

PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

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In Bethany.

From out the city street
With weary, aching feet,
Beyond the gates wide thrown
And hot, brown walls of stone,
Amid the wild-flowers set
On slopes of Olivet,
Across the hillside brown,
By foot-path winding down,
Through restful, airy shade,
The drooping palm-trees made,
He journeyed down to rest
As love's divinest Guest
In Bethany.

A home without a name
Until the Wanderer came!
What love was there outspread
Above his homeless head!
What tender, thoughtful care,
What busy serving there;
Planning how he might eat,
Cooling his way-worn feet,
While one from care apart
Gave him her royal heart.
And thus her love
confessed,
To love's divinest Guest
In Bethany.

Oh, heart of mine,
make way
For Guest divine
to-day!
Come thou with
presence sweet
And make our life
complete!
As from the
mountain side
Come in, with us
abide.
And here thy rest
shall be;
And while we sup
with thee,
Let thy sweet ac-
cents heard
Mould thought
and will and
word,
And thus our love
be told
And Mary's love
of old
In Bethany.

A WISE CHOICE.

BY THE EDITOR.

The family of Bethany seem to have enjoyed the especial regard of the Lord Jesus. To their hospitable home he loved to retire from the dust and heat and confusion of Jerusalem, in order to enjoy its cool quiet, and sometimes, too, its protection from the plots and machinations of the city. Of this favoured family is recorded the blessed fact, "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."

It is a delightful walk, scarce two miles, from Jerusalem through the vale of Kedron, and up the soft slopes of Olivet to the little village of Bethany. As one climbs the hillside, wider and ever wider views greet the vision, and as one reaches the hilltop, beneath the eye lies like a map the city of Jerusalem. In its glory, at the time of Christ, the white temple of Herod glistened in the rising or the setting sun, and the smoke of the morning and evening sacrifices ascended in the still air. It was a view calculated to call up the deepest and tenderest feelings. Small wonder, then, that our Lord, foreseeing its approaching

destruction by the Romans, exclaimed: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

THE HOUSEHOLD OF BETHANY.

The peaceful quiet of the village home is beautifully shown in our picture, the trellised vines furnishing a shelter from the noontide sun, the broad stone seats, the cool well, the fragrant flowers, and blending with the words of the Master, the "sussurrus and coo of the pigeons." Yet, into this quiet scene and into this loving family the spirit of carefulness and anxiety about the things of this world had crept—the spirit which is apt to grow into an engrossing worldliness, and to make the nature harsh and censorious. We read of Martha that she

Martha, and less would have been more acceptable to Christ. Her mind, moreover, was tortured with over-solicitude. A due degree of carefulness for our temporal wants is very proper and necessary. Neither reason nor religion requires or promotes an improvident recklessness or thoughtless indifference. "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

MARTHA'S MISTAKE.

But the word careful here means over-anxiety—an anxiety which tortures and distracts the mind, which throws its dark shadows across the soul and makes it gloomy and fretful. In the case of Martha this anxiety exceedingly depressed the soul till she was troubled in spirit, perplexed and worried by her domestic duties. She had not that sweet, unruffled calm, the peace which Christ alone can give.

Hence, we find that this over-anxiety

trusively manifested in the presence of such an illustrious guest. But nothing will so blunt the finer feelings as the spirit of worldliness. When it takes possession of the soul all higher motives are ignored, and a spirit of thorough and absolute selfishness finds entrance. In this respect Martha is but a type of over-anxious persons everywhere. Frequently this fault becomes a chronic habit of the soul, and fretful and peevish tempers and unlovely and fault-finding dispositions are the result.

Moreover, this spirit led Martha to

REPROACH HER HEAVENLY GUEST

and treat him with seeming disrespect. "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me." No doubt she loved her Lord, it may be, loved him intensely; yet this worldly spirit so warped and biased her nature that she here conveys the tacit reproach that

while she was so careful about his comfort, Christ cared not for her. She forgot his exalted dignity, his heavenly mission; she forgot or ignored the fact that his meat and drink was to do his Father's will, and not personal gratification.

This, too, is the universal habit of a worldly spirit. It is continually reflecting on God's providence, his plans and dispensations. It accuses him of neglecting his children and reproaches that sleepless love that wearieth not forever. When the storm arises and danger is imminent, it cries: "Lord, carest thou not that we perish?" Art thou indifferent to our sufferings or our trials; and, height of wickedness, it even envies those who are in the religious enjoyment of the favour of God and accuses them of unkindness.

This conduct we find extorted from the loving

lips of Jesus the tender reproach made doubly poignant for its very gentleness. "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her." The very attitude and gesture of Martha in the picture suggests the fault-finding tone of voice and reproachful words.

MARY'S WISE CHOICE.

Let us proceed to observe the conduct and character of the loving Mary whose devotion to our Lord called forth the querulous complaint of Martha.

Mary, in the meantime, was sitting at the Master's feet, drinking in the lessons of his love, imbibing his meek and gentle spirit—at his feet, the proper place of a disciple, teachable as a little child.

Did Christ comply with the request of Martha, "Bid her, therefore, that she help me"? Not so. He never drives from his presence those who find their chief enjoyment there. He never spurns from his feet those who in meekness sit



THE HOUSEHOLD OF BETHANY.

"Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her."

was "cumbered about much serving," overwhelmed with anxieties about the necessities of the body.

The mind is so formed that it cannot actively pursue more than one object at the same time. Its powers are enfeebled by presenting too great a number and variety of themes demanding its attention. Our real necessities are but few, our imaginary ones are numberless. "Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" Our real life is something higher than that of the body. It is the growth and spiritual culture of the soul. The food and raiment of the body are but accessories of the real life. The needs of the soul are the bread of life, which, if a man eat, he shall never hunger more.

And yet, how many defraud their immortal spirit that they may minister to the appetites of the pampered body. Thus, much serving was injurious to

deprived Martha of many precious blessings. Here beneath her roof was the Son of God, the heavenly teacher who spake as no man ever spake, from whose lips fell the pearls of divine wisdom, sublimer lore than any of the school of Gamaliel or of the rabbis of Jerusalem.

But instead of sitting at his feet and gathering those precious pearls and treasuring in her heart his lofty teachings, Martha was anxiously engaged in some unnecessary domestic employment. Unnecessary we say, for otherwise the gentle rebuke of our Lord would have been a harsh and cruel taunt instead of a mild and loving remonstrance, as it evidently was.

Moreover, it was over-anxiety of Martha which led to censoriousness of spirit, therefore with querulous tone she accused the meek and gentle Mary of having left her to serve alone. This was unkindly cruel, and gave evidence of bitterness of soul that ought not to have existed, far less to have been so ob-