

A Picture of God.

By S. D. Gordon.

It is fairly pathetic what a stranger God is in his own World. He comes to His own, and they who are His own kinsfolk keep Him standing outside the door while they peer suspiciously at Him through the crack at the hinges. To know God truly is the beginning of a normal life. One of the best pictures of God that I ever saw came to me in a simple story. It was of a man, a minister, who lived in a New England town. He had a son about fourteen years of age, and going to school. One afternoon the boy's teacher called at the home, asked for the father, and said: "Is your boy sick?" "No, why?" "He was not at school today." "Is that so?" "Nor yesterday." "You don't mean it!" "Nor the day before." "Well!" "And I supposed he was sick." "No, he's not sick." "Well, I thought I should tell you." And the father said "thank you." And the teacher left.

The father sat thinking. By and by he heard a clink at the gate, and he knew the boy was coming, so he went to open the door. And the boy knew when he looked up that his father knew about those three days. And the father said, "Come into the library, Phil." And Phil went. And the door was closed. And the father said, "Phil, your teacher was here this afternoon. He tells me you were not at school today, nor yesterday, nor the day before. And I supposed you were. You let us think you were. And you do not know how badly I feel. I have always trusted you. I have always said, I can trust my boy Phil." And here you have been a living lie for three whole days. And I can't tell you how badly I feel." Well, that was hard on Phil to be talked to quietly like that. If his father had asked him out to the woods for a confidential interview, or had spoken roughly it, wouldn't have been nearly as hard. Then the father said, "Phil, we'll get down and pray." And the thing was getting harder for Phil all the time. He didn't want to pray just then. And they got down. And the father prayed. And the boy knew as he listened how badly his father felt over his conduct. And they got up. And the father's eyes were wet. And Phil's eyes were not dry.

Then the father said, "Phil, there's a law of life that where there is sin, there's suffering. You can't detach these two things. Where there is suffering there has been sin somewhere. And where there is a sin there will be suffering. You can't get the two things apart. Now," he said, "you've done wrong. And I am in this home like God is in the world. So we will do this. You go up to the attic. I'll make a pallet for you there. We'll take your meals up to you at the regular times. And you stay up there as long as you have been a living lie, three days and three nights." And Phil didn't say anything. They went upstairs, the pallet was made and the father left the boy.

Supper time came and the father and mother sat down to eat. But they couldn't eat for thinking about the boy. The longer they chewed upon the food the bigger it got in their mouths. And swallowing it was clear out of the question. Then they went into the sitting room for the evening. He picked up the evening paper to read, and she sat down to sew. His eyes were not very good. He wore glasses. And this evening he couldn't see distinctly. The glasses seemed blurred. It must have been the glasses. So he took them off and cleaned them carefully, and then found he had been holding the paper upside down. And she tried to sew. But the thread broke. And she couldn't seem to get the needle threaded again. You could see there were both bothered. By and by the clock struck nine, and then ten, their usual hour for retiring. But they made no move towards retiring. She said, "Aren't you going to bed?" and he said, "I think I'll not go yet; you go." "No, I guess I'll wait a bit." And the clock struck eleven, and the hands worked around toward twelve. Then they arose, and went to bed. But not to sleep. Each one made pretence to be asleep, and each knew the other was not asleep. And she said, "Why don't you sleep?" And he said, "How did you know I wasn't sleeping? Why don't you sleep?" "Well, I just can't for thinking of the boy." "That's the bother with me." And the clock in the hall struck twelve, and one, and two. Still sleep did not come.

At last he said, "Mother, I can't stand this any longer. I'm going upstairs with Phil." And he took his pillow and went softly out of the room, and up to the attic stairs, and pressed the latch very softly so as not to wake the boy if he were asleep, and tiptoed across the attic floor to the corner by the window and there Phil lay—wide awake, with something glistening in his eyes, and what looked like stains on his cheeks. And the father got down between the sheets with his boy, and their tears got mixed upon each other's cheeks. Then they slept. And next night when sleep-time came the father said, "Good-night, mother, I'm going up stairs with Phil." And the second night he slept in the attic with his boy. And the third night again he said, "Good-night, mother, I'm going up with the boy again." And the third night he slept in the place of punishment with his boy.

You are not not surprised that today that boy, a man grown, is telling the story of Jesus with

tongue and life of flame in the heart of China. You know I think that father is the best picture of God I ever saw. God couldn't take away sin. It is here. He could not take away suffering out of kindness to man. For suffering is sin's index finger saying: "There's something wrong here." So He came down in the person of His Son, and lay down alongside of man for three days and three nights. That's God. And He comes and puts His life alongside of yours and mine and makes us hate the bad, and long to be pure. To spend the day with Him—that is the true normal life.—Commonwealth.

Life's Decisions.

By Newell Dwight Hillis.

It is not enough that men should desire good, they must, with instant resolution choose the good, and give themselves to it with entire abandon. It is often said that men are in danger of emotionalism in religion. People are urged not to act in haste. Take plenty of time. Wait for the second sober thought. When a man is thinking about committing a crime, the sober second thought is the best thought. When a man is thinking about doing right the first thought is the only good thought, and the second thought is treachery. Life is a conflict, every day brings its test. No man is safe until he is carried to the cemetery. And evil surges round the soul, beating with ever constant stroke, and the way of instant resolution is the only way of safety. No counsel can be more foolish than the counsel for delay, time, and consideration. In an hour like that of the Iroquois fire, it is the foolish man who says "consider." "Wait for the second thought. Avoid precipitancy." The one duty of the moment is to make haste. Save yourself first, and consider afterward. You are on the great overland express. Some spark has kindled a flame on the bridge. The locomotive goes down. Startled by the jerk, you spring to the door of your sleeper. The car hangs on the edge; the one duty is the duty of precipitancy. You must act, and you must act for your life. This is also the law of the soul. In these hours when God is brooding upon you, and the finer feelings rise, commit yourself; turn to the man who is sitting beside you, and say: "For years I have been wrong. I am determined to do right." Speak to every friend you meet, announcing your decision. Give hostages to pride. Many and many a man might have been saved if he had acted with decision and energy. There are men here who have been gambling in secret; some of you have been tempted, and have yielded. You are standing upon the edge of a precipice; go forth tomorrow and make restitution. Build buttresses between you and evil. When the sentinel gives the word that the enemy is approaching, the regiment hastily throws up an earthwork. So they sleep behind defences. You must take sides, and so buttress yourself about. This is the function of the church. This is the philosophy of Christ's word: "If any man is ashamed of Me and My word of him will I be ashamed when I come into My kingdom." Do not be deceived; God is not mocked; you are coming to an hour of shame and of peril. You think that you have some excuses for not walking in Christ's band of disciples, for not carrying His flag or following His banner. Do you think that if Christ were in your place He would refuse and stand aloof as you have stood for years? All the little flimsy excuses that you have been making for keeping out of His church are as important as the drifting leaves. Then you must choose. Why not now!

CHOOSE THIS DAY.

Swiftly the years come and go. Already some of you are approaching the end. Did you but know it, you are now in sight of the home land. Just as men framed to the sea perceive the smell of the soil in the air, before the shore comes into sight, so already the foretokens and intimations of the life beyond are now being made clear. Already the air is full of voices; if you only had ears to hear. And yet, you are now in the winter of your discontent. Restlessness disturbs you; with fear and shrinking you draw back from the end. More and more you cling to the things called bonds and goods and houses. But soon these ambitions will explode like balloons. Soon the whole fabric material will dissolve, and leave not a wrack behind. When it is too late, you will discover that those things that you have pursued are only for the support of the body, that the things of the soul alone are of consequence. In that hour, you will recall all the interferences of God in your behalf. What has your career been but a succession of overtures from the all-loving Father God. And are all these events to be in vain? What a father and mother you had! Are their graves to mean nothing to you? What teachers, and what companions in life's way! What offices and honors and joys and victories God has sent you! Are these all to be in vain? What a succession of prophets and apostles and martyrs who have inspired and guided you. Is their work to come to nought! What means this voice, this still small voice, that whispers and still whispers. Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation. My son, give me thine heart. Oh, I am lonely, close! For God and your soul are not enemies, but friends. You must not be enemies. Though selfishness and sin have strained they must not break; the bonds of affection. In my vision I see the mystic

chords of memory stretch from your heart and hearthstone and your mother's grave, to the arms of yonder cross that stands on Calvary. Surely the chords will give forth the music of the Christian life when the angels of God and your better nature touch the strings. Do not go out in silence, as Judas did. If you do, then all is in vain. For then, the harvest is past, the summer is gone, and man's soul is not saved.—Commonwealth.

The Back-Seat Christian.

By Rev. William Futehy Gibbons.

"When He marked how they chose out the chief seats."—Luke 14:7 (R. V.)
The chief seats at a lecture or a concert or at a fashionable church wedding are on the centre aisle, well forward; but the chief seats at a prayer-meeting are farthest away from the speaker's desk. At least this is the only conclusion we can reach if we decide the matter by the preferences of the majority. But there is a still more curious fact, viz.: it often happens that the very people who rent the front pews in the church; and will not be content with any others, are just the people who drop into the back seats at prayer-meeting; that is, if they ever go to prayer-meeting.

Not every Christian that sits on the back seat is a back-seat Christian. There are busy mothers who have slipped away from household cares at the last moment; there are humble, unfashionable worshippers, too much strangers to go forward, yet not liking to stay away, who are as near to God in the back seats as if they were next to the speaker's desk. But the fact remains that the man who habitually chooses the back seat in the Lord's house expresses thereby the inward desire of his soul; he wants to follow Christ—afar off.

The back-seat Christian is not usually steadfast, but he is almost always immovable. Having taken the back seat, he sticks to it as if his hope of heaven depended on his holding to that seat, when the fact is that his hope of heaven may depend on his getting out of it. The back seat is dangerous. It has been said that the back seat is so exposed to the draughts of worldliness that the occupant is liable to spiritual pneumonia.

The back-seat Christian would be in the most convenient position to shake hands with the stranger who might be within the gates of the church, if it were not that the back-seat Christian runs a foot-race for the door during the benediction to prevent anybody from shaking hands with him.

It is a strange fact that the very man who needs a policeman to keep him in line at the entrance to the baseball park will resist every invitation of the minister to move forward and take a front seat at the prayer-meeting.

The back-seat Christian is not a good hearer; sometimes he giggles, sometimes he gawks, sometimes he gapes, sometimes he sleeps. Neither is the back-seat Christian a good giver. When he doeth his alms to be seen of men, he taketh a front seat; and when he intends to contribute copper, he takes a back seat, that no man may discern the meanness of his gift.

It has been said that the back seats at prayer-meeting would be a good place to prepare to enter the back door of heaven, if heaven had any back doors. It might also be said that the back seat would be a good place to prepare for backsliding, if the man who deliberately and repeatedly chooses the back seat had not already begun to backslide.

There is hope for the back-seat Christian, but only one hope. He needs to come near to the heart of Christ. Then he will no longer be content to be a hanger-on in the outskirts of the worshipping congregation. The same spiritual dynamite that moves him from his place by the door will force open his mouth and set him to praising and praying.—Golden Rule.

HEAVEN.

Ah, what is heaven, but to bless some life,
Some radiant beams of joy to give
To joyous souls, and to make their life,
With better purposes of how to live!
To awake in slumbering souls the while
A restful calm of hope and peace:
To make heavy-laden hearts to smile,
And to the troubled bring release!
To rid mankind of doubt and strife,
And brighter hopes of life to give,
Ah, this is heaven! yes, this is live!
This is indeed alone to live!

Adam S. Craen.

THE REASON.

O reason! faculty divine, that turns
Forever to the truth, and finding, burns
To search out more, my spirit bows to thee,
And bowing feels the peace and harmony
Of vital union with the universe.
O light in darkness burning, while this verse
I offer up to thee, possess my soul,
Illuminate, and guide it onward, roll,
Tradition's heaven-hiding night away,
And halo round with ever-growing day.

Arthur D. Wilmot.