

SEASONED WITH SALT

Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt.—Col. iv. : 6.

Several months ago I received a letter from one of our readers asking me to write on the subject of Sunday-afternoon conversation. My correspondent—like many country residents—lives too far from a church to attend more than one service each Sunday. She says that the friendly talk with a neighbor, which fills up the afternoon and evening, soon drifts away from discussion of the morning sermon into secular talk. She is disappointed, and feels that the Sunday is not the inspiration of the week, as it might be.

If I have taken a long time to answer this letter, it is not because I fail to see its importance, but rather because I have not words forcible enough to help those who are struggling to overcome a similar condition of things. Words are strange things. Sometimes they are like froth, and seem to have no power at all. Then, at other times, we realize that there are mighty for good or for evil. Of course, it is the character behind the words that tells most. One man may speak or write very fluently and make little impression, while another says a few quiet words which go straight to the heart of the hearers.

But I think my correspondent is right in desiring to have the Sunday conversation more helpful than a dissertation on the state of the crops or the latest fashion in millinery. God gives us Sunday to draw us higher, nearer to Himself and to each other. It is a day when we should take time to look up into our Master's face and grow strong through quiet fellowship with Him. He calls us apart from the ordinary work of the week to "rest awhile"—rest not only our bodies, but our minds and spirits. If we let the thought of the work fill our hearts, revealing itself as it always does in our conversation, then we lose the chance of drinking in joy and power and the invigorating touch of God.

Now, I am not suggesting that conversation on religious topics should be rigidly insisted on all through the hours of Sunday, and just as rigidly shut out of Saturday and Monday. Conversation is worth very little if it is formal and unnatural. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. If

we think of the highest things, then our everyday talk will reveal it plainly, and there is nothing wrong in letting our Sunday conversation occasionally drift into discussion of earthly matters, any more than it is wrong to let the thought of these things slip into our minds.

But we do want to spend God's holy day with Him. That is our privilege as well as our duty. And we want to be refreshed and strengthened by happy talk about spiritual things. It is an opportunity to be eagerly seized. Our speech should not be frivolous or stupid at any time. The Apostle's command is to let it be "with grace, seasoned with salt." The red-letter times of our life are the times of real heart-to-heart communion with other souls. These may be hours of spiritual fellowship only, times when we reach out through Christ, secretly and silently, and touch a heart that is dearest to us. Or they may be the rare moments when words are the real, quickening medium of spiritual fellowship. One of the joys of the life beyond death will surely be the joy of expressing our inmost selves. But even here we can do it far better than we usually do.

My advice is to make it the subject of definite and earnest prayer. Ask God to direct the conversation so that it may be inspiring. We all prefer a talk on the mysterious realities of the invisible life within, around and above us, to a wearisome discussion of outside topics. Then draw into the circle of speakers some of the great thinkers who will gladly take their share. This is easy in these days when the noblest thoughts of the noblest thinkers—as far as they have been able to express them in words—are set down in print. Prepare for the Sunday talk as you prepare for the Sunday dinner. Have bits marked in various books or papers, and take an opportunity of reading enough to start conversation. Or read these bits over and over, and think about them until they naturally color your talk.

Above all keep fresh in your heart the

fragrant remembrance that Christ is one of the family circle. His Presence will prevent any scandal or unkind gossip, any cutting sarcasm or unbecoming talk. He can direct the conversation as He did when walking with two disciples to Emmaus, until you might say with them: "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way?"

And when we talk of Him, the remembrance of His Presence should be like a glory in the room. "All that we say of Jesus we say to His face." How that thought transforms the common-place atmosphere!

I am afraid I have not helped anyone much with this Quiet Hour, but the opportunity is right in your way—the opportunity of seasoning with salt any tasteless conversation from the Atlantic to the Pacific, where you may be called to take a hand. A man was once bemoaning his lack of opportunities, and was so occupied in saying that he had none that he passed two of them on the road. One said to the other, "What a hurry he is in! He never even noticed us!"

Remember that it is not a very terrible thing to try and fail—the real failures are the people who are so afraid of failing that they don't try, or only try once or twice. Jacob A. Riis says:

"Some defeats are only installments of victory." But it is foolish to invite defeat by going unprepared. If we wish to keep the general home conversation at a high level, we must read inspiring books, think holy thoughts, and drink in more and more of God through daily communion with Him. And we must cultivate tact and sympathy, entering into the thoughts of others instead of dragging them by main force the way we want to go. There is the fragrance of beautiful courtesy in our Lord's conversation with a woman by the wayside, as described in the fourth chapter of St. John's Gospel. He leads her thoughts higher—and she catches the inspiration from His words and fires a whole town

with the desire to hear Him. And if He wants to reach a town through you, He can do it as easily. Only look up into the Face of the Living Christ—He can converse with you as with the woman of Samaria. "Speak to Him, thou, for He hears."

DORA FARNCOMB.

Editor "Hope's Quiet Hour":

In the year 1847 or 1848, I was a lad of 15. The Scotch minister in the fast-growing village in the Scotch settlement was asked to give a special sermon to members of the Bible class, Sunday school, and parents. His text was Eccles. iv. : 13: "Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished." He spoke of the first step of youthful life in occupation or employment, but above all the wisdom of that better part that would never be taken from them, that it was better than a foolish king that would not be admonished or warned of the evil he was doing to himself and others. He brought forward the thought that a man did not need to be a king, but the father and mother were king and queen of their household, and when counsel was given by minister and elders, that the youth was better than the man who held much possessions. When 16, I left school and learned a trade, where were eight or ten men of all nationalities, where smoking, drinking, swearing and foul language was common. How far did his words affect me or keep me from falling into those habits, or the mother with frilled-bordered, white, mutton cap and spectacles, who looked so kindly at me and raised a warning voice to beware, and who never allowed my brother or me to be out on street after dark. Curfew bell rang at 9 o'clock. I started to learn to smoke, but took very sick from it, dropped it, and subscribed for *Harper's Magazine*, just beginning, joined the Sons of Temperance, wore the big collar, and was nicknamed "The lad that wore the goose collar." I had a harder time to quit swearing, being passionate, and would come out at times when angry.

"78 AGAIN."

Thank God every morning when you get up that you have something to do which must be done whether you like it or not.

—KINGSLEY.

Hope's Quiet Hour



WHERE THE STREAM RUNS