

Life is Brief.

(Horatius Bonar.)

'Tis not for us to trifle. Life is brief,
And sin is here.
Our age is but the falling of a leaf,
A dropping tear.
We have no time to sport away the hours,
All should be earnest in a world like ours.
Not many lives, but only one, have we—
Our only one;
How sacred should that one life be!
That narrow span
Day after day filled up with blessed toil,
Hour after hour still bringing in new spoil.

How They Missed the Blessing

(Sara Virginia Du Bois, in the 'Christian Intelligencer'.)

The three girls strolled out over the broad expanse of lawn and threw themselves lazily beneath the shade of an elm tree.

'It's ideal, Isabelle, simply ideal, and I'm glad we decided to come here. It is just rustic enough to make us feel free of the conventionalities of society, and yet near enough to civilized life to feel its great heart throbbing when in the mood for it. But, dear me, Helen, what is this that we hear?'

'A church bell, my dear girls. You remember that quaint little church building, do you not? We passed it on our way here yesterday. I think it must be about five squares from the Strand.'

A slight flush covered Isabelle's face as she continued:

'I had really forgotten for the moment that it was the Sabbath, I, a professing Christian. Judging from the distance we shall have to cover and the time it will take us to brush up our toilets, we shall not have any spare moments to loiter, girls.'

'Isabelle!' both girls cried, as with one voice, 'you are not thinking of going to church this morning?'

'Why not? Is there any reasonable excuse that I could present for being absent?'

'But it's August, Isabelle, my friend.'

'Yes, I know it is August, but I have never yet found my Scripture passage that would warrant me from absenting myself from service during that month. My version does not read, "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together except in August. Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God, except in August." No, there is no available excuse that I could render to my Master for absenting myself this morning.'

'We will await your return here,' said Iva. 'I've not your conscientious scruples, and since the groves were God's first temples, ours may be the fullest measure of blessing.'

Fifteen minutes later a slim figure stepped out from the cottage and waved a farewell to the girls.

'What a dear little girl she is!' said Helen, 'and how good and true in all that she does! But she never makes her religion obtrusive nor sets herself to be better than the rest of us. But somehow she is different, we all acknowledge it; there is a certain restfulness and peace about her nature that the rest of us do not seem to possess. I wonder why it is?'

Isabelle walked briskly along the almost deserted road, directing her footsteps to the little church which she could plainly see nestling among the trees. 'How could I have forgotten,' she said, quietly, 'when my life has such manifold blessings for which to render thanks? I hope I am not late. Father says it is the duty of every Christian to make

it his business never to disturb the religion of others. I'll slip in as quietly as I can.'

She was not late, and the little scattered congregation gazed at her half inquiringly as though unused to having strangers in their midst. The cultured girl seated herself and gazed at the quaint little church with evident interest. But almost the next instant a stranger was saying to her, 'Our organist is absent, and there is no one here to fill her place; could I ask the favor of you?'

She gave a smiling consent and followed the stranger to the organ loft. When the opening hymn was announced, her sweet contralto joined in the words, and more than one wondered at the beauty and melody of her voice:

I love Thy kingdom, Lord,
The house of Thy abode,' etc.

There was no questioning the intensity of the words—she loved His kingdom with a love which left no doubt in her mind or that of others.

It was a comforting service throughout, and the sermon seemed to carry more weight and importance than usual to the eager young listener. 'Now ye are the bodies of Christ and members in particular.' What a personal religion it became, and how important every deed and action when viewed in such light! (The bodies of Christ fit temples for His image. The beauty of it all rose up before her and appalled her in its magnitude. Perhaps she had done wrong in not insisting that her young friends come with her. The blessing received was so full and great that she was eager to share it. And they were not there to receive it.

More than one thanked her later for the service she had rendered; and when she retraced her steps at the close of the service, she had promised to come again in the afternoon to instruct a class of young boys whose teacher was also absent.

'Well, Isabelle, back again, eh?' said Iva. 'Was it what you had expected? Upon my word, you look as if you had received a tenfold blessing. Your face is fairly aglow with happiness. Do tell us what has happened, dear.'

'Oh, girls, I have received such a blessing! It is not often that I have been made to realize as this morning the importance of Christian living. We represent in our bodies the living Christ. When I think of it, I am both humbled and exalted. Oh, Helen, if only you and Iva had gone with me!'

'I wish we had,' said Helen, who had risen from her lounging position and was gazing earnestly at her friend. 'We might have gone just as well as not, and by staying away we failed to receive the blessing. I have wondered, dear, why your religion meant more to you than to some of us, but now I know the reason why. We absent ourselves from His sanctuary, but you go and receive the full measure of reward. Next Sabbath we worship with you, Isabelle.'

'There is no reason why you should wait till next Sabbath. I am going to the Bible school this afternoon, and teachers are needed there. Suppose you go with me and share the work?'

And they did. It was five o'clock when the three girls seated themselves on the cottage porch.

'How very busy and happy we have been,' said Iva. 'I shall never make the plea again that there is nothing to do. Think of fretting over the narrowness of environments when numberless branches of Christian endeavor

await us. If we have desires after usefulness we will find glorious outlets in a perpetual round of service for the Master.'

'Yes, it is beautiful,' said Isabelle, 'and it is a sacred privilege, for He has said, "Whosoever will not hearken to My words, I will require it of him."'

A Roman Boy's Birthday.

It is doubtful if there was ever a prouder boy than Publius Septimius Antonius Geta on his eleventh birthday, when he drove to the race course in a gilded chariot, with two magnificent black horses, all his own. He had reason to be proud, for it was not the lot of many boys to have the march of a victorious army halted, that their birthdays may be celebrated with military games.

The fiery steeds pranced and curveted. The heavy, unsteady chariot, as clumsy as it was magnificent, rocked from side to side. A hundred hands were ready to take the reins should the emperor's young son give the nod; but, though his arms seemed almost pulled from their sockets, and his footing shifted with the swaying chariot, he would not give up. Boys were expected to be hardy and fearless in those days. Young Geta had already been two years with his father in the army, sleeping uncomplainingly, if need be, on the bare ground, eating anything or nothing, seeing sights which our bravest men could hardly bear. He was a frank and friendly little fellow, whose greatest pride was to endure all the hardships that the Roman soldiers suffered. What wonder that the whole army loved him, and that the emperor, Septimius Severus, preferred him to his sullen elder brother, Caracalla!

When the brilliant cortege reached the amphitheatre where the games were to be held, Geta was placed in the seat of honor at the right hand of the emperor, and a happier face than his never looked down upon an assembled audience. At the left, with a brow as black with anger as Geta's was bright with happiness, sat the older son, Caracalla, whose heart was full of bitterness at this honor paid to his brother.

It was a little provincial town. The amphitheatre did not begin to compare with the wonderful Coliseum at Rome, but the citizens had made great effort to adorn it suitably for the emperor. The place reserved for his train was hung with the richest draperies the time produced, but it was not as far removed from the seats of the common people as was most fitting to the Roman ideas of etiquette. Caracalla scowled as he took his purple-draped seat; for the people—the vulgar herd, as he called them contemptuously—were so near that he could have touched them with his hand.

Geta, with shining face, watched every movement of the wrestlers. Caracalla looked idly about with eyes of disdain. At last the climax seemed to have come. The whole amphitheatre was silent in breathless interest; even Caracalla began to show some faint sign of attention. One combatant after another had been downed by one stalwart Roman soldier, who now challenged the world. Just at that moment a luckless slave child from a tier of seats above Caracalla's left hand leaned too far over, lost his balance and fell, and, clutching wildly at emptiness, to save himself somehow, struck the emperor's heir full in the face.

Oh, what an angry Caracalla started up from the purple seat and, with scowls and fierce imprecations, ordered that the unlucky child who had unintentionally insulted him should at once be put to death!

It was common punishment for such an of-