

The Deeper Life

Looking Back

By Dr. Salem Bland

Wistfully contrasting the clouded joy of men with the skylark's ecstasy in the present, Shelley says:

"We look before and after,
And sigh for what is not."

And never, perhaps, does the "after" draw our thoughts as at the close of the year; a season which, however often it may recur, never becomes commonplace.

Few mental attitudes may be more full of help than looking back; few more full of harm. Much of the most innocent happiness of life is found in looking back. Some one has said that the charm of foreign travel is three parts of it anticipation, two parts realization, four recollection, and that is true of other eagerly anticipated pleasures.

As age subdues the passions and energies, the soul finds a quiet but deep pleasure in recollections, especially those of childhood. That is one of many reasons why all children should be ensured, at least, a happy childhood. It is in childhood and youth, and perhaps only then, certainly at no other period so richly, that they store up what will be the chief solace of old age. A childhood of toil and hardship, bare of love and gladness and beauty means a dreary and cheerless old age. A child robbed of joy is deeply, doubly robbed. I well remember how often in the last five years of his life my father, drawing on to eighty, in his letters and conversation, would refer to the lovely Yorkshire Valley in which his earlier years had been passed as increasingly in his thoughts.

Looking back, too, is the supreme condition of wisdom and all improvement. "Experience teaches," but only if it be remembered. We must recall our failures, our mistakes, look them squarely in the face, even if we flinch; analyze them, understand them, or life will be a humiliating repetition of them. "Success," Josh Billings used to say, "doesn't consist in never making blunders, but in never making the same blunder twice." Our success, too, must be recalled and investigated, though this is a much more dangerous exercise than studying our failures.

If we will look back wisely, too, we shall find deliverance from many anxieties. We shall find how many of our fears have never been realized.

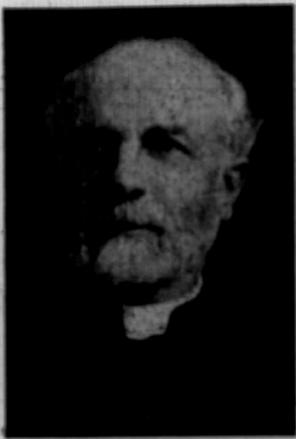
"Some of our ills we have cured,
And the sharpest we still have survived,
But what torments of grief we've endured

From evils that never arrived." Looking back is the natural source of thankfulness and trust and hope. The great teachers of the Bible always called men to look back and consider the way in which God had led his people. Some of the noblest psalms are just historical summaries—records of past sins and the inexorable penalties, past dangers and deliverances. We should be less beset with doubts and fears in this hour of peril and strain if we only would consider the past a little more carefully. This is not the first time that the darkness has fallen and the storms have been loosed, not the first time that powerful forces have threatened and the most precious things of human life have been brought into jeopardy. Old Testament history and the supplementary history of Britain would, if we looked back with a discerning eye, greatly increase our confidence in the coming triumph of the right.

Especially is looking back an essential element in the Christian development of the old Hebrew faith. The chief inspiration of Christianity, its inexhaustible fountain of devotion and love and courage and hope will always lie in the look turned back to that great landmark which can never sink below the verge, the divine key to all the mysteries of life and death—the Cross of Calvary.

But there are grave perils in the backward gaze. St. Paul in one of the impul-

sive outbursts that are so characteristic and so attractive interdicts it altogether. "One thing I do," he says, "forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things that are before, I press on toward the goal." And a greater than St. Paul has warned us that "no man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God." We are bidden remember Lot's wife and not look back, though to remember her and her tragic fate is to look back. We must not look back to the thing that must be left. A man fleeing from a sheriff got on the state boundary just in time. Linger in conscious safety just on the other side of the line he railed the baffled officer. The sheriff seemed to accept his failure philosophically. "Shake hands," he said; "we may as well part friends." The man stretched out his hand. The sheriff seized it and with a quick strong pull jerked the man across the line. "You are my prisoner," he said.



Dr. SALEM BLAND

Looking back to vanished joys is ever deadly—it is like that fabled river that gradually stole away the strength of those who bathed in it.

No one, perhaps, has expressed that sad and yet seductive word of melancholy retrospect more vividly than Tennyson:

"Break, break, break,

On thy cold grey stones, O sea!

Break, break, break,

At the foot of thy crags, O sea!

But the tender grace of a day that is dead,

Will never come back to me."

The slow, heavy, sullen surges of grief fall smotheringly on the heart till it loses, like a drowning man, all power of resistance.

Even more poignant is the song from The Princess:

"Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,

Tears from the depth of some divine despair,

Rise in the heart and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Oh, sad and strange as in dark summer-dawns,

The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds
To dying ears, when into dying eyes
The casement slowly gives a glimmering square;

So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remembered kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned

On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret,
O death in life, the days that are no more."

It may be as clear a duty to wrench oneself away from a selfish sorrow as from a selfish joy and it may be much harder.

Looking back at past successes may be still more dangerous. It has a value as a stimulant, as strong drink may be lawfully given to him that is ready to perish. As a habit it is deadly. That is the kind of looking back probably that was in St. Paul's thought when he so sweepingly condemned the backward look. Our successes may be our greatest peril.

"Let the dead past bury its dead," Longfellow tells us. But the past does not die and ought not to die, much less be buried. It is not to be forgotten. It is the quarry out of which we build neither despair nor pride, but humility, thankfulness, courage, inspiration and unconquerable hope.

A Selected List of Books of the Hour

The reading season is here—Turn it to good account. Never before has there been presented such a fine list of worthy books.

The Major—By Ralph Connor.

Postpaid\$1.50

This is a history of the heart of every red blooded Canadian who in his soul loves first liberty of conscience and demands the right to live to the best that is in every man and woman in Canada. A book to stir the spirit, a trumpet call to freedom, a story that throbs with the pulse of the North-west.

Anne's House of Dreams—By L. M. Montgomery.

Postpaid\$1.00

Readers of the earlier Anne Books will welcome their old friend, who no longer Anne Shirley, but Mrs. Gilbert Blythe, is still the heroine of the series, the story is, however, complete in itself. For relief from all the horror of these days no book is better than this one. This book was reviewed in the Christmas number of The Guide.

Over the Top—By Guy Empey. Postpaid\$1.00
Thrilling, humorous and yet thoroughly practical stories of actual war conditions among the British troops. Empey was not a war correspondent; he was an actual fighter. While it is exceedingly realistic it does not contain a line you would not want your 16 year old daughter to read. The best seller in America.

All in It, K1 Carries On (continuing "The First Hundred Thousand")—By Ian Hay. Price, Postpaid\$1.00

Thousands of Canadians revelled in "The First Hundred Thousand," and will revel again in the continuation of the story. Do you remember Lieut. Bobby Little, Private M'Sumph and Sergt. Mucklewane? They are here, and most of the others, "Carrying On" through the later events of the war.

Militarism—By Doctor Carl Liebknecht. Postpaid\$1.10

This book is a translation of original which landed its author, a member of the German Reichstag, in jail for an extended period. One man, at least, has seen the situation and has spoken his mind. "The boldest man in Europe" he has been called because of his passion to make the world safe for democracy.

My Four Years in Germany—By Ambassador Gerard.

Postpaid\$2.20

This is the book sensation of the year. Candid testimony of his experiences in Germany during the most critical period of the world's history. The author has the experience of coming to know as familiar figures the Kaiser, the Crown Prince, the Chancellor, Admiral Von Tirpitz, and scores of others about the Prussian Court. Fully illustrated with photographic illustrations of documents, including the Kaiser's famous letter to President Wilson.

Kitchener's Mob—By James Norman Hall. Postpaid95

The most vivid, coherent, logical, intelligent, well-balanced account of what being in the British trenches was like, that we have yet encountered. In its straight forwardness and its avoidance of hysteria or gallery byplay it deserves to become a classic.

A Student in Arms (Second Series)—By Donald Hankey. Postpaid \$1.00

The second series promises to be as popular as the first book, and will be one of the most widely read books of the season. The chapter entitled "Don't Worry" will carry a message of faith to thousands of burdened hearts. It reveals the attitude of our soldier boys to the "Great Mystery." This chapter is one of the author's gems, and is a wonderfully brilliant piece of writing.

The Next of Kin—By Nellie McClung. Postpaid \$1.35

This book reflects public feeling in typical towns and country districts throughout Canada, and shows with telling effect how Canadian men and women are doing their bit in the war. The whole book is strong and fearless but always comforting and healing. It is relentless in its truth, hopeful in its philosophy, and stamped on every page with the optimism which has characterized Mrs. McClung's books.

This book was reviewed in The Guide issue of December 1916

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