

Family Circle.

The Silver Dollar, or how God Provides.

BY MRS. H. C. KNIGHT.

It was a season of great scarcity on the hill regions of New Hampshire, when a poor woman who lived in a hut by the woods had no bread for the little family. She was sick, without either friends or money. There was no helper but God, and she betook herself to prayer. She prayed long, she prayed in earnest; for she believed that he who fed the young ravens would feed her.

On rising from her knees one morning, her little bare-footed girl opened the door to go out. Something shining on the sill stopped her. The child stooped down, and behold, a silver dollar! She ran and took it to her mother. It really was a new, round, bright silver dollar. They looked up and down the road, not a living person was in sight, and neither footsteps or wagon wheels were to be heard.

Where did the dollar come from? Did God send it? Doubtless it was from his hand; but how did it get there? Did it rain down? No. Did he throw it from the windows of heaven? No. Did an angel fetch it? No. God has ways and means of answering prayer without sending special messengers. He touches some little spring in the great machinery of his providence, without in the least disturbing its regularity, and help comes. Some times we do not see exactly how, as this poor woman did not; then it seems to come more directly from him; while, in fact, our all being taken care of ever since we were born, comes just as directly from him, only he employs so many people to do it, fathers, mothers, servants, shopkeepers, that we are apt to lose sight of him, and fix our eye only on them.

But how did the silver dollar get on the door-sill? some boy may ask. It happened that a pious young blacksmith was going down to the seaboard in quest of business. It was several miles before he could take the stage-coach; so instead of going in the wagon which carried his chest, he said he would walk. "Come ride," they said, "it will be hot and dusty." He kept answering, "No," to all his friends urged, "I'll walk, and take a short cut through the pines," and off he started with a stout walking-stick. As he was jogging on through a piece of woods, he heard a voice from a little lonely hut by the road side. It drew his notice, and he stepped towards it on tiptoe; then he stopped and listened, and found it was the voice of prayer, and he gathered from the prayer that she who offered it was poor, sick, and friendless.

"What can I do to help this poor woman?" thought the young man. He did not like to go into the hut. He clapped his hand into his pocket, and drew out a dollar, the first silver dollar he ever had—and a dollar was a big sum for him to give, for he was not as rich then as he is now. But no matter, he felt that the poor woman must have it. The dollar being silver, and likely to attract notice, he concluded to lay it on the sill and go away, but not far; for he hid behind a large rock near the house, to watch what became of it. Soon he had the satisfaction of seeing the little girl come out and seize the prize, when he went on his way rejoicing. The silver dollar came into the young man's hand for this very purpose, for you see a paper dollar might have blown away; and he was led to walk instead of ride—why, he did not exactly know, but God, who directed his steps, did know. So God plans, and we are the instruments to carry on his plans.— Oftentimes we seem to be about our own business when we are about his, answering, it may be, the prayers of his people.

The young blacksmith is now in middle life; he has been greatly prospered, and given away his hundreds since then; but perhaps he never enjoyed giving more than when he gave away his first silver dollar.

The man who fawns upon you in prosperity will surely trample on you in adversity.

The Smooth Shilling.

"That piece won't go, sir," observed the man behind the counter, handing me back again a shilling so worn that nothing could be seen on either side of it but a dull, silvery lustre, and no perceptible figure. I took it, and replaced it in my purse. But as I rode home my meditations were on the shilling. It won't go, he said; but why not? It is no doubt a genuine coin. For ten, twenty, or even fifty years, it has been in constant circulation. The hands of some thousands of persons have held it. It has sparkled as a pretty toy in the tiny fingers of some sweet child—it has been clutched by the feruginous hand of the miser. It has laid upon the glazed eye-ball of a youth in the shroud—clinked in the till of the liquor-dealer—been tossed to the street musician as an inducement to him to cut short the agony of his organ. It has travelled through the States, passing current from seaboard to the remotest interior, and never at a discount. It has been exchanged in its time for commodities enough to make any beggar a Cæsus. To multitudes it has brought, over and over again, in some shape, the worth of a shilling. Others have possessed and lost it, but obtained no equivalent. It was their fault, however, and not the shilling's. But now the tide is turned. The faithful piece of money would seem to be delinquent. "It won't go." But why not? again I ask. Because it is smooth. Its surface tells no tale that we can credit. It bears not the impress of the mint, or the government stamp. No head, pillars, or date does it show. A coin must have impressions, or it is only a plaything, a medal, or a silver button mould. Smooth pieces of silver "won't go" any better than if they were bits of my grandmother's spoons, or those famous knee-buckles that figured on my grandfather's small-clothes. The genuine current coin must have a *genuine stamp*.

Here, though I, is a lesson for us. Our minds, hearts and lives must bear the right impressions, or we cannot pass current in good society. Of little worth is he in life of whom "the smooth shilling" is a type. The man on whom you can see no head, or date, or stars, or pillars, or eagle—nothing by which it could be guessed that he was "*e pluribus unum*,"—his expression only the dull resemblance of tarnished silver, his eyes of pewter, in which there is "no speculation," his soul unmarked with any trace or bound of moral obligation, of generous sympathy, of Christian fervour—everybody is ready to say of him, as said the tradesman of the shilling, "That piece won't go, sir." It ought not to go. It has been loosely drifting about long enough. It is time it was returned to the mint as bullion, to be re-issued, to receive the stamp of a man. Ah! there is the fault with him. It was the original sin of education, that no deep, strong, correct impression was made upon his nature. He had no pious mother to furrow his soul with her tears; no godly father to drive landmarks deep into the substance of his spiritual existence. The pulpit did not raise along the margin of his affections the breast-work of faith, and hope, and fear of God. The sanctions of the Bible were either unknown or unheeded, so that no "image or superscription" of divine truth was ever inscribed upon him when in the mint of his years, his plastic infancy. The world, the flesh, and Satan, have made him rough enough, but no trace of the divine government is on him, no stamp of the powers above. He is smooth for all such impressions, and, therefore, he cannot pass current. Reader, are you a parent, a teacher, a pastor, a Christian, a lover of your race? Put your stamp upon the young. Prepare the die with greatest care. Improve your opportunity. Make your mark. Let it be deep and indelible. Let each immortal coin, each living soul, be charged with the image, not of an earthly queen or emperor, but with the features of our heavenly King, with the radiant lines of our Redeemer's face, and then it shall be legal tender in the church below, and at the gates of the New Jerusalem.

Little do we know, when we go forth in the morning, what God means to do with us ere night.

General Miscellany.

The Spider's Thread.

Reader, when thou hast gazed upon the beautiful webs of the geometric spider that glitter so abundantly in the fields and by the roadside on a dewy morning, or when thou hast, with unsparing hand, swept from the wall of thy dwelling the less pleasing net of the house-spider, hast thou ever considered how important a part the delicate thread of this despised web-spinner plays in the affairs of men? If thou hast not, follow me awhile, and I will tell thee part of the wonders it has contributed to accomplish.

It is then, in some sense, the astronomer's measuring-line, by which he has taken the distance of the sun, moon, and planets, and has approximated to that of a few of those remoter luminaries, the fixed stars. By it he has ascertained that these latter, though called "*fixed*," and until lately supposed to be absolutely permanent in space, are in reality perpetually moving with great velocity, and in orbits of inconceivable magnitude. By means of it he has tracked the comet in its erratic course, and has learned the diameters of the numerous orbs that compose the solar system. He has even weighed these distant and ponderous bodies, suspending them, as it were, to his balances by the slender and almost invisible thread spun by a weak and insignificant spider. And to the delicacy of these wonderful balances we are wholly indebted for that grand discovery, the detection of the existence of the planet Neptune, and the determination approximately of its position, before a ray of its feeble light had been caught by the searching glass of the observer.

But how,—some of my readers will by this time exclaim,—how can the spider's thread have, in any way, contributed to these wonderful results? The answer is, that all these results are due to the remarkable accuracy that has been obtained in astronomical observations; and that in order to make accurate observations, the astronomer must have delicate instruments, one essential feature of which is some means of determining exactly the instant when a heavenly body crosses the central line, or axis, as it is called, of the telescope. For this purpose, a line of some kind, or, more correctly, a system of lines must be stretched across the tube, in or near the focus of the eye-glass, marking precisely the axis of the instrument. A fine thread of silk or linen, or even the finest human hair, or the most delicate wire, is too coarse and uneven for the purpose where great exactness is required. A spider's thread is found to answer perfectly. Hence it is used in nearly all the better class of astronomical instruments; and daily, in various parts of the world, astronomers are watching the passage of the sun, the moon, the planets, and the fixed stars, behind the fine spider-lines that stretch across the tubes of their telescopes.

The results already mentioned as attributable in part to the fineness and regularity of the spider's thread,—a thread which, slender as it is, is composed of some hundreds, nay, according to Reaumur, of some thousands of fibres,—are of themselves sufficiently remarkable. But when we consider their relation to nautical astronomy,—that the lunar and other tables used by the navigator in determining his position at sea, owe their accuracy in part to the nicety of astronomical observations, and hence to the delicacy of the spider's thread,—the importance of this singular product of animated nature rises still higher in our estimation. It is not too much to say that it has contributed to the preservation of human life, and that the "oak leviathans" of the ocean are in some sense guided in their course, and drawn aside from sunken rocks and the lurking dangers of the deep, by the light and slender cord so curiously elaborated by the spinning-apparatus of the spider.

As an illustration of the accuracy with which the position of a vessel at sea may be obtained from astronomical observation, I will introduce, although it may appear to be somewhat of a digression from our subject, an anecdote from J. F. W. Herschel's "Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy," with some of the author's accompanying remarks. Speaking of the practical

verifications of astronomical predictions, he says: "Eclipses, comets, and the like, afford but rare and transient displays of the powers of calculation, and of the certainty of the principles on which it is grounded. A page of 'lunar distances' from the Nautical Almanac is worth all the eclipses that have ever happened for inspiring this necessary confidence in the conclusions of science. That a man, by merely measuring the moon's apparent distance from a star with a little portable instrument held in his hand, and applied to his eye, even with so unstable a footing as the deck of a ship, shall say positively, within five miles, where he is, on a boundless ocean, cannot but appear, to persons ignorant of physical astronomy, an approach to the miraculous. Yet the alternatives of life and death, wealth and ruin, are daily and hourly staked with perfect confidence on these marvellous computations, which might almost seem to have been devised on purpose to show how closely the extremes of speculative refinement and practical utility can be brought to approximate. We have before us an anecdote communicated to us by a naval officer,* distinguished for the extent and variety of his attainments, which shows how impressive such results may become in practice. He sailed from San Blas, on the west coast of Mexico, and after a voyage of eight thousand miles, occupying eighty-nine days, arrived off Rio de Janeiro, having, in this interval, passed through the Pacific Ocean, rounded Cape Horn, and crossed the South Atlantic, without making any land, or even seeing a single sail, with the exception of an American whaler off Cape Horn. Arrived within a week's sail of Rio, he set seriously about determining, by lunar observations, the precise line of the ship's course, and its situation in it at a determinate moment, and having ascertained this within from five to ten miles, ran the rest of the way by those more ready and compendious methods, known to navigators, which can be safely employed for short trips between one known point and another, but which cannot be trusted in long voyages, where the moon is the only sure guide. The rest of the tale we are enabled by his kindness to state in his own words: 'We steered towards Rio de Janeiro for some days after taking the lunars above described, and, having arrived within about fifteen or twenty miles of the coast, I hove to at four in the morning till the day should break, and then bore up; for, although it was very hazy, we could see before us a couple of miles or so.—About eight o'clock, it became so foggy that I did not like to stand in farther, and was just bringing the ship to the wind again before sending the people to breakfast, when it suddenly cleared off, and I had the satisfaction of seeing the great Sugar-Loaf Rock, which stands on one side of the harbour's mouth so nearly right ahead that we had not to alter our course above a point in order to hit the entrance to the Rio. This was the first land we had seen for three months, after crossing so many seas and being set backwards and forwards by innumerable currents and foul winds.—The effect on all on board might well be conceived to be electric; and it is needless to remark how essentially the authority of a commanding officer over his crew may be strengthened by the occurrence of such incidents, indicative of a degree of knowledge and consequent power beyond their reach.'

Another anecdote illustrating the same thing I remember to have met with somewhere; but, not being able to find it, I cannot give the authority of the minor details. Among the passengers of a certain vessel was a mathematician, who in the course of the voyage occasionally amused himself by making observations from which to obtain the ship's place on the ocean. On one of these occasions, after thus obtaining the vessel's position, he found upon examining the chart, that the course they were pursuing would very soon bring them upon some dangerous rocks. He immediately informed the Captain; but he found him unwilling to admit that they could be in the position indicated. The mathematician returned to the cabin, went over his calculations, and, finding them correct, he applied again to

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