

THE SURVIVAL OF THE UNFIT.

SUNDAY SCHOOL TIMES.

The "survival of the fittest" is a fact as old as the law of cause and effect. It was proclaimed by our Lord when he said, "Unto every one that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away from him." Those individuals or species which were best adapted to their environment, or were capable of adaptation, lived, flourished, and advanced. Those which were not, or could not be made to be, perished. One observes the workings of the law everywhere, among plants and animals and men.

And yet there seem to be exceptions. We sometimes find the survival of the unfit. Some who do not at all seem to display the qualities that match their surroundings are found not only to be surviving, but to be magnificently successful. We hear of a great leader, and picture to our imagination a being strong, robust, confident, self-assertive. Ushered into his presence, we find a man weak of physique, stammering of tongue, mild of manner, an asthmatic skeleton, like William of Orange, an epileptic like Caesar, perhaps like Paul. The revelation of the surprise is almost ludicrous. Yet these outward weaknesses may hide a frame of steel, a heart of fire.

Often the realization of unfitness is true because it is by the man himself. He is entrusted by God or circumstance with honors and tasks and responsibilities, and he sees nothing in himself that measures up to them. He has to act like a man of iron; he feels himself to be a man of lath. He is thrust into the battle, sword or spear in his hand, while every fiber of his nature protests against it. The situation demands qualities that he knows he does not possess. Men insist on placing him there, and he looks with incredulous wonder at them. Timid, retiring, self-distrustful, without popular gifts, he finds himself pushing some aggressive enterprise, some venture of daring boldness, perhaps in the teeth of bitter opposition, as if his face were indeed the flint he knows himself not to be. Perhaps a quiet man, a domestic man, a man of peace, he is forced to be a warrior, a world-traveller, a man of affairs. And in observing others we are at a loss, again and again, to understand how equipments such as theirs could be entrusted with such endeavors. We could have chosen a thousand men better adapted to the situation. Yet strange to relate, those who seem, and feel themselves, and are, so tremendously unfit, are not only managing to live, but are conspicuously "making good."

Is it all a travesty of the law, or at least an overriding of it? Is God's world topsy-turvy, and the law of cause and effect sometimes operative and sometimes not?

That men may for their own good know the true sources of power, God purposes to show mankind that Jehovah can save with many or with few, and can make the weak things of the world confound the mighty. Let the successful man reflect on that! Perhaps he is simply a modern and conspicuous instance of God's power to make a thing that is not as though it were. It may be very often that the Father, willing to show at once his power and his grace, chooses to let his lightnings flash through a thing of clay. But God is not a God of caprice, and it will be found, if we look far enough, that some thread of character, found or made by God, ran through the clay, and conducted the divine electricity to its goal.

These cases may simply reveal to us the fact that God's estimate, infinitely more accurate, is also very different from ours. Few people are strong where they think they are, and very often men are not weak where they think they are. Two confessors were facing the great ordeal of martyrdom. One feared greatly that his courage would fail and that he would dishonor His Lord. The other was sure he never could. In the face of the flame they changed places.

Our estimate of our own ability and fitness goes oftener astray, no doubt, in the direction of exaggeration, but sometimes it is the other way, and sometimes both. Not few have been the authors who have scorned the "potboilers," in which their most splendidly effective work was done, while they chased ridiculously some phantom of a "masterpiece." A man can often have no worse judge of his abilities than himself. Therefore if a man find himself, by no eager self-seeking of his own, in a place for which he feels himself inadequate, why not assume that He who placed him there knows his size best, and will not desert him in his task? "Behold, I have made thee this day a fortified city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls." The brass of God's making is worth a thousandfold the "natural" variety.

It is plain, moreover, that in most things fitness is not so much a matter of equipment as of will-power. What we do and are depends little upon our equipment, much upon how we use our equipment. Power lies deeper than in equipment. Men do not see with the eye, however dull or however delicate; they see with the brain. They do not see even with the brain; they see with the mind. In the last analysis they do not see with the mind; they see with the will. The old skit at the evolutionist told a great story nevertheless:

"A deer with a neck that was longer by half
Than the rest of his family's—try not to laugh—
By stretching and stretching became a giraffe,
Which nobody can deny."

We develop new organs or make the old ones over. The will runs new grooves through the brain, almost literally makes itself a brain to its own order. Fitness, within limits, lies not in the wit, nor in the weight, but in the will. Wilt thou?

And some of us may comfort ourselves in the thought that simple proximity is one of the greatest elements of fitness. There is everything in being on the ground. A thing at hand is vastly better for God's purposes than a thing a thousand miles away. The man seems to a good many of us, and to himself, like the jawbone of an ass, or even the ass itself, certainly no better than an ox-goad; but the Philistines are here, and the battle is on,—and the battle is won.

Therefore no man need spend much time in underestimating himself, or in estimating himself at all, or in bewailing his own weakness and looking for the thousand men who no doubt are far superior to him. All that is neither here nor there, since he is here and they are there. God knows where he is, and has put this upon him. Who is he that he should question? Let him push on, knowing that he is just the one man for that task, since he is the one man who is in it.

And let us remember that no man radiates force; he simply transmits it. He is not a source; he is a channel. The reason why God so conspicuously uses the "unfit" is because they are the more willing channels of his force. They are the poor in spirit. They are not forever thrusting themselves in the way, and shutting him out. They "give God a chance." Their very sense of unfitness casts them upon God's strength, and removes the obstacles that hinder his power,—pride and self-will and self-direction. Their very agony of helplessness is the condition of his help. He found them, or made them, more willing to be made the channels of his grace.

The survival of the unfit? Can there be a more magnificent picture of fitness than this? Behold this man, chosen by God rather than by himself, equipped, not with accomplishments and powers, but with will and purpose, surrendering his own judgment, pleasure, self-estimate, at the call of need, which is the call of God, ready to do the thing that lies at hand, in touch with God and surrendered to him. Do these "exceptions prove the rule?" They are the rule—at its highest.

OVER-DISCIPLINE OF CHILDREN.

BY IRENE GARDNER.

Where discipline leads to deceit, then better no discipline at all.

The majority of children, after they begin to get away from the constant surveillance of their parents, do many things of which those parents know nothing. The little ones practice deceit through fear of being harshly reprimanded. Many times they fib regarding where they have been and what they have been doing, when in reality they have done nothing of which to be ashamed. But they are afraid the parents will disapprove, and so don't care to take the risk of meeting that disapproval.

This trait in children was illustrated a few days ago. Two little boys and a girl, all between the ages of six and eight, were playing on a raft in a creek. They were having no end of fun, when suddenly the little girl fell overboard. The boys realized that unless they saved her she would drown, for the water was deep enough for them all to be in serious danger. Nevertheless the boys jumped in to save the girl—and succeeded. After a few exciting moments they all climbed up on the shore, very much frightened.

Of course, they were dripping wet, and one would naturally suppose all three would have run home for consolation and dry clothes. But no, indeed. Instead, they sat down together in the sun to get well dried before they went home, and pledged themselves that they would never, never tell their parents what had happened. They were afraid if it became known that they had been near the water, a severe whipping would result.

After they considered themselves sufficiently dry, home they went. The boys managed to keep their secret well, but the little girl's mother soon discovered that her clothes had been wet, and after many questions drew from her the truth regarding the matter. To the child's amazement, she received hugs and kisses, instead of a scolding.

The next day, the mothers of the two boys were much surprised to receive a call from the little girl's mother. She had come to thank their sons for their heroism. That was the first the mothers had heard their sons were heroes. The boys were called, and for some time stoutly denied that any such event as that described by the little girl had happened. They felt sure if they owned up that dire wrath would descend upon them. But at last they weakened, and the whole story came out. They could hardly believe their senses when they received violent embraces from three women and a well-filled purse from the rescued child's fond parent.

How is that for discipline? Of what use is it to whip a child for doing wrong when, at some other time, he lies for fear he will get punished for doing what in the end, proved to be right?

That those two boys should repeatedly deny that they had saved a child from drowning because they were afraid of being whipped if they told the truth, is both humorous and pitiful.

This state of things is almost universal. Children early learn to deceive through fear. This shows how far grown-ups are from understanding the real nature of the little ones. Strange, too, when all of us were once children ourselves.

Perhaps this deceit among children comes because parents find it so much easier to punish carelessly than to explain carefully.

Mr. Howard—Isn't it wonderful what force Niagara has?

Mrs. Talkmuch—Marvelous! Do you know when I first saw it, for a full moment I couldn't speak.

"There are three kinds of people in the world—the wills, the wots and the can'ts. The first accomplish everything, the second oppose everything and the third fail in everything."