

The Story of an Egret's Plume.

IN TWO ACTS.

Act 1. Deep down in the shadows of the woods—enlivened by little patches of sunlight glancing and glimmering through the foliage of the trees and upon the greensward—the river ran merrily on toward the sea. The air was fragrant with all delicious odours of the woods, and musical with the sweet songs of birds. Hidden amid a tangle of reeds and vines was an egret's nest, from which four baby birds peeped out, watching for their mother, who was busying herself on that sweet, sunlit day in bringing them food; and as she hovered over the nest her looks and tones denoted a heart full of happiness. Bending over them, her long, white, feathery plumes brushed them gently like a caress, and as she lifted her head to utter forth her thanksgivings, she seemed proud of this new adornment [the distinguishing badge of her motherhood]. Suddenly her song ceased, and her heart beat with fear and trepidation, as she saw a hunter slowly but surely approaching. She crouched down over her helpless little ones and spread out her wings to protect them. His hand was stretched towards her, but she loved her babies with a mother's love and would not leave them—and so he snatched her from her nest, tore the plumes from her bleeding body, and threw her to the ground. She died within sight of her helpless young. The shades of night hushed the songs of the birds, but plaintive cries fell upon the silence. They were the cries of those four little birds—crying for their mother's love and protection.

Act 2. Within the dim light of a cathedral sits a large and fashionable congregation. The organ peals forth its notes upon the reverberating air. The white-robed priest and choristers march forth in solemn procession. Moving slowly and gracefully up the aisle is a woman richly dressed and fair to look upon. In her delicately gloved hand she carries a prayer book, with little gold crosses dangling from the ribbon markers. Upon her head is a hat of velvet and lace surmounted by an egret's plume. She makes a graceful genuflection in the direction of the holy altar, and as she sinks upon her soft cassock in silent prayer, the priest in sonorous voice chants the litany—and as the words "From all evil and mischief—from sin—from the crafts and assaults of the devil—from battle and murder, and from sudden death"—fall from his lips—she lifts up her voice and chants "Good Lord deliver us!" The music rolls on—and a mist comes before my eyes; for out through the window—amid the shadow of the grasses and reeds—I seem to see the nest of those four little birds, their throats forever stilled—their eyes staring up at the heaven that would not answer them—the mother lying upon the blood-soaked ground—her glazed eyes turned toward the nest from which no sound comes.—*Mrs. O. B. Champion.*

Restfulness.

Restfulness is an attribute of the best sort of religion. In a certain sanitarium, not long since, we noticed on an invalid's door in the early afternoon, a printed card, which said, "Resting. Please do not knock." At once the thought came—there are some faces which bear upon them, very plainly stamped by long years of quiet trust, the words, "Resting so securely that you may knock as loud as you please without disturbing." Angry words, like stones, may dash against this door, but the inward peace abides unbroken. The furious rain of affliction may beat upon the panel, but still the repose is not destroyed. The rest remaineth in spite of all that men or devils can do. From out the tumult of the storm, where the whirl of clashing wills and the contention of divergent thoughts fill the air with discord, the steadfast testimony stands: "None of these things move me." Souls like these, which are "ever bright as noon," and "calm as summer evenings be," diffuse about them an atmosphere of heaven, and bear loud witness, even when no syllable is spoken, to the overwhelming reality of divine grace.

"The day glides sweetly o'er their heads,
Made up of innocence and love,
And soft and silent as the shades
Their nightly minutes gently move."

Nor is there any lack of efficiency and vigour in such spirits, as is sometimes calumniously charged. At least there need not be. When the serenity is of grace rather than nature, or of principle rather than mere passive acquiescence, the efficiency is doubled rather than diminished. With no rattle or clatter of machinery, and without the waste or frustration of friction, swiftly, noiselessly the work is done, with so little apparent effort that it seems to do itself. This is the perfection of activity combined with the perfection of peace. The Church needs more Christians of this ideal sort.

The Forerunner.

When a monarch makes a royal progress, a forerunner or harbinger or courier goes before him to give notice, that everything may be duly prepared for his coming; so John the Baptist goes before the Lord Jesus, "to prepare the way of the Lord." Usually the harbinger goes on his way, no one looks at him a second time, or remembers him after he is gone; but John is a remarkable person; the functions he fulfils are important; for a little while he and his ministry occupy the foreground of the history, and claim our attentive consideration.

John is so important a person in the history of the Christ, that he himself was the subject of more than one ancient prophecy; for he is the "Voice" of Isaiah proclaiming "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God;" he is the "Messenger" who Malachi foretold, "should prepare the world for Him;" and the "Elijah" of the same prophet, who was to be sent before the Advent of the Lord.

As the preparation for the coming of this kingdom John preached repentance; a national revival of spiritual holiness. So in former times in preparation for the giving of the law, Moses had bidden the people to sanctify themselves. So at this time when the Jews admitted Gentiles into the covenant of Abraham, they first baptized them with water to purify and fit them for admission among the people of God. And so John baptized the Jews unto repentance to purify and fit them for admission into the higher dispensation of the Kingdom of God.

Profounder minds might have seen that the character of the Forerunner and the mode of his announcement of the kingdom foreshadowed the nature of the Christ and of His kingdom. The royal herald was not a warrior, but an ascetic, and the note of preparation was not "He that hath no sword let him sell his coat and buy one," but "Repent."

Self-Improvement.

There are many young working men who are anxious to improve their minds by reading and study out of business hours. But too many grow discouraged and fail in their efforts at self-improvement, although they begin with the best intentions. A want of thoroughness in whatever is undertaken is, perhaps, one great cause of such failures. A practical writer on that topic gives the following good directions: "Never leave what you undertake to learn until you can reach your arms around it, and clinch your arms on the other side." It is not the amount of reading you run over that will make you learned; it is the amount that you retain. Dr. Abernethy maintained that "there was a point of saturation in his mind" beyond which it is not capable of taking in more. Whatever was pressed upon it crowded out something else. It is probable that few of us have minds more sponge-like than that of the great doctor.

Every young man should endeavour to perfect himself in the science of the business he has chosen. Without this, he must always content himself in the lower walks of his calling. The cost of a few cigars will buy all the books he requires, and his own diligence may be made to well supply the place of a tutor. Without such diligence, the best teacher in the world could not manufacture him into a scholar. If once going over a point will not master it he must tackle it

again. Better give a week's study to a page than conclude that you cannot comprehend it.

But though it is wise to give your main strength to your own specialty, you should not confine yourself to such studies exclusively. The perfection of all your powers should be your aspiration. Those who can only think or talk on one subject may be efficient in their line, but they are not agreeable members of society in any of its departments. Neither have they made the most of themselves. They become one-sided and narrow in their views, and are reduced to a humiliating dependence on one branch of industry. It costs nothing to carry knowledge; and in times like these, to be able to put his hand to more than one branch of industry often serves a man a good turn. Do not attempt too much in the way of study to begin with; you will surely lose heart if you do. Be humble and modest in your aspirations, and if you are diligent, never fear but that you will hear a voice saying: "Come up higher." Be content to gather the precious gold of learning grain by grain; you will be able to see the pile growing, and will learn from it the wonderful power of the littles, which is shown in mental as well as golden grains.

Speak Kindly.

A kind word costs little, but it may bless all day the one to whom it is spoken. Have not kind words been spoken to you which have lived in your heart through years, and borne fruit of joy and hope? Let us speak kindly to one another. We have burdens and worries, but let us not, therefore, rasp and irritate those near us, those we love, those Christ would have us save. Speak kindly in the morning; it lightens the cares of the day, and makes the household and all its affairs move along smoothly. Speak kindly at night, for it may be that before dawn some loved one may finish his or her span of life for this world, and it will be too late to ask forgiveness.

Pleasure in Work Well Done.

Duty and pleasure may be antagonistic, or they may harmonize and coincide. If we look upon duty as a hard task, we are not likely to find pleasure in the doing of duty. But if we look at duty as our privilege and opportunity, we shall find that the doing of duty brings pleasure as an inseparable incident. What gives more pleasure to a loving heart than the doing of a duty toward a loved one? All duty ought to be prompted by love—by love to God or by love to God's dear ones. And thus prompted, every duty is an added pleasure; for love is the fulfilment of the law. Good Dr. Hilprecht, the eminent Oriental scholar, who is one of the hardest workers living, is at present in Constantinople, pursuing his Assyriological investigations under the strain of the nerve-taxing earthquake shocks, day after day for successive weeks. Writing of his trying experiences there, and of the occasional longing of his tired body for rest, which he must not seek, he says: "But first duty and then pleasure; and duty faithfully done is always the greatest pleasure."

Do not Be a Slave.

Why will you keep caring for what the world says? Try, oh try, to be no longer a slave of it! You can have but little idea of the comfort of freedom from it—it is bliss! All this caring for what people will say is from pride. Hoist your flag and abide by it. In an infinitely short space of time all secrets will be divulged. Therefore, if you are misjudged, why trouble to put yourself right? You have no idea what a great deal of trouble it will save you. Roll your burden on Him, and He will make straight your mistakes. He will set you right with those with whom you have set yourself wrong. Here am I, a lump of clay; Thou art the potter. Mould me as Thou in Thy wisdom wilt. Never mind my cries. Cut my life off—so be it; prolong it—so be it. Just as Thou wilt, but I rely on Thy unchanging guidance during the trial. O the comfort that comes from this!—*Gen. Gordon.*