

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

THE LIMIT OF HELPFULNESS.

There is a limit to giving and receiving help. There are times when even the strongest, richest love, which is ready to offer itself in completest sacrifice, can do nothing but stand by in silent yearning sympathy. The help one human life can give to another is really only external. We may aid others in modifying or adjusting the conditions of living, but they must live out their own lives in these conditions, without any real help from us. We may secure a place for a young man in which he shall have the opportunity of successfully starting in life, but he must then fill the place himself. We cannot *make* him successful, however earnestly we may desire to do so. We may give a child the best possible opportunities of education, in the way of schools, teachers, books, and leisure, but we can do nothing more; he must be responsible for the use and improvement of these opportunities.

When we think deeply of this matter, there is something really startling in the necessary solitariness of every individual life. Each of us must pass through all the inner experiences of life alone and unaccompanied. Companionship, even at the closest, is only at a few surface points. We may have the truest friends, friends that fully understand us and sympathize with us; yet they stand only in the outer court of our life, while beyond there is a holy of holies into which they may not enter, whose sacred mysteries their eyes may never behold. Kettle, in one of his poems, has put this truth in these words:

"Not even the tenderest heart and next our own,
Knows half the reasons why we smile and sigh;
Each in his hidden sphere of joy or woe,
Our hermit spirits dwell, and range apart."

There may be no intention upon our own part to veil the slightest part of our life or to hide one of the ever-varying experiences of our souls; we may be perfectly open and sincere toward the friend who lies in our bosom; and yet it remains true that even to that friend but a little of our inner life can be known. Another writer says:

"We hold our dear ones with a firm, strong grasp;
We hear their voices, look into their eyes;
And yet, betwixt us in that clinging clasp
A distance lies."

"We cannot know their hearts, how'er we may
Mingle thought, aspiration, hope and prayer;
We cannot reach them, and in vain essay
To enter there."

"Still in each heart of hearts a hidden deep
Lies, never fathomed by its dearest, best,
With closest care our purest thoughts we keep,
And tenderest."

Thus in our deepest, realest life, every one of us lives alone. No human eye sees, no human heart knows, the ten thousandth part of what goes on every day, every hour, in the sanctuary of our souls. We prize human sympathy, and reach out after human help; yet, after all we must live alone. We may receive counsel from friends; we may be cheered by their presence; we may be nerved and inspired by the grasp of their hands, or by the words of affection they speak. Yet not one of them can really share our life with us. We must meet life's questions alone and settle them for ourselves. We must make our own decisions and choices. We must carry our own burdens.

In the day of sorrow, others may come near and hold our hand, or we may lean upon their bosom and feel the support of their sustaining tenderness, and the inspiration which comes from the consciousness of their sympathy. They may whisper divine comforts in our ears and point us to the stars that glimmer through the mists. Yet the sorrow itself we must meet and endure alone. No friend can really share it with us.

So we must meet temptation alone. No one can truly help us fight the battle. Not one of our friends, not all together, can make us victorious over the seductions and enticements of evil, which evermore assail us. Others may warn, or plead, or inspire, or cheer, but we must stand utterly alone in the real conflict. Angels may come to minister to us, but even they cannot take our place, or enter with us into the struggle.

The same is true in all the experiences of life. We may have wisest counsel, truest sympathy, most in-

spiring friendship, but with all these aids we must really live as solitary individuals. No one can share with us the responsibility of living. Every one must bear his own burden. No one can give us such help as will insure our victory in any struggle, or our success in any circumstances of difficulty.

The same is true of the efforts we may make to help others. We may see them fail before our eyes, and although we have abundant strength ourselves to meet the experience which overwhelms them, we cannot impart our strength to them, nor can we save them from failure. With all the mightiest yearnings of our love we cannot give any actual help to our dearest friend when sore trials are upon him. We stand powerless beside him.

There is something almost awful in this view of life. It should teach us many lessons. Our success or our failure in any experience of life, is our own. As, if we succeed, it must be by our own energy, wisdom, and struggle; so, if we fail we cannot charge our failure upon the neglect of others to come to our help. God holds us responsible as individuals. In the final judgment, "every one of us must give account of himself to God."

This should teach us self-dependence in the highest, truest sense. We must not sit inactive, waiting to be helped. Even God Himself will not help us beyond a certain point. He will never take us up and carry us to success or victory. He never compels us to be holy. He gives counsel, guidance, cheer; He prepares the way and adjusts the circumstances and conditions in which we may succeed; He imparts divine strength to our faintness and feebleness; but He does not help us in such a way as to exempt us from personal effort and responsibility.

So each human life stands amid the multitudes of other lives, solitary and alone. It must fight its own battles, endure its own trials, achieve its own success. So each must die alone.

"Why should we faint and fear to live alone,
Since all alone, so Heaven has willed, we die?"
—Westminster Teacher.

OUR HANDS KEPT FOR JESUS.

"Keep my hands that they may move
At the impulse of Thy love."

When the Lord has said to us, "Is thine heart right, as My heart is with thy heart?" the next word seems to be, "If it be, give Me thine hand."

What a call to confidence, and love, and free, loyal, happy service is this! and how different will the result of its acceptance be from the old lamentation: "We labour and have no rest; we have given the hand to the Egyptians and to the Assyrians." In the service of these "other lords," under whatever shape they have presented themselves, we shall have known something of the meaning of having "both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit." How many a thing have we "taken in hand," as we say, which we expected to find an agreeable task, an interest in life, a something towards filling up that unconfessed "aching void" which is often most real when least acknowledged; and after a while we have found it change under our hands into irksome travail, involving perpetual vexation of spirit! The thing may have been of the earth and for the world, and then no wonder it failed to satisfy even the instinct of work, which comes natural to many of us. Or it may have been right enough in itself, something for the good of others so far as we understood their good, but unselfish in all but unravelled motive, and yet we found it full of tangled vexations, because the hands that held it were not simply consecrated to God. Well, if so, let us bring these soiled and tangle-making hands to the Lord, "Let us lift up our heart with our hands" to Him, asking Him to clear and cleanse them.

If He says, "What is that in thine hand?" let us examine honestly whether it is something which He can use for His glory or not. If not, do not let us hesitate an instant about dropping it. It may be something we do not like to part with; but the Lord is able to give thee much more than this, and the first glimpse of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord will enable us to count those things loss which were gain to us.

But if it is something which He can use, He will make us do ever so much more with it than before. Moses little thought what the Lord was going to make him do with that "rod in his hand!" The first thing he had to do with it was to "cast it on the ground," and see it pass through a startling change. After this

he was commanded to take it up again, hard and terrifying as it was to do so. But when it became a rod again in his hand, it was no longer what it was before, the simple rod of a wandering desert shepherd. Henceforth it was "the rod of God in his hand" (Ex. iv. 20), wherewith he should do signs, and by which God Himself should do "marvellous things" (Psalm lxxviii. 12).

If we look at any Old Testament text about consecration, we shall see that the marginal reading of the word is, "fill the hand" (e.g. Ex. xxviii. 41; 1 Chron. xxix. 5). Now, if our hands are full of "other things," they cannot be filled with "the things that are Jesus Christ's;" there must be emptying before there can be any true filling. So if we are sorrowfully seeing that our hands have not been kept for Jesus, let us humbly begin at the beginning, and ask Him to empty them thoroughly, that He may fill them completely.

For they *must* be emptied. Either we come to our Lord willingly about letting Him unclasp their hold, and gladly dropping the glittering weights they have been carrying, or, in very love, He will have to force them open, and wrench from their reluctant grasp the "earthly things" which are so occupying them that He cannot have His rightful use of them. There is only one other alternative, a terrible one—to be left alone till the day comes when not a gentle Master, but the relentless king of terrors shall empty the trembling hands as our feet follow him out of the busy world into the dark valley, for "it is certain we can carry nothing out."

LOVE THE SPIRIT'S GIFT.

The love of God is not in the natural man. We may not qualify this statement. The heart is a mirror in which Scripture finds confirmation of its most humbling and condemning truths. The heart has gone astray from its Maker. It can only be restored by its love being re-won, re-gained. The Gospel message proclaims that wondrous display of Divine love which is designed to regain this love of ours. It testifies, "Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." But the proclamation of the Gospel alone effects nothing. There is a further need. There must be a "receiving," believing, and "knowing" this love—"the love which God hath to us." And here again the Divine Spirit is the Teacher, the Interpreter. He it is who "sheds abroad in the heart" love to God, by revealing to us the wondrous marvels of redeeming love designed to win our love.

This love of God is indeed our need. I know I have the assent of every reader to such a confession as this: "I do not love God as I feel I ought to love Him." It would be a blessed thing for me to be able to say, "God reigns in my heart, and I love Him supremely." Life were gladdened indeed if no cloud ever came between my soul and God; and death then would only remove to His more gloriously manifested presence! But why is it that we do not thus rejoice in the sense of God's love to us? and why is it our love to God is at so low an ebb?

There is—there can be—but one answer. Our hearts are like the soil hardened by a long drought, not easily penetrated by the descending showers. We oppose the entrance of the heaven-sent rain of the Spirit's influences. We fail to watch and wait for the outpouring of the sweet gift of love. How seldom, when we read and hear the Word of the Gospel, is the prayer in our hearts, "Holy Spirit, lead me into the love of God which the Gospel proclaims; shed abroad in my heart the love of God; and make that love a constraining motive within me to manifest my love by a whole-hearted and self-denying service."

REV. C. B. PITBLADO'S declination of the call to Winnipeg will give great satisfaction not only to his own congregation but to the public generally in Halifax and throughout the Province.

A CORRESPONDENT from Kansas writes that in the two weeks since the prohibitory law went into operation, nearly all the saloons and grog-shops have disappeared. The law is being quietly enforced without opposition. In Topeka a physician was arrested and fined for selling a man a bottle of Hostetters bitters on which he got drunk. The druggists of the State have carried a test case to the Supreme Court, in order to determine the application of the law to their business, and meanwhile most of them refuse to sell bitters or furnish bitters for medical purposes.