

"PURPOSELESS LIVES."

BY E. CLIFFORD.

ONE of the best incentives to a healthy use of all our faculties, bodily, mental, and spiritual, is to set forth an object, and, seeing it to be a good one, to strain every nerve in the accomplishment of it. Indolence, and the daily trifling of a life that is dignified by no high resolve, no purpose beyond that of earning daily sustenance, and spending leisure time pleasantly, must tend to suffocate and dwarf those aspirations of which the human soul is capable, and which it should be our highest aim to develop and encourage. If we fail to set ourselves busily to work upon a good object, sure enough some indifferent, frivolous, or bad one will only too quickly start up to seduce our energies from the right path. And it is not necessary to quote the pungent lines of Watts to prove that the best way to avoid temptation in the direction of mischief-doing is to take care that employments, fit and proper, are engaging both hand and heart in well-doing.

A great proportion of the lives around us are only too manifestly purposeless lives in so far as this, that they have no single paramount object of an exalted nature to act as the guiding star of an earthly career. Of course it is easy to say that every life has some purpose, and we might flippantly generalise in this way, without laying blame in any direction. But we maintain that, in the noblest sense of the word—"purpose"—there are too many lives passed by our brothers and sisters around us which cannot admit such an idea at all. We can only justly speak of them as vague and purposeless. Now, this is a sad and grievous evil, and one that brings a host of other evils to the social system in its train. For if a frivolous ideal of life were to become current, inevitably the standard of human character would become lower and lower. Where could we find channels for the development of firm endurance, energy, trust in God, and heroic self-denial, if the spectacle of lives without object or aim became general? It would then become evident that, by debasing human life to the level of a butterfly existence, we had robbed it of its most sacred and ennobling qualities, and made it mean and despicable!

We cannot say of a life that has no higher desire or purpose than to be got through in tranquillity and ease; to have the thorns extracted and only the roses left, that it is a life with a stern and noble object. This, on the contrary, is but a drifting down lazily with the tide, and a paltry equivalent for the glorious gift of immortality which God has given us. Those who are willing to go through the world with no earnest thoughts about their fellow men, no anxious hopes for the spread of religious purity, no awakening interest in the march and progress of the race as time goes on: surely such are living purposeless lives in the truest sense. They are like soldiers who, when the brunt of the battle is being borne, creep aside to some shady nook, and lay down to dream and sleep the time away while others work. Or, were it a possible contingency, like those who, when lives are at stake, and their fellow-creatures are in danger, occupy the precious flying moments with their trivial pleasures, and will not pause to ask how their perishing fellow-creatures are to be rescued! Purposeless lives such as those of the worldling and *ennui*-worn fashionables of society, unruled by any central fire of earnestness in regard to hopes, fears, or resolves for good, are too evidently working mischief both to those around and the unhappy deluded subjects themselves.

An aimless life, pure and simple, is a contemptible thing in the face of the urgent calls for action clamouring on every side of us! What! can man or woman consent to pass along life's path; around which, from every quarter, at every stage, start forth opportunities for doing good for the Master's cause, and leave them idly unnoticed? Can fervent human spirits, endowed with such powers for benefiting others, such faculties and talents for blessing the world, however humbly, glide softly down a stream of pleasure, while vessels are wrecking on quicksands close within hail, and need is warning succour, and comfort? This would appear impossible, but the stern facts afforded by social life prove it true. In the midst of fevered and earnest voices that summon every man and woman to play a decided part in the journey through this world, yet there are thousands so obtuse, so blinded by selfishness and avarice, that they stifle every inward remonstrance and outward call of duty, living out to the bitter end purposeless lives.

Now there may be many causes conducing to produce that saddest of sights—a purposeless existence—where the actor might have stood forth on the world's stage with marked qualities and characteristics; but the paramount one is, doubtless, *selfishness*—the desire besetting all of us to evade unpleasant demands for exertion and self-denial. We are too fond of choosing the flowery path before us without much regard to its being the right one. Yet this is not wise, even without regard to higher considerations. Purposeless lives are far from being always happy, indeed mostly are they the reverse. To have one absorbing theme keeping our best and most generous faculties employed will yield more pleasure than rusting away in idleness. Let us all, then, strive hard to avoid that melancholy comment upon a finished life. "This one had no purpose throughout his career, and died worthless to his fellows and the world around."

DREAMERS AND WORKERS.

The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.—PROV. xiii. 4.

SAMUEL ROGERS was a diligent and successful man. He acquired considerable wealth as a banker in London, and employed part of his leisure in writing poetry, which gave pleasure to his friends, and was admired by many who had no personal acquaintance with him. Mr. Rogers had little sympathy with loiterers. We read that he was sometimes annoyed by the tardy pace of the Hammersmith coach, in which he had occasionally to travel. Railways were as yet unknown. One day, as he sat near the driver, he suddenly put the question, "By what name is this coach known?" The coachman replied, "'The Regulator,' sir." "A very proper name," said the poet-banker. "A very suitable designation, indeed. All the other vehicles on the road go by it!"

There are some people who pass through the world in such a dreamy state, that most of their compeers go by them. The dreamers are not without pleasant wishes. Indeed, they abound in them. But they obtain not what they wish, because they take no suitable pains. A lad, with the multiplication-table before him unlearned, dreams of himself as escaping from the drudgery of the factory, mine, or shop, because of his skill in accounts, but he has not yet fixed in his memory how much eight times seven are. A youth with Euclid open, and near him, is musing on college honours, and how he will be applauded when declared "Senior Wrangler"; but the problems assigned as that day's task remain unsolved. An artisan keeping Saint Monday arranges in his own mind how much better-built his row of cottages shall be than those he is gazing upon, which belong to an acquaintance. Then he proceeds to borrow five shillings for present needs, as he did not get much work done the preceding week, the patron saint of idleness having claimed most of the time.

The Rev. Barnabas Shaw speaks of the Namacquas as a mild and generous race. They were not in the habit of stealing the cattle of other tribes unless specially in want or greatly provoked, and would share their last morsel with needy friends. But they were indolent. Their dwellings were most wretched, because they took the least possible trouble. They were content to creep in at the hole which served for door and window, and to herd together in the dark and unwholesome hovel. Mr. Shaw wished to teach them better, and would have helped them. They admired his neat hut, and had watched with wonder as they saw him build it. But, though they wished for huts like his, they would not work. At length he persuaded them to sow some corn which he provided. He gave them so much seed, and the land was so easily cultivated and fruitful, that the harvest proved abundant. They were puzzled, for they had no place in which to store it before the rains came. At length, Mr. Shaw consented to take care of it for that once. He wrote home for axes and other tools for them; and by various bribes, at length induced some of them to work instead of dream. So they were soon better off.

But we must not think entirely of temporal comfort. It is quite possible that, by selfish diligence, men may secure much of this world's wealth, and still be very unhappy. The best wealth is God's favour. Many who have had few early advantages have, by diligence, become very rich towards God. They have become so rich, that they had grace sufficient for all the needs of their moral pilgrimage. They have been so rich, that they have imparted comfort and guidance to some who were in need and danger. They have been so rich