

Looking for the Handfuls.

By Theodore L. Cuyler, D. D.

When Ruth was gleaning in the barley field of Boaz the generous farmer commended his young men to "let fall some of the handfuls on purpose for her." They were told to "leave them, that she might glean them;" and they were not to rebuke her for gathering them up. So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat what she had gleaned, and it was nearly a bushel of barley. Happy, honest toiler! She received her reward. Instead of consulting a false pride and loitering the day in idleness, her brave industry brought her more than the ephah of grain. It made her the wife of lordly Boaz, the mistress of his mansion, and the ancestress of the promised Messiah. So they who humble themselves are often exalted.

But there is a rich spiritual truth to be gleaned from this beautiful incident in the pastoral of "Ruth." Just as the liberal heart of Boaz commanded his men to let fall the handfuls for the nimble fingers of the maiden, so God is wont to let fall his blessings for those who are diligent in doing his will. No true workman works in vain. Sometimes in the heat of the long day a Christian pastor is tempted to discouragement. He sees but few results. But presently God lets fall a handful of golden stalks to cheer his heart. Some souls are converted. Some fallow-ground heifers begin to show signs of a crop. His prayer meetings begin to give token of a revival. Perhaps a project that lay very near his heart is taken up by willing hands and open purses. Or it may be that the conscientious toiler gets a marvelous blessing into his own soul; a new manifestation of Jesus as his personal guest and comforter; a new incomming of the Holy Spirit. Our Heavenly Father knoweth both what to bestow and when to bestow. There are thousands of pastors and Sunday school workers who, after their summer vacations, are just entering on a new season of gleaning. Let us give them an inspiring hint that just at the right time and in the right way the Master of the field will let fall the handful. Be not weary in well-doing. In "due season" (which always means God's time, and not ours) ye shall gather the precious blessing. It may not come in the way you look for, or be of just the kind you expected; but it will fill your basket. You and I do not serve a stingy Master.

This incident in Boaz's barley field has a beautiful application to Bible study. To many Christians never practice a careful gleaning of the inspired Word. In fact, to such careless readers a large and precious portion of the Word is as utterly unknown territory as the headwaters of the Nile. They never search the Scriptures. But when we patiently go through the wonderful domain of truth with open eye bent down humbly to seek for the hid treasures, oh! what handfuls of fresh promises and fertile suggestions and marvelous teachings are dropped in our path! We pick up a truth never dreamed of in many an out-of-the-way passage. In some historical incident, or some neglected verse of prophecy, or some dry chapter about Jewish rites and ceremonies we find a whole sheaf of divine teaching. God never put one page in his Book without a purpose. There is more than a bushel of barley in the Book of Leviticus. Many persons pass by this portion of the Word as a mere upholstery shop of priestly robes and Jewish rituals. But to Him who can discern things of the Spirit the Book is full of most rich and rare instructiveness. It typifies the Christian life most wonderfully. Even that long catalogue of names in the fourth chapter of the First Book of Chronicles furnishes a text for a capital sermon in that single name of "Jabez," the child of sorrow, who turned out to be a man of many virtues. I once heard Mr. Moody talk for half an hour to a mission school, and the children were delighted. But he picked up his handful of fresh truth in the fence corners of a chapter in the Proverbs. It was a talk about the ant, the spider, the cony and the locust. Happy is that Sunday school class and happy is that congregation whose teacher understands where to find the handfuls of fresh truth in God's great field. He always lets fall such handfuls to the patient, prayer gleaner.

In every field which Providence opens up to us there is precious grain to reward our gleaning. Some of my readers may even now be treading a field over which the sharp sickle of adversity has passed with keen and cutting afflictions. Your hopes have been laid low. Has that stubble-field nothing left for you but the thorns of discontent and the brambles of unbelief? Will you be so blind and foolish as to prick your fingers with Satan's briars? My afflicted friend, the God of love will let fall some precious handfuls of comfort, if you will only search for them with the eye of patient humility. In fact, there are scores of golden passages in God's Word that were only intended for such as these. They are as truly designed for thee as is the letter left by the postman with thy own name on the envelope. These passages of comfort are Christ's love letters to thee. Never wouldst thou have received them if thou hadst not gone through the mown field of bitter disappointment or bereavement. Here is one handful of consolation let fall for thy gleaning "My grace is sufficient for thee."

"As thy day so shall thy strength be." "I will be with thee in trouble, and will deliver thee." "All things work together for good to them who love God." They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Here are but specimens of the treasures of strength and comfort which God dropeth in the path of his chastisements, for his own to gather up. In the closing verses of the ninety-first Psalm is a whole handful of divine promises, as sweet as honey and the honeycomb.

What graces, too, are to be gathered in those stubble-fields of affliction! Abraham found there the noble commendation that he was "the friend of God." Daniel won his crown there. Job came out of that field which the scythe had apparently swept clean, with a whole armful of spiritual blessings. Paul never would have been the man that he was if the first crop of his selfish aims and ambitions had not been cut away. Then he turned gleaner for the Lord, and went home to heaven more richly laden than Ruth came home from the barley field. To everyone of us the Master appointeth his or her field of toil or of trial. He hath the handful for each, if we have but the faith to look for it. At the final hour of judgment the question to each of us will be: "Where hast thou gleaned today?"—The Christian Intelligencer.

Pull-Down Play or Build-up Play.

By Rev. F. B. Meyer.

This difficulty about amusements, where to go, and where not to go, is not a new one. It agitated the Christians at Corinth centuries ago as it agitates us, and led up to one of those questions which the apostle answered in his first epistle.

Dean Farrar, in his graphic style, explains the difficulty and perplexity of their position. They were daily living in the great, wicked streets, in sight and hearing of everything that could quench spiritual aspirations and kindle carnal desires. The gay, common life pressed on them so closely, the splendid vision of Christ's advent seemed so far away, might they not mingle with the heathen festivals, join in the gay processions, watch the dancing-girls, or take part in the fun and frolic of the voluptuous city? Were they to live always on the heavenly manna, and never taste the onion, leek, and garlic of Egypt? Were they never again to drink of the foaming cup of earth's pleasure, and mingle in the dance, the feast, the pantomimic show?

In answer to these difficulties, the apostle laid down two principles, which contain between them the very light we need to enable us to pick our pathway through the world, to teach us how to act with regard to the thorny question of amusements.

"All things are lawful for me; but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful for me; but I will not be brought under the power of any." (1 Cor. 6:12.)

"All things are lawful; but all things are not expedient. All things are lawful; but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but each his neighbor's good." (1 Cor. 10:23, 24.)

First: We must not be enslaved by any form of pleasure. The apostle vowed that he would not be brought under the power of anything, however lawful or innocent it might be in itself. It is marvelous how easy it is to become enslaved to forms of pleasure-taking that in themselves are perfectly harmless and natural. A man may be so intoxicated with golf or cricket, a woman so fascinated with lawn-tennis, or bicycling, that they are spoiled for all the practical business of life, and, at the call of their favorite pastime, will at any moment renounce the most urgent and pressing engagements. It seems as though they can think, dream, and plan for nothing else.

When this is the case, whether the form of amusement be one of those healthy out-of-door pursuits already named, or the more hurtful absorption in the theatre, the ball, or the music-hall; when what should be only the means to an end becomes an end in itself; when we feel our best energies withdrawn from the serious demands of life, and dissipated by its flotsam and jetsam; when our soul is engrossed by the handling of a bar, the striking of a ball, the swiftness of a machine; it is time to pull up and consider which way we are drifting.

Surely life was given for higher purposes than these, and if it be said that all that pastimes react on the health and agility of the body, still we must reply that, at the best, the body is only the organ and instrument of the soul, and that it must be kept under and made subservient to those lofty purposes which the soul conceives in its secret place and executes in life's arena.

Next: We must have an eye to others. There are forms of amusement in which we cannot indulge without helping to destroy the work of God. We have no right to jeopardize the eternal interests of those who copy our example or who minister to our enjoyment.

Paul says that, so far as he was concerned, he felt at perfect liberty to accept an invitation to a meal in the precincts of an idle temple; but that

he would not go, lest the weak conscience of some fellow Christian should be defiled. Our attitude toward certain places of amusements and pastimes should be determined by our considering whether we would wish those that take their cue from our example to follow us thither. What effect will my conduct have on my children, my young brothers and sisters, the scholars in my Sunday-school class, and others who are not as strong as I am to resist the pernicious influences that are associated with this special form of amusement? Let me remember that young life is behind me, and though, as an experienced mountaineer, I might take the more precipitous route, for their sake I must follow the safe path.

Besides, we must consider whether the effect of some system that gives us pleasure may not be in the highest degree deleterious in its effect on those who minister to our laughter or love of spectacular display. Have we any right, for pleasure, to hold out baits of money to young girls or children or others, to jeopardize body and soul, and spend their days on the edge of the precipice? "All things edify not," said the apostle, and we must seek not only our own but another's weal.

On the whole, simple and natural pleasures are the best. The skate over the frozen pond, rather than the dance in the over-heated ball-room; the family party, with its olden games, rather than the scenic representation of music-hall or theatre; the real rather than the artificial, the day rather than the night, the dear ones of the home rather than the society of strangers.

Let every one have a hobby; let every one become proficient in some branch of natural science or history; let every one do something well, be it to handle the oar or alpenstock, use the camera, glide over the ringing ice, or climb the beetling crag. Let this man collect geological specimens, and that flowers or ferns, and that curiosities from various countries and people. But let there be some controlling interest, which shall give occupation in the summer ramble or the snatch of foreign travel, and shall afford amusement in recollection, arrangement, and comparison, when the long winter evenings would hang heavily on hand.

Whatever does not leave a way taste in our mouth; nor causes a feeling of compunction and regret as we review it; nor exerts a baleful effect on those who minister to our enjoyment; nor unfits us for prayer and communion with God; nor so dazzles and blinds us that we can find no pleasure in the simple delights of home and natural beauty; whatever is wholesome and health-giving, whatever is capable of being presented to God in prayer as an object of his blessing; whatever is in harmony with the tender, holy, unselfish, and blessed nature of Jesus in an amusement of which we may gladly avail ourselves; and it shall be to us as the whetting of the scythe amid the mowers' toils and as the mending of the nets torn by the midnight fishing-cruise.—Christian Endeavor World.

Keep the sunshine of a living faith in the heart. Do not let the shadow of discouragement and despondency fall upon your path. However weary you be, the promise of God will like the stars at night, never cease to shine, to cheer and strengthen. The best harvests are the longest in ripening. It is not pleasant to work in the earth plucking the ugly tares and weeds, but it is as necessary as sowing the seed. The harder the task, the more need of singing.—Royal Path of Life.

How strong, how peaceful, how deeply joyful our lives may be if they are sacramental, lived in memory of Jesus, the central stream of their deep determination, like this—doing the will of our Father.—Maltbie D. Babcock.

Why borrow trouble? A lie is always like a flaw in the metal. The human soul is a pearl of great price; for it the Lord came seeking. The firmest thing in this inferior world is a believing soul.—Leighton.

OUR GOD IS ABLE TO DELIVER US.

God hath a thousand keys to open a thousand doors for the deliverance of his own when it has come to the greatest extremity. Let us be faithful and care for our own part, which is to do and suffer for him, and lay God's part on himself, and leave it there; duties are ours, events are the Lord's. When our faith goeth to meddle with events, and to hold a court (if I may so speak) upon God's providence, and beginneth to say, "How wilt thou do this or that?" we lose ground, we have nothing to do there; it is our part to let the Almighty exercise his own office and steer his own helm.—Samuel Rutherford.

Everyright action and true thought sets the seal of its beauty on person and face.—John Ruskin.

There are many people in the world who don't know what they really are till circumstances show them.—Jean Ingelow.

Look for things to be glad about. Insist on being happy. It is your duty; it costs effort, but it pays. Happiness comes only through making those around you happy.—Selected.

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