

How to Keep Life from becoming Stale.

John Stuart Mill, in his autobiography, tells of a certain period in his life when, having asked himself the question whether he would be satisfied or happy could he suddenly have within his possession all he had been striving for, he was forced to give himself the answer that he would not. Brought very closely to him, the object of his whole life appeared not worth the while, and there was no other object to which he could turn with any interest.

This state of life-weariness or disenchantment, though seldom described with as much reality as in this confession is, nevertheless, a state which very frequently checks all the energy and darkens all the future of many a soul. We wonder if there is enough to live for; the very springs of life seem to be running dry.

"For still the doubt comes back,—can God provide
For the large heart of man what shall not pall?
Nor thro' eternal ages' endless tide
On weary spirits fall?"

Sometimes the causes are traceable, and sometimes the listlessness comes suddenly as from no cause at all. But among the fertile causes of it is satiety. Before we know it, we have had enough of the very thing of which we had thought there could never be enough. At other times, it arises from the sudden realization that we have over-estimated the number of possible pleasures. Where we had held out to ourselves the prospect of an endless variety of new ones, and had gone on supposing that they needed no careful cherishing or guarding, we discover that the number of them is more limited than we thought; that, after all, they are very few; and that, though they may be dressed up in different forms, we have practically sampled them all. If life is to be lived only for pleasures, it is practically over at a comparatively early date.

This weariness is an old companion of those who have gone on sinning. Where pleasures once seemed infinitely various, it turns out that there is no monotony like that of sin, and that the full gamut of it is soon run. There are only the same things to be done over again.

One of the first securities against this disease which makes us turn away from life is to learn how to take pleasure in simple things. Sooner or later we shall exhaust all the high flavors, there will not be enough rarities, and thrilling experiences will be all too few to satisfy those who have made happiness depend upon them, and who count nothing else as worthy to be called life. Dr. Van Dyke says that the key to Wordsworth's career was that, early in life, he found himself "bankrupted of joy." The thrilling and romantic experiences which he had promised himself gave out and disappointed him so that he was forced upon a new search for things that should make life worth living. Everybody knows how he found them. Sooner or later the supply of the extraordinary will give out, or else the taste which depends upon it will become more and more jaded. In our day there are very much in evidence what we may call the exotic temperaments, whose inclination is always toward the remote, the foreign, the unusual. All else is commonplace to them. Ordinary interests find them quite without response. Such as these are in great danger of finding life grow stale unless they surprise Wordsworth's secret, and make the re-experiment of life with simple things.

To a certain class of things Paul gives the magnificent description that against such there is no law,—not even the law of satiety; some things that will keep on blooming out forever. With these things we seldom make acquaintance at the start. We come back to them afterwards, as Wordsworth did.

Another safeguard against ennui—which has been well described as being "the want of a want, and the complaint of those who have nothing to complain of"—is the ability to refrain from pressing any pleasure beyond its limit. To know at what moment anything is at its best, at the full, and then to leave it with its flavor still perfect, not pressing it to the point where it is become common, is a wisdom which comes late, and not until we have learned the precarious nature of real pleasure. It is something which has to be watched, something which will not bear too coarse handling, and is a certainty only for such as are willing to stop a little short of the fullest enjoyment.

Gladstone, whose amazing vitality and exuberance has probably seemed to most people to be altogether due to nature, saw the possibility of listlessness coming to him, and was cool and deliberate in taking precautions against it. To experience the fascinations of some new subject of thought or study, and live into it with all one's might, at first deliberately and afterwards spontaneously, was one of the means by which he kept life in full flow up to the last.

But it is unthinkable that any spirit should be able to successfully fight off staleness without having new experiences of God. The Book of Common Prayer suggests the way to this by the manner in which it constantly changes its way of addressing him. At the beginning of each prayer is stated some attribute of God which brings him to the soul under a different aspect. Has God been to you only a being who forgives sins?

Have you never seen him except as the one who reminds you of shortcomings? Then learn variety in prayer. Nothing will more certainly produce variety and richness of feeling in life. Try to approach God in new ways.

That discipline by which John Stuart Mill worked his way back to a zest in life is the only certain way. His own objects of desire suddenly withered, and he began, as a last resort, to interest himself in the needs and joys of others with whom life had not yet suffered his own disillusionment. Little by little losing his life in theirs, and not expecting any pleasure, taking pains to please others, he said that gradually his soul was restored, the joy of life came back, and he again found the incentive without which one cannot live. His last resort was Christ's first one. Whosoever loathes his life shall find it. In most of our troubles it will be found that the thing our life most needs is to get lost for a little.—Sunday School Times.

The Story of a Hymn

One not infrequently sees witty and disparaging words, even in some religious papers, concerning the hymn "Oh, to be nothing." A correspondent of the Christian Register, referring to such remarks in that paper, sends to the editor the story of the hymn, and, in publishing it, the Christian Register says: "It is certain that no one, after reading the pathetic account of the circumstances under which the hymn was composed, could ever again speak lightly of it or its author." The story is as follows:

This hymn was composed by a young woman after she had endured an ordeal such as few mortals are doomed to confront. She was, from her birth, blessed with an almost exhaustless fund of health, vitality, and vivacity. While yet in her teens she became interested in the life and career of Florence Nightingale. To her she was the highest ideal of womanhood, and, to lift her own life to a like exalted standard, she secured a position in the training school for nurses connected with a London hospital. There she made a record for indomitable energy and tireless devotion which has rarely been approached. Her abounding health, iron nerve, and physical strength enabled her to defy fatigue and to almost master the power of sleep. In every new emergency, a new fountain of animal spirits seemed to open within her. Her entrance into a ward of invalids was like a sunbeam. The caressing, magnetic touch of her hand soothed over-wrought nerves and lulled hysterical fear. Pain, seemingly, relaxed its grip as she bent over a suffering victim, while her enormous strength and her skillful manipulations were the wonder of surgeons, the charm of patients, and the boast of the hospital authorities.

Two features in her unique countenance were always remarked, and are still remembered,—the pity and sympathy which kindled and brimmed over in her eyes, and the ever-changing curves of her ripe, red lips upon immaculate teeth. Added to this was the rare gift of moving with noiseless footfall and unrustling skirt, like an arrow of light, between the rows of invalid beds, to whose wakeful occupants she was the incarnation of strength, nerve, pity and purity.

On the 10th of August, 1869, a man, enormous in proportions and muscle, was brought to the hospital in a dying condition from an apparent fatal fall. A rapid examination convinced the head surgeon that his only hope lay in the speedy and perilous operation. The most skilled members of the staff were summoned, including our heroine, the only one of her sex selected. She was among the first to report. Never had she appeared to better advantage. Her dress, feminine alike in taste and utility, disclosed her shapely neck and the outlines of her superb bust. Her arms, snowy, but muscular, were bared to the shoulder. Her hair rolled back and coiled above her ears, crowned her head like a motionless wave-crest. She stood among those trained surgeons a female athlete, her face serious and pitiful, her manner and pose the most self-reliant and unperturbed of all.

The process of producing unconsciousness by anesthetics was not understood then as now, and the brawny patient, motionless upon the operating table, was believed to be fully under its power; and encircling him stood the chief surgeon and his staff, intent, alert, and ready for action. The first insertion of the keen steel broke the spell of the artificial sleep; and the patient, like an aroused Samson, rose and threw his enormous bulk on the operator, crushing him to the floor with his breast and arm, his huge limbs still remaining upon the operating table. All of the assistants stood panic-stricken and bewildered save our heroine, who proved equal to the critical emergency. Dropping the bowl in her hand, she slipped between the patient and the prostrate surgeon; and bracing herself on one bent knee and the other foot, she began slowly to force the patient back to the operating table, on which his trunk and limbs half rested. This released the head surgeon, who was in the act of rising, when an assistant stumbled against the table, which tipped it and threw the nurse from her nicely poised balance; and she fell beneath the combined

weight of the table and patient upon the upturned knife still clasped in the rising surgeon's hand. It pierced and severed her spinal column; and she lay a physical wreck collapsed, paralyzed, and unconscious. Her immense physical vitality defied death for two days. Her first gleam of consciousness came in a few hours, when she was heard to say, "Oh Father, why hast thou torn me from my usefulness?" a cry differing only in word, not in meaning, from "My God, why has thou forsaken me?" A few more hours of unconsciousness followed. Then came her last earthly awakening.

With serene face and distinct tone she said to the watcher, "Mary, write on my tablet a hymn I have just composed." Then she dictated, and "Mary" wrote the following lines:—

"Oh, to be nothing, nothing,
Helpless to lie at thy feet,
A broken and empty vessel,
For the Master's use made meet.

"Broken, that thou mightst heal me;
Empty, that thou mightst fill;
Willing shouldst thou not need me,
To patiently serve the still.

"Yes, I am nothing, nothing,
Painful the humbling may be,
Though low in the dust thou hast lain me,
I am serving and waiting on thee.

"Yes, to be nothing, nothing,
The mystery I plainly can see.
Thy fond arms are closing around me;
I am rising, dear Saviour, to thee.

—Zion's Advocate.

A Voice From the Prison.

Among all the influences that have tended to hasten man's degradation, none has reaped so great a harvest as intemperance. From its towering pedestal of supremacy it has looked down upon wavering man and yielding woman. The realm of its influence extends from horizon to horizon. Ever and anon its sceptre is wielded with great power. From the great white city, where the stars and stripes are wafted in the breeze from the capitol dome, to the realm of the Queen, where floats the Union Jack, whether the nation raises aloft the tri-color or the dragon and the fly, King Alcohol wields a power greater than the sword. Civilization is the greatest ally of which it boasts, for wherever civilization goes to instill into the hearts of the heathen the teachings of the lowly Nazarene, and to lay the foundation rock upon which all must stand, King Alcohol follows like a sceptre in the night. Its poisonous fangs touch the thin, pale lips of old age and smile in the presence of the nursing babe. It goes to bring false merriment to the acions of the rich in the mansions, while it deadens the heart and warps the soul of those who abide in the hovels. With merciless grasp it robs the cheek of young manhood and young womanhood of the flush of health and kills the lustre of the eye, which is the window of the soul. There sleep to-night in the cities of the dead countless thousands of bright gems, who to-day might stand erect as defenders of the nation and of home, were it not for rum.

Legions upon legions of young men and women are marching on toward the premature sleep from which there is no awakening and o'er the mound where mothers weep and sisters mourn and pray, will be placed a slab, upon which might be written in scarlet: "A victim of drink." I speak no words of censure, nor do I condemn, for man is weak and woman will yield, but to the council of the nations I ask: How long, O how long! Will it ever be thus, that our country join hands with the assassin of virtue and of honor, the destroyer of home, and of peace, and rob from humanity the hope of eternity and immortality? How long, O how long, will the treasure vaults of the nation be opened to receive the silver and gold upon which rests the stain of human blood, a soul destroyed, a heaven lost?

From the cities and the wilderness the cry goes up to-night. Ten thousand times ten thousand eyes are peering out from the windows of humble homes toward the cold, grim walls of the nation's darkest spots in every State. Ten thousand times ten thousand voices are speaking prayer this very night for the deliverance of fathers, brothers and husbands from the bondage of body and soul. A thousand homes in Michigan are sad tonight; the firesides are not what they used to be; the loneliness of death has entered; the mantle of gloom has fallen down upon the waiting loved ones. In vain do they seek consolation from the motto on the wall. "God Bless Our Home," for while gazing upon the motto, babes are crying for food and raiment. The cold and snows of winter are upon them, but King Alcohol laughs at the scene. O spirits of dead poets, arise. Arise, O ye sweet songsters and ye painters of ages gone. Let singers sing the story of sadness. Let poets write of sorrow, and ye master painters of centuries dead, arise, and in the light of truth, stretch the canvass from earth to heaven, so that all people, both here and there, may read the words in brightest scarlet: "King Alcohol, the king and curse of earth."—J. M. Higgins, Jackson Prison.

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