

The Family at Home: Familiar Illustrations of Various Domestic Duties

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Section 8 – THE DREADFUL STATE OF A WICKED MAN

"A wicked man is like one that hangs over a deep pit by a slender cord, which he holds with one hand and is cutting with the other."

A gentleman much addicted to profane swearing accompanied a pious miner to see one of the mines in Cornwall. During his visit to the pit, he distressed his companion by many profane and abominable expressions; and as they ascended together, finding it a long way, he flippantly said, "As it is so far down to your work, how far do you suppose it is to hell?" The miner promptly replied, "I do not know how far it is to hell, sir; but I believe that, if the rope by which we are drawn up should break, you would be there in one minute!"

SICKNESS, RECOVERY, DEATH

In times of general sickness, God requires us to be active and kind in ministering to the temporal and spiritual needs of our neighbors, and in endeavoring to lead them to a suitable improvement of the dispensations of Providence. To those in health, we may say, "It is as great a mercy to be *preserved in health* as to be *restored from sickness*; but remember, now is the time to prepare for sickness and death. Hitherto the stroke has passed by you, but that is only to give you an opportunity to prepare for it. When God strikes your neighbor, he threatens you; when he wounds another, he warns you. *Life* is the time to prepare for death; and *health* is the time to prepare for sickness. Delay not preparations for death until you are stretched in agony or insensibility on a dying bed. *Now* is the time to think about your soul; *then* you will have enough to do to bear the pains of the body. He who would reap comfort in sickness, must sow it in health. It is in vain to defer the evil day, and put far from you the thoughts of dying; ready or unready, death will come, and there is no discharge in that warfare. Death will be most terrible to those who have not, in anticipation, died daily. None are the more likely to die for being prepared for it, nor will men's keeping it out of sight, and out of mind, keep it a single moment from them!"

There is nothing terrible in death but what our sins have made so; and even now,

death has no terrors of which faith in Christ cannot strip it. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but acquittal and victory may be obtained by faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. "We should think of death, as if we were dying, and not rest satisfied with anything short of that which would satisfy us if we knew that this moment would be our last." "Let us familiarize death by meditation, and sweeten it by preparation." "It is the great business of life to prepare for death, and to lay hold on eternal life." "Death will introduce us to the judgment-seat of Christ: if death is our friend, and the Judge our friend, then we need not fear."

That man is in a miserable state, to whom it is death to think of death, or discourse of death; and to put away the thoughts of death no more gives peace and security, than the child's shutting his eyes in a storm preserves him from the danger at which he is terrified. "Death often comes without a warning, but never without a warrant, and a warrant which brooks no delays in its execution." "When a believer dies, he leaves all his bad behind, and carries all his good away; but when a sinner dies, he leaves all his good things behind him, and carries with him all his bad—a load which sinks him into the pit of everlasting perdition."

To those recovered from sickness, God seems to say, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you!" Remember, a *respite* is not a *reprieve*; and though, in your late affliction, you were nearer to death in your own apprehension than you are now, it is certain, in fact, that death was never so near you, as at the present moment. Look back and reflect what it was that gave you the most pain and alarm on that bed of sickness, and avoid it, as you would avoid planting your dying pillow with thorns. *A glimmering of eternity breaks in upon the sick chamber, and shows the world and sin in their true light.* Accustom yourself to think of them as you then thought, and allow not yourself to be deceived by the false glare that too often rests upon them. The world is as vain and empty, and sin as ruinous and dreadful, as they appeared when death and eternity seemed just at hand. Your answered prayers and enjoyed mercies now demand returns of gratitude and praise. The vows you made in sickness must now be fulfilled in holy obedience. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. Because He has heard my prayer and my supplication, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live. I will pay unto the Lord my vows, which my lips have uttered and my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble."

I shall now set down some of those comforting sayings which I have heard a minister address to pious people in prospect of death. "Death to a Christian, is but putting off rags for robes—is but exchanging a dungeon for a palace!" "Sin has long been your greatest grief; but that period is very near at hand when—

'Sin, your worst enemy before,
Shall vex your eyes and ears no more;
Your inward foes shall all be slain,

Nor Satan break your peace again.'

Sin received its sentence of death in the death of Christ; but it does not receive its execution until the death of the Christian." "The great comfort of a believer on his death-bed is faith in Christ, hope in the promises, and interest in the covenant: by these, death is stripped of its terrors, and the glories of eternity brought full in view." "Your best friends are gone to heaven before you, or will soon follow after, and Christ is waiting to receive you, which is best of all."

That Christian (the mother of Philip Henry) was in a happy frame who said, "My Head is in heaven—my heart is in heaven: it is but a few more steps, and I shall be there also." And another (the Rev. Joseph Mead), who, on being asked how he found himself, answered, "Well and happy, and going home, as every honest man should do when his day's work is done; and I bless God I have a good home to go to."

There is nothing more grievous to a godly man, than to see aged people tottering over the grave, and yet unmindful of eternity. "Oh!" he will say, "it is a dreadful sight to see old people making more provision for life than preparation for death! What awful folly and madness, to prepare that which they cannot enjoy—and to neglect that which they cannot avoid. The steel being spent—the knife cannot cut; the sun being set—the day cannot tarry; and old age being come—life cannot long endure. It is the eleventh hour, and almost the last minute of that hour. The lamp is just flickering in the socket, and there is the whole work of a life to do—or the soul must be undone forever!"

I once heard the following conversation between an old man and a Mr. Wilson, "Well, my friend," said Mr. W., "you have had a long walk; how old are you?" "Seventy-three, sir, last birthday." "And you are still permitted to enjoy a comfortable degree of health and vigor." "Oh, yes, as well as ever I was in my life; *as likely to live fifty years as anybody.*" "Oh, my friend, do not deceive yourself with so very improbable an idea. It is very unlikely you should live fifty months; you have already been permitted to advance far beyond the ordinary boundaries of the life of man; and you ought to live in daily expectation of death, and in constant preparation for it. What is your hope for another world, if today should finish your existence in this life?" "Time enough to think about that, sir, when death is a little nearer. I hope I shan't be cut off so quickly but what I shall have time to say, 'Lord, have mercy upon me!'" "Alas! alas! and can you venture your immortal soul on such a vain, precarious foundation? If you really think you shall need mercy, then, why do you not cry for mercy now, while the opportunity is afforded you? My soul trembles to think of your awful condition." "Don't disturb yourself about me," said the insensible old man; "you know every tub must stand upon its own bottom; and I dare say I shall do very well at last. Good day to you, sir."

Mr. Wilson then turned to some young people who happened to be present, and

charged us to remember our Creator in the days of our youth, and not deceive ourselves with the thought that old age must needs bring piety with it.

A very few weeks after this, I saw the old man's son, and learned that his father was dead; and there was every reason to fear that he died as he had lived, without God and without hope.

"I am very poorly," said another old man to Mr. Wilson; "I have had another severe plunge since I saw you." After detailing the particulars of his affliction, he added, "I have been a great sufferer in my time. Have I not seen a great deal of affliction? Well, it is best to have it all here; it is to be hoped there will be no more of it hereafter." "But what reasons have you, my friend, for indulging such a hope? The troubles and sorrows of this world have nothing to do with another, except so far as they produce a good or bad effect on those who are exercised by them." "For my part, I have nothing to fear about another world; I have always led a good life; never followed any bad ways. I never cheated any body—never was spiteful—I owe nobody anything—I am sure to do well."

"Come, then, a still small whisper in your ear;
He has no hope who never had a fear;
And he who never doubted of his state,
He may perhaps—perhaps he may—too late."

"But what have I to be afraid of?—Do you think I have been a wicked man?"

"My dear friend, I have known you for many years to be an upright, kind-hearted neighbor, one who would feel pleasure in doing good to anyone. Hence you have a claim on anyone who has it in his power, or thinks he has, to do you good. This very feeling of respect and gratitude urges me to press upon you a serious examination into the grounds of your hope for eternity. For my own part, I know of no other hope than what the Bible reveals; and though I have read my Bible for many years, I never yet met with a passage that intimated, that merely avoiding to cheat or injure his neighbor, would insure a man a place in heaven. Have you thought, my friend, of the relation in which you stand to God, and in what manner you have discharged your duty to him, as well as to your fellow-creatures?"

"Why, you know God Almighty is very merciful?"

"True; He is infinitely merciful. For the very best of us, with all our good deeds and kind actions to our fellow-creatures, deserve at his hands nothing but wrath and destruction. It is of his tender love and mercy that he has sent his only-begotten Son into the world to die for guilty men and women, in order that mercy might be extended to all who humbly believe and accept this great salvation. But the blessed God is never merciful at the expense of his justice. He will never set aside the demands of his holy law, nor accept our poor, worthless doings as an atonement for our sins; nor will he acquit or save any but those who believe and

obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Pardon my freedom in entreating that you will read the holy scriptures, especially the Gospels, and that you will earnestly pray for the Holy Spirit to help you to understand their true meaning; that, if you have been in error as to your state, and building your hopes for heaven on a false foundation, you may be convinced of your error while yet there remains time and hope of amending it."

"Be so good as to examine the following passages, and seriously inquire what aspect they bear on your character and state. 'By the deeds of the law shall no man living be justified in His sight.' 'There is none righteous, no, not one; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' Romans 3:10, 20, 23. 'Except a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' John 3:3. 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' 'He who believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he who believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him.' John 3:16, 36. 'Neither is there salvation in any other—for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.' Acts 4:12. 'Therefore, thus says the Lord God—Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he who believes shall not make be disappointed. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place.' Isaiah 28:16, 17. 'Seek the Lord while he may be found; call you upon him while he is near.' Isaiah 55:6. 'There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Savior: there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth. Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength.' Isaiah 45:21, 22, 24. "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 18:10-14.

TRUE RICHES

I have heard of a great nobleman in the north of England, who used to boast of his great riches. On one occasion, he said to a gentleman who accompanied him in a walk, "These beautiful grounds, as far as your eye can reach, belong to me; those majestic woods on the brow of the distant hills are mine. Those extensive and valuable mines belong to me; yonder powerful steam-engine is employed by me in obtaining the produce of the mines; and those ships in conveying my wealth to other parts of the kingdom; fire, water, earth, and air, all are tributary to me." "Well, Sir," replied the gentleman, "do you see yonder little hovel that seems

but a speck in your estate? There dwells a poor woman, who can say more than all this; for she can say, 'Christ is mine.' In a very few years, your possessions will be confined within the scanty limits of six feet by two; but she will then have entered on a far nobler inheritance than your lordship now possesses—an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for her, who is now kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation."

The following sayings are worth remembering—

"He is the richest man who desires no superfluities, and lacks no necessities."

"To have a portion in the world is a mercy; to have the world for our chief portion is a misery."

"Wealth is a common gift of God's hand; but wisdom to improve it is a special grace from his heart."

"We put a price upon riches, but riches cannot put a price upon us. We must answer for them, but they cannot answer for us."

"The contented man has two heavens; one here in his own bosom, another hereafter in Abraham's bosom."

"There is no miss of the creature where there is a full enjoyment of the Creator, any more than of a candle when the sun shines at noon-day, or of a cistern when we have the fountain at command."

CROSSES AND AFFLICTIONS

Submission, unreserved submission, is not only the most reasonable thing imaginable, but the most calming, consoling state of mind in this valley of tears, and produces the happiest effects on ourselves and on all around us, especially when accompanied with daily earnest prayer for those in particular whom we regard as most instrumental in occasioning or increasing our trials. Mr. Newton used to say, "A sinner has no right to complain; and a saint has no question."

"No affliction for the present seems joyous, but grievous;" and even godly people are too apt to construe their afflictions into expressions of divine displeasure against them, and to discourage themselves with the idea that they cannot be the children of God, or they would not be thus hardly dealt with. I remember hearing a conversation between Mr. Wilson and a godly woman who had been exercised with a series of trials, both in worldly circumstances and family bereavements. It was something to the following effect—

Mr. W.—"Well, my friend, the Lord has chastened you sorely, but he has not

given you up to death."

Woman.—"Not quite to death, sir, but almost to despair. It is a bad sign that I should need to be so hardly dealt with; I must have a deal of wickedness in my heart. Indeed, I think no one can be so wicked as I; and now I begin to think that God has cast me off forever."

Mr. W.—"It certainly is a bad sign that we need affliction, as it is a sign that we are sick when we need physic. But it is more hopeful to have medicine administered, however bitter, than to be left a prey to our spiritual diseases. 'Tis a worse sign to be always without chastisement than to be often under chastisement; and, instead of fearing that God has cast you off, you have reason to be thankful for these merciful intimations that He designs your cure. Afflictions are God's potions, which we may sweeten by faith and prayer; but we are too apt to make them bitter, by putting into God's cup the ill ingredients of our own impatience and unbelief."

Woman.—"That's too true, sir. I wish there was more submission in my heart, and then my troubles would be more easily borne; but here I sit, day after day, thinking of what I have lost, and how I have been exercised; and every day seems to bring some new trial, and it seems as if there was no end to sorrow."

Mr. W.—"Yet do not imagine that any strange thing has happened to you. The same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren, and it is no more than what you have been forewarned of. There are daily crosses as well as daily bread; and if we are enabled to take them up, and bear them with the temper and spirit of true Christians, we have reason to hope for the gracious assistance of our Lord in bearing our burden, and in making it a real blessing to us; but as to the end of our burdens and sorrows, we are not to expect it until we lay down our burden and our life together."

Woman.—"I often think, sir, that I could have borne any trial better than my own."

Mr. W.—"Yours is a very common mistake; but these are true sayings, 'Your own clothes cannot be so well fitted to you as your own crosses.' 'It is a presumptuous child who would choose his own rod, and an unreasonable Christian who would choose his own cross.' A cross we must have; and those that are made in heaven best fit the saints' backs, while those that we make by our own folly and perverseness are the most galling and the least profitable."

Woman.—"True, sir; so I find it. The sorest of all my troubles come through the misconduct of an overindulged child, whom I made my idol."

Mr. W.—"Ah! my friend, 'Whatever we make an idol of will be a cross to us if we are God's children, and a curse to us if we are not.' But what a mercy it is, that though God makes our own backslidings to reprove us, and our folly to chastise

us, he does not utterly take his mercy from us, nor allow his faithfulness to fail. Your great concern now should be, to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, to take refuge in the mercy of Him who smites you, and to see that the end of these painful dispensations is answered in you. 'Though the **hand** of God may seem to be against you—his **heart** may be towards you!' 'Afflictions are sent, not to drive you *from* God, but to draw you *to* him.' 'By afflictions God separates the soul he loves from the sin he hates.' 'Grieve not too much after outward losses; God never takes from his people any earthly enjoyment, but he gives them something as good or better in its place.' Whatever you have lost in the creature, you may find in God; and if these sorrows bring you to cling more closely to Him, as your comfort in life and your portion in death, you may say, as a saint of old said, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.' Afflictions are rather promised than threatened to the people of God.' Afflictions make a large article in God's inventory of good things, and 'no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly.' How much mercy and consolation are contained in that declaration, 'As many as I *love*, I rebuke and chasten!' So far, then, from taking afflictions as evidences of the divine displeasure, we should rather receive them as tokens of fatherly love; and instead of fearing that we are in the wrong road, because we find it rough and thorny, we should be encouraged by the assurance that the way to heaven is through much tribulation. Humility can draw out all the bitterness from the cup of sorrow, and faith can replace it with sweet consolation. Thus many a saint besides the apostle has found that 'as suffering abounds, consolations much more abound,' and has learned to 'glory in tribulation; knowing that tribulation works patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and hope makes not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit.'"

Much more, in the same strain, the good man addressed to his afflicted friend, and marked down many precious passages of scripture for her to ponder over in solitude.

Before he left the room, he turned to me, then a mirthful girl, who had never tasted sorrow, and said, "Remember that your time of sorrow will come. Though you live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. One great means to lessen troubles when they come, is to expect and think upon them before they come. Evils will come never the *sooner* for our being aware of them, but they will come the *easier*. 'Preparation to meet sorrow is labor well lost if it comes not, and labor well bestowed if it comes;' and how can we obtain preparation for meeting affliction? By having the heart established in faith on the Lord Jesus. If our sins are pardoned, the *sting* of affliction, as well as of death, is taken away. If the friendship of God is secured, we shall never lack support, comfort, or protection. If we have a portion in heaven, we may well bear all the losses, crosses, and trials of earth. If we are the children of God, all things will work together for our good; and 'our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, will work for us a far more exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things

which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Since that time, as the good old gentleman told me, I have seen many days of trouble; and his good sayings have often come into my mind and cheered me, especially those blessed portions of scripture which encourage us in the darkest seasons to put our trust in the mercy of God through Jesus Christ: and that is among the uses of affliction; it leads us to search the blessed volume for promises on which to rest our hope. I, for one, may well say, "Unless your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction."

"This was my comfort when I bore
Variety of grief,
It made me learn your word the more,
And fly to that relief."

The following lines were repeated to a minister, by a poor and pious female, when her husband appeared to be dying, leaving her with nine children—

"Long have I viewed, long have I thought,
And trembling held this bitter draught;
But now resolved and firm I'll be,
Since 'tis prepared and mixed by Thee!
I'll trust my great Physician's skill;
What He prescribes can ne'er be ill;
No longer will I grieve or pine;
Your pleasure 'tis, it shall be mine.
Your medicine oft produces smart;
You wounded me in the tenderest part;
All that I prized below is gone,
Yet, Father, still, Your will be done.
Since 'tis your sentence I should part
With what is nearest to my heart,
My little all I here resign,
And, lo, my heart itself is Thine.
Take all, great God; I will not grieve,
But wish I still had more to give;
I hear your voice; you bid me quit
This favored gourd—and I submit."

THE WIDOW AND THE FATHERLESS

It is mentioned as one prominent feature of pure religion, "to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction." I well remember, when my dear father died, that some of our kind, godly friends came to see my poor mother, and one of

them said to her, "This day, my friend, you become heiress to promises more numerous, full, and particular, than to any other state or condition mentioned in scripture; and from this day forward it will be your privilege to plead at the throne of grace: 'Lord, you have seen fit to make me a widow, and these my children fatherless; and now, remember the word unto your servant on which you have caused me to hope.'"

This sentiment rested on the mind of my dear mother, and often roused her fortitude when she seemed ready to sink in overwhelming grief. And she, and those dependent on her, ever had reason to say that not one good thing failed them, of all that the Lord had spoken. We had struggles, to be sure, and sometimes met with unkindness and oppression; but often friends and protectors were raised up, and sources of supply opened most unexpectedly and seasonably. We were all of us willing to work, and, under the blessing of God, our hands have been sufficient for us. Above all, the prayers of our parents were answered in our family being preserved in peace and love, and each of us, I trust, brought to love and serve the God in whom they trusted.

When we read a passage of scripture together, and anything struck my mother as particularly suitable, she would often say, "Mark that place down, child; we may be glad to refer again to it ourselves: besides, there are many widows in Israel; and glad should I be to point out to another that which has brought comfort to my own mind."

In this manner, I got a number of passages marked down under different particulars, applicable to the case of widows and fatherless children; such as these:

God has taken widows and fatherless children under his special care and protection. "The Lord relieves the fatherless and the widow." Psalm 146:9. "A Father of the fatherless and a Judge of the widows is God in his holy habitation." Psalm 68:5. "Leave your fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let your widows trust in me." Jer. 49:11. "The Lord will establish the border of the widow." Proverbs 15:25. "In you the fatherless finds mercy." Hos. 14:3. "You are the Helper of the fatherless. Lord, you have heard the desire of the humble. You will prepare their heart. You will cause your ear to hear, to judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress." Psalm 10:14, 17, 18. "Remove not the old landmarks, and enter not into the fields of the fatherless, for their Redeemer is mighty, and he shall plead their cause." Proverbs 23:10, 11.

Many of the laws given to God's ancient people, the Jews, express his tender concern for the widow and the fatherless. "Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless." Exodus 22:22-24. "The Lord executes the

judgment of the fatherless and the widow." Deut. 10:18. "And the fatherless and the widow which are within your gates, shall come and shall eat, and be satisfied, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the works of your hand which you do." Deut. 14:29. "Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands." Deut. 24:17, 19.

It is often mentioned in scripture as a good feature of character, to be kind and tender to the widow and the fatherless. Those who are so, are encouraged to pray for a blessing on their substance: "When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied. Then say to the Lord your God: "I have removed from my house the sacred portion and have given it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, according to all you commanded. I have not turned aside from your commands nor have I forgotten any of them. Look down from heaven, your holy dwelling place, and bless your people Israel and the land you have given us as you promised on oath to our forefathers, a land flowing with milk and honey." Deut. 26:12, 13, 15.

Job, in the time of his affliction, was comforted by recollecting that, in the time of his prosperity, he "delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon him, and he made the widow's heart to sing for joy." Job 29:12, 13, 31:16, 17.

Such conduct is mentioned as an evidence of genuine piety: "Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." James 1:27.

"Cease to do evil; learn to do well; relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless; plead for the widow." Isaiah 1:17. "If any widow has children or nephews, let them learn first to show piety at home, and to requite their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God." 1 Tim. 5:4.

Cruelty, oppression, and even neglect of the widow and fatherless, are severely censured. In the description of the wicked it is said, "They drive away the donkey of the fatherless, and take the widow's ox for a pledge; they do not good to the widow." Job 24:3, 21. It is given as a mark of the grossest hypocrisy, "which devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers." Mark 12:40. There is an awful curse against "him who perverts the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow; and all the people shall say, Amen." Deut. 27:19. "So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who

oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me," says the Lord Almighty." Mal. 3:5.

"Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help." 1 Tim. 5:3, 5. Such a widow was the prophetess Anna, who departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day; and was there favored with a sight of the infant Savior. Luke 2:37.

The poor widow's offering of two mites for the service of the sanctuary, was graciously accepted and acknowledged above all the costly gifts of the rich and proud. Mark 12:42.

It is very probable, though not certain, that the active and benevolent Dorcas was a widow, who cheered her own solitude by laboring for the good of others. Acts 9:36-41. We have also, in scripture, some remarkable appearances of Providence on behalf of widows. The prophet Elijah was sent to the widow of Zarephath, not only for his own sustenance during the famine, but also to multiply her scanty store for the sufficient supply of her household. He was also permitted to raise her only son to life. 1 Kings 17.

The prophet Elisha was permitted to multiply the widow's oil, so as to supply her with the means of honorably discharging her husband's debt and supporting her children. 2 Kings 4:1-7.

The widow weeping over the bier of her only son, experienced the compassion and sympathy of the Son of God. He said unto her, "Weep not;" and restored the young man to life. Luke 7:11-15.

When expiring on the cross, our Lord provided for his widowed and destitute mother an asylum in the house of his beloved disciple, John 19:26, 27; and, to the present day, many widows and fatherless children can attest their experience of the compassion, faithfulness, and care of Him, who will be known as the Father of the fatherless and the God of the widow.

CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT AND CHEERFULNESS

We had in our village two old women, who lived next door to each other, and whose outward circumstances were in every respect as similar as possible; but their tempers and dispositions as complete a contrast. Jenny Moore was always complaining; Amy Scott was always contented and grateful. A kind lady was in the habit of looking in upon them occasionally. One conversation with each would serve as a picture of their general habit and temper.

Lady.—"Good morning, Mrs. Moore; I hope you are well this fine day."

Jenny.—"It is a fine day, to be sure; but 'tis piercing cold, and I am not well; very poorly, indeed, ma'am; hardly able to get about. I am always bad with the rheumatism."

Lady.—"That is a trying pain. I suppose you are using means to remove it."

Jenny.—"No, not I; poor folks must bear their pains. It is not like the rich, who can have proper advice, and things to make them comfortable."

Lady.—"Shall I give you a turn for the dispensary? You might then have medicines and attendance free of expense."

Jenny.—"Why, for the matter of that, I have got a turn; the rector gave me one last week; but I don't see that doctor's stuff does much good. Besides, the doctor hardly ever calls on me, because I am a poor woman. He has been but once this week, though I have seen him go by twice a day to Mrs. Burroughs. But then she's a lady, and there's something to be got by going to her."

Lady.—"Mrs. Burroughs is ill of a fever, and requires constant attention, which a rheumatic complaint does not require. However, if you feel yourself neglected, I will call and speak to the doctor. He is a kind, humane man, and, I am sure, will be willing to pay you every proper attention, and do all in his power to relieve your pains."

Jenny.—"Thank you, ma'am; but it is of no use to speak to him; all he says is, I must persevere with the stuff he gave me, and wear plenty of flannel; but what's the use of telling poor folks that?"

Lady.—"Have you no flannel, then?"

Jenny.—"Yes, I have got a piece of coarse flannel that was given me at the hall; but I have not had time to make it into a petticoat."

Lady.—"And did you not receive a blanket, and some coals?"

Jenny.—"Yes, I got a few coals, and a small blanket; the large ones were given to those that have families, and I am sure they did not need them so bad as I did."

Lady.—"I should think, where three or four people have but one bed, they must need a larger blanket to cover them than you, who sleep alone. Besides, those who give have a right to give as they think for the best; and you should be thankful for what you receive, instead of being discontented that it is no more. Think how much worse off you might have been, if you had not received the

blanket, and the flannel, and the coals, and the turn for the doctor. For all this you are indebted to the kindness of friends. I really think you have great cause of gratitude instead of complaint. Pray what is your income?"

Jenny.—"I have but three shillings a week to help myself, and the parish grumble at allowing me that."

Lady.—"But you are able to earn a trifle at spinning and knitting?"

Jenny .—"Tis a trifle, indeed! Women's work is always a dead penny; and now they've got these new-fangled machines, as I say, they have taken the bread out of poor people's mouths."

Lady.—"No doubt, it must affect the poor in some respects; but then it is a general good, and even you share the benefit. You can get a gown, shift, petticoat, and pair of stockings, for as little money now as you would have paid formerly for a gown alone, before machinery came into such general use."

Jenny.—"Ah! it is seldom I have money to lay out in clothing; so it is little matter to me whether cheap or costly. 'Tis a hard matter to get a bit of bread to put in one's mouth; and as to butcher's meat, I scarcely ever buy any."

Lady.—"I have often been pleased to see your son's little girl bringing you a plateful at dinner-time."

Jenny.—"Yes, he sends me a bit now and then; but he has a large family, and it is not always that they have got it themselves."

Lady.—"It is pleasing to find that they have the disposition to help you. You have also a steady, respectable daughter in service: I hope she is kind to you."

Jenny .—"Why, she pays my rent, to be sure; that is some help to me."

Lady.—"A very great help, indeed! and you have a convenient, comfortable cottage."

Jenny.—"Tis a miserable cold place, and smokes sadly when the wind sets one way."

Lady.—"Your garden, too, must help you a little. I suppose you grow a few potatoes and cabbages for your own use, and have something to sell beside."

Jenny .—"I don't know how it is, but my crops generally fail, and the birds get at my fruit. What with one thing and another, I don't know that I am a bit better off than if I had no garden at all."

Lady.—"You have got a nice Bible here. What a blessed companion is that in our deepest solitude! Do you recollect the fourth chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians?"

Jenny.—"I can't say that I do—my eyes are bad—I don't read much."

Lady.—"Your little grand-daughter, who attends the Sunday school, reads nicely, and would feel a pleasure in reading you a chapter or two every day."

Jenny.—"Yes, I dare say she would. She often offers to read, but it is not always that it suits me."

Lady.—"I think you would find pleasure and profit in a constant perusal of the sacred volume. There is enough good news there, if we do but take it home to ourselves, to make us rich and happy, whatever our outward circumstances may be. Let me read you a few verses; think them over, and pray that God may give you a contented spirit, and teach you, like his servant of old, in whatever state you are, therewith to be content."

The lady felt almost disposed to leave this grumbling old woman, without any other memorial of her visit; but recollecting, "our Father in heaven, who is kind to the evil and the unthankful," she presented her a trifle, and, taking her leave, called on Amy Scott, at the next door, when the following conversation took place—

Lady—"Well, Amy, how are you? I am sorry to see you tied up with the face-ache.

Amy .—"Thank you, ma'am; my face is much better than it has been; and it is a great mercy to be able to get about at all; last week I really was not able to work."

Lady.—"Why did you not let me know? I should have been glad to send you anything you might be in need of."

Amy .—"Thank you, ma'am; I did not like to be troublesome; besides, I really have not lacked for anything. A friend was so kind as to give me a turn for the doctor, and he gave me some stuff that has done me a deal of good."

Lady.—"Was the doctor kind and attentive to you?"

Amy—"O yes, ma'am; he could not have been more so if I had been a lady. While I could not get about, he called on me every day; and, since I have been better, he told me to fetch more medicine as long as I wanted it, and to let him know if I was not so well again. And he spoke for me to the ladies at the hall, and got me such a nice gift—a good piece of flannel to make me a petticoat, and a beautiful warm blanket—only look at it, ma'am; it is fit for the greatest lady in the

land to sleep under. And I have a hundred of coal every week, while the cold weather lasts, which, you know, is a very great help to a poor body. In short, I lack for nothing but a more contented and grateful heart."

Lady.—"Pray—what is your weekly income?"

Amy.—"I have three shillings a week; and that is more than many a poor creature has to live upon. Besides, my children are very good to me. They generally contrive to make up my rent among them; and would stint themselves to give me a bit if they knew I was in need; and one and another is very kind. I often get a few bones to boil down, and make me a drop of broth, or a little skim-milk at the farmer's; and you know every little helps. Besides, though I am not so strong as I used to be, I can still earn a little myself; and my garden helps me out nicely; I have always greens and potatoes for my own use, besides onions and pot-herbs, and a little fruit and flowers to sell. Take one thing with another, I think hardly anyone in the parish is better off than I am."

Lady.—"Don't you find your house very cold?"

Amy.—"It was cold until my son fixed the door to keep out the draft; and now it is as snug and comfortable as need be. The worst of it is, it is rather apt to smoke; but the wind does not always set one way, and then, perhaps, it does not smoke for a month together."

Lady.—"It is a great matter to have a disposition to look at the best side of everything. I rejoice to see you so contented and cheerful."

Amy.—"I think it would be a great sin to be otherwise; besides, what have I to make me discontented? Where one is better off, a hundred are worse. I often think the lines have fallen to me in pleasant places. I have a goodly heritage. The Bible promises only bread and water, and I have generally better fare than that; and, then, let my fare be what it will, I have the precious Bible to comfort and refresh me. I often think of what it says in Proverbs, 'When you go, it shall lead you; when you sleep, it shall keep you; and when you awake, it shall talk with you.' While I have my Bible, I don't know what it is to be dull."

Lady.—"Is your eye-sight pretty good?"

Amy.—"Not so good as it has been; but our minister was so kind as to give me a pair of spectacles, which help me wonderfully. I have heard of a minister (Rev. J. Berridge), who was preaching to a large congregation, and was a long time wiping his glasses before he could read the text; the people looked up to see if anything was the matter, and he said, 'You that can read your Bible without glasses, bless God for it—I bless Him that I can read it with them.' And I desire to say the same. Besides, my children and grand-children often come in and read a chapter to me; and then, in course of time, one gets a great deal of scripture

treasured up in the mind; and that serves well in darkness and dim-sightedness."

Lady.—"Well, is there nothing I can do for your comfort? You seem to be more independent than many people who possess thousands."

Amy.—"Thank you, ma'am. If you will please to read me a chapter, that is my greatest comfort; and it always sounds better if it is read by a good scholar, that knows just how to speak the words properly."

Lady.—"I think I must read the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians; and I feel very thankful that you are enabled to understand and relish it."

The verses to which she particularly alluded are these—"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:4-7. "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Philippians 4:11-13. "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19

Lady.—"Well, I must now bid you farewell; and, though you seem to lack nothing, I hope you will find a use for this trifle, which I wish to leave with you as an expression of my Christian regard."

Amy.—"O, thank you, ma'am, a thousand times. This will just make up enough, with what I have saved, to buy me a new pair of shoes, which I really am in need of."

Lady.—"If you should at any time be unwell, or in need, I hope you will not hesitate to let me know, that I may have the pleasure of ministering to your necessities and comforts."

Amy.—"Thank you, ma'am; I will make bold to send if I should be in need; and I pray the Lord to reward you for your goodness, and to make me truly sensible of his great goodness to me in thus spreading my table, and causing my cup to run over. 'Surely, goodness and mercy have followed me, and shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.'"

To these contrasted characters, I will add a few maxims and sayings, which I have, at different times, gathered on Christian contentment and cheerfulness—

"But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these." 1 Timothy 6:8

"Godliness with contentment is great gain."

"A contented mind is a continual feast."

"A cheerful countenance does good like medicine."

"Let not your heart envy sinners, but be in the fear of the Lord all the day long."

"Better bring down your mind to your condition, than have your condition brought up to your mind."

"Bless God for what you have, and trust God for what you need."

"We must obey the revealed will of God, and then be resigned to his providential will; committing our souls to his keeping, and submitting ourselves to his disposal."

"Neither content nor discontent arises from the outward condition, but from the inward disposition. If a man is not content in the state in which he is—he would not be content in any state in which he would wish to be."

"Humility is the mother of contentment; think lowly of your deservings, and then you will think highly of your receivings. Those who deserve nothing—should be content with anything. The deeper our self-abhorrence, the easier will be our self-resignation. He has the sweetest enjoyment of God's mercies, who feels himself unworthy of the least of them."

Isaac Walton, himself a man of a very cheerful, contented spirit, relates the following anecdote: "I knew a man who had health and riches, and several houses, all beautiful and well furnished, and would be often troubling himself and his family to move from one of them to another. On being asked by a friend why he moved so often from one house to another, he replied, 'It was in order to find contentment in some of them.' But his friend, knowing his temper, told him, if he would find contentment in any of his houses, he must leave *himself* behind, for *contentment can never dwell but with a meek and quiet soul.*"

The following reasons may be assigned, why a Christian should be content with little.

1. Nature needs but little. A little simple food, and plain clothing, and humble shelter—this is all that man really needs. All that he possesses beyond it, is but the beholding of it with his eyes. King George the Third, walking out early one morning, met a lad at the stable-door, and asked him, "Well, boy, what do you do? What do they pay you?" "I help in the stable," replied the lad, "but I have

nothing but food and clothes." "Be content," replied the king; "I have no more." All that the richest possess beyond food, clothing, and habitation, they have but the keeping, or the disposing, not the present enjoyment of. A ploughboy who thinks and feels correctly, has enough to make him contented; and, if a king has a discontented spirit, he will find some plea for indulging it. Nature is content with little, and grace with less; but luxury is seldom satisfied, and lust is never satisfied.

2. Outward possessions are insufficient. "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Luke 12:15. A godly man is satisfied in himself, and a wicked man cannot be satisfied at all; his bosom is like the "But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked." Isaiah 57:20-21. Outward things can neither make a man happy or miserable. Ahab was discontented on a king's throne; Paul and Silas were happy in a dungeon.

3. Our own unworthiness should make us contented with what we possess. Wherefore should a living man complain? A sinner has no right, and a saint has no reason.

4. A Christian has enough in possession and in prospect of spiritual blessings to make him contented and happy, whatever be his outward circumstances. He is a son of God; an heir of glory; and he is going home; a mean lodging or a rough road need not greatly discompose him.

5. The providence of God orders all things for him, and has engaged to order all in the very best manner. He need not fear being neglected, for his God is attentive even to the falling of a sparrow. He need not be anxious about food and clothing, for his Father knows that he has need of these things, and has promised that bread shall be given him, and his water shall be sure, and that all things shall work together for his good.

6. If we have but little in this world, we may content ourselves with the reflection that it is safer to have little than much. Many have been ruined by prosperity. Many have gone to hell splendidly clothed, and who lived each day in luxury! "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" Very wise was the prayer of Agur, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread." Proverbs 30:8

7. Christians should be content, because time is short; and if time is short, trouble cannot be long. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning!" These *light* afflictions are but for a moment, and then comes an *eternal weight of glory*.

Christians should not merely be contented, but cheerful. It is a disgrace to their profession that they should go mourning from day to day, and hang down their

heads like a bulrush. If they would honor religion, they should sing in the ways of the Lord, and let the world know that—

"Religion never was designed
To make our pleasures less."

"In all our conversation we should be lively, but not light; solid, but not sad."

"When first New England was planted, the settlers met with many difficulties and hardships, as is necessarily the case when a civilized people attempt to establish themselves in a wilderness-country. Being piously disposed, they sought relief from Heaven, by laying their needs and distresses before the Lord in frequent set days of fasting and prayer. Constant meditation, and discourse on the subject of their difficulties, kept their minds gloomy and discontented; and, like the children of Israel, there were many disposed even to return to that Egypt which persecution had determined them to abandon.

"At length, when it was proposed in the assembly to proclaim another fast, a farmer, of plain sense, rose and remarked, that the inconveniences they suffered, and concerning which they had so often wearied Heaven with their complaints, were not so great as might have been expected, and were diminishing every day as the colony strengthened; that the earth began to reward their labors, and to furnish liberally for their sustenance; that the seas and rivers were full of fish, the air sweet, the climate wholesome; above all, they were in the full enjoyment of liberty, civil and religious. He therefore thought, that reflecting and conversing on these subjects would be more comfortable, as tending to make them more contented with their situation; and that it would be more becoming the gratitude they owed to the Divine Being, if, instead of a fast, they should proclaim a thanksgiving. His advice was taken; and from that day to this, they have in every year observed circumstances of public happiness sufficient to furnish employment for a thanksgiving-day, which is therefore constantly ordered and religiously observed."

Most objects have two sides: generally one is pleasanter than the other. It is a great happiness to have a disposition to look at the bright side, rather than the gloomy side of things; indeed, this disposition, founded on Christian principles, is the true secret of finding happiness in a miserable world. In the worst circumstances, a Christian has reason for contentment and cheerfulness; and it is a libel on his profession to be gloomy and discontented. Does he possess but little of this world's goods? It is all more than he deserves. Are some of his comforts taken away? He has reason to be thankful that some are left. Is he in pain and sickness? He enjoys the sympathy of Christian friends, and the sympathy and succor of a faithful High-priest. If circumstances are ever so bad, they might have been worse; and, what is more, they will be better. The Christian is passing a rough and dirty piece of road; but he is going home, and he has a good home to go to.

HINTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

I have frequently referred, and have reason to do it with thankfulness, to the kind solicitude shown by some of my friends in behalf of the young. Many of their sayings are deeply impressed on my mind, and much excellent advice on the subject I have written from books which they have either lent me or read in my presence. I most earnestly pray that, through the influences of the Holy Spirit, they may be deeply impressed on the minds of everyone of my children.

"Remember, now, your Creator in the days of your youth."—The present is certainly the *best* time, and may be the *only* time. Remember God in your youth—and He will not forget, or forsake, or cast you off in the time of old age.

If you wish to be certain of finding God, seek Him in youth; for He loves those who love Him, and those that seek Him early shall find Him.

If you wish to be truly honorable, be truly pious; for riches and honor are with her; yes, durable riches and righteousness.

If you wish to have a good portion on earth, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and then all other things (good and needful) will be added thereunto.

If you wish to be eminent in piety, be early pious. Obadiah feared the Lord *from his youth*, and he feared him *greatly*. He who would reap the honor of being an *old disciple*—must sow the seed in being a young disciple. The youngest of Christ's apostles was *the beloved* apostle.

If you wish to make your parents happy, live early in the fear of God, for the father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice; and he who begets a wise son shall have joy from him. Your father and your mother shall be glad, and she who bore you shall rejoice. My son, if your heart is wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine; but a foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her who bore him.

If you wish to escape the snares and pollutions of evil society—be pious early. Cultivate those principles which will give you a distaste for the society of the ungodly, and which will deter them from soliciting yours.

Some holy people, brought to a knowledge of God in later years, have, through the remainder of life, bitterly regretted that their youth was spent in the society of the thoughtless and ungodly; for though that society is now forsaken, it left recollections which polluted and harassed the mind, and stuck to it like the stains to the walls of a leprous house. The only way to avoid this, is, to grow up in *happy ignorance* of the words and ways of evil society. It is a great thing to be

enabled to resist when sinners entice; but it is still more for the peace of the soul never to have been near the path of the wicked and the way of evil men; but to have been a companion of those only who fear the Lord and keep his commandments.

If you wish to possess that which will wisely guide you in all your future engagements and connections, and fit you to be useful as you pass through life, be early pious. "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments. Then shall you walk in the way safely, and your foot shall not stumble."

If you wish to have a friend who may be depended upon, seek the friendship of God—the only Friend who *never* forsakes, who *never* dies, who is *never* unable or unwilling to befriend to the full extent of our need. There is a Friend who loves at all times; who sticks closer than a brother; who is the same yesterday, today, and forever; and able to do for you exceeding abundantly, above all that you can ask or think. Secure his friendship in early life.

If you wish always to have something at hand that can comfort and support you in time of trouble, this is it—early piety; the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit; a good hope, through grace, of an heavenly inheritance, and a firm conviction that all present things work together for good.

If you wish to be ready for death, come when it may, be early pious. Grace in the heart is oil in the lamp, which will light us through the valley of the shadow of death. The severest blasts and storms cannot put it out; but the great concern is—to have the lamp filled and lighted in good time; not to be running about to seek it when the call is upon us to go forth.

If you wish to have large capacities for the enjoyment of heaven, be early pious. All who are admitted to heaven will be happy; but we are led to conclude there will be different capacities for happiness, and, therefore, different degrees. Growth in grace on earth is growth in capacity for heavenly enjoyment. Then he whose heart is earliest opened for the reception of divine grace, and continues most expanding, is likely to be a large partaker of the bliss of heaven.

The following suggestions ought to be deeply impressed on the minds of youth—

1. Choose God for your portion. God alone can make you happy; but all the world cannot make you happy without God.
2. Consider that by nature you are dead in trespasses and sins. You are a child of wrath, a stranger, and an enemy to God. Labor to be sensible of this, and let the sinfulness of your nature be your greatest burden.
3. Remember that Christ Jesus is your way to God. Justification, pardon, and

acceptance with God, are by faith in him. Sanctification and a new nature are by the power of his Spirit. Let Christ, therefore, be precious to your souls. Labor for true faith in him. Take him for your Lord and Savior. Submit to his commands in all things, and rest your soul upon him for reconciliation and peace with God. Open your heart to the motions of his Holy Spirit. Welcome that principle of a holy and divine life; improve his motions, follow his drawings, and by no means grieve him.

4. Be speedy in your repentance, and diligent in your endeavors after holiness. Know the time of God's gracious visitation. Consider that life is short and altogether uncertain. To defer one day may be your everlasting undoing.

5. Endeavor to be truly and thoroughly pious, and be not discouraged at the difficulties of it. God's grace shall be sufficient for your help. His promises shall be your sweet encouragement. Peace of conscience, and communion with God, shall be your ever-present cordial. The troubles and pains of piety shall be but short, and your reward shall be glorious and eternal.

6. Devote your young and blooming years to the love and service of your God and Savior. The first-fruits are the most acceptable—

"A flower, when offered in the bud,
Is no vain sacrifice."

Grudge not, that the vain delights and sinful pleasures of youth should be lost. They shall be exchanged for spiritual delights, which are more excellent, inward, and lasting.

7. Remember you must give an account to God of your youth as well as your age. It will be no excuse, if you be found in your sins, to say, "I was but young!" He who is old enough to sin, is old enough for hell. You cannot make sure of God's love, a saving interest in Christ, and the salvation of your soul, too soon. It may be too late, but can never be too early.

8. Let those who have been piously instructed remember, that they cannot have that pleasure in sin which others may. They know better. They sin against light and conviction. Conscience will mix gall with their honey. When they go to prayer in the evening, or when upon their bed, alone, retired, in the dark, or in a thunder-storm, conscience will read sad lectures to them, and make them review all the pleasures of sin with bitterness.

9. Repentance and conversion are easiest in youth. Sin is not so deeply rooted; Satan not so strongly fortified; grace not so much slighted; the Spirit not so much grieved; the conscience not so much hardened.

10. Early conversion, as it is most easy, so it is also least questionable. It is little for a man to renounce the world when he is just forced to leave it; or to forsake the pleasures of sin when he has no longer the ability to pursue them. But when the bloom and strength of youth are given to God, when the world is fully before it—it then appears plain that God is loved for himself; that Christ is preferred above the flesh, and grace, above the sweetest delights in the world.

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