

The Thinning Ranks.

BY MARGARET E. SANGSTER.

The day grows lonelier; the air is chillier than it used to be. We hear about us everywhere. The haunting chords of memory. Dear faces once that made our joy. Have banished from the sweet home band; Dear tasks that were our loved employ Have dropped from out our loosened hand.

Familiar names in childhood given None calls us by, save those in heaven. We cannot talk with later friends Of those old times to which love lends Such mystic haze of soft regret; We would not, if we could, forget The sweetness of the bygone hours, So priceless are the faded flowers; But lonelier grows the waning day, And much we miss upon the way Our comrades who have heard the call That soon or late must summon all.

Ah, well! the day grows lonelier here, Thank God it doth not yet appear What thrill of perfect bliss awaits Those who pass on within the gates. O, dear ones who have left my side, And passed beyond the swelling tide. I know that you will meet me when I too shall leave these ranks of men And find the glorious company Of saints from sin forever free, Of angels who do always see. The face of Christ, and ever stand Serene and strong at God's right hand.

The day grows lonelier, the air With wailing strangely keena and cold, But woe in, O glad, O rare, What love notes from the hills of gold! Dear crowding faces gathered there, Dear blessed tasks that wait our hand, What joy, what pleasure shall we share, Safe anchored in the one home land!

Close up, O comrades, close the ranks; Press onward, waste no fleeting hour! Beyond the work, lo! the banks Of that full tide where life hath power, And Satan lieth underfoot, And sin is killed, even at the root. Close up, close fast the wavering line, Ye who are led by one divine. The day grows lonelier apace, But heaven shall be our trusting place. —The Congregationalist.

Power to the Faint.

There is something wonderfully helpful and satisfying in the assurances given to the Christian of divine co-operation for his benefit. Again and again he finds himself confronted by a situation that baffles him. He may be assailed by temptation so frequently and so insidiously that his resolution to resist gradually weakens; he may be standing before some open door of service, but because of his conscious unfitness for the work, hesitate to enter; he may be overwhelmed by a great and grievous sorrow, and discover that his hold on God is relaxing under the pressure of his grief; he may be so bowed down by the weight of disappointment that his strength to endure is becoming depleted; he may be approaching the verge of some domestic calamity, or be face to face with some terrible trial, and in the agony of that experience his humanity succumbs; then his strength is turned into weakness, his consciousness of the divine presence and purpose to succor is overshadowed by the desperation of his situation, and he is prone to imagine that there is no ear to hear his cry, no eye to pity, no hand to help, no heart to sympathize. But it is not so; it is imagination only. There is sympathy; there is compassion; there is succor—infinitely sweeter, tenderer, and more potent than ever enlarged human hearts in their glad response to human needs.

Let him who has been driven to the wall by trying circumstances in his Christian experience, and whose strength has seemed to change to weakness, remember that "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." This Scripture stands for a profound and indisputable fact of human experience, and there are scores of other passages indicating the willingness of God to serve and support those who are His in every time of trial and distress. The comfort and sustenance extracted from these messages of divine illumination and inspiration are greater and more enduring and satisfying than we can understand. Nor can we know how the communication of the divine with the human is brought about, so deep are the mysteries that surround the relations of God with His children. But that such relations do exist, and that such helpful communications are maintained, we do verily believe; and the fact that we cannot fully explain how these things can be does not in any way invalidate the fact that they are. There is mystery in everything that surrounds us. The world of nature is full of it. We accept the phenomena of the natural world without question, with or without individual testimony; shall we not also accept the phenomena of the spiritual world, especially when fortified by the evidence of thousands who can truly say, "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen?"

It should not be thought a strange thing that in spite of God's promise to be a refuge and strength to His children in their time of need, so many

find themselves faint of heart when the crucial hour is upon them. If our divine Lord was so overcome by His humanity in the hour of His intense agony as to say, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" let it not be considered anomalous if the "frail children of earth," under the awful pressure of hostile conditions, succumb temporarily to the frailties of their humanity. When one contemplates the adverse surroundings of many devoted followers of the Lord, and comes to know something of the perils of their evil heredity, as well as the equally pernicious tendencies of their environment, and the awful character of the temptations that emerge from these conditions, he ceases to wonder that sometimes the heart grows faint as it heroically strives to continue the unequal warfare. And then the burdens that many men and women are carrying with sweet and uncomplaining patience, and the load of sorrow that almost crushes them, and the bitter disappointments that cut into their hearts, and the anxieties that drive away the smiles, and the responsibilities that are heavy and exacting—is it strange that Christians, regarding these things, sometimes grow distracted and faint, and wonder what it all means? Not at all. But He who giveth power to the faint, and who increaseth strength to him that hath no might, is in keen and loving sympathy with them, and desires to become their refuge and strength in all their adverse circumstances.

O burdened, distracted, struggling, weary child of God, be brave of heart. The burden is heavy, but you will not have to carry it much longer; the disappointment is severe, but its sting will not be felt after a little while; the sorrow is crushing, but the Man of Sorrows will help you bear it; the temptation is sore, but a way of escape is open before you; the responsibility is great, but the Master will share it with you. Relax not your hold on God, but rather tighten it, even though the conditions that surround you are such as would naturally lead you to relinquish it. For the word of God is true which says: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint." Wait, then, on the Lord, and every promise of succor and sympathy will be fulfilled unto you.—Christian Advocate.

The Weather and Church Attendance.

Few things affect attendance upon church services more than the weather. If the day be fine people will generally be in their places to cheer the minister by their presence; but if the weather be unpleasant in any way the pews that ought to be filled are empty, and the heart of the earnest pastor is saddened. Why should this be so? If religion is anything in a man's life it is a very important thing; if the worship of God be a privilege and duty it is a most sacred matter not to be lightly regarded. Yet the perversity of human nature is evident in this vital matter. A man who on Sabbath morning thinks the day too wet or too cold to go to church will be found off to business on Monday morning even though the weather be really far more inclement than on the Sabbath. Many a good woman who has braved the weather on the week day to do her shopping or make some social calls, on the Sabbath will remain from church even though the weather is not nearly so unpleasant. And the children will be kept from Sabbath school on account of the weather, when it would never be thought of keeping them from the public school for the same reason.

It would seem as if no cold is so cold, and no rain so wet as that which comes on the Sabbath day. The prospects of a dull morning on the Sabbath are almost always taken to mean a rainy day; while if it be the day for the excursion or the fair, the prospect of sunshine later on in the day is always held to be good. Then the rubbers and mackintoshes and umbrellas seem to be much more confidently relied on at any other time than on the Sabbath, and the danger of taking cold on Sabbath in a comfortable church is often deemed to be greater than anywhere else in the course of the week. Such are the curious perversities of human nature as they appear in this connection.

In some cases indifference and thoughtlessness may partly explain the facts alluded to. The love of ease and comfort, which is one of the crying evils of our time, may have something to do with this tendency. Above all, the disposition of the human heart to think lightly of religion, and to fail to cherish a love for spiritual realities may have much to do with the strange perversities just noted.

But a little reflection will show the folly of this carelessness and should

lead people to show as much devotion in attendance on public worship as in attendance on business or pleasure. It is not necessary to recite all the advantages of public worship and instruction in matters of religion in order to make good the plea for church attendance irrespective of the weather. Men should love the gates of the sanctuary, and throng them every time they are opened for public worship.

It is the command of God in His word. We are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is. God is worthy of our public homage, for he is the giver of all the good we enjoy. And religion will never flourish if public worship is neglected.

Then the hearts and lives of men and women who are fighting life's strenuous battle need the teaching and cheer which come to them through attendance on the services of God's house. If the devout spirit holds communion with God in this way, and receives instruction from the precepts and promises of His word, that spirit is better able to fight the battles of life afterwards.

In addition, the heart of the minister is cheered and the work of the church greatly helped by attendance on the services of the sanctuary no matter what the weather may be. Nothing is more distressing and paralyzing to the work of any church than to have empty pews which ought to be filled regularly. This feature is most distressing oftentimes at the night service. Many a minister's heart is burdened on this account by the carelessness or indifference of his people. And many a charge becomes vacant by reason of the discouragement thereby produced.

Above all, we should always keep in mind the fact that each church service is an appointment with God, and should be most sacredly kept. We do not lightly break any business or social engagements, and surely we should be equally careful in regard to the engagements we have with the Lord. From this point of view careless neglect of attendance on the services of God's house is an affront to him with whom we have an engagement. If we rightly consider this fact, no sort of bad weather, that would permit us to attend to secular matters, should detain us from God's house.—Chris. Observer.

Christ's Teaching About Personal Responsibility.

What does personal responsibility involve? Evidently it is responsibility for one's own relation to God, and also for the relations of others to God, so far as it is within one's power to influence them. We often shrink from admitting responsibility, especially in our own obligations are all which we can manage, but also are reluctant to take the trouble involved in concern for others. But, whatever our state of mind, responsibility cannot be escaped.

We are in this world and we have personal duties to God which cannot be evaded. No thoughtful mind fails to realize that it is better for us to have them than it would be not to have them. Moreover, we are surrounded by other people. We cannot avoid coming into more or less close relations them from hour to hour. We could not be happy, it is a question if we could live, but for this intercourse and it inevitably clothes us with a measure of control over their thoughts and actions and subjects us to their influence. We cannot avoid responsibility.

It follows that a right-minded man, who desires to make the best of his life and to be of use to the world, will accept his responsibility, both for himself and others, and try to meet it suitably. This is what Christ bids him do. It involves the honest, reverent consideration of the claims of Christ as the Redeemer of man upon the individual soul. And this leads to the acceptance of Christ as a personal Saviour. For choice in this matter each of us is responsible, and the only true wise choice involves loyalty to God through Christ. It also involves admitting that it is in our power to make other people better or worse than they would be if they had not come in contact with us.

It is inevitable that we do them good or harm in some degree. We are responsible for the silent influence of our mere manner of life, whether we distinctly intend to impress others thereby or not. We influence in a measure their thoughts, their aspirations and ambitions, their hopes and fears, their plans for life, their relations to the present and to the long future. And if the fact that such a responsibility for others rests upon us be almost overwhelming, it is lightened by the consciousness that to encourage and strengthen them to fight the bat-

tle of life, as without our aid they could not, is not only possible but easy by the sympathetic spirit, the kindly word, the noble and consecrated example no matter how modestly rendered before them. Responsibility is indeed serious and weighty, but also it is a privilege, and it may become a joy and a blessing.—The Congregationalist.

The Small Congregations.

On stormy days, or when other unfavorable conditions dwarf a congregation to a mere handful of people, then the question arises, or is likely to arise, in the minister's mind, What shall I do? What shall you do? Why, your duty is plain. If God sent you at that time and to that place with a message, He knew just how many would be present, and it is your duty to deliver His message. Yes, deliver it with as much unction and zeal as though the house were full of waiting people. Do your duty faithfully, at all times and under all circumstances, and leave the results with God.

Here is an incident in the life of Bishop Randall, who at one time was announced to preach in an Eastern church in behalf of his missionary work in Colorado. Only six persons appeared, and it is said for a moment the good bishop hesitated. Finally he concluded that it was his duty to carry out his appointment. The question of congregation was none of his business. Accordingly the service went on, and he preached his sermon to the six people. In the collection which followed was an offering alone of two hundred dollars. This amazed him. The next day he received a note from a gentleman asking him to call at such an office. The bishop responded, "I am the one," said the gentleman, "who gave you the two hundred dollars last night. But after getting home I did not feel quite satisfied with doing that. I propose to make up the sum to one thousand dollars, and here is my check for the balance."—Unknown

The Folly of Infidelity.

"Aren't you the evangelist preaching up here at the church?" said a man in a New Jersey city to a stranger one morning. "Yes, sir," replied the preacher. "Well, I supposed you were a gentleman." "I claim to be one." "Well, I don't think you are one. Didn't you say last night that you could prove to the satisfaction of anyone within ten minutes that all infidels are fools? If you don't prove it to my satisfaction, I will publish you in all the city papers as the most consummate liar that ever struck the city."

"Where is your infidel?" said the preacher. "I claim to be one," was the reply, and I want you to know I am no fool, either." "You don't mean to say there is no reality in Christianity?" "I do, sir. I have studied all phases of the subject, and have travelled and delivered lectures against Christianity for more than twelve years, and I'm prepared to say there is nothing in it." "You are certain there is nothing in it?" "Yes, sir, there is nothing in it." "Will you please tell me," said Mr. Hyde, "if a man who will lecture twelve years against nothing is not a fool, what, in your judgment, would constitute a fool?"—H. L. Hastings.

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Sweet-Minded Women.

So great is the influence of a sweet-minded woman on those around her that is almost boundless. It is to her that friends come in seasons of sorrow and sickness for help and comfort. One soothing touch of her kindly hand works wonders in the feverish child; a few words let fall from her lips in the ear of a sorrowing sister do much to raise the load of grief that is bowing its victim down to the dust in anguish. The husband comes home worn out with the pressure of business and feeling irritable with the world in general; but when he enters the cozy sitting-room and sees the blaze of the bright fire and meets his wife's smiling face, he succumbs in a moment to the soothing influences which act as a balm of Gilead to his wounded spirit. We all are wearied with combating with the stern realities of life. The rough schoolboy flies in a rage from the taunts of his companions to find solace in his mother's smile; the little one full of grief with its own large troubles, finds a haven of rest in its mother's breast; and so one might go on with instances of the influence that a sweet-minded woman has in the social life with which she is

connected. Beauty is an insignificant power when compared with hers.—Great Thoughts.

One Standard For All.

There are no such things as Christian duties. What duties are incumbent on Christians belong to them as men, not as members of the church or as "professors." It is every man's duty to confess Christ, to trust him for pardon and life, and to accept his lordship. He is lord and head of every man. No man escapes the obligation of any subsequent or derivative duty by shirking the duty that is primary. Because he is a human being, he incurs the whole series. And Christians should avoid speaking as though they are required to obey a more exacting standard than are men of the world. In so doing, they copy the unjust steward, who had his lord's debtors write fifty or eighty in their bonds, instead of the full hundred.—S. S. Times.

To-Day.

Finish every day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. To-morrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely, and with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense. This day is all that is good and fair. It is too dear, with its hopes and invitations, to waste a moment on the yesterdays.—Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Sorrows are often like clouds, which, though black when they are passing over us, when they are past become as if they were the garments of God thrown off in purple and gold along the sky.—Henry Ward Beecher.

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