

PRAYER.

Lord, what a change within us one short hour, Spent in Thy presence will prevail to make. What heavy burdens from our bosoms take, What parched grounds refresh as with a shower! We kneel, and all around us seems to lower: We rise, and in the distant and the near Stands forth in sunny outline, brave and clear: We kneel how weak! we rise how full of power! Why therefore should we do ourselves this wrong, Or others, that we are not always strong. That we are ever overcome with care, That we should ever weak or heartless be, Anxious or troubled, when with us is prayer And joy and strength and courage are with Thee! —Archbishop Trench.

NELL'S OPPORTUNITIES.

[Kate S. Gates in Zion's Herald.]

CHAPTER IV.

"Sometimes 'the heaviest wheat of all' may spring up from seeds dropped in an incidental way. What a motive to the maintenance of a personal business! The incidental is the shadow of the intentional. Influence is the exhalation of character."—W. M. Brooks.

"Whatever ye do, whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God." Nell repeated the words softly as she took a final survey of herself before donning her wraps. "I suppose that mamma would say that 'whatsoever' took in everything, even the sociable to-night, but I am sure I cannot conceive of anything there that I could possibly do to the glory of God. I almost hope that I won't think of anything, for I want to have just a nice happy time, and it's so horrid to have some hateful thing coming up every other minute. I do want to be good, but I wish that it wasn't quite so hard work. However, I'm not going to worry, for I do not believe that even mamma could find anything to-night."

But, alas for Nell's hopes! The evening was not half gone when Nettie Willis came to her. "They want you to sing, Nell." Nell was talking with Dean Gray, Nettie's cousin from the city.

"What shall I sing?" "Anything," was Nettie's laughing reply. As Nell turned to go, two lines from a little hymn of Miss Havergal's went flashing through her mind.

"Help me to sing Always, only for my King." "Oh, dear!" she exclaimed in dismay. Here was the "whatsoever" certainly, here was something for her to do to the glory of God.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Gray. "Nothing—only a thought," replied Nell. What should she do? In the new music Aunt Helen had sent her were two pieces—one a song, the other a beautiful hymn, "Rock of Ages"—which should she sing? One would only amuse, the other would not only please by its beautiful melody, but also cheer and help, perhaps touch some heart and awaken a desire to cling to this Rock of Ages. But, oh, how could she sing it! It seemed so like a confession of faith! And yet it was the church sociable—why was it not appropriate?

And Mr. Gray—what would he say? She fancied that he was not a Christian. Was this a chance for her to show her colors, to speak to him for Christ? And then her voice—was it not a gift of God, and had she ever used it in his service? Question after question went flashing through her mind as she crossed the room to the piano, and still her decision was not made.

"Whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

The words seemed to ring in Nell's ears as her fingers rested idly on the keys. "I will, God helping me!" was her resolution, as for an instant she bent her head. Then she sang as never before in her life.

Dean Gray, standing beside her, started a little in surprise at her selection. He was not in the habit of hearing such music in society, and he watched Nell closely.

"She feels it, evidently," was his mental comment. "I—wish that I did."

When Nell finished, instead of the covert sneer she half expected to meet, there was only a grave, courteous, "Thanks, it is beautiful."

Five minutes later Nell was the centre of a merry group, the life of the circle.

"I wonder," thought Dean Gray, watching her, "if there really is anything to it after all."

And then following the direction of Nell's eyes, he spied in the corner a solitary figure looking with wistful eyes at the merry group.

"Here's a chance for you to show if you meant what you just sang," thought Dean to himself.

"O—h—dear, here's another 'whatsoever,' was Nell's thought. "There's Ray Perkins, she does look forlorn, that's a fact, and I might draw her in with us. She's real good only kind of poky. Oh, Nell Weston, I am ashamed of you! I hadn't any idea you were so selfish."

It all came about easily. Nell proposed a new game, and in the bustle of settling themselves, she unobtrusively asked Ray to draw up her chair with them.

Dean Gray noted it, however. "It is real," he said to himself, and Nell, without knowing it, had spoken for her Master.

"But, oh mamma," she said, as she stopped for a little good-night talk, "I didn't know that it was like this. I thought being a Christian meant praying and reading the Bible, going to church, being charitable, and such things. I didn't know it went into everything so."

"Nellie, dear, whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God. In all your ways acknowledge him. Let me read you this little extract from Mr. Thomas Hughes concerning his instructor, Dr. Thomas Arnold: 'Dr. Arnold certainly did teach us—thank God for it—that we could not cut our lives into slices, and say, "In this slice your actions are indifferent and you needn't trouble your heads about them one way or another, but in this slice mind what you are about, for they are important." A pretty muddle we should have been in had we done so. He taught us that in this wonderful world no boy or man can tell which of his actions is indifferent and which not, that by a thoughtless word or look we may lead astray a brother for whom Christ died. He taught us that life is a whole, made up of actions, and thoughts, and longings, great and small, mean and ignoble, therefore the only true wisdom for boy or man is to bring the whole life into obedience to Him whose world we live in, and who has purchased us with his blood.'"

"Nell—I say, Nell, here's a letter for you," called Teddy one morning.

Nell came flying out on the piazza, duster in hand.

It proved to be an invitation from Mrs. Capron to ride over to D, that evening to a concert. How Nell's eyes danced and sparkled as she read it! Hadn't she just been "aching" to go, but without the remotest idea that she could? Dear me, it was only half-past seven in the morning!

How could she wait until evening? Right in the midst of her joyful anticipations a thought occurred to Nell that banished the brightness from her face in a twinkling. It was prayer-meeting night. But what difference need that make, she said to herself, as she finished her dusting.

Of course she was very sorry to have it happen so. If it was anything she could put off, or something that she could go to again, why then it would undoubtedly be her duty to give it up and go to meeting. But it could not be put off, and when should she ever get another such invitation? Concerts as fine as this were rare events in D., and invitations for Nell were still more infrequent.

What would be the harm in going just this once? She would never make a habit of it, of course. She was provoked at herself for remembering just then how severely she had criticised Mrs. Norgross for going out calling prayer-meeting evening. That was entirely different.

Mrs. Capron was a church member herself—really it would almost look impertinent in her to decline, it would seem to imply that she, a young Christian, thought she knew better than the other ones. Dr. Mason and his wife, Tom Grant, Annie Carroll, Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong, and Mrs. Bennet, all church members, were going. If they went why could not she?

And then Nell tried to consider the question decided, but upstairs, downstairs, wherever, she went, something kept silently whispering in her ear; "what is that to thee? Follow thou Me."

What difference did it make to her what the rest did? She had pledged herself not to follow them, but Christ. She was not trying to be simply as good, to do as near right, as this one or that, but she was trying to be like Christ—and He was perfect. If others failed, it was no excuse for her. Rather, should it not make her doubly careful? Oh, how much easier it was to condemn others for their inconsistencies than to be perfectly consistent one's self!

"Well, I have learned one lesson," said Nell wearily to herself, as she went upstairs after dinner to write her note to Mrs. Capron, "and that is to be a little more guarded in my comments of others. I find that I, too, am even like unto them."

"Going to meeting to-night Nell?" asked Jennie as they arranged the table for tea.

"Yes," replied Nell, with a little quiver in her voice in spite of herself. It had been so hard to give up the concert.

"Maybe—I wouldn't mind going along with you," said Jennie, hesitatingly.

"I would be ever so glad to have you," replied Nell quickly. They had tried to get Jennie to go, but she had declined even on Sunday.

"She didn't care so great about such things," she said, "and she hadn't any fine feathers. It would do her more good to stay at home and rest."

Nell listened for two that night. She was so glad that good old Father Kent was there, he always seemed to have a message direct from heaven. And Mr. Lamson spoke so earnestly. If Jennie would only heed their words, thought Nell as they walked silently home.

Could she—Nell—say anything to her? She did so want her to accept Christ.

"I would urge it if it was anything else I wanted half so much as this. Why can't I know? If a perfect stranger was sick, and I knew something that would help her, I should not hesitate an instant. I know Christ will be to Jennie what no one else in the world can, why don't I tell her so?"

But they had reached home and stood on the porch in the moonlight before she could find courage to speak. Then, just as they turned to go in, she put her arms impulsively round Jennie.

"Oh Jennie, I do wish that you would love Christ. I do truly; I cannot tell you what a friend and helper he is. Won't you let him help you, Jennie?"

"I'll think about it," was all she said as she hurried upstairs.

"I am so glad that I went to meeting instead of going to the concert," thought Nell. "I should have lost this opportunity if I had."

CHAPTER V.

"Would you judge of the lawfulness or unlawfulness of pleasure, take this as a rule: Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes away the relish of spiritual things that is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself."

Nell and her mother were alone in the sitting-room. Jennie had gone down street, and the children were out of doors.

But it was plainly apparent that Nell had something on her mind. Mrs. Weston, glanced up now and then from her own work, watched her half curiously but asked no questions. She knew that Nell would speak when she was ready.

Presently it came: "Bell Tracy invited me to her party."

"Well?" was Mrs. Weston's only reply; but the matter was clear to her now.

"And I do want to go—well—awfully bad, as Teddy says."

Nell laughed, but there was a little quiver in her voice which testified to the truth of her words.

"But you think perhaps you had better not?" Mrs. Weston's voice was kindly sympathetic.

"That is just what I can't decide. Of course it is a genuine 'reglar' party—to quote Teddy again—not very large, but they will dance, play cards—some of them, I presume—they generally do at Belle's, and I don't really know what to do. Of course I would not dance or play cards, and yet I can't really see what harm there would be in my dancing a few times."

"Nellie," said her mother earnestly, "suppose you settle those questions once and for all at the beginning of your Christian life. What do you really think you ought to do about it?"

"I don't hardly know. I don't think it would be right, of course, for a Christian to go too much, but why can it hurt me once in a while among my own friends?"

"You remind me, Nell," said Mrs. Weston smilingly, "of a little story I once read of a gentleman who wanted to hire a coachman. He asked each applicant for the position how near he could drive to a precipice and not drive over. Most of them were positive that they could come pretty near; but still he was not satisfied. Finally one man said that he did not know how near he could come, but he should try to keep just as far away as he possibly could. Isn't that the safest way? How do you know that you can meddle with temptation and come off unhurt? And then, dear, there is another thing to be thought of. Even allowing it to be perfectly right for you, how will it affect your influence over others? What will your friends who are not Christians expect you to do?"

Nell finished hemming her apron before she answered again.

"I don't think it would hurt me one single bit to go; and I am sure I don't see why I must give up all my fun just for other folks' sake."

"Very well, my dear, but suppose some time you should find out that some one was led astray by your example, even supposing it is only one single person—will any amount of pleasure you may enjoy compensate for that? Possibly you might dance or even play a game of cards without any injury to yourself, though I doubt it, for whatever does not help us hinders us; but by doing it you would convince it, and some one else, seeing you drive in apparent safety so near the precipice of sin, might venture themselves and be lost. There are a multitude of pleasures that we may enjoy without fear of leading anyone astray. Is it best to meddle with any that may?"

Nell folded her work and went upstairs without replying.

Much against her will she was secretly convinced that her mother was right. There was Susie Barrows. She knew she was thinking very seriously just now; she had talked with her yesterday. Would it do Susie any good as she was feeling now, to go to such a party? And wouldn't Susie be likely to think, if she went, that there could be no harm in her going? There was not the least doubt in Nell's mind but that she ought to give it up, but she was not willing yet.

"I say, Nell," said Grace Sherman the next day, "what does all you? You are crosser than two sticks. Oh, by the way, what are you going to wear at Belle's party?"

"I don't know," answered Nell shortly; and then catching a questioning, surprised look from Susie Barrows, she added even more shortly if possible, "I have not said yet that I was going, have I?"

"No, dearest," replied Grace laughing. "And really, love, I trust you won't unless you are in a pleasanter frame of mind than you are now. You remind me of the renowned little girl who had a little curl; when you are good, as you have been for the past few weeks, you are very good; but when you are bad—don't let me hurt your feelings—you are horrid. That is, the little girl with the curl is."

Nell turned away to hide the tears that would come. What did Susie think of her, and Grace? Oh, dear, how miserable and wretched she was! She made an almost complete failure in history, and went home at night more wretched than ever, thoroughly out of sorts, and throwing the blame of her unhappiness on everybody but herself.

"I wish that Belle had never so much as thought of having a party," she said bitterly, as she sat down on the porch to rest.

"Nellie, dear," said her mother, coming out and sitting down beside her; "Nellie, don't you see how you are grieving your Master?"

"I haven't the least intention of going," replied Nell sharply.

"I know; but cannot you make the sacrifice lovingly and willingly? Remember, the Lord loves a cheerful giver, not only of money, I believe, but also of obedience and the little every-day sacrifices. Suppose that I should give up doing something I wanted to because you wished me to, and then should spend my time fretting because I did not want to give it up, would you feel very much pleased, or very happy about it?"

"N—o," replied Nell slowly. Somehow she had not thought of it in that light before; she had seemed quite a martyr to herself for giving up going, and she had kept thinking how much she wanted to go instead