

THE ADVANTAGES OF SICKNESS.

"The advantages of sickness!" what a preposterous idea, says the bright young girl as she bends over the page a face glowing with health, and the cheerful animation with which health decks the young. "The advantages of sickness! who can have chosen such a theme? The very title is enough for me; I have no desire to read more of it;" and she turns away with a merry laugh to something more in accordance with her gay mood. But a day is coming, bright being, when you may repeat again those words, from a sincere heart, taught by experience that there is meaning in them. For the kind Father has ordained that to all shall the hour of sickness come, and blessed are those whose hearts are ready to receive its holy teachings.

To the Jews, sickness, with its hours of agony and weakness, seemed a messenger of punishment for sin, a sign of the anger of God. But by the light of Christianity, we see in sickness and sorrow the hand of a kind parent who "chasteneth those whom he loveth." We know that sometimes, with the sinking and exhaustion of the frail body, the soul is purified and gloriously elevated; that often the sick man seems surrounded with a halo of light, and the frail being lying there filled with a more than earthly peace and joy.

Truly, often, too often, do we see in sickness the stern law of retribution, which says to man, "As thou sowest, so shalt thou reap,"—when disregarding all the laws of health and temperance, he plunges into excesses which leave him with a worn-out frame to toss upon the bed of pain. God's laws cannot be slighted with impunity. It should be a duty to attend to the health of the body, for it is closely connected with the health of the soul. But sickness cannot be wholly guarded against. It sometimes visits every one, and sad indeed is it for him who despises the lessons which it brings, and whose soul is not made stonger by its discipline.

Even the most thoughtless must rise from the bed of pain and exhaustion, with a more vivid sense of the privilege of health. Something like gratitude must fill the heart even of him who has through his former life received God's gifts, unmindful of the source from whence they came. He must feel, for the time at least, that a more than mortal hand has laid him on that couch of pain, a more than mortal hand has raised him up. Who that has ever passed many weeks of sickness and exhaustion, can ever forget the joy of feeling well? Shut up in the darkened room, each day the world seems to grow narrower. We can hardly believe, that in the street people are rushing to and fro, intent on business or pleasure, good or ill,—so still and quiet is that little spot to which we are bound. No one who has not himself felt it can tell the joy that comes with the return of strength. Each motion brings pleasure. The consciousness of living in health again, free to move about once more in the open air, to revel in the sunshine, again to feel one's limbs grow strong and elastic, and the weight removed with which ill health so often cumbers the spirit;—such a pleasure as this even the dullest, the most callous heart must feel. And many will then be ready, if not before, to look upon sickness as a friend, for having taught them that, which, but for its teachings, they might have been long regardless of, the great blessing of health and strength.

How often too, when sickness comes, do we find with it a kindness and sympathy which we have yearned for in health, but which was hidden from us until sickness called it forth! How universal is the sympathy for sickness. How it arouses, even in hearts that are strangers to the invalid, a glow of pity, and a desire to render to the sick one all possible assistance. How constant are the inquiries until the danger is passed. How often is it said, "I did know that I had so many friends until I was sick."

And what a tide of affection is poured out upon us by the loved ones whose hearts are racked with anxiety because we are in pain. What touching pictures of self-forgetfulness and devoted love does the sick chamber summon up; of a love never wearied with watching "the last star out" by the side of the sufferer, knowing no fatigue while danger is there. Surely sickness is a blessed revelation to us of the affection which makes life so precious.

But more even than this can sickness do for us, if our hearts are ready to receive its

lessons; for it weighs us in a balance, and then can we see in what are our spirits wanting. In those quiet hours when weakness and exhaustion have cramped and bound every bodily energy, it holds up a glass before our soul and we can see ourselves as we really are. In health we are in the midst of business or pleasure, and a thousand things continually absorb our attention. We find but little time to look within, and we are too apt to be deceived.

We have thought ourselves well schooled in patience, perhaps; but we find, when the trial comes, our patience soon exhausted. We have heard of suffering borne without a murmur, of long years of languishing passed in cheerfulness, and we have been so thrilled with admiration, we have felt so deeply the greatness of such fortitude that we have earnestly determined that we too would be girded and ready to bear, when our hour should come: and we find ourselves broken down, our energy and cheerfulness gone, after a few days only of suffering. We have seen repining too in sickness. We have heard the sick one murmuring that God should make his lot so hard, that he was deprived of the free air, when so many around him were rejoicing in it, in health and strength; and this too, when surrounded with comforts; and we have hoped and prayed that our faith would be stronger than his; and now we find our faith too failing us. A few days of sickness have shewn us much yet to do, where we thought much already accomplished. It has shewn the spirit to be weak as well as the body. Shall we not be thankful for this knowledge of ourselves, which this dread sickness has brought us?

Is not sickness too often made an excuse for indulging ourselves in our faults and weaknesses? How often it is said in the presence of children, "You must not mind if he is cross to-day, for he is sick." Would it not be better to teach a child that he is always to use self-control?—to teach him as he goes on in life, that the trial of sickness is sent by an All-kind Father, not to annoy him, but to be borne patiently and thoughtfully and willingly, and that by its means his character may be strengthened and improved.

We must all prefer health to sickness. We may look back upon sickness as upon a friend who may have done us much good, and we may not regret that we have gone through the experience of those days and hours of pain; but we must naturally look forward to it with dread. None can desire to lose the vigor and strength of health. No one can part with it without sadness. But God sends it in kindness and because He loves us. He sends it because He would shew us at last that He has made us in His own likeness. Because by it he would lead us to the "green pastures and still waters" of the true spiritual life. He would have us feel that though health and strength are gone, and every avenue to earthly pleasure shut up, yet that none of these things are essential to the spirit's life. We are to be independent of all these. He would have us feel that we are to live in the body, and yet out of it, and above it. For all these pains and pleasures beside to the body, and that is soon to be laid aside; but that higher life still goes on into eternity, and here on earth must have its beginning.

This earthly life may be filled with pain and sorrow, as to some among us it is; and terrible to many a one would be the rising of the sun that brought but a new day of suffering, if it were not for that blessed example of him who bore his sufferings so gloriously; who knew not where to lay his head, and yet was so peaceful; who said to his friends, when the hour of mortal agony was drawing near, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Health and prosperity seem so essential to us when we are in possession of them, and it is so difficult then to feel that they are transitory, should we not find ourselves too much absorbed in the business and pleasures of mortal life, too thoughtless of the life beyond, if sickness did not come with its solemn warning, to tell us that life is more than the enjoying of this world?

"Is pain an evil? yet large spirits have made it the platform for the development of the greatest virtue;" and though it must ever be dreaded, shall we not receive it when it comes, willingly, because it is God-sent, and meekly take to our hearts the teachings and warnings it brings with it? striving to say, in the spirit of those beautiful lines,

"My God, I thank thee; may no thought
E'er deem thy chastement severe;
But may this heart, by sorrow taught,
Calm each wild wish, each idle fear."

And if, through it, our spirits are strengthened, and elevated, and weaned from earthliness, shall we not call it a friend and a blessing?—*Religious Magazine.*

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PEACE BETWEEN GREAT BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES.

[To many of our readers the language of this article, and the two others which follow it, will not be entirely new. They are extracts from a Sermon preached on the morning and evening of the first Sunday of the New Year, in the Unitarian church of this city. The aim of the discourse was to review several of the more prominent events of God's Providence during the past year, to deduce profitable lessons therefrom, and to show how a beneficent Deity ordereth all things in wisdom and love.]

This time last year, in this city, throughout this country, over the most important portion of this continent, and in the parent land across the Atlantic, men all talked of war,—of a possible war,—of a probable war,—in which the people of Britain and the United States were to be involved. The constituted authorities amongst us were constructing militia lists, our newspaper columns, and placards on the corners of our streets, invited able-bodied men to join battalions, industrious citizens were looking out for military uniforms, and seeking swords to hang by their sides. On the other side of the frontier the men in power assumed a threatening aspect, talked of undoubted rights, when their alleged rights, in their entire extent, were extremely doubtful; whilst men out of power, but mighty in the fulness of their moral force, reproved their rulers, and warned them against provoking war. From the other side of the Atlantic came offers of peaceful compromise, which failed to satisfy. Accredited ministers negotiated, but in vain. The political horizon was darkened. The black cloud of impending war flung its gloomy shadow across two countries of kindred blood.

Thus it was a year ago. But since that time the cloud has passed away. Peace has been established during the past year. This, then, is an event worth reflecting upon. That we have escaped the desolating curse of war, should surely be a matter of devout gratitude. In connection with this topic—the lately-apprehended war between Great Britain and the United States—two or three considerations present themselves. First, with regard to the cause of the apprehension. An immense tract of country of no immediate use to either, lay between the acknowledged and occupied possessions of the two nations. One claimed it in part, the other claimed it in full. It was simply a question of disputed boundary. And many thought that it could not be settled without an appeal to arms. This was the cause of the apprehension. Now let me ask, in the next place, should it have been a sufficient cause between two such countries? Both nations consider themselves enlightened, wise, and fully alive to their own interests. Both profess the religion of Jesus Christ. Between two such enlightened countries, then, I ask again, should such a cause have been sufficient to make men think of war, talk of war, and prepare for war? Clearly not. War undertaken under such circumstances would have been an open folly and a flagrant sin. In view of their temporal interests, we could convict them of the first. In view of the laws of the Gospel, we could convict them of the second. Great Britain and America have each an active, enterprising, and industrious population, one nation is the parent, the other is the child, and they are worthy of each other in the position they hold among the countries of the earth. They are engaged in an extensive and mutually profitable commerce. Now consider the effects of war upon communities such as theirs. It would come upon them

like the earthquake upon the smiling and cultivated plain. It would unsettle and disturb the face of society. Men's minds would be distracted from their usual avocations. The family circle would be invaded and the strong hands called forth to fight. The artisan would leave his hammer for a firelock. The operative would be summoned from the noise of the factory to the clamour of the camp. The merchant and the manufacturer, instead of having their minds exercised with the ordinary business of the counting-house, would be harrassed with pressing anxieties for their country and their all. The national resources, strengthened and improved by the season of industrious peace, would be weakened and squandered. The noble ships which sail from shore to shore with well-filled holds and well-thronged cabins, could no longer pursue their way with safety on the waters. The deep-mouthed cannon would lie in wait for them on the ocean, and these agents of prosperity and friendly intercourse would be menaced or destroyed. Now, would the advantages to be derived from the possession of a tract of unoccupied territory, which neither party required, be sufficient to compensate for the inconvenience of the loss here set forth? Surely not. Would it not be open folly, then, to incur so much loss for the sake of a portion of gain, in itself, at present, almost imaginary?

But we have said that in such a case we could convict them likewise of sin by the laws of the Gospel. It may be evident I think to every reflecting mind that had the Christian code of morals been thoroughly imbibed and duly appreciated in both countries, no such apprehensions of war could have existed. I need not remind you of the disinterested and peaceful requisitions of Christ. "Peace on earth and good will towards men" was the song of the angelic choir which ushered the birth of the Christian's Lord into the world. And peace, forbearance, and disinterested love, were the burden of his teaching from his first appearance on the Mount of Beatitudes to his last appearance on the Mount of Calvary. To impress mankind with the grand idea of God as a beneficent and impartial Father,—to unfold the animating doctrine of the universal brotherhood of man, was a leading aim of the mission of Jesus. In giving prominence to the passive, peaceful, and benevolent virtues, and leading men to look to God as the loving Parent of all, he laid the foundation of a system at complete variance with all warfaring and strife. And in this he gave evidence of his divine wisdom. For it is from the angry passions of man that his greatest unhappiness comes. Jesus taught men to submit to anything and everything rather than give these passions scope. Smitten on the right cheek, they should turn to the smiter the left, rather than indulge in revenge. Stripped of the coat, they should give the cloak likewise, rather than reciprocate such acts of aggression and plunder. Compelled to travel one mile, they should go twain, rather than yield to stullenness, ill nature, or the quarrelsome spirit. So it should be with individuals who profess Christianity. And so it should be with nations likewise, for nations are but individuals in the mass. Now if these principles had pervaded the countries in question, should there have been any anxiety or uneasiness about a war? I cannot see how there should. The professed religion of both Great Britain and the United States is that of Christ. To violate or contravene the laws of his Gospel is confessedly sinful. To have engaged, then, in such a war, would have been a sin as well as a folly.

But some may ask, Are we to overlook national greatness and national honor? I answer that we are to overlook and avoid everything that would conflict with Christianity. But what constitutes national greatness? What is national honour? Are we to understand by the former the extension of territory? Is a nation to be accounted great in proportion to the number of square miles it can reckon as its own? Are we to understand by the latter the feeling which prompts