

The Duty of Rest.

BY LYMAN ABBOTT.

Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.—Ps. lv. 6.

I am sure we have all sometimes felt an experience which these words interpret. Our life-activities have ebbed away; we are weary; the grasshopper has become a burden to us, although we are not old; things that would scarcely bring any serious concern to our minds now bring tears to our eyes; we wish we had wings and could fly away and make our nest in the wilderness and be forever at rest. These experiences are themselves the communications of God that we need rest. He summons us to rest as truly as he summons us to activity. Rest is as sacred a duty as work. The Scripture bears its witness to this. In one clause of a sentence the Almighty says, "Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work;" in the same sentence He says, "But on the seventh thou shalt do no work." The duty of doing no work is as sacred as the duty of working. He who awakens us in the morning full of fervid activity, eager for toil, lulls us to sleep at night, weary with our exertions and longing to stop. Every night He says, "Come to me and rest," and at every recurring period of exhaustion repeats the invitation.

We know that vegetation needs rest. The winter is its sleeping-time; there could be no awakening buds in spring, no efflorescent beauty in summer, no ripened fruits in harvest, if there were no sleep in winter. The snow is God's coverlet that keeps nature warm. "He giveth His snow like wool." God tucks His little vegetable children in and gives them resting-place that they may be ready for life in the spring, which is the morrow.

We need these resting-times for our own best growth and activity—resting-times, not merely times of recreation, though we need those too. Americans know how to do everything better than they know how to rest. We grow weary with our work, and need a little frolic at night; and we dance until we can no longer stand. We grow weary with our work, and will have a little recreation in the country; and we get on our bicycles and ride a hundred miles for rest.

We may divide the activities of the mind into three general categories. First, acquisition; second, meditation; third, production. We must acquire in order that we may produce—every one knows that; but it is not enough merely to acquire. Between acquisition and production comes the intermediary, the meditation, and that is almost a lost art in America. Someone has finely defined the difference between active thought and meditation. In active thought we are pursuing new truth; in meditation we are dwelling upon familiar truth, digesting it, assimilating and making it a part of our very being. We know how to search for truth, we know how to communicate truth, but we do not allow ourselves time to meditate truth. We ministers need to take more time for meditation. The minister who spends all his mornings in acquiring truth and brings Sunday what he has gathered the six days before, gives a crude, raw, unripened sermon. He is really giving you other people's thoughts, not his own; he is the mere retailer of the life of others; he communicates no life of his own. What is true of the minister is true of the author. One difficulty with our newspaper writing is, not that it is not brilliant, not that there has not been thought upon it, but there has been no meditation; it contains no vital element, nothing of the writer's own personality. Our literature is often unripe for want of previous meditation. Business men need this meditative quality, and mothers need it no less.

Not only do we do our best thinking when we do not know we think, but we receive our best gifts when we are not searching for them. He who never knows how to say to himself, "Be still, and know that God is God," who lives in perpetual quest for Him, misses by his very activity Him who reveals Himself in the silence. The "still, small voice" is heard in the quiet hour; and if we spend all our life in dancing to the sound of music or laboring to the jar and whirl of busy machinery, how shall we have an ear to hear the "still, small voice" of God? nay, if we are always busy praying, always busy singing, always busy in great congregations, always listening to what other men have to say, how shall we have an ear to hear what God has to say? I do not know that Americans spend too much time in talking to God, but I am sure we spend too little time in listening to Him.

These rest hours God prescribes in His Word; He summons us to them by our own experiences; He requires us to take them by His providence; and we do not understand it. Every night He lays the obligation of rest on men; every seventh day He has put the obligation of resting in His Word, and written it in the very

necessities of human nature; but, more than that, He often says to the busy man, who has been so busy that he has had no time to think, "You must stop." Suddenly He takes away employment from him, compels him to spend a little while in idleness, and the poor man does not understand that God is saying, "Stop and think." So He put His hand on Luther in the midst of the battle, when it seemed that Europe could not do without him for a single day, and shut him up in the castle at Wartburg, saying to him, "Stop and think." So He put His hand on Moses in Egypt, took him away from the people he would have delivered, carried him off into the wilderness, and compelled him to spend years there in quiet reflection. The men who have wrought great results have generally had these resting periods either conferred upon them or imposed upon them. In England Dr. Fairbairn would not be the leader in theological thought that he is if for twelve years he had not worked in a little country parish, thinking much and producing relatively little. Morse elaborated and perfected his scheme of electric telegraphy on an ocean steamer; and that is the one place where you cannot do anything unless you are a captain or a sailor. The quiet times are the fruitful times; and we do not know it. Invalidism is often man's opportunity for rest. God takes this woman out of her household, or this man out of his business, and says, "Lie on that bed for two weeks, and rest." If he only knew what he was put there for, only would stop and rest for those two weeks, he would come back to his life reinvigorated and refreshed, but all the time he is resisting and struggling and worrying about the work he cannot do. When these hours come, and the Father and the Mother of us all takes us in His arms and says, "My child, rest a little while," let us learn not to struggle against Him, but to accept the gift, lay aside the work, and relieve ourselves from the responsibility, take the quiet hour, rest, and grow strong.

"Oh that I had wings like a dove! that I might fly away, and be at rest"—that is the cry of the heart. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—that is the answer of the Christ. Observe the difference. We want to fly away and be at rest; but Christ tells us how we can stay in life and there be at rest. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me." The yoke is not a burden, it is an instrument that helps us carry the burden. He makes it possible to carry the load which the unyoked cannot carry. And what Christ says is this: "I will show you, not how you can fly away and be at rest, but how you can be at rest where you are." For there are two ways of getting rest; one to run away from life and its toils; the other to get such accretion of life that what was a burden is a burden no longer. The boy at school toils over Greek, and listens to the buzzing of the bees and the singing of the birds outside, and sighs at his task. By and by he grows up to manhood, and comes back from his shop or his factory, and in the evening sits down and takes this very Homer and reads it in the Greek. What was his burden becomes his rest. Why? Because of the accretion of life that has come to him through the education. So God gives us rest by adding to our strength, not by taking away our toil.

These rest periods—the night, the Sunday, the hour of invalidism, the vacation hours—these are the provided times when we are to gather life for future service; they are not wasted times, if we know how to use them. The Mill-race running its busy course calls back to the Mill-pond and says, "Oh, you lazy Pond: why are you idle? Go to work;" but the Pond replies, "If I did not lie here, there would be no Mill-race." The racing Raindrops call back to the Cloud above, "You lazy Cloud, lying there in the sky, why do you not come down and refresh the thirsty earth?" and the Cloud replies, "If there were no cloud hanging in the heavens there would be no racing Raindrops." These hours of rest are the needed preparation, the accumulations of life, out of which grow its activities.

God help us to take rest from Him as the gift of His love, and so to use the rest that it shall recuperate our life; and when, at last, the long, deep sleep shall fall upon us, the grave shall not be as a nest in the wilderness where we shall rest forever, but only as a bed on which we lie down for a little night, with the glad awaking in the morning, and the restfulness of an eternal labor that is never toil.

Thy love

Shall chant itself in its own beatitudes
After its own life-working. A child's kiss
Set on thy sighing lips, shall make thee glad;
A poor man served by thee, shall make thee rich,
A sick man helped by thee, shall make thee strong.
Thou shalt be served thyself by every sense
Of service which thou renderest.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING