

The Days That are no More; or Glimpses at the Past With Lessons for the Present.

BY VERNON LAMBDIN.
V. A CUP OF COLD WATER.

The memory is very erratic in its working. It plays strange freaks with its possessor. Matters of moment that one might suppose it would treasure long it drops with careless hand into the swift stream that flows to the ocean of oblivion; while a trivial circumstance it retains and preserves as we press between the pages of some loved volume a little leaf we have gathered during a holiday ramble. An apparently common-place incident is as fresh today as when it first happened; it comes back with startling vividness; it abides with us forever; whereas other, maybe greater events through which we lived, are seldom, if ever, recalled. We set ourselves to conjure up some stately figure from the past; instead thereof a laughing imp starts into being before us and mocks our wizardry.

Memory is often like a dark lantern whose light is focussed on one little spot, while the beauties of the surrounding landscape remain veiled in denser darkness. As we peer into "the dark backward chasm of time," we catch sight here and there of a glimmering fact; but much lies hid in profundity and gloom.

When I think of "the days that are no more" in my young life, one day stands out distant from others, and one slight happening makes for itself a permanent record in the imperfect register of recollection. It seems that before I attended the public school I used to go to a dame's school. The whereabouts of that domestic seminary I have forgotten; though I have an idea that it was one of a row of small cottages not far from my aunt's abode. The personality of that early preceptor is altogether shadowy to me. The names, the appearance, the ways of my fellow-scholars have all escaped my remembrance—to say nothing of the lessons we shared. One thing only I remember: a sultry afternoon with its choking heat, its feeling of oppressive restraint, and its sense of interminable length. I am very thirsty, and the mistress permits me to repair to the kitchen; and take a drink from the household pail. The very sight of the water revived me, and today I almost feel the old delight as I raised the tin cup to my lips. Ever since that time I have been partial to drinking vessels made of the same humble ware. Never has any beverage had such an exquisite relish for me as that simple drink of water. Why does its memory abide with me? Probably because it was the gratification of a perennial instinct. We are strangely subject to physical cravings, and their denial or appeasement strongly affects the mind. Then, too, the impressions of life's opening years are usually the deepest, and their associations the most attractive and abiding. Almost all our poets have testified to this. One of the humbler of their order has sung with homely pathos of:—

"The old oaken bucket, the iron bound bucket
The moss-covered bucket which hung in the well!"

Another, and a greater poet has sung his famous song beginning—"I remember, I remember," which stirs all our hearts because it appeals to what is in them all. No sunshine so bright as that which poured through the windows of the early home, no air so fresh as that which blew through the clustering curls of childhood, no skies so near and glorious as those which canopied the familiar scenes of youth. Truly, as the still greater Wordsworth tells us, "Heaven lies about us in our infancy." Alas, the celestial glory fades too soon into the light of common day. But even its remembrance serves to lighten the gloom of after years, and while the tender thoughts it awakens are possible to us we are never without influences which the blessed spirit can use to soften hard hearts, and make world-weary men and women as little children again.

It will be seen that the experience I have mentioned is not peculiar to me; nor is it peculiar only to persons of an imaginative turn. It has been shared by all sorts of people in all ages. A minister, whose house is adjacent to a beautiful spring, told me how his son, sick with fever in another land, heard its musical gurgle as he lay weary worn and thirst-tormented. Ah, how he longed to place his poor parched lips to the wooden trough o'er-running with that cool, delicious water. As the prodigal said, "In my Father's house is bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger," so another and worthier, son might have said: "Near my father's house is living water running to waste, and I am well nigh dying of this raging thirst." That spring was more to him by reason of the past, which the thought of it revived; a past which meant home, health and happiness. And the human heart is much the same in all times and places. One touch of nature binds the sons of men through the centuries into one kinship. When David was in the cave of Adullam, separated from his old home by the hated Philistines, he felt an intense longing to taste once more the water that had seemed so sweet in the peaceful and far-off days of childhood, and his thoughts involuntarily revealed themselves in the exclamation, "Oh, that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" Three of his mighty men heard the audible whisper of their beloved leader, and his wish became a command, and furnished a rare opportunity for a display of loyalty, so at imminent risk, they

broke through the hostile garrison, and drew water out of the well, and brought it to David. But the great Captain would not take a draught brought at such a cost of jeopardy to the lives of those brave men. So he poured it out as a libation unto the Lord, it being beautifully symbolic of sacrificial devotion. Had David drunk of it, it would not have tasted to him as it once had done. Distance not only lends enchantment to the view; it also enhances the flavor of simple fare. Some things will never taste to us as they once tasted, even though we return to the old life, it would never again be what it once was. We ourselves have changed, the passing years, whatever compensations they may have brought, have robbed us of the capability for the former keen enjoyment. Many burdened with the weight of this all weary world have longed to be little children again. That cannot be naturally, nor would it be well even were it possible, but some better thing is provided for us, we may become little children in a higher sense. We may become humble, teachable, gentle, with hearts susceptible and eyes full of wonder at the marvels wrought by God. In spiritual phraseology, we may be born again. The new birth is not only a gracious possibility. Millions have experienced it to their everlasting joy. John Bunyan tells in "Grace Abounding," how, being rebuked by a loose woman for his ungovernable habit of profanity, he longed to be a little child again, that he might learn to speak without swearing. That desire was afterwards granted; he became in the spiritual sense a little child, and instead of oaths, prayers and praises came spontaneously from his lips. As we come back to the old wells in the places of our youth, and drink of their waters only to be disappointed, Jesus meets us as he did the woman of Samaria, and says as he looks wistfully into our sad faces: "If thou hadst known the gift of God—thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." And as he points to the well which has mocked our cherished expectations, he further says: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Yes, and we prove his words to be true. He gives us water far exceeding that which softened and sweetened our childish lips. It brings satisfaction without satiety, and its quality is the more appreciated the more we taste. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

While I remember so vividly that drink of water in days of childhood, I have another memory which is dearer still. I look back to the time when I was a poor, way-worn sinner; when I was destitute of inward peace, and all earth's streams had faded as brooks dried by summer's heat. Then I felt a thirst I had never known before: I thirsted for God, even the living God, and that which alone can be found in God. And there appeared one like unto the Son of Man who with radiant smile and gentle hand led me unto fountains of water of life. I can best sum up my happy experience in the oft-sung words:—

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
Behold, I freely give
The living water, thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink, and live:
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him."

I can testify that "of all rivers, the river of the water of life is the best," and that no draught is so satisfying as that which comes from the wells of salvation. "As cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country." The tidings of salvation brought from heaven is, indeed, the gospel—the best of all news, reviving, cheering, refreshing those ready to die. What suitable and abundant provision God has made in his word for our deepest needs! As the spiritual nature asserts itself there is a longing for something more than bodily gratification; then we cry with the Psalmist: "As the heart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." And God has made himself accessible to us in the Scriptures of truth. Water springs sparkling through all the pages of that Book, from the undefiled river which watered the Garden of Eden to that river, in the restored Paradise, clear as crystal which proceedeth from the throne of God and the Lamb. One of the last words of Revelation is an invitation voiced by the Spirit and the bride—and echoed from lip to lip by those who have sought and found. "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." Let us sound forth that welcome word until all thirsting souls hear the good news.

Jesus has told us that whosoever shall give to drink unto one of his little ones a cup of cold water, shall in no wise lose his reward. The smallest help rendered to God's dear children, prompted by a spirit of brotherhood, shall be highly esteemed in the great day. How many there are who need some material assistance, how many more who need words of good cheer when ready to faint beneath the burden and heat of the day, and how many more who need most the consolations of the gospel. Let those of us who have found sources of strength carry therefrom supplies to others in the hour of need. Thomas Carlyle relates a beautiful incident in the life of Frederick the Great, showing how the lowliest may help the highest by practical deed and kindly word. It will be well to re-tell it as nearly as

can be in the gifted biographer's words. When Frederick's fortunes were at a low ebb, after his defeat at the battle of Koblenz, and all the world seemed arrayed against him, he felt naturally somewhat depressed. As he and his men were marching away from the scene of disaster, a staunch, ruggedly pious old Dragoon brought in his steel cup a draught of pure water to the king, from some fine well he had discovered;—old Mother Earth's own gift, through her rugged Dragoon, exquisite refection to the thirsty, weary soul, and spoke in his Dragoon dialect: "Never mind, your Majesty! The Almighty and we; it shall be mended yet. The Kaiserin may get a victory for once, but does that send us to the devil!" Those words of rough comfort were well taken. So some of Christ's soldiers, even leaders, seem now and again worsted in the battle against evil. But let those who are strong in faith take from the well of divine promise a reviving draught, and remind the weary warrior that we shall yet be more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Heaven's Light on Earth's Drudgery.

BY REV. F. S. MEYER.

What a difference heaven's light makes to common objects? A worn-out bottle skin, a patch on an old garment, the fox creeping to its hole, the homeward flight of birds from their feeding-grounds, a rustic penfold, all these shine with a new glory when touched with the luminous words and thoughts of Christ. The shavings and implements of a carpenter's shop are forever consecrated because the light from His face shone on them during the years of his service in carpentry.

It is also true that when his thoughts and conceptions of life fall on the scenes of daily toil, "the common round" no longer appears as a treadmill, but becomes a ladder which links the lowest earth to highest heaven.

What are the considerations which will shed heavenly light upon drudgery like this, until the result is that common things begin to shine with heavenly lustre, as a bit of glass bottle across a valley, which has caught the level rays of the setting sun, is transformed and begins to sparkle like a star?

The first thought which will light up life's drudgery is the remembrance that it has been appointed by God's wise providence. God as much sent Joseph through the drudgery and discipline of prison as through the glory of the palace. Every part of his life was designed for the evolution of a divine purpose for himself and others. If he had evaded the irksome duties of the prison, he would never have come in contact with Pharaoh's servants, and so the link which bound prison and palace would have been missing.

You can never tell why God is exposing you to the fret and pressure of the present moment until you see the apartments of which it is the vestibule. All God's purposes are love; "all things work together for good." For the disciple, all long, straight roads, however dusty, lead to the Golden City,—the sure anticipation, therefore, of the goal which must be a happy one, since God is God's, and our trust that he is bringing us thither by the shortest and wisest path should gild with the light of expectant hope the tedium and monotony of the present. I am ever prepared to read the rather dull introductions and disquisitions with which Sir Walter Scott prefaces his great novels, because I know that I shall be well repaid when I get to the narrative.

The drudgery of life is as much a divine vocation as are its most brilliant passages. Too often we speak of being called to the ministry, confining the term to the young lad, who, like Samuel, has heard the divine voice; as if it were unsuitable to speak of a carpenter as being called to the bench, the blacksmith to the forge, the shoemaker to the last. This exclusive use of the word is in direct collision with the apostolic precedent which bids "every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." "Brethren," said the great apostle, who more than any other has inspired the thinking of subsequent generations, "let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God."

If it were possible for the poor slaves of some great patrician's household, who might be compelled on their bended backs, to bear for hours together without the least movement the chess-board on which their masters were deliberately playing, to be taught to think that the menial service they were called to perform was a divine vocation (1 Cor. 7: 21.) surely there is no toil or duty assigned to us in the course of divine providence in which we may not hear the voice of God. If you listen when the bell arouses your tired body so another day of toil, you will detect the silver music of the bells of heaven summoning you to take up your part in the great economy of the universe.

He who appoints stars and glow-worms, cherubim and fire-flies, suns and molecules of dust, to perform their several parts in the clock-work of the universe, has appointed you as a little cog-wheel or screw, and by your faithful performance of obscure and unrecognized duty you are doing your part in helping to maintain the order of the great movement which extends throughout the universe and is slowly advancing to that "far-off, divine event" of which the poet sings.

The faithful performance of drudgery duties is tending to the formation of noble character. All that God wants of anyone is faithfulness. Not brilliance, not success, not