

## Choice Literature.

### CLOUDS AT SUNSET.

James T. Shotwell, in The Week.

Adown the western sky on crimson'd tide  
The sun-god slowly sinks and floats and falls  
Toward that great city, on whose far-off walls  
The sentinels of day are faint descried,  
By Sunset's gleaming portals, open'd wide  
To give him entrance; there still Echo calls  
With wailing music thro' funereal halls,  
Mourning a monarch fall'n in his pride.

Silent from East, where once victorious rose  
The day-beams seeking refuge in the West,  
The legion of the night, in blackness dress'd,  
Hurls the dark javelins on its fleeing foes,  
And o'er the blood-red plumes of Even's crest  
The lonely pall of death and silence throws,  
Strathroy, Ont.

### HIRAM OSBORNE'S NEARER DUTY.

Anna D. Walker in The Christian at Work.

Hiram Osborne lived in the pretty thriving country town of Glenfield.

Mr. Osborne kept a genuine country store and dealt in all sorts of wares as we might say.

And the man prospered year by year, owned his own house, a handsome residence with garden attached, had an amiable wife and two promising children, a son of fifteen years and a fair daughter two years younger.

Hiram Osborne had a brother living about ten miles from him, a very poor but worthy man, who while he was as deserving as Hiram was not as energetic and thriving in business.

Martin Osborne owned a farm with that unfortunate attachment a mortgage, which attachment ever threatened to eat the heart out of the property, and did eat a large share of the crops, as poor Farmer Osborne often realized.

The farmhouse held six children, all healthy and strong, and able to consume food and wear out clothes equal to the best, and then the little wife was broken in health and rather inefficient in management. What more was needed to make Martin Osborne acquainted with poverty?

Vice only; but as we have said before, Martin was a stranger to that most fruitful source of poverty.

The farm was the old homestead of the family, and when affairs were settled after the father's death Martin took the farm and mortgaged it to pay to his brothers the share which fell to them.

Hiram was a conscientious man, and religiously gave a tenth of his income to the church and to the poor, but he did not widen out his charities farther. When he had given a tenth he felt that in that line his duty was done, and strange to say he seldom ever tried to assist his poorer brother. He felt that his consecrated money, as he deemed the tithes, was too sacred to be used for his own kindred, and also felt himself too poor to give beyond that amount, and so Martin struggled along often needy where his brother could have assisted him.

For instance, one day when Martin was standing in his brother's store a neighbouring poor woman came in and made a few purchases, and then in answer to inquiries from Hiram, said that her two children were suffering for shoes.

Here was an opportunity to do good, and Hiram Osborne would not let it pass him by, so going to a shelf where a shining row of shoes displayed themselves he selected two pairs and gave them to the woman, first ascertaining the sizes she needed.

After the pleased recipient of his bounty left the store Hiram turned to his brother and remarked humorously "There goes a happy woman."

Martin smiled but looked wistful as he replied.

"I wish my little ones could be shod as easily."

"O well," said Hiram, "I gave those out of my tithes, and of course I could not give my own brother from my consecrated money. I cannot give beyond the tenth; I always deduct something from prices for you."

Hiram felt a little twinge of conscience

as he looked at his brother's careworn face, but quickly dismissed the matter from his mind, and the same evening took to his daughter a beautiful pair of ties. He felt pleasure in his act of benevolence, and went on his way forgetful of the duty that lay nearer by.

Mrs. Osborne, the mother of these two men, had from the time of the death of her husband resided with a sister who needed her companionship, but suddenly death came to the sister, and the mother was left almost wholly dependent upon her children.

According to the father's will a life right in the farm and a home there belonged to this good mother, but Martin was poor and his brother was prosperous. What should be done?

Besides Martin and Hiram there was a third brother, a younger one, but he was far away, none of the family knew where, therefore nothing was expected from him.

Hiram coolly said "He could not take his mother, her home was naturally with her eldest son and in the homestead."

Martin on the other hand said "Hiram can make mother comfortable, but she is welcome to come to her place in the old homestead just as soon as she is ready to come."

Again Hiram felt some twinges from conscience, but reasoned them away once more; he thrust from him the duty near by, and did that which was farther away.

The mother came to the farm and was met by her eldest son with the exclamation "Mother you are welcome here."

The little wife was as warm in her welcome, and the world moved on as before.

It was early Summer when Mother Osborne came to the farm, and in that beautiful and busy season it was soon discovered that the newcomer was a valuable acquisition to the family, her pale and wrinkled hands were everywhere useful, her travel worn feet kept pace with those much younger, while her cheerfulness and wisdom were inspiring to one and all.

And yet that same Summer was a trying season to Farmer Osborne and family, for a drought long and protracted fell upon the ever thirsty earth and lasted until the potato vines withered in unfruitfulness, the corn held up long green arms in entreaty for rain, the pasture grew sere and brown, other crops were blasted, and the sun with great red eyes scorched man and beast with his fiery glances, and never seemed weary of shining.

Right in the midst of this trouble dear little baby Osborne sickened and died; there had been six babies born to the parents, as we have said, healthy, well children, and they had all been welcomed, but now a new kind of guest came. O how unwelcome! There was a little white casket, a baby face and form in snowy whiteness, laid within it, a funeral, a burial, and lonely aching hearts that ill could bear the missing of baby, and yet again the world moved on as before.

Martin Osborne was greatly troubled over the lost crops. O how much a protracted summer drought means to the farmer, of anxiety and trouble.

Martin with dismay thought of his interest money which in October must be paid.

"How could he raise it? No use of going to Hiram for aid," thought he, "he can give to anyone but his brother, but then he's a good man, and I will not complain."

How about Hiram while his brother was in especial trial? He felt sorry for Martin, showed much sympathy at the time of the baby's death, but did very little to help those so near to him. 'Tis true he sent his mother a present sometimes; a new dress one week, a pair of shoes another, and once or twice a small sum of money.

But the Lord had a controversy with Hiram, and the man was loth to yield. Conscience at times entreated, at other times upbraided. "Give to your own kindred," it cried, "with your tenth or with your own surplus, but aid them in their need." Hiram was wont to reply

"Martin had as good a start in life as I had, and even better, and I don't feel it my duty to assist him."

Yet Hiram was uneasy, he knew he ought to reach out a helping hand to his

brother, but he did not want to recognize that duty.

Martin was a man of prayer and he besought the Lord for help, and when October was almost at hand he went to Hiram and timidly asked him to loan him the amount that must be had to meet the demands of the mortgage.

"I cannot lend it to you, Martin," was the answer. "I have just been obliged to make arrangements to have my house repaired and painted, and that will take my loose money. I am sorry for you, old boy, but can't do it, indeed I can't."

Martin turned away, and as he did so his brother noticed the haggard expression of his countenance, but murmured

"No, no, I cannot do it; if I commenced to help Martin he will depend upon me more and more. It's the case with such people."

This did not quiet Hiram Osborne's conscience, it would not be quieted, and yet the man argued against its reproaches and suggestions and tried to shun duty.

The Sabbath came just after Martin had asked his brother's assistance, and Hiram as usual went to church. How often God has a message for us in church.

The text of the discourse to which Hiram listened upon that September Sabbath was the last clause of the seventh verse of the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah, "Hide not thyself from thine own flesh." Upon the previous Sabbath the pastor had preached from the foregoing clauses of the verse, and now in a series of sermons had come to speak of our duty to our own kindred, and Hiram Osborne sat spellbound as he heard his duty to his brother declared. The collection basket came around and the sum which our good friend laid in it was a liberal one, for the cause was one of the best, even Foreign Missions, but this did not quiet conscience, though Hiram hoped that it would do so.

The remainder of the Sabbath was spent in the unsuccessful fight, and after a distressful night Hiram Osborne hurried away to his brother's farm, saying to his wife as he left home.

"I must go and help Martin, for there is no rest for me till I do so."

Along the way Hiram queried to himself as to how much assistance he should render.

"Cancel the mortgage which threatens to swallow the old homestead, and which brings new wrinkles every day to poor Martin's face," cried conscience, "that's your duty—do it?"

"I won't!" cried Hiram, "see myself giving back to Martin all my share of the farm! I guess not; it's not duty. One owes something to self and to wife and children."

"Your wife and children are handsomely provided for, and will lose nothing from your benevolence," answered that faithful monitor.

"I will lend Martin enough to pay his year's interest, and that is all I will do in that direction; this is not conscience, it's a streak of nervousness that has taken hold of me. Ridiculous idea, truly. Pay all that mortgage off, eh? No! no! indeed I will not!" and Hiram whipped up his horse and tried to forget the harassing subject.

Arriving at the farm he clasped his careworn brother in his arms, asked his forgiveness, and begged to be allowed to help him.

Their interview took place in the old barn, where as boys they had played together; it was private, none but the Lord witnessed it, and when with bowed heads and wet faces they came forth, the sky seemed to bend kindly above them in approval of their brotherly love.

Together the two went to the house, where Hiram kissed his mother more tenderly than for years, and then taking her pale and wrinkled hand he said

"Mother, would you like to go and live with us?"

The mother hesitated for a moment and then answered

"I feel more at home here, my dear son; here is where your father lived and died, and where my children were born, and here is home, but perhaps it is better to go; for poor Martin is burdened with debt and other cares that he has enough to bear without me to look after."

"It's no burden to keep you, mother dear!" cried Martin as the tears filled his eyes. "Never think so."

After further discussion it was concluded to leave the mother where she was.

"But," said Hiram, "I will attend to expenses, and see that mother does not want, and that Martin receives weekly what I consider as my share of taking care of our dear remaining parent. Let me take Mildred instead, if her mother can spare her, and we will give her the advantage of Glenfield Academy along with our own daughter."

It was gladly agreed that Mildred, the eldest daughter at the farm, should accompany her uncle home, and after the carriage was emptied of its load of provisions which Hiram had brought from the store, they were ready to start.

Uncle and niece rode away leaving good cheer behind them, only for the great problem unsolved regarding the interest money.

"It was strange," thought Martin, "that brother didn't offer aid in that direction; and now what can I do? There's where the need is imperative, and Hiram did not even mention it."

Why, ask our readers, did not Hiram Osborne help Martin with his interest money?

Ah, just because conscience was so busy with him, and he was so determined to fight against it that he left the farm without mentioning that most important matter.

Cancel the mortgage," cried conscience. "No," said Hiram. "I have brought the money to loan Martin, enough to pay the year's interest, and I think I am very kind to do it."

"Kind," echoed conscience. "Look at your brother's careworn face, and cancel the mortgage."

"I won't! I won't! I won't!" and Hiram set down his foot hard by way of emphasis, and rode homeward, leaving Martin as we have seen, perplexed thereabout.

Two days went by and Hiram fought lustily, but thanks be to the Lord, conscience conquered, and the mortgage was cancelled, and Hiram, wholly subdued, rode to the farm once more, and as he thrust the paper into his brother's hand cried

"Take it! take it quickly! it's your own now," and then the mighty feeling Hiram Osborne burst into tears and sobbed like a child.

When at length he could speak, he explained matters, and told his brother that unless he grew wealthy he need never think of returning the money, "and," continued he, "I will still try to be charitable to the church and the poor, but hereafter will endeavour to remember my own kindred, my own flesh," and springing into his own carriage he abruptly rode away to hide his emotions, and to escape from his brother's efforts at thanks, which were painful to him.

And now a change came to the farmer and family, gradually prosperity flowed in to their dwelling, and it was always thought that the blessing was intended from the day that Martin so warmly welcomed his mother.

There is no great truth which has not been abused, perverted, and turned to evil purposes.

Aim at perfection in everything, though in most things it is unattainable; however, they who aim at it and persevere will come much nearer to it than those whose laziness and despondency make them give it up as unattainable.

A piece of rotten wood shines in the dark, but when the daylight appears forfeits its lustre. So in the darkness of this world titles of honour seem glorious, but in the morning of eternity they lose their flaming brightness, and vanish forever.

You can always find plenty of people, both male and female, who will help you to spend your money, who will admire your generosity, and will call you the best fellow in the world if you will only make a fool of yourself for their gratification.