

THE SILENT GRACE.

"You're to come for the last month of vacation, now don't forget it, and we'll go back together."

"I'll surely be there unless something unforeseen turns up. You know we believe in saying 'D. V.' now."

A glance of understanding passed between the two lads; as if some new and close bond united them, as indeed was the case. Then the one swung himself up to the rear platform of a train going North, and the other of a train going South. They waved hats till a short curve cut off the vision.

Guy Herbert and Mark Dinsmore were chums at a Preparatory School. They had been one year together and hoped for at least five more, as both had the same university in view. In the preceding winter, a quiet, deep religious interest had pervaded the school, to which both yielded. Their antecedents were unlike. Mark came from a Christian home; it was but natural that he should first submit to Jesus' claims, and then Guy was led to a like decision by the patient drawing of his friend.

Guy's parents were people of refinement and intellectual cultivation, but Mr. Herbert especially was cold and hard where religion was concerned.

With honorable reticence on family subjects, Guy did not confide even to Mark, the indifference, perhaps opposition, which awaited his new purpose in life. His father meant him to follow his own business pursuits—so much he knew, and already his own heart began to suggest the ministry, possibly the missionary field. However, the ultimate choice need not be made for two or three years yet, and there was no need to come in conflict now.

The separation meant more to Guy than to Mark, and he was persistent in urging that nothing should prevent the latter's promised visit. Nothing did prevent. The Lord willed—how often he does will what gives his children present pleasure. How he wills always what will give them lasting joy.

"It's just jolly to see you again, Mark." This was Guy's welcome. Boys don't waste words of affection usually, but what they say counts.

"How goes it?" Mark answered. Guy understood that "it" included the newer experiences.

"I've learned to stand alone," he he said with some hesitation. "Not alone, either for our Helper has been very real, so perhaps it has been good for me. Maybe I leaned on you too much."

"Pshaw!" Mark gave an incredulous laugh. "Pretty poor stuff I'd be to lean on." He checked the question on his lips—he would not pry into Guy's home relations.

"We won't quarrel about the stuff you're made of," Guy responded. "Poor or good, it's mighty good to have a fellow to talk to. Now I want to present you to father and mother."

Mark was most cordially received. Mr. Herbert prided himself on his courtly hospitality, and the wife followed suit. He was evidently the masterful one in that household.

Dinner was soon served. Now, all his life, Mark had been used to a blessing before eating. When his father happened to be absent, the mother always bowed her head in silent grace, and the children did the same. He could scarcely remember ever sitting at a table where this custom was not observed, so that now, not even thinking

what the others did, he bowed his head, with closed eyes. Day after day as the pleasant visit went on, he did the same, though after awhile he noticed that he was the only one. Why not? There was nothing obtrusive about this silent recognition of indebtedness to God.

He longed to ask Guy why he did not join in the simple observance, but he could not. Neither could Guy tell him that he tried when he came back, and Mr. Herbert peremptorily had forbidden what he called an "exhibition of sanctity," and, with stinging sarcasm, had quoted the Pharisees who prayed at street corners. Guy thought it right to obey his father when in his father's house, knowing that the Heavenly Father accepts thanks which are hidden in the heart.

But a man must needs be more polite to his guest than to his own son, and Mr. Herbert couldn't well say to Mark, "Stop bowing your head, sir!" Still, the silent grace three times a day irritated him; it came to be like a thrice-repeated rebuke.

At length he decided he must have it out with Mark, but in the most courteous manner—oh, certainly. So he approached him thus: "I notice, pardon me, I cannot help noticing, that you seem to say a short prayer before eating. Of course I know a blessing is customary in some circles, and when we entertain a clergyman, I pay the tribute to the cloth of requesting it, but as it is not our habit, I am curious to know why you continue it."

Mark was surprised, but with an upward appeal for the right word, he answered, frankly smiling, "It seems only polite, if one may so express it, to say, 'Thank you' to God."

"Polite—'Thank you' to God!" This was taking Mr. Herbert on his own ground. Mark went on: "I wouldn't think of receiving a favor from you, sir, without saying, 'Thank you.'"

"True, true," his host concurred. This is a new way of putting it. I believe in a God, though I don't believe much in what is usually called religion. But why, may I ask, do you give thanks for food, and not for other things?"

"Oh, but we do, for everything," Mark responded brightly. "The repetition at every meal?" The lad was thinking fast. "I never reasoned it out before, but it seems to me it must be like this. Man in some climates can live without clothes or shelter, but there is no place where he can live without food; it seems to be the essential of physical life. There is another reason, sir—Jesus did it."

Mr. Herbert was silent a moment. Then he said, "You have given me something to think about."

Two days later as they sat down to dinner, all were astonished by Mr. Herbert's announcing in his most stately manner: "I have aimed to be a courteous gentleman. Our young friend here has, without intending it, made me aware that I have been unwittingly lacking in politeness. Henceforth we shall render thanks to God for his favor in giving us food." With that, the master of the house offered thanks audibly. Guy grasped Mark's hand under the table.

Such a man, having taken such a step, was not likely to stop there. Mr. Herbert learned to think more about the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and at length he accepted with a grateful, penitent heart, the best gift of God's love, even his only begotten Son.

Then first did Guy tell Mark of his former trials, and the contrast of pre-

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sent happiness. "It came because you had courage to keep on with the silent grace."

"There wasn't a bit of courage about it—it was a matter of course," Mark said.

Ah, it is the Christian life which is a matter of course, that tells.—*Christian Union Herald.*

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