

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

THE NOBLEST LIFE A GODLY SERVICE.

(Contributed.)

As we take a walk through the country we come every now and then to places from which we can survey that part of the journey already traversed, and view the land that is before us; and so it is with the march of life. We do not always move on one monotonous level. Now we descend into the valley and again we ascend the hill; and as we gaze from its summit we take in at a glance the entire scope and purpose of our pilgrimage. These are the times for making fresh resolves and receiving new spiritual powers into our experience. If used aright these are moments of definite progress, rich with spiritual opportunity; but if neglected or abused they flee away and leave us worse than they found us. It was at such a crisis as this in the history of the Israelitic people when these words (Joshua XXIV. 15) were spoken. After years of toilsome wandering and of changeable life they had reached the land of promise; they can now take retrospect and ponder gratefully the kindly and wondrous dealings of Providence. As they stand and look back, they remember Egypt with its degrading slavery, and their hearts burn as they think of the glorious emancipation. In imagination they pass once more through all the difficulties and toils of the wilderness, and as they realize the greatness of the deliverance, the music of joy rings through their hearts, the song of praise steals to their lips and they cry, "The Lord shall reign forever and ever." Now the retrospect has done its work. It has softened their hearts and kindled lively emotions of praise, but they must not linger too long in thought of the past; their deep feelings must assist in shaping their future life and give an impetus to their spiritual progress. Henceforth their life is to be more settled; they are no longer to carry their tents through the barren wilderness but form themselves into families. There is to be less of the crowd and more of the man in their experience. They are now called to a life of personal thought and individual responsibility.

There are such times in our life, days of humiliation and thanksgiving, when we ought to look back with gratitude and forward with hope. We have been the recipients of innumerable blessings. The eternal goodness has shown itself in our preservation. While many have fallen in the wilderness, dropping suddenly out of the ranks, we have continued our onward march. Our sustenance has come from heaven as the manna descended from the skies so has our food come from the divine bounty; and has not God wrought out for us a far greater deliverance than that of Moses? He has sent his Son to be our redeemer, to free us from the thralldom of sin; and by the power of his precious blood to conquer the power of Hell. Praise then is comely. We may most appropriately express our thanks in sacred song. Then we must face the solemn question, what use am I making of these great benefits? What is my life? What the purpose of all my earthly struggle? This day let me be true to myself and to my God, while I ponder this momentous subject; and God grant that the thoughts of this present hour may bear rich result in my coming life.

We are all servants. We are each day of our life serving something or someone. There is no man who can say: I am perfectly independent. I am the source of my own power, the centre of my own being, the end of all my actions. Such a state of isolation is not attainable by any of us. There are some who are servants of inclination, victims of their own capricious na-

ture, the sport of their own wild passions. Their life is an aimless erratic thing. These people do not believe in premeditation; they do not seek after a conduct which moves from the soul outwards. Theirs is an extemporaneous life which waits on passing circumstances and transient feelings. There are many who are the loyal servants of custom or fashion. They acknowledge as their highest law that it is fashionable; and they cling to it whatever it may cost. This class has no faith in individuality. They imagine that the man should be completely swallowed in society, and that no one should be animated by a higher purpose than that of embodying and reflecting the ordinary ideas of the community. Men of stronger personality and clearer vision they denounce as eccentric. Confusion to the man who is bold enough to meddle with the goddess of fashion! Even worse are the blind servants; those who have run their life into a groove and cannot get it out again. During their past life they have been busy forging a chain and now they are sunk in a pit of their own digging. The slave who is ground down by a hard taskmaster is not in such a vile condition as the man who is bound in the slavery of an evil habit. The creature of habit has sold his manhood into bondage and can only be rescued by a wondrous exercise of heavenly grace. But we thank God that there are some whose lives are a search after truth, an effort to know and do the Will of God. These have accepted the divine redemption. They trust no longer in self, but have passed from the spirit of indifference to that of penitence and prayer. Their life is a struggle with inclination, fashion and habit, and their spirit seeks constantly a higher plane of life. Yet they glory in the thought that they are servants; they make no parade of independence, knowing that such human pretences are false and that the true purpose of life is to serve God.

From the foregoing remarks it is evident that the bent of our nature is in the direction of service. We will offer up the energies of our nature at some shrine. This is supported by the fact that men everywhere have some sort of religious service. Abraham was not called from a life of Atheism but from the false service of idolatry to the true service of the Jehovah. The Canaanites who despised the religion of Israel hid their own cruel gods to whom they rendered a degrading worship. And to-day there are disciples of Buddha and Mahomed as well as disciples of Christ. Although there is much hypocrisy in these systems, yet doubtless there are vast millions who are endeavoring to find the real purpose of life and who feel that is to serve some high and holy will. Still the fact remains man will and must serve. If he does not serve the beautiful true and the good, he will cling to the base and the bad. If he does not look upward, and aspire towards heavenly purity and holy activity, he will sink towards the lowest hell of vice and prostitute the noblest powers of his nature.

A pure service is the highest kind of life. There is nothing humiliating or degrading in the idea of service. To work for others in a pure spirit and with a willing heart is a noble employment. The angelic life of heaven is service. They serve their Maker day and night; they manifest an intense interest in the moral life of man and draw their highest joy from deeds of goodness. We cannot tell how much we owe to the constant service of angels, for they are ever flying on errands of mercy; and doubtless they find a delight in ministering to sad and lowly spirits. The life of our Lord was one

of service. "He came not to be ministered unto but to minister and give his life a ransom for many." Minister is only another word for servant; and he who was the King of kings stooped to the lowliest acts of goodness. He was willing to bind up the feet of humanity; and even give Himself on the cross that he might perform a spiritual service and rescue us from the damning power of sin. Thus when we are asked to serve we are simply entreated to follow the example of our Master. It is simply another version of that apostolic exhortation "Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children." We are asked to serve Him who serve us.

We have sought to bring out in bold relief the fact that human life must be a service of some kind, and now the great point for consideration is to whom shall we render the service of our lives? This question each one must face and decide for himself. It is not enough that God has brought the chosen people out of Egypt and set them in land flowing with milk and honey. They must make a free choice of their God. They are divine property and are called the people of God but they must decide with all freedom and willingness to live a godly life. And we are in precisely similar positions today. We cannot lawfully withhold our service, for we are under great obligation to the divine Saviour who has redeemed us. Still we must consider whether we can give ourselves unto Him for our religious life must begin in the spirit of self-surrender. We cannot settle this matter for another. Each single soul must be saved by personal acceptance of a divine redemption and personal consecration of ourselves to a course of heavenly service. This vow comes to every one at this moment: "Choose ye whom ye will serve." Men may be compelled into the observance of religious forms or the performance of outward acts; but such action will be destitute of the spirit of service and consequently is worthless in the sight of Heaven.

Let us not think any forced attention in religious duties or any formal acceptance of Christianity can benefit us. So long as we keep our hearts out of our service it is hollow, possessing no merit; and we know that none can compel the movement of the heart. The religion of many is simply serving the gods of their own making, or accepting ideas and forms which have been handed down to them. With them the tradition of the elders is the highest standard of truth. They are content with the superficial religion which passes from one age to another. Our text checks this error and shows us that we must have a faith which comes to us through personal conviction and experience. We must allow the light of Heaven to come direct into our hearts and enkindle a flame of sacred love to God. There must be at the personal coming of each soul to Christ a childlike, confiding faith.

His service calls for intelligent consideration and constant thought. In our search after righteousness we shall often be perplexed but never forsaken. We give to worldly matters a rational treatment. We think quietly and earnestly as to what education we will have, what business we will pursue, what company we will keep; and surely we should not be surprised to find that personal religion requires patient thinking and thorough heart searching. The service of God is reasonable; it stimulates our reason into a healthy excitement and brings all our powers into subjection to