

Sunday Reading

The Ministry of Kindness.

[By Ian MacIsaac.]

Popular illustrations vary in different countries, because they correspond with the climate and with the life, so that they must be read by a foreigner with some imagination. It were poor comfort in our chill and rainy climate to offer any person a cup of cold water, but no gift could be more welcome in the dry and sultry heat. A traveler, Jesus suggests, is coming along the road and is weary with his journey. As he passes a house, some one, sitting in its shadow and moved by a kindly impulse, fetches a draught of water from the cool water-jars. He offers it with courteous words and gesture, and for a moment the stranger rests and enjoys the refreshment of God's best gift of earth. A little later he is again upon his journey, and soon he disappears over the crest of the hill, but the brief service of the householder is cherished in his heart. He has been encouraged on his way, and many days will pass before the traveler forgets this act of willing and reasonable hospitality.

With this simple illustration drawn, as was His custom, from the incidents of common life, Jesus teaches us one of the lessons which was ever near His heart and which he desired to write upon the conscience of His disciples. We ought not to hide ourselves, so to say, within our cool homes with our comforts near to hand, while along the hot dusty road our fellow-men are traveling, in weary procession. If one has a heart within him he ought to have eyes to see that a person here and there is fainting for a cup of water, and ought to be willing to take some little trouble to give it to his fellow-men. This is Jesus' ministry of kindness.

Many of the trials of life are inevitable and irrevocable, but one has a shrewd idea that life could be made much easier if everyone of us bethought himself of his neighbor, and did his little part to cheer him upon the road. It is pathetic to notice that the sum of life's sorrow does not arise from the crushing weight of one or two heavy providences, but from the hardness, or thoughtlessness, or want of generosity, or want of sympathy of our fellow-men. Even the big black trials welcome the offices of kindness. If death enters a home and takes the dearest, it may seem as if mourners would be so dulled by the stroke that they could not be sensitive to little things. Yet the chief mourner, amid the sense of his bitter loss, will feel it keenly that a friend did not write and did not offer his little help. His supposed friend saw him pass, staggering in the way through weakness of soul and ready to drop and did not hurry out with a cup of water. Never again can he feel that that man is quite true who failed him in his hour of distress. What can a man do in these agonies of life for his neighbor? Can he bring back the dead, or live with him in his lonely home? How impotent does human sympathy appear in these dark moments, and how lonely is a man in his Gethsemane! What good is it to write a note—some few words upon a sheet of paper? Is it not an impertinent intrusion upon the sacredness of grief? Cease thy meddling, some one may say, and let the man go past on the isolation of his affliction. You are wrong and shallow, knowing neither human nature nor human life. Strange as it may appear, he will lift a corner of the blind in the darkened room to read your note, and he will read it more than once; when some one comes in of his family he will give him the note, also to read. Days after, he will refer to that note, and tell his friends that it comforted him. Afterward he will tie up half a dozen notes of this kind and lay them in his desk, and as often as he opens his desk and sees the package his heart will grow warm.

We cannot relieve our brother of the fatigue and weariness of his journey, nor can we carry for him the burden which is bending down his soul and beneath which he is apt to sink. It is only a mouthful of water that we can give, which costs us nothing, and is the commonest of things. Only that, but the water was a sacramental cup; it meant that no sorrow could befall this man but it also touched his friend, that a human heart was beating with his in his loneliness, and that behind that heart was the heart of God. When a man says that he never could have endured had it not been for the sympathy of his friends, is this only a graceful sentiment? It is the solemn truth, and the man who says it may be the most matter-of-fact of all your acquaintances. No man can endure his sorrow alone, not even Jesus Christ, who took disciples with Him

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into the Garden. What sustains a man is an atmosphere of sympathy and love—the thought that he has been remembered, that his brother has given him what he could. The note was but the common cup; the contents thereof were love.

It is only once, perhaps, in twenty years that a big sorrow comes, but every day we are suffering something just through the dust and heat of life; through the commonplaceness of duty and the tedium of its repetitions; through trifling disappointments which we would not mention, and little slights which perhaps we have imagined; through the irritation of other people's successes, and the haunting sense of our own failure. It is not only gloomy looking and complaining people who are cast down; they have their comfort in their pessimism and in their endless whining. Quiet folks who never murmur, and take life, as they say, with admirable patience, may conceal sore hearts, and even people who ever smile in public and add to the gaiety of life may not smile when they are alone, but drop the mask from the face of sadness. Perhaps it may be taken for granted that almost every man needs a word of good cheer, and will be the better for your cup of water, even although you saw him laugh as he entered your village street.

Were we all to enter into a general conspiracy of kindness, and now I mean commonplace, intangible, inexpensive kindness, we cannot imagine how much of the weariness of life would disappear. Suppose, for instance, you and I should only avoid controversy of every kind in conversation except in the emergencies of conscience. Suppose we took care not to tempt our neighbour to envy and jealousy by thoughtless reference to his rivals or the people he did not like. Suppose we touched his peculiarity with a gentle hand instead of having our innocent sport with him—he has his peculiarities, but not quite as many as yourself. Are there not subjects he likes to talk about? Why not encourage him for a time? You also have your favorite themes. Did you congratulate that mother on her son's success with honesty of warm speech? She had forgotten the cares of the house that day. Did you tell that father you were glad to hear his boy was doing his work well in the city? It is curious, but that man would have gone down the street with a lighter step. When your friend acquitted himself well in some public work, had you sent him a pleasant note it would have carried him through a week of criticism. When it was possible shake hands with a brother man and wish him God speed. He may have temptation that afternoon and the grip of your hand will help him. Pass no man whom you see and know without some greeting; it will cheer him on his life's way. Take trouble to render little services; great services may never be asked of thee. Take trouble to say kindly things; if thou canst not say clever things none will miss them. Suppose only five people should show a man some kindness in a day, that man will come to the close of the day with a strong heart and a good hope. It may be unintelligible but it is perfectly true that six words of approbation spoken by a true heart have clarified a man's brain and lifted the cloud from a man's heart and sent him on his way rejoicing. It is in our power to make our fellow-traveler forget the hardness of the road and the blazing of the sun by the simplest of all means—friendly words and friendly acts as he passes, words and acts which cost us nothing, but are everything to him, which in an hour we have forgotten which he remembers till the sun has set.

Does it seem to you as if the law of commonplace service were of limited application because there are many people to whom your ministry were a superfluity and

an impertinence? It is well enough to offer a draught of cold water to a poor man carrying his bundle and trudging along earth's highway; it is another thing when the traveller is clothed in purple and fine linen and is passing in a chariot. When our neighbor is poorer than ourselves, or is cast down, then must we be tender with him and stretch out our hand. If he be increased in goods, or if he has achieved fame; if he has risen to high position, or if all the world be praising him, then he can take care of himself, and I may let him pass. Were I to hurry out with my poor little cup he would stare at me, and refuse my tribute of interest; perhaps he might suspect me of selfish schemes, and might even allow himself to patronize me. With this mighty man I think that it becomes me to be cold and distant. Are we sure that we are not doing injustice to this successful man, who may be thirsty enough and tired enough, even in his chariot? Are we not much more charitable in our judgment of the poor than of the rich? It is in the hour of success a man's friends draw away from him, and look at him from a distance, then the end thereof will be that they shall envy him, and he will grow insolent. If they congratulate him with a single heart, they will be saved from bitterness, and he will be saved from hardness. Success, instead of dividing, will unite, and life instead of being soured will be sweetened. While to our eyes Dives appears to swagger past in his prosperity, he is really remembering with regret the friends of former years whom he has lost, and he is as ready as any person for a hearty greeting. A man may be rich in houses, and lands, and stocks, and business, and be very poor in love. His very circumstances may isolate him and make him suspicious of advances; he would be willing to give a quarter of his fortune for a genial and honest friend. If, indeed, any person be so satisfied with his possessions and so lifted above his fellows that he does not thirst for their approval and good will, then I grant you it were no use to offer him that humble cup. He has lost the simple heart and the single mind; his humanity has been hardened and has grown insensible; his soul is filled with wind and pride. This miserable man is poor indeed, for he has cut himself off from human sympathy, so that in his hour of trial (it must come some day) no one will sorrow with him save they who are paid to serve him, or who wait for the reversion of his goods. He has ceased to be among the number of God's 'little ones,' who are humble and trustful, and human and brotherly. When any one is lifted above kindness he is either too good or too bad to live. He has declared himself independent both of the love of God and man. He is, however, one in a thousand, and to be counted an unfortunate freak of human life. And the rest of us, although we may not look or ask as we pass along the road, and although we may even pretend that we are self-sufficing and do not care, are all the while thirsting for kindness, and note in an instant from the corner of our eye the shadow of the humblest host who is coming forward with the cup.

When Jesus insisted on this duty of kindness He anticipated that people would be apt to belittle it and to think it was of small consequence, so He emphasized its value and insisted on its sure recompense. 'A cup of cold water only,' He said, to show that He really did intend, not huge gifts and costly sacrifices for His cause, but the ministry of kindness in humble daily life. 'Verily,' He said, 'I say unto you, he shall in nowise lose his reward,' to convince doubting hearts of His remembrance. When He laid such stress upon the inherent value of pure kindness and the

absolute certainty of its reward, Jesus was in touch with the finest instincts of human nature and with the mind of His Heavenly Father. Do not we all estimate an act by its soul rather than by its body, so that we regard more the spirit of him that gives it than the gifts? That this man should have been looking upon the highway at all, while he might have been resting in the cool of his house through the noontide of the day, and that he should have been concerned about me, a stranger, whom he had never seen before and might never see again, and that with his own hand he should have brought the cup and offered it after this kindly fashion, are far more to me than the water and its refreshment.

Had this man built a fountain of alabaster in the market place, and caused the water to flow daily for all wayfarers, he had done a good thing, but I had never been so much touched—so curious is human nature—by the fountain as by the man. A fountain, after all, is but a machine for which a man paid so much and to which he gives no more thought, but a man has a heart, and love is more than money. There is too much public fountain kindness—the public charities of detached givers too little cup-of-water kindness—the ministry of personal interest. Of course it munificence and kindness go together there can be no objection that the cup be gold instead of earthenware and the draught be wine instead of water; but if kind heart and personal impulse be wanting, then perish gold cup and costly wine; give me the earthen cup, and sweet, cold water. Why is it that many a celebrated and generous philanthropist has honor from the churches and titles from the State, and fame in religious journals, and the applause of packed meetings and yet no man will say that he is loved, and his own servants, who are nearest to him, detest his name? Is it not that he is hard in his dealing with his brother men—pay what thou owes; hard in his theology—regarding God as an angry despot; hard in his nature—without charity, liberality or geniality. He may give, but not in the 'spirit of a disciple.'

How is it that another man who has not had the opportunity of rendering such public benefactions, and whose fame runneth not abroad throughout all the land, is yet regarded with such kindly respect that no one has a word to say against him and every one mentions his name with kindly accents? Ask the clerks in his office whom he befriends through health and sickness, with whose affairs he is acquainted and whose future he advances, and whose heart he has won by 'innumerable acts of thoughtful kindnesses; ask the workmen in his manufactory, their wives and their children, to whom he has been doing good and not evil all these years; ask that struggling firm [whom he might have crushed, but which he helped, so that half a dozen homes have been kept in plenty, which would have been closed, and half a dozen men who might have been broken have done their duty in the commonwealth. That is why the one man is detested, because he is hard; that is why the other is loved because he is brotherly.

Both men shall have their reward, for the providence of God is just. Whatsoever a man soweth that also shall he reap. For his public and ostentatious benefactions the Pharisee shall have his high place in the synagogue and the applause of other Pharisees in the market-place. For his kindness unto those whom God has placed under his charge and at his door the good Samaritan shall have the unaffected gratitude of unknown and voiceless people whom he has blessed, and beyond that, a reward stored and accumulated is awaiting him in the world to come. Good-hearted man and simple-minded, he forgets the cup of cold water as soon as he has given it, and could not tell to save his life how many weary travelers he has helped. But his record is in the Heavens, and there is One who does not forget. The day is coming when these modest and nameless deeds of kindness shall all be laid to his charge before angels and men. When he begins to deny them in his humility, he shall be covered with joyful confusion for behold the traveler to whom he gave his cup of cold water—the struggling clerk, the helpless widow, the toiling workman—is now Judge upon the throne; for inasmuch as he did it to the least of these he did it unto Christ.

His Character.

The old hiring fairs are still held in some rural districts of England. There is a story of an old Gloucestershire farmer, who seeing a likely lad at such a place, opened negotiations with a view to engaging him. 'Hast got a character from thy last place?' the farmer asked. 'No,' replied the boy; 'but my old gat-

fer, be about somewhere, and I can get he to write one.'

'Very well,' was the reply. 'Thee get it and meet I here again at four o'clock.' The farmer and the boy met at the appointed hour.

'Hast got thy character?' was the query. The answer was short and sharp. 'No,' but I ha' got thine, and I bea'n't a-coming.'

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Women of all ages, owing to their delicate and sensitive organism, expend more nerve energy than men. Their organs require vigorous nerves to insure healthy action. It is a fact worthy of special notice that suffering from acute nervousness is caused by weak and inflamed nerves.

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Their Remarkable Record.

It would be well if all families could point to as creditable a history in point of freedom from domestic broils as that of Deacon Kendrick of Danville. The good deacon and his wife were celebrating their fiftieth anniversary. A large concourse of relatives and friends had assembled at the old homestead, a splendid dinner had been served and eaten, and the speeches, without which no anniversary of this kind is considered to be complete were in progress.

'In all these fifty years, my friends, said Neighbor Brown, in the course of his remarks, 'as I have been told a hundred times and believe to be true, our venerable friend and his wife have never exchanged a cross word. Is it not so, deacon?'

'Yes, that's true,' replied the deacon. 'Is it not so sister?' asked Mr. Brown, addressing Mrs. Kendrick.

'Yes,' she replied, with a twinkle in her eye. 'Abner may have given me a cross word now and then, but I've never answered back.'

DR. AGNEW'S OINTMENT.

The Great Skin Cure—35 Cents.

Alfred Le Blanc, of St. Jerome, Que., has such faith in Dr. Agnew's Ointment that he buys it by the dozen to take with him to his lumber camp. He finds it a quick cure for chafing, bruises, frost bites, and other emergencies incident to camp life. It cures salt rheum, eczema, tetter, scald head and other skin eruptions, and piles in three to five nights, 35 cents. Sold by E. C. Brown.

'The reason why I can't find permanent employment on the newspapers or magazines,' lamented the literary hack, 'is, I presume, that I write away over the heads of the common herd.'

'Then why don't you leave this attic,' asked the sympathizing but uncultured friend, looking about the apartment, 'and get a room lower down?'

EVERY DRUGGIST in the land sells Pain-Killer. The best liniment for sprains and bruises. The best remedy for cramps and colic. Avoid substitutes, there's but one Pain-Killer, Perry Davis'. 25c. and 50c.

Said he: 'For me no chaperon; I do not care to see one—' The maiden answered with a groan: 'I'd rather see than be one.'

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Hard life the plucky firemen lead; out in all sorts of weather, losing sleep, catching cold and straining their backs.

Hard to have strong, well kidneys under such conditions. That's why firemen, policemen and others, who are exposed to the weather, are so often troubled with Weak, Lame Backs and with Urinary Troubles.

DOAN'S Kidney Pills

are helping hundreds of such to health.

Mr. John Robinson, chief of the fire department, Dresden, Ont., says:

'Prior to taking these pills I had kidney trouble which caused severe pain in the small of my back and in both sides. I had a tired feeling and never seemed to be able to get rested. However, I commenced the use of Doan's Kidney Pills, and after taking three boxes am completely cured. I have now no backache or urinary trouble, and the tired feeling is completely gone. In fact, I am well and strong.'