

ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER

A DAY AT A TIME, AND
OTHER TALKS ON LIFE
AND RELIGION

Archibald Alexander
A Day at a Time, and Other
Talks on Life and Religion

*http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=24166596
A Day at a Time, and Other Talks on Life and Religion:
ISBN <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/39309>*

Содержание

I	5
II	11
III	16
IV	22
V	27
VI	32
VII	37
VIII	43
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	45

Arch. Alexander
A Day at a Time, and Other
Talks on Life and Religion

"As thy days, so shall thy strength be."
(DEUTERONOMY xxxiii. 25.)

I

A DAY AT A TIME

If any one of us knows a word of hope or has picked up a message of comfort anywhere, it is his plain duty to share it, these days. We owe it to each other to cherish as exceeding precious, and to pass on to others, every brave and helpful word or thought we come across.

Well, here is a splendid one for us all, and especially for those who have most at stake in this great conflict, and are looking anxiously ahead and fearing what the weeks may have in store, – "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." It is a great and glorious promise. And just a couple of verses further on, it is caught up and included in one greater still, – "The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms." Fathers and mothers, with a boy, or more than one, perhaps, away on active service for King and country, this promise is for you, to take to your heart and hide there, like some precious secret between you and God, – As thy days, so shall thy strength be.

Notice carefully, however, how the promise runs. Not, mark you, as your life is, not as your years are, not even as your weeks are, but as your days, so shall your strength be. For each day as it comes, God's promise is that strength will be given you, but just for a day at a time. The way to live under any circumstances, but

especially in these hard weeks, is just a day at a time. Leave to-morrow with God, my brother, until it comes. That is what the Word of God lays upon you as a duty. Live this day at your best and bravest, trusting that God's help will not fail you. And for the duties and trials of to-morrow, however hard and heavy, believe that strength for that day also will be given you, when it comes.

You cannot have failed to observe what an important place this way of living had in the teaching of Jesus Christ. He was always trying to get men to trust the coming days to God, and to live fully worthily and nobly to-day. He was dead against the practice of adding to the burdens of to-day fears and forebodings for to-morrow. It is in love to us, in His desire to save us unnecessary pain, that He bids us remember that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

In one of R. D. Blackmore's fine open-air stories, there is a character who talks at length about horses. After comparing good ones and bad ones in their behaviour the first time they breast a hill with a load behind them, he sums the matter up thus: "Howsoever good a horse be, he longeth to see over the top of the hill before he be half-way up it." The man who is listening to him confesses that he has often felt that way himself! And I do not know that there are many of us who can claim to be guiltless in this respect. Yet it is perfectly plain that the men and women who are living the bravest and most successful lives around us, and are proving towers of strength to others, are those who have learned the art of living just a day at a time, and of depending upon God

for strength for that day in the simplest and most trustful fashion.

Why, my brothers, if God our Father had meant us to carry on our backs the fears and anxieties of the coming days, He would surely have told us more about them! If we were meant to bear to-day what next week holds, surely we should have been permitted to see into next week. But we cannot. We cannot see a single second ahead. God gives us Now, and To-Morrow He keeps to Himself. Is there anything wiser or better we can do with our to-morrows than just to leave them quietly and trustfully with Him?

The habit of living ahead, as so many of us do, prevents us from getting the full taste and flavour of the happiness and blessing that are ours to-day. I defy any man to be adequately grateful for this day's sunshine if he is worrying all the time about the chance of a bad day to-morrow. Mark Rutherford, merciless self-critic as he was, takes himself severely to task for this habit in his "Autobiography." "I learned, alas! when it was almost too late," he says, "to live in each moment as it passed over my head, believing that the sun as it is now rising, is as good as it ever will be." Yes, in great things as well as in little things, that is true. If we are to live our lives at the full, and anywhere on the Christian level, the only way is to live one day at a time.

Our forefathers in the pulpit were fond of reminding their hearers to live each day as if it were their last. And in solemn truth, without being in the least morbid, that is the way to live. If a man knew that after to-day, he would not smell the sea again, how fully and gratefully would he fill his lungs with its ozone to-

day! If he knew he were not to enter God's House again, how earnestly and sincerely and reverently he would join in its worship to-day! Yes, but the point is, why should his hope, that he has other days to come, prevent him taking out of this day all that he possibly can? Why should this day be any less prized, because others in all probability will follow it?

But the great value of this word is the comfort of it to those who are anxious and fear the coming days. And which of us is not in that category? I do not suppose there is one of my readers upon whom, somehow or other, the war has not levied its tax. Nearly every one has somebody belonging to him or her who is in this gigantic struggle, and whose welfare is a matter of real concern. And, closer still, there are fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, whose very dearest are "in it" or are getting ready to do their share. They have joined, and we are proud that they have joined, for this is a cause that ennobles every mother's son who fights for it. But who shall say what the mother's thoughts are, these days? How proud, and justly proud, the father is that his boy has played the man, and offered himself to his King and for his country! But only God, who made the father-and the mother-heart, knows what the surrender costs. And only God knows how eagerly and anxiously they look ahead to try to see what the future may hold.

And, knowing that, He sends His comfort to you, fathers and mothers. The comfort of His promise, – As thy days, so shall thy strength be. Just a day at a time, my friend! Do not take fears for

next month on your shoulders now. You will get strength given you for to-day, certain and sure, and when next month comes, the strength and comfort for that day will come too, as certain and as sure. Be not over-anxious about the morrow. Leave your to-morrow, and your soldier-son, in God's hands. You can do nothing more at the best, and this is the best. But it is such a mistake to do anything less. Leave all your to-morrows with God-it is what He wants you to do-and humbly and gratefully take from His hands His gift of To-day, and the strength that comes with it. If that be not enough-and it is not enough for God has said more-when that is not enough, still your heart a moment, and listen! And you will hear, beneath that promise for to-day, like the grand deep tones of an organ, the magnificent diapason of the Father's constant love and mindfulness, – "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." And surely that is enough!

"So for To-morrow and its needs
I do not pray,
But keep me, guide me, help me, Lord,
Just for To-Day."

PRAYER

O Lord our God, who dost appoint the way for each of us,

give us the grace to trust that as Thou hast helped us hitherto, so, in Thy great mercy, Thou wilt bless us still. We do not ask to see the distant scene. Keep us, and our beloved, this day; and in quietness and confidence teach us to leave to-morrow with Thee, our Father. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

"The Spirit of life was in the wheels."
(EZEKIEL i. 21.)

II

GOD IN THE WHEELS

The prophet Ezekiel once had an extraordinary vision of God. He tries to tell us about it, but his description seems to be a meaningless jumble of cherubim, and wheels, – wheels within wheels, complex, wonderful, unresting. Behind all, he saw the Glory of God. And again and again he tells us that "the Spirit of Life was in the wheels."

Now that at least is intelligible, and it is a good thing for us to think about. The Spirit of God is in the wheels.

I want to suggest to you that He is in the wheels of industry. We have no hesitation in saying that God gives the farmer his harvest, and we actually thank Him for it in His temple. A shepherd with a lamb in his arms is for a pastoral people like the Jews the very image of the Saviour God. But men who dwell in towns, and work in mills and factories and yards and railways, or who control or manage such places, have little to do with either corn or sheep. Is it not worth while to remind them that God is also in the wheels? Do you remember how Kipling's old chief engineer Macandrew believed that his twin monsters, driving the liner onward on her way, sang their hourly hymn of praise to God? And why not? From all the wheels of industry and man's inventiveness, goes there not up to Him a praise as real as the

song of His little birds?

Where two or three gather together on Lord's days, God is truly and graciously present. But I want you to remember that out in the noisy moving world of industry and business, God is present also, guiding, controlling and bringing His long, long plans to pass. It is by His decree that all the countless wheels of traffic and production turn and spin, for He needs them all, and has brought them into being by the hands of men, and they are His, as the Church is His. I would not have you, as Christian men, look upon your week-day world with its mechanism and its traffic, that world of yours that goes so literally upon wheels, as a province of life very far remote from the presence of God. I would remind you rather that God's spirit is in those wheels, that they move at His bidding, and that they are working out His purposes upon the earth.

I would suggest, further, that God is in those wheels whose turning brings us Change. If you will allow the figure, I would say that God is in the wheels of Change and time.

As we grow older, we resent more and more the constant alteration of the surroundings of life. It saddens us that there should be such a continual moving on. But perhaps it is in the realm of doctrine and practice that changes hurt and perplex us most. Godly old customs die out. The face of truth seems to alter. Old notes in religion disappear and new ones take their place, and we are sorely tempted to ask if it be possible that the children can know God better or serve His Christ more truly than their

fathers. Ah yes, from forty years and upwards, men are very apt to have a quarrel with change. They resent it, and would spike Time's wheels if they could.

Forgetting that the Spirit of God is in those very wheels. Change is God's method and His blessing. The Bible does not envy the man who has no changes. It is afraid for him, afraid that for want of them, he may settle on his lees, and forget the fear of God.

Of course, no one will defend every new fashion, or assert that everything recent is an improvement on what went before. But I, for one, do believe that generation after generation men are moving up, being shepherded up, the long slope of history nearer to God. I believe that God's promise is that He will do better for us than at the beginnings, and I believe He is keeping His promise. I must believe that the history of this world which man rough hews, in spite of all the wars-being shaped by God Himself, or else there is no God at all. And so I would say to those who distrust the continual changes of life, and would fain stop the wheels that turn on and on and never halt, "Fear not! Be of good courage! For a back of all change is God our Father, and it is His Spirit that is working in the wheels."

Again, I would suggest to you that God is in the wheels that shape your own lot and mine. The wheels of Chance, they are sometimes called, the mere whirligig of destiny, as if the world were some blind irresponsible machine grinding on in the dark, and heeding not which or how many lives were broken in its teeth.

And I grant you that there be times when that idea seems feasible. For life is full of mysterious happenings, and chance sometimes seems the most probable explanation. The tragedy of Job is always being played somewhere. There are men who up to a certain point in life have known nothing but good fortune, and after that, nothing but disappointment and disaster. Out of a blue sky the bolt may fall on any one; while from clouds lowering and heavy, it is waited for, expected and dreaded-and never comes! The merest knife-edge of circumstance sometimes affects results out of all proportion to its importance. "A grain of sand in a man's flesh" as Pascal remarks, "has changed the course of Empires." Yes, I grant you, there be times when the blind chance theory does suggest itself.

But by an overwhelming majority the instinct of man is against it. And best of all, Jesus Christ, our supreme authority, has pledged Himself in His life and death, that the Ruler and Disposer of all events is Eternal Love. We have learned from Jesus to say and to trust "Our Father who art in Heaven." We know and believe that whatever is to come falls not by chance, but is sent and permitted by the Love of God, who makes no mistakes. Taught and inspired by Jesus, many thousands of men and women have committed themselves and all their interests-home, health, happiness, reputation, loved ones-to the keeping of God the Father, and known by the peace that came to them, that it was a real transaction.

Soulless wheels of destiny! say some. The blind mechanism

of law! Ah, no, Jesus is the refutation of that. Law there is, and mechanism there must be. But neither blind nor soulless. For, above all, is the Father Love of God, and it is His spirit that is guiding and governing the wheels.

Wheels of Industry, Wheels of Change, Wheels of Destiny.
And God's Spirit in them all!

PRAYER

O Lord our God, to whom not only the Church but our whole work-a-day world belongs, give us the purged sight that can see Thy tokens there. Deliver us from all foolish fear of changes since the goad moving all things onward is in our Father's hand. And help us to be sure that whatsoever befalleth us and ours has been permitted and appointed by a Love that passeth knowledge. Amen.

*"The just shall live by faith."
(ROMANS i. 17.)*

III

A TRIPLE BEST

Some time ago I came across the life-motto of George Stephenson, the "father of the locomotive," as he has been called, the man whose brains and sagacity made possible the network of railways which spreads now over the earth. The crystallised experience of such a life is worth studying. Here, then, was Stephenson's working formula: – "Make the best of everything; think the best of everybody; hope the best for yourself."

First, **MAKE THE BEST OF EVERYTHING**. In every set of circumstances possible or conceivable, there are always, at any rate, two ways of acting. You can look for the helpful, bright, and hopeful things, and "freeze on" to these meantime. Or, you can select all the doleful, sombre aspects, and sit down in the dust with them. Now, if it did not matter which a man did, there would be no good saying any more. But it has long since become abundantly clear that the man who makes the best of his circumstances, however hard they be, comes most happily out of them in the end. In other words, it pays to make the best of things. It is the cheery people who recover quickest when they are sick. There are men who, if their house should fall in ruins about them, will contrive some sort of shelter meantime with the broken beams! That is the type that wins out in the end somehow;

these are the men to whom the miracles happen—who never know when they are beaten, who will face the most tremendous odds with "the half of a broken hope" for a shield, who are never done until they are dead. What makes for success or failure in a man is nothing external to him at all. It is something within him. It is the temper of his spirit. It is the way he captains his own soul.

The other day I saw a photograph of a backyard. It was a little bit of a place, of the most forlorn appearance, littered with tin cans, overgrown with weeds, and hemmed round with blank walls of brick. But it came into the hands of a man who believed in making the best of things. Another photograph showed that same backyard after a year had passed. It was still as small as ever, still overlooked by high walls and surrounded by chimneys. But it was now a perfect little oasis of beauty amid a wilderness of bricks and slates. Will anybody deny that that spirit pays?

Right up the scale, from little things to the highest things, the man who looks for the shining possibilities and follows them, is the man on whom, in our short-sighted way, we say that Fortune smiles. Rather, he smiles in such a determined way to Fortune, that she has at length to smile back!

Nobody pretends that it is easy, when we have failed, to gather our powers together and try again. But nearly all the big men have had to do that very thing. It certainly is not easy, when you have a heavy burden of your own, to spare a cheery word or a hand of sympathy for somebody who is really much better off, but there are plenty of people doing it at this moment. Nero's palace

is the last place in this world where you would expect to find a company of loyal Christian folk. Yet there were such people there, "the saints of Cæsar's household." And the grace of God that made that possible can achieve all these lesser wonders too.

Second, **THINK THE BEST OF EVERYBODY**. There is a winsome legend that Jesus once revealed Himself in this way: – A knot of idlers had gathered in the street round a dead dog. One remarked how mangy and unkempt its hide was. Another said, "What ugly ears!" But a stranger, who had come forward, said, "Pearls are not whiter than its teeth!" And men said to one another, "This must be Jesus of Nazareth, for nobody but He would find something good even in a dead dog." Certainly it is the mark of the most Christlike men and women that they delight rather in emphasising the merest speck of goodness than in denouncing the too visible evil. We can, all too easily, see the fault in another. What we cannot see is the heart of the defaulter, the weight of temptation he struggled under, and his bitter inner penitence. "Granted," as Carlyle says, "the ship comes into harbour with shrouds and tackle damaged; the pilot is blameworthy. He has not been all-wise and all-powerful. But, to know how blameworthy, tell us first whether his voyage has been round the globe, or only to Ramsgate and the Isle of Dogs."

The way to get the best out of people is to think the best about them. Let a man see that you have good hopes of him, and recognise what is best in him, and, in ways of which science can give no explanation, you add to his chances of reaching better

things. In any case, who would not wish to stand on Christ's side rather than on Judas's. "This ointment might have been sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor." That is Judas. "Let her alone. Why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work in me. She hath done what she could." That is Jesus Christ.

Third, – Don't leave yourself out of the picture. HOPE THE BEST FOR YOURSELF. George Eliot, in her "Scenes of Clerical Life," gives, in one chapter, an account of how the Rev. Amos Barton is criticised and discussed in his parish. In the next chapter we see the Rev. Amos himself going on his way blissfully unconscious of the poor opinion in which he is held, believing quite honestly in himself, and not a little proud of his abilities. "We are poor plants," says this keen student of character, "buoyed up by the air vessels of our own conceit." And a blessed thing, too, when you think of it! If we only knew all the disparaging remarks people make about us, we should never face up to our duties at all. What helps us along is our innocent belief in our powers, in the esteem in which we are held-our little conceits, if you like. Since they send us to our tasks with more spirit, and keep us at them with more determination, aren't they good things in their way? They are indeed just a lower form of that hope that we are speaking of-Hope's poor relations.

If these are of such value, how much more pure quiet steady Hope itself, purged of all pride and undue self-esteem? Hope the best for yourself, and you are already a good way on the road to it. Suggestion is a tremendously powerful instrument, even

when you make it yourself. By self suggestion, the psychologists tell us, you can influence your actions, your character, and your general outlook in a wonderful fashion, either to your advantage or your hurt. Therefore, they say, be careful never to suggest evil to yourself. Never say to yourself, "I'm going to make a mess of this," or "I am not fit for that." Suggest success, happiness, health, and you beckon them to you. Hope the best for yourself, and you pave the way for its coming.

On higher planes, the same holds true. Hope on, and, though you fall you will rise again. Believe that you will be enabled to face your trouble or temptation, and you will be brought through it somehow. Even when the end of life is near, hope still, for beyond this best there is a better, and God's road winds uphill all the way.

But, you say, this is just faith. I know it is. Run your hopes for yourself up as high as you can reach, and they will touch God and become faith. That is why you are to hope the best for yourself. Because-God. Because God the Father loves you, and desires the best for you too. I believe in the optimism which Stephenson's motto embodies, because I believe in the Fatherhood of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why I counsel you to go on hoping that the best is yet to be. Not that we can earn it at all, or that we deserve it at all. But-because God, our Father. And, for the daring and faith of that saying, this sufficient ground. – Because-Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Help us all, Heavenly Father, to meet the discipline of life with stouter hearts. May we all try harder to cultivate the Christ-like mark of charity. And spite of our many sins and shortcomings, and our poor love of Thee, grant us the courage to believe that all things, in Thy great Love for us, are working together for our good. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

*"He that observeth the wind
shall not sow, and he that
regardeth the clouds shall not
reap."*

(ECCLESIASTES ii. 4.)

IV

FINICAL FARMING

When a man like the writer of Ecclesiastes gives his views on life, it is worth everybody's while to listen. A tabloid of experience is worth a ton of theory. And it is from his own knowledge of men and experience of life that he has discovered that "he that observeth the wind shall not sow, and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap."

Was ever a temper of mind, that we all know something about, more neatly hit off than that? You can see the very picture which this wise preacher had before his eyes. Agricola was a farmer in his parish who would not sow his fields unless the wind was blowing soft and gentle from a certain direction, and the clouds were just as he wished to see them. He held there was no hope of a harvest unless wind and clouds were right. And I observed, says the wise man, that Agricola, my farmer friend, waiting for the exactly suitable conditions, never got his seed in at all.

He was speaking chiefly about benevolence and charity when he used this figure. And that is one reason why we need to give heed to it. For ours is an age of charity. We give more to the poor and needy to-day than ever any nation gave before. It is said, indeed, that a good deal of our giving is not very wise. Our charities overlap. The truly necessitous are forgotten, and

the improvident, the lazy, and the wasteful reap the largest share. Certainly that is one of the perils of charity-giving. But I question very much if, in our efforts to avoid it, we are not running the risk of falling into a graver mistake still, namely, of observing the wind overmuch before we sow. If I refuse to give my mite for Christ's sake till I have made perfectly certain that it will not be misused, if we withhold our subscription from a charity till we are assured that it is managed in the very most economical fashion, it will end in us giving nothing at all. There is, of course, a reasonable amount of inquiry that is not only legitimate but necessary. Just as there is a regarding of the clouds before reaping which is simply wise. But, to wait till every scruple is satisfied, till every risk has been eliminated and there is not a cloud in the sky, is to wait for a state of matters that may be long enough in coming. Meantime the needy person may die; or the corn blacken in the fields.

Charity, however, is but a small part of Christian benevolence. The law of Christ says "neighbour" whether he be poor or not. He is in trouble, and I feel inclined to visit him. Must I wait till I am sure he will not misunderstand my motive? I have it in my heart to forgive him. Shall I defer the reconciliation till I am convinced he will not offend again? Or I have hurt and offended him, and wish to apologise. Had I not better wait till I know that he will not reject my advances? The wise man's answer to all these questions is an emphatic No. If you wait for all that, he says, you will wait too long, and the chance will go past. Wait till the wind and the

clouds are just as you would wish them, and you will neither sow nor reap at all.

What to do, then? The wise man answers: "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand, for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." Just because you can never fully calculate what the result of your labours may be, give up trying. Don't trouble about it, but do what comes to your hand at the time. If it is sowing time, don't wait for the perfect day. If the weather will do at all, sow thy seed in the morning, and in the evening do not stop. In other words, Take life more royally. Do not be deterred by its ordinary risks. Seize your chance like a brave man. You do not know, of course, whether that seed you sow will prosper or not. But sow it, all the same. Don't let the fact that you don't know cause you to hold your hand. It is just because you do not know but that the kindness which you offer your neighbour may be ill-requited, that there is a royal free-handed self-forgetfulness in offering it. That a man should live his life and do his good deeds with a certain dash and carelessness of consequence—that, the Preacher thought the ideal of noble living. And when we measure it by the standard of Him who said, Do good and lend, hoping for nothing again, it does not seem to come so very far short.

For, of course, there are the continual surprises that life holds for faith. If only the corn reaped when the clouds were just right was safely gathered in, then indeed we might feel that we

could not be too careful. But what do we find again and again? Why, we find that men who have had the faith to sow when the day was by no means perfect have been blessed beyond their expectations. We find our barns full and running over, though we reaped on a cloudy day. We have seen men cast their bread upon the waters, where you would say it was certain to be lost, and find it again, after many days. It's perfectly true that you don't know whether shall prosper this or that. Yet how often have you been surprised to find that where you thought you knew, you were proved mistaken, and where you dealt in faith, it stood justified beyond your dreams.

And so, the end of the matter for the Preacher is, once more, Live your life royally, with a certain loving wastefulness, and an easy disregard of calculations. Do all the good you can, and do it with a free hand, not asking to see your harvest before you sow, but taking your risk of it, and leaving the outcome with God. "Cast your bread on the waters, and you will find it after many days."

But what of the bread one has cast on the waters, only to see it carried away, apparently of no use to anybody? What of the faith that has not been justified? What of the good done to the ill-deserving, of the kindly-meant act repaid with indignity and scorn? It is a hard question, not easy to answer, not fully to be answered at all. "After many days," said the Preacher. And there is no sign yet, we say. Patience, brothers, patience! God's day is not yet done. When the days have run out to the end, it will

be time enough to say if we miss the bread returning. We shall be better able to count the gains and the losses, if there are any then, – when the "days" are done.

PRAYER

Teach us, O Lord and Master, the high and difficult lesson that only those who lose their lives shall truly find them. Show us that the manna hoarded in miserly fashion is always touched by Thy curse. In small things as in great, may this be a token that we are Thy disciples, that virtue also goeth out of us. Amen.

*"But when Jesus heard
that, he said unto them, they
that be whole need not a physician,
but they that are sick."*

(MATTHEW ix. 12.)

V

THE DOCTOR

Jesus is Himself the best witness as to what He was, and what He wished to do for men. It is a fact, moreover, for which we cannot be too thankful that, in explaining Himself, Jesus used not the language of doctrine, but living figures and symbols which the humblest and youngest could not fail to understand.

When, for example, He compared Himself to a shepherd leaving the ninety and nine in the fold and braving the darkness and the steep places that he might bring back the one that had wandered, He opens a window into His own love for men which is worth pages of description. For those who are familiar with the daily life and work of a shepherd, it means a great deal that Jesus waits to be the Shepherd of men.

But, in these very different days of ours, there are multitudes in streets and tenements who have never seen a shepherd, and know not what manner of life is his. So that one is glad that Jesus gave Himself other names as well. When Matthew Arnold met the pale-faced preacher in the slums of Bethnal Green, and asked him how he did-

"Bravely," he said, "for I of late have been
Much cheered with thoughts of Christ, the Living Bread."

If that name for Christ brought him comfort, another preacher may be allowed to confess that he has often been cheered and helped by the thought of Jesus as the Good Physician. I am glad that in effect, at least, if not in actual words, He called Himself by that name.

This is His apology for consorting with publicans and sinners, for being so accessible to those who had lost caste and character. He says it is the sick who need a Physician, not those who are well. And His defence implies that Jesus regarded Himself as being in a true sense a Physician, not for outward ills merely, but for the whole man, body, mind, and spirit.

The days were, as you know, when priest and physician were one calling; and it is doubtless to the advantage of both vocations that their spheres are now distinct. But it may be, and I think it is, unfortunate that Jesus should be regarded by many as so entirely identified with the priestly side of life and the priestly calling. It is beyond question that a faithful priest is, in his degree, a mirror of Christ, and helps men to see Him more clearly. But it is also true-and a truth worth underlining in these days-that the Doctor, too, is a symbol of what Christ means to be to men-nay, more, that there are respects in which the figure of a beloved physician of to-day comes nearer to the reality of the living human Christ than any other calling in the world.

It is a sure and unique place which the Doctor holds in the esteem and confidence of the community. He is the most accessible of all professional men, the most implicitly trusted,

and, I think, the best beloved. At all hours of the day and night he is ready to give his services to those who need him. His mere presence in the sick room inspires confidence. In the poor districts of town and city especially, he is more really the friend and confidant and helper of everybody than any other person whatever. As no other man does, the Doctor goes about continually doing good. His life is a constant self-sacrifice for his fellow-men. He wears himself out in the interests of the needy. He runs risks daily from which other men flee. He asks not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and often and literally he gives his life a ransom for many.

And I do not know what we have been thinking of that we have not oftener made use of this as Christ's claim for Himself, that we have not told the ignorant and the very poor especially, who know far more about the Doctor than they do about the Church, who are, in fact, shy of all that is priestly, but who do understand and appreciate the Doctor, I say, I do not know why we have not oftener told them to forget that Jesus is the King and Head of the Church and remember only that He is the best of all Physicians. That Christ is compassionate, sympathetic, and approachable, like the Doctor, would be veritable good news to many a poor ignorant soul who is mightily afraid of His priests.

The word which comes to our lips when we seek to characterise the life and work of the true Doctor is Christlike. And big as the title is, it is deserved. In sacrifice and self-forgetfulness, in his care most for those who most need him,

in the way he identifies himself with his patient, bearing with, because understanding, his weakness and petulance and fears, and seeking all the while only to heal and help and save him, there is no more Christlike character or calling in the modern world than the Doctor.

I am the happy possessor of an engraving—a gift from one whose calling is to teach doctors—of Luke Fildes' famous picture. Most of you doubtless are familiar with it. It represents the interior of a humble home where a little child lies critically ill. The father and mother, distracted with grief, have yielded their place beside the couch to the Doctor, who sits watching and waiting, all-absorbed in the little one's trouble. It is a noble face, strong, compassionate, resourceful, gentle; and if the Eternal Christ of God is to be represented to us in His strength and gentleness by any human analogy or likeness whatever, as He wished to be, and indeed must be, no finer figure could be found, I think, than that, none more certain to draw out the reverence and gratitude and trust of men.

Men of all grades and classes appeal to and trust the Doctor. But how many of them realise that Jesus desires that men should come to Him and trust His willingness to help and save them, just as they would do to some good physician? How many men who have found comfort by taking their fears and forebodings to the Doctor and hearing his authoritative "Go in peace!" know or realise that just so would Jesus have us bring Him our unworthiness and shame and sin? Jesus never preached at those

whom His compassion drew to Him. He never lectured them, He just helped them, and that at once. He lifted them to their feet and gave them a new hope. He, straightway, in God's name, assured them of forgiveness.

Ah, if men only understood that Jesus is to be found to-day down among the world's burdened and weary souls, not as a Priest begirt with ceremony and aloof from daily life, but as a Physician, approachable, helpful, human, who sees and pities their weakness, and longs to save them and help them to their best. If men only understood that!

PRAYER

We come to Thee, Thou Good Physician, with all our ills and fears. We would whisper in Thine ear the troubles that frighten and shame us. Surely Thou wilt hear. Draw near us in Thy strength and Pity, and in Thy Mercy heal us all. Amen.

*"Whatsoever thy hand findeth
to do, do it with thy might,
for there is no work nor device
nor knowledge nor wisdom in
the grave whither thou goest."
(ECCLESIASTES ix. 10.)*

VI

WELL AND NOW

In popular and condensed form, the golden rule according to Ecclesiastes is, "Do it well and do it now." His own words are, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work nor device nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest." We want to let that precept soak into our minds for a little.

DO IT WELL. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Among the lesser joys of life there are few that thrill one with a more pleasurable sense of satisfaction than that which goes with the bit of work finished, rounded-off and done as well as one can do it. No matter what the job may be, if it is worth doing at all, or if it is one's business to do it, it is not difficult to recognise in the curious inward glow over its honourable completion, a token of God's good pleasure, some far-off echo of His "Well done!"

It is a truism which never loses its point that it is enthusiasm that commands success. In her weird book called "Dreams," Olive Schreiner tells the parable of an artist who painted a beautiful picture. On it there was a wonderful glow which drew the admiration of all his compeers, but which none could imitate. The other painters said, Where did he get his colours? But though

they sought rich and rare pigments in far-off Eastern lands they could not catch the secret of it. One day the artist was found dead beside his picture, and when they stripped him for his shroud they found a wound beneath his heart. Then it dawned upon them where he had got his colour. He had painted his picture with his own heart's blood! It is the only way to paint it, if the picture is to be worth while at all. If we would have the work that we do live and count, our heart's blood must go into it. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.

What magnificent heart-stirring examples are coming to us every day just now, from sea and battle-field, of the good old British virtue of sticking in gamely to the end and "seeing the thing through!" If the stories of the old English Admirals are calculated, as Stevenson says, to "send bank clerks back with more heart and spirit to their book-keeping by double entry," shall not the story that unfolds day by day of what our own kith and kin are doing, nerve and inspire us all to "do OUR bit," to face up to OUR duty, humdrum and ordinary though it be, with the same grit and energy, with the same determination to see it through, and make as good a job of it as we can?

The Preacher has his reason for this advice. Because, he says, some day you will have to stop and lay down your tools, and that will be the end. No more touching botched work after that. No going back to lift dropped stitches then. Such as it is, your record will have to stand as you leave it, when Death raps at your door. Even for us in this Christian age, this ancient Preacher's reason

still stands valid and solemn. Do what you are at now as well as ever you can, for you shall pass that way no more again for ever.

The Apostle Paul, who expresses practically the same sentiment, gives a different reason. "Whatever ye do," he writes to the Colossians, "do it heartily as to the Lord." And that is the point for you and me. Not merely because we have a limited time to work, but because our work is Christ's service, we must do it heartily, with all our might. It is to the Lord. To us all in our different labours, in the things we work at day by day, and the worthy interests we endeavour to support, there comes this call that transforms the very commonest duty into an honourable obligation to a personal living Master-Whatever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord.

Yes, and **DO IT NOW**. For the amount of misery and suffering and remorse that is directly due to putting off the God-given impulse or generous purpose to some other season, is simply incalculable. If all the kind letters had been written when the thought of writing was fresh and insistent-ah me, how many burdened souls would have been the braver and the stronger. If only the friendly visit had been paid when we thought about it-and why wasn't it? "Never suppose," says Bagshot, "that you can make up to a neglected friend by going to visit him in a hospital. Repent on your own death-bed, if you like, but not on another's."

An old writer on agriculture says that there are seasons when if the husbandman misses a day he falls a whole year behind. But in life the result is often more serious still. When you miss the

day, you miss it for ever. Wherefore, let us hear the words of the Preacher. If we have a kind purpose in our heart towards any living soul, let us do it now. If we think of beginning a better way of living, let us begin now. If we propose to end our days sworn and surrendered servants and soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ, let us volunteer now, for this is the day of salvation.

It is said that a great English moralist had engraved on his watch the words, "The night cometh," so that whenever he looked at the time he might be reminded of the preciousness of the passing moment. The night cometh. How far away it may be, or how near to any one of us, no one of us knows. But near or far it cometh with unhalting step. Wherefore, whatsoever the thing be that is in your heart to do, great or little, for yourself or for others, for man or for God-DO IT NOW!

PRAYER

O Lord our God, by whose command it is that man goeth forth to his work and his labour until the evening, grant us all a more earnest regard for the sacredness of each passing moment, and help us to do with our whole heart whatsoever our hand findeth to do. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

*"And he washed his face,
and went out, and refrained
himself, and said, Set on bread."
(GENESIS xliii. 31.)*

VII

THE "WASHEN FACE" IN WAR TIME

That is what Joseph did when his feelings nearly overmastered him at the sight of his brother Benjamin standing before him, all unconscious of who he was. He "sought where to weep," says the record with quaint matter-of-factness, for of course he did not want his brothers to see him weeping just yet. So "he entered into his chamber and wept there." But Joseph's secret affections being thus recognised and allowed their expression, he had a duty to perform. He put a curb upon his feelings. He took a firm grip of himself. He "washed his face and went out, and refrained himself, and said, Set on bread." One cannot help admiring that. It was a fine thing to do.

And there are two classes of people in our own time in whom one sees this same attitude, and never without a strange stirring of heart.

The first and most honourable are those who have already tasted of the sorrows of war and lost some dear one in the service of King and country. We speak of the courage and sacrifice of our men, and we cannot speak too highly or too gratefully about that. But there is something else that runs it very close, if it does not exceed it, and that is the quiet heroism and endurance of

many of those who have been bereaved. Time and again one sees them facing up to all life's calls upon them with a marvellous spirit of self-restraint. God only knows how sad and sore their loss is. And upon what takes place when they enter into their chamber and shut the door and face their sorrow alone with God, it does not beseem us to intrude. Such sorrow is a sacred thing, but at least we know, and are glad to know, that God Himself is there as He is nowhere else. It is never wrong and never weak to let the tears come before Him. As a father understands, so does He know all about it. As a mother comforteth, so does the touch of His Hand quieten and console.

But what fills one with reverent admiration is that so many of those whose hearts we know have been so cruelly wounded have set up a new and noble precedent in the matter of courage and self-control. They are not shirking any of the duties of life. They are claiming no exemptions on the ground of their sorrow, and they excuse themselves from no duty merely because it would hurt. They wear their hurt gently like a flower in the breast. They carry their sorrow like a coronet. Out from their secret chambers they come, with washen face and brave lips to do their duty and refrain themselves. How beautiful it is! What a fine thing to see! The sorrowing mother of a noble young fellow I am proud to have known, said to a friend recently who was marvelling at her fortitude, "My boy was very brave and I must try to be brave, too, for his sake." Dear, gentle mother! One cannot speak worthily about a spirit so sweet and gracious as that. One can only bow

the head and breathe the inward prayer, "God send thee peace, brave heart!" But, surely, to accept sorrow in that fashion is to entertain unawares an angel of God! The feeling which underlies this new etiquette of sorrow with the washen face is not very easily put into words. But it rests, I think, upon the dim sense that the death which ends those young lives on this noble field of battle is something different from the ordinary bleak fact of mortality. If death is ever glorious, it is when it comes to the soldier fighting for a pure and worthy cause. There is something more than sorrow, there is even a quiet and reverent pride in the remembrance that the beloved life was given as "a ransom for many." When one thinks what we are fighting for, one can hardly deny to the fallen the supreme honour of the words "for Christ's sake." And it is not death to fall so. Rather is it the finding of life larger and more glorious still. It is that that marks the war-mourners of to-day as a caste royal and apart. It is that that moves so many of them by an inward instinct to wear their sorrow royally. Hidden in the heart of their grief is a tender and wistful pride. Lowell has put this feeling into very fine words:

"I, with uncovered head,
Salute the sacred dead,
Who went and who return not-
Say not so.

'Tis not the grapes of Canaan that repay,
But the high faith that fails not by the way.
Virtue treads paths that end not in the grave;

No bar of endless night exiles the brave,
And, to the saner mind,
We rather seem the dead that stayed behind."

The other class who are teaching us a new and better way to bear burdens are the friends at home of those who are on active service. Men, with sons in the trenches, are going about our streets these days almost as if nothing were happening, making it a point of honour not to let the lurking fear in their hearts have any outward expression. Wives and mothers and sisters are filling their hands and their hearts full of duties, and putting such a brave face on life that you would never suspect they have a chamber that could tell a different tale. It is absolutely splendid. There is no other word for it. I walked a street-length with a young wife recently whose man has been ill and out of the fight for a while. She hoped that he might have been sent home, and who can blame her? but he has gone back to the trenches instead. And how bravely and quietly she spoke of it! Pride, a true and noble pride in her beloved soldier, a resolute endeavour to do her difficult bit as uncomplainingly and willingly as he-it seemed to me that I saw all that in her brave smile. And I said to myself, "Here is the cult of the washen face! And a noble cult too! Britain surely deserves to win when her women carry their crosses so!"

It is easy, of course, to read the thought in their minds. Our men, they say, are splendid, why should we be doleful and despondent? They have made a new virtue of cheerfulness; let us

try to learn it too. They have offered everything in a cause which it is an honour to help in any degree; let us lay beside theirs the worthy sacrifice of the washen face and a brave restraint. Such, I imagine, is the unconscious kind of reasoning which results in the resolute and cheerful bearing you may see on all sides of you every day.

And wherever it is seen, it carries its blessing with it. Others with their own private burdens and anxieties are encouraged to hold on to that hope and cheerfulness which are just the homely side of our faith in God and in the righteousness of our cause.

The cult of the washen face is contagious. It spreads like a beneficent stain. And since it is entirely praiseworthy, we can but wish it to spread more and more. Those who come out from the chambers where they have kept company with sorrow or anxiety, to face life and duty with shining face and mastered feelings, are not only proving their faith in the Divine Strength, they are making a precious contribution to the moral stedfastness of the nation.

"And he washed his face and went out and refrained himself."
Good man!

PRAYER

We bless Thee, O God, for the assurance that Thine ear is ever open to our cry, that it is never wrong to take our sorrows and our cares to Thee. But help us also, endowed with Thy strength

in our secret chambers, to bear our burdens bravely in the sight of men. For Thy Name's sake. Amen.

*"But few things are needful,
or one." R. V. (margin).*
(LUKE X. 42.)

VIII

THE REAL MARTHA

When Jesus said, upon one occasion, that He had not where to lay His head, He was speaking the bitter and literal truth. He had really no home of His own, but was everywhere a wanderer, dependent on others for shelter and food; and though the New Testament draws a veil over all the hardships which that entailed even in the hospitable East, imagination can picture something at least of what the homelessness of Jesus must have meant.

But He had close and warm friends who made it up to Him as far as friends could, and of these were the two sisters, Martha and Mary, who with their brother, Lazarus, had a house in Bethany. This place was His haven and shelter, for "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." The sisters were unlike in disposition. Mary, we can imagine, was dreamy, meditative, perhaps a little delicate and fragile, and gifted with a quick and loving sympathy. Martha was robust, practical, energetic. Her way of showing the Master that she considered it an honour to have Him for a guest was to give Him the very best that her housewifely skill could suggest. No trouble was too much for her. And it is very possible that one of the charms which this home had for Jesus—one of the qualities which made it a real place of rest—was its well-ordered arrangements, the quiet, efficient, capable way in which things

were done. And whose was the credit for that? Martha's.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.