

The CONTINENT



JULY 24, 1913

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THE CONTINENT

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The Life of the Soft Step

"I shall go softly all my years because of the bitterness of my soul."

So spoke Hezekiah the king when the tide of health came flowing back into his veins after that fierce illness of his from which there had seemed to be no possible recovery.

A bold, strong man was Hezekiah—a strenuous man who had dealt with the tasks of his kingship as a smith smites iron, quick and hard—a man of action, bent on having done the thing he saw to do and with no patience at delays. If obstacles and hardships loomed up before him, he drove at them with main force and headlong determination.

Thus had he traversed the youthful years of his reign. Life was a joyous map of obvious duties to him. His days were a calendar of successes. All was plain and open and unmysterious.

But then came the earthquaking assault of Sennacherib upon his kingdom and capital. After that the terrible disease. And he was helpless before both. Only by the hand of God interposed had he escaped from either calamity.

Yet now he was getting well. And his foes had gone—the heartless Assyrian and the awful legions of Nineveh dead and very sure not to trouble him more. God had shown him most signal favor. Surely Hezekiah may take up living again with all his old boldness, his old-time swing, confidence and aggressiveness. Strong once more and back to the strenuous life!



No, Hezekiah is not returning to the strenuous life. No longer is he the fiery Hezekiah he was before—no longer the youth so certain of himself, so sure that life is all simple and understandable, to be disposed of with one impetuous stroke of action after another.

The king had been walking ways his earlier years had not known—ways of fear and humiliation and disappointment and suffering. These have been the "bitterness" of his soul. And the descent into such experiences—still more, the wonderful ascent out of them—have laid on his life a solemn awe that can never be shaken off.

He will be well again and able to work and ready to serve his Lord. But the world will never again seem to him simple and easy for a strong man's hands to handle. He will never again bear himself jauntily as a man fit for any task, armed to leap recklessly to any fight. A strange self-distrust mantles his heart.

Fifteen years of his reign remain to him, and Hezekiah will try to do his duty. But the weight and problem of duty—the measure of life's obligations—are vastly greater than he had dreamed; the puzzle of life is stranger than he had imagined. No man, he knows now, dares venture to meet life's tasks without God—God in prosperity as needful as God in adversity.

And this is what has driven out his old self-confidence before the increeping reverence that possesses his soul. To dash wildly and noisily through life, vaunting one's own strength and pursuing one's own will, is as impious as to stride with haughty clank of sword and spurs through the quiet temple courts. God is in his holy temple—and in life.

Wherefore Hezekiah knows that for all the years remaining to him he must walk softly—awesomely—head bent, voice hushed, ears hearkening to divine whispers. Life is too mysterious and too solemn to be roistered with or boasted over.

And this is what Hezekiah learned when for his peace, as he says, he had "great bitterness."



And it is for sake of bringing them this same experience of peace—this lesson in walking softly amid the awe and puzzle of the years—that the heavenly Father to this day permits his children to suffer great bitterness in their souls.

Youth, by the common consent of humanity, is not expected to take life seriously. Its boisterousness and self-assertion are forgiven; its daring and rash courage are admired. For a season at least it seems well that the young man shall not too keenly understand how enormous a task he has undertaken by beginning to live.

But all life cannot be frivolous if it is to be wholesome and fine, nor recklessly romantic and cavalier if it is to do service in the world's tasks.

There are indeed those who in age as in youth still refuse all serious meanings in living, but their hilarities and prides, though seeming comedy in the morning of their careers, turn to unmistakable tragedy long before the sunset.

Those alone vindicate their manhood and justify their lives who have learned ere the noon that there is something awful in the mere necessity of spending a lifetime in a world whose doubts and perplexities no human wisdom has ever yet explicated. Sobriety of life has no alternative but cheap and empty folly.

To sense sacredness in the commonplaces of human experience, to realize the dread burden of being a man and answering for the obligations of that estate, to know the thousand perilous chances of going wrong and the one sublime possibility of going right—these are the revealing motions of the soul that check the bold stride of self-confidence and warn the reverent foot to go softly.



But how shall the youth learn all this? While everything around him prosperously urges forward his gay and leaping step; while success attends him and the favor of men remains to feed his vanity; while health renews and reaffirms the power to do, there is little chance for the quieter message of God to steal into his heart.

But God knows how much the young man needs the other lesson, and so in some form or another, sooner or later, the Father brings him into "bitterness." It is pain or loss or opposition or the stress of labor heavier than even youth can bear with head erect, and at length it brings the man to the ground in heartache and dismay.

Then the mighty help of God envelops him. Then a nobler strength than his own revives him. Then the stiffening of a courage which is not his sets him erect again. But not for vaunting and strutting as before—but for humble wonder that the eternal Helper is so near, so dependable and so sufficient.

Hard work, determined fighting, steadfast endurance, after that, but no more swashbuckling. Who would swagger in a world where he had felt—even seen—God hasten to his help in the extremity of his weakness and failure?

No; in that world where God walks so near and ready at hand one must always carry with him the deference due to a kinglier Presence than any king of earth.

Thus are we taught to "go softly all our years."

world, and in the last century of all centuries since the commencement of recorded time, money and the power that money brings were desired and sought; least of all that in Great Britain there could be anyone who would soil his hands with filthy lucre! These writers conveniently forget that in the United States ninety-nine people out of a hundred are poor, or only moderately well-to-do. They forget that the "four hundred" are almost literally numbered in this designation, and that the other ninety-odd millions of people, the great majority, are not bitten by the gold bug but cherish lofty ideals for themselves and for their children, and try to realize them. These writers overlook the hundreds of thousands of ministers, professors and public school teachers who have chosen professions that give no hope of large wealth; the physicians, most of them poor men, whose ambitions would be sadly thwarted if they sought chiefly money; and the vast multitude of traders and mechanics who seek only a comfortable fireside and a happy, virtuous home.

I did not set out, however, to defend America but simply to call attention to a source of international irritation which it seems to me might easily be avoided.

Travelers Give Offense by Comments

Next to these newspapers perhaps the traveling Englishman is the source of greatest irritation to the American. He is often so serenely unconscious that any good thing can come out of the American Nazareth or indeed from any country save British Judea.

"Are there many Americans in Egypt now?" asked a friend of mine to her vis-a-vis at a steamer table on the Mediterranean.

"Yes," replied the Englishman, "and I am sorry to say we can always tell them by their manners and their nasal accent."

"Did you ever realize that we can always tell you by your manners and by your accent, which sounds equally outlandish to us?" replied the high-spirited little American woman.

"No, really now, can you?" replied the Englishman in amazement. It was an entirely novel idea to him, and seemed to afford him food for reflection for many an hour.

On another steamer of the French Messageries line, as we were making the slow loops that took us to the different Mediterranean ports on the coast of Syria and Asia Minor, a bright little English boy, traveling with his mother, attracted the attention of an American lady, who said to him, "Do you speak French?"

"No, but I wish I could," was the reply.

"Perhaps you speak American?" continued the lady.

"Oh, no!" replied the little lad with emphasis; "mamma says it's very nahsty to speak American"—a feeling shared, it would seem, by many traveling Englishmen.

I am inclined to think that this lack of understanding of the fact that Englishmen may seem as queer to Americans as Americans do to Englishmen accounts for not a few of the gadfly stings, both in conversation and in print, and that very few are in malice.

There is still discernible the "certain condescension to foreigners" of which Lowell speaks, but it is largely an unconscious condescension. I have more often heard this condescension hotly resented by colonials in Canada and Australia than by Americans, though perhaps it is scarcely worthy of notice, since it is evidently so unconscious and free from malice prepense.

As one who was born on Canadian soil, though a full-blooded American, since all my remoter ancestors from Pilgrim times have lived in the United States, and as one who glories in English history and achievements, and who cherishes a profound and sincere regard for the British character, I may be allowed perhaps to write these reflections on the gadflies in the English press. I realize that there are papers, perhaps many of them, that always treat America fairly and generously. Let us hope, for the sake of the good relations we would all see firmly established after these hundred years of peace, that the press of both countries will recognize the good and cease to exaggerate the evil, and thus do its part to promote another century of unbroken concord.

Resolutions Resolved Into Nothing

BY PRESBUTEROS CYNICUS

AS A BOY I was passionately fond of the hymn "I'm a pilgrim, and I'm a stranger." The tune had a haunting melody. It stayed by one. But the throne of the hymn was usurped and its melodious crown made jingling tinsel when the irreverent college world adapted it to the idiotic words—

"I'm a June bug, and I'm a Katydid.

I can buzz and butt my head against the wall!"

Now one cannot hear the tune without recalling these "forlorn hope" words.

For several years a number of men in our presbytery have been trying to storm the sessions of the churches and secure a systematization of their missionary committee activities—using the latter word as a euphemistic expression of hope rather than as a correct characterization of conditions.

But these sessions aforesaid have been securely entrenched behind escarpments of hide-bound tradition—deep, stagnant moats of opinionated self-satisfaction—citadel walls of inertia. Thus, after storming the pastoral skirmish line and outposts, sometimes insidiously admitted within the lines by a secret friend, we have found the missionary committee still impregnable in its last defenses, and inertia has been our destruction.

Its vast power can be inferred from its having resisted the onslaughts of Laymen's Missionary Movement, Men's Movement for Missions, enthusiastic individual initiative, Men and Religion impetus, and even, here and there, pastoral appeal.

In a particular church, that shall be nameless, the attempt was made to repeat the Valley of Dry Bones mystery play.

At first the attack seemed crowned with victory. Unanimous reorganization of the missionary committee was *Resolved* and spread upon the minutes (that vast cemetery of the church). The committee of session was to take on men of the congregation as members, was to confer and cooperate with the women's and other missionary organizations, and was to adopt methods of informing the members of the congregation as to the needs, progress, opportunities and privileges of missionary endeavor!

The Men's Movement for Missions sang the "Te Deum," notified other churches that Lofty Heights church had capitulated and that an offensive and defensive alliance was formed with its great army.

This unhatched-chicken census had the usual fate. The military operations of months, the victorious assault, the capitulatory resolution, once the missionary enemy disbanded its troops, all went for naught. How, you ask? The missionary committee did not convene. It treated the resolution as New Year's chaff, and again intrenching itself in Fort Inertia, hung out a banner, "We're doing well enough now"—and there you are.

Men of the Presbyterian churches, this is a true case. Is it an exceptional one? Is the fact that this particular church gives tens of thousands a fact that excuses its sin of inertia?

If 20 per cent of its people give those tens of thousands, is it relieved of the responsibility of informing and inspiring the 80 per cent to share and perhaps to double its privilege as a "channel of benevolence"?

Is it unfair to characterize this inertia as a church sin of omission—or of foreign mission?

Is it unjust to try to drop a bomb of sarcasm from the aeroplane of wider vision?

Has not the presbytery episcopal power to require a sort of civil service test for membership in session committees on missions?

To change the figure, many of these committees constitute bunkers that can be played over only by a brassy faced back so as to look vertically upward.

A new "greens committee" ought to be created to change some of the hazards.

The Final Faith

BY EDWARD D. MORRIS

There lies no large religion, Man, in the chemistry of sod;
He who delves for God in Nature, will never unearth God.
Nor canst thou create religion—easier to make a star;
It must flow down upon thee, from some loftier Life afar.
From that far Life descending, through the shadows, through the mist,

To fulfill our human longing, comes the one transcendent Christ.
And in his gracious hands, O Man, behold a Book divine;
Truth, wisdom, goodness, life supreme in every lustrous line.
He kissed my forehead once; and that supernal breath
Forever proved for me each word that the Immanuel saith.
His saving faith at heart, no mental stress or doubting more,
In peace I wait to hear his footstep at the opening Door.

Columbus, Ohio.

Appearance's Sake

Of course everything must be neat and shipshape aboard a private yacht. A writer in *The Mariner's Advocate* tells the story of the captain of a sloop who crossed the deck in a hurry, seemingly very much perplexed. A lady guest stopped him and asked what the trouble was.

"The fact is, ma'am," he said, "our rudder's broken."

"Oh, is that all? I shouldn't worry about that," said the lady. "Being under water nearly all the time, no one will notice it."