

Each For the Other and Both for God.

(By Aldine, in 'The Advance'.)

It had been a day—a long, delightful day of tender, happy, heart-felt talk; for Sylvia was soon to be a bride; and to her friend—a wife of many years, who shared and sympathized with her every hope—she had opened her heart, revealing the dear anticipations she was cherishing, concerning 'him' and the future; which, being interpreted, was 'him' also.

And yet, though the long summer day had faded, and the two women were sitting in the dusk, watching the coming of the stars, some things there were that were still unsaid. Then it was, when the shadows sheltered each conscious face from the gaze of the other, that inmost heart could speak to inmost heart, uttering those deepest, most sacred things, which they could not look into each other's eyes and say.

Sylvia, resting on a cushion at the feet of the older woman, and leaning her head against her knee, spoke softly, wistfully.

'You have told me much that will help me, and that I shall be happier to remember always, and yet—'

'Yes, dear,' in a tone of invitation from the other.

But these were timid thoughts, reluctant to shape themselves to speech, and for a little time there was silence. Then, as a sympathetic hand rested softly on her hair, she ventured—

'When you and your husband first loved each other—as we do—and promised to share one another's lives, you looked for happiness in the spending of your lives together?'

'Yes, Sylvia, we were sure—as you are—that to unite our lives would bring us happiness.'

There was a moment's pause; then the low questioning went on.

'And is it possible for people to realize—do not answer, if I venture too far in my asking—have you, in your married life known such happiness as you thought to find in one another?'

Low and sweet was the voice that gave answer; and thrilling with deep feeling:

'Sylvia our life of married companionship has lasted now for almost twenty years; years that have brought us the severe as well as the sweet realities of human experience. There have been times of struggle to escape poverty; and other times when the burden of ill-health was long-endured. Then, too, the weary routine of every-day work and worry, that so often of itself is sufficient to wear away all the grace and beauty from life, leaving it threadbare and common. And in one bitter year, as you know, we parted with both our loved children. All these have been ours to bear and to share, and yet—this I say truly, and with deep thankfulness to God—the years that we have shared have brought to me far more, far deeper and truer happiness than I had ever thought or hoped to know; for the love that came to us when we were young, that led us to unite our lives, has never changed. As it glorified those early years, so it has endured to bless all the years that since have passed, until to-day, out of a full heart I can utter this assurance, that we love one another more and better than on any yesterday. Whatever of trial has been laid upon us, whatever of joy has been withheld, this always has remained our sure possession, beyond the power of life's cruelest touch.'

Sylvia breathed softly a happy sigh.

'It is so beautiful,' she said, 'this reality

of a life-long love. If my heart's desire could be mine for the asking, this is the one gift I would ask of life, that the love which has been given to me, which makes life now so glad and sweet, should be mine always; should endure and abide through all of life's experiences, unmarred, untouched by time or change. And yet—a note of sadness quivered in her voice—it is not always so; I think sometimes it is not often so. Is it something that could be shared—might I hope to know it from you—this secret of the lasting happiness that is yours, while so many lose or miss it altogether?'

'Dear child, the answer came at length, truly the one supreme blessing that can crown the life of any woman is a faithful, unflinching, unchanging love. If to share with you the secret of my own unbroken happiness can help you to reach like blessedness, I may not withhold it. And yet to unfold this secret is to approach with words sweet and sacred experiences of which I never thought to speak.

'It seems but a little time ago that the knowledge came to me that I was loved, and when with happy, hopeful eyes I looked into the future. Into John's keeping I was ready to surrender myself; my life, and all my interests, without doubt or fear; assured that with him my future would be as safe as human power could make it. I had long known him as a true and steadfast man, the basis of whose character was faith in God and fidelity to duty.

'One shadow only dimmed the brightness of my anticipations, and it was this: the fear that when closer association should bring to my husband a fuller knowledge of my character, and of all it lacked; and should reveal to him my many faults and defects, that then his love, which had come to be the joy of living, would chill and change and slip from my possession. Even to my marriage day the shadow of this fear followed me.

'In planning for our marriage John had expressed the desire that we might have a little time, just with and for each other, before we should take up the routine of every-day life; and so we went away together for a week. It was a very modest little trip, including none of the accompaniments of the modern wedding journey. Our arrangements provided for nothing more than a stay in a remote village on the edge of a lonely, lovely lake in Minnesota, where we might spend our days out of doors, among the lakes and forests.

'Those seven summer days with one another, away from all the world, are days never to be forgotten. Our stopping-place was a farm-house, close to the water's edge; and there, in the cool of the evening, upon our marriage-day, we came—we two together, and all the world withdrawn.

'I will show you some time, Sylvia, my little bible, that went with us on that wedding-journey. It is old now, and ragged past using. It was well worn then, for it was no unfamiliar thing for us to look together into its pages. I brought the little book to John, that we might receive its message of guidance as we should take our first steps into the untravelled future. But the dusk was all about us; so that there was a two-fold significance in his words, "We shall need a light, dear." So our lamp was lighted, and together we looked into those luminous pages whose brightness ever shone upon the untried and shadowy places of our life's path: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." We read the familiar words; and then, holding my hand in his strong clasp, John said:

"Shall we pray together, dear, for God's blessing on our life?"

'Hand in hand we knelt, as we have knelt each night since; and I heard for the first time my husband's voice in prayer, a prayer for God's guidance and blessing upon us through all the years that were to come.

'When we had risen, and while our hands still joined, then, as if to link together the sacredness of worship with the sacredness of love, I felt his kiss and heard his words.

'"I love you, my wife."

'It was the first united act of our married life, this seeking the divine message, this mingling of our souls in worship, this renewal of our pledge of love. There came to me at that moment the realization that human love is so sacred a thing that Christ has used it as the image of his own relation to his Church, and remembering, I realized that into no less holy a relation we two had come to one another.

'It is upon this foundation that our happiness has rested. As this, our first day, ended, so at the close of each day since we have knelt with clasped hand before God, and never has the clasp been severed till the lips have again repeated their assurance of love. Not that our two natures, young and undisciplined, were adjusted to each other without friction or jar. For such a possibility human nature is too wayward; and of this wayward human nature neither one of us had less than a full share. So some days there were, sadly marred by carelessness and wilfulness, by hasty words, by words unkind or wrongly taken, by pride and stubbornness, humiliating though it be to own it, all these uglinesses appeared.

'Not seldom, in our earlier years, such things came to threaten the harmony of our lives—to threaten, but never to destroy, for always awaiting us, at the close of each day, was the moment—too precious after that first day, ever to be omitted or spared—when together we entered into the sanctuary of our lives to render to God the worship of our souls and to renew with each other our covenant of love.

'Many a day I can recall, through whose long hours I have carried about the hurt of a sore heart, wounded by some quick word or thoughtless act, or have endured the burden of my own conscience reproving me for some injustice or neglect. Often at these moments have I looked forward with longing to the moment of clasped hands when it would be easy to utter the contrite word, and say, "Forgive me," or, in receiving the assurance of unchanged love, to feel the hurt in my heart healed by a word. In the truth and sacredness of that moment, pride has melted to tenderness; doubt and questioning have become happy confidence; injustice and wilful misrepresentation, of each other have vanished.

'And so, though days have come whose surface discord has disturbed, no day of all the years we have spent together has ended in aught but love and harmony.

'"Each for the other, and both for God," Sylvia, life lived according to the spirit of these words will bring—has brought—to married companionship a beauty and blessedness beyond all else in human experience. God grant it may be yours to know its fullest measure!

They were sitting no longer in darkness. The late moon had risen to flood the summer night with its softened glory. Sylvia lifted her wet eyes to the face of the wife, but the tears that shone in them were not sorrowful, only tender.

'It has all grown bright while we have talked,' she said.