

THE GLADNESS OF ENTHUSIASTIC SERVICE

I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.—2 Cor., xii.: 15.

"O, the rare, sweet sense of living, when one's heart leaps to his labor, And the very joy of doing is life's richest, noblest dower! Let the poor—yea, poor in spirit—crave the purple of his neighbor, Give me just the strength for serving, and the golden present hour!"

There are plenty of people in the world to be pitied—among them many mis-called "rich" people, who are finding God's great gift of time a heavy burden on their hands—but don't let us waste pity where it is entirely uncalled for. Pity, if you please, one whose "soul" is starved and dressed in rags, "a beggar, with a million bits of gold," but never think anyone who is enthusiastically devoting his life to the service of God and man is to be pitied. St. Paul's gladness was not dependent on the gratitude of those to whom he so willingly devoted himself. If he had been working for wages—even the wages of gratitude—he would not have poured out loving service so joyously when it was often met by coldness, indifference, or active opposition. Our Master, who came to be the King of servants, must have found joy in stooping to wash His disciples' feet, the joy of willing service which He calls us to share.

No one can read the wonderful story of the gentle Francis of Assisi, without feeling the childlike gladness which was the natural result of his crystal purity of soul and wholehearted devotion to his fellows for Christ's sake. It is only a very shallow critic who will dare to call him a "fanatic," just because his methods are not exactly what we approve of in this century. Though we may not feel that it is our duty to fling away all worldly possessions, and walk the earth barefoot and homeless as he did, yet all Christians are called to copy him in his life of enthusiastic service. No story of romance could be more full of intense interest than his, and if it is interesting to read about his burning zeal, how much more interesting it must have been to live such a life of active love. No wonder he drew hearts after him by thousands when he was continually drinking in the love of God, and pouring it out everywhere with a reckless prodigality that reminds one of the sun that shines alike on the evil and on the good. Each day was a true resurrection day—a day of joy and gladness—for it was crammed with opportunities of service. He saw Christ everywhere, not only recognizing Him in the persons of men, but even in birds and flowers; and to recognize Him was to spring instantly to serve Him in every possible way. His wonderful joy—a joy that rested not at all on external circumstances—has for hundreds of years been an object lesson to the world, a lesson that will never lose its effect. As the writer of "Adventure for God" boldly declares: "The Christian life is not a life of renunciation, but a life of consecration—a life that means giving up only in so far as giving up is giving upward—giving upward of the whole self, its gifts, its present and its future. It is the life of courageous freedom, the life of security in peril, the life of abundance in the midst of want, the life of peace in the midst of care, the life of large fellowship in the heart's loneliness."

Let none dare pity the missionary; for that man stands exultant, with the emblem of his vocation bound to his brow as a monarch wears a diadem.

God is faithful, and the promise to those who take up the cross and follow the King is continually being fulfilled: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it." We cannot be happy unless we are climbing up after higher and ever higher life.

"A greater light puts out the lesser light—

So be it ever!—such is God's high law—

The selfsame Sun that calls the flowers from earth,

Withers them soon, to give the fruit free birth;

Hope's Quiet Hour

The nobler spirit to whom much is given, Must take still more, though in that more there lie The risk of losing all: to gaze at Heaven, We blind our earthly eyes; to live we die!"

If life is not interesting to us—if we find in it more prose than poetry—let us try this plan of enthusiastic service. Then, unless the fountain of joy is choked or poisoned by some cherished sin, we too shall find life full of glad interest.

One day I was talking to a Jew who has been for fifteen years engaged in relief work among his own people. He is very enthusiastic in his plans for uplifting the poor, flinging himself into the work seven days in a week, utterly regardless of the strain on his own body, mind and spirit. I told him he was following in the steps of Christ, and was a Christian without knowing it. He replied: "I wish Christ were alive now, for He is greatly needed, and if He were alive to-day, every Jew would be a Christian."

"But," I said, "that is just where you Jews make a great mistake, for He is alive and in the world to-day." That Jew is living a life of service, and has found the secret of an interesting life, though he is not as glad as he would be if he knew the Master he is faithfully serving.

The Church is the Bride of Christ, and must rejoice in preparing for His return. "Behold, I come quickly," He says. Why, He may come today! Indeed, He surely will come today in the person of some of His brothers and sisters. Let us hurry to meet Him, let us minister to Him of our best, and gladness will certainly spring up in our hearts. Bring darkness and light together, and the light must always conquer; bring sadness and joy together, and joy will be victorious, too. And joy is not only a pleasant thing to possess, it is a positive sin to live our lives without it. If we have no joy in our hearts, then there must be something wrong with our Christianity, for we are commanded to rejoice in the Lord, "Alway." That means when you are serving Him by

scrubbing His floors or washing His windows, just as much as when you are waiting on a sick person, or preparing a sermon. Holiness is health of soul, and should reveal itself by the outward signs of vigorous health—glad activity, a free, quick step, a sunny face, and cheerful voice, and a hearty interest in your everyday work, and in the people around you. Everyone is interesting if you can only get through the shell and touch the person underneath. In every soul we may see something of God. Some are like polished mirrors, reflecting His face, so that the slightest contact with them, or even the thought of them, sends one's heart upwards almost involuntarily; while in others the image of God is very dim and distorted. But even then we know it must be there, know that in serving them we are serving our Master and Lord. With this glad thought in our minds, the ordinary routine of daily work is changed to the grand and glorious sacrifice of a martyr—a true witness for Christ. Then every duty becomes an inspiring opportunity, and every day is a red-letter day—a holiday, because it is a holy day. This is the Midas-touch which can change common earthenware into bright and shining gold. I have no patience with the pessimists who tell children that youth is the happiest time in life. It is an instinct with us all to press forward to something better than we already have, and it is a true instinct. Those who consecrate their lives to God in childhood, will surely find that their path shines more and more until the Sun of Righteousness floods every day with inner sunshine—deep joy, which is infinitely more satisfying than the gay light-heartedness of childhood. Every day brings fresh opportunities of touching other lives, and of growing in the knowledge of God, which, as our Lord tells us, is "life eternal." Then there is the joy of making real progress in spiritual growth, for it is false humility to shut one's eyes to that progress when there is a steady struggle after God and holiness.

We hear a great deal in these days about a "strenuous life." Well, that is the kind of life we should live. Those who settle down to a half-hearted kind

of Christianity, are sure to find life dull and disappointing. Christianity is not just the conscientious doing of one's duty, it is enthusiastic devotion to the only Master who can fully satisfy the hungry heart. Though He is out of sight, He is not a long way off. You can find Him in the person of the dear father or mother, husband, wife or child, in the neighbor or visitor, or you may even serve Him by throwing crumbs to His birds, or watering His flowers. If all other service be denied you, there is the rich field of your own being to cultivate. The body should be tenderly cared for and kept clean and healthy, because it is God's holy temple, and the soul should be held always in the light of His Presence until it glows with the radiant beauty of holiness.

With all these doors of opportunity standing wide open, surely no one should find life narrow, commonplace or uninteresting. And no one can walk through life with the fearless, happy trust of a dearly-loved child in his own father's house, without radiating brightness. Joy is very infectious, and we can render grand service to our brothers and sisters just by being happy. It is no use pretending to be happy. The gladness must spring like a living fountain, ever fresh from the Christ within the heart, if it is to do real service. We must walk with God every day in the week if we are to be mirrors reflecting the Sun of Righteousness. The Sun is always shining, but the trouble with us is that we don't always walk with faces upturned to reflect His light. We can get to God through serving man, and we can get to man through serving God. Our duty—and privilege—towards God, and our duty—and privilege—towards our neighbor, are so intimately joined together that it is impossible to separate them. We cannot really serve God without serving man, too; we cannot really serve our neighbor without climbing ever nearer and nearer to God, where only true and living gladness is to be found.

"There's heaven above, and night by night

I look right through its gorgeous roof; No suns and moons, though e'er so bright,

Avail to stop me; splendor-proof I keep the broods of stars aloof: For I intend to get to God, For 'tis to God I speed so fast, For in God's breast, my own abode, Those shoals of dazzling glory passed, I lay my spirit down at last."

DORA FARNCOMB.



BEFORE SUMMER WAS DONE