

A CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR.

'But, Elma! you dear child! what a plague it might be! A meeting every Tuesday! and to go whether you felt like it or not!'

So spoke Agnes Manning in reply to a timid invitation of her lifelong friend Elma Brooks to join the society of Christian Endeavor of the North Presbyterian church. Elma was not timid about other things; but not many months had passed since, in the presence of God's people in her home church and the great cloud of unseen witnesses who ever compass about the children of God, she had taken God the Father to be her Father, God the Son to be her Saviour, and God the Holy Ghost to be her Sanctifier, and she was filled with a great longing that this dear friend might share her joy.

Nothing daunted she tried again. 'But you went every week to the Pastime Club last year. Was that never a plague?' 'Elma Brooks! you witch! Is it fair to turn a past confidence against me in that fashion? I told you about the most horrid evening of all. Confidentially, however, I'll confess it is 'more plague than profit.' 'Plague,' you see, was her favorite word, though she was a Wellesley graduate. 'Mamma wants me to be well everywhere, for if we do not keep in the stream we shall soon be passed by,' continued this sage of twenty-two and then, in a more wistful tone: 'Betweens' have a hard time in this world! You are a minister's daughter, and know just where you belong. They would be shocked if they saw you at the dances, and the theatricals, and the card parties; and if they did not see me—why, in a little while they would forget all about me.'

'But,' said the puzzled Elma, 'are such friends worth having? To come back to our society; there are people there of as good family, and some quite as rich and cultivated as the gay set.'

'Yes,' returned Agnes, 'but they would not care for me. I'm not like them—I enjoy the parties and things when all goes well. I'm young yet—I guess I'll try the world a little longer; and then, if it does not begin to pay better, perhaps I'll join the 'Endeavorers.'

They were just at the manse, and as they parted Elma almost whispered, 'O, Agnes, I want you to be a Christian Endeavorer! Nothing pays except to belong to Christ!'

All the way home these words sounded in her ears: 'Nothing pays except to belong to Christ.'

She knew it was true; she had already learned that keeping pace with society is hard work. She had toiled through hours of small talk, whether the young men were interesting or not, for fear the other girls would have more attention; worked hard to keep her somewhat limited wardrobe up to society standards; wasted time and energy calling on people who cared as little for her as she did for them, so as to be asked to their 'dances' and 'teas'; when, down in the depths of her heart, she knew that the day after a party, she was happier than the day before—she knew then whether she had had a good time; and if she had not, it was over with.

She knew all this; but, like all young girls, though never quite satisfied with the present, she was full of hope for the future—dreamed of a time when life would be just a succession of 'good times,' leading up to a romance which should end all care.

But even the future has its shadows. Only last month one of her comrades, a fair young girl, had been laid away in the grave. All were quite certain where she belonged in this world; but no one was certain that she belonged to Christ.

'I think I'll go to the Christian Endeavor meeting this evening,' said Agnes at the dinner table.

'Do any of your set go?' queried her mother, a spice of disapproval in voice and manner.

'O, yes,' broke in irrepressible Tom, 'the Mowbrays and Lawrences, and lots of "first chops"—all the 'goody-goodies'; and Will Mowbray says some of them are just as much in earnest as people were last election time.'

Mrs. Manning looked less disapproving at the mention of the Mowbrays and the Lawrences; and contented herself with expressing a hope that Agnes would not be inveigled into joining the society, as the winter promised to be a gay one. 'Remember,' she said, 'how delicate you are. I do not believe in religious dissipation.'

Mrs. Manning's name was on the roll of church members, and she would have been glad to see her daughter's there also; but this society she feared might unfit her for a successful social career. Like many another in these degenerate days, she was almost afraid of being too good.

'Mrs. Joline tells me,' she added, 'that it makes the people neglect the regular church services. When they had it Sunday night, for example, she used to meet a crowd of the younger members going home instead of staying for the evening service, or off walking, more probably. She says, too, that over at Rolston it has degenerated into a sort of literary and benevolent club; she believes the members spend all their time getting up entertainments and worrying people to buy tickets.'

Tom looked amused, and treasured these last words to fire at Will Mowbray the next time he 'bothered' him about going to the meetings. Tom hated to sit still.

Agnes stole away and ran across the street a few moments later to slip into a back seat, hoping no one would notice her. But Elma saw her and began to feel anxious lest all should not please her friend.

'Had there ever been so few present! Where were they all? Agnes could have told her; she knew that in the opera house near by many of the members were gathering to listen to a noted singer.

Some one handed Agnes a hymn book, and opening it her eyes glanced over the Christian Endeavor pledge.

'Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I promise him that I will strive to do whatever he would like to have me to do; that I will make it the rule of my life to pray and to read the bible every day, and to support my own church in every way, especially by attending all her regular Sunday and mid-week services, unless prevented by some reason that I can conscientiously give to my Saviour.'

'As an active member I promise to be true to all my duties, to be present at and to take some part; aside from singing, in every Christian Endeavor prayer meeting, unless hindered by some reason that I can conscientiously give to my Lord and Master.'

Elma was praying for her; asking the Holy Spirit to use that meeting to win her for Christ. But Satan, too, was on the watch; the powers of good and evil were warring for her soul. Her proud young lip curled. 'How could they take that solemn pledge? Was religion anything more than a passing enthusiasm? Could any be sure that they belonged to Christ?'

She was sick at heart, disappointed in them; and resolved to make no professions, join no societies till quite certain that she would be an honor and not a disgrace.

They began to sing: 'I've found a friend in Jesus,' and a great longing surged through her heart to forsake all for Christ; but Satan, whose most efficient weapon is the inconsistency of professed Christians, whispered to her of the chairman of the 'Look Out Committee,' looking out for self at the concert, and suggested that the rest would have gone if they had dared.

Prayer and testimony followed—warm and faithful hearts were there, but Agnes went away as she came, because of those faithless ones who had forgotten that the lives of the professed followers of the Master are the worldling's bible—'epistles known and read of all men.'

And how fared the renegades? Some listened to the music without a thought but that they had a perfect right to be there; others, with more tender consciences, glanced about uneasily to see how many of their fellow members were present to sustain them, and wished they had not come. They were not happy—no half-hearted Christian is. 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon.'

Mrs. Joline counted them with great satisfaction. 'She knew it would not lat.'

For months Agnes watched the working of that society as though her soul's chance of salvation depended upon the faithfulness of its members. Who will dare say it did not? And this is what she saw—some becoming less and less interested, and finally rarely at the religious meetings. When asked why they staid away, some said: 'The meetings are so stupid,' or 'The people are so unsocial,' or 'Mamma does not approve of it; she says if we go to the regular church services that is all that should be expected of us.'

That was part of what she noticed; but there was a brighter side. At the church gate on Sunday, and here and there during

the week, she came upon happy, eager groups of young people. There was a unity of purpose, an interest in each other, a good comradeship about them, that somehow her 'set' lacked. The efforts of a committee whose work was to invite and welcome to the evening service those who had no church home, soon filled the much-bewailed empty seats.

On Saturday afternoon religious 'weeklies' were carried to the homes of the poor, in the hope that the pernicious Sunday newspaper might be supplanted by the grand old champions of truth and orthodoxy.

She saw faces growing in the beauty that comes from an inner life at peace with God; listened to voices raised in humble, fervent prayer that before had only spoken to God in secret; heard of weak ones guarded, lonely ones sought out and befriended, and sad hearts comforted.

There was a reality about all this; it fitted in with her ideal of the Christian life; but still she held aloof.

One day, dropping in upon the long-suffering Elma, who never wavered in her loving welcome, in spite of the wayward and often irritable manner of her friend, she found a group of 'Endeavorers' earnestly scanning a little book, and taking from it names and addresses.

'What new scheme now?' she asked, as the door closed upon them.

We have no space for the conversation; but what she learned, under the seal of secrecy, was this.

The whole congregation and Sunday-school had been classified, and in this little book were recorded the names of those who had not yet openly confessed Christ; from it the workers were selecting those each could best reach, to try to win them through prayer and effort to surrender to Christ and become his open followers.

'Elma!' cried Agnes, 'now I know you are in earnest! I've always felt that there must be some sham about the Christianity of people who profess to believe that their unconverted friends are going down to destruction and make no effort to prevent it. Wouldn't we snatch even our enemy from a burning house or pull him back from a precipice? Elma, I'm sure you've taken me!'

She hurried home, ran up to her quiet room, locked and bolted the door. She was at last willing to do anything for the sake of being a Christian. She would walk over burning ploughshares, go in sackcloth and ashes all her days, to win the certainty of salvation.

The Sunday before, Dr. Brooks had preached from the text:—'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved;' but her heart was as cold as the snowdrifts outside. How could she make herself believe? Perhaps she had put it off too long. She had promised to try to surrender to Christ. What did that mean?

She grew quieter as the silver light of the moon flooded the room; she was so tired with the conflict.

At last, kneeling by the window, gazing into the starry sky, these words came in awestruck tones from her lips:—

'O God! I do not understand it—I do not know how to believe—show me, for Christ's sake! Take me just as I am, and make me what thou wouldst have me to be.'

And purer than radiance of moon or star was the light, that dawned in her soul; for unto her the 'Sun of Righteousness' had arisen. She was no longer weary and heavy-laden, for there is 'healing in his wings.'

And around the throne of God in heaven was sound of 'hallelujah' and 'joy among the angels' over 'one sinner that repented.'

—J. W. Gardner, in New York 'Observer.'

DR. ARNOLD'S DAILY PRAYER.

Dr. Arnold's daily prayer was as follows: 'O Lord, I have a busy world around me; eye, ear and thought will be needed for all my work to be done in this busy world. Now, ere I enter on it I would commit eye and ear and thought to thee. Do thou bless them, and keep their work thine, that as through thy natural laws my heart beats and my blood flows without any thought of mine, so my spiritual life may hold on its course at these times when my mind cannot conspicuously turn to thee to commit each particular thought to thy service. Hear my prayer, for my dear Redeemer's sake. Amen.'