

THE HIDDEN LIFE

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*"Out of the dark must grow,
Sooner or later, whatever is fair."*

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Faithfully Yours,
J. R. Miller.

THE chapters in this little volume may have their message to some who are striving to live near the heart of Christ. It is the hidden life that makes the character. What we are in the depths of our being, where no human eye can penetrate, that we are actually, as God sees us. Then this inner life will ultimately work its way through to the surface, transforming the character into its own quality. Nothing can be more important, therefore, than that the hidden life be true, pure, beautiful, and Christlike.

J. R. M.

PHILADELPHIA.

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THE HIDDEN LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

THE HIDDEN LIFE.

" We live together years and years,
And leave unsounded still
Each other's springs of hopes and fears,
Each other's depths of will ;
We live together day by day,
And some chance look or tone
Lights up with instantaneous ray
An inner world unknown."

IN a sense, all life is hidden. The blood courses through the veins as the heart keeps throbbing, throbbing, day and night. You can lay your finger on your wrist and feel the pulsings. The lungs also continue breathing, inhaling, exhaling, without pause, from infancy's first gasp until at last watching friends say, "He is gone!" Pulsings, breathings — yes ; but have you found the life ? What

is it that keeps the heart throbbing and the lungs respiring? "Life," you say. Yes, but what is life?

Take the mind. It is very active. One man thinks, and writes beautiful poems or charming stories. Another thinks, and puts marvellous visions on canvas, or throws great bridges over rivers, or erects a noble cathedral. But who ever saw the processes of thought? Mental life is hidden.

Take heart-life — the life you lived yesterday, with its hopes and fears, its joys and sorrows, its pleasures and pains, its cares and its affections, its thousand varying experiences. Does the world know what is going on in your breast to-day, any day? People see the smile or the shadow that flits across your face, but they do not see the emotion which produced it. Even to your closest bosom friend your life is unrevealed, cannot be revealed. Says Keble:—

"Not even the tenderest heart and next our own
Knows half the reasons why we smile or sigh."

Take spiritual life. We see the effects of

the Holy Spirit's work — new dispositions, new conduct, new character ; but the divine spark of life we cannot see as it comes down from above. It is secret, hidden. One day you are sad, disheartened ; and, taking up your Bible, you find a sweet word of promise, a revealing of God's love, and into your heart there comes a strange peace. You are in sorrow. A friend sits down beside you, and speaks a few words of strong comfort. You are calmed and quieted. Yet no one sees any of these processes. They are hidden, secret.

There is an inspired word which says, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." The thought is wonderfully bold and strong. Christ is the source of the Christian's life. Christ is in heaven with God, in God, wrapped up in the very glory of divinity. Hence the Christian's life is with Christ in God. Its source is thus in the very heart of God.

Outside an old garden wall hung a great branch covered with purple clusters of grapes. No root was visible anywhere ; and those who saw it wondered how the vine grew, how its

life was nourished, where its roots clung. It was then discovered that the great vine from which this branch sprung grew inside the garden. There it had an immense root, with a stem like the trunk of a tree. This one branch had pushed out over the wall and hung there, bearing in the mellow autumn its clusters of luscious fruit.

Every Christian life in this world is a branch of a great vine which grows in heaven—a branch growing outside the wall. “Your life is hid with Christ in God.” We have heaven’s life in us in this world. The fruits that grow upon our life are heavenly fruits. Jesus spoke of giving his own peace to his disciples. He prayed that they might have his joy fulfilled in themselves. We read too that love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, are fruits of the Holy Spirit. Thus in our human experience in this world we are drawing our life and its support from the hidden source of life in the heart of God. This assures us of its security. It is beyond the reach of earthly harm. Herein, too, lies the secret of the quiet

peace which we find so often in Christian sufferers. In all their pain they are sustained by some hidden strength which the world cannot understand. They are drawing their life from a source which no earthly experience can reach or affect.

“ Oh! there are some who, while on earth they dwell,
And seem to differ little from the throng,
Already to the heavenly choir belong,
And even hear the same sweet anthem swell.

They joy, at times, with joy unspeakable,
Pouring to him they love their heartfelt song;
While to behold him face to face they long,
As the parched traveller for the cooling well.

Ask you how such from others may be known?
Mark those whose look is calm, their brow serene,
Gentle their words, love breathing in each tone,
Scattering rich blessings all around unseen.

They draw each hour, from living founts above,
The streams they pour around of peace and joy and love.”

One writes of watching an old tree in the autumn, as the leaves were touched by the frosts and fell off when the rough wind blew. As the tree at last became bare he saw a bird's nest on one of the branches. Through the

summer days the nest had been hidden beneath the thick foliage, but the blasts of winter which swept away the leaves uncovered this home and shelter of the birds. So, oftentimes, is it in the history of God's children. In their prosperity we see not their refuge, which is hidden and secret—hidden beneath the leaves of worldly prosperity. But when adversity comes, taking away earthly beauty, stripping off the bright foliage, their true and eternal refuge in God is disclosed. The storms of earth only drive them back into God's bosom.

We say a certain person's beauty has been wasted by sickness. One came to me whom I had not seen before for five years. Then a dark tragedy had just darkened her home, and I went to try to give a little comfort. Until that day her face had been beautiful with all the freshness of youth. But these five years since had been like twenty years in her life. The beauty was now faded; how could it have been otherwise, with the broken heart she brought out of those terrible days? Yet a few minutes' conversation showed me that in

all the wasting of physical beauty her spiritual loveliness had not been marred. She had kept near the heart of Christ in all the bitter anguish, and the joy and peace of her inner life had not failed. Beauty of the face is only external, and is transient. Any accident may mar it. But beauty of the soul is spiritual and imperishable. It abides even in the destruction of the body.

There is mystery in this hidden life which is in every Christian. It has a strange power of recognition. When two Christians meet, though utter strangers heretofore, there is something that reveals them to each other. The same life pulses in their hearts. They have the same hopes, the same joys, the same Christ, the same purpose in living, the same heaven. The world has nothing in common with Christians, but all who love Christ are members of one family.

“ I walk along the crowded streets, and mark
The eager, anxious faces,
Wondering what this man seeks, what that heart craves,
In earthly places.

Do I want anything that they are wanting?
Is each of them my brother?
Could we hold fellowship, speak heart to heart,
Each to the other?

Nay, but I know not! only this I know,
That sometimes, merely crossing
Another's path, where life's tumultuous waves
Are ever tossing —

He, as he passes, whispers in mine ear
One magic sentence only,
And in the awful loneliness of crowds
I am not lonely.

Ah, what a life is theirs who live in Christ!
How vast the mystery,
Reaching in height to heaven, and in its depth
The unfathomed sea!"

The Christian's life is hidden also in the sense that its true and full glory is concealed in this world, and will not appear until it enters the heavenly life. Only the bud is seen as yet; by and by the flower will burst into rich bloom. The best of every Christian's life remains unrevealed on the earth. We fail to realize even our own best intentions. You did not live yesterday as you

meant to live when you went out in the morning. No artist ever puts on his canvas all the beauty of his mental vision. No singer ever gets into the song he sings all the music of his soul. No saintly Christian ever translates into disposition and conduct all the spiritual loveliness that glows in his ideal. Our hands are too clumsy and unskilful to express the best things of our mind and heart in word or act or character. We see the good, but cannot do it in more than a mere fragmentary way. Yet the visions of beauty which we have in mere flashes and glimmerings are hints of divine revealings that are yet to be made, and of the wondrous possibilities which lie in the hidden depths of our nature, some day to be brought out.

The sea covers great fields of concealed splendors. Now and then a storm stirs its depths, and washes up a few brilliant shells or pebbles, which shine like fragments broken from heaven's walls. Yet these few stones or shells are only specimens of millions more, even more brilliant, that are buried in the

ocean depths. So there come out here and there, in a human life, in times of special exaltation, glimpses of something rarely beautiful — an act, a word, a self-denial, a disposition, the revealing of some noble quality or some marvellous power or measure of love; and we say as we see it, "That is like Christ. That is a gleam of heavenly life. That is a fragment of divinity." But that flashing gleam of character, that glimmering of Christlikeness, that act which seems too pure for earth, is only a hint of the infinite possibilities of each human soul. Hidden in the depths of the nature, under all its faults and imperfections, is a life which far surpasses the highest things that are reached in this world. The love, joy, peace, unselfishness, purity, holiness, attained in the saintliest experience of earthly Christian life, are but divine intimations of what we shall be when the limiting conditions of earth shall have been left behind.

There will be a time when all this hidden life shall be revealed. The bud shall burst

into the rich flower. The gem shall break through its rough imprisoning crust, and shine in lustrous splendor. The dull character that here shows only gleams and flashes of spiritual beauty, amid manifold defects, flaws, and infirmities, shall yet show in its every feature the beauty of Christ. The holy thoughts, desires, longings, and the hunger after righteousness, which here are hindered, restrained, limited, and which fail to take full form in life and character, shall yet be wrought out in deeds as beautiful and holy as themselves. We shall see Christ, and we shall be like him, when we shall see him as he is.

Some day we shall slip away from the things that are familiar to our eyes and hearts here, and shall enter into what we call the other life. Really, however, it is not another life, but only a fuller, deeper revealing of the life we have been living in Christ since we first gave ourselves to him. The mystery of the Christian's life of faith is that it is "hid with Christ in God." Here we touch but the outer edge of it; in what we call dying we shall press farther

into its blessedness. Here our little barks move only along the shore ; by and by we shall sail out into the infinite expanse. There will be nothing to dread in the experience. We call it death, and we shudder at its mention ; but really it is life — fulness of life. To those who watch us in departing we shall disappear ; but to us the path will be only one of increasing brightness, as we go on until we enter into the presence of Christ.

“I watched a sail until it dropped from sight
Over the rounding sea. A gleam of white,
A last far-flashed farewell; and like to thought
Slipt out of mind, it vanished and was not.

Yet, to the helmsman standing at the wheel,
Broad seas still stretched before the gliding keel.
Disaster? Change? He left no slightest sign,
Nor dreamed he of that dim horizon line.

So may it be, perchance, when down the tide
Our dear ones vanish. Peacefully they glide
On level seas, nor mark the unknown bound.
We call it death — to them 'tis life beyond.”

So will it be when we leave this world. It

will not grow dark to our eyes, as we imagine it will do, when we enter the valley of shadows. We shall pass into fuller light, until we, too, are hid with Christ in God, in the glory of eternal life.

CHAPTER II.

THE OUTER AND INNER LIFE.

" I wait
Till from my veiled brows shall fall,
This being's thrall,
Which keeps me now from knowing all.
In stormless mornings yet to be,
I'll pluck from Life's full-fruited tree
The joys to-day denied to me."

IN every man there are two men. There is an outer man, that people can see ; there is an inner man, that no human eye can see. The outer man may be hurt, wounded, marred, even destroyed, while the inner man remains untouched, unharmed, immortal. St. Paul puts it thus : "Though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day." He is referring to his own sufferings as a Christian. His body was hurt by scourgings, by stonings, by exposure. It was worn by toil, and by endurance of hunger, of hard-

ship. But these things which scarred his body, leaving marks upon it, making it prematurely old, had no effect on the inner man. His real life was not wounded by persecution. It even grew in strength and beauty as the outer man decayed.

There is a quenchless life within our decaying life. The beating heart, the breathing lungs, the wonderful mechanism of the body, do not make up the real life. There is something in us which thinks, feels, imagines, wills, chooses, and loves. The poet lies dead. His hand will write no more. But it was not the poet's body that gave to the world the wonderful thoughts which have so wrought themselves into the world's life. The hand now folded shaped the lines, but the marvellous power which inspired the thoughts in the lines was not in the hand. The hand will soon moulder in the dust, but the poet is immortal. The outward man has perished; but the inner life is beyond the reach of decay, safe in its immortality.

The inner spiritual life of a Christian is not

subject to the changes that come upon his outer life. The body suffers; but if one is living in fellowship with Christ, one's spiritual life is untouched by physical sufferings. The normal Christian life is one of constant, unchecked, uninterrupted progress. Unkindly conditions do not stunt it. Misfortunes do not mar it.

The inner growth of a Christian should be continuous. The renewal is said to be "day by day." No day should be without its line. We should count that day lost which records no victory over some fault or secret sin, no new gain in self-discipline, in the culture of the spirit, no enlargement of the power of serving, no added feature of likeness to the Master. "The inward man is renewed day by day."

This does not mean that all days are alike in their gain. There are special dates in every spiritual history which are memorable forever for their special advance — days when decisive battles are fought, when faults are discovered and conquered, when new visions of Christ are

granted, when the heart receives a new accession of divine life, when one is led into a new field of service, when a new friend comes into the life, when one takes new responsibilities or enters into new relations.

Then there are days in every life when there would seem to be no spiritual advancement. We all have our discouraged days. We have days that are stained by folly, marred by mistakes, blurred and blotted by sin; and these seem to be lost days. There are days when we appear to fail in duty or in self-control, or in struggle with temptation. The inner man would appear to be crippled and hurt in such experiences as these; and the days would seem to be idle and useless, without profit or progress. We come to the evening with sad confessions of failure, and with painful regret and disheartenment. But even such times as these are really gaining times, if we are living near the heart of Christ. We are at least learning our own weakness and frailty, the folly of self-dependence, the feebleness of our own best resolves. Ofttimes our defeats prove our great-

est blessings. No doubt many of our richest gains are made on the very days on which we weep most sorely over our mistakes and failures.

Then there are days that are broken by sorrow. The lights go out in our sky, and leave us in darkness. The friends of many years are taken away from us. Prosperity is turned to adversity. Misfortune touches our interests. Our circumstances become painful. Is not the growth of the inner life interrupted by such experiences? Not if we are truly abiding in Christ, and receiving from him the grace he has to give. No doubt many of the best, the divinest blessings of spiritual life come to us on just such days. The photographer takes his sensitive plate into a dark place to develop his picture. Sunlight would mar it. God often draws the curtain upon us, and in the darkness brings out some rare beauty in our life, some delicate feature of his own loveliness.

The teaching of the Scriptures is that, whatever the experience of the outer life, the

growth and enrichment of the inner life should never be interrupted or hindered. This is the divine purpose for us. Provision is made in the grace of God for this continuous work. We need never be harmed by anything that breaks into our life. Indeed, there is nothing that touches us in any way that may not be made to minister good to us. Woundings of the outer life may become pearls in the soul. Losses of earthly things may become gains in the spiritual realm. Sickness of the body may result in new health and increased vigor in the inner man. It is the privilege and the duty of the child of God to move upward and forward day by day, whatever the day's experience may be.

This is the meaning of the promises of peace which are found so frequently in the Bible. We have no assurance of a life without strife, trial, trouble, earthly pain, and loss ; but we are assured that we may have unbroken peace within, while the outer life is thus beset. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." "In me ye shall have peace."

The blessing of such a life in this world is incalculable. It becomes a source of strength, of shelter, of comfort, of hope, to many other lives. Susan Coolidge writes of one whose heart is kindest, and whose life is a perpetual benediction :—

“O heart beloved, O kindest heart!
Balming like summer and like sun
The sting of tears, the ache of sorrow,
The shy, cold hurts which sting and smart,
The frets and cares which underrun
The dull day and the dreaded morrow—
How when thou comest all turns fair!
Hard things seem possible to bear,
Dark things less dark, if thou art there.

Thou keepest a climate of thine own
'Mid earth's wild weather and gray skies,
A soft, still air for human healing,
A genial, all-embracing zone
Where frosts smite not, nor winds arise;
And past the tempest-storm of feeling
Each grieved and weak and weary thing,
Each bird with numbed and frozen wing,
May sink to rest and learn to sing.”

Then she writes, giving the secret of this wondrous power of helpfulness :—

“Like some cathedral stone begirt,
Which keeps through change of cold and heat
Still temperature and equal weather,
Thy sweetness stands, untouched, unhurt,
By any mortal storms that beat,
Calm, helpful, undisturbed forever.
Dear heart, to which we all repair,
To bask in sunshine and sweet air,
God bless thee ever, everywhere.”

We can be truest and best blessings to others only when we live victoriously ourselves. We owe it therefore to the needy, sorrowing, tempted world about us, to keep our inner life calm, quiet, strong, restful, and full of sweet love, in whatsoever outer turbulence of trial or opposition we must live. The only secret is to abide in Christ.

The lesson has a special application to sickness. Sickness is common. Not always does it prove a means of grace. There are some who are not spiritually benefited by it. Yet it is the duty and the privilege of every Christian so to meet the experience of illness or invalidism as ever to grow in it into Christlier character. The secret is a living faith in

Christ. Restlessness or distrust will mar the divine work that Christ would do in the heart ; but quiet submission to the will of God and peaceful waiting for him will ensure continual renewal of the inner life, even while the outer life is being consumed.

It is well, therefore, that those who are called to endure sickness should learn well how to relate themselves to it, so as not to be harmed by it. Sickness is discouraging. It is not easy for one with life broken, unable longer to run the race with the swift, to keep his spirit glad, cheerful, and wholesome. It is hard not to be able to do the heroic things which the unquenched spirit longs to do. Life seems now to be useless. They appear lost days, in which no worthy service can be done for Christ. Too often those who are called to invalidism lose out of their heart the hope, the enthusiasm, the zest of living, and become depressed, unhappy, sometimes almost despairing. But this is to fail in true and noble living. When we cannot change our conditions, we must conquer them through

the help of Christ. If we are sick, we would better not fret nor chafe. Thereby we shall only make our illness worse, retarding our recovery, while at the same time we shall mar the work of grace going on in our inner life. The captive bird that sits on its perch and sings is wiser than the bird that flies against the wires and tries to get out, only bruising its wings in its unavailing efforts. The sick-room may be made a holy of holies instead of a prison. Then it will be a place of blessing.

The lesson has its application, also, for those who are growing old. Old age ought to be the most beautiful period of a good life. Yet not always is it so. There are elements in the experience of old age which make it hard to keep the inner life ever in a state of renewal. The bodily powers are decaying. The senses are growing dull. It is lonely. There is in memory a record of empty cribs and vacant chairs, of sacred mounds in the cemetery. The work of life has dropped from the hands. It is not easy to keep the

joy living in the heart in such experiences. Yet that is the problem of true Christian living. While the outward man decays, the inward man should be renewed day by day. This is possible, too, as many Christian old people have proved. Keeping near the heart of Christ is again, as always, the secret. Faith gives a new meaning to life. It is seen no more in its relation to earth and what is gone, but in its relation to immortality and what is to come. The Christian old man's best days are not behind him, but always before him. He is walking, not toward the end, but toward the beginning. The dissolving of the earthly tabernacle is a pledge that the house not made with hands is almost ready.

The lesson has its application also for death. That seems to be the utter destruction of the outer man. The body returns to the dust whence it came. What of the inner life? It only escapes from the walls and fetters which have confined it on the earth. It is as when one tears a bird's cage apart, and the bird, set free, flies away into the heavens.

An old man, nearing his end, spoke of his bodily decay, the tokens of the approach of death, as the land-birds lighting on the shrouds, telling the weary mariner that he is nearing the haven. Death is not misfortune; it is not the breaking up of life; it is growth, development, the passing into a larger phase of life. We need death for life's completing.

“Death is the crown of life;
Were death denied, poor man would live in vain;
Were death denied, to live would not be life;
Were death denied, e'en fools would wish to die.
Death wounds to cure; we fall; we rise; we reign;
Spring from our fetters; hasten to the skies,
Where blooming Eden withers in our sight.
Death gives us more than was in Eden lost;
This king of terrors is the prince of peace.”

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CHAPTER III.

SATISFACTION — NOT REPRESSION.

“The mighty God! Here shalt thou find thy rest,
O weary one! There is naught else to know,
Naught else to seek — here thou may'st cease thy quest.
Give thyself up. He leads where thou shalt go.

“The changeless God! Into thy troubled life
Steals strange, sweet peace; the pride that drove thee on,
The hot ambition and the selfish strife
That made thy misery, like mists are gone.”

THIRST is characteristic of humanity. Wherever you find a human soul you find in it longings, desires, yearnings. Then it is only commonplace to say that in all this world there is nothing to satisfy a human soul. There has been no lack of searching for a fountain of life whose waters will quench human thirst; but in vain. There is nothing that has not been tried, and yet always the result has been the same:

“Life's thirst quenches itself
With draughts which double thirst.”

The theory of happiness which Buddhism proposes is to tear desire from the soul, and to destroy the heart's hunger. But this is not possible. A craving repressed, held in check, shut up in the heart, is not at rest. The desire still lives, though caged, smothered, confined. Happiness never can be found in this way.

Christ came to tell us of a way in which our soul's thirsts and cravings may all be satisfied. Instead of crushing them within the heart, he would let them live, and would find perfect satisfaction for them.

These longings within us are not evil in themselves. They are the divine qualities in our soul crying out for divine nourishment. We are not bodies—we are souls, immortal souls. We bear the image of God. We belong to heaven. It is no wonder that house and furniture and pictures and sumptuous fare and rich clothing will not answer our higher nature's needs. How could such things satisfy an immortal soul? Imagine an angel living in the house of one of our worldly mil-

lionaires, and living just as the millionaire lives. How much comfort would he get from it all? It is because we have in us the divine that earth cannot satisfy us.

“ Thank God for life; life is not sweet always;
Hands may be heavy laden, heart care-full,
Unwelcome nights follow unwelcome days,
And dreams divine end in awakenings dull;
Still it is life; and life is cause for praise.
This ache, this restlessness, this quickening sting
Prove me no torpid and inanimate thing, —
Prove me of him who is the life, the spring.
I am alive, — and that is beautiful.”

A traveller tells of holding in his hand the egg of a rare East India bird which was so near the hatching that the bird inside was pecking away at the shell. He could hear it struggling to get out. It was shut away in the darkness, cramped, confined, but it was not content to stay there. It seemed to know that there was a larger life for it outside, that on wings it might soar away to greet the morning light, that it might put on splendors of beauty, that it might look on mountains, valleys, and rivers, and bathe in the pure air of sunny skies.

This bird in the shell is a picture of the higher nature which is within every human life. It is not satisfied. It is a prisoner longing to be liberated. It is conscious of a wider freedom, a larger liberty, that is possible to it. We are made for communion with God. The mission of Christ to us is to bring us out into this larger, fuller life. Instead of vainly trying to satisfy our spiritual needs and cravings at earth's fountains, he leads us to heaven's fountains. He reveals to us the love of God. He tells us that we are God's children, and brings us into intimate relations with our Father in heaven. He gives us intimations of a future for ourselves that is full of blessedness and glory. He calls us to this larger life.

So the hunger for love in our beating heart is the prophecy of a satisfaction of love which is possible in Christ. The longing for holiness, for strength, for beauty of character, for power of helpfulness, for Christlikeness, is a revealing of our capacity for noble living, and of the spiritual growth to which we may attain and shall attain, unless by unbelief and sin we

stunt, choke, and smother the immortal life that is ours as Christians.

Take another illustration from nature. The dragon-fly is born at the bottom of the pond, and for a time lives there, a low, meagre form of life. It does not know of anything better — that there is a higher sphere where insects and other creatures have wings, and fly in glorious freedom in the sunny air. But one day there comes a wondrous change. Tennyson tells the story well : —

“To-day I saw the dragon-fly
Come from the wells where he did lie.

An inner impulse rent the veil
Of his old husk: from head to tail
Came out clear plates of sapphire mail.

He dried his wings: like gauze they grew;
Thro’ crofts and pastures wet with dew
A living flash of light he flew.”

This dragon-fly of the darkness and the mire now breathes heaven’s sweet air. It has wings, which unfold under the impulse of the new life into which it has emerged, and spread themselves out in shining beauty, and the

lovely creature soars aloft. It is dead to its old life in the ooze, and lives now in the brightness and the fragrance of the fields and gardens.

This, too, is a picture of the new life in Christ to which human souls may rise. Satisfaction can never be found in mere earthly conditions. In these we are like dragon-flies, living at the bottom of the pond, while our true place is up in the sunny air, with wings outspread, soaring in blessed liberty. Thus only in this new life can our thirsts be satisfied.

There are mistaken thoughts of what we must do with our cravings and longings. The Buddhist says we must crush them. Many Christian people have the same thought. They suppose that many of their desires and yearnings are sinful and must be crucified. But this is not true. Our longings are parts of our greater nature. God has not put a single yearning or desire in us that needs to be destroyed. Our passions, appetites, and affections are not depraved qualities in us. They may become depraved through our efforts to

gratify them in mere earthly or in sinful ways, but in themselves they are not evil. They belong to our divine likeness, and are all meant to be satisfied. But this satisfaction can come only in true uses of our powers.

A man found a wild torrent in the mountain. It could work only waste and ruin as it rushed, uncontrollable, down the gorge. He built a flume for it, and carried its wild floods in quiet streams down into the valley, where they watered the fields and gardens, gave drink to the thirsty, and turned many a wheel of industry. That was far better than if he had dried up the torrent. It was far better, too, than if it had been left to flow on forever with destructive force. Now it was flumed and made to do good, and make the world richer and more beautiful. That is what God wants to do with the cravings, the desires, the passions, the longings, and all the mighty energies of our nature. They are not to be destroyed. Yet they are not to be allowed to work waste and ruin in efforts to find gratification in merely earthly channels, in unbridled license.

That is sin's way. Rather, these great forces in our nature are to come under the yoke of Christ, and are to be led by him into all holy service for God and man.

Years ago there were in southern California great stretches of burning plains, covered with dry sand, with scarcely a living thing growing anywhere upon them. Meanwhile, up in the mountains, there were streams of water, produced by the melting snows, running to waste, oftentimes causing damage as they rushed down the gorges. Men saw that if those wasting and destructive streams could only be carried down into the valleys, and made to distribute their waters over the alkaline sands, the desert could be changed into a garden. To-day great orange orchards grow on what, twenty-five years ago, were barren wastes.

This is an illustration of what the forces of human nature, which now in so many lives run riot in dissipation, doing harm to others, and hurt to God's kingdom, might be trained to do, if all their energies were but turned to noble and beneficent uses. That is what Christ pro-

poses to do with those who come to him. He sets them free, not by unleashing them to live without law or control, but by bringing them under his own yoke, where in true and holy serving and obedience they will not only find rest and peace for themselves, but will also become means of carrying benediction to others.

In no other way can the longings and cravings of human hearts find satisfaction. These were not made for idle rest, but for healthful activity. The affections can find satisfaction only in loving, and in loving purely, truly, unselfishly. Love is not a sinful passion; it is sinful only when it is perverted from its true end and debased, and becomes unholy lust. Nor is love an unworthy or an unmanly quality. God is love—love is his very nature. To live is to love. Loving in its true sense is the whole of living. We can never find satisfaction until we have learned to love in a Christlike way, as Christ loved us, giving our life as he did to be consumed in the flame of love.

The mind can never find satisfaction for its thirst save in learning. The desire to know is part of the divine likeness in us. On all sides books are lying open, and we are bidden to read. The voices of wisdom are evermore speaking in our ears, and we are bidden to listen. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." One of the first words the great Teacher speaks to those who come to him to find rest for their souls is, "Learn—learn of me." Our minds are made to know, and they can find rest only through knowing. There is no true peace in ignorance. It is only an empty and shallow "bliss" that is found in not knowing. Our minds are made to think, and can be satisfied only in thinking. Satisfaction can come to any function of our being only when it finds the use for which it was made, and devotes itself to that use.

The spirit can find satisfaction only as it attains the character which belongs to it. There is a beatitude for hunger and thirst—for those who long for righteousness. Such thirst is a mark of life. The dead have no

longings, no desires. They are satisfied. Wherever there is spiritual life there is unrest, unsatisfaction, a hunger for larger life, richer, fuller, holier. Such thirst can never find satisfaction save in ever-new attainments of holiness, in forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forward to the things that are before. Complete satisfying will never come until we reach the full stature of Christ, until we see him, and are made like him ; but in the Christian life on earth the beginnings of this perfect satisfying are realized.

So it is with all the powers of our being. Longing is a quality of true living, and a mark of health. It is the upward looking and striving of our nature. We can attain satisfaction only as our powers find their right functions and their right uses, and train themselves to run in the channels in which they were made to run. The word of Augustine is true enough almost to be an inspired word : " Our souls were made for God, and can find no rest until they find it in God." But not always have our life-teachers explained to us the full mean-

ing of this divine truth. Too often they have given us only half of it. It is not enough to come to Christ, and nestle in his bosom in the joy of reconciliation and forgiveness. Sometimes that is as far as our teachers lead us. Satisfaction can never come in inaction, however holy the state may be. The powers of the life must be disciplined and trained, and then led out into active service. They must find the use for which they were made. Knowing and doing must go together, or there can be no fulness of life, nor any true rest in living.

It is not enough to seek attainments merely for the sake of the attainments. That will bring no satisfaction. Learning merely to know, neither enlarges nor truly enriches the mind. It is only when we desire more knowledge in order that we may use it in living more nobly and in doing greater good to others that we are led into deeper peace. Says Froude: "The knowledge which man can use is the only real knowledge which has life and growth in it, and converts itself into practical

power. The rest hangs like mist about the brain, or dries like raindrops off the stones." The same rule applies in all our longings. To desire to be good merely for the sake of being good, to stand up among men in holy beauty but with no wish to make one's goodness a power in honoring God and in blessing the world, will bring no true and permanent satisfying.

After all, satisfaction can come only through the consecration of all the powers to God for love's service. Deeper amid the laws of our immortal being than any of us can ever know in this world, lies the *must* of service. "*Ich dien,*" I serve. I must serve. "Not to be ministered unto, but to minister," is the divinest law of moral and spiritual life ever enunciated by any teacher. This is the way, the only way, to satisfaction. The powers of the soul must be led out in the paths of their own true craving, to lay hold upon the things which they were made to attain. They must not be repressed or destroyed, but must be drawn out, directed, disciplined. Then all the life

must reach its divine purpose in becoming as Christ to the world, living to bless others, giving itself in utter abandonment to help save the world.

This is the way, and the only way, to the satisfying of human desires. The water that Christ gives alone can quench the soul's thirst. Only as we return to God, and to the place and service for which we were created, can we be at peace. Obedience, likeness, service, are the keywords of spiritual life. Earthly satisfaction at the best is incomplete; but the well in the heart in this life springs up into eternal life. What we call dying is but entering into fulness of life and perfection of blessedness.

CHAPTER IV.

COMFORT IN CHRIST'S KNOWLEDGE OF US.

“Thou knowest, not alone as God, all-knowing ;
As man, our mortal weakness thou hast proved ;
On earth, with purest sympathies o'erflowing,
O Saviour, thou hast wept and thou hast loved ;
And love and sorrow still to thee may come
And find a hiding-place, a rest, a home.”

To many people the thought of Christ's perfect knowledge of them is an unwelcome one. It awes them and troubles them. But if we are living as we should live, if we are true to our purpose and sincere in our striving, the consciousness that Christ knows all about us should give us great comfort.

Too often this thought of the divine omniscience is presented as an element of terror. Children are told that God sees them ; and the fact is presented to them as one which should inspire dread, and they are made to fear God's eye. The words “Thou God seest me” are

quoted and commented upon as if it had been in stern aspect that the Lord appeared to Hagar. Really, however, it was of a friendly revealing that these words were first used. Under God's all-seeing eye was a shelter of love for the poor woman. So it is always that God looks down upon his children; his look is ever kindly. He is our friend, not our enemy; and his feeling toward us is very gracious and loving. The thought of his perfect knowledge of us should never be an oppressive one; and it will not be so if we understand even a little of his yearning interest in us, and if we have even a faint conception of his infinite patience.

True, our life is full of failures and blemishes. We mean to be loyal to Christ, but the world is hard, and we are very weak. At the best, we get only little fragments of the beauty of Christ into our character. We are Christ-like only in dim, blurred resemblances in our disposition and conduct. We intend to be gentle and loving; but we mar our days oftentimes with unhappy tempers, querulous bickerings, unseemly complaints, and selfish striv-

ings. We intend to be strong in faith, allowing nothing to make us fear or doubt ; but our trust fails us many times, and we grow fearful in life's stress. We mean to be consistent Christians, to live blamelessly in this evil world ; but our strength is small, and temptations are sore ; and where is the day which is not marred by failures ?

When we come into the presence of Christ with our broken vows and our stained records, what can we say ? Can we look up into his blessed face and declare that we love him, with the memory of all our faults, inconsistencies, and failures fresh in mind ? Is not our poor Christian life a denial of our fair profession ? We might say that we are sorry, and will not repeat these sins and follies ; but have we not been saying this over and over, perhaps for years, and then almost immediately repeating the things we deplored and promised never to repeat ?

What shall we do ? If Christ were but a man like ourselves, judging of love by its deeds, we could not hope for his patient bear-

ing with us. Men are not so tolerant of our failures. They grow weary of our broken vows. They do not know our inner life ; they cannot see the sincerity which is in our heart beneath all that would seem to prove us insincere. But here it is that we find the comfort in Christ — in his perfect knowledge of us. He knows not only the sin and wrong that are in us, but he knows also whatsoever in us is true and sincere. He sees the little true love — little, yet true — that there is amid the weakness, the broken vows, and the sad failures.

It was in Christ's knowledge of him that Peter found his comfort when, after his denials, Jesus asked him three times, "Lovest thou me?" What could he say about his love, with that sad story of inconsistency so close behind him? He could take refuge only in the assurance that his Master knew all — what was true and sincere, as well as what was so false and unworthy. "Thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that I love thee."

We may find comfort in the same consciousness. If Jesus did not know us perfectly, if

he, like men, judged only from our acts, our behavior, then we could not make such an appeal. But he sees into our heart. The sincere love for him which we know we have, in spite of all that seems so contradictory of love, he sees. So we can ever, with simple confidence, say, "Thou knowest," and rest there.

"I strive, but fail; oh, why, dear Lord,
Must this my constant record be?
Why finds each daily westering sun
My work for thee but half begun,
Or done, alas! so selfishly?

I'm tempted oft, and often yield,
For Pleasure hath a siren voice;
She sings my scruples quite away,
And with her charming roundelay
Deprives me of the power of choice.

My faith is strong when skies are bright;
But sunny days are all too brief.
When clouds arise, and sorrows come,
My lips are sealed, my heart is dumb,
And full of weary unbelief.

But this, dear Lord, my comfort is:
My troubled heart is known to thee;
Thou knowest that I love thee, Lord;
And, Saviour mine, I love thy word
That this shall my salvation be."

There is another phase of the comfort we have in Christ's perfect knowledge of us. The world is not charitable toward our faults. Men are quick to note our inconsistencies. They see our faults with unfriendly eye. They are not patient with our infirmities. They easily doubt our sincerity when we fail to live up to our profession. Then sometimes men misunderstand us even when in our hearts we are really most faithful. Jesus himself was continually misjudged and misunderstood. Men took his noblest and divinest acts, and made them appear unworthy and sometimes even disreputable. The disciples must not hope to escape the misrepresentation and the maligning which the Master himself had to endure. There are few good men who are not at some time in their life misjudged or falsely accused. But in all such experiences we know there is One who knows the truth about us, who is always charitable in his judgment, who never misunderstands or misjudges us. When we have sinned and failed, yet knowing in our heart that we are repentant and sincere, or

when we are misunderstood or falsely accused, we can look up with confidence into Christ's face, and say, "Lord, thou knowest." There is wonderful comfort in such cases in the consciousness that he understands all.

This love that is in the heart of Christ is a wonderful love. It is a love that never tires of us. We are not sure always of such patience and endurance in human affection. We complain if our friends do not return as deep, rich, and constant love as we give them. We are hurt at any evidence of the ebbing of love in them. Human love is oft-times chilled and even repelled by the discovery of things unworthy, traits of character that are not beautiful, acts that are not right.

We are not sure always that human friends will love us still when they know all about us. We could not trust the world with the perfect knowledge that Christ has of our real inner life. There are records in the secret history of most of us that we would not dare spread out before the eyes of men. There are things in us — jealousies, envyings, self-

ish desires, earthward turnings, unholy affections — which we would not feel safe in laying bare even to our dearest and most patient friends. But Christ knows all. Yet we need not be afraid to trust him with all the innermost frailties, faults, and failures of our life. His love will not be turned back by these repulsive things while it finds in us even the feeblest true love for him. “He knows all, yet loves us better than he knows.”

In one sense it is not easy for Christ to save us. We struggle and resist, and there is much in us that persistently disputes his sway. It was the prayer of a saintly man, “Lord, save me in spite of myself.” We must all be saved, it would seem, if ever, in spite of ourselves. St. Paul found a law in his members forever opposing the impulses of the new nature in him, making him do the things he would not. The only way Christ can save any of us is by never giving us up, never letting go his hold upon us, never allowing our stubborn earthward striving to drag us out of his hands.

If he ever did grow weary of our persistent sinning, and were to let us have our own way, what would be the result? Suppose that Jesus had let Peter go that night after his denial, giving him no further thought, what would have become of the poor fisherman? He would have been swept away on the dark bosom of sin's floods, and would never have seen his Lord's face again. We do not know the perils of our own weakness, nor our capacity for sinning.

When the disciples were told by their Lord that one of them should betray him, they did not begin to suspect one another. Each one seemed to be seized with a terrible dread lest it might be himself that would do this dreadful thing. Who has not shuddered when hearing of the fall of some other person into sad, dishonoring sin, feeling that it might have been himself? Terrible are the possibilities of sin in human hearts. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

We talk lightly of sin and sin's dangers.

We speak oftentimes sternly and bitterly of those who are overcome in temptation, and swept down in its relentless tides. Oftentimes we have little charity for those who fall. It is because we do not know sin's awful power. There is evil enough lurking in the heart of the holiest of us, if only it were unleashed, to destroy our souls forever. Nothing but the mighty power of the grace of God keeps unto final salvation those who are preserved blameless through life. We cannot fathom what we might have been, abandoned to ourselves to drift in the wild floods, had it not been for the hand of Christ, who saves us from our fatal self.

It is told of a saintly man, that by his own request the only epitaph on his grave was the word "Kept." We are all kept, we who do not fall away into the darkness of eternal death — we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Some people speak of the beginning of their Christian life, when they decide to follow Christ, as if that were all, as if the struggle were all over

when the choice is made. We hear it said that certain persons are saved, as if the whole of being saved were accomplished in the one act of deciding to be a Christian. Really, however, the struggle only begins with the conversion, ending only when the life reaches glory.

Some speak, too, as if all Christ's work in saving us had been done on the cross nineteen hundred years ago, in his giving up of himself for us. But his actual work in saving us is done with us, and in us, one by one, in teaching us life's lessons, giving us grace to overcome in temptation, lifting us up when we have fallen, going after us and bringing us back when we have wandered away, and keeping us from the world's deadly evils. Were it not for this patient, never-failing, watchful love of Christ, not one of us would ever be saved.

It is Christ's perfect knowledge of us that gives such infinite patience to his love and grace. He knows the sincerity that is in us; he sees, too, the possibilities of good that are in us—not what we are now, but what we are to be when the work in us is finished.

There is a word of St. John's which says, "We shall be like him ; for we shall see him as he is." This is a vision of the final outcome of Christ's work in saving us. The mother of the artist saw in her boy's childish attempts, foregleams of genius, and kissed him to encourage him. That kiss made him an artist. So the patient, loving Christ sees in our poor living, in our yearnings, our human discontents, our strivings, our hungers, our longings, gleams of what we may become ; and it is to bring out these possibilities that he deals with us in such grace and gentleness.

So we may trust Christ with the innermost things of our life. We need not be afraid, however faulty or sinful we know ourselves to be, to lay all at his feet in holy confidence. Lucy Larcom's lines voice Christian faith's attitude before Christ :

Lord, I would offer thee
A heart's untarnished gold;
And yet how can it be
When all there is in me
Is touched with blight and mould ?

I find within no thought
So holy that it may
Unshamed to thee be brought,
Except as it hath caught
From thee a hallowing ray.

Yet all I am is thine;
Through sins and flaws and stains
I feel thy presence shine.
Take me, and make divine
All that uncleansed remains.

Lord, of thyself not much
In me canst thou behold,
And yet thou savest such;
The magic of thy touch
Transmutes my dross to gold.

Contrition thou dost prize
All sacrifice above.
Dear Lord, I dare arise
And look into thine eyes,
Because I know thy love.

CHAPTER V.

A CONDITION OF DIVINE BLESSING.

Like a blind spinner in the sun
I tread my days ;
I know that all the threads will run
Appointed ways ;
I know each day will bring its task,
And, being blind, no more I ask.

HELEN HUNT JACKSON.

THERE is a secret of living which, if people knew it, would make all life easier for them. It may be stated thus — that as we take up any duty and go forward with it, we shall receive the strength we need to do it. There are several divine promises that give this assurance. One reads, “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” This seems to mean that the help which God gives varies according to the necessity of the particular day. When we have abundance of ordinary human strength, we do not need so much special divine help,

and God then gives less. Really it is always God's strength that we have, whether it is what we call natural, or whether it comes in a supernatural way. When we have human friends about us, with sweet companionships, we do not need so much the revealing of the divine presence and the companionship of the unseen Friend ; but when we lose the human, then we need the divine more deeply ; and in the loneliness God makes himself known to us as never before. So it is in all our experiences. God fits his blessing to our days. When we faint, he increases strength. When we are sorrowful, he gives comfort. When we are in danger, he grants protection. When we are weary, he gives rest. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."

Another of the promises reads, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Every word of this assurance shines with radiant light. It is Christ's grace that is sufficient. We know that he has all divine fulness, and therefore we are sure that no human need can ever exhaust his power to give help. It is

Christ's grace that is sufficient. If it were anything else but grace, it might not give us such comfort. Grace is undeserved favor, — goodness shown to the unworthy. We deserve nothing, for we are all sinners. But it is grace that is sufficient for each one — “for thee,” the promise runs; and that means each one who reads it or hears it. It is present tense, too, — “is sufficient.” Christ is always speaking personally to the one who is in any need, and saying, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” Then the word “sufficient” is one whose meaning expands and amplifies with the measure of the need. No necessity is so small as not to be included, and none is so great as to go beyond the capacity of the blessing that is promised.

There are divine words, also, which imply that the supply of blessing that we receive will depend upon ourselves. God's people in ancient times were commanded to cross the Jordan, the promise being that the stream would divide for them. Yet the waters would not have parted for them if they had not

gone forward in obedience and faith. As a matter of fact, it was only when the feet of the priests, walking in advance, were wetted in the rushing floods, that the stream began to sink away. When Jesus was ready to send forth his disciples to bear his gospel, his command was, "Go ye into all the world." Then came the promise, "And lo! I am with you all the days." The promise is very precious, but we cannot separate it from the command. We cannot have this blessed presence unless we are, in our own way, to the measure of our own ability, seeking to make disciples of all nations. It is when we go out in his name that he will be with us.

This is the unvarying law of spiritual blessing and good. Life lies before us, with its burdens, its duties, its responsibilities, its struggles, its perplexities. It does not come to us all in one piece. God breaks our years into months and weeks and days, and never gives us more than just a little at a time — never more than we can bear or do for the

day. Then if we take up the present duty or burden, we shall always have strength to do it. If we have enough of our own natural strength, —and that is God's strength too, —he does not need to give us special strength; for why should anything so precious as strength be wasted? But if we do not have strength of our own sufficient for the work or struggle, we need not falter, but should go on, just as if we had omnipotence in our arm; for the promise is that if we honor God by obeying him, though the task be impossible to our ability, he will honor us by giving us all the help we need. The river will surely open when he has bidden us to cross it, if only we move on as if there were no river. The bread will surely be given when we enter the wilderness, following the divine leading, if only we go on as if we had abundance of provision.

But we must not forget that the blessing which is promised depends upon our faith and obedience. If we do not begin the task that seems impossible, if we wait to receive

the help before we will begin it, the help will never come. If we do not begin our march toward the river, waiting till it opens, it will not open at all. If we do not enter upon the struggle, waiting for strength to be given for the battle before we accept it, we shall never get the strength. An old proverb says, "Get thy spindle and thy distaff ready, and God will send the flax." Yes; but he will not send the flax unless we get the spindle and the distaff ready. We must do our part, thus proving our faith, or God will not do what he has promised, for his promise is conditional. Another old proverb says, "For a web begun God sends the thread." We must take up the scant bundle of threads we have, and begin our weaving, confident that the Lord will provide threads as we go on, enough to finish the web. He will never put his threads into folded, waiting hands. The best commentary on this proverb that can be given is a little poem by Josephine Pollard, the last she ever wrote:—

"'For a web begun God sends the thread.'
Over and over these words I read;

And I said to myself with an easy air,
'What need to burden myself with care
 If this be true,
 Or attempt to do
More than my duty? For here is proof
That we are to hold ourselves aloof
Until from the Master we receive
The thread for the web we are to weave!'

So day after day I sat beside
The loom, as if both my hands were tied,
With idle shuttle and slackened warp,
Useless as strings of an untuned harp;
 For I took no part
 With hand or heart
In the work of the world. To the cry of need,
The voice of the children, I gave no heed.
'When the task is ready for me,' I said,
'God will be sure to supply the thread.'

Others might go in cellars and slums,
And weave a web out of scraps and thrums,
Finding excuse for the daily toil,
The reckless waste of life's precious oil;
 But as for me,
 I could not see
How I was to follow them, or believe
That the needed strength I should receive,
Unless I waited, howe'er time sped,
For God to send me the promised thread.

I had no strength of my own, I knew,
No wisdom to guide, no skill to do,

And must wait at ease for the word of command,
 For the message I surely should understand,
 Else all in vain
 Were the stress and strain;
 For the thread would break, and the web be spoiled —
 A poor result for the hours I'd toiled;
 And my heart and my conscience would be at strife
 O'er the broken threads of a wasted life.

But all at once, like a gem exhumed,
 The word 'begun' — by a light illumed —
 From the rest of the text stood boldly out,
 By the finger of God revealed, no doubt;
 And shocked and dazed,
 Ashamed, amazed,

I saw as I had not seen before,
 The truer meaning the sentence bore,
 And read as Balthasar might have read:
 'For a web *begun* God sends the thread.'

The man himself, with his mind and heart,
 Toward the Holy City must make a start,
 Ere he finds in his hands the mystic clew
 That shall lead him life's mazes safely through.

 And if loom and reel
 And spinning-wheel

Idle and empty stand to-day,
 We must reason give for the long delay,
 Since the voice of the Master has plainly said,
 'For a web begun God sends the thread.'"

There is a whole sermon in these lines.
 There are thousands of good people who do

almost nothing with their life because they are waiting for God to send the thread before they will begin to weave the web of duty he bids them to weave. They say, "I want to be useful; I want to do good; but God has not given me anything to work with." Now, the truth is, that God has given them enough to begin with, and that is all he will give them at first. There were only five barley loaves, and there were five thousand hungry people. What were these among so many? But for the web begun God sent the thread that day. There was only a little meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse, and there were years of famine yet to be passed through. But again for the web begun God sent the thread.

The teaching is for us, and it is one of the most practical lessons we can learn. Put your hands to the tasks that are surely yours, never asking whether you are able to do them or not, and not waiting for God to provide all the strength or all the material you will need, before you begin to do them. Whatever is your duty must be done, no matter how far

beyond your strength it may be. It is yours to begin ; it is God's to help you through ; and he will, if you honor him by trusting him.

Those who live lives of great usefulness have always begun with the little they had. It grew in their hands, until they filled a large sphere of usefulness, touching many lives with the benediction of their helpfulness. For a web begun God sent the thread.

The same law of human diligence and divine blessing prevails in the building up of character. Ten lepers cried to Jesus for healing. He answered, bidding them go and show themselves to the priest. That was what the law required lepers to do after they had been cured, when the priest would give them a certificate of health and cleanness, permitting them to return again to society. These lepers were not yet cured. Their bodies showed no mark of healing. But they promptly obeyed the Master's word ; and "as they went they were cleansed."

There are those who long for a beautiful life,

for a transformed character, but it seems they never can attain to such renewal, they are so full of faults and blemishes. But if they begin to follow Christ, starting with the little fragment of Christlikeness which their hands can pick up, God will help them, and they will grow at last into rich beauty of soul. Get the victory over the one temptation of the hour, and that will be the first thread in a web of complete victoriousness. Get one little line of loveliness into your disposition, and that will be the beginning of a spirit which at last will include "whatsoever things are lovely." For a web begun God will send the thread.

There is a beautiful Eastern story of a child walking beside the sea, who saw a bright spangle lying in the sand. She stooped down and picked it up, and found it was attached to a fine thread of gold. As she drew this out of the sand there were other bright spangles on it. She drew up the gold thread, and wound it about her neck, and around her head and her arms and body, until from head to foot she was covered with the bright threads

of gold, and sparkled with the brilliance of the silver spangles. So it is when we lift out of God's word an ornament of beauty to put into our life. We find that other fragments of loveliness, all bound together on the golden chain of love, are attached to the one we have taken up. Then as we draw up the chain and twine it about our neck, and weave it into a web to make a garment for our soul, we find that it is endless. Infinite as God himself is the abundance of the lovely things that we may draw out of the treasury of his grace to deck our life with beauty. "For a web begun God sends the thread."

This same law applies in the learning of all life's lessons. The divine teaching is never wanting; but we must ever begin the lesson with the little we know. We must take the one step that is plain to us, and then God will make plain the next step for us, and the next, and the next. We must not demand to know all the way before we will set out. We must trust Christ, and go on, even in the dark. We must never falter when there seems to be no

path ; as we go on it will open. As we do the will of God we shall know the teaching. When we begin the web, God will send the threads to weave it to the beautiful ending.

CHAPTER VI.

SECRETS OF CONTENTMENT.

"I am glad to think
I am not bound to make the world go right,
But only to discover, and to do with cheerful heart,
The work that God appoints."

SOME one has said that if men were to be saved by contentment, instead of by faith in Christ, most people would be lost. Yet contentment is a duty. It is also possible. There was one man at least who said, and said it very honestly, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therein to be content." His words have special value, too, when we remember in what circumstances they were written. They were dated in a prison, when the writer was wearing a chain. It is easy enough to say such things in the summer days of prosperity; but to say them amid trials and adversities requires a real experience of victorious living.

But what did St. Paul mean when he said, "I am content"? He certainly did not mean that he was satisfied. Contentment is not an indolent giving up to circumstances. It does not come through the dying out of desire and aspiration in the heart. There is a condition of mind which some people suppose to be devout submission to God's will which is anything but Christlike. We are to make the most of our life. We are not to yield irresolutely and weakly to everything that opposes us. Ofttimes we are to resist and conquer what seem to be impossibilities. We are never to be satisfied with our attainments, or our achievements, however fine they may be. Satisfaction is undivine; it is a mark of death, not of life. St. Paul never was satisfied. He lived to the very last day of his life looking forward, and not back — forgetting things behind, and stretching forward to things yet before, eager to do more and achieve more. When he said he had learned to be content, he did not mean that he had ceased to aspire and strive.

The original word, scholars tells us, contains

a fine sense which does not come out in the English translation. It means self-sufficing. St. Paul, as a Christian man, had in himself all that he needed to give him tranquillity and peace, and therefore he was not dependent upon any external circumstances. Wherever he went, there was in him a competence, a fountain of supply, a self-sufficing. This is the true secret of Christian contentment, wherever it is found. We cannot make our own circumstances ; we cannot keep away from our life the sickness, the pain, the sorrow, the misfortune ; yet as Christians we are meant to live in any and all experiences in unbroken peace, in sweet restfulness of soul.

How may this unbroken content be obtained ? St. Paul's description of his own life gives us a hint as to the way he reached it. He says, " I have *learned* to be content." It is no small comfort to us common people to get this from such a man. It tells us that even with him it was not always thus ; that at first he probably chafed amid discomforts, and had to "learn" to be contented in trial.

It did not come naturally to him, any more than it does to the rest of us, to have peace in the heart in the time of external strife.

Nor did this beautiful way of living come to him at once, as a divine gift, when he became a Christian. He was not miraculously helped to acquire contentment. It was not a special power or grace granted to him as an apostle. He tells us plainly in his old age that he had "learned" it. This means that he was not always able to say, "I am content in any state." This was an attainment of his later years; and he reached it by struggle and by discipline, by learning in the school of Christ, by experience, just as all of us have to learn it, if we ever do, and as any of us may learn it if we will.

Surely every one who desires to grow into spiritual beauty should seek to learn this lesson. Discontent is a miserable fault. It grieves God, for it springs from a want of faith in him. It destroys one's own heart-peace, — discontented people are always unhappy. It disfigures beauty of character. It sours the

temper, ruffles the calm of sweet life, and tarnishes the loveliness of the spirit. It even works out through the flesh, and spoils the beauty of the fairest face. To have a transfigured face, one must have heaven in one's heart. Just in proportion as the lesson is learned are the features brightened by the outshining of the indwelling peace. Besides all this, discontent casts shadows on the lives of others. One discontented person in a family often makes a whole household wretched. If not for our own sake, then, we ought at least for the sake of our friends to learn to be contented. We have no right to cast shadows on other lives by our miserable complainings and discontents.

But how can we learn contentment? One step toward it is patient submission to unavoidable ills and hardships. No earthly lot is perfect. No mortal ever yet in this world found a set of circumstances without some drawback. Sometimes, however, it lies in our power to remove the discomfort. Much of our hardship is of our own making. Much of it

would require but a little energy on our own part to cure it. We surely are very foolish if day after day we live on amid ills and frets which we might change for comforts if we would. All removable troubles we ought therefore to remove. Too many people are indolent in resisting hard circumstances and conditions. They give up too readily to what they mis-call divine providences. Obstacles are not always meant to block our way ; oft-times they are intended to inspire us to courage and effort, and thus to bring out our hidden strength. We must not be too quick in submitting to hardness, nor too limp in yielding to circumstances. Some of the things which we find in our way we are to lift out of our way.

But there are trials which we cannot change into pleasures, burdens which we cannot lay down, crosses which we must continue to carry, thorns in the flesh which must remain with their rankling pain. When we have such trials, why should we not sweetly accept them as part of God's best way with us? Discontent

never made a rough path smoother, a heavy burden lighter, a bitter cup less bitter, a dark way brighter, a sore sorrow less sore. It only makes matters worse. One who accepts with patience that which he cannot change has learned one secret of victorious living.

“ Two men toiled side by side from sun to sun,
And both were poor;
Both sat with children, when the day was done,
About their door.

One saw the beautiful in crimson cloud
And shining moon ;
The other, with his head in sadness bowed,
Made night of noon.

One loved each tree and flower and singing bird
On mount or plain ;
No music in the soul of one was stirred
By leaf or rain.

One saw the good in every fellow-man,
And hoped the best ;
The other marvelled at his Master's plan,
And doubt confessed.

One, having heaven above and heaven below,
Was satisfied ;
The other, discontented, lived in woe,
And hopeless died.”

Another part of the lesson is that we moderate our desires. "Having food and raiment," says St. Paul again, "let us therewith be content." Very much of our discontent arises from envy of those who seem to be more favored than ourselves. Many people lose most of the comfort out of their own lot in coveting the finer, more luxurious things some neighbor has. Yet if they knew the whole story of the life they envy for its greater prosperity, they probably would not exchange for it their own lowlier life, with its homelier circumstances. Or if they could make the exchange, it is not likely they would find half so much real happiness in the other position as they would have enjoyed in their own. Contentment does not dwell so often in palaces as in the homes of the humble. The tall peaks rise higher, and are more conspicuous, but the winds smite them more fiercely than they do the quiet vales. And surely the lot in life that God makes for us is always the best that could be made for us for the time. He knows better than we do what our true needs are.

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The real cause of our discontent is not in our circumstances ; if it were, a change of circumstances might cure it. It is in ourselves, and wherever we go we shall carry it with us. The only cure that will effect anything must be the curing of the fever of discontent in us.

Envious desires for other people's places which seem finer than our own, prevent our getting the best blessings and good out of our own. Trying to grasp the things that are beyond our reach, we leave unseen, unappreciated, untouched, and despised the many sweet bits of happiness that lie close about us. Some one says, "Stretching his hand to catch the stars, man forgets the flowers at his feet, so beautiful, so fragrant, so multitudinous, and so various." A fine secret of contentment lies in finding and extracting all the pleasure we can get from the things we have, the common, every-day things, while we enter upon no mad, vain chase after impossible fancies. In whatever state we are we may find therein enough for our need.

If we would learn the lesson of content-

ment, we must also train ourselves to live for the higher things of life. One of the ancient wise men, having learned that a storm had destroyed his merchant ships, thus sweeping away all his fortune, said, "It is just as well, for now I can give up my mind more fully to study." He had other and higher sources of enjoyment than his merchandise, and felt the loss of his ships no more than manhood feels the loss of childhood's toys. He was but a heathen philosopher; we are Christians. He had only his studies to occupy his thought when his property was gone; we have all the blessed things of God's love. No earthly misfortune can touch the wealth a Christian holds in the divine promises and hopes.

Just in the measure, therefore, in which we learn to live for spiritual and unseen things, do we find contentment amid earth's trials and losses. If we would live to please God, to build up Christlike character in ourselves, and to lay up treasure in heaven, we shall not depend for happiness on the way things go with us here, nor on the measure of temporal good

we have. The lower desires are crowded out by the higher. We can do without childhood's toys when we have manhood's better possessions. We need this world less as we get more of God and heaven into our hearts.

There is a modern story of a merchant who was devoted to high purposes in life, who was determined to be a man free from bondage to the lower things. One day a ship of his that was coming homeward was delayed. He became anxious, and the next day was yet more troubled, and the third day still more. Then he came to himself, awaking to his true condition of bondage to earthly things, and said, "Is it possible that I have come to love money for itself, and not for its nobler uses?" Taking the value of the ship and its cargo, he gave it to charities, not because he wished to be rid of the money, but because only thus could he get the conquest over himself, holding his love of money under his feet. He was learning well one secret of contentment.

St. Paul knew this secret. He cheerfully gave up all that this world had for him. Money

had no power over him. He knew how to live in plenty; but he did not fret when want came instead. He was content in any trial, because earth meant so little and Christ meant so much to him. He did not need the things he did not have; he was not made poor by the things he lost; he was not vexed by the sufferings he had to endure, because the sources of his life were in heaven, and could not be touched by earthly experiences of pain or loss. George MacDonald's words are very true: "In life, troubles will come which look as if they would never pass away. The night and the storm look as if they would last forever, but the calm and the morning cannot be stopped. The storm in its very nature is transient. The effort of nature, as that of the human heart, ever is to return to repose; for God is peace."

"We bless thee for thy peace, O God,
Deep as the soundless sea,
Which falls like sunshine on the road
Of those who trust in thee;

That peace which suffers and is strong,
Trusts where it cannot see;
Deems not the trial way too long,
But leaves the end with thee."

These are hints of the way we may learn in whatsoever state we are, therein to be content. Surely the lesson is worth learning! One year of sweet content amid earth's troublous scenes is better than a whole lifetime of vexed, restless discontent. The lesson can be learned, too, by any one who is truly Christ's disciple; for did not the Master say, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you"?

The artist painted life as a dark, storm-swept sea, covered with wrecks. Then out of the midst of the wild waves he made to rise a great rock, in a cleft of which, high up, amid herbage and flowers, he painted a dove sitting quietly on her nest. It is a picture of Christian peace in the midst of this world's strifes and storms. In the cleft of the Rock is the home of content.

CHAPTER VII.

OUR UNANSWERED PRAYERS.

“O tired heart !
God knows,
Not you nor I
Who reach our hands for gifts
That wise hands must deny.

We blunder where we fain would do our best,
Until a-weary ; then we cry, ‘ Do thou the rest !
And in his hands the tangled threads we place
Of our poor blind weaving, with a shamèd face.
All trust of ours he sacredly will keep ;
So, tired heart, God knows ; go thou to work or sleep.”

THERE are times when God seems to be silent to us. To our earnest supplications he answers not a word. We are told to ask and we shall receive — to seek, and we shall find — to knock, and it shall be opened unto us. Yet there come times when we ask imploringly, and seem not to receive ; when, though we seek with intense eagerness, we seem not to find ; when we knock until our hands are bruised and bleeding, and there seems to be

no opening of the door. Sometimes the heavens appear to be brass above us as we ask, "Is there anywhere an ear to hear our pleadings? Is there anywhere a heart to feel sympathy with us in our need?"

Nothing is so awful as this silence of God — to feel that communication with him is cut off. It is a pathetic prayer in which a psalm-writer pleads: "Be not silent to me, lest I become like them that go down into the pit." Anything from God is better than that he be silent to us. It would be a sad, dreary, lonely world if the atheist's creed were true, — that there is no God; that there is no ear to hear our prayer; that no voice of answering help or love or comfort ever comes out of heaven for us.

Are prayers ever unanswered? There are many prayers which are answered, although we do not know it, and still think them unanswered. The answer is not recognized when it comes. This is true of our common mercies and favors. We pray every morning, "Give us this day our daily bread," and then we never think of our three meals each day as

being answers to prayer. We ask God for health, for raiment, for the things we need, for prosperity in business, for friends; all these things come to us in continuity, without break. But do we remember that we prayed for them, and that they come from God as answers to our requests?

The same is true of many of the spiritual blessings which we seek. We ask for holiness. It does not seem to us that we are advancing in holiness; but all the while our life is imperceptibly and unconsciously receiving more of the mind and spirit of Christ, and we are being changed into his image. We expect the answer in a marked way, while it comes silently, as the dew comes upon the drooping flowers and withering leaves. But, like the flowers and the leaves, our soul is refreshed and our life is renewed.

We put our cares into God's hands in prayer, and they do not seem to become less. We think there has been no answer to our supplications. But all the while an unseen hand has been quietly shaping, adjusting, and

disentangling for us the complex affairs of our life which made us anxious. We are not conscious of it, but our prayers have been receiving continual answer in peace and blessing.

We find ourselves in the midst of circumstances which appear adverse to our happiness and good. We seem about to be crushed by sorrows, by disappointments, by trials, or by antagonisms. We pray to be saved from these distressful conditions. No answer seems to come. The shadow deepens; the blows falls. We sit in the darkness, and say that God did not answer our prayers. We are unaware of the blessing that really came to us in the time of our pain. The cup was not taken away; but we were secretly strengthened, so that we were able to drink it.

We are very ignorant. We know not how to pray as we ought. The thing we ask for is not just what we need, although we think it is. The thing we really need comes in place of what we thought we needed. The prayer seems to be unanswered, while in fact it is answered in a far better way than if what we

sought had come instead. We think it is more of God's gifts we need ; these do not come, but God himself comes into our life in new fulness, imparting to us more of his love and grace. We have an answer better than we sought. The Giver is better than his best gifts.

Thus, there is a large field of praying in which answers come, but come unrecognized. We have been blessed, although we knew it not. We did not perceive the blessing when it was given to us. We did not understand that the good things we were receiving so plentifully were answers to our prayers. We thought God was not heeding our requests, when really he was giving us abundant answer every day.

But there are other prayers that really are not answered. God is silent to us when we ask. Yet there is a reason for his silence. It is better we should not have the things we want and plead for. For example, we ask God to lift away our burdens. But to do this would rob us of blessings which can come to us only

through the bearing of the burden ; and our Father loves us too well to give us present ease at the cost of future and eternal good. There are mistaken notions current about the way God promises to help us. People think that whenever they have a little trouble to endure, a bit of hard path to go over, a load to carry, a sorrow to meet, or a trial of any kind, all they have to do is to call upon God, and he will at once deliver them, take away the burden or the sorrow that threatens, free them from trial. They think that is what God promises to do. They imagine that when anything goes a little wrong with them, all they have to do is to pray, and God will set it right. But this is not the manner of God's love. His purpose concerning us is not to make things easy for us, but to make something of us.

So when we pray to God to save us from all care, to take the struggles out of our life, to make the paths mossy, to lift away all loads, he simply will not do it. It would be most unloving in him to do so. Prayers of this kind, therefore, go unanswered. We must

carry the burden ourselves. God wants us to learn life's lessons, and to do this we must be left to work out the problems for ourselves. There are rich blessings that can be gotten only in sorrow. It would be a short-sighted love, indeed, that would heed our cries and spare us from the sorrow because we cried for this, thus depriving us of the wonderful blessings which can be gotten only in the sorrow.

A child may indolently shrink from the study, the regular hours, the routine, the drudgery, and the discipline of the school, begging the parent to let him stay at home from school and have an easy time ; but what would you think of the father who would weakly and softly grant the child's request, releasing him from the tasks which irk him so ? Nothing more unkind could be done. The result would be the dwarfing of the child's life for all the future. Is God less wisely kind than our human fathers ? He will not answer prayers which ask that we may be freed from duty or from work, since it is by these very things

we grow. The only true answer in such prayers is the non-granting of what we ask.

Then, there are also selfish prayers that are unanswered. Human lives are tied up together. It is not enough that any one of us shall think only of himself and his own things. Thoughts of others must modify all our life. It is possible to overlook this in our prayers, and to press our own interests and desires to the harming of others. God's eye takes in all his children, and he plans for the truest and best good of each one of them. Our selfish prayers, which would work to the injury of others, he will not answer. This limitation applies especially to prayers for earthly things. We must not pray selfishly even for prosperity in business. We must not ask for our own comfort and ease, without qualification. Love must come into our praying as well as our living. Or if we forget love's law, and think only of ourselves in our asking, God will not grant us our desires. He thinks of all his children, and will not do injury or harm to one to gratify another.

These are examples of prayers that are not answered. They are not according to God's will. They are for things that would not prove blessings to us if we were to receive them.

There is yet another class of prayers which appear to be unanswered, but whose answer is only delayed for wise reasons. Ofttimes we are not able at the moment to receive the things we ask for. A child in one of the lower grades in a school may go to a teacher of higher studies, and ask to be taught this or that branch. The teacher may be willing to impart to the pupil the knowledge of the higher study, but the pupil cannot receive the knowledge until he has gone through certain other studies to prepare him for it. There are spiritual qualities for which we may pray earnestly, but which can be received only after certain discipline. A ripened character cannot be gotten by a young Christian merely in answer to prayer; it can be gotten only through long experience.

Or it may be that the things we pray for

cannot be given to us until they have been prepared for us. Suppose you were to plant a young fruit-tree, and were to begin to pray for fruit from its branches ; could your prayer be answered at once ? It is thus with many things we ask for in our pleading, — they must be grown before they can be given to us. God delays to answer, that he may give us in the end better things than could have been given at the beginning. He seems silent to us when we plead ; but it is not the silence of indifference, nor the silence of refusal, but the silence of love, that really assents to our request, and sets about preparing for us the blessings we crave. We need only patience to wait our Father's time.

Here it is that oftentimes we fail. We cannot wait for God. We think he is indifferent to us because he does not instantly give us what we crave. We fret and vex ourselves over the unanswering of the very prayers which God is really answering as speedily as the blessings can be made ready for us, or as we can be made ready to receive them. We should

teach ourselves to trust our Father in all that concerns our prayers, — what he will give, what he shall withhold, and the time and the manner of his giving.

These are suggestions concerning what seem to be unanswered prayers. The prayers may have been answered in ways in which we did not recognize our requests. They may be, indeed, unanswered, because to answer them would have been unkindness to us, or would have wrought hurt to others. Or the answers may have been delayed until we are made ready to receive them, or while God is preparing them for us.

An Eastern story tells of one who was discouraged because his prayers seemed not to be answered. An enemy taunted him, bidding him call louder; but a heavenly message brought him comfort, assuring him that his prayer to God really had the answer in itself.

“‘Allah, Allah!’ cried the sick man, racked with pain the long night through:
Till with prayer his heart was tender, till his lips like honey grew.

But at morning came the Tempter; said, 'Call louder,
child of pain!

See if Allah ever hear, or answer, "Here am I" again.'

Like a stab, the cruel cavil through his brain and pulses
went;

To his heart an icy coldness, to his brain a darkness, sent.

Then before him stands Elias; says, 'My child! why thus
dismayed?

Dost repent thy former fervor? Is thy soul of prayer
afraid?'

'Ah!' he cried, 'I've called so often; never heard the
"Here am I;''

And I thought, God will not pity, will not turn on me his
eye.'

Then the grave Elias answered, 'God said, "Rise, Elias,
go, —

Speak to him, the sorely tempted; lift him from his gulf of
woe.

Tell him that his very longing is itself an answering cry;
That his prayer, 'Come, gracious Allah,' is my answer,
'Here am I.'"

"Every inmost inspiration is God's angel undefiled;
And in every 'O my Father!' slumbers deep a 'Here, my
child!'"

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR THE PEOPLE WHO FAIL.

“God sets some souls in shade alone ;
They have no daylight of their own —
Only in lives of happier ones
They see the shine of distant suns.

God knows. Content thee with thy night.
Thy greater heaven hath grander light.
To-day is close. The hours are small ;
Thou sitt'st afar, and hast them all.

Lose the best joy — that doth but blind ;
Reach forth a larger bliss to find.
To-day is brief ; the inclusive spheres
Rain raptures of a thousand years.”

It is quite time some strong words should be spoken for the people who fail. There are enough to sing the praises of those who succeed. When a man is valiant, and overcomes in the battle, and stands a victor at the close of the strife, there are enough to shout the huzzas, and to twine the laurel for his brow. When a man prospers in business, rising to

wealth and influence, living in splendor, there are enough to do homage to his achievements. When one has won honor in any calling, attaining eminence and distinction, as in art or in a profession, there is no lack of voices to speak commendation. Books are written, telling the stories of heroes who won great victories on land or sea. Poets weave their verses into garlands of honor for those who conquer in the world's battles. We have many volumes filled with the world's records of men who became famous, and women who became famous, rising from obscurity to greatness.

All this is well. But who tells the story of those who fail? Who sings the praises of him who goes down in the fight? Who tells of the heroism of him who is defeated in the battle, and falls wounded and overwhelmed? When the struggle is over, and the victors come out of the smoke and carnage in triumph, there is a jubilant shout to greet them; but who lifts up the cheer for the men who fell and died on the field? Yet were they any less brave than those who came unwounded from

the strife? Did the honor of the victory belong any less to them than to those who lived to hear the shout of conquest?

In all departments of life there are a few who seem to succeed, while the many seem to fail. Have all those who sink down, weary and broken-hearted, who fall out of the ranks, unable to keep up in the swift march, who do not get on in business, whose hopes are disappointed, and who drop in the dust of defeat, — have all those who seem to fail really failed?

“While the voice of the world shouts its chorus—its pæan
—for those who have won;
While the trumpet is sounding triumphant, and high to the
breeze and the sun
Glad banners are waving, hands clapping, and hurrying feet
Thronging after the laurel-crowned victors, I stand on the
field of defeat,
In the shadow with those who are fallen, and wounded and
dying, and there
Chant a requiem low, place my hand on their pain-knotted
brow, breathe a prayer,
Hold the hand that is helpless, and whisper: ‘They only the
victory win
Who have fought the good fight, and have vanquished the
demon who tempts us within;

Who have held to their faith unswayed by the prize that
the world holds on high;
Who have dared for a high cause to suffer, resist, fight,—
if need be to die.’”

When a great building is to be erected, deep excavations are made, and piles of stones are laid down in the darkness, only to be covered up and hidden out of sight by the imposing superstructure which rises high into the air. This foundation work receives no praise. It is not even seen by any human eye. It appears in a sense to be wasted work; yet we know that without it there would be no massive buildings towering in majestic proportions in the air. So, many men's lives seem to be failures, while in reality they have been built into the foundations of great temples. Their work is covered up and hidden out of sight, and makes no show before the world; but without it those who come after them could not have achieved the success which makes their names bright.

For a whole generation men are experimenting along some line; for example, in

electricity. Some of them almost succeed. They seem to be on the very edge of achieving what they are seeking; but success persistently and narrowly eludes them, and they die at last, broken-hearted over their failure. Then a new man arises, and takes the results of their experiments as a starting-point. He is successful, and all the world rings with his praises; yet he never could have brought the invention to this triumphant issue but for the long, patient experimenting of those who went before him, toiling, sacrificing — failing. Nearly every great discovery or invention that has proved a boon to the world, had a long history of such effort and failure behind its final success. Who will say that the men who wrought thus so unselfishly in obscurity, and without result or reward, really failed? They did their part in preparing the way. Their work was essential in its place. Should they not share the songs of victory which the world sings for the man who at last brings the invention to triumphant completion?

Recently a man, prospecting in the mining

regions of Arizona, found a remarkable natural bridge. It spans a deep cañon, forty-five feet in width. The bridge is made by a great agatized tree that lies across the gorge. Scientific men say that many ages since this tree was prostrated by some terrific storm, and fell across the cañon. By the effects of the water and of time, it has passed through many stages of mineralization, and is now a wonderful tree of solid agate. And there it lies, making an agate bridge over which men may pass from side to side. This tree seemed to be a failure when, that day in its prime, it was broken off by the storm and hurled to the ground. But, instead of being a failure, to what nobler use could it have been put than thus to become a bridge of agate, to stand for ages, and on which countless human feet may walk across the chasm?

This fallen tree is an illustration of countless human lives which have fallen and seemed to fail, but which in time have proved to be bridges over which others can walk to honor, success, and triumph. We are all daily pass-

ing over bridges built of the toils, sacrifices, and failures of those who have gone before us. The luxury, ease, and comfort we now enjoy cost other men tears, pain, and loss. We cross continually to our blessings and privileges, our promised lands, our joys, on the bridges built for us by those who failed.

“And I say again, Count you the cost
Of this bridge? To what is it nailed?
What are its bulwarks piled high—these
You cross to the city of ease?
Man, I tell you, 'tis built on the failed—
The fighters who lost.

Dryshod you reach your promised land now
On their failure—on those the world railed—
They the stuff of whom heroes are—
Who saw its light gleam from valleys afar,
And fought for it—died for it—failed—
No failure, I vow.”

Christ himself is the greatest example of this truth. His life was a failure as seen on the world-side. At three and thirty it was all over, the brightest light that ever shone on the earth quenched in the darkness of the cross. But now it is a bridge of agate,

over which millions are passing from sin to holiness, from sorrow to joy, from death to life, from earth to heaven. Christ said, "I am the way No man cometh unto the Father but by me." So his failure became the saving of the world. It built the bridge over the chasm between earth and heaven, on which all who are saved pass over. We live because he died.

So in smaller measure is it with thousands of human lives. They fail. They sink down in the dust and are forgotten. Their names are lost in the indistinguishable multitude. No fame, no remembrance, is theirs. But without them the world would have missed a portion of its blessing, and many lives, honored now, would have missed their honor. Many a man is living to-day in bright happiness—prosperous, successful, enjoying distinction—because his parents toiled, sacrificed, and—failed. None of us know what we owe to the past,—to those who have gone before us, to the lives that sank down in unmarked obscurity. They labored, and we are entered into their labors.

It is doubtful if any good man can make the most possible of his life in a worldly pursuit and yet be a loyal Christian. He may have brilliant powers, all the qualities that lead to success. If he were to devote all his energies without reserve to his chosen business, he could outstrip all his competitors, and win the highest place. But he is a Christian; and a Christian cannot live for this world's ambition alone, though he do it honestly and honorably, and though the ambition be altogether worthy, and yet be altogether faithful to his Master. He must serve his fellow-men as he passes through life. He must be as Christ to the weary and stumbling ones. He must turn aside oft-times, like the good Samaritan in his journey, to help those who are in need, whose cries break upon his ear. He may not press on in his ambition, heedless of love's duties.

Then, while he thus stays his feet to do service to those who need sympathy and help, his competitors in the race, not troubling themselves to heed the calls of distress about them, thinking only of winning the goal, gain upon

him, and pass him by. Men say he is foolish thus to permit himself to fail through his heart's tenderness and sympathy. But that is not failure which comes through pausing to comfort and bless others. Rather it is such ministries as these that alone redeem an earthly life from utter failure. The man who steels his heart against all appeals for pity and help, and goes remorselessly on to the goal of his ambition, without turning aside at the calls of need, finds no blessing in that which he achieves. But he who seeks first the kingdom of God, stopping in his busiest days to do good, and turning aside from his most ardent pursuits to minister to human want or sorrow, though his hands hold less of this world at the end, will be rich in the rewards of love's service.

Not every good man succeeds in worldly affairs. Not every true effort that is made has apparent success. Sometimes it is by failure that a man can do his best. Success in the undertaking can come only after many have sunk down without attaining. Nearly

always the first prophets and heralds of a new reform must perish in defeat, thus preparing the way, building the bridge over the chasm, for those who come after them to carry the reform to success. But surely it is just as glorious to do one's part in the essential preparatory stages, and then fall without sharing the victory, as it is to have one's part at the last among the victors.

We may set it down as an unalterable truth, however, that there can be no real failure when one is faithful to God and to duty. Sin is always a failure. The apparent success that men build up through unrighteousness is only a gilded picture. It has no foundation, no substance. It is an illusion. It will vanish in the presence of the divine judgment, as the morning mists vanish before the rising sun. But whatever men build up in truth and right is real as God himself. All truth is part of God, and is imperishable. No failure is possible when we work with God. "He that doeth the will of God abideth forever." Nothing may seem to come from the toil, the sacri-

fice, and the outpouring of precious life; but sometime, somehow, somewhere, there will be a harvest from every sowing. Not one grain of the holy seed of love can ever be lost. The life may sink away, and seem to have perished; but from its grave will come an influence which will be a blessing in the world. We need not care what we do, nor where we go, nor what comes of our work, if only we do God's will.

It is sweet to see the blessing come from our serving, to gather the fruit from our sowing, to witness the success of our work, if that be God's will for us; but whether we have this privilege or not, it is a comfort to know that nothing done in truth for God can ever fail, and that no service rendered in Christ's name can be in vain.

“I know that love never is wasted,
Nor truth, nor the breath of a prayer;
And the thought that goes forth as a blessing
Must live as a joy in the air.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE SIN OF NOT PRAYING FOR OTHERS.

Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep and goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

TENNYSON.

THERE is a Scripture word which suggests to us in a striking way the importance of praying for others. Samuel had been set aside by the people in their eagerness to have a king. For a moment their consciences were awakened to a sense of their sin; and they came to him, as they had done so often before, with a request that he would pray for them. His answer was: "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."

Perhaps we are not accustomed to think of praying for others in just this way, as a duty, the omission of which is a sin against God. We think of it as a privilege, but scarcely as a part of love's solemn duty. We are in danger of narrowing our prayers to ourselves and our own wants. We think of our own sorrows and trials, our own duties, our own work, our own spiritual growth, and too often do not look out of the window upon our friend's rough path or sore struggle. But selfishness in praying is one of the worst forms of selfishness. If ever love reaches its best and purest, it ought to be when we are standing before God.

Or our ceasing to pray for our friends may be from want of deep, earnest thought concerning them. We pray for them when they are sick or in sore trouble, but at other times we are not impressed with the truth that they need our prayers. Their wants or perils are not apparent to us. They seem to be happy. There is nothing of which we are aware in their life that appeals to our sympathy. We

see only the surface, and are oblivious to their deeper necessities or dangers. We forget that they are souls with immortal needs; that they have enemies whom we cannot see, who are seeking their hurt continually; that in this vast, complex life there are a thousand influences touching them which tend to work them injury; that only the hand of Christ can safely lead them through this perilous life; that they are to live forever, and that they have interests which project into eternity. We are apt to forget that our bright, happy, gentle, attractive friends without Christ are without true hope. We need to think of these deeper spiritual needs of those about us, lest we cease to pray for them, and so sin against God.

Another reason why some cease to pray for their friends is, that answers to prayers already offered in their behalf have been so long delayed. There are mothers, for example, who for weary years have been pleading for the salvation of children who still remain impenitent. In the unanswering of their supplications they lose faith and hope, and their prayer

languishes. The same is true of other prayers. Hearts fail in the long delays.

But deferred answers should not chill the warmth and earnestness of our asking. Delays are not refusals. God has his own time and way of granting our requests for others as well as for ourselves. There are some blessings it takes a great while to prepare. They are like fruit which cannot ripen until their season comes, and to give them at once would only be to put into our hand that which is unripe and unwholesome. There are purposes which God is working out in our friend's life through the sorrow, the loss, or the burden, which cannot be completed if our prayers are answered at once. It was more than twenty years before Jacob saw his prayers for his lost boy answered. We should not cease to pray because the answer tarries. Perhaps the coming of the blessing at last will depend upon our faithful continuance in prayer. If we faint, it will not come. It is a sad thing if deferred answers cause any of us to cease to pray for a careless friend. That is giving

him up; and when we give him up, and cease to make supplication for him, what hope has he remaining? There are no other chains to bind him about the feet of God.

Another reason why some persons cease to pray for those they have prayed for before, is something in these friends, or in their conduct, that has hurt or grieved them. There seemed such a reason in Samuel's case. He had given all his life to the interests of his people. He had spent all his years in serving them. It was good service too,—service which brought incalculable blessing to the nation. Yet in his old age, when his hair had grown gray, he was set aside by the people he had served so loyally and so unselfishly. Samuel might have ceased now to pray for the people who had proved so ungrateful to him, and had treated him so unkindly; and he would have seemed to do right. They did not deserve to be longer loved and remembered in his prayers, he might have argued justly. Many men would have grown bitter against the people who had so treated them.

Instead of this, however, Samuel says he will not cease to pray for them ; that it would be a sin against God for him to do this. No wrong treatment of him by them could absolve him from his duty of praying for them. Thus he exemplified the spirit of that love which found its complete revealing only in Christ.

Our duty of intercession is not limited to those who are kind and faithful to us. Any man can pray for those who are generous and loyal to him. But the sin of which Samuel spoke was ceasing to pray for those who had treated him most unworthily. The lesson for us is no less wide in its reach. We may not strike from our prayer-list those who have treated us with injustice or bitterness. Our Lord commands us to pray for those who despitefully use us. We sin against God if we cease to pray for the man who has harmed us and done us evil.

Why is it so important that we should pray for others? Why is it a sin to cease to pray for any? Why is prayer so important a duty?

Have we a real obligation to pray for others? Friendship without prayer lacks a vital quality. There is no other duty of friendship which rests upon us with deeper obligation than this of intercession. We know that we sin both against God and against our friend when we cease to show him kindness in word and deed. No kindnesses shown in act are so important and so essential a part of friendship as prayer for our friend.

“Yes, pray for whom thou lovest; if uncounted wealth
were thine,
The treasures of the boundless deep, the riches of the mine,
Thou couldst not to thy cherished friends a gift so dear
impart,
As the earnest benediction of a deeply prayerful heart.

Seek not the worldling's friendship; it shall droop and
wane ere long
In the cold and heartless glitter of the pleasure-loving
throng;
But seek the friend who, when thy prayer for him shall
murmured be,
Breathes forth in faithful sympathy a fervent prayer for
thee.”

Samuel said it would be a sin against the

Lord for him to cease praying for the people. It would be failing in a duty, and that is always a sin against God. We are to represent God in this world. He never ceases to love and care for his children. He is kind to the unthankful and the evil. He wants us to have the same spirit toward others that he has, — to be always interested in them. For us to be indifferent to the good of any human being is ungodlike. To cease to pray for any one is to fail in part of our duty.

Then, God has ordained that many of his blessings shall come to his children through prayer. He is ready to bestow upon them the favors of his love; but he would be inquired of to do it for them. He says, "Ask, and ye shall receive." That is, the gifts are within our reach, but they must be claimed; they wait to be sought. This is true of good things, both for ourselves and for others. We do not know how much we miss of the grace and help and fulness of life which God has in store for us, simply because we do not ask more largely. When we cease to pray for

ourselves, or when we ask only little things, we impoverish our life.

The same is true of prayer for others. God has blessings manifold for our children, — blessings which he is eager to put into their lives; but we must ask him for them. If we do not, the blessing will not be bestowed, and the responsibility for their missing it will be ours. We have illustrations of this in the stories of Christ's healings. Fathers and mothers came with their sick children, and at first they could not be cured because the parents had not faith. No doubt in many homes to-day children fail at least of fullest, richest blessing because of their parents' unbelief or small faith. Then, what shall we say of the altogether prayerless homes, where fathers and mothers love their children deeply and tenderly, and yet bow no knee in supplication for them? What a sad, irreparable wrong they inflict upon their children's lives! For the world is very full of peril for young lives. We grieve when a child dies; but we should remember that it is our living children who are really

in danger, not our dead, who are safe with God.

“ Lord, we can trust thee for our holy dead;
They, underneath the shadow of thy tomb,
Have entered into peace; with bended head
We thank thee for their rest, and for our lightened gloom.

But, Lord, our living! who on stormy seas
Of sin and sorrow still are tempest-tost!
Our dead have reached their haven; but for these,—
Teach us to trust thee, Lord, for these, our loved and lost.

For these we make our passion-prayer at night;
For these we cry to thee through the long day!”

The lesson is for all as well as for parents. Through prayer is God's ordained way of receiving blessings. God has comfort for men's sorrows; but you and I who see our friends in their grief must reach out our hands, and bring down the comfort by our intercession.

There is a Bible story of a battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites. Moses was on a hill-top, overlooking the conflict. While he held up his hands Israel prevailed; but when his hands grew weary and heavy, and sank down, the battle went against Israel. Our

friends are in the valley in sore conflict. While our hands are lifted up in intercession they are victorious ; but if we cease to pray for them, they falter and fail.

We do not know how much the blessing and saving of others depend upon our praying for them. We do not know how often men's failures, defeats, and falls are due to our having ceased to pray for them. We stand between God and needy lives, and are bidden to give ourselves no rest, but to cry continually to him for those about us. The healing of the world is in our intercessory prayer.

CHAPTER X.

ON GROWING OLD SUCCESSFULLY.

“ Old — are we growing old ?
Life blooms as we travel on
Up the hills, into fresh, lovely dawn ;
We are children who do but begin
The sweetness of life to win.
Because heaven is in us, to bud and unfold,
We are younger for growing old ! ”

A GREAT deal of advice is given to young people. Sermons are preached to them. Books are written for them, filled with counsels. No doubt the young need wise advice, solemn preaching, and paternal counsel. The world has many dangers for youth. Besides, character is formed into permanence in the early days. When this period has been safely passed through, guardian angels begin to breath more freely. Their solicitude relaxes.

But youth is not the only stage of life which has perils ; each period has its own. A great

many men break down at mid-life. Many whose youth and early manhood gave brightest promise fail utterly in some crisis when at their very strongest. Not all the wrecks of life occur in the early days. A majestic tree fell at its prime, — fell on a calm evening, when there was scarcely a breath of air stirring. It had withstood a century of storms, and now was broken off by a zephyr. The secret was disclosed in its falling. A boy's hatchet had been struck into it when it was a tender sapling. The wound had been grown over and hidden away under exuberant life, but it had never healed. There at the heart of the tree it stayed, a spot of decay, ever eating a little farther and deeper into the trunk, until at last the tree was rotted through, and fell of its own weight, when it seemed to be at its best. So do many lives fall when they seem to be at their strongest, because some sin or fault of youth has left its wounding and its consequent weakness at the heart. For many years it is hidden, and life goes on in strength. At last, however, its sad work is done, and at his prime the man falls.

One might suppose, however, that good old age, at least, is safe from moral danger. It has weathered the storms of many long years. It has passed through the experimental stages. The passions of youth have been brought under masterful control. Life is sobered, quiet, steady, strong, with ripened character, tried and secure principles, and with rich experience. So we congratulate the old man on having gotten well through life, where he can at last enjoy the blessings of restful years.

But really old age has perils of its own, which are quite as grave in their way as those of youth. Sometimes it does not fulfil the prophecy and the promise of the earlier years. Some men who live nobly and richly until they have passed the meridian of their days, lose in the beauty and splendor of their character, and in the sweetness of their spirit, as they move toward the sunset.

Old age has its temptations and perils. It is hard to bear the honors of a good and worthy life, and not be spoiled by them, as they gather about the head when the years

multiply. Some old men grow vain when they hear their names mentioned with honor, and when their good deeds are applauded. It is hard to keep the heart humble, and the life simple and gentle, when one stands amid the successes, the achievements, the ripened fruits, of many years of struggle, toil, and sacrifice, in the days of a prosperous old age. Some old men become self-conceited — quite too conscious of the good they have done, and the honor that gathers about their head. They grow garrulous, especially about themselves and their own part in the achievements of the past. They like to tell the stories of the things they have done.

The ease and freedom from care which sometimes come as the fitting reward of a life of hardship, self-denial, struggle, and toil, do not always prove the most healthful conditions, or those in which the character appears at its best. Some men who were splendid in incessant action, when carrying heavy loads, meeting large responsibilities, and enduring sore trials, are not nearly so

noble when they have been compelled to lay down their burdens, drop their tasks out of their hands, and step out of the crowding, surging ranks into the quiet ways of those whose great life-work is mainly finished. They chafe at standing still. Their peace is broken in the very days when it ought to be the calmest and sweetest.

They are unwilling to confess that they are growing old, and to yield their places of responsibility and care to younger men. Too often they make the mistake of overstaying their own greatest usefulness in positions which they have filled with fidelity and success in the past, but which, with their own waning powers, they can no longer fill acceptably and well as heretofore. In this respect old age puts life to a severe test. It is the part of true wisdom in a man, as he advances in years, to recognize the fact that he can no longer continue to carry all the burdens that he bore in the days of his strength, nor do all the work that he did when he was in his life's prime.

Sometimes old age grows unhappy and discontented. We cannot wonder at this. It becomes lonely, as one by one its sweet friendships and close companionships fall off in the resistless desolation which death produces. The hands that have always been so busy are left well-nigh empty. It is not easy to keep sweet and gentle-spirited when a man must stand aside and see others take up and do the things he used to do himself, and when he must walk alone where in former years his life was blessed with tender human companionships. Broken health also comes in, oftentimes, as a burden of old age, which adds to the difficulty of the problem of beautiful living.

These are some of the reasons why old age is a truer and sorer testing-time of character than youth or mid-life. New perils come with this period. Many men who live nobly and victoriously in the days of active struggle and hard toil, fail in the days of quiet and ease. While busy, and under pressure of duty, they prove true and faithful; but they

fail in the time of leisure, when the pressure is withdrawn.

We should set ourselves the task, however, of living nobly and victoriously to the very close of life. We should make the whole day of life beautiful, to its last moments. The late afternoon should be as lovely, with its deep, serious blue, and its holy, restful quiet, as the forenoon, with its stir and freshness, and its splendor and sunshine; and the sun-setting should be as glorious with its amber and gold as the sunrising with its glow and radiance.

The old, and those who are growing old, should never feel for a moment that their work, even their best work, is done, when they can no longer march and keep step in the columns with youth and strong manhood. The work of the later and riper years is just as important as that of the earlier years. It is not the same work, but it is no less essential in the world. "Young men for action, old men for counsel," said the great philosopher. The life that one may live in the

quieter time, when the rush and the strife
 are left behind, may be even more lovely,
 more Christlike, more helpful, than was the
 life of the more exciting, stirring time that
 is gone.

It may mean more in results, in real fruit-
 age, though lacking in stir and noise. Here
 is a parable of a beautiful old age:—

“ Yon is the apple-tree,
 Joints all shrunk like an old man’s knee,
 Gaping trunk half eaten away,
 Crumbling visibly day by day;
 Branches dead or dying fast,
 Topmost limb like a splintered mast;
 Yet behold in the prime of May,
 How it blooms in the sweet old way!

Heart of it brave and warm,
 Spite of many a wintry storm,
 Throbbing still with the deep desire,
 Burning still with the eager fire,
 Striving still with the zeal and truth
 Of the gladsome morning days of youth;
 Still to do and to be, forsooth,
 Something worthy of Him whose care,
 Summer or winter, failed it ne’er.
 This is motive for you and me,
 When we grow old like the apple-tree.”

The pathway of the righteous is compared to the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. A good life ought to grow more and more beautiful every day. The task of sweet, useful living is no less a duty when one has gotten through the years of mid-life, into the borders of old age, than it was in the days of strength. A man should not slacken his diligence, earnestness, faithfulness, prayerfulness, or his faith in Christ, until he has come to the very gate of eternity.

One of the perils of old age is just at this point. A man feels that his work is done, his character is matured, his reputation is established; and he is tempted to grow careless, as if it could not now matter much what he does or what he leaves undone. This is an error which sometimes proves very costly. There have been old men who in their very last years, for lack of the accustomed wisdom or restraint, have marred the beauty which through all their life their hands had been diligently and painstakingly fashioning.

Sometimes the fabric of a whole life-work is torn down in a few days or months of foolishness, when the watch is taken off the life, and discipline is relaxed.

We are not done with life in this world until the hands have been folded on the breast in their final repose; therefore we should not slacken our diligence for an instant. We should make the last moments beautiful with trust and faith and sweet patience and quiet peace and earnest usefulness, dying beautifully. Robert Browning says in "Rabbi Ben Ezra," —

“ 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.”

How shall we live so that we shall be sure of a successful and beautiful old age? For one thing, all the life, from youth up, must be true and worthy. Old age is the harvest of all the years. It is the time when whatsoever we

have sown we shall also reap. Wasted years, too, give a harvest — a harvest of regret and sorrow, of unhappy memories, and remorseful self-accusings. We are building the house, all along the years, in which we must live when we grow old. The old man may change neighbors or change countries, but he cannot get away from himself.

To have a golden harvest, we must sow good seeds. To have sweet memories, we must live purely, unselfishly, thoughtfully, with reverence for God and love for man. We must fill our hearts with the harmonies of love and truth along the years, if in the silence of old age we would listen to songs of gladness and peace.

The old should never let duties drop out of their hands. Duties may not be the same when years have brought feebleness, but every day to the close brings something for the hands to do. No old man has earned the right to be useless, even for a day. The old should never cease to look forward for the best of life. The year we are now living we should always make better than any year that is past. It was an old man,

with martyrdom imminent, who gave as his theory of life the forgetting of things that are past, and the stretching forth to things that are before.

Such a life never grows old. Even at fourscore it is "eighty years young," not eighty years old. It is a beautiful fancy that in heaven the oldest are the youngest, since all life is toward immortal youth. Why may it not be so of the good on earth? We need not grow old. We can keep our heart young — our feelings, affections, yearnings, and hopes young. Then old age will indeed be the best of life — life's ripeness, life's time of coronation.

"It is a favorite speculation of mine," said Dr. Chalmers, "that if spared to sixty years of age, we then enter the seventh decade of human life, and that this, if possible, should be turned into the Sabbath of our earthly pilgrimage, and spent sabbatically, as if on the shores of an eternal world, or, as it were, in the outer courts of the temple that is above, the tabernacle that is in heaven."

This is a beautiful thought, with a suggestion

which must commend itself to many devout people drawing toward old age. It does not imply a decade of idleness, or of selfish ease, but such a use of the life in its ripeness and richness of experience as shall shed upon the world the benignest influence and the holiest benediction.

“ Old — we are growing old:
Going on through a beautiful road,
Finding earth a more blessed abode;
Nobler work by our hands to be wrought,
Freer paths for our hope and our thought;
Because of the beauty the years unfold,
We are cheerfully growing old.

Old — we are growing old:
Going up where the sunshine is clear;
Watching grander horizons appear
Out of clouds that enveloped our youth;
Standing firm on the mountains of truth;
Because of the glory the years unfold,
We are joyfully growing old.

Old — we are growing old:
Going into the gardens of rest
That glow through the gold of the west,
Where the rose and the amaranth blend,
And each path is the way to a friend;
Because of the peace that the years unfold,
We are thankfully growing old.”