

fluence, strips him of every artificial distinction arising from wealth or poverty or social status, and then shuts him up in an exclusive circle, alone with God, who is no respecter of persons, and there demands of his naked and solitary personality a voluntary surrender of his will to God's will and an immediate response of obedience to all its demands. There are no sponsors, or proxies. Enforced or insincere obedience counts nothing at all. The sole responsibility of decision and action rests directly on the individual soul. Each one must give account of himself to God. This is the first principle of New Testament law—to bring each naked soul face to face with God. When that first Baptist voice broke the silence of four hundred years it surely led the world with its appeal to individuality: "Think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father. Behold the axe is laid at the root of the trees and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire." Do thou repent. Do thou confess thy sins. Do thou be baptized. It was the first step of Christianity, and what a colossal stride! Family ties count nothing. Greek culture nothing. Roman citizenship nothing. Circumcision nothing. O soul, thou art alone before God. The multitude shall not swallow thee up.

"If thou shalt be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it." Family relationship intruded upon our Lord's busiest hour. "Behold, thy mother and thy brothers seek thee." Once before he had said: "Woman, what have I to do with thee," and now like a flash of lightning comes his scathing reply: "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? Whosoever doeth the will of my heavenly father, the same is my mother, my brother, my sister."

Another time it intruded upon Him to call forth his crucial statement: "If any man have not his father and mother and brother and sister he cannot be my disciple."

In his dying hour, on the way to the cross, he heard its voice once more. "Blessed is the womb that bare thee and the paps that gave suck," and once more he replied, "Yea, rather blessed is she that doeth the will of God." Superiority for the twelve-year Paul was claimed because they had known the Lord in flesh. But Paul rejoined: "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more."

How often in history has the question been propounded by some wishing to shun personal responsibility? May I not refer this matter to the magistrates? May I not consult the customs of my country? May I not seek the guidance of my priest and put on him the responsibility of interpreting this book? Nay, verily. Do thou interpret. It is God's letter to thy soul. Thy right of private judgment is the crown jewel of thy humanity. Sometimes even Baptists falter on this point. I have heard one of them excuse himself from an acknowledged duty of co-operation in missions, because his church was opposed to the mission work. Not even thy church can absolve thee from individual duty. Churches are time organizations and are punished in time. They do not stand before the great white throne of judgment. But thy soul shall appear before the Judge. Well did our Lord know there could be no evangelization of the world if ancestors, families, customs, government, commerce and priests could stand between the individual soul and God. Thy relation to God is paramount. His law takes precedence of all and swallows up all. In giving emphasis to this doctrine of individuality our Baptist fathers have suffered martyrdom at the hands of the heathen, the Romanist, the Greek, and the Protestant alike.

### The Skeleton in the Closet.

BY A. A. K.

The day was done. The feast was over. The last carriage load of guests had departed, and quiet had settled over the house. The master turned from the doorway with a stilled sigh. Back into the library he went, and turning low the lamp, sank into the big easy chair before the fire, and stared in the glowing coal, conscious all the while of the vacant chair across the hearth.

Then the Skeleton, creeping from its closet took the empty seat, and when the man raised his eyes with a smothered groan he beheld it.

Long they gazed at each other, these two. His lips were closed a little more firmly, and his hands were clenched, but his head drooped wearily, for they two were alone—the Man and the Skeleton.

The world knew his trouble, but none spoke of it. It was not a grief that hangs sombre streamers from the door, that goes flower-laden to a heaped-up mound, that receives the tender letters of condolence and the words of sympathy.

Yes, his world knew of his trouble, but none spoke of it. He held his head up among men, though the crushing burden weighed down his heart. He met his days' duties with a smile on his lips though he paced his bed-room floor at night with streaming eyes. When a sudden inward pang wrenched his breast, he spoke to his fellows with unmeant sharpness—and the world condemned. When he met his neighbors with a forced calmness or assimulated gaiety, the world misjudged. Oh! his burden was a crushing one, and it would be till death. He sank

deeper into his chair, and groaned.

Then the Skeleton spoke. "These are hard times for you, these feast days, when all your kinsmen gather for merry-making. I saw you to-day. I knew what you thought."

"When that golden haired baby clasped your knee to lift itself from the floor, you thought of another baby, years ago, in whom all your pride centered. Don't you remember the first Thanksgiving after the baby came. You and your wife sat before the fire when the guests were gone and planned for the baby's future."

(The Man sank deeper into his chair, and in the glowing coals pictured a baby face, wreathed in smiles and crowned with yellow curls.)

"Then when he was five years old, you had a different Thanksgiving. You remember that?" (The Man nodded, and in the fire another picture arose. A father and a mother, a doctor and a nurse, kept vigil in a darkened room. There had been no feasting, two of them had refused food, for their child lay dying. But when the doctor had turned from a long look at the fever-flushed face, and had whispered words of hope, the father and mother had fallen on their knees by the bedside, and given God thanks.)

"He would better have died then."

"No! No!" said the father. "Oh Absalom, my son! My son!"

"You cannot forget him, even though he disgraced your name. You wince when you know men are pointing you out as his father, but for a moment your heart leaped with joy to-day when you heard that voice that sounds like his and looked into another pair of brown eyes that reminded you of him."

(But the man had covered his face with his hands, and two tears trickled down, and fell between his fingers.)

Then he raised his eyes to the card upon his desk. His dead wife's hand had lettered it when the crushing blow had fallen, and they two had sat before the fire in speechless grief.

"The sorrow that nobody mentions,

The sorrow no one may share,

Is the one that the dear Lord giveth

His dearest, tenderest, care,

and below the line, penned by the same dear hand:

"Cast thy burden on the Lord, and he will sustain thee."

And he reached for the worn Bible, and as he did so, the Skeleton slipped softly back whence it had come. And as he took up the Book it opened of its own accord, for from the depths he had often cried mightily unto the Lord. And as he read, the burden seemed to roll from him. It was his, yet it was not his. He was carrying it, but he was sustained. And he arose with a lightened heart and left the vacant chairs standing before the fire. And he laid him down in peace and slept, for the Lord had been with him—Presbyterian.

### The Monastic Idea.

The student of the Bible will recall several instances of holy men abiding for a season in solitude. Christ also at times courted retirement, and undoubtedly we are warranted in inferring that with profit their example might be followed in the modern world. Lander has written: "Solitude is the audience chamber of God. It is also the meeting place of the living and the dead. Then in its calm can we not measure better than in the noise of the world the real value of the things we strive for? Nearness to the objects blinds us to their character. When we are alone we soon find that the crown we have won is not worth the battle, that the harvest is not worth the toil. In the close of life when the sense of loneliness cannot be evaded, we find kings, queens, princes, warriors, exclaiming as did Saladdin 'All that is left of the great Saladdin!'"

Lander is right, and quiet hours and solemn lonely thought make for the deepening of character. Our Lord commanded that we go into the closet, and in secret commune with God. But this occasional withdrawal from the strife of public affairs was not to be adopted as a vocation. The retreat was not designed to be perpetual. The saintly men of the Bible who sought the desert, never made their home there—but having prepared themselves in seclusion, they then addressed themselves to the activities of a real mission. What they mastered in secret they proclaimed from the housetops. Their conduct and their aims were not identical with those of the ancient hermits, or of the monks ancient or modern. Anthony, Hilarian, Ephrem Malchus and the rest abandoned human society that they might escape from its pollutions, and secure their own perfection. Moreover they branded the secular as unholy as though everything not sacred was necessarily foul and unclean; discredited the most virtuous relations that exist, and degraded piety by proclaiming its inability to cope with evil of the world. Instead of contending against actual foes they wasted their strength in fighting imaginary enemies, fiends and phantom tempters born of their own imagination. From the prevalence of monastic ideas religion came to have little influence on public life. The two were widely separated. They are to-day wherever monasticism and conventional sisterhoods exist. And while professedly Protestants reject this kind of separation, nevertheless they feel the effect of the historical error. Many withdrew their religion, if not their person, from the world. In the office

they are sinners; in the church they are saints. They do not use their faith as Moses did the tree which he cast into the bitter waters—that they might be sweetened. Then there is often revealed among converts a notion that they can serve God in an exceptionally worthwhile sense by neglecting their avocations for the purpose of giving Bible-readings and doing evangelistic work. There has also developed of late a new mercurial order of persons who have a religious repugnance to toil, and who live by faith, which in bald English means that they subsist on the labors of others. Others without natural gifts, rush into the ministry. But our Lord would have us go into the world and impart to all of its secularities the religious spirit and motive. Times and Freeman.

### For His Sake.

Who is there among us who has not some little secret drawer or box with careful lock, and sometimes we steal alone to our room and unfasten that little hiding-place which looks so common and take out some treasure which is perhaps more precious to us than gold. What is it? Only perhaps a little lock of hair, only a withered violet, only possibly a faded packet of old letters, quite out of date only perhaps a little baby's shoe. Yet there are old voices and memories connected with these slight things which make their value to us quite inestimable. And as we look at them the sunny scenes come back of the days that are no more and there is a magic in them which surpasses the wand of the magician. We love them for the sake of that dear one to whom they once belonged, to whom we feel they still belong. So should it be with the things that belong to God, the men whom he has created in his own image. They belong to him, they are his, they speak of us to him, they are living witnesses to us of his love and providence and care. Him we cannot see, but we can see the human creatures whom he has made. Then we must love because we love him. Then we must pity, because he pities them. Then we must think for and feel for and pray for and labor for, because he, our tender heavenly Father, is working for them too, and slumbers not nor sleeps in his care for their souls and bodies. Selected.

### Trusting in God.

Not long ago a business man found himself in narrow financial straits. He became moody and reticent. He appears to have been a Christian, but without strong faith. His financial burden almost completely crushed him. He sat down at the table with his family, and ate his bread in silence. When he did speak it was with petulance and feverish excitement. One day he took up an old book and opened it. The book chanced to be an old geography which he had studied when a boy. On the page to which he opened there was a picture of Atlas bearing the world on his shoulders. Looking at the picture, he was reminded of the freedom and happiness of his childhood. To himself he exclaimed: There is poor Atlas. Ever since I was a child he has crouched under that burden, and for centuries before. How his back must ache! I can sympathize with him now. I wonder that he has been standing on all these centuries. Then closing the book he took out his pencil and thoughtfully wrote on paper these words: I will not be an Atlas. Since I must trust God for ground to stand on, I will trust him also for the load.

With that resolution a new inspiration came into his soul. He went out to struggle with his financial embarrassment with new hope. His business associates observed a change in his spirits. His countenance was brighter, his voice was more ringing, his step lighter. They thought some change must have taken place in his financial condition. But the change was within. He rolled a heavy load from his soul. He had found a burden bearer who was able to carry his load. He went on in this way and prospered. Afterward he said he would have gone to the wall but for the new hope and strength which came into his life when he made his decision to trust God for the burden as well as for the ground to stand on.

Trusting God may bring financial success. It will not always do so. If it did it might tend to make men mercenary. But it may do so, because it makes the heart lighter. It inspires new hope and strength in the soul. When the burden of care is lightened one is in better frame for financial enterprises. His mind is clearer, his nerves are more quiet, his spirit is more calm. But whether trust in God bring financial success or not, it will certainly bring what is far better. It will bring peace. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee because he trusteth in thee." It will give strength. Even physical strength and intellectual strength may result from patient trust in God. Certainly spiritual strength will be the result. They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.—The Morning Star.

We are to be awarded, not only for work done but for burdens borne, and I am not sure but that the brightest rewards will be for those who have borne burdens without murmuring.—Andrew Bonar.