

Work is the law of the universe. Even the agnostic recognizes the all-present and ever active energy of force; and the believer in God sees in all the forms and processes of nature the presence and the operation of God. "My Father worketh," said the Lord Jesus. He does not exempt Himself from this law of life. In all around us we see that activity is life, that inactivity is death. We cannot say that God conforms Himself to this principle; for the principle itself, as we behold it in nature, is but the expression of the Divine nature.

If man is made in the image of God, then his life and powers and energies must also go forth in work. He is a living being, and life means power, effort, activity. Every power must be intended for some use and purpose. All idleness is, as far as it goes, the neglect to use the powers with which we are endowed, and is, therefore, a frustration of the Divine intention as revealed in the constitution of our nature. And these truths are enforced by the history of mankind, whether as it is written on the pages of Scripture or as it is enacted before our eyes.

There is no place for idleness in the universe of God. Even rest is but a means of refreshment in order to fresh toil. "Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work," is the precept embodied in that Commandment which bids us rest on the seventh day, and the requirement of labour is in no way, as some have foolishly thought and said, a punishment for sin. When man was created there was found for him a sphere of work. "The Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden, to dress it and to keep it." This employment was, in God's purpose and, in fact, a blessing, and was intended to bring many blessings in its train.

The same purpose was apparent after man had disobeyed the Divine command by refusing to heed the restriction which was laid upon the forbidden fruit. The ground was "cursed," but it was cursed for his sake. Labour had become toil, but that was because innocence had been exchanged for guilt, and guilt needed a sterner discipline. It may be that, through our personal sins and our social sins, the burden has often become so heavy as to be, in fact, insupportable and crushing. It may be that to some it has become more of a curse than of a blessing. But even as the world is now constituted, and as men live in the world, idleness is an endless evil and misfortune, and work a blessing.

If we pass from the actual man to the ideal man, the same lesson is enforced with increased solemnity. The Son of man, the representative of ideal humanity, was not born in a king's palace, nor laid in the lap of luxury, nor ever emancipated from the obligation of work. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." He was a working man, and so were all his truest and greatest followers. The chief of them all wrought with his own hands at the same time that he was doing the highest kind of work—work sufficient to engross all the energies of his nature. But to him no work came amiss which was appointed by God. And so it has ever been with the noblest and the best. They have felt, as we must feel if we would be like them, that the requirement of labour is as much a Divine command as any other; and that therefore idleness is not a mer venial fault, still less a permissible weakness, but a sin against God.

Arguments of this nature will appeal with varying force to different minds. But there are certain facts and principles connected with the nature and effects of labour which can hardly be