

blessing reminds us of that solemn and joyful truth. The blessing brings to our tables the element of thanksgiving makes the humblest table like an altar from which the fragrant incense of the thanksgiving ascend to our gracious Lord. The blessing has value as testimony. Christ's act was a testimony to all the thousands before him. None could have seen that upturned face and heard his voice in that prayer without accepting it as a testimony to the loving relation between him and the Father.

So every meal of ours gives us the opportunity to bear witness to the grace of God, and to make known to all in our family circle how loving and intimate may be the relation between us and him. So the father teaches his children, so the host his unconverted guest. Our meetings in the place of prayer are not the only places where we may bear effective witness for Christ. Equally at our tables we may do the same. The blessing is one of the exquisite little marks distinguishing the Christian family from others.

The Christians cherish this custom not because Christ commanded it, but because he did it, and because we have the same reason for doing it that he had. It is a delight to the Christian to pause before partaking food, and to do what Jesus always did, give thanks.—The Standard.

### "NOR LIFE."

One of the finest passages in St. Paul's letters is his triumphant expression of confidence that nothing can separate the Christian from the love of God. One of the items the writer names in life—"neither death, nor life." We are not surprised that he should mention death, for death carries us out from "our bourne of time and place," into a mystery which no eye can penetrate. We are grateful, therefore, for the assurance that death will not separate us from the love of God.

"'Tis but to pierce the mist—and then  
How beautiful to be with God!"

There is a deep significance, however, in the fact that life itself is named among the perils to which we are exposed, and in the assurance that it cannot separate us from God's love. Living is fraught with far more danger than dying. Think what life is. It is not merely getting through life in the way we can. We are not here to make a living, but to make a life, to grow, to do God's will, to leave at least one spot of the world a little brighter and better. Think of the way we begin life—as babies, with great possibilities, but all to be developed. Think how much depends upon our strength, and yet how weak we are; upon our wisdom, and how ignorant we are. Think of the evil there is in the world, and how easy it is for us to drift away on its dark tides. Think of the temptations we must meet continually, and how unequal we are to the terrific struggle with them. Think of the work we have to do, the burdens we must carry, the responsibilities that are ours. Think of the mistakes we may make, and of what disastrous consequences may result from them.

It is not easy to live. Every step of the passage from birth to death is through perils and antagonisms. Yet we have the assurance that even life, with all it holds of danger and conflict, cannot separate from the love of God; that in all these things we may be more than conquerors through him that loved us. Serious, then, as life is, we need not dread to live. No load can crush us. No power can wrench us from the keeping of God.

Indeed, the divine love changes all the evil things into blessings. There is a way of living in this world by which the evil is transmuted into good.

There is another word of St. Paul's which comes in here: "We know that to them that loved God all things work together for good." Instead of being something to dread, therefore, because of its dangers antagonisms, its burdens and sorrows, life is a school of good. Temptations are meant by the Evil One to destroy us; but when we resist and overcome them, they become helpers of our growth and progress, leaving us stronger and wiser. Sorrows which seem only to wound and scar, purify and enrich our character. The best lives are those that have suffered the most and struggled the most. The men and women who reach the finest things in character and the largest usefulness are not those who have had only ease and a comfortable time but those who have learned in struggle how to be strong, and in suffering how to be sympathetic and gentle.

Life is not a series of merely fortuitous happenings, unplanned, unperposed. A divine purpose runs through all the events and circumstances of our days. This purpose is not that we should do a certain amount of work, but that we ourselves should be built up into strength and beauty of character. Work is not a curse, as is sometimes thoughtlessly said; it is a means of grace. The reason we have to work is not primarily because the world needs the work, but because we need it. Men are not in business just to build up so many houses a year, to sell so many bales of goods, to cultivate so many acres of land, to do the routine work of their calling successfully; they are set to these duties in order that they may grow into men—strong, true, gentle worthy men. Women are not appointed to certain tasks in household work, in social life, in teaching or business, merely to become good housekeepers, good business women or good teachers, nurses, or physicians—the divine purpose in all their toil is that they may grow into noble womanhood.

Sometimes men fail in their business ventures or their professions. They give their best strength and their most strenuous efforts to some work, and it does not succeed. The work fails, but the men need not fail. It is a great thing to meet misfortune victoriously, coming out of it with life unhurt, with new strength and courage for another effort. A distinguished jurist lost an important case in the courts. He showed no feelings of discouragement however, and a friend asked him how he could take his disappointment so calmly. "When it is over," said the great lawyer "I have no more to do with it. If I kept thinking over my defeats I feel that I should go mad. But I will not brood over them. When one case is done I drop it, whatever the result may be and go on to the next."

It is a fine thing to see a boy, when his competitor has won the game, reach out his hand to him in manly congratulations. He has lost the game, but he has won in nobility. The real defeat is when a man shows an unmanly spirit and yields to depression after losing in business, or sulks, or acts like a baby when he has failed to get the prize he wanted.

The one secret of being in the world and not of the world of passing through life and not being hurt by life's evil, of having all things work together for good to us—the one and only secret—is to have the love of God in our hearts. No one can be lost whose heart keeps in it always this blessed love.—Sunday School Times.

### The Primal Thing Which Should be Permanent.

BY DR. GEORGE MATHESON.

"Thou hast left thy first love."—Rev. 2:4.

There are three sets of men who may be said to be under a cloud—the sceptic, the pessimist and the cynic. I should say they represent respectively the clouds over faith, hope and love. Scepticism is the cloud over faith; pessimism is the cloud over hope; cynicism is the cloud over love. Now, of these three, the greatest cloud is the last. It is a sad thing when a man is compelled to say, "There is no ground for religious belief." It is a sad thing when he is compelled to say, "There is no ground for human hope." But the saddest of all things is when he is compelled to say, "There is no ground for brotherly love." There was a time when this order of comparison would have been greeted as the wildest of paradoxes. There are ages known to history as "the ages of faith." This means that in those days there was no sin deemed so bad as the sin of being a sceptic. In our day the greatest of all sins is deemed the sin against love. And I feel sure that this latest judgment by earth is the permanent judgment in heaven. There is no cloud deplored like the cloud over my love—over my power of loving. The church has often lamented "advanced views." What my Father laments is my contracted views—the contraction of my heart. An eclipse of faith may come from larger life; an eclipse of hope may come from transcending my environment; but an eclipse of love means a spiritual decline. My Father fears when I enter into this cloud.

My soul, leave not thy first love! I will not say, leave not thy first faith! The first faith is not always the best; thy thought of the Father may be purified by the fire through which it passes. I will not say, leave not thy first hope! The first hope is not always the best; thine earliest dream of Paradise may be a selfish dream. It is written, "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail." Our first prophetic hopes generally do fail; the man would scorn the ideals of childhood. But thy first love, thy morning love, that ought not to die! I would have no cloud to come over the vision of my heart. If thou wilt keep that vision clear, there will be no want to thee. There may be starless nights to the eye of intellect; the old tongues may cease in which faith once expressed itself. There may be starless nights to the eye of fancy; the old prophecies may fail in which hope once delighted. But, if thy love remain, the eye of the heart will not be starless. The heart can see in places where the reason has lost its sight, where the fancy has become blind. Destroy these temples, and in three days love shall raise them again! It will give thee back thy faith; love believeth all things. It will give thee back thy prophecy; love hopeth all things. It will give thee even better than either faith or prophecy—power to wait without them; love endureth all things. Never let out the fire of the heart! Though nerve be low, though sense be feeble, though judgment be groping, though fancy's will be weary, yea, though virtue itself be erring, keep that fire ever burning; and all the rest shall be added unto thee. Leave not thy first love, O my soul!—Christian World.

### Spiritual Invalids.

BY HENRY DRUMMOND.

And so now many resign themselves to their low degree of Christian attainment. It is a case of religious sickness. They are spiritual invalids. I want to find some principle something solid, something on which to stand the strain of life. Why is religion so disheveled? Why so made up of heterogeneous scraps? Why does every sermon we hear put out of mind every last sermon? It is because the religious life is without foundation, without a sensible, solid,

natural principle on which to rest. I will try to point out that principle which may give permanency, stability, vivacity to the religious life of each. It is the principle that every effect produced upon the soul of man is dependent upon some pre-existing cause. Therefore there should be more praying over causes and less upon effects. Nature affords ample illustration. Nothing in the world happens by chance. There is cause for everything we see or hear or feel. Not an action but can be traced back to a cause. So in religion, if a man possesses a religious joy or peace there is some definite cause that produces it. Fulfill these causes and joy or peace follow as sure as day the night. What Christian grace do you want? Perhaps a little more joy. You have been praying for it for years and have not found it. Joy is an effect; it must have a cause. What is this cause? In the parable of the vine Christ stated it clearly: "Abide in Me. . . . These things have I written unto you that you may be full." How Christ bases everything upon some cause. "If ye love me (a cause) ye will keep my commandments. . . . If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye may ask what you will," etc. The conditionality of all God's promises is the point here. Where a cause is not stated it must be understood. All the promises are conditioned. Religion is the simplest thing in the world. Things here go on not by caprice, but by law law absolutely simple, absolutely unerring. It is the everlasting lesson of science. Law is sure and inevitable. Let us get into the Christian life a little science. Nature and the eternal truths of God are older than religion, and they predated religion. Our common everyday lives are the means God supplies by which we shall build our Christian lives. A farm or an office is not a place to make crops or money, but men. All the little things about our daily toil are the framework and scaffolding of our spiritual life.—Ex.

### Conscience Inflexible.

Conscience is a faithful judge. When the law and evidence are in the decision accordingly will be rendered, and from this decision the individual has no appeal, since law is a transcript of the nature of God, the decisions rendered in accordance therewith should be held in supreme reverence. It is evident that man, though fallen as he is, has something yet of the nature of God in his bosom. The decrees of conscience are irrevocable, except as time may show that the law was misinterpreted, or the evidence untrue. In the busy hours or the quiet seasons memory recalls the decisions of the past and sends the guilty to right the wrongs committed, or discharge the duty neglected.

Victor Hugo in the character of Jean Valjean, gives a remarkable illustration of the use of a sentence of guilt. The hero had committed a crime for which he had been sent to the galleys and while serving his sentence made his escape. He became an exenplary man, by means of an invention he became the employer of a large number of people, their support depended upon him. He became wealthy, was made mayor of the city and had the respect and love of all. Yet he was a thief and an escaped galley slave and conscience set the bells of memory to the tune of her old decrees, until the man of reputation and honor sed himself over and over again if he had not better confess his guilt and place himself at the disposal of the law. Finally he hears that a man in another village is being tried for his crime. The unfortunate prisoner, for a striking resemblance to Jean Valjean, and the court claimed to have sufficient evidence to send the hapless prisoner to the galleys. That night the real Jean Valjean was troubled. Should he permit another to suffer for his crimes? In his restless delirium of memory he began to reason upon the situation. If he relieved this guiltless man by surrendering himself, he and the host of dependents in the village would suffer great humiliation and privations. He seems to have reached a decision that it would be better for one guiltless to suffer rather than that he would give himself to the galleys. But about the time he was forming his decision memory rang the bells of conscience until his whole being trembled like a forest in a mighty wind and soon Jean Valjean was going with all possible speed to stand at the bar of justice to confess himself the real culprit and to demand the release of the innocent.

Let us then give conscience a true law and the whole truth, and upon the noble aspirations and high ideals of life bestow a holy reverence, that conscience may have foundation unalterable for her decrees immutable and eternal.—G. H. Simmons.

### How the Father Cares.

"I grew up in a family where there were several children and never a superabundance of money," said a gentleman speaking of his boyhood. "I knew my father loved me, of course, but those last two words might pretty nearly have expressed my view of the tie between us if I had considered it at all. He was kind, but he was naturally rather reserved and he was a very busy man.

"When I was a lad of eighteen, I went away from home and among strangers for the first time. I had obtained a situation in a town some two hundred miles distant, and I was greatly surprised one day to see my father come walking into my boarding-place. He had managed to leave his business for two or three days and had come to spend his brief holiday with me. I knew how he must have planned for it, have counted the money the journey would cost, and have given up other things for the sake of being with me, and suddenly I understood as never before my place in my father's heart. He visited the shop where I was employed, shared my plain little lodging-room and when I was free, we had one long, happy day together wandering about the little old town. I went with him to his train and walked back through the streets alone, saying to myself—I didn't know father cared for me like that!"

"He never knew what a revelation that visit was, nor how from that day to the latest of my life it has put new meaning into the words, 'Our Father in heaven.'"—Sel.