

SPECIAL  
ARTICLES

## Our Contributors

BOOK  
REVIEWS

## THE CHARMED CHAMBER.

(By Rev. J. A. R. Dickson, D.D.)

It is in every house, some time or other. No home can be long without it. And when it discovers itself it rules imperiously over every one belonging to the family, and even exerts its power far beyond it on many others. It gathers about in eager, anxious and sometimes, we might more truly say oftentimes, sleepless thought. It is the centre of attention. To it an unabated stream of sympathy flows. It commands low-voiced speech, noiseless footsteps, subdued light, a muffled knocker, ever open eyes, ministering hands, loving hearts and everything it wills. Its sovereignty is an undisputed sovereignty, and its laws is the law of love. All bow to it, and no burden it imposes, however heavy, is ever spoken of as grievous. All wait on it, and delight in becoming its ministering angels. What is this charmed chamber? It is the sick room. That part of the house, whether lofty or low, spacious or narrow, magnificently or meanly furnished, where disease contends with health and seeks to overcome it. The sick one there, in his weakness and helplessness and danger, gathers about him the strength and wisdom and skill not only of the individual dwelling to which he belongs, but also that of the whole neighborhood. This gracious sympathy is one of God's natural laws, and it is unspcakably grand. It proclaims the true kinship and brotherhood of man. It brings to the surface, what the bustle and business of life covers up and in a great measure hides out of sight, the genuine human affections each has for the other. Ralph Waldo Emerson speaks a great truth in these words: "We have a great deal more kindness than is ever spoken. Maugre all the unselfishness that chill like east winds the world, the whole human family is bathed with an element of love like fine ether. How many persons we meet in houses, whom we scarcely speak to, whom yet we honor, and who honor us! How many we see in the street, or sit with in church, whom, though silently, we rejoice to be with! Read the language of these wandering eyeballs. The heart knoweth." All this kindness is revealed when one is thrown down by disease, and trampled upon by pain, and threatened with death. Then all hearts are touched, and express their sympathy by doing all that can be done to minister, so far as in them lies, restoration to health. And that is a touching sight to look upon.

The sick chamber is a sacred spot. The angel has come down to trouble the waters that healing processes, of the highest order, may go on. God's hand is manifestly there; and it is not there without good reason, either as touching the individual himself or those who may be affected through him. God reached David through the death of his child. God dealt with Martha and Mary and a multitude of others through the death and resurrection of Lazarus. We know nothing of the effects on Lazarus himself. Tennyson has expressed that as only a wise man could:

Behold a man raised up by Christ!  
The rest remaineth unrevealed:  
He told it not; or something sealed  
The lips of that Evangelist.

Whatever effect the affliction may have on those who can be reached through the sufferer, it is intended for good to the sufferer himself. It is a messenger sent to call sin to remembrance; to lead to great searchings of heart, that repentance and reformation may be the result. Sickness to the sinful is God's voice reminding him of his want of love to the Lord, of his rebellious and unbelieving heart, and of the peril in which he is placed. It says: "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." Sickness to the Christian—the man who has sought pardon through Christ Jesus—is a means of grace. It is intended to further the divine life in his soul. Such is the explanation given of it in Hebrews xii. 9:11: "We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of Spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." This being the case, we need not marvel at that memorable saying of the great commentator, Matthew Henry: "It is a great loss to lose an affliction." That is, to have it go unimproved; unblest to the spiritual uplifting of the nature Godward.

Of this we may be sure, "That nothing walks with aimless feet." Everything in life has a mission. And sickness is sent to sweep away our dross, to refine our nature, to bring us into line with God's will.

In ministering to the sick, therefore, the interests of the soul must not be forgotten any more than the interest of the body. It is well to seek, by every means in our power, physical well-being; but spiritual well-being must not be overlooked. Then the heart is softened and the memory ready to receive characters and impressions it may retain forever. Then seed may be planted that shall grow and yield fruit in time and in eternity. Then the spiritual vision may be cleansed, and the atmosphere so cleared that heaven and the hereafter may stand forth clearly to view. It was the reading of Witherspoon's "Practical View" that taught Dr. Chalmers the means of a sinner's acceptance with God; but it was a sickness that rested on eternal realities, and lifted up his life to a position of power and blessing. Before this Dr. Hanna tells us that "parochial duty pressed lightly on Dr. Chalmers during the first seven years of his ministry at Kilmarnock. Kindly inquiries were made, tender sympathy was shown, and needful aid was tendered, but no solicitude was manifested as to their religious condition, no references occurred in visiting them to their state and prospects for eternity, and it was only when specially requested to do so that he engaged in prayer.

But the great change came through his illness at Fincraig, and with it a total alteration in the discharge of all parochial duty. From a place of visible subordination, the spiritual care and cultivation of his parish was elevated to the place of clear and recognized supremacy. To break up the peace of the indifferent and secure by exposing at once the guilt of their ungodliness and its fearful issue in a ruined eternity—to spread out an invitation, wide as heaven's own all-embracing

love, to every awakened sinner to accept of eternal life in Jesus Christ—to plead with all that, instantly and heartily with all good will and with full and unreserved submission, they should give themselves up in absolute and entire dedication to the Redeemer—these were the objects for which he was now seen to strive with such a severity of conviction, as implied that he had one thing to do, and with such a concentration of his forces as to idle spectators looked like insanity." What a cleansing of the vision and an elevation of the purpose was there.

The frequent sicknesses of Richard Baxter incited him to great diligence in his work of preaching and teaching and writing books that are yet as live coals from God's altar. How many have reason with the Hebrew psalmist to say: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes." Sanctified affliction is a choice blessing. It is not lost upon us. It carries its own gracious teaching to the heart to renew the fountains of our life; and to lift us up above the thralldom of the things of time and sense.

When we enter the chamber of sickness we need to pray specially for divine help and guidance that we may know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary. Great skill is required to diagnose each case so as to minister to it aright. The power to speak a profitable word to the sick is a divine gift. It demands a thoughtful mind, a sympathetic heart, an appreciation of the circumstances—an ability to understand what is necessary. Where there is wisdom a few words shall be sufficient. The sick should not be lectured, but led gently on to such knowledge as is suitable for them. Christ is to be central, and the light of Him shines on sin to turn the soul against it, and on salvation to win the heart to desire it, and on eternity to cause the soul to seek preparation for it. Christ includes all. How sweet to be able to say as R. M. McCheyne does: "I have been privileged to smooth down the dying pillow of an old school companion, leading him to a fuller joy and peace in believing. A poor, heavy laden soul, too, from Lambert, I have had the joy of leading toward the Saviour."

The conditions may not always seem favorable for a "word only," yet we must remember the command to which is joined an encouraging promise: "Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days." It is beautiful to see the sweet flowers and choice delicacies that are carried to the sick ones, and to mark the manifold thoughtful attentions paid to them—these are not to be omitted, for they tell out a deep and considerate affection—but they are to be crowned with Christian regard, uttered in warning, exhortation or promise. "A word spoken in due season, how good it is!" Jonathan Edwards' resolution may be taken as our motto, subjectively as applying to ourselves, and objectively as applying to others: "Resolved to improve afflictions to the uttermost."

Michigan Presbyterian: It is harder to make a short speech than a long one, harder to preach a short sermon than a long one, harder to write a short article than a long one. And yet it is generally the short, pithy, pointed speech or sermon or article that tells. This is often seen in lies. In battle the small hot shot of the riflemen are more effective than the missiles of the big guns. It is worth while for speakers and writers to study the power of brevity.