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THANKS FOR THE GIFT.

A CHRISTMAS SERMON.

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(*Methodist.*)

Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.—II. Corinthians ix., 15.

THIS is the one day of all the year for joy and gladness. Even the grey hairs of the most aged and venerable shake with the laughter within. And from that highest snow-crowned peak in all the area of human life, the ever-increasing stream of laughter goes rippling and sparkling down through the domestic circle. The maternal brow, marked with burdens and cares, becomes more placid and smooth, as the remembrances that each year has sacredly treasured up in the true heart, pour in a full, fresh current over the gladdened spirit. The little stream of laughter on the cold peaks of age becomes a resistless torrent as it dashes into the nursery, scattering toys and delicacies in reckless confusion, breaking out in wild huzzahs and shouts, in triumph that school laws have lost their jurisdiction, and that the fragments of the family, scattered for purposes of business and education, are drawn together again by the resistless magnetism of love. What a day, that can send clear around the world peals of laughter, echoing and answering back, and currents of sympathy that soothe and heal, and make the tears dry more rapidly!

Of all the days of the year, this should be a day of thanksgiving and praise. Whatever doubts may be started as to the 25th of December being the exact date, certainly we do know that the Christmas Child came into the bleak wilderness of our world's life, and came as a gift of God so precious that no human language can state how high is the estimation in which it should be held. It is indeed "the unspeakable gift!" And every child knows that it is

RELIGION IN DAILY LIFE.

BY REV. JOHN H. BARROWS, D. D., OF CHICAGO.

(*Presbyterian.*)

Not slothful in business ; fervent in spirit ; serving the Lord.—Romans xii., 11.

IN THIS age we think of God less as an external power or a remote personality, than as an abiding and immanent presence. It is the God who not only “glows in the stars” but who “blossoms in the trees ;” it is the God who not only made the remotest worlds, but is in actual and loving and personal contact with our daily lives, whom we reverence. And so to-day, religion is not so much devotion to the externals of service as to the internals of character. It is not the religion represented by a Sunday boquet, whose flowers, however splendid, almost immediately fade ; it is rather the religion expressed by the flower-garden itself, which men honor. The religion which is a momentary act of worship may be the lightning, but the religion which is a pervasive goodness, expressed in common life, is the light of mankind. What has been called by Dr. Bushnell “a Sunday goodness, a churchly feeling, a prayer-meeting mood,” and which some good people think is about “the utmost grace of religion permitted to them,” needs in its essential spirit to permeate all our lives. And that this is possible is one of the first things that Christians need to learn. The earth revolving on her axis revolves also about the sun, and so we, while actively engaged in the cares and business of an earthly life, may also be revolving in a larger and more glorious orbit about the Sun of Righteousness. The one movement of our lives is not inconsistent, but perfectly harmonious with the other. Our daily work is done no less faithfully and perfectly from the fact that all the while the soul is conscious of heavenly illumination.

The time is long past when seclusion from the world could rightly be thought the best means of saving the world from sin and wretchedness. What makes the remnants of monasticism tolerable is the fact that the recluses from the world still find ample occasion to render charitable service to mankind, and thus, in reality, are not following in the footsteps of the ancient anchorites. But, after all, does there not prevail the notion that the spirit which sings hymns, and offers prayers, and renders worship is incompatible with the hard and strenuous life of business and the gay life of sociability and

pleasure? Is not the world so opposed to the church that the spirit of Christianity cannot pervade and control worldly pursuits? These are serious inquiries, and I readily confess that most people do go through the world and are made continually worse by their experiences. They begin life with a nobler spirit, a truer faith, and loftier ideals than they possess when approaching the darkness of the tomb. It is not merely with pleasure, but with amazement that we read of striking exceptions to this law of degeneracy; that, for example, of Charles Sumner in his old age in the hot Summer months in Washington toiling over his books with the same lofty enthusiasm, the same unquenched ardor; the same hopeful faith, with which he began his great career—not one ideal of his boyhood shattered or dimmed. But this is not the experience or achievement of the many. How solemn are the words in which the American poet has described the death-bed of a man of eighty, who bemoans the fruitlessness of a life which had plucked “the world’s coarse gains,” and who for death-bed guests is confronted by his lost youth and the ghost of his shattered ideals:

“God bends from out the deep and says :
 ‘I gave thee the great gift of life,
 Wast thou not called in many ways,
 Are not My earth and heaven at strife?

“I gave thee of My seed to sow,
 Bringest thou Me My hundred-fold?’
 Can I look up with face aglow
 And answer ‘Father, here is *gold!*’”

I have been innocent, God knows
 When first this wasted life began,
 Not grape with grape more kindly grows,
 Than I, with every brother man.

Christ still was wandering o’er the earth
 Without a place to lay His head,
 He found free welcome at my hearth,
 He shared my cup and broke my bread.

Now, when I hear those steps sublime
 That bring the other world to this,
 My snake-turned nature, sunk in slime,
 Starts sideway with defiant hiss.

O glorious youth that once wast mine,
 O high ideal, all in vain
 Ye enter at this ruined shrine,
 Whence worship ne’er shall rise again.

The bat and owl inhabit here,
 The snake nests in the altar-stone,
 The sacred vessels molder near,
 The image of the God is gone !"

Such a frightful triumph of the world over the spirit is a frequent tragedy, and from it we turn to the triumph of the spirit over the world, which Christ illustrated, and which He made possible for us. This life of ours can be made holy from the cradle to the grave. The sunlit drop of dew, which the Hindoo mystics call life, can reflect in its tiny sphere the whole azure and infinite heaven. Our daily paths can be made sacred like those over which Jesus walked.

Faith has yet its Olivet,
 And love its Galilee.

The music of heaven's bells ought to be heard, and may be heard, amid every chime of wedding bells on earth, amid the tolling of the knell which speaks of sorrow, and amid the din of the factory, and the gaiety of social life. It is said that in one of the great pictures by Murillo we have the interior of a convent kitchen, and that doing the work there are—not mortals in old dresses—but lovely angels with white wings ; one is serenely putting the kettle on the fire to boil, another is lifting a pail of water with angelic grace, and one is at the kitchen dresser reaching up for plates. I suppose all this means that every occupation however humble, every pursuit however secular, may be glorified by the purpose of following it in the love of God and the love of man. Angelic presences thus haunt the humblest scenes of Christian life.

People say that it is difficult, if not impossible, to be a Christian in business, in politics, and in pleasure, and, therefore, they draw a sharp line, and resolve to serve God on Sunday and follow the world all the rest of the time, using religion as a medicine applied every week to heal the wounds of the daily sinful life. They forget what religion is, and how it can best be developed. If, in one sense, religion is the preparation of the soul in this world for the eternal world, then the best preparation should be sought in whatever tests character and develops self-sacrifice. And, surely, the daily cares, the constant attention to our physical necessities, the conflict with the temptations, and difficulties, and sorrows of the world, and even the absorption in things of no great value in them-

selves, all this may be made a help, rather than an obstruction, to the heavenly life, for all this is the schooling of character, and character is made up of many common homely virtues. "The weight of a clock," it has been said, "seems a heavy drag on the delicate movements of its machinery, but so far from arresting or impeding its movement, it is indispensable to their steadiness, balance, and accuracy. There must be some analogous action of what seems the clog and drag-weight of worldly work on the finer movements of man's spiritual being." As it is God's design that all should work, and that all should be holy, therefore, work faithfully performed, and in the right spirit, must, unconsciously it may be to us, lead to the result of holiness.

These truths come home with a vast consoling and inspiring power to multitudes who find their lives very unsatisfactory. They furnish a new standpoint from which to observe our own lives. Nobody is perfectly satisfied with the work which he is compelled to do in the world. But, after all, the daily drill from which we shrink is essential to our spiritual discipline, and should be accepted as such, and the higher the work we attempt, the more we need to be grounded in those fundamental virtues which fidelity in little things, and the daily doing of disagreeable things with a noble purpose, alone can produce. The men who do well the humble drudgery of the clerk and the salesman are those who at last are fitted for the higher drudgery of the merchant prince. And so there is an upward pointing to all this discipline of life. We are not degraded, but refined, by the lowliest work which is performed aright. It is not what men do that defiles or ennobles them, but the mind they carry into it. He is the most religious man who does his own work the most religiously and best; and, in the eye of God, he who does his humble work well is better than he who does his high work ill, just as the man who makes a good picture frame should rank above him who makes a bad picture.

I recently saw a sculptor in his studio who had been handling a lot of clay by which his fingers had been soiled, but on that account his work was not ignoble, for with that clay he had represented in striking bas-relief a chief event of modern history—the surrender of the leader of the Southern Confederacy to the great Captain of the Union Army. Our hands in life may be dirt-stained by what we deem ignoble toil, and yet with those hands we may fashion a pic-

ture sublimer than any which ever appeared on canvas, or has been graven in marble—the surrender of the powers of darkness in our hearts to the angels of light. What is required of us is not new and better occupations, but to bring the love of God and the love of man to our daily work, to the ledger, to the school-book, to the carpenter's bench, to the counter, to the office, to the library, to whatever fills up the most of our lives. There may be more of religion in the mother's faithful attention to her children in the quietness of the nursery, than to the minister's public preaching of the Gospel. The higher the service which man attempts the more awful is the bringing to it of an ungodly spirit. Acts of worship in which there is no religion, sink infinitely beneath deeds of humble toil into which has entered the love of Christ.

CHRISTIAN PATIENCE.

I am sitting on the steps of Thy pavilion ;
 I am waiting for the coming of the day,
 But I know I am but one amongst the million,
 And I shall not murmur at the hour's delay.
 I know that there are others in December
 That are waiting at the gates as well as I,
 And my burden is forgot when I remember
 The sound of the million's cry.

There is not in the pages of earth's story
 A beauty that the laurel less has crowned,
 Than the patience that has waited for Thy glory
 When the winter snows have covered all the ground ;
 The meekness that, with folded hands abiding,
 Has trusted in the love it cannot see,
 And kept amid the chill its lips unhiding,
 Has a palm from none but Thee.

How little do we deem that in the attic,
 Where the invalid repines not in her pain,
 There is seen by Thee a glory more ecstatic
 Than the triumph leading captives in its train.
 There is seen by Thee a lustre more resplendent
 In the patience that refuses to revile,
 Than when victor marches home with kings dependent
 To bask in a nation's smile.

Thou hast precious gems to count from lane and alley,
 When Thou shalt gather jewels from the dust ;
 Thou hast precious flowers to cull from nook and valley
 When Thou shalt blend the garlands in Thy trust ;
 Thou hast precious hearts to glean from fields of anguish,
 When Thou shalt raise the army of Thy Son,
 And the leaders shall be those that did not languish
 Till the march of the day was done.—*Dr. Matheson.*