

Detachment From the World.

PROF. S. C. MITCHELL.

There is no spot on earth so near to heaven as the deck of an Atlantic liner, where the human spirit enjoys a freedom hardly known elsewhere. To account for this exhilaration of soul, it is not enough to mention the tonic sea air nor indeed the rest, which smoothes out from day to day the deep-dug wrinkles on the faces of wearied merchants and overwrought women. Is it not due rather to the fact that here the sordid interests of the world find no place? Every one has leisure for courtesy and kindness. Sympathy and communicativeness are the keywords to life on shipboard. Cut off from business, your high nature has play. Living a common life with your fellow-passengers and encountering like perils, you begin to feel an interest in them, to know something of their deeper experiences, their secret hopes and aspirations—things, a knowledge of which, the rush of trade does not permit. Distant from every land, you feel an interest in all countries; and the talk of these widely traveled companions is now of Germany, now of India, again of France, and then of America. You become a cosmopolitan. Thus in this little republic where all are on a footing of equality and brotherhood, you gradually creep out of your shell of selfishness and share the life and love of those about you. Moreover, your spirit, now free, wanders further. You stand face to face with the elemental forces of nature, admiring the majesty of the sea in its infinitely varied aspects. The thought that, any accident might be fatal and that, too, instantly, so far from causing dread rather invites you to a more trustful reliance on Him, "who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand." This is the veil between you and your fellow, between you and nature, between you and God. Here is detachment from the world in a physical way, better far than monasticism, whose aim was such.

In war likewise there is detachment from the world. At the call of his country, the patriot turns his back upon business, upon home, upon even wife and child. Fired by a higher duty, he tramples under foot the lower. Heroism dominates over greed: the conventional ties are snapped; sacrifice becomes supreme. This is the high moral gain that compensates in part for the hellish elements in war. Its cruelties are a big price to pay to detach from the sordid interests of the world: yet God has ever seen fit to use this as a discipline for the human race. In peace the individual is everything; in war the good of the whole effaces self.

In marriage there is a breaking of old ties to form nobler ones. The daughter leaves the comfort and protection of father's roof to share the struggles of a young man whose career is in the making. Yet out of these two fragments, torn with more or less violence from their long-embosomed places, there springs a higher life, another home, with all its sacred joys and responsibilities.

The discovery of new truth necessitates detachment on our part from the old set of ideas and relations. This is a rearing process often no less violent than that of the earthquake. Inquisitions have been the sharp surgical instruments devised to stop such pain. But all in vain. As the daughter turns from the father to the husband, as the patriot leaves his plow for the musket, so the mind, however slowly, grows out of the false into the true. New wine bursts old wine-skins.

What a collapse of cherished notions was there, when it was first hinted that the earth is not the centre of the universe and, more, revolves about the sun! The wrench given to the popular mind was so painful that the blood of Bruno hardly soothed it. That poor Neapolitan had a sad, tragic life. By the sleuth-hounds of the inquisition he was chased from Italy into France, England, and Germany. Finally captured at Padua—the very year in which Galileo began his lectures there on the new astronomy—he was kept in the Leaden Prison at Venice for six years; then demanded at Rome, he languished two more years in a tiny dungeon in Hadrian's tomb—a cell so narrow that in no position could his body lie out at full length. He was found guilty of teaching that there were more worlds than one, and so condemned "to suffer death in the most merciful way possible without the shedding of blood"—the horrible formula used at the inquisition for burning at the stake. To-day you can walk from his cramped cell across the Tiber to the recently erected bronze statue of the brave Bruno, which marks the spot where the flames enveloped his mortal body on that February day, in 1600. Such is the agony birth of an idea! Intolerance is only another word to express the deep-rooted unwillingness of man to stir (or to be stirred) out of his hole, whether mental or physical.

Sickness and suffering, by these God tries to prise the soul of man out of the mire of this world. Grief raises the curtain of life just far enough for us to see the fleeting character of all earthly things. It throws the soul back to God. How often does the one who has gone not only make heaven dearer but also appears now nobler to us.

"Forgive my grief for one removed,
Thy creature whom I found so fair.
I trust he lives in thee, and there
I find him worthier to be loved."

By exile, by imprisonment men are detached from the world to do great things. Detached from the petty politics of Florence, Dante climbed the heights of Monte Casino and dreamed the Divine Comedy. Cicero, driven out of public life, thwarted in his chosen career in the Forum, weighed down by grief not only at the overthrow of the Roman Republic but also by the death of his loved daughter Tullia, turned to his pen as a refuge from himself and threw off in the brief space of a year a series of masterly books which have forever enriched the heart, the language and the imagination of man. The time which he accounted lost has turned out to be the most profitable by far to the world. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life shall find it. A lost life was that of Paul, of Luther, of Judson—a life in which the interests of self were forgotten in the presence of the good of others.

This truth Jesus stressed with an emphasis that startles: "If any man cometh unto me and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Such was his reversal of our ordinary aims. Religion is the dominion of reason over sense, of sacrifice over selfishness, of love over hate, of God over self. Such is the new tariff of values which Jesus put upon man's qualities and deeds. The Roman's raised temples to Valor; Jesus exalted humility, meekness, self-sacrifice, love; making mastery consist in service and setting up a little child as the ideal of all. Detached from the world, we are free to live, to live the life of the soul: for man lives by truth, beauty, righteousness, love, and not by bread alone.—The Argus.

The Master's View.

The Master made his appeal to reason, and asked men's suffrages because his view was the most fitting. Round him gathered a crowd—hearing the Pharisees' criticisms, waiting for his defense—and he was willing to abide by their decision. First, he addressed a farmer standing in the second row—strong, sensible, prejudiced. Last week his flock of sheep came home, one short, in the evening—only one lost, and ninety and nine in the fold—yet this matter-of-fact and unemotional man scoured the country side, nor rested till his tale of sheep was complete. No one laughed at him; no one censured him. Why should they? It was his property; and was the Creator of all more careless or more foolish than a Galilean farmer? Did he not care about his creatures also, who were not sheep but human beings?

Behind the farmer was a young housewife, and yesterday there had been a little tragedy of domestic life in her home. As she was handling her necklace of silver coins, one slipped from her fingers and rolled out of sight. A poor little coin, and not worth a thought. Yet it had its associations, for it had been her mother's and had been a part of her dowry. So she rested not till it was found, and her neighbors, instead of finding fault with her, shared her joy. And were not His human pieces of silver as precious to God? While he was speaking, his eye already rested with sympathy on a prominent figure standing out from among his audience, round whom a very pleasant interest had gathered. He was a man of substance, a country squire and magistrate, respected and beloved, and some years ago he had suffered the keenest of human afflictions, which is not the loss of a son, but his disgrace. His younger son, a headstrong lad, yet lovable, had given him trouble at home—too much with the gay company of Tiberias—and then one day he departed to a distant Gentile city, where he played the fool so shamelessly that the tidings came to his Galilean home, and his father aged visibly. Fellow-Pharisees, like Simon with whom he used to feast before he lost heart for feasting, said he was well rid of the wastrel, and that it would be a good thing if he never returned. His father may have also passed careless judgment after that fashion on other prodigals, but circumstances had changed, and he was silent at Simon's advice. He could not be quite indifferent to the fate of one of his two sons; and when the young man came back an honest, humble penitent, and his father, sitting lonely and sad on the house-top, saw him coming down the familiar road, he forgot the counsel of Simon and all the other Pharisees, and not only gave him public, joyful welcome, but celebrated his return with the feast of a king. As Jesus touched on this happy romance of love, the faces of hard, suspicious Pharisees softened; for they had kinder hearts, if it came to their own flesh and blood, than they allowed to God, and would not on any account have done the things they imputed to him without scruple. It was as when the sun shines on gray rock after a shower and softens the face. Had not God also a father's heart as much as they? And would not they give him also the liberty of joy when such a one as Mary of Magdala or Matthew the Publican came home? And the Pharisees did not wish to answer Jesus, because they were with him for once, mind and heart.

As the Master revealed the idea of God, in whom he gathered and perfected beyond imagination everything which is reasonable and beautiful in man, he gave at the same time to the Pharisees the idea of a sinner, and it was something which never could have entered into these prosaic, frigid minds. For the Master was persuaded that a sinner was miserable, and the very idea was strange and almost diverting to a Pharisee. It seemed to him that the sinners were entirely happy for their kind, because they were often rich, and had a certain power, and gave feasts and lived riotously. Perhaps there were days when the saints regarded the sinners with envy because of "the roses and raptures of vice." Jesus, who knew all men, and had ever his hand on their pulse, saw beneath the poor show of gaiety and the mask of bravado. He knew the self-reproach and sated disgust, the bitter remorse and wistful regrets of the sinner. According to the Master, the sinners were hungry and thirsty, laboring and heavy-laden, vagrants of the highways and hedges, a set of despairing miseries. They were as sheep, which, either through wilfulness or foolishness, has wandered from the flock, and has lost its way, and is far from the fold, rushing hither and thither, torn and bleeding, palpitating and terrified.

The Master also believed firmly that the sinner was precious; and neither had this occurred to a Pharisee. The value of such a woman as washed Jesus' feet seemed less than nothing; she was a disgrace and a snare, an ulcer eating into the very vitals of society. She was a sad tragedy, with her degraded beauty and gay attire—a woman ruined, a woman ruining. Was she not also a soul made in the divine image and intended for high ends—a coin which had passed through many unholy hands, and now lay in the mire? She was still silver, and had on her the traces of her origin. What a wealth of passionate love and unreserved devotion was running to waste in this life! Now this piece of good money shall be laid out to usury, when the eyes wherewith she tempted men's hearts to destruction shall shed tears on the Master's feet, and the hair wherewith she ensnared men's lives shall wipe them dry.

And the Master dared to think that every sinner who had gone astray was missed of God. It might seem that amid the multitude of his creatures one less counted for nothing; but if any Pharisee thought so, he did not know the minuteness and the breadth of the Divine love. It had no forgetfulness; it made no omissions. As a bookman will discover in the dark the absence of a tiny volume, as a gardener will mark the empty place where a plant has been once, as a workman looks in vain for the tool among many his hand desires, so does the Divine love have in constant remembrance him who is lost, and will not rest till he be restored.

The Pharisees made their great mistake because they did not know God, and Jesus threw himself in the way of sinners because he knew the Father. He was indeed the true elder brother, who saw the sorrow on the father's face as he mourned for his younger son, and could not remain in the home; who went himself into the far country, nor ceased from his search till by his grace and passion he had found his brother and brought him home rejoicing. This was the meaning of his strange friendships; this was the secret of his unconquerable hope.—Rev. John Watson, in McClure's Magazine.

The Life of Daily Faithfulness.

Let us, day by day, do all the good we can. The apostle was intent on beneficent action, and day by day he sought strength for such action and looked for renewal through it. He did not put faith in the periodical doing of great deeds, but in the faithful pursuit of a daily helpfulness. In one of her letters Miss Haverall writes: "The bits of wayside work are very sweet. Perhaps the odd bits, when all is done, will really come to more than the seemingly greater pieces—the chance conversations with rich and poor, the seed sown in odd five minutes, even the table d' hôte for me and the rides and friends' tables for you."

This doing of good in a small way at every opportunity makes many rich. Said the painter of antiquity, "No day without its line," and so one by one his masterpieces came to perfection. Let our motto be: "No day without its beneficent deeds, although that day be simple and obscure," and we, too, shall turn our masterpieces which no mere artist can rival.

Let us live the life of daily faithfulness, and we shall rejoice as those who find great spoil. The years shall only clear our vision and show us more glorious things; they shall render the ears more acute, that they may catch wonderful whispers we now miss; they shall bow the body to the earth, but they shall give to the soul wings and crowning mercies. When our heart and flesh fail us God shall be the strength of our heart and our portion forever. What nobler work, what greater blessedness can we ask than this? The world may not know us to applaud; but what to us is the world when God approves?—W. L. Watkinson, D. D.