

Thinking On Religious Truth.

The habit of religious meditation needs encouragement. In the past, Christians apparently used to reflect more about the great truths of the gospel, in itself and its practical applications, than most of them do now. This is partly due to the enormous multiplication of topics of interest in modern times, because of the more rapid and comprehensive facilities of intercommunication, the abundance of publications and the advance in valuable knowledge of many kinds. Then religion had nothing like as many competitors as subjects of thought as it has now and men were not so much tempted, as at present, to superficial reflection.

Meditation upon spiritual truth is essential to a substantial and symmetrical Christian growth. It is as important in religious matters as in technically scientific, for example. It has its delights and its rewards yet it involves honest effort. It offers the most alluring and interesting themes and no other sort of reflection equally expands and ennobles the mind. He who possesses only humble natural abilities but who trains himself to meditate earnestly upon divine things soon surprises others by the freshness and force of his comments.

Prayer is the best accompaniment and aid to such reflection. Well chosen devotional reading also proves suggestive and stimulating. Study of the Bible itself is at once necessary and natural and is full of increasing enjoyment. Conversation with Christian people, especially those of experienced and ripened piety, is an important help. And when one has formed, or desires to form, the habit of religious meditation, it is of much advantage to set apart a regular portion of time to be sacredly reserved for it.

Such reflection is most fruitful when guarded from too wide a range at a given time and when concentrated upon one's self so far as to promote self-enlightenment and spiritual improvement. It is our best opportunity of comparing ourselves with our great Example and of discovering how to become like Him. And one notable result of it is that many a puzzling subject is cleared up. New points of view are suggested. Mysteries somehow solve themselves reasonably. The divine Spirit keeps the promise of God to His own and real revelations come to us which are of present and eternal value.

Unseen Protection.

A lady was wakened up one morning by a strange noise of pecking at the window, and when she got up she saw a butterfly flying backwards and forwards inside the window in a great fright, because outside there was a sparrow pecking at the glass, wanting to reach the butterfly. The butterfly did not see the glass, but it saw the sparrow, and evidently expected every moment to be caught. Neither did the sparrow see the glass, though it saw the butterfly, and made sure of catching it. But all the while the butterfly, because of that thin, invisible sheet of glass, was actually as safe as if it had been miles away from the sparrow.

It is when we forget our Protector that our hearts fail us. Elisha's servant was in great fear when he awoke in the morning and saw the city of Dothan encompassed with horses and chariots and a great host; but when his eyes were opened at the prayer of the prophet, his fears vanished, for he beheld the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." "The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth, and even for ever more."

"Though now unseen by outward sense,
Faith sees Him always near;
A guide, a glory, a defence:
Thou, what have you to fear?"

Overwork.

It is not work that kills: it is worry. It is not work that breaks down the health, it is overwork. And probably more women yield to this form of prostration than men. They have not been long enough harnessed to the world's chariot wheels to have learned to shirk. They work while strength holds out, and if they hold a responsible position, they are apt to feel that they are indispensable there, and so cling to it alone instead of

asking others to share it with them; or training younger persons to be ready to step into their places when the time comes for rest. One of the best lessons, health-wise, for capable men and women to learn is that there are "just as good fish in the sea as ever were caught." It may sound like an inappreciative sentiment, but it is magnifying the human race at large, though it may seem to belittle the individual. No man or woman is indispensable. The world is not made on that plan. Therefore the busiest person may pause to breathe, and so be able to live the longer and work the harder. For, though a wise Providence supplies the needs of humanity as they occur, yet the process of adjustment of new men to new places is not easy; and those who are doing important work should so order their lives that changes shall not come oftener than necessary.

But how often people forget this, and burdening themselves with work enough for several shoulders, sink at last under the heavy load! It is but a little space of time since a noble woman gave away her life in this fashion—a sacrifice to overwork. To-day, too late, three or four people are carrying the heavy load she tried to carry alone.

As we look over the country and study various institutions, we wonder what will happen when the overworked and overworried heads fall, as they must sooner or later. People are raised up to succeed them; but what a pity to lose precious lives and experience simply because the labor was not divided sooner!

One sees the same thing in homes. The patient mother is cook, nurse, maid of-all-work, till she drops in her place. Then a housekeeper, a maid and a nursery governess are found necessary to make good the absence of the busy hands; but no hired service can fill the void in the home and the hearts.

It is economy to spend money in home, office, institution, if it will lessen the strain of head and heart, divide the labor and lessen the care.

A Sermon.

Taste in sermons, we are glad to believe, is improving. Congregations are not nearly so willing to tolerate the babyish trifling with texts which Dr. Parker once satirized by a sermonic parody of "Old Mother Hubbard." But the old style is still not quite extinct. There is a fine example in a sermon "outline" by a Congregational minister in the *American Treasury of Religious Thought*. The text is, "The woman then left her water-pot" (John iv. 28). He thus expounds:

"She left her water-pot because she forgot it. Forgot it, as you and I forget. Forgot it, as you, perhaps, forgot to put the lighted match to the shavings and kindlings and wood which you had adjusted, and wondered why the fire did not burn. Forgot it, as you did, when you forgot to mail your letter. Forgot it, as you did, when you carried the ash-pan to the horse or emptied the dish of oats on the ash-heap. I knew a minister who actually dismissed his congregation at the close of the morning sermon, entirely oblivious of the communion-table spread in his very presence. Henry Ward Beecher declares that he three times went to the office one morning and enquired for his mail, each time forgetting to deposit his letters, which was his real errand to the office. Both of these men were completely swayed by the thoughts of the moment, and forgot everything else. So with this woman. There was no special need of mentioning the water-pot, except to show her forgetfulness of it. The water-pot had nothing to do with the story otherwise. Whatever of interest attached to it before had vanished now. She forgot the water-pot."

Did any of the congregation wish that a water-pot could have been emptied over the preacher?

Distinctions Of Character Confused.*

BY REV. ADDISON P. FOSTER, D.D.

HOW DISTINCTIONS OF CHARACTER ARE CONFUSED.

Christ's twin parables of the Tares and the Drag-net set before us a fact patent to all, that under certain conditions it is not easy to distinguish between good

*A Meditation based on (Matt. xiii. 24-30, 36-43, 47-50); in the Bible Study Union Course on "The Teachings of Christ."