

## The Supreme Allegiance.

From one point of view it almost looks as if the Book of Daniel were written to emphasize and impress the moral value of independence of character. The Hebrew youths refuse the king's meat; the three worthies refuse to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image, and Daniel refuses to intermit praying in obedience to the king's commandment. All these men stood for the right of private judgment, of freedom of conscience, and of a personal accountability to God that emancipated them from human standards and human laws.

They utterly repudiated the doctrine that finds its modern expression in the Satanic motto, "My country, right or wrong." If they had been living to-day they would have said, "My country, may she always be right, and when she is wrong may I have the grace and courage to do what I can to make her right." And God honored them in the stand they took. The Hebrew youths became stronger and fairer on their simple food; the three worthies were unharmed by the furnace, and Daniel found that the mouths of hungry lions were stopped. These men, through their brave witness for the truth, enlarged the boundaries of human liberty, and widely commended the principles for which they stood.

Our Sunday school teachers will confer a lasting benefit upon their pupils if, on the basis of this study, they lead them to see that in their decisions they are to be guided by their perception of what is right, and not by what they see is expedient or profitable or popular. The temptation is just as strong to-day as it was in Babylon to be false to the dictates of duty, to preserve comfort or secure profit, or retain the good-will of others. In this country we have no king, but the mandates of public opinion or of the sentiment of a sect or party are frequently as inexorable as royal mandates. We sing, "Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone," but when a man actually does dare to be a Daniel and stand alone, he is apt to find that if he does not fall down at the music some kind of furnace is ready for him.

The Puritan and Baptist doctrine of a supreme accountability to God, that emancipates the soul from every other allegiance, does not make life comfortable to those who are loyal to it. They are constantly compelled to set themselves against the will of others, and to seem to be disturbers. When their position is too outspoken they can smell the heat of the furnace. Some cross is always looming before them. But these are the souls who maintain the sacred cause of liberty in every generation, and they have within themselves a peace that is fitly represented by the cooling of the flames, and the blessed companionship of one "like unto the Son of Man."

There is nothing that gives human life such dignity and worth as the habit of referring all decisions to the standard of righteousness, and being controlled by it. Merely human standards, laws, customs, expediences, and policies are as unstable as the fashions of apparel, but the man who seeks to know God's will and to incorporate it in his spirit and conduct comes into alliance with eternal and celestial forces. "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness. He shall maintain his cause in judgment. For he shall never be moved. His righteousness endureth forever. His horn shall be exalted with honor." And "The world passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."—*The Commonwealth.*

Dr. van Dyke maintains that the important thing in building up a strong church is not to secure a minister who will draw, but what is needed is a church that will hold—hold the people when they get into it.

## The Mercy of God.

By ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D.

"The earth is full of Thy mercy" as a cup is brimming with rich wine, or as the flowers are full of the morning dew.

The Psalmist's point of view is not the scientific nor the poetical. It lies back of all science, and is quite unaffected by it. He is sure that God is at work in the world, so that every creature that lives, and everything that is, lives and is because God is operative on it; and that the whole creation is the object of God's loving thought, and has some reflection of His smile cast across it, as "the light of laughing flowers along the grass is spread."

A deeper faith than most men have is needed to feel thus. For, sadly, to many of us the world has come to be very empty of God, and we rather hear the creaking of the wheels of a machine or see the workings of impersonal force than hear the sound of His going or catch the gleam of His garment. But all the growth of physical knowledge may be accepted thankfully, and yet beneath all we may see the living will and work of God. There is no reason why nineteenth-century savants, full to the finger-tips of modern physical science, may not say as heartily as, and more intelligently than, the Psalmist said, "The earth, O Lord is full of Thy mercy."

But when we include ourselves in "the earth" a different aspect is presented. The sunny play of gladness is shadowed. "I am a stranger upon earth."

Man is out of joint with the great whole, out of tune with the concert; the only hungry guest at the feast. All other creatures fit their "environment" and it them, like a glove on a hand. But we, "the roof and crown of things," have been made "acquainted with grief," have learned what they "amidst the woods have never known, the weariness, the fever, and the fret." We have burdens of toil and care, are cursed with sorrow, and saddened by remembering, and torn with desires. We need something more than the "mercy" of which the earth is full to make us as completely blessed as the lowest little life that crawls or buzzes about us.

"Hide not Thy commandments from me." The one thing that will give us rest and blessedness to the height of our capacity is that we should have the knowledge and the love of the will of God.

If we delight to do His will, and lay ourselves beneath the mould of God's impressing purpose to be shaped as He will, then care and toil and sorrow and restlessness and the sense of transiency and the sorrow of homelessness cease to pain. Like some black cliff, smitten by sunrise into rosy and golden glory, the ills of life are tinted and glorified when the light of God's recognized will falls on them. With His will in our hearts we can cease to feel that it is sad to be as strangers and sojourners here; for then can we say, "We seek a better country; that is, a heavenly."

We need the "statutes of the Lord;" we need no more; and they will "be our songs in the house of our pilgrimage."

If the thought, "I am a stranger upon earth," teaches us our need of God's commandments, the thought "the earth is full of Thy mercy," assures us that we shall receive what we need. He who opens His hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing will not leave us to sit the only hungry ones at His table. We are not intended to lie dry and dusty, like Gideon's fleece, while every blade of grass holds its own drop of dew. In a world full of God's mercy, am I to be empty of the highest mercy, the knowledge and love of God's will? Never, never can that be so.

The Psalmist's prayer on our lips becomes a prayer for more knowledge of that Christ who is God's uttered will and our law, for more love to Him whom to love is to be a stranger nowhere,

and to be filled with God's mercy.

"The earth is full of thy mercy," but the Word, who dwelt among us, is "full of grace and truth," and of His fulness can we all receive. Then we shall be replenished with richer mercy than all the universe besides is capable of receiving.

## If He Had Limped?

The pastor was speaking of the lame man in the temple at Jerusalem, who was healed by Peter and John. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk," said the Apostles. And immediately the man, who had never walked in all this weary life of forty years, leaped and stood before the amazed crowd, and walked and leaped and praised God. The narrative itself trembles in sympathy with the excitement of the incident, and repeats its words and phrases, as it paints the picture of this impotent man so suddenly made completely whole. "What if he had limped?" said the pastor. Sure enough, what if he had? Then the miracle would have been a failure, the apostles would have been discredited, the people would not have been so thoroughly aroused, the five thousand would not have been converted, the hostile rulers would have had easy work in suppressing the disturbance. Peter and John would have gone to prison without protest from anybody, the place where the disciples assembled would not have been shaken, Christ would have been dishonored, and his sacred cause would have received a fearful check. But he did not limp, and none of these disasters followed. Filled with exuberant life and irrepressible joy, he leaped and walked and praised God. Neither friend nor foe could question his identity or doubt that he was entirely healed. And what if we limp, after the divine healing has come to us? Who can measure the mischief wrought by the limping of those who are walking as Christians? And who can estimate the power that goes out from the godly and joyous lives of those who do not limp?

## A Friendly Man

We all feel the charm of his presence. He carries a pleasing face and speaks in winsome tones. His hand is never cold and limp nor hangs nervelessly at his side. He is interested in you and in all you do; never forgets your family from old grandmother to youngest babe. If you are across the street from him he gives you his salute, and in the evening he drops in to see you in a casual way. When good fortune comes to you he writes a note of congratulation, and if trial befalls you a token of sympathy is left at your door. A bunch of flowers the doctor's first visit to your house. After you lose your position he is "all eyes and ears" to discover something to your advantage, and his forethought never waits your asking a favor. He shares your burdens and multiplies your joys, and so goes through the world scattering sunshine and the healing leaves from the tree of life. How he is loved, and what friends he makes, even in this cold and reserved world! When thinking of the beauty of his life, and of how much he is admired, we often wonder why more of us do not aim to become like him. It is a great pity that kindness and good nature are not more contagious than they are in the world. But we are often content to admire and praise the excellent in others without trying to imitate and emulate. Talk of flowers wasting their sweetness on the desert air, there is more wasted example in the world of mankind than flower sweetness in unfrequented plains. Many are at a loss to know how they can serve Christ; opportunities are few and transient think they, but if they considered how well they could act the friend's part in life, out of love to the Supreme Friend, they would find a ministry neither limited nor unfruitful.