

## The Inglenook.

### Thanksgiving Difficulties and Thanksgiving Lessons. A true Story.

BY MRS. ANNA ROSS.

Early in her Christian life, Bell found a very unmanageable difficulty—how could she ever learn heartily to give thanks to God? It was easy to say thanks, but well she knew that real thanksgiving is a song rather than a nice, proper little speech. Often she had serious misgivings if it were not better to refrain from thanksgiving altogether, rather than to be saying thanks when her heart was cold and heavy. The fact is, that the hiding of God's face and the continual consciousness of defeat in her efforts to be good, made it impossible to be joyfully grateful for the precious earthly blessings of her lot, or even for the confidence of continual safety in Christ—a confidence which she never lost for it was anchored upon His own everlasting word, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." But it was not perplexing that even her thanksgivings for that blessed safety had lost all their joyfulness?

There was a pretty bit of bush jutting out into the clearing, almost even with Bell's home. One autumn afternoon, as the sun was sinking a little behind the tree-tops, and the variegated maple leaves in their dying brilliancy were rustling about her feet, she was passing over the stubble field towards the bush. Walking along, she was thinking of this strange and unlovely characteristic of her Christian life, and wondering how her thanksgivings could ever be changed from the lifeless speech style to the upspringing song. Then she "lifted up her eyes to the hills," from whence cometh help for the helpless. She laid hold upon Him, who only can work miracles, to do this thing for her, and teach her how to be really thankful as she knew she ought to be. There was a rest in that. She had taken her shameful neglectfulness to "Him, and "He hears prayer."

No immediate answer seemed to come: but looking backward over more than thirty years, there is an answer, like a slowly unfolding rose-bud, seen blossoming out into Bell's life. The spirit of thanksgiving is not indigenous to the soil of this earth. It is a rare and fragrant exotic, and seems to require peculiar care and skill from the heavenly gardener.

The method of its cultivation in this case can be pretty distinctly followed. The earlier lessons were confined almost exclusively to temporal blessings. She was led greatly to desire some good gift. After considerable delay in the granting of it, it would be given with such sweet tokens of loving-kindness, that she could not help seeing the love of the Giver as well as the excellence of the gift. This is what is necessary to the growth of this heavenly exotic. It thrives only in the sunshine of His "lifted up" countenance—when the "love of God is shed abroad in our hearts."

The first well remembered instance of this method of dealing with her was in the giving to the family the joy of a musical instrument. The piano had been sold before leaving England, and its place had never been in any way filled. At last, after many hopes and fears concerning it, a finely-toned

cabinet organ was bought and took its place in the sitting room. The night of its arrival was one ever to be remembered. The organ was such a delightful blessing; it had been so long desired, and it came in such a sweet and loving way. The verse that went singing through her heart that night—singing right up to Heaven in joy and gratitude was this, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

Another intense desire—an internal craving rather than a mere desire—was for an education. There were many rare opportunities in the home itself for self-improvement, really more valuable than any mere school course. But a school course besides would unquestionably be of immense advantage. But no door would open. She took a teacher's certificate and sought to get a school, but was baffled at every turn. The way seemed opening for a short session in Goderich Grammar School, but, to her deep disappointment, her father's judgment decided against it. It was a time of tears, but she found rest and even joy in Christ's own resting-place, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."

A little later she was spending a long quiet day alone on the bush farm. As the silent hours moved slowly past, she was thinking along all the way the Lord had led her, especially regarding this eager desire for education. She looked critically at every move in that direction, how it had been allowed to just such a point and then checked. Examining all the facts of the case, she came definitely to the conclusion that her Father in heaven had Himself decided against gratifying this desire, and she gave the matter restfully over into His hands. Again she found peace in Christ's own resting-place, "Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."

"Since all the downward tract of time  
His watchful eyes surveys,  
O who so wise to choose my lot  
And regulate my ways?"

After that the restless ambition lay still and gave no further trouble.

That must have been in August, and in the very next November, a conversation, altogether unexpectedly, arose at the breakfast-table, that wrought a wonderful change in Bell's life. That conversation was the means of slowly, but surely, opening the way for her to a higher gratification of her educational desires than had ever come into her own head. It was "exceeding abundantly above what she had asked or thought," and again so many sweet love touches with it that, instead of finding it hard to give thanks, she would have found it impossible to restrain the song of thanksgiving that, at every fresh touch of the Divine hand, carolled up to Him who was managing it all so beautifully for her. The very delay prolonged the lesson, giving the opportunity for progressive teaching along with continuous practising.

Other distinct instances of this same kind of teaching arise plainly into view. As to her desire to teach, and to use her pen for Christ, the opportunities eventually given have again been "exceeding abundant." And these are only specimens.

Truly that was a very profitable prayer—that prayer to be taught to give thanks. The answer came not only in the beautiful giving of earthly blessings, but by shedding around these so many glory tints of loving kindness that it was impossible to help feeling the love that was at the back of them.

But another lesson of a higher series was given during the first year Bell was a teacher.

She had one class that occasioned her a good deal of trouble. Most of them were giddy, half-grown girls, who cared but little for merit marks. No other punishment was administered in the College, and with this particular class the timid young teachers felt weak-hearted. One Friday they behaved worse than usual, and feeling that something striking must be done, at the close of the half-hour period, she demanded with some dignity and no warning, that all the girls who had not talked during recitation should stand. She instantly saw what a mistake she had made when only three out of a class of nearly twenty rose to their feet. But the mistake could not now be mended, and she kept the class waiting till she solemnly put down the names of those who had thus confessed to breach of rule.

When all were dismissed, (it was the closing period for the morning), she leaned her head upon her hands in utter dejection and dismay. What could she do? She well knew that, for a teacher to bring in a whole class as having been talking during recitation, was much more disgraceful to the teacher than to the class. Then, there were a few really good students who had, though the prevailing disorder, been led to misconduct that was not usual with them, and her incompetence would be the means of spoiling the honors of students well known in the school as reliable girls. To give these marks in at Faculty Meeting on Tuesday evening meant evidently, confession of incompetence in herself, and loss of honor for those whose honors had scarcely been lawfully forfeited. But not to give in these names, especially after they had been so conspicuously taken down, must necessarily bring her discipline into contempt. She had to choose between the two horns of a most uncomfortable dilemma.

All Friday afternoon the burden was heavy. Saturday brought no solution of her difficulty. Sabbath morning, as she led her little company of Presbyterians to church, she was as heavy hearted as ever.

There was a stranger in the pulpit. She never found out who he was. His text was, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." One point of that sermon came home to Bell. The preacher strongly took the position that "everything means everything." You would not think such a simple statement would require much proving, but she soon realized that she had never believed it before. He pressed it earnestly home that "everything" does not mean simply the things we are in the habit of calling blessings, but just as truly the things that hurt and the things that worry. "Everything means everything." But he explained quite distinctly that we could not honestly give thanks for everything, were it not for God's own emphatic assurance, "All things work together for good to them that love God." That the sorrows and the losses and the thorns are sent to work out most precious good for us just as truly as the joys. He said, our privilege is literally to look up in God's face and give Him thanks for everything that touches us, because of His own assurance that both joys and sorrows are sent to work out good.