

(From the Covenant for February.)

SHALL I JOIN THE ODD FELLOWS ?

BY CYRIL PECK.

DOUBTLESS many an honest man is revolving this question, and, with such light as he has, endeavouring to settle it in a manner that will give him nothing to regret hereafter. The thought is especially on my mind now, as I have this morning visited a sick man, who has been laid up with a fever about four weeks. His strong muscular frame has wasted almost to a skeleton, but he now seems likely to recover, and if there should be no relapse, he may be at his employment again in two or three weeks.

About a year ago he was on the point of joining the Lodge, but as he was a mechanic and had a young family on his hands, and as the winter evenings were favorable to his business, he decided to wait till Spring. When the Spring arrived he still deferred, for no very definite reason, and finally he was prostrated with fever, and must lose, in all human probability, seven or eight weeks of the best season of the year in his profession. He spoke of this neglect to join the Order with much feeling, when the substance of the following conversation occurred:—

"I see now my mistake in not joining the Odd Fellows last winter,—I might have gone forward and taken the degrees, and should now have received back all that it would have cost me."

It is easier to see our mistakes after they are committed, than beforehand. "It is a little remarkable that you should have been only one of several among our neighbours who have seriously regretted a similar mistake. "Ah! who else has been in the same condition?"

One of them was your nearest neighbour and particular friend, and I well recollect that when you thought of joining last winter, he said to you one evening, "wait till I am ready to enter and we will both go in together." He delayed, and the time passed on till his fatal sickness was upon him. He, as you recollect, was seized violently, and had a few lucid intervals. I saw him often and did what I could to relieve and comfort him; and in the seasons of consciousness and reason, he expressed the strongest feelings of horror, both on his own account and on account of his family, that he had thus neglected to join while he was well. He would say, "if I live to get well, I shall join as soon as I can, if they will let me." Poor fellow, he never recovered.—He sleeps in the silence of death, where no hand of a brother can relieve him.

And how suddenly his loving wife followed him.

Yes, she withered like an Autumn leaf, when struck by the *killing frost*. It was affecting to see her after his death, so silent and uncomplaining, yet the fatal disease was silently preparing her to lie down by the side of her husband. She would say, I have regretted very much that my husband did not join the Lodge when he proposed to do so. I should feel a great deal more courage about getting along, and training up my children if he had been a member. The tears would stream down her pale cheeks as she pressed her little ones to her bosom, and thought what must be the struggle which she must encounter alone with them.

It would have been a great help to her, for he was embarrassed with debt, and left nothing for his family. How much would she have received, if he had been a member and taken the degrees?

His weekly benefits and funeral expenses, would have amounted to near forty dollars, which she would have drawn from the Lodge.

That would have helped her very much: She suffered a great deal from anxiety in regard to immediate wants, and knew not how she was to get through with the winter. I suppose that was one cause of her distress.

She did not know till after his death that he owed much, and when one demand after another came in, and some creditors blamed her husband, she could not endure it, this almost broke her heart.

Yes, this was very manifest in her sickness and delirium. She was haunted with the idea that some one was injuring her husband, or her children. But she is now at rest. She sleeps by the side of her husband, and her little ones are now the care of others.

Well now suppose that she had lived, and her husband had been a member, would the Lodge have taken the children without the consent of friends? Certainly not. There would be no interference of the Lodge with any suitable provisions made for them by friends; but only to see that they were provided for, and supply their wants if necessary, so far as the means of the Lodge would allow. The names of the widow and orphans would have been entered on the records of the Lodge, and they would be visited frequently, and their conditions and wants made known as occasion might require. This provision I value much. When I was sick away from home the last winter, and recovery was very doubtful, it was a great relief to feel that they would be cared for, and their mother with them encircled by the sympathies of the brethren of the Order.

What other case do you refer to as suffering by neglecting to join?

Our friend S—K—, he was proposed and accepted last summer, while at work at W—. He intended to come forward immediately, but delayed from week to week, supposing it might be a little more convenient to join at another time. Before he closed the contract he had undertaken, he was brought down with fever, and has not been able to do a day's work since. When I first saw him in sickness, he spoke affectingly of his neglect, and now I never meet him without his expressing similar feelings. Had he been a scarlet member his benefits up to this time would have been some fifty or sixty dollars. And there seems no prospect of his immediate recovery.

If one could know when they were going to be sick it would be quite an object to join. If I could be always sure of being well, I would not give anything to join.

But that is a narrow and unworthy view of the subject.—It is only a selfish view, totally inconsistent with the principles of the Order. If none were to join but those about to be sick, the Lodge would be a mere hospital, and be soon bankrupt and worthless. There are social, intellectual, and moral benefits to be derived in the meetings of the Lodge which the sick could neither receive nor enjoy. These may be greater than any pecuniary benefit to be secured. These, of course, you cannot now appreciate, as they are to be acquired in their appropriate way, as are all other privileges.

I should like it better if it were not for those quarterly dues. Come to pay two dollars and a half a year, I think I should rather pay that for a newspaper.

But we get in the Lodge the reading of four papers, two weekly and two monthly works, we take and distribute among the members to be read in their various families. It is manifest that by this combination of numbers, we can adopt measures for reading and mental improvements more effectually than we can separately. If the funds of the Lodge are in a healthful state, and not in danger of being exhausted, such methods of mental improvement can be adopted as the members shall agree upon, and their circumstances warrant. This quarterly contribution to the funds is one of the important features of the Order. There is, perhaps, no one, but can by calculation and effort lay by this sum, and the habit does him good. It cultivates habits of industry, economy, and benevolence, and what is thus begun as a duty, becomes at length a pleasure. There is a pleasure in thus laying by something in store for those whom we or our fellow-creatures may