

THE MESSENGER.

grew very wistful. 'I would willingly die to-day that I might taste the life of the better world, and find my earth-worn spirit free and strong for God's happy service.' There was a knock at the door; one of his clerks wanted some instructions, and he answered—not like one who had just been longing for the higher life and aspiring heavenwards, but roughly and impatiently. When the door closed again he sneered at himself: 'I am a fool; my religion costs me something now and then, but it has not made me better than other men.'

Then he wrote on. He did not know that an angel was bending over him—a being so fair, so strong, so radiant with holy joy that a mortal could hardly look upon him without envying his bliss. The angel's face was very sweetly grave, and his clear eyes were full of tender pity.

'Brother!' he said, at length, in tones of music, that opened the ears and heart of the man beside him, 'brother, fear not! I am like thee, one of the servants of God; and but now, as I sang in my place in the chorus of heaven, his word came to me, bidding me seek thee, because thou art very weary, and having shown myself to thee, tell thee that if thou art willing we may change our service. We shall be ourselves unchanged in heart, and character, but changed in all beside. Thou shalt dwell in this angelic body, and I will tabernacle in thy mortal flesh. Thou shalt watch me, if thou wilt, as angels have many times watched thee; or, if thou chooseth so, thou shalt soar heavenward and join the celestial chorus. All the powers and privileges of angelhood shall be thine while I dwell here in thy place, wearing thy form and fulfilling thy duties. What sayest thou? Art thou willing?'

'More than willing, oh, blessed angel!' the man answered eagerly, his voice broken with a sob of joy. 'How could I be other than willing to resign this humdrum life, with its sordid cares and ceaseless toils for things earthly, for joy and glory, holiness and happiness like thine?' As he spoke a strange gladness thrilled every nerve; he closed his eyes for a moment. Then he looked again toward the angel, and lo, he saw instead the outside of himself. Yet, on the careworn face of the man, with its early wrinkles and premature gray hairs, the angel's sweet, grave smile shone strangely; and even in the first amaze of glancing down at the glories of his new exterior, the man felt that he was not all angel.

'Am I as thou wert?' he asked, doubtfully and half afraid.

'Thou hast all I had that could be taken from me without robbing me of myself,' answered the angel. 'As thou seest that I am truly become as thou wast, so completely art thou become like what I was. Thou wearest the glories of the life celestial; thou hast the form and privileges of a heavenly servant of the King of kings. Will thou rise heavenward and taste the joys from which I came, worshipping in my place?'

'No,' faltered the man, 'not yet. I fear—I fear I know not what. Old burdens cling to me and I dare not go heavenward; my heart faints at the thought of it. I am not happy; I am not at peace; how can I venture among the blessed? Let me stay here and watch thee!'

'As thou wilt,' answered the angel, 'Thou shalt be invisible to all, even to me, till thou desirest otherwise.' And turning to the desk he began to write, like the man he seemed, and worked diligently, and swiftly, with intent, smiling face, until his pen scratched, and a heavy blot fell on the clean page before him. Then, as he paused long enough to take away the spoiled sheet, a low, sweet song burst from his lips: 'Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive

the glory and the honor and the power, for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they were, and were created.'

Then he wrote on till someone knocked at the door. He responded cheerily, and turning a kind, bright face toward the clerk, answered his inquiries pleasantly, and busied himself among the papers again. So he wrote until it was time to go to the man's house. He went through the busy streets with a happy face, singing in a low, sweet undertone. He did not lose his serene smile in the bustle and throng of the crowded railway station; it rather deepened as he guided a weakly old man down the stairs, and helped a frightened woman and her little ones into the train. Men who sat in the carriage with him forgot to read their evening papers as they watched his face, wondering at its look of exceeding gladness, and following his eyes as he gazed at the sky, glowing toward sunset. One after another spoke of the beauty of the evening, the loveliness of the long bright days, and the sweet glimpses of summer that came even to the noisy city; and, somehow, as they went to their homes, they felt strangely happy. It seemed, indeed, that he carried an atmosphere of joy with him, for as he entered the house smiling, the children ran to meet him, and clung round him in eager welcome. When he sat down they climbed to his arms and whispered baby confidences, and listened eagerly to the tales he told them till their mother came, with apologies for delay, and more complaints of the careless maids, to call him to the evening meal. She was half timid, half resentful, and her eyelids were reddened with unconfessed tears. But he smiled on her.

'There is no need to trouble,' he said; 'it is all very well if thou wilt be happy.' And those few words, uttered in the gentlest of tones, made her more eager to serve him than all the harsh reproaches that her husband had spoken in the morning.

The meal was a very happy one, and when it was over she lingered near, with tear bright eyes, till, turning from the little ones, he talked with her, and they spoke together of many things.

Presently she said, 'It is long since we have talked like this; how is it you are more kind than usual?'

'Am I?' the angel asked, smiling. Then she blushed, for though there was no hint of reproach in his words or his tone, she could not help remembering how often she had been cold and unresponsive when her husband meant to be kind. Kissing the bright, hair of her youngest child, she vowed in her heart to be more gentle and loving from that hour.

That night there was to be a meeting at the old church, when the members were to hear the report of the special committee, and vote upon the plans for rebuilding. The man had dreaded it, as likely to be a stormy, disputatious gathering. The angel went to it singing, and greeted the members he met so kindly that they whispered to one another their wonder at the change in their old friend. And the meeting was curiously peaceful. In his opening remarks the minister had nervously deprecated unseemly strife, for he feared a conflict among his strong-willed helpers, but for once there was no disagreement; it seemed as if everybody was more anxious to decide on the best plan than to recommend his own, and one after another spoke of serving Christ rather than sect or creed. The closing hymn was a shout of praise, and the minister's prayer was full of gratitude, while many eyes were dim with wholesome tears, and many hearts felt a new softness. There was a hush upon them all, as they went out into the summer night. Some one whispered to the angel.

'It has been a strange meeting—more like one for worship than for business.'

And the angel answered,

'Worship is our business, and all our business is worship; if we are the servants of God. What he cleanses cannot be common or unclean.'

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For many days the man in angel form watched the angel who had taken his place, and saw how he met life's difficulties. Worries and annoyances, trials and temptations met him in the house, in the office, in the church. He was often weary, yet he never seemed vexed or troubled or sad; he never complained or showed impatience. Steadfastly and faithfully he went through the round of commonplace duties, and partly because he did them so well, partly because of a nameless something in his look and word, he had power over all whom he met. The children were ashamed to quarrel or be disobedient in his gentle presence; the men who served dared not bring neglect or unfaithfulness before his clear eyes; men and women who came to his office greedy of gold, and unscrupulously eager to win it, were humbled and sobered as they talked with him. And always in the pauses of business, as he walked through the busy streets, while he watched the children at their play, he sang low and sweet a song which had for its burden 'Thou art worthy, O Lord!'

The man, listening enviously, was not surprised to hear many praises of the angel. One morning the children whispered together that 'father was such a dear now,' and their mother asked him, 'Do you notice what the children are saying? And they are not the only ones. The servants say it is a pleasure to wait on master now, and yesterday, as I was shopping, I heard—'

But something in the angel's face checked her, and she fell into reverent silence, while he sang low as he went away to the dingy office, 'Thou art worthy O Lord!'

When he entered it the splendor of his angel shape flashed upon him, and the man's voice cried, 'Let me speak! I can bear this no longer. Let me ask thee some questions. Art thou happy?'

'Yes, every day and all day long,' the angel answered heartily.

'But art thou content? Thou art far from heaven now, and thy life is full of common tasks and petty toils. Instead of angels, thy neighbors are men and women, erring and often sinful. Some of them praise thee, but some of them misunderstand and despise thee. Thou canst not be happy! Dost thou not loathe this life and long for heaven?'

The angel's smile glorified the plain, worn face through which he looked as he answered, 'I am content, I am happy. I love this life, for it is heaven to do the will of God, and I would not leave heaven.'

'But it is impossible that thou art content here!' the man protested passionately. 'Thy angel powers are wasting. Dost thou desire nothing better? Hast thou no longing for God's nearer presence, for more worthy service?'

'I long for nothing better than to do God's will. I desire no better service than he gives me. He cannot waste what is his own, and what he uses is very near to him,' the angel answered steadfastly.

Then the man burst into bitter weeping, and the angel glory which he wore was strangely dimmed with the passion of his tears.

'Alas!' he murmured, 'I am weary, troubled, lonely. I cannot tell why thou art so happy! Not even thy angelhood has brought me joy. I dare not seek heaven, and I have no gladness here. Give me back my manhood again.'

The angel's glance was infinitely tender as