

# WOMAN and HER WORK.

A correspondent wrote to me in all earnestness last week asking me if I believed there was no such thing as unselfishness in the world; and more especially if I had ever met an unselfish man. Now the question she asks is such a very broad one and so full of general interest that I decided it was worthy of a little more attention than an ordinary query in the correspondence column usually receives, and so have taken it for the subject of the little talk I generally try to have with my readers before beginning the more serious business of the week.

I think it would be the most terrible thing imaginable to believe seriously that there was no unselfishness in the world and I cannot imagine anyone doing so, it is in too direct contradiction not only of all that our own experience has taught us, but also of everything that has made life worth living since the world began!

"No such thing as unselfishness?" What about the sleepless nights and anxious days our parents spent over us at the very threshold of our lives, of the unceasing care, and utter self-forgetfulness with which they watched us anticipating our slightest want, and cheerfully giving up not only their time, their own comfort and their own inclinations, but absolutely their whole lives for our sakes. Why I tell you girls that it would be a strange thing for human beings to disbelieve in unselfishness when they are surrounded by it from the very hour of their birth, cradled in it, and nurtured by it until they are old enough to be independent of it, and then perhaps turn round and deny its existence.

The more I think about the subject the more surprised I am that anyone should waste a moment's thought in questioning the existence of a virtue which is perhaps the most common one in the world, and of which the whole universe teems with evidences. One must indeed go through life with closely shut eyes if he fails to see unselfishness in its most beautiful and touching forms on every side of him, from the devoted mother who denies herself almost the necessities of life, that her darling boy may go through college and receive the education of a gentleman, down to the hungry street urchin who shares the "bit o' apple" in the shape of an apple or cake that has fallen in his way, with his still hungrier comrade. And we need not depend on the human race alone for examples of unselfishness; which of us is there who possesses any points of observation at all, who has not watched the lean and hungry looking mother cat bring home a plump mouse and hand it over to her kitten, asking no greater pleasure than to watch the creature she loves enjoying the fruits of her labor? And who has not seen the common barn door hen scratching eagerly for succulent worms and bugs, and then calling her greedy, boisterous family around her to partake of the treat? I think all farmers and poultry fanciers will bear me out in the statement that they never saw a mother hen who was anything but a mere frame of bones with just enough skin and feathers stretched over them to keep them together, until after her family were all grown up, and provided for. Coming down to the tiny creatures of the air, let anyone who doubts that unselfishness, instead of selfishness is the rule amongst created beings watch the little birds when they are brooding, and rearing their young; the male bird undertakes the task of feeding his mate while she is sitting on her nest and that obligation is rigidly fulfilled whether food be plentiful or scarce; it is only found enough for one, be sure that one will not be himself, for not a morsel will he touch until his spouse is satisfied, she comes first and after that it is time enough to think of himself. I only wish all husbands followed the brave little bird's example. And even after the young are hatched, the father bird's work is not lightened but only shared, his wife helps him to provide for the hungry youngsters, and together they devote their lives to the younger generation, who give them so little thanks, and so soon fly away and forget them; but the parent birds ask for no return, they are satisfied to perform their task for pure love of the little creatures who take all, and give nothing neither expecting, nor obtaining any reward.

So much for the general unselfishness which helps to make the world go round, and prevents this life from being utterly flat, stale and unprofitable. Now for the second clause of this query which has started my tongue—or rather my pen—wagging this morning. "Have I ever met an unselfish man?" Yes, thank God, I have met several, and known them well; not millions of them, of course, nor even hundreds, but a few; quite enough to redeem their sex from the charge of utter selfishness which has lain upon them for so long, and if I, with my limited experience, can point to a decent percentage of men with whom self is not the ruling power, why should not other women be able to do the same, and thus show that man is not as black as he is painted, and let the city be spared for the sake of even a few righteous men, instead of condemning the innocent with the guilty?

I have met men whose unconscious, and

utter unselfishness might put many a woman to shame! Men who had become so accustomed to think of others first, and themselves last of all, that it had become second nature, and they did not know it was a virtue, and would as soon have thought of claiming credit for the color of their eyes or the shape of their feet, as for a characteristic they were almost unconscious of possessing, and for which they would never have dreamed of expecting praise.

I have known men who would cheerfully give their last cent to anyone who needed it and never imagine they had done anything wonderful, who really loved their wives, or their mothers and sisters better than themselves, and who thought it only right and natural to do the hardest work in order that their wives might sit at ease, and have nothing to trouble them; who would pinch themselves in secret, to let their wives enjoy some treat they could not otherwise have afforded, and who would resort to almost any subterfuge rather than let those for whom the sacrifice was made, suspect it, and to deprive the anticipated pleasure of half its enjoyment.

And last, though by no means least, I have known really bright, clever men who never talked about themselves or their own doings, who did not assert their opinions and set them up above everyone else's, who listened as politely and with as much interest when their wives spoke as if they had been perfect strangers, who asked their wives' advice, consulted them on important subjects and were not ashamed to show respect to their opinions, and to tell other men how highly they valued their wives' advice and how dearly they loved their mothers. I have known men who did all these things and yet who were thoroughly manly, thoroughly human, and self-loveable in spite of it all, unlikely as it may sound to some people, and I firmly believe that the man who asserts that all his sex and all his species are selfish is but a poor creature, who judges others by himself. So it is scarcely to be wondered at that I am willing to defend the many for the sake of the few whose virtues I have known, and I should be very glad indeed to have the opinions of some others of my sex, on this subject; therefore if any of the maids, or matrons, especially the latter whose experience must necessarily be greater, who read this page will write and tell me what they think about it I should be very much pleased, and I think the subject would be interesting to us all. When I say matrons and maids I do not mean to exclude the other sex by any means, but will be glad to hear what they have to say also.

I am sorry to be obliged to remind my correspondents so often that letters which are scribbled all over both sides of the paper, cannot be answered. I have spoken of this most common of all rules in a newspaper office so frequently, and with so little effect that I have grown tired of being knitted even with first offenders, and now consign all such letters to the waste basket; so correspondents who have failed to receive any answer to their communications will please accept this intimation of the reason therefor.

For the benefit of the numerous correspondents, who frequently ask me for the names of the proper precious stones for different months of the year, and also for one correspondent in particular, who requested me to do so, I repeat the list I have so often published.

The language of precious stones—January: Jacynth or garnet, constancy and fidelity. February: Amethyst, sincerity. March: Bloodstone, courage. April: Sapphire or diamond, repentance or innocence. May: Emerald, success in love. June: Agate, health and long life. July: Cornelian, a contented mind. August: Sardonyx, conjugal felicity. September: Chrysolite, preserves from folly, an antidote to madness. October: Opal, misfortune and hope. November: Topaz, fidelity and friendship. December: Turquoise or malachite, prosperity and the most brilliant success and happiness under all circumstances.

SHUT IN, N. B.—I am afraid you thought I had forgotten to answer your last letter, but it was only that the space for correspondence seems to shrink each week, and there have been a number of letters waiting for some time. I don't think it was good of me at all to devote a little space to answering your letter, which fully deserved all the attention it received. Your letters are a real pleasure to me, and I only wish I could answer them more fully, if you would not mind trusting your address to me in the strictest confidence, perhaps I might be able to do so. The promise of an appreciative audience of one, will help me many a time when I feel inclined to doubt most things myself in particular and I thank you for it sincerely, it is no small matter always to feel sure of the sympathy of one, especially one whose opinion is worth having.

About your book—I feared you would be late with it, and I do hope you will have it ready early, not later than the spring, if possible, as I believe that would be the best time.


I was so sorry to hear of your illness, and trust that you still continue better. I think it will be an additional bond of union between us, when I tell you that I

can feel for you more than most people, having suffered as you do for years; and perhaps it will encourage you to know that I am fairly well now, so I trust most sincerely that you will get strong by and by. I cannot say that I have much faith in the scientist idea of dismissing pain and weakness by mere will power, either. I wish I could help you, for you have much to bear. Perhaps I may take advantage some day of your suggestion about the invalids and perhaps also, I know, more about the subject than you have any idea of.

The conclusion of your letter was very sad, and I hope you will let me have a line now and then, just to tell me you have not yet "passed over to the silent majority" but are still living your brave and patient life. Believe me, I think of you very often. I trust this New Year may bring you both health and happiness.

SAMANTHA.—Surely Josiah Allen's Samantha should know as much about the subject as I do, but if you wish my opinion, you have only to read the first column of this page, and you will find it, and be surprised to see what a long and prominent answer your letter received. Of course I believe in it, and I think it is a pity those young men did not choose a more sensible subject to debate upon, and one which had two sides. Suppose they try "Resolved—that the moon is made of green cheese. Resolved that it is not"—next time. My dear little girl don't let any such nonsense come between you and happiness, but take that nice boy—I am sure he is nice—and try to teach him what a beautiful thing unselfishness in a man is, and you will have the blessing of your friend. ASTRA.

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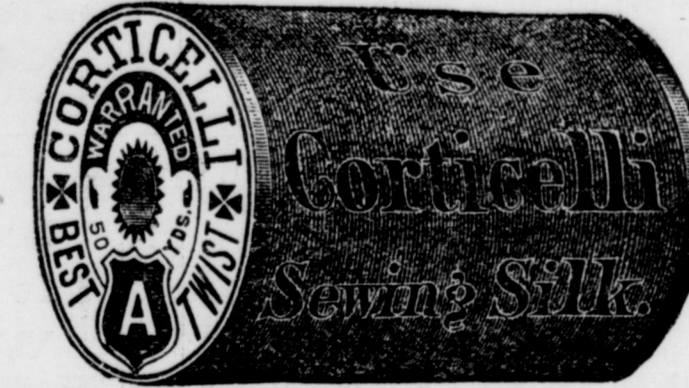
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