

OUR HOME CIRCLE.

AT THE DOOR OF THE YEAR.

The corridors of Time Are full of doors—the portals of closed years; We enter them no more, though bitter tears Beat hard against them, and we hear the chime Of lost dreams, large-like, in behind them ring At Memory's opening.

But one door stands ajar— The New Year's; while a golden chain of days Holds it half-shut. The eager foot delays That presses to its threshold's mighty bar; And fears that shrink, and hopes that shout aloud Around it wait and crowd.

It shuts back the unknown, And dare we truly welcome one more year, Who down the past a mocking laughter hear From idle aims like wandering breezes blown? We whose large aspirations limmed and shrank Till the year's scroll was blank.

We pause beside the door, Thy year, O God, how shall we enter in? How shall we thence Thy hidden treasures win? Shall we return in beggary, as before, When Thou art near at hand, with infinite wealth, Wisdom, and heavy health?

The footsteps of a child Sound close beside us. Listen! He will speak. His birthday bells have hardly rung a week, Yet has he trod the world's press undefiled. "Come with Me!" hear Him through His smiling say, "Behold, I am the way!"

Against the door His face Shines as the sun. His touch is a command; The years unfold before his baby hand! The beauty of His presence fills all space, "Enter through Me," He said, "nor wander more; For lo! I am the door."

And all doors openeth He, The New-born Christ, the Lord of the New Year, The threshold of our locked hearts standeth near; And while He gives us back love's rusted key, Our future on us with His eyes has smiled, Even as a little child.

THE HIDDEN CLOCK.

FOR THE NEW YEAR.

One lovely summer evening I was walking with a friend down a quiet street, when our attention was arrested by what we thought a curious sight. The day had been very hot, and most of the houses that we passed had the windows wide open to admit the air, which was now beginning to be pleasantly cool. In one house the lower sash was thrown up, and, as we walked by, we could see the pendulum of a clock that was on the wall, but the blind drawn over the upper part of the window hid the face from our sight.

"How singular that pendulum looks!" I said; "it is swinging away as if it were all alone, and were just going backwards and forwards to amuse itself."

"Yes," said my friend; "it is strange to watch that moving thing without seeing the other part of the clock. Do you know what it makes me think of?"

"Of what?" I asked.

"Well," said my companion, "somehow that pendulum, which we see while the clock is hidden, seems very much like our life on earth: slowly, regularly passing from us a day at a time. Each day seems like one tick of the clock, and each New Year like the striking of another hour. Now, as I look at that pendulum, there are some things that I know about the clock, and others that I cannot tell. I know there is a clock on the wall, and that, at some time, it has been set going, and that at another definite period it will stop. I know too that the clock did not set itself going, and without its permission every hour brings it nearer to the point when the weights will run down, and it cannot help stopping. But I cannot say how many times it has yet to tick. It may be that for several hours longer the pendulum will swing backwards and forwards, or, perhaps, the weights are nearly run down, and it has only a few more minutes to remain in motion.

"And I know just about as much and as little as to the duration of my own life. I was 'set going,' so to speak, without any consent or control of my own; I shall not be asked when I have had enough of life. We talk about time passing more swiftly as we grow older, and so it seems to do, though, in many cases the longer people live the harder it is for them to realize that they are coming nearer to the point when time shall be no longer. Yet we cannot really lessen the speed, or arrest the flight of our days. Sometimes we wish very much that they would pass quickly. Look at that sailor-boy, who is coming home from his first voyage. He hopes in a few days to be in port, and soon to meet his friends. How he wishes that the vessel would sail more swiftly, and the days fly more quickly, till he reaches his home! But 'time and tide' do not hasten, more than they wait for any one. Look at him again after a few weeks are over, and his holiday on shore is nearly spent. In a few days he must join his ship; he would give a good deal now to keep back the days from rushing on at such a rate; but he is just as unable to stop them now as he was to quicken their speed when he longed for the day to come that he should be free.

"Is there not something very solemn in the thought of the days that come and go so swiftly and silently without asking our leave, and all the more so because such tremendous consequences depend upon the manner in which we employ them?"

The pendulum has ticked away many hours and days since that summer evening. The clock may be worn out now; but the lesson of that hidden clock has not been forgotten by either of us. The great clock of Time is nearer run down than it was then.

It is about to strike the hour for the beginning of another year; and I should like to ask you, my friend, just to stop and think what you are doing with your days—those little portions of time that are given us so regularly, and seem to slip from us almost before we can call them our own. Have you ever considered what is the best investment for them?

Do you say?—"I am much too busy to trouble about such things. I get up long before it is light; I work like a horse in a mill all day long; then in the evening I am too tired to do anything, and go to bed with a splitting headache, which won't let a man think if he wants to, which I don't. We must get through life somehow, and then there's an end of it. And as to what's to come after, it's no use to trouble about it; I shall get on as well as most people."

Talk like that is often heard, but there are times when one is almost forced to think whether one will or no; and we are come to such a time just now. You don't notice the clock as it ticks quietly on, but when it strikes then you can't help looking up and noticing what hour it has reached. And so the days of the year have passed quickly away. Perhaps one has been so much like another that you have not noticed their rapid flight; but now at the commencement of a New Year, the most careless of us feel serious. I don't know where the last night of the Old Year finds you—not asleep I dare say; for somehow, few of us feel inclined to go early to bed on this particular night. Perhaps sitting at home by the fire; or it may be drinking the Old Year out and the New One in; or it is possible that just for a change you may have sauntered into the House of God, as many do on the last night of the year, as if to compound with God for all the other nights on sin bestowed. Just as some people think that, even if they spend all their lives in sin, it will be right at last if they can only get a minister, or some good person to come and pray by their death-bed. But wherever you are, I know you have been thinking—not very seriously perhaps, but you have sent some stray thoughts back over the past, and forward to meet the future; and we want you, just now, to ask yourself, "Why was this life given me? and how am I using it?"

One bright New Year's morning a young lady paused in her country walk and entered a cottage where a good old woman lived. "A Happy New Year to you, Mrs. —" was her cheery greeting. "The same to you," was the hearty response; "and I would like to say, Spend it to the Lord." This was quite a new idea to the young lady; the words kept coming up in her mind, till she began to wish to share the life that her poor old friend enjoyed; a life that could not be useless, because it was given to One who employs the least and the weakest; and better still, she sought till she found the way to live that life. What is the way? Do you really wish to know? Then wake up, and be in earnest, and come very humbly to God, asking him to help you. Ask Him, too, to forgive you for all the years you have squandered in idleness, or spent in open rebellion against Him, and for Christ's sake to receive you, and "create in you a clean heart." Then, if you thus put God in the centre of your life, so that His glory is the mainspring of your actions, you will not feel uneasy about the flight of time; for—

"It matters little at what hour of the day the righteous fall asleep, Death cannot come to him untimely who is fit to die."

THEY WOULD NOT SAVE HIM.

The Hon. W. E. Dodge, in an address before a meeting of the Evangelical Alliance held recently in Liverpool, England, said:—"My summer residence is on our beautiful Hudson River, lined for fifty miles from our city by the most noble dwellings of our wealthy citizens. In one of these elegant mansions was the home of one of our principal lawyers in New York. His wife was a lovely, highly educated lady, but for a number of years there was this dark cloud of

intemperance hanging over that residence. There was scarcely anyone seen about the dwelling during the summer; but one day the wife came to my door and asked to see me privately. She then opened her heart to me (I had not time to go into the whole of it), to the effect that her husband had periodical fits, during which he left his home and business in New York, and spent two or three weeks in a state of constant beastly drunkenness, till she herself had given up all society. She saw that he was going down step by step, and could not live long, and she begged that I would come and speak to him, and see if something could not be done to save him. I knew that he was a proud, high-spirited man, and asked God to help me. I went to him, and as kindly as I knew how I opened the whole case to him, and set before him the dangers that were impending, and what must inevitably be the consequence unless he changed. The result was a solemn promise on his part that he would abstain entirely, and that he would unite with our national temperance society. Two days after his father, one of the most eminent lawyers in America, and his brother, whose name is a household word not only in America but over England, came into my private office, and with tears in their eyes took my hand and thanked me for what I had done for the brother and son. I said, "He has promised the day after to-morrow to meet me by appointment at our National Temperance Society Office and sign the pledge. I want you to come with him," and they thanked me and promised to come. The morning arrived, and they came into one of our private rooms, and the father again repeated his grateful acknowledgments for what I had done. I turned to him and said, "This is a very solemn hour. It is the turning point in your son's life. He has come here to sign the total abstinence pledge, and I want you—the father—and you—the brother—to sign the pledge with him."

This tall, aged man, raised himself to his full height and said, "I do not think, Mr. Dodge, that is necessary. I do not think there is any necessity for that at all." The brother said the same. I took them aside and said, "I did have hope of saving this brother and son, but unless you are willing to make the sacrifice yourselves and join with him I shall have but little hope of success." They declined. I took up the pledge and read it, and the brother whom I wished to reform said, "I can't sign that Mr. Dodge, I am willing to sign a pledge that I will never touch another drop of intoxicating drink myself, but I can't say I will remove it from my table. I have friends—my brother, and father, and others—and I don't want to deprive them of their privilege for my sake." I said, "My friend, after fifty years' experience I tell you your only hope is in banishing it from your house for ever." The result was he signed a compromise pledge. I went home and said to my wife, "That poor man is gone. I thought he was saved, but he is gone. Neither the father nor the brother is prepared to make any sacrifice for him, and he does not understand the philosophy of the matter sufficiently to say that he will banish it from his own table." The result was that some six months after, as we attended a great entertainment at the house of the brother, I saw this same young man bring to that wife who came to my house the glass of wine, and she took it in her hand. As I passed she said, "See that, Mr. Dodge." "Yes, I see it." In less than three months from that day that poor man died of delirium tremens.—*Albion News.*

OLD STYLE—NEW STYLE.

The exact length of a year is 365 1/4 days, lacking about 11 minutes. In correcting the calendar, nearly two thousand years ago, Julius Cæsar reckoned it at exactly 365 days, and made every fourth year consist of 366 days. This is an excess of 45 minutes in four years; and this error being discovered, Pope Gregory XIII. ordained another correction to take place in 1582. He ordered that the dates should be altered so that the fixed feasts of the church should take the dates they would have had if there had been no error from the time of the Council of Nicæa, A. D. 1325. The error amounted to ten days, so Christmas day, 1582, was celebrated on the 15th of December, but it was called as before, the 25th, i. e., ten days were omitted. England did not adopt this change until 1752; it was ordered that the third day of February should be called the fourteenth, thus omitting eleven days. Washington was born Feb. 11, 1732, O. S.; to adjust it to new style, his birthday is put on the

22nd, for the day that would have been the 11th of February would that year and thereafter be called the 22nd.

Another change was also made in Britain and other colonies with the new style. The beginning of the year was changed from the 25th of March to the first of January, so that 1751 lost its January, February and 24 days of March, and they were counted as the first part of the year 1752, new style, or the last part of 1751, old style, and so with any date previous to March 25th, if given in new style and old style, the year will differ.

Russia has not yet made the change, and now the error is 12 days, so that they in Russia celebrate Christmas 12 days after the other European countries.

THE OLDEST CITY IN THE WORLD.

Damascus is the oldest city in the world. Tyre and Sidon have crumbled on the shore. Baalbec is a ruin; Palmyra is buried in a desert; Nineveh and Babylon have disappeared from the Tigris and the Euphrates. Damascus remains what it was before the days of Abraham—a centre of trade and travel—an isle of verdure in the midst of an oasis; "a presidential capital," with martial and sacred associations extending through thirty centuries. It was near Damascus that Saul of Tarsus saw the brightness of the sun; the street which is called Strait, in which it is said "he prayed," still runs through the city. The caravan comes and goes as it did one thousand years ago; there are still the sheik, the ass, and the water-wheel; the merchants of the Euphrates and Mediterranean still occupy the streets "with the multitudes of their wares." The city which Mohammed surveyed from a neighboring height, and was afraid to enter "because it was given to have but one paradise, and for his part he was resolved not to have it in this world, is to-day what Julian calls "Eye of the East," as it was in the time of Isaiah, "The Head of Syria." From Damascus came the damson, our blue plum, and the delicious apricot of Portugal called damasco; damask, our beautiful fabric of cotton and silk, with vines and flowers raised upon a smooth, bright ground the damask rose introduced into England in the time of Henry VIII.; the Damascus blade so famous the world over for its keen edge and wonderful elasticity, the secret of whose manufacture was lost when Tamurlane carried the artist into Persia; and that beautiful art of inlaying wood and steel with gold and silver, a kind of mosaic engraving and sculpture united—called damaskeening—with which boxes, bureaus and swords are ornamented. It is still a city of flowers and bright waters; the streams of Lebanon and the "silk of gold" murmur and sparkle in the wilderness of the Syrian gardens.

THE YEAR HAS GONE.

Has gone, and with it many a glorious thought Of happy dreams. Its mark is on each brow, Its shadows in each heart. In its swift course It waded its scepter o'er the beautiful, And they are not. It laid its pallid hand Upon the strong man, and the haughty form Is fallen, and the flashing eye is dim. It trod the hall of revelry, where thronged The bright and joyous, and the tearful wail Of stricken ones is heard where erst the song And reckless shout resounded. It passed o'er The battle-plain where sword and spear and shield Flashed in the light of midday, and the strength Of serried hosts is shivered, and the grass Green from the soil of carnage, waves above The crushed and moldering skeleton. It came And faded like a wreath of mist at eve; Yet ere it melted in the viewless air It heralded its millions to their home In the dim lane of dreams.

George D. Prentice.

THE REMEDY.

The Rev. Dr. Howard Crosby gives, in the *Sunday Afternoon*, advice to mothers about the training of their daughters. He says that the idea of uselessness as a fashionable necessity for a young woman is wrong. "The boys, after leaving school or college, naturally gravitate to commerce, law, medicine, science or divinity; but the girls at a like period begin to play the fine lady, spending their days in petty idleness. The only question that seems to be asked is, 'How can I best amuse myself?'" Dr. Crosby's remedy for this evil is regular daily tasks for girls, either of household or charitable work, or of self-improvement. He thinks that young women trained in that way are more likely to get good husbands than those who devote themselves to folly. He adds:

"Perhaps you have a notion that if your daughter is out of 'society' she might as well be in Sahara or Kamschatka, and you have brought your belief to believe that the only 'society' on earth is that which is distinguished by white kid gloves and 'germans.' Did you ever soberly think of the possibility of life outside of the charmed circle? It is humbly believed by some that men and women, both old and young who have had brains and hearts, have managed to enjoy life without initiation into the mysteries of fashion. Some have dared to think that true refinement is best cultivated in a less artificial atmosphere."

OUR YOUNG FOLKS.

A STRANGE NEW YEAR'S DAY.

A strange New Year's Day, indeed, it was for Charlie King. He had never spent one like it before, and was sincerely hoping he would never spend another like it as long as he lived.

This is the way it came about: Charlie King lived in a pleasant country town, not far from the great city of P—. His parents were not rich, but were in good circumstances, and Charlie, with his two brothers and a sister, had a very cheery and comfortable home. One would think, looking in upon this family of a winter's evening, when all were gathered round a table full of papers and books, and bright with the light of a student-lamp, that nothing was wanting to make their life delightful. If there was anybody in the world that ought to have been contented, that person was Charlie King.

But Charlie was not contented. He had somehow got hold of a book of adventures on the sea, and his imagination had been so inflamed by this book, that home seemed dry and tame, and he could think of nothing with pleasure but the life of a sailor. All the books he could find in the library, or borrow from his friends, which treated of the sea he devoured with an ever-growing interest. He even dreamed at night of the sailor's life, and in his sleep was filled with longing to taste its freedom and joy.

Perhaps if he had spoken to his parents on the subject, they might have consented to his trying ocean life for a while, and might have secured some pleasant situation for him. But he was afraid that they would only laugh at him, and so determined that he would quietly slip off and find a place for himself. One autumn morning he put this resolution into effect. The thought of the pain he would give his mother, whom he tenderly loved, had long held him back; but now even this was swallowed up, and he made his way as quickly as he could to the wharves of the great city, near by, where he knew a half dozen ships were preparing to sail.

As Providence would have it—for God meant to teach this boy a needed though hard lesson—Charlie found a place on a ship bound for the East Indies. The night after his engagement the ship started on her course. Charlie rose the next

morning sore from the hard bed on which he had slept, and troubled with remorseful thoughts. Still the movement of the ship was so pleasant, and the breeze so fresh, that he soon forgot his discomforts and began thoroughly to enjoy himself. But a change soon took place. When the bay was reached, and the deep swell of the sea caught the ship in its arms, and rocked it up and down, Charlie found himself growing deathly sick.

Oh, how sick he was! For three days he could scarcely lift up his head. And how the older sailors made sport of him! The captain was kind enough, but he had employed Charlie to work, and he could not allow him to be idle; so, sick as he was, he had to do what he could. And this made him homesick. When faint and feeble, he crawled to his berth, there was no gentle mother's hand to be laid on his head, no delicate meals to tempt his appetite. Often in these first days would the poor boy fall asleep on his hard bed, weeping over his folly and longing for home.

And so the days went on. Charlie grew stronger and more accustomed to the sea. He could even enjoy standing on the spars as they danced up and down, and could climb to the mast-head without the least dizziness. But he was far from happy. The life of a sailor had lost all its romance for him. To wash pots and kettles for the cook, to make the captain's bed and sweep the decks, and pull until his shoulders ached, at the ropes, made up a very different experience from what he had imagined in his pleasant country home. In short, the life of a sailor was found by Charlie King to be hard, dry and commonplace. If he could have had with him some of those favorite authors who had tempted him to leave friends and home, he would have felt inclined to pitch them into the sea.

And now at last the New Year's Day had come. In the King household much had always been made of the holidays. There were Christmas presents for every member of the family, and on New Year's Day a grand turkey dinner, with plum-pudding for dessert. This year there were no Christmas presents for Charlie, and no New Year's dinner, beyond the pork and hard bread which he had to eat every day. And then it was not cold weather, such as he had always known on New Year's Day. They were now far to the south, and Charlie found it more comfortable to go without shoes, and with as little clothing as possible. How strange it all seemed to him! In the afternoon he sat down and thought of the dear ones far away. Pretty soon he found that the tears would come, and, afraid that the sailors would see him, he crept up to the main-top. There, with his arm around the mast, he stood looking longingly toward home, and thinking of the family circle gathered there. As he looked it seemed to him that he could almost see them. Then he lifted up his heart in prayer. "O God," he said, "keep my dear father and mother, and Joe and Frank and Emma. And, oh, do forgive and keep me, and bring me safe to them once more."

God heard this prayer. The next fall, nearly a year after Charlie had run away, the good ship on which he was employed turned in at the capes, and went sailing up the river. The boy could scarcely contain himself. At Calcutta he had written home to his people, telling them all about what he had done, and imploring their forgiveness. He had not heard from them, but he felt sure they would receive him back again to their hearts. So when the vessel ran into its place at the wharf, he scanned with eager interest the faces of the people who stood waiting. Nor did he look in vain. There, near the landing-place, were his own dear father and mother, looking a little older and thinner than when he went away, but with the light of expectancy and hope beaming from their eyes. In a moment he had leaped over the ship's rail, and was at their side.

"Mother," said Charlie, as they sat talking the next New Year's, "it was very wrong for me to run away as I did, and I was a great fool for doing so. Yet God has come out of the evil. Last New Year's Day, far from you, and full of sorrow and longing, I offered my first prayer to God. He showed me my sinfulness, and then forgave me and filled me with peace. It was a New Year's day to me in more senses than one; for since then he has been with me and blessed me, and I have been trying to live for him."

"My dear boy," replied Mrs. King, "God's ways are not our ways. Let us thank him that he makes even our follies and sins the means of bringing us to Himself."

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