

Selections.

THE SUNDAY MORNING'S DREAM.

[The following very impressive tract is now being largely circulated in England, and is reprinted for the first time in this country in this paper.—*Ed. Ep. Rec.*]

My first day of returning health, after many weeks of severe illness, was a bright Sunday in June. I was well enough to sit at an open window in my easy chair, and as our house stood in a pleasant garden in the suburbs of London, the first roses of the year scented the soft breeze that fanned my pale cheek, and revived my languid frame. The bells of our parish church were just beginning their chimes, and the familiar sound awakened in me an intense longing to be with my family once more a worshipper in the house of God. I took up my Bible and Prayer Book, which had been placed ready on the table beside me, intending to begin to read, when the hour of the eleven o'clock service should be announced by the ceasing of the bells; and, in the mean time, closed my eyes, and soothed my impatient wishes by picturing to myself the shady avenues of blossoming limes that led to our church, and the throngs that would now be entering it for the public worship of the day.

All at once I seemed to be walking in the beautiful churchyard, yet prevented from gratifying my eager wish to enter the church, by some irresistible though unseen hand. One by one the congregation, in their gay Sunday dress, passed me by, and went in where I vainly strove to follow. The parish children in two long and orderly trains defiled up the staircases into the galleries, and except a few stragglers hurrying in, as feeling themselves late, I was left alone.

Suddenly I was conscious of some awful presence, and felt myself addressed by a voice of most sweet solemnity in words to this effect: "Mortal, who by divine mercy has just been permitted to return from the gates of the grave, pause before thou enterest God's holy house again; reflect how often thou hast profaned his solemn public worship by irreverence, or by inattention, which is in his sight irreverence; consider well the great privilege, the unspeakable benefit and blessing of united prayer, lest by again abusing it thou tire the patience of thy long-suffering God, and tempt him forever to deprive thee of that which hitherto thou hast so little valued." Seeing me cast down, my eyes and blush with conscious guilt, the gracious being continued in a milder tone, "I am one of those angels commissioned to gather the prayers of the saints, and form them into wreaths of odorous incense that they may rise to the throne of God. Enter thou with me, and thou shalt, for thy warning, be able to discern those among the devotions about to be offered which are acceptable to him, and to see how low in number, how weak, and unworthy they are."

As he ceased speaking I found myself by the side of the angel still, but within the church, and so placed that I could distinctly see every part of the building.

"Observe," said the angel, "that those prayers which come from the heart, and which alone ascend on high, will seem to be uttered aloud. They will be more or less audible in proportion to their earnestness—when the thoughts wander the sounds will grow faint, and even cease altogether."

This explained to me why the organist, though apparently playing with all his might, produced no sound, and why, presently after, when the service began, though the lips of many moved, and all appeared attentive, only a few faint murmurings were heard.

How strange and awful it was to note the sort of death-like silence that prevailed in whole pews, in which, as was thus evident, no heart was raised in gratitude to heaven. Even in the Te Deum and Jubilate, the voices sometimes sunk into total silence. After the Creed there was a low murmuring of the verses, and then distinct and clear above all other sounds, a sweet childish voice softly and reverently repeated the Lord's Prayer. I turned into the direction of the sound, and distinguished among the parish children a very little boy. His hands were clasped together, as he knelt his eyes were closed, his gentle face composed in reverence, and as the angel wrote on his tablets the words that fell from those infant lips, his smile, like a sunbeam, illuminated the church for a moment, and I remember the words of holy David, where he says, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise."

Presently I was again reminded of a scripture passage—the prayer of the publican. A wretched-look-

ing man, who swept the crossing near the church, lounged into the centre aisle during the reading of the lessons, his occupation being for the hour suspended. The second lesson was the 24th chapter of St. Matthew, some verses attracted his attention: he listened with more and more seriousness, until at length he put his hand over his face and exclaimed aloud, "What will become of me at the day of judgment; Lord have mercy upon me a sinner." That prayer was inserted on the angel's tablets. Oh, may it not stand alone, but be an awakening of better things. May God indeed have mercy on such poor neglected ones as he, and raise up some to teach them, and care for their immortal souls.

After this, growing accustomed to the broken murmurs and interrupted sounds, I followed many a humble Christian through large portions of the Litany: through often, while I was listening with hopeful attention, a sudden and total pause showed but too plainly that the thoughts of the kneeling suppliant had wandered far away, and that he who appeared so earnest in his devotions had become languid and silent like the rest of the congregation.

"Thou art shocked at what thou hast observed," said the angel, "I will show thee greater abominations than these. God is strong and patient: he is provoked every day. Listen now, and thou shalt hear the thoughts of all these people; so shalt thou have some faint idea of the forbearance God continually exercises towards those who draw near to him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him."

As the angel spoke my ears were deafened with a clamor which would have been shocking in a public meeting, but which here, in God's holy house, was awfully profane. The countenance remained indeed as composed and serious as before, the lips moved with the words of prayer, but the phrases they uttered were of the world and its occupations.

"How shamefully late Mrs. Slack always comes," said one woman, who, looking over the edge of her Prayer-Book, saw her neighbor and a train of daughters bustle into the next pew. "What an example to set to her family, thank goodness no one can accuse me for that sin." "New bonnets again already!" exclaimed the last comer, returning the neighborly glance from the other seat, ere she composed herself to the semblance of devotion. "How they can afford it heaven only knows, and their father owing all his Christmas bills yet. It my girls look shabby, at least we pay our debts."

"Ah! there's Thom Scott," nodded a young man to his friend in the opposite gallery, "he is growing quite respectable and respectable, I declare. He has been to church two Sundays running: How much longer will the devout fit last?"

These were shocking and striking examples of irreverence. there were happily not many such, the involuntary wanderings of thought were more common.

I was much interested in a young couple near me, whose attention for a considerable part of the service had been remarkable. From the dress of the young man I judged him to be a clergyman, the lady wore deep mourning; they were evidently betrothed,—they read out of one book. Gradually he forgot the awful presence in which he stood, his eyes wandered from the Bible to her gentle face, and fixing there, called off his thoughts from heaven. "How good she is," he began to say, "how attentive to her prayers, as to all other duties! What a sweet wife she will make! How happy I am to have won her love." By this time the countenance of the young girl wore an expression which showed that she felt the earnestness of his gaze; her eyelids trembled—her attention wavered, and though she looked at the book some minutes longer she too began to murmur of earthly things, and I heard her say, "Oh, how he loves me—even here he cannot forget that I am beside him." It was many minutes before either of them returned in spirit to their devotion.

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 of 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 arouse 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 all 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, are these few words 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! Oh, 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 smiles 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 be counted 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 lesson I learned in these few minutes never be effaced from my heart; and if this account of them should recall 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.

A MERCHANT'S SYSTEM OF GIVING.—A merchant in answer to inquiries, refers back to a period when he says, "In consecrating my life anew to God, aware of the ensnaring influence of riches and the necessity of deciding on a plan of charity before wealth should bias my judgment, and I adopted the following system:—

"I decided to balance my accounts as nearly as I could every month; and, reserving such portion of profits as might appear adequate to cover probable losses, to lay aside, by entry on a benevolent account, one-tenth of the remaining profits, great or small, as a fund for benevolent expenditure, supporting myself and family on the remaining nine-tenths. I further determined, that if any time my net profits, that is, profit from which clerk hire and store expenses had been deducted, should exceed five hundred dollars in a month, I would give twelve and a half per cent.; if over seven hundred dollars, fifteen per cent.; if over nine hundred dollars, seventeen and a half per cent.; if over thirteen hundred dollars, twenty two and a half per cent.; thus increasing the proportion of the whole, as God should prosper, until, at fifteen hundred dollars I should give twenty five per cent. or three hundred and seventy-five dollars a month. As capital was of the utmost importance to my success in business, I decided not to increase the foregoing scale until I had a certain capital, after which I would give one quarter of all net profits, great or small, and on the acquisition of another certain amount of capital, decided to give half, and on acquiring what I determined would be a full sufficiency of capital, then to give the whole of my net profits.

"It is now several years since I adopted this plan, and under it I have acquired a handsome capital, and have been prospered beyond my most sanguine expectations. As, though constantly giving, I have never yet touched the bottom of my fund, and have repeatedly been surprised to find what large drafts it would bear. True, during some months I have encountered a salutary trial of faith, when this rule has led me to,