

Parish and Home.

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THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST.

Who would not haste to do some mighty thing,
If safe occasion gave it to his hand,
Knowing that, at its close, his name would ring,
Coupled with praises, through a grateful land?
Who would not hear with joy some great command,

Bidding him dare to earn a glorious name?
The task is easy that secures us fame.

But, ah! how seldom comes the trumpet call
That stirs the pulse and fills the veins with flame,
When victory asks fierce effort, once for all,
And smiling fortune points a way to fame
Along some path of honor, free from blame.
To one, the call to do great deeds speaks loud;
To one, amid a vast unhonored crowd.

Far otherwise the common lot of man.
Our hourly toil but seeks the means to live;
Our dull, monotonous labor knows no plan,
Save that which stern necessity doth give.
Our earnings fill an ever-leaking sieve!
Our task fulfilled, another still succeeds,
And brief neglect brings overgrowth of weeds.

What wonder, then, if suffering men repine,
And hopelessness gives way to mad despair?
Some murmur at, yea, curse the scheme divine
That placed them where the saws of fretting care
Across their brows a deepening channel wear.
For them, no springtide speaks of hope renewed,
But changeless, wintry skies above them brood.

Oh, fools and blind! This world is not the goal,
But shapes us for a larger world unknown;
The vilest slave that keeps a patient soul
Shall yet rank higher than the sensual drone
Who seeks to please his worthless self alone.
If humblest toil be hardest, yet be sure,
He most shall merit who can most endure.

—Walter W. Skeat, in the Academy.

FOR PARISH AND HOME.

The Shadow and the Substance.

It was an evening in November. Five or six friends had just returned from the regular week-night service, and were sitting and chatting by the drawing-room fire. The service, perhaps, had not made a very deep impression upon some of them, for the topic of conversation was the past and expected social events of the winter.

"Lent is very late this year," said Mrs. Richards. "Ash Wednesday does not come till the last of February."

Mrs. Richards was a bright, energetic little woman of perhaps forty years. Society was her passion. As long as the weeks brought plenty of gaiety she was happy, but a quiet, uneventful life in the bosom of her family she could not bear even to think of. For want of anything better she would spend her evenings with various friends, or go to church. Not that she was a bad mother or wife; she loved her husband dearly, and got the name among friends of being his guardian angel, and was very devoted to her children. But she was a shallow woman with no power of self-entertainment, and seemed to have too much energy ever to be still. Besides, she loved admiration, and was conscious of good, though limited, conversational powers, which she loved to use—one of those women who need to be held in check by very quiet, domestic husbands. But, unfortunately, Mr. Richards was very little at home himself. He spent his days in his office, and his nights at business or society meetings, and often at the house of a business friend.

"What has an early or late Lent to do with the social prospects of the winter?" replied Mrs. Allen, in whose drawing-room the group was seated. There was a little mischief in the reply, for Mrs. Allen knew very well that parties, and balls, and entertainments of various kinds usually come to an end at the beginning of Lent. But she wanted to draw her friend out on the question of the observance of Lent.

The two women stood in remarkable contrast. Mrs. Allen was the senior by ten years or more. She, too, was bright and energetic, but time and the experience of life had brought her a serenity and a quiet contemplativeness, and her vivacity and energy were held back as a reserve force, which was drawn on with great discretion. She had no love for society, and was never missed of an evening from her own fireside. Her family was everything to her. But there was something about her that won all kinds of people, and her house was a place to which young and old alike loved to go to spend a happy evening. It was the most natural thing in the world for the little group to drop in at her house after church.

The conversation was now successfully turned and Lent was the new topic.

"One never thinks of going to parties during Lent," said Mrs. Richards. "Church people, at least, always keep Lent."

"Why?" was the only reply of Mrs. Allen.

"Because it's our duty. Don't you believe in fasting and abstinence during Lent?"

"No; it never makes any difference in our way of living. We are not society people, and our fare is never luxurious."

"Oh! But surely we ought to fast in Lent, or give up some articles of food, such as cake, or tea, or sugar. I must confess I don't always do it myself, but I ought to, and children should be taught to do the same."

"Does it make you a better Christian?"

"Now, don't poke fun at me. Fasting is self-denial, and surely self-denial is a good thing."

There was in the group a young lawyer who had recently begun to practise in the town. He was a university man, and had the reputation of being a good student and well read. Religious matters interested him greatly, for he was particularly well read in theology. Wider reading and increased knowledge, instead of making him sceptical and careless, had but strengthened his hold on religious truth and deepened his faith. He held that the manliest thing in the world was the religion of Jesus Christ, and that for a man of education to discard Christianity was to do violence to his reason, or to shut his eyes to some of the profoundest moral truths and phenomena in life.

He had listened to the conversation without saying a word, but all the while intensely amused. Now, however, he saw they were getting into deep water, and his amusement changed to interest, as he remarked: "Is it really true that self-denial is always a meritorious thing?"

"Why, of course," said Mrs. Richards.

"What a question to ask."

"What is self-denial, may I ask?"

"Self-denial—oh—self-denial is—doing without anything we like."

"Well, I like sleep very much. Suppose I didn't go to bed for a week. Would that be self-denial?"

"I suppose it would," said Mrs. Richards, feeling that she might possibly be cornered.

"Would it be pleasing in God's eyes, do you think? Would He rather have me do without sleep each night, and go to work tired and fit for nothing?"

"Oh, well, who ever heard of anybody's doing that?"

"But you say it is self-denial, and it must be good."