

HOW TO SERVE GOD.

BY GEORGE HODG KES.

"If God will keep me in the way that I go and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God."

That was the bargain which Jacob made with God. Jacob was just then running away from the consequences of one over-cunning bargain, and it came to pass as he stopped to say his prayers, that the phrases of trade crept in among the phrases of petition. And he tried to make a contract with God. He was like some business men who come to church to-day and plan their Monday work in prayer time and do sums in mental arithmetic during the sermon. Even that is better than to imitate the people of the parable, who went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise, one to his leisure at home, another to his accounts at the store, and missed the service altogether.

Jacob was a shrewd and crafty money-maker. Even religion, he thought, might be made to minister to a man's material advancement. If God would give him bread to eat and raiment to put on, if God would build him a good house and furnish it, if God would give him a fair measure of success in his mercantile adventures, why, then, for his part, he would be perfectly willing to recite his prayers, and sing his praises, and to be on the side of God. So much prosperity, so much praise, so much wealth, so much worship. "Then shall the Lord be my God." It would be a paying bargain. It would be worth while.

That was the idea of God which that Saxon priest of Odin had, who listened to the good Bishop Paulinus as he preached the promises of the new religion and said: "The old gods have profited me little. These long years have I served them, no man more diligently, and yet many are richer and more prosperous than I am. I will try the new." And thereat he role full-tilt into Odin's temple, and with his lance tumbled the great statue of the god over into the dust.

That was the idea of God which men had in those days when the favorite deity among the Romans was that fickle goddess Fortuna. There are no more pathetic and significant relics of that old religion than the little battered and broken altars dedicated to Fortune. "Let us say our prayers," men said. "To the great god, Good Luck. Let us get him to give us this and that." Toward the end, nothing remained of that ancient faith but this—a serving of the gods to ward off evil and to get good.

To-day, "the negro of Guinea beats his gods when they do not gratify his wishes, and the New Zealander threatens to kill and eat them." Indeed, it was the opinion of the devil in that wonderful play of "Job," that godliness everywhere is merely for the sake of gain. In comes Satan among the sons of God, weary with a long journey. He has been going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it. "And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the Lord and said, Dost Job fear God for naught?"

It was the opinion of the devil that any man will serve God faithfully so long as he gets good pay for it. If the Lord gives him bread to eat and raiment to put on, any man will chose the Lord for his God. But let adversity come—and then see! Doth any man serve God for naught?

I am afraid that Jacob's bargains has its parallels in Christian communities. I am afraid that the devil's sneering question must in some instances be answered in the devil's way. The most evident instances are of course to be looked for in connection with the great troubles of life. Adversity comes, and it is not everybody who meets it as faithfully as Job did. People lose their money, or they lose their health, or they lose their friends; and then because they are poor, or sick, or full of loneliness and sorrow, they lose their faith. They begin to stay away from the sacrament, and to be missed out of their places in the church, and presently they are found to say that God does not care for them, and perhaps there is no God at all. If there is a God, why do they suffer? Why does He not send prosperity? What is God for if not to help us? A God who does not serve us, why should we serve Him?

That was not what Job said. No doubt there were plenty of imperfections in Job's religion, but, at least, it was not founded upon selfishness. It was not built upon that shifting sand. It was not constructed out of such materials that it stood up and made a brave show in the sunshine, and toppled over and went to pieces when it rained. Job said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." Jacob said, "If he pay me, then

will I trust him." There is some difference!

It is said that in these days the commercial spirit of our time has got into religion; that Jacob is still bargaining with God; and this not only in the great adversities which try men's souls, but in lesser matters in some of the ordinary duties of the Christian life. Thus there is a general complaint among the clergy that people nowadays must be paid for everything.

Jacob will give money for Christian uses, he will help the cause of missions, he will assist the poor, he will do his part in building the church and maintaining the parish—if you pay him, if you get up a great supper, and give him something good to eat, or a concert, and let him hear sweet music, Jacob will come to church—if he is well paid for coming, if there is a popular preacher and a fine choir. Provide enough "attraction." Make the services "taking," "interesting," and not too religious, and Jacob will never miss a meeting.

"If God will keep me in the way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house, then shall the Lord be my God."

But we ought to think a great deal more about what we owe to God, than about what God owes to us. The central fact of our religion ought to be the fact of God, rather than the fact of self. The sovereignty of God and the smallness of man, the omnipotence of God and the weakness of man, the inexpressible pre-eminence of God—we ought to think of. It used to be asked of converts, in one of the great religious communities, if they so set God first that they were even willing, if it were for God's glory, to be forever damned. That is a strong way of putting it. But there is a great truth underlying that given question, nevertheless. It is an essential condition of Christianity to look utterly away from self toward God.

There are accordingly two words which we all need to emphasize in our religious life. One word is duty, the other is devotion. There are a great many things which we ought to do, whether they are pleasing to us or not, simply because they are among our duties. I fear that the good word "duty" has not the place which it should have in the vocabulary of modern life. People live in the direction of their inclinations. Whatever good work interests them, they do—as long as it interests them! When it gets to be tiresome or unpleasant, they put it away, like a child. They go where they like, and when they like, and as long as they like. And they take small counsel of that stout imperative "must."

But God expects every Christian to do his duty. Nelson reminded his sailors that England expected that of every Englishman. Napoleon reminded his soldiers, at the Battle of the Nile, that from yonder pyramids forty centuries looked down upon them. There are the two motives. Shall we work to give something, to give our allegiance and our lives to the Power that is over us? or shall we work to get something, to get somebody's good opinion, or to get a gratification of our own pleasure? Shall our offering be a sacrifice or a bargain?

God desires us to do our duty. And one of the characteristics of duty is that it is a thing done out of a sense of obligation. It is our duty, for example, to obey the will of Christ. And that means that we are to do just what He tells us to do, whether we want to or not; obeying not our own inclinations, but his positive commandments. Take for instance the matter of forgiveness, upon which He laid such frequent emphasis. When it is easy for us to forgive, we are probably not obeying Christ nor doing our duty at all; we are obeying our own pleasure. When it seems almost impossible to forgive, and yet we forgive—then we are following the Master, along the hard path of duty.

Indeed, the test of duty is nearly always the presence of difficulty. When inclination says "I don't want to do that," and conscience says "You must," there is a case of duty. Let me illustrate this by two or three everyday applications.

I would say that it is the duty of all Christian people, who are in health and are not imperatively hindered, to present themselves before God in His home upon every Lord's day. This is one of the things which man owes to God. When you are tired with your week's work, or the way is long, or the sky is overcast, or the rain falls, then the test comes. You can go to church, and you don't want to go to church, but you ought to go to church. That is the syllogism of duty. Now you will discover whether your attendance is a matter of duty with you, or not. When there are empty seats upon a rainy Sunday, one-third of those who are absent are infirm in body, the other two-thirds are only infirm in duty.

I would say, further, that it is the duty of every Christian who has time to do some Christian work. This applies to every Christian, but especially to women, because they have most time. The societies of a parish never enroll all the members of a parish; often the members are but a minority of the congregation. This is partly because some of the people have no time. They are mothers who must take care of their children, or who must do their household work. In their case, the call of duty is to stay at home. But there are always a great many other people in every parish who are never seen helping with the good work because they are deficient in a sense of duty. They are doing what they like, not what they ought.

It is also a universal Christian duty to give not only time but money. And this applies chiefly to the men, because they have most money. But every offering in every congregation discovers a lack of the sense of duty. Whoever sees it, and notices what kind of coins compose it, knows that the larger part of it was given simply at haphazard. The plate came by, and the giver felt constrained to give something, and he put his hand in his pocket and gave the first small coin which his fingers lighted upon. That was no honest, Christian giving. That did not count, in God's sight, for anything. These men did not say to themselves: Here is this good cause, how much ought I to give? They knew that if they gave nothing, somebody would notice it. And so they gave—perhaps a three-cent piece which looks so much like a dime. Ask the Treasurer of the church how often people come to him, after the day of some special offering, and say: "I could not be at church last Sunday, here is my part of the contribution." That is a measure of the sense of duty.

But there is a better word than duty, and that is devotion.

"When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do." What! Unprofitable servants still, with all our duties done? Yes; for there is a defect in duty. Duty has plenty of conscience, but no heart. The essential characteristic of it, as I said, is obligation. But that is not the ideal kind of service. "I will take the Lord for my God, because I want to; because I love Him." That is the ideal way of serving God.

Love is better than obligation. Better than duty is devotion. For it is love which enriches, and beautifies, and inspires and consecrates devotion, and lifts it high above all the duty-doing in the world. Love drives no bargains. Love knows no measuring of give and take. It is love's privilege to give. By and by Jacob came to love God; he came to realize his own imperfect service and God's great infinite love and boundless goodness; he came to see that a balancing of divine blessing with human obedience would be the most disastrous thing that could happen to a sinful man.

God is our loving Father. What devotion is too great for us to give Him? Christ from His cross cries: "This have I done for thee." Who shall set a bound or a measure or an end to our willingness and eagerness to do whatever thing we can for Him?

For all who love God the terms of that old bargain are written over again, with a different meaning. Though God lead me along a narrow way, where it is hard to go, and give me of bread and raiment but a scanty measure, and tribulation with it, yet will I serve Him, yet will I devote myself to Him body and soul, and count no sacrifice precious enough for Him, yet will I love Him with all the love of my whole heart, and the Lord shall be my God.

Three Pairs of Shoes.

There they are in a neat little row under the mantel in the children's bedroom, a pair of twelves, a pair of nines and a tiny pair of fives belonging to the baby.

They are all more or less wrinkled and worn and the pair of twelves have holes in the toes which caused me to say a little while ago to the sturdy wearer of them that there was "no sense in his kicking out shoes like that," and if he were not more careful he would just have to go barefooted.

He heard me with the utmost indifference as I know from the fact that the threat was hardly out of my mouth when he asked me if I knew whose little boy he would have been if I had never been born.

"You might have been the little boy of some papa who couldn't have bought you any shoes at all," I said reproachfully.

"Oh, well," he says, calmly, in the fullness and beauty of his childish faith, "God has millions and trillions of shoes and I

could just ask Him for a pair whenever I wanted them. Don't you see, papa.

Three pairs of shoes! Three pairs of tender little feet upon the untried border of life's mysterious land.

I sit and look at the little shoes wondering where the feet that wear them will be led in the time to come, the little feet that

"—Through long years,

Must wander on 'mid hopes and fears."

How much I would give to know the future that I might stand between them and the temptations so sure to assail them, that I might guide their feet aright, that I might shield them from pain and sorrow if I could.

There is something strangely appealing and half pathetic to every loving father and mother in the sight of a row of little shoes like those I see before me now. They arouse the tenderest instincts of one's nature. I don't know why.

The wearers of the little shoes may have been very fretful or mischievous or trying all day.

You may have been "all out of patience" with them. You may have whipped the little hands or put the rebellious little ones to bed, declaring that they were "worrying the life out of you," but they are not "worrying" you any now, and you go about picking up a little stocking here and a little shirt there with nothing but tenderness in your heart toward them.

You think only how precious the wearers of the little clothes are, and there is no melody on earth—half so sweet to you as the music of the baby voices when they knelt around you a little while ago saying "God bless mamma and papa, and keep us all safely through the night." You will hear no sweeter music than that this side of Paradise.

You reproach yourself for your lack of tenderness and patience as you look at that little row of shoes, and sometimes you fall to thinking of the unutterable sorrow that would fill your heart to breaking if the wearer of any one pair of the little shoes would wear them no more—if you should awaken some morning, as heartbroken fathers and mothers have sometimes awakened, and find that the wearer of one pair of the little shoes had gone from you in the night to wear the garments that wax not old.

Three pairs of little shoes! There are tears in your eyes as you look at them now, and perhaps you steal softly to the bedside of the little sleepers to make sure that they are sleeping sweetly and safely and to touch their little hands or their cool, moist brows with your lips, your heart filled with tender memories, with hopes and tears, with unspoken prayers.

Three pairs of little shoes! Three little pilgrims setting out on the voyage of life, their frail barks as yet untouched and unharmed by adverse winds and waves. God bring them all to port!

A Glorious River.

The St. Lawrence is a phenomenon among rivers, says *Nature's Realm*. No other river is fed by such gigantic lakes. No other river is so independent of the elements. It despises alike rain, snow and sunshine. Ice and wind may be said to be the only things that affect its mighty flow. Something almost as phenomenal as the St. Lawrence itself is the fact that there is so little generally known about it. It might be safely affirmed that not 1 per cent of the American public are aware of the fact that among all the great rivers of the world the St. Lawrence is the only absolutely floodless one. Such, however, is the case.

The St. Lawrence despises rain and sunshine. Its greatest variation caused by drouth or rain hardly ever exceeds a foot or fourteen inches. The cause of this almost everlasting sameness of volume is easily understood. The St. Lawrence is fed by the mightiest bodies of fresh water on earth. Immense as is the volume of water it pours into the ocean, any one who has traversed all the immense lakes that feed it, and for the surplus waters of which it is the only channel to the sea, wonders that it is not even more gigantic than it is. Not one drop of the waters of the five great lakes finds its way to the ocean save through this gigantic, extraordinary and wondrously beautiful river. No wonder, then, that it should despise the rain and defy the sunshine.

Sad Deception.

"Have you parted from that grass widow?"

"Yes. We have said farewell forever."

"How did she take it?"

"She said I would be always green 'in her memory.'"

"Well, but you won't."

"Why?"

"Because there's nothing green about grass widows."