

## THE MASTER'S FOOTSTEP.



L.L. people who call themselves Christians acknowledge that when serious illness comes, or when we grow old—in fact, when death is evidently near at hand—it becomes at last really necessary to attend to the things that belong to our salvation. Thus far, all are agreed, even the most careless amongst us.

But there is one very great mistake into which a large number of people fall. They think that when that time comes, and when all further

possibility of evading the question is taken from us, when it becomes so absolutely necessary that we should be prepared to meet our God, we can still be able to make the preparation on which eternal life or death must depend.

I entreat such people to listen to a few words from one who knows something about what it feels like when we hear our Master's step approaching, and His voice calling upon us to come and say the lesson He had given us to learn.

I have had illness myself, and I have seen others suffer, and I have seen people die, and all that I have observed proves the same thing, namely, that a severe illness is not the time for any great effort of the heart or mind; on the contrary, the more ill people are, the less they are able to think.

When those who have never really drawn near to God, through faith in Christ, are told that they are going to die, they may be frightened; but that is quite another matter. More frequently, however, they feel too weak and ill to care deeply about anything. The hour has come when they are being called upon to say their lesson; and not only the time for learning it is past, but the power of attending to it has gone too.

And though there may have been some few exceptional cases in which people have repented with true repentance, even in a last illness, most assuredly it may be said that this has never been known for certain to have been the case with any one person who had wilfully put it off till then.

As I said before, I have seen people die; and I will tell you about two cases which, I am most thankful to say, were very different from those who put off caring for their soul to a dying hour.

One of the friends to whom I allude died after a very short illness of great suffering. He never knew that he was dying, for those whose duty it would have been to tell him so never thought the illness would prove fatal. They even thought, during the last two or three days, that he was getting better; they believed this until he actually became unconscious, and in a very little while his spirit passed away.

Yet it mattered not that death had come upon him unawares, for he was one whose life had been dedicated to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. During the worst suffering of that illness, from which he had so little thought that he should never recover, he had felt that blessed Saviour nearer to him even than ever before, simply because his need of Him was so great.

The other friend of whom I would speak to you did know that she was dying; for many weeks she knew that her end was approaching, and rejoiced to know it. But many and many a time during those weeks she said that she wondered how people bore such illness when they did not already feel sure that they were forgiven and accepted for Jesus Christ's sake.

"Suppose I had to come to Him now," she would often say; "suppose that I had now to come to Him for the first time, whilst I feel so weak and can think so little. I could not do it; I am sure that I could not."

But she had the comfort of knowing that she had come to the feet of Jesus long ago. She knew that His blood had cleansed her from all sin; that He had loved her, and redeemed her unto Himself. And she knew also, as the last hour gradually drew nearer, that He who had led her all her life long, because she trusted in Him, would lead her still—would lead her through the valley of the shadow of death. When she passed through that valley she feared no evil, because He was with her; His rod and His staff comforted her. He kept her in perfect peace, her mind being stayed on Him, until she entered for ever into His visible presence, where there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

And now let me entreat each one who reads these words, if you have hitherto delayed, to delay no longer, but let me entreat you by all that is most precious, and that will continue most precious when the troubles and pleasures of this world shall have alike passed away, do not wait to give the last portion of your life to God. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not give a part of His life for us, but the whole. Let us also give the whole of ours to Him. It is not much to bring, for it does but grow worthless in our own keeping. Only give it to Him, and He will give you "manifold more." Give Him your earthly life, and He will give you—what a wonderful exchange!—life everlasting. And not only that, but even the earthly life which is dedicated to Him, He will brighten now with His own love. He will comfort you in every trouble; He will help you in every difficulty; He will lead you and teach you from day to day.

But remember that whether you will come to Him now or not, sickness and death must one day come to you. However strong or however prosperous you may now be, the time must at last come when nothing save the help of Christ can avail you. And remember also that it is those, and only those, who have already learnt to know Him as their Good Shepherd who, when they reach the valley of the shadow of death, fear no evil, because He is with them.