

PLEASANT HOURS

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SAMUEL AND GOD'S VOICE.

BY SAMUEL GREGORY.

Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth.—
I SAM. iii. 9.

A LITTLE PRAYER.

THAT is a little boy's prayer. It is a very short prayer. It is a beautiful prayer. A little boy asked God to speak to him. "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth!" This boy lived away from his home. His home was a farmhouse in the country. In the bright evenings his mother often sat under a great fig tree near the door. She took some sewing, and sat there at work. At times she dropped her work on her knee and looked across the country, as if she were watching the bullock teams and the sheep coming home, or as if she were watching the sunlight on the hills. But, really, her thoughts were far away. After she had sat like that a little while she went on with her sewing again. She was making clothes for her little boy, ready to take to him when the day for her visit came round.

Her little son lived with a gentle, good old man, who was a priest. The boy helped him in the temple, which at that time was a large tent. The child had as much sense as a man, and they got on well together, these two. The name of the boy was Samuel, and Eli was the priest's name.

One night the boy was gone to bed, and he thought he heard his name called. He ran to Eli, and said: "Here am I!" Eli was surprised and said: "I haven't called you; go back, and get to sleep." After a while the same thing happened again. Eli sent him back once more, and lay wondering why the boy came. He thought perhaps the child is not well, or perhaps he has been dreaming. While he lay wondering the boy came again, and was very positive this time. He said: "I'm sure you called!" Eli thought for a minute, and then he perceived that the Lord had called the child. His voice be-

came very tender and sweet, and he said: "I have not called you at all. It is God who keeps calling. I know you are not afraid of God, so go and lie down, and it shall be, if he called thee, thou shalt say: 'Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth!'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

God called again, and the boy quietly asked God to tell him what he wanted, and in the morning he told Eli all about it.

Now God is continually calling to boys and girls, and to men and women. I want to make you remember that. God's voice. That is what I want you to think about.

You notice this, that God's voice is a very quiet voice.

When God called Samuel, though he called four times, Eli never heard a sound. There was nothing for him to hear. These two were not far from each other, this old man and this little boy, but the old man heard nothing, while the little boy heard some one call four times over. It is a strange thing, but that is the way always when God calls. The hymn says that "a voice divine rang through the silence of the shrine." But it was a voice to Samuel only.

There was once a man travelling along

the road leading to one of the most interesting cities in the world. In the distance lay Damascus, with its white houses and its green gardens. This man was going on a bad errand. He hated Christians, and was persecuting them. But about twelve o'clock at noon there came a flash of light, brighter than the sun, and a voice cried: "Saul! Saul! I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." A number of people were there, but only one of them heard those words. They were spoken to the conscience of St. Paul, that is why no one else could hear them.

It is like that now. On many a Sunday people sit side by side in God's house. God comes and calls. Those hearts that God speaks to hear him as plainly as Samuel did, but others do not hear. God speaks quietly and softly, yet his voice is as distinct as thunder. We hear God's

thing wrong, and ran away from home. He came to a lonely place, and put a stone for his pillow, and lay there crying and looking up at the big stars, and feeling very miserable. In the night he dreamed, and saw a ladder from earth to heaven, and from the top of it God spoke to him. In the morning he said: "I shall never forget this!" But as time went on he did forget. Twenty years after, Jacob had another sad, lonely night, and God spoke to him again. This time it made a deep impression on him, and Jacob remembered. But he often said: "I wish I had but listened to God earlier!"

God speaks over and over again. The best of all is that he forgives our forgetfulness. We often begin worship by saying: "I will arise and go to my Father!" Jesus tells us of a young man who was made him very miserable, and who said

You read "The Pilgrim's Progress." I wish you all read it. It is quite as interesting as "Treasure Island," or "The Splendid Spur." You read "The Pilgrim's Progress," you seem to see Greatheart, you hear his easy way of speaking to the giants who went to stop him, you see him draw his sword and win the fight. While you are reading you wish you could be a Greatheart, and help people. It is God who sends such thoughts. It is God's voice that stirs them in your mind.

That is why you sing: "I think when I read that sweet story of old, when Jesus was here among men,—I think—I should like to have been with him then." It is when we read that story of Jesus and his love that we hear God speak most plainly of all.

Sometimes your fathers and mothers and friends counsel you to be better, and you feel that you will try never to give them trouble any more. It is God's voice making us feel that.

Some of us who are older have fathers and mothers in heaven. We often remember things which they used to say. We seem to see their gentle eyes, and how they used to look at us when they spoke. We seem to hear them pronounce our names. As we call all this to mind we feel that we want to do things that they ask us to do. This is all God's voice—the quiet voice that speaks without noise or words.

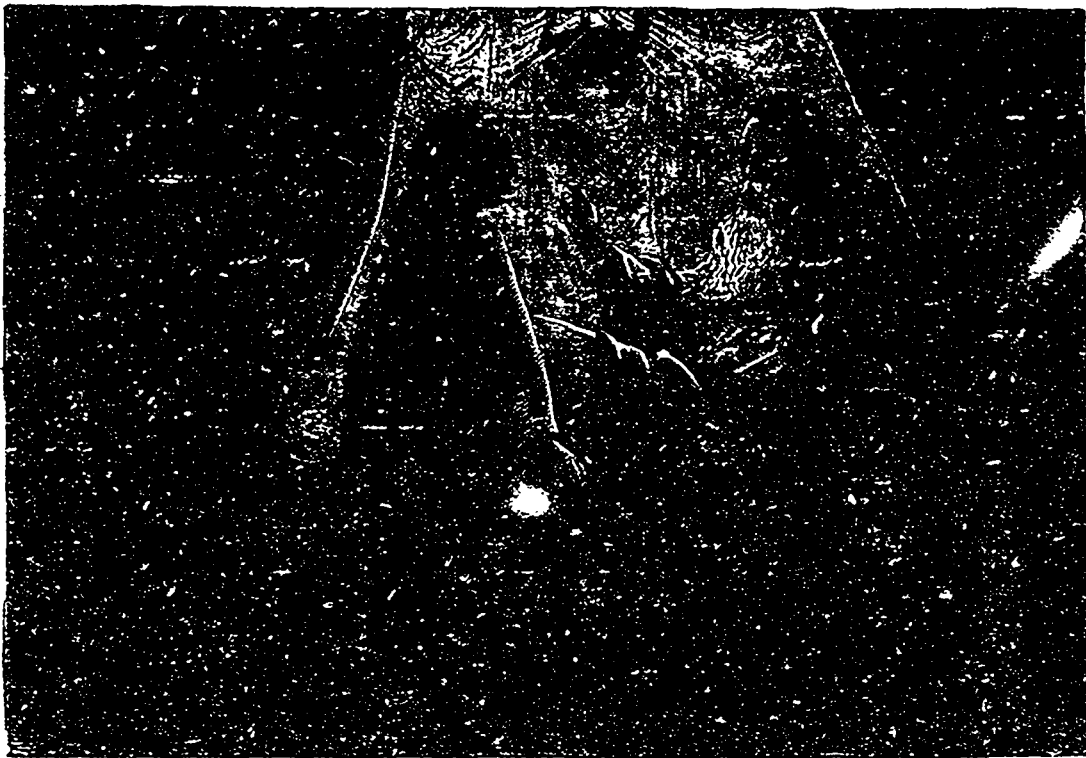
Jesus called this voice—the Holy Spirit—the guide of all who follow God. Let us always listen. Let us often say: "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth!"

To you, the fathers and mothers, the men and women of this congregation, I wanted to say something of this sweet Divine voice; but I think the message of the old Bible story is much the same for us all. Some of us in our childhood dealt better with God's voice in the soul than we are dealing with it now. We had truer hearts. God pity us that we have let the Voice become so feeble. Let us take the child's place again.

It is only so that we can listen and learn life's divine counsels. Distracted thinkers are knocking at the great Doors of Mystery, and are all at sea, without star, or chart, or compass, or hope, while those whose hearts are fresh and simple "do not in the desert stray, or miss their providential way."

As life's perplexities thicken, as sorrow folds us in its gloom, as we see the darkening slope of life's decline, how sorely we need the voice—the voice of Christ's promised consoler. In parts of life we fill our minds with excitements that bear us along, and have their day. We are no better for many of these distractions, but, like morphia, they keep us from some of our pain. Now and then we learn that nothing is radical and sufficient short of God's friendship. Let us go like children to the great door of divine intercourse—the gracious Saviour of our souls, and keep our souls in communication with that sweet inward voice, that it may guide us with its counsel till travelling days are done.

Brads of a feather flock together, but geese and ducks are found in divers places.



ELI AND YOUNG SAMUEL.

quiet voice best when we are quiet and thoughtful. If we are still, and say, "Speak, Lord!" then he speaks.

Then remember too that God speaks often. He calls us many times.

On that quiet night God called to the boy four times. After that God spoke to him thousands of times. As you go along the road the telegraph wires that stretch from post to post are always singing. They vibrate to every breath of air. In Samuel's heart it came to be as if there was always music—the music of God's voice. In time he became an old man. He said to the people: "Behold, I am old and greyheaded, and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day." And the people cheered when he spoke, until he could not go on with what he wanted to say. They knew that he had been a good man, and that God often talked with him.

I dare say your mother sometimes says: "I've told you fifty times!" Sometimes we have to be told fifty times or thereabouts. God tells us what he wants us to do, and he tells us many times. What a pity it is that he has to tell us so often. But God keeps speaking till we listen at last.

You have read of how Jacob did some-

that, when he came to himself. The young man arose and went to his father, and Jesus teaches us that if we will go to God our Father he forgives and forgets all that we have done wrong.

People say: "I intend to listen to God's voice by-and-bye!" When the ice was going away some boys were still skating on it. It became thinner and thinner, and was covered with water, and had holes here and there. People said: "Come off! It's dangerous!" Oh yes, they knew that, and were coming off soon. But in the newspapers there was a long list of people who did not come off soon enough.

It is like that with the way in which people say of God's voice: "I mean to attend to it by-and-bye!"

Then you must also remember that God's voice speaks in many different ways.

God speaks to us in the Sunday services. Our good thoughts are his voices.

Sometimes while you are reading a good book, perhaps a tale of some one who did noble things, and resisted great temptations, while you read your hand holds the book tight, your heart beats faster, and you feel the "pins and needles" in your cheeks. You want to be good and noble, true and brave.