



The Family Circle.

BEST.

BY HELEN HUNT JACKSON.

Mother, I see you with your nursery light,
Lending your babies, all in white,
To their sweet rest;
Christ, the Good Shepherd, carries me to-night,
And that is best.

I cannot help tears, when I see them twine
Their fingers in yours, and their bright curls
shine

On your warm breast;
But the Saviour's is purer than yours or mine—
He can love best!

You tremble each hour because your arms
Are weak; your heart is wrung with alarms,
And sore oppress;
My darlings are safe, out of reach of harms,
And that is best.

You know, over yours may hang even now
Pain and disease, whose fulfilling slow
Naught can arrest;
Mine in God's gardens run to and fro,
And that is best.

You know that, of yours, your feeblest one
And dearest may live long years alone,
Unloved, unblest;
Mine are cherished of saints around God's throne,
And that is best.

You must dread for yours the crime that scars,
Dark guilt unwashed by repentant tears,
And unconfest;
Mine are entered spotless on eternal years,
Oh, how much the best!

But grief is selfish; I cannot see
Always why I should so stricken be
More than the rest;
But I know, that, as well as for them, for me
God did the best.

"I CANNOT COME DOWN."

BY LEANDER S. KEYSER.

How the words kept ringing in Howard Pentecost's ears! He was slowly returning from the morning service at a small chapel in a village to which he had been sent on the previous day, on a business errand by his employer. Having been unexpectedly detained on Saturday, he had been compelled to remain in the village over the Sabbath.

At home he was a regular attendant at church, and so, when Sunday morning came, he obeyed the suggestion of his conscience, and made his way to the chapel, whose steeple was just visible above the intervening buildings from his hotel window.

"I shall not be likely to hear much of a sermon in a small town like this," he muttered to himself as he drew near the church. "Probably nothing but rant. Some ignorant exhorter will be very likely to work himself into a frenzy to-day. If I were only at home this morning to hear one of Dr. Marshall's polished and pithy sermons!"

From this soliloquy, it may be inferred that Howard was not a spiritually-minded young man, and there is no denying that the inference is correct. He had, somehow, got into the habit of going to church as he went to a lecture—merely to hear an eloquent discourse, one that would make the ear tingle rather than edify the soul. True, he had been converted, but had, as so often happens, soon lost his spiritual fervor even while he was punctilious in the performance of certain religious duties.

With the feeling that the hour spent in the little chapel would be as good as lost, and that he would probably be bored by the service, he entered the church just as the opening anthem was being sung. However, his opinion of the preacher had to be revised. The clergyman was a middle-aged man, and his pinched features told plainly that some fatal malady was preying at his vitals; but Howard had never before seen so spiritual a face, nor had he ever listened to a sermon so full of spiritual power. There were times when it seemed to the young listener that a live coal from

the altar must indeed have been laid upon the speaker's lips. He chose for his text the ringing words of Nehemiah in reply to Tobias and Sanballat, who tried to lure him from rebuilding the shattered walls of Jerusalem: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."

As Howard listened to the earnest words of the clergyman his pulses beat fast, and a mist gathered before his eyes. The preacher spoke of the great work of the Christian in building up a spiritual manhood and in rescuing his fellows from sin; of the dignity of his calling, in which God himself and his angels were deeply concerned; and then, with an enthusiasm that bore everything before it, he pleaded with his auditors never to "come down" to that which was frivolous or debasing. The lesson was enforced by allusions to more than one example of unswerving devotion in the history of the church.

As Howard walked to his hotel after the service, pondering the thoughts to which he had just listened, his own meagre, fruitless, unspiritual life haunted him. True, he was a professed follower of Christ; nominally, at least, he was engaged in a "great work," aye, a greater work than Nehemiah; "and yet—and yet," he reflected with a sigh, "how often I have come down!"

It seemed that his whole life, since the day he had made a public confession of Christ, had been a coming down, a lowering of the spiritual standard. How often he had done things that were beneath the dignity of his calling as a follower of Christ! All the afternoon he ruminated and when at night he kneeled by his bedside, he said;

"By the grace of God I shall never come down again!"

His resolve was put to the test sooner than he expected. The next day, on reaching the city in which he lived, he learned that his pastor, Dr. Marshall, had decided to begin a series of special meetings in the church of which Howard was a member. That was the first "great work" he had ever seriously undertaken for his Master. He went quietly to work, urging his acquaintances to attend the services, and in these efforts proved an efficient helper to Dr. Marshall, who seeing his earnestness, called him his "young aide-de-camp."

One evening, a few days later, Howard met a congenial young friend whose esteem he valued very highly. He was on the point of inviting him to Dr. Marshall's meetings when his friend said:

"Howard, I want you to go with me to-night."

"Where?" queried Howard, uneasily. "Where? Why, to the theatre, of course, where we have so often spent a pleasant evening together. It is to be one of the best plays that has ever been presented on the boards of this city. You know we never go to puerile or immoral performances, but this one will be exceptionally fine."

"What is the name of the play and who are the principal actors?" asked Howard, forgetting himself for a moment.

His companion told him. "Of course, you see, it's no cheap show."

The temptation was very great, almost overpowering, in fact, for Howard had a passion for dramatic and spectacular performances, and it must be confessed, had often gratified it, even since he had become a church-member. The play to which he was now urged to go was one of the best. Nothing really immoral would be represented, he argued mentally, and the actors were among the most celebrated for histrionic talent. One of them Howard had long been especially anxious to hear.

Yes, he believed he would go. It was so rare an opportunity he could not afford to miss it. He was just on the point of opening his lips to give his consent when the pale face of the humble clergyman to whom he had listened only last Sunday morning in the village church seemed to rise before him and say: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."

"No, Wilson, I can't go," he said firmly after a pause.

"What! Can't go to such a play! Why not?"

"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down," quoted Howard, looking intently into his interlocutor's eye.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I shall explain. At present our

church is engaged in special services, in which I am deeply interested, and I can't afford to allow my mind to be diverted from the work in hand. It would be wrong to go elsewhere to-night."

"Pooh!" scoffed Wilson. "You're not becoming as squeamish as that, are you? You really don't think that such a play as the one given to-night would be demoralizing?"

"Perhaps not that precisely," Howard replied. "There might be nothing immoral said or done, but it would divert my thoughts into another channel, and perhaps cause me to lose interest in spiritual matters. That is one fatal trouble with all theatrical performances; they make men and women worldly-minded, and destroy their religious fervor."

"There are a great many church members who go to theatres," argued Wilson.

"I know it; but they are not the spiritually-minded ones, I fear. Ask any pastor and he will tell you that they are not the people who lead souls to Christ; Come, Wilson, you'd better change your mind and go with me to church this evening."

"Oh! I can't. I must—I'd rather go to the play."

"You'd rather?" said Howard. "Rather go to the play than to church where the gospel is proclaimed and sinners are being won to Christ! Don't you see, Wilson, what a deteriorating effect theatre-going has already had on your spiritual nature."

"Well, I never thought of it in that light before. Good evening, Howard, I'll see later what I shall do."

They parted, and when the evening service began Howard was not a little surprised to see Wilson enter the church. Afterward he said; I felt that I, too, ought to be doing a great work, so that I could not come down."

Little did the earnest clergyman in the village chapel think that his sermon on Nehemiah's words was preaching itself over again and again in the life of the young stranger whom he noticed that morning in his audience, becoming a watchword in his career, a spiritual talisman, as it were, to ward off temptation. As the weeks passed Howard became more and more earnestly engaged in his "great work." "I cannot come down, I cannot come down!"—How often the text kept him from sin!

At length he decided to go back to college, and finish the course of studies which had been temporarily interrupted; and then came the resolution to prepare himself for the gospel ministry.

Ten years passed! Mr. Wortman, the pastor of the village chapel, had been compelled at last to give up work on account of failing health, and lay dying inch by inch in his humble home, attended by a loving wife whose heart was breaking.

"A letter for you, dear," she said one morning, as the door closed on the postman.

"Will you read it, Mary?" he requested in a feeble voice.

She opened the envelope and read. The letter was from Howard Pentecost, who was now the pastor of a flourishing church in a neighboring city, and was rapidly becoming known as a most successful soul-winner. He described the Sabbath morning so long ago when he had dropped incidentally—or rather providentially—into Mr. Wortman's chapel and heard his sermon on the Christian's high calling.

"I want to thank you, my dear brother," the letter ran, "for I feel that to you, more than to any one else, is due the fact that I am to-day in the ministry of the gospel."

"Thank God!" whispered the dying man, "I've been of some use in his kingdom."—Standard.

SEVENTY-SIX.

"I was just seventy-six last week," said Grandmother Holly, and she smiled as she tied her hood for a snowy walk. Her hair was not so very white, nor her step feeble. The joy in her heart had preserved her powers, yet, when she at last stands before the throne, her place will be among those who have come up out of great tribulation.

"Do you not long to get to your heavenly home?" said Mrs. Heald, as she adjusted the old lady's furs.

"No, oh no; I would rather stay here and work for Jesus just as long as he will

find me anything to do. I know I cannot get about quite as well as I used to, but when I cannot sleep nights I am thinking about those I want to see saved, and praying for them; and the Master comes so near in those still hours that I do not want to sleep. He rests me, and the songs that he giveth in the night are sweeter music than these lips ever sung."

"I wish I could feel as you do," said the careworn woman at her side. "But I just stay here with my house-work, day after day, and at night I can scarcely see what I have done, and so sometimes I feel that I am of no use here, and I want to go."

"Oh if you are of no use here, what will the Lord do with you in heaven? Have you never thought that those who seemed to be doing most here were the ones soonest called home? And he waits and waits, and hedges us round, and prunes and purges us again and again, so as to get us ready for his palace garden. You may be doing all you can, but are you doing it for him?"

"What, my every day work?"

"It is not your work. It is what he has given you to do, and He comes and wants to help you in everything, and you will not recognize him as you go about in your kitchen and parlors; and so what needless pain you bear; and the blessed uses of your toil in fitting you more and more for heaven are all but lost."

"I know it is all true. I will try to profit by your kind words. Are your rooms furnished yet?"

"The rooms are there, and I am there, and Jesus is there! John is a little tardy, and the children are noisy sometimes, but I dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and have a happy life."—Episcopal Recorder.

WHAT MR. THOMPSON GIVES.

Mortimer Thompson, a young man connected with one of our churches, a blacksmith by trade who earns \$3 a day, and has a wife and five children, regularly saves and gives one-tenth of his annual earnings to the cause of Christ and philanthropy. To the current expenses of the church he gives \$25; to the missionary cause, \$10; to each of the other benevolences of the church, \$3. He puts \$1 every month in the collection for the poor, always has something to give to a worthy cause, and subscribes to various other causes about \$20 per annum. Nobody ever found this out by anything Mr. Thompson said, but by putting several things together the trustees of the church and the Sunday-school superintendent found out that he gives systematically more than \$90 a year out of the \$900 he earns. Mr. Thompson lives economically, and has sense enough not to give away all he earns. He is supposed to be worth now about \$1,500 besides the little house he has, which he has paid for. He does not use ardent spirits or tobacco, always looks neat on Sunday, but throws away no extra money upon clothes, and wears an overcoat until it is worn out. He would have no surplus for the Lord, or be able to save a dollar if he did not apply all the powers of a sturdy brain to get the most for his money, and to spend the least compatible with good health upon himself. Mrs. Thompson is of the same way of thinking, and often says: "Mortimer, have you your money ready for the collection?"—N. Y. Christian Advocate.

KIND WORDS.

A little word in kindness spoken.

A motion or a tear,

May heal a spirit broken.

And make a friend sincere.

A word, or look, has crushed to earth

Off many a budding flower,

Which, had a smile but owned its birth,

Would have blest life's latest hour.

Then deem it not an idle thing

A kindly word to speak;

The face you wear, the smile you bring,

May soothe a heart or break.

—Whittier.

MOST PEOPLE would succeed in small things if they were not troubled with great ambitions.—Loufellow.

PRAY for whom thou lovest; thou wilt never have any comfort of his friendship for whom thou dost not pray.