

THE HILL DIFFICULTY.*

By Robert E. Spear.

A country without hills is a very uninteresting country. It is the hills which vary the landscape. Without them there would be no pleasant valleys with running streams, no shadow from the heat of the sun, no lofty outlooks, no rest of nerve and brain such as comes from variety and change. To be sure, the hills present their problems. They block travel and transportation. But they hide our richest treasures. Our minerals are buried in the hills, and our forests grow upon them. And men are better men for having their problems to solve, their barriers to pierce and their secret treasures to uncover.

Difficulties are to us in the moral life what hills are in nature. They are to be rejoiced in. This was the way Paul accepted his. He met outward difficulties and was exhilarated by them. "I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost," he wrote, "for a great door and effectual is opened unto me and there are many adversaries." Those adversaries did not affright him. They made him eager to stay. He saw in them only an opportunity, "a great door." Paul met inward difficulties and found a consolation in them also. He was humbled by a "thorn in the flesh," as he called it. He asked God to remove it. God said, "No." Paul was not cast down. He gladly kept his thorn and the spiritual grace which his need revealed to him in Christ and brought to him in his own soul. Difficulties only give to us a yet larger claim upon God.

And our best work is always done against difficulties. The greatest achievements of men have been their conquests of the mountains. The greater the task, the greater the triumph. And so in our heart struggles. The man who has most to contend against achieves the richest victory. He who does something or makes something on the level spaces against no difficulties, does what he does or works what he works. But he who makes something against odds, makes not only that thing but also more manhood. And the making of manhood is the best of achievements.

Our difficulties hide our best treasures. We find them by conquering our high places. We climb arduously up some steep ascent wondering what it all means. When we reach the top we understand. It was per aspera ad astra, as the favorite old class motto declares, through roughness to the stars. On top of that steep, wearisome ascent we breathe the very heavens and see as from Pisgah into the far-off promised land, to which we ourselves are bound.

Or perhaps our hill is there not to be climbed but to be mined, and we dig on in darkness and gloom and loneliness, envying those whose way is across the plains and whose tasks are in the sun. But by and by, as we dig on, we come to wealth, the wealth we have dreamed of and longed for but never thought to find here.

Let us thank God for the hill country where we are appointed to live. Our God is a God of the hills, and we need not fear them. He has appointed them to us as friends.

"It is no tiresome work to me to study Chinese," said Griffith John. "Its difficulty only intensifies my desire to grapple with it."

DAILY BIBLE READINGS.

Mon.—Strength for all tasks (Isa. 49: 8-11).
Tues.—David's Hill Difficulty (1 Sam. 17: 32-51).

Wed.—The dangers of slackness (Rev. 2: 1-7).

Thurs.—A call to awake (Rom. 13: 11-14).

Fri.—The victor (1 John 5: 1-5; Rev. 3: 12).

Sat.—Retracing our steps (Num. 14: 26-35).

* Y.P. Topic, Sunday, June 20, 1909
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THE TWO VOICES.

He stood at morn by the ocean's shore,
The wild waves sparkled free;
A voice came down from the far hill-side,
A voice came from the sea.

The first he knew—a gentle voice,
It stirred his youthful breast—
The voice that in his boyhood's days
Had lulled him oft to rest.

"Come back," it said, "my love, my joy"—
In broken tones thro' tears—
"Be still my stay while thus I bow
Beneath the burdening years."

Alas! he heard, but heeded not,
His thoughts were on the sea,
The clouds that hid its outward rim
Were deep with mystery.

In fancy's ear a siren voice
His wandering steps lured on;
He dashed aside the rising tear.
A moment—he was gone.

Thus wayward youth will home and friends
And love of mother scorn,
And build its hopes upon a dream,
That flits like clouds of morn.

J. G. THOMSON.

PRAYER.

O God, to whom alone the hearts of men are open, look into our hearts to-day, and cleanse our spirits of all grossness on this Thy Sabbath day. In all the ages has this sublime season of meditation been given to man for converse with Thee, and we now pray Thee to teach us as Thou didst teach those of old to walk with Thee, and to taste of the sweets of close communion with Thee. Amen.

When Christ plucked away the sting of death, the earth went into convulsions.

The power of the grave was rolled away when the angel rolled the stone away.

Tainted honor is worse than tainted money, for it adds its taint to the character of the possessor.

Unbelief sees every difficulty in the path, and is so engrossed in the effort to surmount them without getting hurt that it knows not what or where the end of the journey may be. Faith looks to the goal and sees no obstacles.

Life is most worth living when it is lived for the most worthy ends. The thought of heaven hereafter, and of heavenliness now, has been the redemption of many a spirit from misery and sordidness. In this sense, even earth may be blest by heaven's best.

Many of us are still buying and selling in the house of God. We carry our merchandise with us, and while the sermon is in progress we are mentally trafficking or balancing books or visiting patients. A vision of Christ with his scourge of cords might cure our manners as well as our morals.

There is one day of rest, but there are six of activity. God's world is an active world. There is a great work to do, and he would teach his people to be zealous. He gives the green pastures, and he provides the still waters, but he also shows us the paths of righteousness.

The God that answers by fire is the God whom mankind will acknowledge; and so long as the fruits of the Spirit continue to be visible in charity, in self-sacrifice, in those graces which raise human creatures above themselves, thoughtful persons will remain convinced that with them in some form or other is the secret of truth.—James Froude.

THE LIVING SACRIFICE OF CHARITY.

"I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."—Romans xii. 1.

In none of his Epistles has the Apostle Paul connected the doctrinal and practical parts of religion so closely as he does in this Epistle to the Church of Rome. Nowhere in the New Testament are they so inseparably woven together; for no writer in the Scriptures has grasped so profoundly the relation of right thinking to right living. We all know that what is wrong with the living of to-day is the false thinking that is beneath it. If we could only get people to think rightly of God and immortality, life, and duty, the gross, luxurious, and vicious living among us would soon disappear. No one in his day understood this so well as the Apostle Paul. It was natural, from his view of things, that he should begin this letter with a discussion of the doctrine of Christianity, and end with their practical application. He marks the passage of his thought and treatment from the one to the other for us in his use of the word "therefore," which indicates that Christian believing has its realization in Christian living. Besides, the Apostle's method of writing met and corrected two dangerous tendencies in the Church at Rome—there was the danger that the Jewish believer would overshadow Christianity with its ritualism, and that the Gentile Christian would run the liberty of the Gospel into licence; now to keep the Jewish section of the Church right, Paul states what the Gospel is in its doctrines, and specially for the benefit of the Gentile section, what is their bearing upon character, and here "conduct becomes three-fourths of life."

Be it observed that whether the Apostle is dealing with the doctrinal or practical part in his Epistle, it is one and the same idea—that of sacrifice—that is everywhere present in it. Sacrifice is the master-word of the Bible, and because it is so, religion is the same in its essence and character in all dispensations. A distinguished statesman has left it on record that all sensible people are of the same religion, but when he was asked what that religion was, all he would say was, that wise men never tell. But the Bible tells us, and tells us that that religion is the religion of sacrifice. Under all its forms and manifestations, and in all its normal and abnormal development, the one genuine religion is that of sacrifice. In the spiritual worshipper of to-day it is difficult to recognize the lineal descendant of the sincere animal worshippers of the days of Abraham, and yet, because at the heart of the worship of both there is sacrifice in spirit and essence, their religion is the same. In all ages sacrifice is the highest expression of worship, but how different its matter and form and services are in the Christian dispensation from those of all other dispensations; in them the sacrifices were dead, but now they are living; in them it was the bodies of animals that were presented, but now it must be our own bodies that we offer; in them the sacrifices were ceremonial and outward, but now they are spiritual and inward; there is no longer need of a local national priesthood, for through Christ Jesus the priesthood has become spiritual and universal—the property of humanity—and wherever the heart is consecrated there is the altar of God, on which we can "offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually—that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name." The sacrifice of Christ was made on the Cross, that "we also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God."