

Hope's Quiet Hour.

To All Their Dues.

Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. Owe no man anything, but to love one another.—Rom. 13:7, 8.

Life would be easier for everybody if we always paid our debts promptly. It is the accumulated weight of man unpaid accounts that usually causes business firms to fail. Many people seem to think it is not necessary to be very particular about returning a quarter or a dime, borrowed from a friend. Yet the same person who has a habit of forgetting to pay trifling debts would be horrified at the idea of stealing small sums out of his friend's purse. If the money is not ours, and we are making no attempt to return it to the owner—is it not practically stealing? Of course, it is easy to say, "I forgot!" But at least we should try to remember.

Debts are of many kinds. But, if we would be honest in God's sight and able to look unashamed into His face, we must try in real earnest to obey the command: "Render therefore to all their dues."

One thing we should be especially careful about, and that is to deal justly and fairly with those who work for us. We have no right to grind them down to the lowest possible level of wages; nor have we any right to grind out of them the utmost possible amount of work in return for their wages. We are bound, in honor, to give them their dues in the matter of money, rest and recreation—not to speak of good food and plenty of it.

In this morning's paper I saw a statement that the Germans were "making slaves of the Belgians." Let us be careful never to make slaves of the men or women who are employed by us. Sometimes we ought to render to them rather more than they can legally claim as their right, if it is only to remind ourselves that we all belong to one family. We don't forget to give a present to a brother at Christmas time—and all of us are brothers and sisters.

Do you remember how Dickens, in "A Christmas Carol," showed the ugliness of exacting every cent we could possibly claim? It was Christmas Eve, and Scrooge said grudgingly to his over-worked and under-paid clerk:

"You'll want all day to-morrow, I suppose."

"If quite convenient, sir," was the meek reply.

"It's not convenient, and it's not fair," said Scrooge. "If I was to stop half a crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound."

As he couldn't help himself, he submitted, saying, "Be here all the earlier next morning."

Then the spirit of Christmas past took the close-fisted, rich man back to the days when he was a poor lad. His employer, "Old Fezziwig," as the apprentices affectionately called him, called out, "Yo ho, my boys! No more work to-night. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer!"

After a glimpse of that jolly Christmas party which had filled his heart with loyalty towards his employer many years before, Ebenezer Scrooge began to wish that he had been a little more genial towards his poor clerk.

When our turn comes to look back at our earthly life we shall be very eager to redeem the time—to make good our failures. "Owe no man anything, but to love one another," is the advice of St. Paul. It is our past failures in loving one another that we regret when the Christmas spirit has filled us with goodwill to men. We look back on the year that has just slipped away, and wish we had been kinder, less selfish, less grasping.

It is not a trifling sin to be easily condoned. God has said that He Himself will be a swift witness "against those that oppress the hireling in his wages." He is not only the Judge and the Witness,

but He is the Prosecutor. Inasmuch as we have done it unto one of the least of His brethren we have done it (any injustice or unkindness) to the King of Kings Himself.

He has warned us: "Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates. At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the Lord."

Perhaps one reason the young people prefer to work in stores and factories, rather than in private houses, is because they know they will get their wages as soon as they are due. "At his day thou shalt give him his hire," commanded Moses, thousands of years ago; and the law of love—the Golden Rule—is still pressing home the command. It may not seem a matter of much consequence to the master or mistress to pay wages the day they are due, but it is a matter of importance to the person employed. God does not forget pay-day, and He expects us also to remember.

Then there are others, nearer still, who are often refused their just rights. A hired servant has to be paid or he will not work. Think of the young men and women who are working very hard at home, and have to ask for every dollar—yes, even every "quarter"—they receive! They have earned it over and over again; and yet it is doled out grudgingly, very often, as a "gift." No wonder the young people escape from the grinding work and poor pay at home, to work for regular and just dues elsewhere. When money is scarce at home they are ready and willing to do their part, and more than their share. I know young boys and girls, just out of school, who bring every cent of the week's pay to "mother," and accept an occasional dollar out of their own money as gratefully as if it were a gift. But if the young people are, without sufficient reason, deprived of their just rights, they will learn very little honesty or generosity. Give love, and love will come back to you in overflowing measure. Any kindness shown to the least of Christ's brethren is accepted by Him as a gift—a Christmas gift—to Himself. He will not remain in debt to anyone.

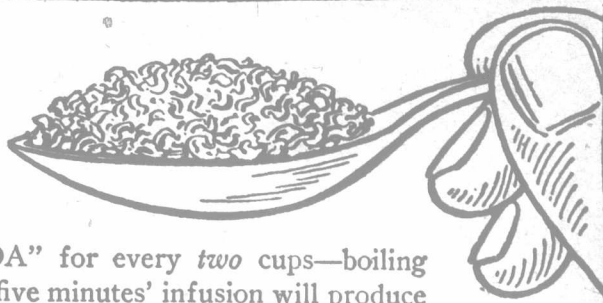
"Owe no man anything, but to love one another." Love does not count every cent, in fear of giving a little too much. It was not Mary, but Judas—not the giver but the looker-on—who counted up the value of the precious ointment and said that it was "wasted."

We owe to others a debt of kindness—kindness in word as well as act. Many who are generous and kind to the poor who are not working for them never seem to think of treating with equal consideration their own employees. How few ever think of paying the woman who has been washing or housecleaning all day a little extra money, and sending her home cheered and happy! Perhaps she has a lot of children to feed and clothe out of her hard earnings. Do you try, if possible, to engage someone to work for you who has "only herself to keep," and is willing to take "starvation wages?" When people are forced by circumstances to accept less than their work is really worth, are we willing to "steal" their precious time and strength?—for that is what it amounts to if we don't try to render to them their dues.

There is another debt too often left unpaid—the debt to the home-maker. Think of the many unselfish women who are toiling cheerfully year after year to keep the house tidy and the meals going! The pay she cares most about is the affectionate appreciation that she deserves. The man who never mentions the meals, unless it is to find fault, is not rendering the thanks due to the cook. If the cook is working for love instead of money, she deserves all the more gratitude. In many homes the weight of the housework bears heavily on the mother, and the husband and children often accept all her toil as a matter of course. When the long strain breaks down her strength, and she is unable to keep everything up to the usual standard, they are inclined to feel injured. Would husband and children be quite so ready to blame and slow to thank the tired woman who is being made the slave of the household, if they remembered that she, whose just rights were so persistently disregarded, might—"happen to be God."

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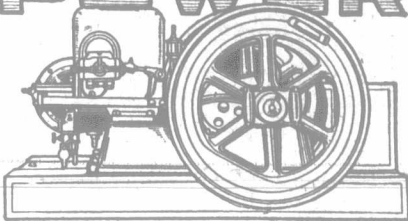
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