

As the service proceeded, the attention of the congregation flagged more and more—the hubbub of worldly talk increased. One man composed a letter he intended to send, and even altered whole passages and rounded elegant periods, without one check or recollection of the holy place where he stood. Another repeated a long dialogue which had passed between himself and a friend the night before, and considered how he might have spoken more to the purpose. Some young girls rehearsed scenes with their lovers—some recalled the incidents of their last ball. Careful housewives planned schemes of economy, gave warning to their servants, arranged the turning of a gown, or decided on the most becoming trimming for a bonnet.

To me, conscious of the recording Angel's presence, all this solemn mockery of worship was frightful. I would have given worlds to rouse this congregation to a sense of what they were doing, and, to my comfort, I saw that for the involuntary offenders a gentle warning was provided.

A frown from the Angel, or the waving of his impatient wings as if about to quit a place so desecrated, recalled the wandering thoughts of many a soul, unconscious whence came the breath that revived the dying flame of his devotions.

Then self-blame, tears of penitence, and bitter remorse—of which those kneeling nearest knew nothing—wrung the heart shocked at its own careless ingratitude, wondering at and adoring the forbearance of the Almighty, while more concentrated thoughts, and, I trust more fervent prayer, succeeded to the momentary forgetfulness.

In spite of these helps, however, the amount of real devotion was small; and when I looked at the Angel's tablets I was shocked to see how little was written therein.

Out of three hundred Christians, thought I, assembled after a week of mercies to praise and bless the Giver of all good, these few words are the sum of what they offer :

“Look to thyself,” said the angel, reading my inmost thoughts. “Such as these are, such hast thou long been. Darest thou, after what has been revealed to thee—act such a part again! O could thy mortal ears bear to listen to the songs of the rejoicing Angels, before the throne of the Almighty, thou wouldst indeed wonder at the condescending mercy, which stoops to accept these few faint, wandering notes of prayer and praise. Yet the sinless Angels veil their faces before Him, in whose presence man stands boldly up with such mockery of worship as thou hast seen this day. Remember the solemn warning, lest hereafter it may be accounted to thee as an aggravation of guilt.”

Suddenly the sweet solemn voice ceased, the glorious Angel disappeared, and so oppressive seemed the silence and loneliness, that I started and awoke. My watch pointed to the hour of eleven, it must have been the stopping of the bells that interrupted my slumbers, and all this solemn scene had passed before my mind in the short space of a few minutes.

May the lessons I learned in those few minutes never be effaced from my heart: and if this account of them should aid in recalling one wandering thought in the house of prayer, or teach any to value more highly and cultivate more carefully the privilege of joining in the public worship of our church, it will not have been written in vain.