeting all the while. We are in the midst of pressing activities which fill our hands and require our best energies every hour. What we are doing seems essential. If our hands should willingly slack, there would be a blank in the work we are doing, and this would be disloyalty to God. Besides, it requires the full wages of

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all the days to provide for our family. Then suddenly one morning we cannot leave our bed to go to our work. The doctor says it will be weeks before we can leave our bed. We are in consternation. We were happy in our trust before this interruption. All things were going well. We thanked God every day that he was providing for us so abundantly. But how shall we meet this new problem?

The first thing to remember is that this is our Father's world, and that all its events are in his hand. He is not dependent, in his care of us, upon what we can do for ourselves. He indeed needs us; and, while we are able to do our part, his providing for us depends on our doing our part. If we fail to do our part, and, growing indolent, drop our tasks while we have strength to do them, we are proving unfaithful, marring God's plan of providence, and must suffer. But if we are stricken down and can no longer go on with our task, God is not at the end of his power to care for us. We may trust his love to provide for us when we cannot do it.

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The sick man thinks he is losing time when he must stay on his bed and do nothing, day after day, for weeks. But really he is not losing. He is no longer essential. Nothing will suffer because his hands are not doing his accustomed tasks. Work in stone or wood is not all that the builder is in the world for. There is building to go on in his own life and character which is far more important than what he does in the house on which he is working. Some time he will know that his days of illness were his best building days. As to his family, God has a way to provide for them while the natural bread-winner is not able to do it.

While he was busiest in material things, accomplishing most in earthly labors he was leaving untouched the work in his own life and character that was absolutely essential to the spiritual completeness of his life according to God's purpose. One of the busiest men of the generation now closing, busiest too in the best things, who has devoted his life to others with self-forgetful ability, said

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the other day to a friend that he was discovering he had left a whole section of his life-work undone. While he was caring so diligently for the comfort, the good and the spiritual culture of others, he had not been giving due attention to his own inner life. When he was shut in and the work for others could not be done as heretofore he found quite enough to do in the things that were waiting for his hands. The months when he was laid aside from active duty, he had found serious work to do in getting right within, in the cultivation of the graces of humility, and love, and patience, and unselfishness. If he had come to the end of his life when he had finished his active tasks he would have stood before God most incomplete in spiritual readiness. He needed the period when his hands must be still and he must suffer, in order to make his life complete. This was not lost time.

The principle thus stated applies in all relations of life, whatever the circumstances may be. While we are able to work we may never slacken our diligence. Our own hands

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must earn our daily bread. But when we cannot longer work, work is not our duty; God does not require it of us. It is some other one's duty then, not ours. If you are a teacher, you cannot evade the responsibility of meeting your class regularly, if you are well enough to do so. But if you are really ill and cannot be in your place, you have no duty there and no responsibility. If you are a minister and for years have never missed a service, and then are sick and unable to get to your pulpit for a certain appointment, your Master does not expect you to be there; he has no message for you to deliver to the people that day, and nothing will go wrong with your work because you are not there.

A pastor who had wrought long and had hardly ever been absent from his church was broken down and for months could not come to his accustomed place. During his long absence he wrote to his people words like these: "I understand that when I am physically unable to do the work I would be doing gladly if I could, it is not my work at all. It would

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have been mine if I were well, but now my only duty is to be quiet and still. Duty is not all activity; sometimes it is to wait and sing. Nothing is going wrong in my life because I am not in what would be my place if I were well. My ministry is not broken or even interrupted by this experience. My work for my Master has not been stopped,—its form only has been changed.” No doubt this pastor was doing as much for his people those quiet days away from them as he had ever done in his active days in their midst.

We dare not take comfort from this teaching if we are not called from our duty in some providential way. Some of us are too easily taken from our work. Small excuses are allowed to draw us away. Obstacles are not always meant to interrupt our efforts,—ofttimes they are meant to be overcome, making us more earnest and persistent. There is altogether too much resignation in some Christians. Their resignation may be indolence. We must be sure the Good Shepherd calls us to “lie down in green pastures” before we stop

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in our service. But if lying down is our duty, then we must do it as joyfully as ever we listened to a call to move strenuously forward.

This lesson is not easily learned. For many it is very hard to accept interruptions in happy activities without chafing and fretting. It is hard for a man to break down in the midst of some great task, and be as trustful and songful in his disappointment as if he had been allowed to go on in his busy way. Some people find it very hard to grow old, to let go the work of years, and see others do it.

The lesson is, that our faith shall not fail when interruptions of any kind break in, but shall keep our hearts brave and sweet and strong in all human weakness and disappointment. We must take care that our religion does not fail in these testings. We say that Christ will suffice us in every experience; we must show that he does. If he does not, the trouble is with us. There is marvelous power in a witnessing life. A young Christian woman wrote to a teacher who through years had taught her to love Christ and trust him, and

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who was now broken in health and a sufferer, but joyous as ever: "I want to thank you for teaching me this beautiful lesson of all your life, this peaceful and joyous acceptance of all trouble. You are living out now all you have taught me. I am glad you let Christ speak so plainly through you." Suppose this teacher, having taught the lesson of faith and trust and peace for years, had then in pain and loss and trouble chafed, complained and fretted, how different would the effect have been upon the pupil!

We may be laid aside from our active work; but God never lays us aside for himself. So we need never lay aside our joyous witnessing for him, his love, and his keeping power. If that witness has counted for much when we were active, it can count for more in our inactivity. If we wasted the days of our activity by failure to witness for him, we may yet, in Christ's strength, start to-day, in our new helplessness, upon a showing forth of God's presence in a life that shall gladden him and change his world.

Face to Face with One's Own
Life

*"It was only a helping hand,
And it seemed of little availing,
But its clasp was warm
And it saved from harm
A sister whose strength was failing,
Its touch was tender as angel's wings,
But it rolled the stone from the hidden springs,
And pointed the way to higher things,
Though it seemed of little availing.*

*"A smile, a word or a touch,
And each is easily given,
That one may win
A soul from sin
Or smooth the way to Heaven.
A smile may lighten the failing heart,
A word may soften pain's keenest smart,
A touch may lead us from sin apart.
How easily each is given."*

CHAPTER XXV

Face to Face with One's Own
Life



WRITER in one of the magazines said recently that if he were a preacher he would raise his voice in behalf of the individual life. He thinks the individual is lost sight of by too many preachers in considering the needs of Society in general. The personal human soul is starving while men are discussing the problems of mankind. "If I were a preacher," he says, "I would talk usually just to one person."

Every one who has received any good thing ought straightway to begin giving it out that others may have it too. But one must receive before one can give. So the personal life must come first. You must feed your own soul or you cannot feed another's soul.

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This is universally true. There is the duty of helping others,—the strong are bidden to help the weak,—but one must have in himself the ability and the resources of helpfulness before he can do for others what they need. If you are to teach others, you must be taught yourself. Before you can lead men, you must know the paths yourself. No one about to climb mountains would accept a guide who had never acquired skill in mountain-climbing in experiences of his own.

You must face life's problems yourself and master them. No one can do it for you. "Each man shall bear his own burden," says the Scripture. Another Scripture says, "Bear ye one another's burdens." There is no conflict in these teachings that seem contradictory. It is every one's duty, always, to put his shoulder under his brother's load, but always it is true that every one must bear his own burden, and that no one can bear it for him. God's promise in all the work of the world is the making of men. Here, what is done must be done by the individual himself.

Face to Face with One's Life

Each man must build his own house. The process is going on continually. All experience contributes to it. Tennyson says:

"I am a part of all that I have met."

Every life we touch leaves something of itself in us. Every book we read puts some mark on our character. Every temptation makes us either stronger, if we resist it, or wounds and hurts us if we yield to it. Every sorrow that befalls us makes us better or spoils our beauty. The effect of these experiences upon us is not accidental, but depends upon the way we receive them.

God's purpose in all our life is our edification, to use one of Paul's suggestive words. This up-building is not all wrought out in church services, in acts of worship. Christ is building men all the while—in love-filled homes, in places of labor, in daily companionships and associations, as well as at communion tables or prayer meetings. We say that the business of the carpenter is to make the things that a carpenter usually makes.

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But God's purpose for the carpenter is the making of a man. The work of a farmer, we say, is to till the soil and reap harvests. But the thought of God in the farmer's work, what He looks for as the real outcome, is a beautiful life. If this result is not reached the farmer's life is not successful, however prosperous he may be as a farmer. We say that a man's circumstances make him; but at the center of all the circumstances the real, determining factor is the man himself. Whether the hard knocks you experience through the years makes a man of you or wrecks your life depends upon the way you meet them. It is you, not your circumstances, that will determine the outcome in your life.

There is need, therefore, for personal preaching at this point. It will not do to tell men merely that their lives are plans of God, that God thought about them before he made them, and then made them to fill a certain place and to do a certain work. This is not the whole truth. The other part of the truth is that we have now to fulfil this divine pur-

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pose and live out this divine plan. We can spoil God's beautiful plan for our life if we will,—every man does who lives in sin, rejecting the will of God for him and taking his own way instead. We can fall far below God's perfect plan for us by living indolently, self-indulgently. Every man is required to do his best if he would measure up to the divine plan. An English writer says the three words, "That will do," have done more harm than any other three words in the language. Men get easily into the habit of looking at something they have made or done, and, though knowing it is not what they ought to be, or what they could make it, yet indolently let it pass, saying, "That will do." Thus they suffer their work to deteriorate in quality and fall far below God's plan, which requires the best.

It is said that the great violin maker, Stradivarius, would never allow any violin to leave his hands which was not as nearly perfect as he could make it. George Eliot makes Stradivarius say :

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“If my hand slacked,
I should rob God,—since he is fullest good,—
Leaving a blank instead of violins.
He could not make Antonio Stradivarius’ violins
Without Antonio.”

It is true we rob God when we do any of our work less well than we could do it. God will help us to do our best, but we must work with him. He will not do our work without us. He will not do our best for us if we work indolently. “He could not make Antonio Stradivarius’ violins without Antonio.”

Thus at every point we need this lesson of individuality. We must meet life as individuals. We are responsible in a certain way for the good of all men. We owe a duty to “the other man” which we dare not fail to pay. But we must not forget that our first duty is to let God have his full way with ourselves. Keeping other people’s vineyards will not be enough if meanwhile we have neglected our own. Doing a great work for others is not enough if we have not let God care for our own life.

The Meaning of Immortality

Out of myself, Lord!

*From the narrowing prison,
The grave-clothes bound on hand and foot and knee,
Up to that life and light where Thou art risen,
Call me, and set me free.*

Out of myself, Lord!

*From the reckless seeking,
The babel of earth's care and fret and loss,
Into the hush where love alone is speaking—
The silence of the cross.*

Out of myself, Lord!

*From life's tangled story,
The doubts unsolved, the fears unanswered still,
Into the clear white morning of Thy glory,
The peace which is Thy will.*

Out of myself, Lord!

*What shall yet befall me
I ask no more; enough that Thou art mine.
Turn but Thy face. O Son of God! and call me
To lose my life in Thine.*

Mabel Earle.

CHAPTER XXVI

The Meaning of Immortality



IT is intensely interesting to try to tell ourselves the meaning of immortality. Not to think of existence projecting beyond the clods of the grave is to miss the glory of life. To think of it, however, as extending into the future indefinitely, to think of ourselves as born to live, not seventy years, but seventy thousand years, and this deathlessness gives to our lives a meaning whose grandeur is overwhelming. We talk about the brevity of life, only a span, the flying of a shuttle, a breath—it seems too short for doing anything worth while, but immortality will give us time to finish the most stupendous tasks. There will be time enough then to correct the mistakes and the misunderstanding of our ignorance and wilfulness in our immature earthly years. One was grieving that he will never have an opportunity to unsay certain unkind

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words he had spoken to his mother, or undo certain acts of his which had broken her heart. She was gone now and he could not see her to ask her pardon or atone by love and worthy living for all that had so wronged her. Immortality will give opportunity to make such things right. A poem quoted in *The British Weekly* tells of The Land of Beginning Again:

I wish that there were some wonderful place
Called The Land of Beginning Again,
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches
And all of our poor, selfish grief
Could be dropped, like a shabby old coat at the door,
And never put on again.

I wish we could come on it all unaware,
Like the hunter who finds a lost trail;
And I wish that the one whom our blindness has done
The greatest injustice of all
Could be at the gates, like an old friend that waits
For the comrade he's gladdest to hail.

We would find all the things we intended to do
But forgot and remembered—too late,
Little praises unspoken, little promises broken,
And all of the thousand and one
Little duties neglected that might have perfected
The day for one less fortunate.

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There is something extremely fascinating in the thought expressed in these lines. Nor is it a mere fancy. If we believe in immortality, we shall begin again the morning after we have died, if we have given ourselves to Christ and have his life in us. At the best we are imperfect here. We live far below our ideals. We are continually making mistakes, mistakes of ignorance and mistakes of weakness. Then death will come. Men think it the end, but it is only a new beginning. For the Christian it will be a beginning of life in new conditions. The old will be left behind; all will be new. The light will be clearer. We shall not repeat the old blunders again. We shall be beyond jealousy and envy and all the narrow things that so marred the life here.

It wouldn't be possible not to be kind

In the Land of Beginning Again;

And the ones we misjudged and the ones whom we
grudged

Their moments of victory here

Would find in the grasp of our loving handclasp

More than penitent lips could explain.

Easter starts in our minds many thoughts

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and questions about immortality. Good Friday shows us Christ dying and laid away in the grave. Easter morning we see him risen and living again. Is that always the story of death? We know that all die. Shall we all live again? Are we immortal?

People have always thought so. But does that prove that death is not the end? Has anybody ever come back after dying to tell us? A few have been raised, three by Christ himself, but these were brought back not to immortality, but only to a little more of the old life, and they had to die again. None were ever raised to immortality—none but Christ himself. He rose to die no more.

What proofs have we then that we shall live again and go on living forever? The greatest proof of all is that Christ rose again. He said, "Because I live ye shall live also." He said, too, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Thus all who believe in Christ have the assurance that they

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will live forever. Death is not the end of life for them. It seems to put a stop to their living and doing. It does to bodily life. Physical activity ceases. Our unfinished tasks will drop out of our hands. The house the builder was erecting will stand uncompleted. The letter the father was writing to his boy will never be finished. But five minutes afterward the person we say is gone will be going on with life somewhere, in some form. Death is not a period in the sentence of life—it is only a comma, a little breathing place, with more to come after.

What should this mean to us? Should it make any difference in the way we live the years we stay here? Should it make any difference in the way young people improve their school days and their opportunities? Should it have any influence on the principles of conduct by which we live, on the kind of personal character we build up? Should it affect our choice of friends or of things we do in this world?

There is a phrase in one of the Epistles

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that speaks of the power of an endless life. We may apply the thought in many ways. It is an endless life that we are living any moment. It makes a vast difference whether the word you say to another will be forgotten as its sound dies, or whether its influence will last for ages. It matters infinitely whether the choice or decision you make to-day is only for an hour or whether it is the fixing of the course of your life for a career and the settling of your immortal destiny.

If you are immortal, you are dealing now and always with the things of an endless life. Everything you let another do to you is for an immortal impression, whether it be for beauty or for stain. The fabric you build up in yourself through the years will be endless. No prayers will change it or make it beautiful, if you find, near the end, that it has all been wrong. The work you are doing on the lives of others cannot be torn out and something else altogether different put in its place, if you should discover by and by that it has been false and ruinous. Pilate did

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not know the full meaning of his words when he said, "What I have written I have written." The law of an endless life gives a stupendous meaning to every moral act of our life and ought to make us thoughtful and careful in all that we do.

Many of those who read these words are young people. But they are not too young to think about the matter of immortality. It may not be wholesome for youth to think about death. But immortality is not death. It is something which annihilates death. It throws a plank across the grave. It shows us a life that goes on forever.

It is a glorious conception of living, therefore, which enables us to think of it as endless, beginning with infancy's first breath and going on without break forever. It gives us a splendid reach for effort. The years of earth are too short to make much of our life. We have some vast dream and begin to work it out, then what we call death breaks in with its interruption when we seem to be only beginning. But if our conception of life is

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endless, the interruption is only for a moment and we can plan for things that will take ages.

Just how the sentences after the comma will read, we cannot know. Just in what form we shall continue to live we may not even guess. We know that we shall be the same persons. Individuality will never be lost. I shall be I through all changes and transformations. The being that shall be serving God a million years hence will be the same person that played about the home early in childhood, wrought in the hard tasks of mature days, and suffered and sorrowed. I will always be I—there never can be any confusion of individuality. This is perhaps all we can assert positively about the immortal life. But this is a great deal. We shall lose nothing in our efforts. This makes it immensely worth while to live.

One lesson we may take from all this is, that we should begin now to live the immortal life, to practice immortality. We should think and plan and choose. these common

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days, for immortality. We should do nothing we should ever wish we had not done. We should say no word we shall ever want unsaid. We should build only fabrics we shall be glad to look upon in endless years. Immortality has begun already in the youngest life. It is not something we shall enter upon when we get to heaven. It is going on now in the schoolroom, on the playground, in the friendships and amusements of the young people, and in all their hours, however spent. We must practice immortality all our days if we would realize its fullest meaning.

The Christian View of Death

*"All around, man's acres lie,
Under this same brooding sky.
There, the plowman blithely sings;
Broadcast, there the sower flings
Golden grain, to die in gloom,
Making every clod its tomb.
Lo! a miracle is seen—
Acres clothed in living green.*

*"In their midst, God's acre lies,
Under these same yearning skies.
Here, men move with dirges slow;
Here, their tears unbidden flow;
Loved forms, here, in earth they lay;
Leave to darkness and decay.
Autumns wane, and springs return;
Still they sleep 'neath shaft and urn.*

*"Side by side, those acres lie,
Under this expectant sky.
What? On God's lies death's dark spell,
While in man's comes miracle?
No! for love's eyes pierce the gloom!
No! for Christ hath burst the tomb!
God will give, by power unknown,
Each a body of its own!"*

CHAPTER XXVII

The Christian View of Death



OMEHOW most people never get beyond the heathen idea of death. They think of it as darkness and terror. They talk of it as floods of waters through which they must pass. The fear of death is almost universal. Dying is surrounded in the minds of the great majority of men and women with all that is gloomy and dreadful. We shudder to think of our loved ones passing out of our homes of comfort, out of the gentle care of our love, into the strange mystery of dying. We tremble to think of ourselves sinking away into the shadow of death. There are many Christian people who do not have in their conception of the final departure a single gleam of the beauty and the blessedness with which the New Testament invests the death of the believer. If we could bring the Christian conception of dying into our every-day thought

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of it, it would change all the terror and darkness which we are accustomed to associate with the great event into brightness and glory.

The New Testament does not employ a single alarming word in all its allusions to the subject. In the ruler's house when they said, "Thy daughter is dead," Jesus said, "Weep not; for she is not dead, but sleepeth." It was a priceless blessing that Jesus gave to the world when he gave the name sleep to what men had always called death.

It is interesting to notice how Jesus himself spoke of dying as he came toward it. We must not think of the darkness and mystery which were so terrible to Jesus before he came to the end as part of his experience of dying. The anguish of the Garden was most bitter. "He began to be sorrowful and sore troubled." Then on the cross when the darkness spread over all the land, there was heard from the holy Sufferer a cry, the saddest cry earth ever heard, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But this was not

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part of our Lord's experience of dying. This anguish, this feeling of forsakenness, he endured as he was bearing the sin of the world. We may not try to understand the sufferings of those hours.

But turn to his real experience of death. The six hours of agony were ended. The darkness was past. Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." There was no darkness now, no feeling of forsakenness. The Father's face was not hidden now, but instead it beamed in love upon the Sufferer on the cross, and the words Jesus spoke were full of joy and confidence. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." That was the way Jesus died. There was no fear. There was no blackness. He was not confused nor bewildered. He was face to face with his Father. He was calm and quiet, not startled as if some fearful experience were before him. Dying—what was it for him? Simply breathing out his spirit into the hands of his Father. His body was to stay on the cross until gentle hands should

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take it down and lay it away in the grave. But his spirit, the deathless part, was breathed into the hands of his Father.

Was there anything dreadful about that? The spirit had not been pierced by nails, nor hurt by thorns, nor touched in any way by the anguish or pain of the terrible hours on the cross. The spirit now was breathed out and commended into the Father's hands. Those were gentle hands, safe hands, hands out of which no one could ever snatch that spirit.

Note well that this is death, this and nothing else, as Jesus found it. There never was a simpler, gentler, quieter, gladder experience in all of our Lord's life.

And this is a true picture of death as it will be in the story of every believer. There will not be anything to make it hard or terrifying. It will mark the end of all darkness, pain, and trouble. We think of death as full of mystery. We cannot understand it. We cannot see anything. But this picture of Jesus dying ought to show us that to us, too, dying is only joy, life, blessedness. "Into thy

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hands!" One moment dazed and confused as we leave the body, but next moment in the Father's hands. When we have been dead only a minute or two, the terror will be past, if there is terror at all in the experience, and we shall find ourselves in joy in the presence of God. There is not a word in the New Testament to suggest that death has horrors for the believer in Christ. Dying is only a phase of life.

The only death-scene we have in the New Testament besides our Lord's is that of Stephen. It was a death of violence. He had a wonderful vision. Looking up steadfastly into heaven, he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. His enemies in rage rushed upon him, cast him out of the city, and stoned him. The martyr prayed as the stones smote him. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The simple narrative says: "He fell asleep." It is a scene of peace, so far as the dying of Stephen is concerned. He saw Jesus standing up at the right hand of God to receive his servant who

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was being driven out of the earth. When he died he was only received by the living Saviour in glory. His broken body lay dead on the ground, but his spirit was safe, unhurt, in the keeping of his Lord.

But little is said in the New Testament about death. We have very dear and definite assertions of the fact of immortality, but mere hints only of the form of the life into which the earthly life emerges, through dying. Two of the most vivid of the expressions used by St. Paul in speaking of what occurs in dying is in the phrases—"absent from the body," and "at home with the Lord." In dying we leave the body which has been "the earthly house of our tabernacle" during our stay. The old house is empty—the tenant has gone out of it. But we are not homeless now, because of our eviction from the earthly house; we are "at home with the Lord." That is, we have a far more glorious dwelling place than the one we were in before. "We know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building

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from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens." Instead of a tent, which is frail and temporary, liable to decay and dissolution, our new habitation is a building from God, not made with hands, eternal. Instead of an earthly house, our new home is in the heavens. Instead of a place of pain and suffering in which we groan, being burdened, when we leave it we shall find ourselves at once at home with Christ. There is no time for wandering, unclothed, as disembodied spirits, seeking for a new habitation in which to dwell, but a minute after the earthly tabernacle is dissolved and we are absent from it, we shall find ourselves at home—not in another frail tent but in a home in heaven. This is what Jesus promised his disciples in his words of comfort spoken to them at the last supper. "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God: believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where

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I am, there ye may be also." Our new habitation will be a home, with all the blessed meaning of that word; it will be eternal; it will be with Christ.

We see how simple and beautiful Christian death is, as we read these descriptions of it. We ought to find richest comfort in these glimpses. There is nothing in dying to give us fear or terror. It will not interrupt our living for a moment. Five minutes after watching friends say of us "He is gone!" we will be through the experience and will be living as we have never lived before. Dying is but leaving the old tent to be received into the heavenly home. It is but changing mortality to the glory of immortality. We shall live on, only our life will be purged from all its imperfections, its selfishness, its envy, its grudging, its resentment, its earthliness and made perfect. We shall not lose interest in our friends, but shall think of them, speak to God for them, save them in some way, as helpfully, and far more wisely than when we were living. Moses and Elijah after they

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had been hundreds of years in heaven were sent back to earth to cheer and strengthen the weary Son of God as he was bearing the cross of his love. The mother will not forget her children, nor the faithful pastor his people after death.

Death will not break any sacred tie of friendship. It will not separate us from Christ. "Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." It will not rob us of any real treasure. It will empty our hands of money and property we have invested in our name, but have never made ours by proper use for Christ, but not one penny we have used in honoring God and blessing our fellow men shall we lose in dying. Millionaires who have truly consecrated their money will be millionaires still after dying. Death will leave no blot, no scar, no wounding on us; but will only strip off every blemish, purge from us every spot, bring out all hidden beauty and transform us, for when we see him we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

We need not dread to see our Christian

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friends die, for they have come to the most blessed and glorious moment of their existence, and are only departing from us to be forever with the Lord.