

An "Off Year."

We are not always at our best!
The loaded orchards of last year
Showed but a scanty bloom this May;
A child could count their fruit to-day,
And yet the farmers east and west
Prune the poor trees, and show no fear.

We are not always at our best!
The sheep are chary of their wool,
They do not always yield the same,
The woods are sometimes bare of game,
The trees not always autumn dressed,
The wheat-fields have their harvests dull.

We are not always at our best!
Earth has its tidal ebb and flood;
And lives like seas have each a tide,
Men's hearts are stont what'er betide,
They wait in hope, and try and test,
And take the evil with the good.

We are not always at our best!
Is God than man less patient then?
Less sure of knowledge, strong of will,
Less able to compete with ill,
To wait till the slow-foaming crest
Of tide shall turn to shore again?

We are not always at our best!
Dear Lord, thou know'st what was and is;
Our best, our worst, our hopes, our fears,
Our sins and our repentant tears;
In Thy great patience we can rest;
Next year may make amends for this.
—Susan Collidge.

Her First Effort.

The meeting had been one of special interest. Many were inquiring the way to Jesus. The text, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" had been dwelt upon with great earnestness, and one listener was endeavoring to renewly consecrate her life to Christ. Under the inspiration of the meeting it seemed easy to work for Jesus. There was nothing too hard to do for him. At home, before going to rest, the question was again asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" and instantly there came to her mind the thought of a young friend, and the rest of the prayer was a pleading for the soul of that one.

During all the next day, came the thought, "Oh, I wish Lucy knew Jesus! I must pray for her constantly." Then the question would arise, "Is there nothing else to do?" "Oh, I can't talk to her; I never could do that; I wouldn't know what to say. So many people do more harm than good by talking to unconverted friends."

"Faith without works is dead." "Yes; I know; but that is not my work. I will ask some of my Christian friends to unite with me in praying for her."

"Even Christ pleased not himself." So the conflict went on through the day, but, by night it had ceased, and at prayer-time the thought was "Lord, help me to tell her about thee; give me strength and courage." Tuesday morning came, and this was lesson day. Mary was a music teacher, and Lucy one of her pupils. All through the morning the thought of Lucy was present, and as Mary walked to her home a half mile from town, she was endeavoring to frame words and sentences into language that would be winning; but underneath it all was the hope that something might happen to make it an impossibility to approach the subject. Why should she, a loving disciple, feel such a strange repugnance to talking of Him and his tender care? Did you ever have such an unnatural experience as that?

Lucy met her at the door with her accustomed bright smile and cheerful words. "I will give the lesson first and then talk," was Mary's thought. So the music hour passed by in the usual way, excepting the fact of unwonted abstraction on the part of the generally alert, attentive teacher.

Lucy thought, "I wonder what is the matter; she does not seem to be hearing me or noticing my mistakes." The lesson was over, and Mary lingered talking about common-place things, the task seeming harder as each moment passed. Some one may come into the room and it would be so embarrassing.

Finally a bright thought came. "Lucy, get your hat and walk through the woods with me, can't you?" As they walked along together in the pleasant spring air, they talked of the beautiful flowers and trees, but no word of the Maker of these beautiful things. Lucy pointed out the spot where the ferns grew best, and gathered a bouquet of wild flowers for the mother at home; showed the bird's nest with the speckled eggs, wondering mean while what caused that preoccupied look and manner. They had reached the roadside and Mary had found no words; and, as Lucy seemed to be ready to return, she said "Good by," and turned aside, saying to herself, "I can not do it. I don't know how to broach the subject." Lucy ran quickly up the hill and Mary walked homeward with such a heavy heart. The thought of a neglected opportunity was dreadful.

In thinking it over now she could see so many places where it would have been easy to bring Jesus into the conversation. The words now burned on her tongue and she

longed to run back and try once more. The next three days were filled with self-reproaches, and a humiliating sense of having been weighed in the balances and found wanting. Friday's lesson hour was gladly welcomed, and, after the lesson, she began immediately to tell Lucy of her hopes and desires; but the words she had thought of would not come. Instead of the pleasant winning story, was such a stammering tongue, and such a confused jumble of words! There seemed no answering look on Lucy's face; her bright eyes seemed looking through the young teacher, and she knelt and listened quietly while Mary prayed. Afterward, as they parted, she forgot to say good-by. Just that quiet, astonished look. And Mary—poor child—the burden was partially gone and Jesus seemed very near; but she felt she had made a great failure and turned to Him and said, "I knew I couldn't do it. Why didst thou send me on such an errand? I am so sorry I tried; she is just laughing at me; I have only driven her away with my harsh commonplace words."

On Sunday, Mary dreaded to meet those bright eyes; and when Sabbath-school time came avoided looking in the direction of Lucy's class. Feeling a light touch on her arm, she turned to see Lucy standing by and holding out a little Sunday-school card on which was printed this verse from Ephesians: "Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;" and as Mary looked up quickly and eagerly she caught the answering look of love and peace. There was only time for a quiet hand clasp, and as she led the children in the opening song her voice swelled out triumphantly. She had learned the lesson that when Jesus really sends one on a mission for him he will prepare the way, and the Holy Spirit will take care of the words uttered by the most stammering tongue.—*Journal and Messenger.*

A Pastor's Word to those Recently Converted.

My Dear Friends: You are just beginning a Christian life. It is of the highest moment that you should have right and clear ideas as to what that life is, and how to carry it on. Let me suggest a few things that will help in this.

1. Remember that you are now God's children. You have been born into his family; you are therefore, no longer to seek to do your own will but his will; you are not your own, but have been bought with a price, even with the precious blood of Christ; you are, hence, consciously and earnestly and always to seek to do what will honor God. Your one supreme rule of life is, whatsoever you do, to do all to the glory of God. If you settle this at the outset, as a first principle of Christian life, you will avoid many stumbling-blocks and difficulties farther on. Remember, that religion, following Christ, obeying God, is in no sense a matter which depends on your feeling. Make it a point to do your duty, whatever it is, whether you feel like it or not. Never neglect reading your Bible, or praying, or going to church or prayer-meeting, because you do not feel like it; say rather, I am to do my duty, feeling or no feeling. Right-doing brings right-feeling.

2. Be steadfast and not periodical Christians. Do not allow yourselves to think that you cannot live consistently all the time. The true branch abides in the vine. The Spirit of Christ dwells always in the true believer, and is ready every moment to impart wisdom, courage, patience, and ensure victory over every besetting sin within, and every foe without. Keeping ever close to Christ will make your life like his—a life without paroxysms, or eclipses, or breaks.

3. Put honor upon God's word. Let there be no day without the reading of the Bible and prayer. Better give up one meal a day than miss the feeding of your soul on God's manna. Better part with any other treasure than the "still hour." There is nothing like starting the day with an interview with God.

4. Honor the Lord's day. The keeping of no commandment goes more to the heart of all Christian life than this. To make little of it, by allowing habits of travel, or visiting, or pleasure seeking, or reading of Sunday papers, is to bring certain leanness upon the soul—is to weaken, if not destroy, one's testimony. The world rates Christians as they rate God's commands.

5. Be faithful in little things. There is a great temptation to be careless here, and dismiss as trivial many omissions of duty or failures to hold to a high Christian standard. Remember that we are to present our bodies a living sacrifice unto God—are to seek to be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. Faithfulness is the great test of true discipleship. The balance that goes wrong in ounces, or quarter ounces

goes wrong in pounds. One mistake in a column of figures spoils a balance-sheet. He that is faithful in that which is least, and only he, will be faithful also in much.

6. See that no man take your crown. Forget the things behind, and reach forth unto those before, pressing toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Having received the gift of eternal life, live worthy of the gift, holding in high regard the rewards promised of God, as did Moses, who esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, because he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. It is one thing to have sins forgiven—another thing to render such service as insures abundant and rich reward. The wages of sin is death, the gift of God eternal life; and the wages of God surpass in value all that has entered into the heart of man to conceive! Lay hold upon that for which God laid hold upon you, and let not the rewards reserved for you be passed over to others more faithful. Let no man take thy crown.—*Dr. Goodwin, Chicago.*

Rules for Reading Holy Scriptures.

These rules are part of a sermon preached in the parish church of Broad Clist, in Devonshire, by the Rev. Prebendary Acland, the vicar, on the "Duty of Searching the Scriptures."

1. In reading Holy Scripture keep steadily before you its great purpose of teaching you the will of God and the way of salvation through Jesus Christ.

2. Let its beautiful histories, and the many interesting questions which arise out of it, serve (as they are doubtless intended) to engage your attention, and to help you to look at God's dealings with man in many different points of view; but never read or search into them in a mere spirit of curiosity, or let them distract you from its one great purpose.

3. Read it *recently*; remembering that God caused the books to be written as they are, and to come down to us as we have them; and that he is speaking to you through them.

4. Read it *thankfully*; blessing God who has caused it to be written for your learning; and often reflecting how sadly in the dark we should have been without its guiding light, and what blessed hope you have through it, which without it, you would not have had.

5. Read it *prayerfully*. It is well to offer a short prayer before reading; but I mean as to the whole spirit of your reading, read with the wish and with the expectation that the voice of God in Holy Scripture may speak to your heart and conscience, and that you may be better for reading that portion which is before you.

6. Read it *humbly*; remembering that a book which God has caused to be written by men gifted with his Holy Spirit for that purpose, must be, very much of it, far above us; that we must be content to wait till God shall give us more light; and that meanwhile he will enable us to understand *all* that is good and needful for us to know.—*The Gleanings.*

Praying in Half a Room.

In a large and respectable school near Boston, two boys—from different States, and strangers to each other—were compelled by circumstances to room together. It was the beginning of the term, and the two students spent the first day in arranging their room, and getting acquainted. When night came the younger of the boys asked the other if he did not think it would be a good idea to close the day with a short reading from the Bible and a prayer. The request was modestly made, without whining or cant of any kind. The other boy, however, bluntly refused to listen to the proposal.

"Then you will have no objection if I pray by myself, I suppose?" said the younger. "It has been my custom, and I wish to keep it up."

"I don't want any praying in this room, and won't have it!" retorted his companion.

The younger boy rose slowly, walked to the middle of the room, and standing upon a seam in the carpet which divided the room nearly equally, said quietly:

"Half of this room is mine. I pay for it. You may choose which half you will have. I will take the other, and I will pray in that half or get another room. But pray I must and will whether you consent or refuse."

The older boy was instantly conquered. To this day he admires the sturdy independence which claimed as a right what he had boorishly denied as a privilege. A Christian might as well ask leave to breathe as to ask permission to pray. There is a false sentiment connected with Christian actions which interferes with their free exercise. If there is anything to be admired, it is the

manliness that knows the right and dares to do it without asking any one's permission.—*Youth's Companion.*

Canon Wilberforce on Temperance.

Canon Wilberforce, the celebrated English clergyman, says he is an advocate of total abstinence, and he wants every temperance worker to take the motto of General Grant, "Unconditional Surrender," which gave the General the title by which he was often called, until total abstinence should be universal. He appeals to his hearers not to mix the temperance cause with politics, to keep it continually from the political ranks, because unscrupulous politicians would use it for a means to further their own ends. "In my own country the House of Lords has many members who have become wealthy by manufacturing alcoholic spirits and selling them at an illegal rate," he said. "There are daily pouring into this country thousands who came from all parts of Europe. For a time they linger in their national colonies, the German, Italian or Irish, but before long they separate and become digested in the great national stomach." The influence, he thinks, that was exerted over them has a very powerful effect for good or bad upon the people in the countries from which they came. Unless the liquor traffic is driven from this country, the land will become fettered in despotism and slavery worse than that of a century ago. The eyes of all liberal people in Europe are on this country, and the people here should make it in the future the success that it has been in the past. He touched lightly on the high license measure, but says he didn't understand it clearly, and did not believe in licensing a wrong.

Foretastes.

Dr Cuyler once told a good story of a veteran negro who, in a homely way, expressed a great wealth of Christian experience, when he said to his pastor on one occasion: "Ise tinkin dat if de crumbs ob joy dat fall from de Massa's table in dis world am so good, what will de great loaf in glory be?"

Who that has fed upon the promises of God, and has known the sweetness of the sincere milk of the Word, has not had just such a thought as the simple old man thus expressed in his rude vernacular? How great are the joys, how immeasurable the privileges of the Christian here below! Not only have we the promise of the unspeakable gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, but ours is also the glorious privilege of living this life for him "who loved us, and gave himself for us."

O, the "crumbs of joy that fall from the Master's table!" How full of sweetness they are! How the soul delights in them, filling itself with marrow and fatness! The precious promises that sustain us, the tender mercies that refresh us, the opportunities for doing good that uphold us, the love of God that everywhere surrounds us—what comfort they bring us, what an inspiration they are to us, prompting us to reach out and grasp and make our own more and more of the Spirit of God and the eternal life which is our heritage through Christ!

Words of Wisdom.

Jealousy is the apprehension of superiority. Good thoughts are no better than good dreams, unless they are executed.

The love of all things springs from the love of one.

Malice and hatred are very fretting, and apt to make our minds sore and uneasy.

Mere beauty ever was, and ever is, and ever will be, but a secondary thing; except to fools.

The innocence of the intention abates nothing of the mischief of the example.

Though men's persons ought not to be hated, yet without all peradventure their practices justly may be.

A man's nature runs either to herbs or weeds; therefore let him seasonably water the one and destroy the other!

It was the policy of the good old gentleman to make his children feel that home was the happiest place in the world; and I value this delicious home feeling as one of the choicest gifts a parent can bestow.

RANDOM READINGS.

Remember that every person, however low, has rights and feelings.

What ought to be done for God can be done. What can be done shall be done.

Paul was happier in his chain of iron than King Agrippa in his chain of gold.—*Thos. Adams.*

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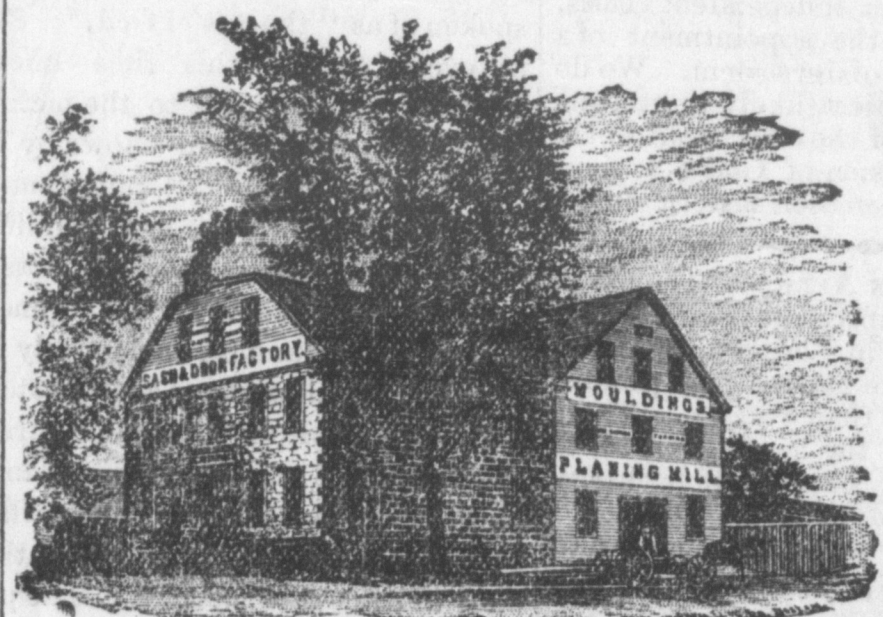
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