

CHATS WITH YOUNG MEN

SENSITIVENESS

Time was, I shrank from what was right, From fear of what was wrong; I would not brave the sacred fight, Because the foe was strong.

THE CENSOR

Some time ago my heart was moved to pity. A friend of mine who has been working faithfully for a railroad for many years, related sadly that he had to cede a good and lucrative position to a favorite of the manager and take an inferior place with considerably less pay.

They tell of a quaint philosopher of ancient Greece, Diogenes, who in broad daylight was seen to go about the crowded market place with a burning lantern. Upon being asked what he was about he replied: I am trying to find an honest man.

In younger days, when idealism and optimism run high, one fancies he will find one or the other man whose justice in every department is sure to show him the folly of his dreams.

The one great obstacle to the observance of absolute justice is self-love, an element foreign to no human being. Then, too, ignorance and weakness, two traits that are also a common heritage of our kind often counteract the demands of justice.

In my philosophical musings I frequently dwell on the relations of the virtues of charity and justice. Charity is more winning and fascinating, but justice commands more reverence and esteem.

A charitable man is loved, a just man is respected. For my friend give me a charitable man, for my foreman or superior give me a just man.

The best way to discover the sinuous tracks of human nature is to observe carefully the operations of your own heart. By following this method I notice I am not inclined to injustice towards others but when some selfish advantage lures me.

Whoever is beneath me and offers no possible rivalry to me can be sure of my good will, my encouragement and generosity. But once a man is a menace to my own position and a competitor for my popularity, my honors or dignity, I am strongly inclined to have a sinister feeling for him, to suspect him in various ways and to ferret out some reason or other to slight him, to decry and belittle him, to ignore him directly or indirectly, to shelve and eliminate him entirely, the sooner the better.

I always yield to this tendency. God forbid! but the inclination is there at any rate, and the stronger my prospective rival is, the more brilliant his parts, the more promising his gifts and the higher his aspirations, the more I am tempted to nip his rising in the bud and to blast his prospects thoroughly.

He was standing one day at a window overlooking the Vatican gardens when he noticed a boy who was climbing with great agility the rather high wall which surrounded the grounds. Having accomplished the difficult feat he ran swiftly toward a rosebush which had been planted seventy or eighty years and which was just then covered with lovely flowers.

In this way, I say, I notice that my heart operates when left to itself. It is therefore not surprising to what extreme and heartless measures it will have recourse to attain its object, if it is not duly restrained by the virtue of justice. No one ever persecutes or injures another without justifying his conduct in his own mind.

The enemies of our Lord made their case, in spite of its basest injustice, appear plausible to the mob. So, too, no just man has ever been or is persecuted but his enemies have satisfied themselves, successfully or not, that he is a criminal and deserves all the maltreatment meted out to him.

There is scarcely a great man in history who did not endure the bitter stings of injustice and spend years under a cloud of undeserved suspicion and ill-will. This is the test of true greatness of soul.

Presidents and superintendents, however, generals, governors, foremen, managers and bosses of all kinds will ever do well to bear in mind that nothing will so much gain and hold the respect of their subjects and beget in them the harmony of action and the enthusiasm of endeavor as the unswerving fairness and impartiality of their leaders.

OUR BOYS AND GIRLS HOW TO BE HAPPY (It is related that on being asked by his little niece, Alice, to write something in her album on "How to be happy," Bishop Vaughan took his pen and wrote as follows:)

There was once a hermit Who lived in a wood, And the way to be happy He well understood.

Now I wanted to know— The true secret of bliss, So I sought the old hermit And I said to him this:

"Oh, please, Holy Father, I've something to say, I wish to be happy, Pray show me the way."

The hermit smiled, And his saintly old face Seemed beaming all over With God's holy grace.

And he said: "To be happy Is a gift from above, To those alone given Whose hearts are all love.

You must love the good God, And do all that you can To show you wish well To each dear fellow-man.

You must think less of self, And of others think more, Then will joy and delight Soon enter your door."

THE VATICAN ROSE

Pope Leo X., who filled the chair of Peter from 1518 to 1520, was a man of singularly benevolent disposition and rare affability of manner. In a special manner he was the friend of children.

He was standing one day at a window overlooking the Vatican gardens when he noticed a boy who was climbing with great agility the rather high wall which surrounded the grounds. Having accomplished the difficult feat he ran swiftly toward a rosebush which had been planted seventy or eighty years and which was just then covered with lovely flowers.

Furtively glancing round, the boy hastily snatched one of the roses and set off at full speed evidently

hoping to escape as he had entered. But he was pursued. An officer of the Pope's bodyguard, who had been an unseen witness of the larceny, quickly captured the culprit.

The Pope, whose curiosity was aroused, ordered the boy to be brought before him. When the little criminal stood trembling in his presence the Holy Father gently questioned him.

"Why did you enter the garden and take away a rose?" "Your Holiness," stammered the youth, "my mother is very ill and we are very poor. Last night she dreamed that she would recover if she had a rose out of the Vatican gardens. I determined to get her one even if I risked my life."

His Holiness was touched by the boy's love for his mother. "It was not quite right of you, my child," he said, in a kind voice; "but I forgive you. Take the rose to your mother, with my blessing." Filled with delight, the boy hurried away. Scarcely had he reached home when the Pope's physician arrived there. He had been sent by the Holy Father himself to see the sick woman. Having inquired into her case, the doctor prescribed suitable remedies, and before long the poor mother regained health and strength. Her dream was verified.

The Pope was so pleased with the boy's filial love that he arranged for his education. He never had cause to regret his benevolence. His protégé became a holy and learned priest. He always retained the most grateful recollection of his benefactor; and in the extreme old age to which he lived it was one of his chief delights to relate the story of the Vatican rose.—The Tablet.

THE BELL OF JUSTICE

It is an old story but one that can not be told too often how, in one of the old cities of Italy, the King caused a bell to be hung in a tower in one of the public squares, and called it a "Bell of Justice," and commanded that any one who had been wronged should go and ring the bell and so call the magistrate of the city and ask and receive justice.

And when in course of time the bell rope rotted away, a wild vine was tied to it to lengthen it; and one day an old and starving horse that had been abandoned by its owner and turned out to die, wandered into the tower, and in trying to eat the vine-stalks, rang the bell. The magistrate of the city coming to see who had rung the bell found the old and starving horse. And he caused the owner of the horse, in whose service he had toiled and been worn out, to be summoned before him, and he decreed that as this poor horse had rung the "Bell of Justice," he should have justice, and that during the horse's life his owner should provide for him proper food and drink and a stable.

LONELINESS

Strange is the pilgrimage of man, not unlike the passage of a summer day. In the morning his sun rises, feebly at first. It ascends the horizon; it reaches the zenith of its glory and majesty, and gradually begins to decline. Or the journey of man through this earthly pilgrimage may be compared to the outgoing of a ship at sea. With sails unfurled and prow erect, it begins its slow passage out into the deep. Little by little the shore is left behind; it is forced onward, while in the distance, the faint outline of familiar landmarks begins to recede.

A slender thread of silver foam marks its bird-like passage into the vast Unknown. It becomes a tiny speck upon the horizon, and finally appears to dip, like a weary bird, its tired wings into the mighty bosom of the deep. It is gone.

As he journeys through life, man is frequently confronted with the spectre of loneliness, in reality a faint image of the Angel, Death. As a light-hearted child, he is led by strange hands into a darkened room where one whom he dearly loved and who has cherished him most tenderly lies shrouded in a strange and terrifying peace. They who conduct him thither speak in hushed tones, telling him that this is death. Strange, grim unkind personality, it represents a being whom he does not comprehend. Suddenly, on the horizon of his carefree life, there scurries a dark cloud. He sheds tears, scarcely knowing the reason for his grief, while upon his childish consciousness dawns the horrid realization that sunshine and butterflies and sweet and gracious faces pass by. Scented breezes waft over orchards and meadows only to be succeeded by chilling blasts. Life, so bright, so joyous, comes to an end, and that end is death.

When his consciousness has still further developed, the boy realizes the meaning of death. In the midst of his busy work or play there passes a shadow; a grim funeral procession goes along the village street. Now and again faces are missing from the throng that he knows. There are vacant places, cradles of little children, grandfathers' rocking chairs; busy toots are idle, and there are a few more habitations in the little white City of the Dead.

So, after a time, the youth comes to the startling discovery that life is, should be, an active preparation for death. Men are sometimes very much alone when they are surrounded by

KINDNESS

Of all the gifts to be prayed for, next to grace at heart, tact, and gentleness in manner are the most desirable. A brusque, shy, curt manner, a cold indifference, a snappish petulance, a brutal appearance of stolidity, antagonize and wound and rob even really kind actions of half their value. It is

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the faces and forms of those dearest and most familiar to them) In the midst of crowded streets, shops, dwellings, in the busy hum of machinery and the din of a thousand shrill noises of the city,—a man may be very much alone.

The footprints of a man are awe-inspiring to the traveler who comes upon them in some isolated tract of desert, in the tropical jungle, in the frozen regions of the far North Pole. He encounters them with something akin to fear, like Robinson Crusoe, discovering the marks of a white man in the trackless sands of his abandoned home.

Men are started from their solitude by unlooked-for interruptions; they are forced out from their secret thoughts in the certain knowledge that they are observed by others,—most of all by the grim spectre, Death. Some day they must claim the intimate attentions of this unwelcome visitor. In the thought of death, all men save the Saints are very much alone.

In the story of saintly and heroic lives, there are many who overcome this craven fear of loneliness who, realized that, after the first stern encounter with spiritual desolation, there comes a time of reckoning with the soul. This reckoning made courageously and faithfully, there succeeds a great peace and calm. This is the condition which a great Mystic has aptly called "The Dark Night of the Soul." Its aspects loom black and ghostly at first and plunge the untried into desolation. It is like a child walking into the dark, at first he fears the possible phantoms which lurk hidden beneath chair and bedstead, the mysterious shadows which peep in at the windows and play about the floor. But courageously forcing himself to lose his hold of his mother's hand, he goes forward and finds himself a conqueror, a microcosm independent of all others in the world.

Job on his remote hill, surrounded by his three friends who endeavored to comfort him with their false philosophy, was very much alone. Job, solitary with God, in patient contemplation of the blessings attendant on following the Will of his Lord, had company enough nor did he desire more.

Thomas a Kempis, in the crowded market place of Kempen, suffered the desolation of a lonely soul. In his secure corner with his little book, he found the Presence Whose sacred friendship can overcome the world. St. Bonaventure, pondering on abstruse theses, and weary of the vacillation of his mortal spirit, was very much alone. But contemplating with undivided heart the Book of his Crucifix, he asked for nothing more on earth.

The beautiful and edifying life of the late Holy Father, Benedict XV., furnishes us with an example of loneliness with God. In the solemn midnight hour, surrounded by a few of his dearest friends, having received the Last Sacraments with all the simplicity and humility of the poorest child in Rome,—he extended his frail hand to him who had bestowed Holy Viaticum upon him, saying: "I thank you for having given this great Sacrament to me." And then, with his accustomed gentleness and sweetness, he begged that for a short while all would retire, stating that he wished to be alone with his Divine Lord.

What sacred colloquies took place within this loving and saintly soul in this last lonely interview in this world,—no one knows. Life fleeing swiftly, earth growing dimmer, heaven nearer, even within his breast. Ah, surely the world has never been able to understand the beauty of lonely moments spent with God.

In the midst of their worldly business, the Saints found time to steal away, lured by the great desire of conversing with the Beloved of their souls. And we know that from these interviews, sometimes struggles during which they fell mortally wounded by the shafts of Divine Love,—they grew strong in the spirit and burned with the desire of giving all for all.

In lonely moments weak souls sometimes grow strong, and strong souls all powerful, for at such moments men find face to face with true destiny,—eternal life.—The Pilot.

Of all the gifts to be prayed for, next to grace at heart, tact, and gentleness in manner are the most desirable. A brusque, shy, curt manner, a cold indifference, a snappish petulance, a brutal appearance of stolidity, antagonize and wound and rob even really kind actions of half their value. It is

Fear, hate and prejudice deprive a person of the power to arrive at correct conclusions. Let us guard against abusing our happy lot; while we have it, or we may lose it for havng abused it.

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WORKING IN THE DARK It is the one critical act of obedience to the divine voice of faith which lends a merit to all our spiritual exercises. Entire willingness to accept and perform that which is inspired by the motions of grace is the end of a life of perfection. "We have toiled all the night." A paraphrase of this text would be that we are working in the dark until we recognize the reasonableness of an act of faith and are anxious to make it, while we reverence the authority of the one who demands it. "But at Thy word I will let down the net." This was not an act of blind but of reasonable obedience and confidence in the authority and power of the Master who suggested it. The Church is the authentic reflection of Christ's Mind—subservience to her is licit and entirely gratifying to the intellect when we perceive the reasons for accepting her authority. Every act of faith is built upon reason. That which we are pleased to call blind faith is implicitly consonant with the dictates of reason since the basis of the operation is merely the acceptance of a statement from one who has authority to teach.

This state of mind underlies all the ordinary performances of daily life. We likewise arrive at the truths of science on the presumption that the utterances of scientists are always veracious. Alas! this is not always so. It is very distressing for earnest men to meet with modern teachers who throw out unwarrantable propositions (which seemingly affect religion) and abruptly withdraw them without apologies to religion or even a slender explanation for unbecoming misbehavior. In the act of Christian belief nothing is required but that which is essentially reasonable. Heart and intellect are not contracted but immeasurably expanded. To run in the way of the Commandments adds brighter light to the mind and greater width to the heart.

"We have toiled all the night." In special trials of faith the predominant virtue is patience. Even in the more intimate things of religion sweetness and light are oftentimes withdrawn. Our Communion may be dry and void of all sensible delight, the mysteries of faith more abstruse, and, indeed, all our devotional exercises lacking in comfort, but there is more merit to be gained in darkness and aridity than there is in a sunny, equable condition of the soul.

Confidence in times of desolation of spirit brings its own reward. For the most part the bidding to lower the net into the sea does not come until we have reached the shore after a night of toiling in the storm. We treat temptations against faith as we dismiss unlawful thoughts. If we have not the mental ability to investigate the claims of faith let us, at least, cultivate the virtues of obeying that constituted authority which has the divine and human right to impose upon us the obligations of faith—"at Thy word I will let down the net."—The Missionary.



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