

Messenger and Visitor

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The Blessing of Work.

Righteous is the saying—"If any man will not work, neither shall he eat." It is true in a general sense at least, as Ruskin has said, that "God intends no man to live in the world without working." There are of course a great many persons who, by means of illness or from lack or loss of mental or physical faculties, are incapacitated for the ordinary work of life, but for men and women in the normal use of their faculties, work of some kind is an essential condition of honorable life and of happiness.

It must be admitted that there are a very large number of people in the world who apparently do not accept this doctrine. They appear to regard work as at best a disagreeable necessity. They would avoid so far as possible all that involves strenuous effort. To go where pleasure leads, to exhibit themselves attractively and get themselves admired, to drink at cisterns which other hands have hewn, to eat at tables furnished by others' toil, to have their bodies nourished and their minds amused, without any labor of their own, in fine to make life one long holiday,—such is their ideal. But the more men gather wisdom from experience and reflection, the more clearly they come to perceive that the best development and the truest happiness in this world is conditioned upon work. The man or woman of willing spirit to whom the privilege of a place among the world's workers is denied wins and deserves our sympathy and our respect, but the poor creature who, from mere love of ease and idleness, is content to do nothing but sip the sweets made ready to its hand, evokes from us a pity which is strongly seasoned with contempt.

God works constantly, infinitely. Jesus Christ, the type and realization of ideal manhood, said: "The Father worketh hitherto, and I work. . . . I must work the works of him that sent me. Let us work while the day lasts, for the night cometh when no man can work." The highest privilege conferred upon men is that of being co-workers with God, and into such fellowship everyone may enter who is willing to do any honest work in His name. All honest, useful toil, however humble, is honorable, because it is a God-appointed task. Each one of that great army of honest workers, laboring in countless fields of toil, may regard himself or herself as a worker together with God, carrying on His work, realizing His increasing purpose and attaining to a larger comprehension of His thought. We pity the youth who has no ambition to be a worker, whose heart does not leap at the thought of joining the great fraternity of God's workmen:

"Men my brothers, men the workers,
Ever reaping something new;
That which they have done but earnest
Of the things that they shall do."

If one comprehends the truth that work is honorable, that it is God's appointment for men, and that every honest worker is helping to realize the divine idea in the world, then work can be to him no more mere slavish toil. It is a friendly, wholesome thing, something to be loved and delighted in, it is a condition of our true development and the largest and best expression of our personality upon the world. The man who works honestly, cheerfully, under however humble conditions, is always worth something to the world and the world to him.

To give men work—work that is wholesome, enlarging, educative in its character—is one of the great problems in practical philanthropy, for it must be confessed that while there are many who despise the opportunities of work which are offered them, there are many others to whom the blessing of work is denied. There is a vast difference between such work as we have written of and mere labor which scarcely demands of men more intelligence than that of the brute, and yields him in return scarcely more than it does to the brute. And

there are millions of our fellow men and women who are toiling long hours, day after day, with no more sense of the blessing of work than is felt by the cart-horse, and often with a bitterness of spirit from which the toiling animal is mercifully delivered. "The best gift we can make to any man is the gift of work," it has been said, and truly, if it is really work that is given, and not mere labor with labor's starvation wage. Of course even such work as that is better than mere pauperism. But happy is such a country as our own, in which for the most part there is opportunity not merely for labor, but for work in its highest sense, where men can work cheerfully, hopefully, under wholesome conditions, where work need not be mere hopeless drudgery, but a constant education for larger opportunities and more fruitful service. For men to despise work under such conditions is to despise one of the chiefest of their earthly blessings.

Watching.

Our Bible lesson for this week, it may be said, presents the positive side of a truth, of which the negative side was presented in the lesson of last week. In last week's lesson we were told how a man ought not to live, in this we are shown what is the true attitude of the Christian life. In the parable of the Rich Fool there was the picture of a man ignoring his duty toward God and his fellowmen, shutting his eyes to the inevitable facts of death and judgment, making it his great aim to amass and to enjoy earthly treasures, and setting before his eyes as his ideal a condition in which he might abandon himself to selfish and sensual enjoyment, saying to his soul—"Eat, drink and be merry, for thou has much goods laid up for many years." In the present lesson the picture presented is in the strongest possible contrast. It is that of a servant who has a stewardship to fulfil. The things with which he has to do are not his own. It is not for him to say—I will pull down, I will build greater in which to bestow my goods, and then I will satisfy my soul with sensual pleasures. This man is not his own master, but all his purposes and acts are ruled by the duty which he owes to his lord. So with the Christian, there can be no abandonment of himself to careless ease and selfish pleasure. He must be like a servant who is watching for his lord when he will return from the wedding, his lamp lit, his loins girded, ready at any moment for whatever service his lord may require of him. The Christian's attitude is that of one who is expectant, vigilant, alert. He is a servant, a steward, and all his life is dominated by the consciousness of his relations to his Lord. The present is full of significance to him because in it the will of his Lord is to be done, and the future is big with meaning because in it his Lord is coming. The early disciples looked for the coming of their Lord within their own lifetime, and still his disciples are expecting that supreme event. But there is in every generation and in every individual Christian life what may be regarded as, in a very true and real sense, comings of the Lord. In many an opportunity Christ comes knocking at the door, calling forth his servants to service and to holy fellowship with himself, and they that are ready go in to the marriage supper, and the door is shut, while they of the unguilt loins and the unlit lamp remain without in the darkness. If we were only wise, if we did but watch with minds and hearts alert and eager for his service, we should perceive that our Lord is often coming, and we should understand that the highest prizes which life offers men is that of service for Christ and fellowship in his love, and that the greatest calamity which any Christian can suffer is to be found unready when the hand of the Lord opens the door of opportunity and bids him enter into a fuller, larger service in his name.

We must not think that the relation of the Christian to his Lord is fully expressed by such words as stewardship, duty, service, and that his watching means only the fulfilment of imperative duty. The great truth that the fundamental relationship between Christ and his disciples is that of love, is never to be lost sight of, and it is not lost sight of by our Lord in this passage. He binds men to his service by the power of a supreme, personal affection. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord at his coming finds watching. Why? Because this vigilance is the fruit of love begotten by love and leading to larger manifestations and fuller enjoyment of the love of him who is both Saviour and

Lord. "Verily, I say unto you that he shall gird himself and make them to sit down to meat and shall come and serve them."

Is there anything which the world more needs today than a fuller realization of the idea of Christian stewardship in the lives of those who are by profession the disciples of Christ? How many ministries in which the servants of Jesus should be engaged are neglected, how many open doors are unentered, how often to the Master's knocking there is no response, and how many fail of any part in the joy of the marriage feast, because so many lamps are unlit and so many loins are ungirded! And is there anything more needed today as an inspiration to faithful Christian service than the consciousness of the personal love of Jesus? Paul's life, so noble in its devotion, so fruitful in service for Christ, was lived, according to his own testimony, "by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." This too has been the inspiration of every earnestly devoted Christian life. What we all need, in order to the service to which we are called, is such a consciousness of the love that redeemed us as shall keep our eyes ever expectantly directed Christward, making us vigilant to watch for and eager to accept the service which his love asks at our hands.

Editorial Notes.

—The American Baptist Missionary Union has found it necessary to abandon all its stations in China, except Swatow which is so situated that the missionaries can leave at any time should such a step become necessary. Some of the missionaries of the Union who were stationed in the western provinces of China have been in great peril, but it is gratifying to learn that they are now all reported to be in places of safety.

—Rev. W. B. Boggs, D. D., writing to a friend under date Ramapatam, July 31st, 1900, gives the following forecast. "I am expecting to see a large harvest of souls in India follow this time of agony, this time when plague and pestilence and famine and awful calamities have conspired to make the past three or four years one of the most heart-rending periods that India has ever seen. Already there are signs that many are about to turn to the Lord." Many in this land will hope and pray that this forecast may be realized.

—There are Baptists in Ireland, but, unfortunately for the Emerald Isle, the number of them is not large and there is no indication of a rapid increase. From the annual report of the Baptist Union of Ireland just published, it appears that the number of baptisms last year was 193, as compared with 268 the preceding year; the membership is 2697, as compared with 2710. There are 221 Sunday school teachers and 2211 scholars. Seven of the churches have started Christian Endeavor Societies and show a total membership of 290.

—Significant as to the effect of "establishment" upon the benevolence and aggressive force of a religious body, are the figures showing the respective contributions to Foreign Missions of the Established Church and the Free Churches of Great Britain. The total contribution of England and Scotland to Foreign Missions is about one million pounds sterling; and of this sum about two-thirds comes from the Free Churches, while the Established Churches, with their immense endowments and the hereditary wealth of titled families so generally connected with the Establishment, contributes the remaining one-third.

—A Chicago physician declares that the frequenters of liquor saloons encounter great danger in drinking from glasses which have been washed in water in which hundreds of other glasses have been cleaned, since it is possible for the germs of the most malignant diseases to be transmitted from one drinker to another by this means. As a means of avoiding such unpleasant results the doctor would have the glasses cleaned in running water. There is however a more effective way of avoiding the dangers indicated, which will readily suggest itself to the reader, for after all the disease germs do not probably constitute by any means the greatest danger which the dram-drinker incurs.

—Dr. Lorimer has discouraged the proposal of the Executive Committee of his church to add a thousand dollars to his salary. This is justly commended as showing that with the pastor of Tremont Temple the financial consideration is not the controlling one. The prominence which is given to the fact, however, suggests that many regard it as indicating a magnanimity quite rare among Christian ministers. But it should be considered that not many ministers have the opportunity to decline an addition of a thousand dollars to a seven thousand dollar salary. If one is really in quest of instances of self-sacrifice in the ministry, we would suggest looking among the hundreds of ministers who are doing very faithful and cheerful service on salaries not one-tenth as large as that enjoyed by Dr. Lorimer.

—Rear-Admiral Serada of the Japanese navy, who has lately died, the Congregationalist says, "was an earnest Christian, becoming so when he was a member of the Japanese Naval School, remaining so while a student at Annapolis, when he graduated at the United States Naval Academy. Upon his return to Japan he enlisted heartily in Christian service. He was president of the Tokio Y. M. C. A. when he died. He founded and largely supported a preaching service in the Ichigaza district of Tokio, and there taught each Sunday afternoon a class of seekers after the truth. Few of the Japanese had given more careful study to the doctrinal aspects of Christianity and possibly no one of his compatriots was as successful as he in dealing with enquirers, especially those troubled with intellectual doubts, his work in this respect being apparently much like Henry Drummond's."

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