

SILENT FORCES.

Workmen in stone quarries sometimes find a very hard kind of rock. They pick little grooves for the iron wedges, and then, with great sledge-hammers, drive and drive the wedges into the flinty rock. And yet, once in a while they fail to divide the solid mass. The iron wedges and the sledges prove useless, and the workmen wonder at the stubborn rock.

But there is yet another way. The iron wedges are removed from the narrow grooves. Then little wooden wedges of a very hard fibre, are selected. Now you begin to shake your heads and think, "Well, if iron wedges will not do, how is it possible for wooden wedges to be used successfully?" Just wait until we explain. The sharp, well-made wooden wedges are first put into water. They are then inserted in the grooves tightly, while wet, and water is kept in the grooves, and no sledge is needed to drive them. They would break under the severe blows of the ponderous hammer. But the workmen just let the wet wedges alone. They will do what the driven iron failed to do. How so? The damp wood swells. The particles must have room to enlarge. And the granite heart of the rock cannot withstand this silent influence. In a little while the solid rock parts from top to bottom, and the workman's will is accomplished.

It is so, often, in other things. What noise and visible effort fail to do, some quiet power, when applied will surely achieve. Teachers may remember this fact in mechanics, and manage some very stubborn natures by the application of the silent forces. The iron and the sledge-hammers often fail; but tears, prayers and a patient example never fail.

"KEPT"

It was one of those days when rain and snow and wind seemed each to be striving for the supremacy, and winter and spring took part in the contest; when the smoke and everything else would go the wrong way; when even the furnace-fire, if it condescended to burn, persisted in sending all its heat into the cellar, instead of, as was right and proper, into the parlour and my own special "snuggery." In short, it was just the kind of day when, if one's temper does not give way, one's spirits do, and poor weak human nature feels hopeless and forsaken by both God and man; murmurs that prayers remain unanswered, and is tempted to doubt that there is a superintending Providence either in the natural or the moral world.

Effort after effort I had made to accomplish something, but all in vain. I could neither sew, nor read, nor write, for it was too cold to sit by the window, and too dark to sit anywhere else. I threw down everything and commenced thinking or rather grumbling over the existing state of affairs. "Why must we have such horrid weather? Why did the sunshine and a warm day flatter us, and then snow and ice fall on everything and keep it back? Keep back the horse-chestnut in front of my window, whose great buds had been swelling for the past few days under the influence of soft showers and sunshine, and seemed ready to burst and disclose their hidden treasures.—Why did they not burst? And that fine large chrysalis, given to me in the autumn, and which I had kept in a warm place all winter, why did it not burst through its brown covering and come forth, a beautiful winged thing, to gladden my eyes and speak of a better resurrection—*now*, when everything seemed dead?

Why did not hopes and well-formed plans and earnest work bring greater results? Why did everything stand still? Why is everything kept back? Kept? Who keeps it?

Almost like the whisper of a voice in my ear came the answer, "Kept by the power of God." It comes to me with added meaning now, not only as applying to our heavenly inheritance, we kept for it and it reserved for us, but all creation kept—kept safe from winter winds and storms, and kept from development too soon. The bud kept back for the fruit-blossom to form beneath, the chrysalis for its wings to grow, and both kept back till winter winds and storms have given place to the balmy air and warm sunshine, in

which flowers fear no blight and butterflies sport joyously and securely.

And for us—God's children—is not *kept back* part of the promise, part of the keeping? Hopes unfilled, plans thwarted, answers to prayer kept back that the wings of faith may grow and the fruit-blossom develop beneath the bud. And not that alone. Not only are we kept back till fit to *receive* the blessing, but till the blessing is ready for us. Such as will not blight us, such as we shall enjoy securely, which will not injure us here nor peril our happiness hereafter.—Shall we then murmur as I did, at dark days and winds and ice and snow, for which there is a "need be," when amidst it all there comes to us, sweeter than "joy bells," brighter than sunshine, more restful than a mother's lullaby, this promise of promises, "*Kept by the power of God.*"

LIFE'S SLUGGARDS AND TRIFLERS.

No sensible person can fancy that race of beings known as *sluggards*, whether male or female, old or young, in high life or low life. They have come to the wrong world; and the sooner they get out of it the sooner society will be relieved of a burdensome and expensive nuisance. Eating and drinking and sleeping are their chief employment. Give them their provender, and they are quite satisfied. Habits of industry they have not; business in the useful sense they have not; and, moreover, they never expect to do anything that is of practical value for either world. Fortunately for themselves, breathing is spontaneous and animal nutrition goes forward by a self-impelling law of Nature. Were it otherwise, they would either die for the want of breath or speedily become ghastly skeletons. Occasionally they relieve the *ennui* of doing nothing by making a business in the shape of hunting, fishing, playing cards, going to the theatre, whiling away their hours at the grog-shop, attending a horse-race, and perhaps visiting the dens of nocturnal infamy. Such men are the sluggards of human society, having no purpose in their heads or practice in their lives that lifts them above the low level of the animal.

Woman, in her way, generally more delicate and less offensive, is sometimes amenable to the same charge. There are too many women—far too many for the credit of the sex—whose lives are practically as useless as they are aimless. They can manipulate the little punctillios of what they regard as elegant life; they understand the fashions and know how to spend money; no one can beat them in using an opera-glass or laying plans for empty and profitless amusement. In the matter of mere *show* they are finished experts; and this is about all that they are good for—indeed, all that they propose. To life they productively contribute nothing. They never did anything, and they never expect to do anything that has the value of a dollar to humanity. The world is in no sense richer, or wiser, or better for their presence in it. They were born with a free ticket of exemption from all the practical responsibilities of an earthly existence. Splendid *receivers* they are, and just as poor producers.

Such persons are not really worth the garments they wear or the bread that it takes to feed them. The wonder is that the sun will consent to shine upon them. They are mere mockeries of a rational human life—guilty abusers of their own powers and as guilty misusers and wasters of time, as indifferent about its value, its improvement, its duties, the claims of the world present and the world future, as they could be if no such ideas had ever been heard of on the globe. Their violation of the two great principles of *utility* and *moral obligation* they seem to regard as one of the fine arts. Their idleness they present as their letter of credit to the first class of human society. They do not belong to the vulgar crowd that must practically work in order to live. When one of these profligates of time dies, society loses nothing by burying them, since it has just one pauper the less to support.

God never made any man or any woman thus to spend the hours of his or her sojourn on earth. It is

a false and abnormal mode of life. The very least that one can consistently think of doing is to return to the world as much as it takes to carry him through it. He ought to pay the expenses of his passage through life. If he does less than this, he will then die an insolvent debtor to mankind by all the difference between his consumption and his production. Children falling victims in their early years, congenital imbeciles, and persons without the ordinary normal abilities of our nature are the only ones excusable from the obligation. Society is really a compact of mutual dependences and services; it lives and thrives upon the toil of its members. From it all receive something; and, hence, all are bound to give back to it at least as much as they take from it. The law of useful labour binds all, and condemns the system of helplessness in all, whether it be genteel or vulgar.

The *triflers* with time form a class of beings not far removed in moral estimate from the sluggard. The first thing is to identify them. Here is one of them; and as we look at him we see a light, frivolous, empty-headed specimen of humanity, just skimming along the surface of existence and generally running upon the errands of a *fool*. He has no solid thoughts and no solid enjoyments. The books that he reads, if he reads at all, are, like himself, sensational, superficial, and trashy: quite often worse than this—indeed, not worth the paper on which they are printed. His pleasures have his own specific gravity. To banish care; to work but little and play a great deal; to drive away all serious meditation and keep life on a sportive jump: to flit about hither and thither, and chase all the amusements and perhaps dissipations that can be found: to have a gay time in the winter and, if possible, a gayer one in the summer; to make and receive fashionable calls and always talk nonsense; to think and chat about fine feathers, beautiful colours, graceful attitudes, the newest fashion, and the latest opera; to spend one's midnight hours in revelry, at the theatre or in parties of pleasure, jading his powers with the fatigues of nocturnal diversion and perhaps crime—these and the like things are the well-known characteristics of the trifter. They form the staple articles of his existence, and with them he manages to keep life in a meaningless buzz.

Now, to a sensible eye such a character appears positively ridiculous, and to a Christian eye appalling. Is this, indeed, the life of a *man*, a moral being, whose mission on earth is the grandest imaginable and on whose every breath the mighty future is waiting with its solemn warning? Is this all that the man has to show? Is life in reality nothing but a joke, that this jester laughs so loudly? God is serious, if he is not. That which so infatuates him now will ere long more afflict him than it ever pleased him. In death it will appear to him as a miserable farce, having no dignity and no utility here and certainly none hereafter.

Life, yes the *moral* life appointed to man as a denizen of earth is always an intense and exciting emergency, full of interest, full of duty, full of opportunity, ringing with the call to action, brief in its period yet everlasting in its results. It is a succession of emphatic words, every one of which should impress the heart. The things that are to be done in life, that *may* be done and *should* be done, with the consequences ensuing for both worlds, from providential oratory by which God loudest calls and which earth should be most anxious to hear. Life morally photographs eternity upon time. In productive power time is eternity. It is really a more solemn thing to live than to die. Some people reserve their anxieties and tears for death. It would be wiser to spend them on life, and then they would have less occasion for them in death.

A moment's glance at these views of life rebukes time's sluggards and trifles with a withering frown, which even they would not be able to bear. As compared with the men of diligent and earnest action connected with high and noble aims—the men who see what life is and for what it was given, and who load its fleeting hours with the strongest and purest displays of human vigour, and then retire to sing its triumphant psalm in other and brighter