

Sermons in Trees.

ANNA D. BRADLEY.

Bro. M. M. Davis preached recently, in Dallas, a beautiful and helpful sermon on "Life as a river." And as I heard him I could not but feel that, to the listening ear, everything in nature is vocal with its mighty lessons; that brooks and trees and rivulets all hold their precious pages ready to be unfolded to any one who will stoop low enough, or yet climb high enough, to read what they hold written there.

While what I am writing now is mostly suggested by our pastor's tenderly helping sermon, I do not pretend to reproduce that sermon for you. I am not at all capable of that; I am only capable of catching and reflecting a little of the beauty, telling a little of the comfort, and giving a little of the strength which was given in such large measure unto us.

And, indeed, how like to a river, flowing on and on forever, is this life of yours and mine. So often has the simile been used that it has become trite; yet, nevertheless, it is true and full of striking suggestions.

No river ever began its course except it began in the mountains of God; and no Christian life has ever been lived that did not have its source in the heart of God. The river must be fed, and so must your life and mine. But what if the river should say, "Now I am sufficient unto myself. My faith is divine; and, since this is true, I can appropriate what I like, and reject what I like; yet still, because I was born in the mountains of God, I must at last find my way to the sea?"

But no, the river does not talk like that. It is only Christians (?) who presume to arrogate to themselves the right to live as they please, and to eat such food as they may fancy. And our dwarfed and stunted life is the natural result.

Sometimes we forget that only God can give us food convenient for our healthful growth, and so we try to feed ourselves with ordinances, with ceremonies and with doctrine. But doctrine is only "sound" when we have learned it at the feet of Jesus. Ordinances are worthless except we have looked up in the face of Jesus and asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?" And forms are meaningless except our heart has first been formed anew, and made a fit dwelling place for the Spirit of God.

We cannot grow by works. The heart that is not fed by God grows weary with perpetual care, and, sooner or later, it must die. Yet, always, in

working for God, if our motive be wholly pure, we are brought in closer contact with the divine. Our activities lead us up to the source from whence the full supply of nourishment can be obtained; and then we scarce can help but cry, "Lord, evermore give me this bread."

Again, like the river, the current of our life runs through a channel. Men often cut canals, and the water runs direct as an arrow from point to point. Not thus the river. In and out, around this huge obstruction; fighting its way through yonder hindrance; struggling for existence; yet always urging its course toward the sea.

And the Christian life, if it is real, is wonderfully like the river. Never pausing for obstacles; nothing daunted by overhanging rocks; fairly fighting its way against every hindrance; always knowing that somewhere the eternal bosom is waiting to receive it.

And is the Christian life embittered by the battles it must wage? Let us look for answer at its beautiful type. When the river has the fiercest struggle to hold its place, there are the waters the sweetest and the purest. Their every effort gives them added purity and beauty. Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth. I must fight, if I would win. I cannot be wafted to heaven on flowery beds of ease. The highest blessing is only given "to him that overcometh."

Poor and of little worth, as I humbly confess my own life to be, yet I know it is stronger and purer too because of the battles which have been given me to fight. God forbid that I should ever pause. Only the still river can ever become stagnate. May I have grace to press onward and upward, forever and forever, until I attain the highest.

The seeming obstructions that come to you and me are oftener helps than hindrances. Our Guide well knows that even though a moment's lull would mean eternal death, yet we would often pause, if He did not sternly force us on.

Sometimes a huge boulder plants itself firmly and directly in the river's path. What can it do? It can neither pass over it, through it nor under it. The river does not pause. Quietly it makes a little detour; cuts for itself a new channel, and triumphantly goes around the rock. The boulder is big and ugly and seems to mock the river with its ungainly form, its total lack of grace. What can the river do to

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remove this unsightly mass from its presence? Nothing. It must simply endure.

Nothing? Let us see. Watch the river as it silently nourishes vines that soon cover the unlovely intruder with beauty and fragrance. And soon the hateful deformity, the blot upon the fair scene is, changed into a glad temple of beauty by which weary pilgrims will often pause to worship.

The rough edges, the hateful hindrances, the awkward elements of your life and mine may, by patient love, be so transformed into grace and loveliness that they, too, may appear as a wayside shrine at which some tempted soul may find fresh courage.

If it so happens that our life must needs cut a new channel, we will not murmur; but like the river, let us weave chaplets of beauty to deck the turning points, and let it ever send forth its tender benediction to those whose trembling feet may be halting at the parting of life's ways.

And now what remains to be said? The river,—the glad and beautiful river; the broad and bounteous river that carries richest blessings on its bosom wherever it is flowing; the river so tiny and seemingly insignificant in its beginning that a child's hand might turn its course this way or that; the great and mighty river whose current, now, no power on earth can stem, is rushing eagerly, triumphantly on to meet the sea.

And is the sea glad? Think you that the great sea cares for the river that is hastening on to it? "If the river miss the sea," would it not be "the sea still forever;" yet—who knows? perhaps its mighty bosom would be lonely; sadly conscious of some loss if it did not meet the river.

For look! As the river draws near, the sea fairly leaps out of its bed to clasp the waters in its waiting arms.

And the new born babe; how small its opening life. How easily it could be crushed or dwarfed, But God is guiding, feeding and forming it. On and on it flows gathering strength and force and beauty with each changing season. All that the new life touches is blessed by the contact. And now, broad and mighty and deep, the race is almost run, and the river of life is hastening rapidly and gladly on to cast itself on the eternal bosom of God.

Does God care for the soul so soon to come to Him? Would not God still be God, the Ruler, the Supreme, even though the expectant saint should fail to cross the threshold of His Glory?

Who knows? Perhaps e'en the divine heart of a God could feel lonely if about his Great White Throne your face and mine should not be found.

The sea seems glad to meet the rivers; and God is eager to greet His own. A convoy of angels was quickly sent to carry Lazarus in great pomp to the Eternal Courts. And Stephen saw the Heavens open and his Maker bending low to watch for and welcome his arrival. Twice in the recorded history of the world, and for aught we know, many times, God seemed so impatient to reward and crown His saints, He did not wait the slow messenger whom we call Death, but sent the chariot of heaven which swiftly bore His loved ones to His side.

It is no fancy, but sweet religious history, that when the saints are going hence, they see and hear much that is hid from mortal senses.

We can all call to mind the glad rapture of some dying face; and we can well believe it caused by the tide of God's ocean of love coming out to meet the river of Christian life that has been flowing so steadfastly on to Him.

Labor and Liquor.

It is frequently said that in the slums of one of our great cities poverty is the cause of drunkenness quite as much as drunkenness is the cause of poverty. It has always been hard for me to believe that, but not till a fortnight ago have I seen figures to disprove it. The report of the United States Commissioner of Labor for 1894 shows that the average weekly earnings of families in the slums of such cities as Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia and Chicago, are in none of these cities lower than \$15, and in Chicago they are \$21.60. Families that are receiving an income like that can afford to live elsewhere than in the slums. It looks as if they prefer to live where the saloons are thickest, and the saloons, on the other hand, multiply where such people live. There is no language adequate to the cursing of this awful habit on one hand, this awful traffic on the other, which robs the purse of its cash, the heart of its love, the brain of its sanity, the will of its regnancy, the whole man of his manliness, the wife of her husband, the child of its father, parents of their sons and daughters, the state of its citizens, and God of His creatures. The liquor traffic is the "sum of all villainies," and the drink habit is the crown of all maladies.—Rev. W. J. Lhamon, in Cecil Street Church of Christ. — *Toronto Star*.

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