

VII

GROWING AGE AND THE OUTLOOK

MIDDLE AGE.—Middle age may be defined as the years between thirty and fifty. It is the fullness and the flower of life. During those years a man has a hold upon his destiny and tastes the ripe flavour of the world. It is the time of accomplishment. Minds that get their stimulus from passion, such as Burns and Byron, come earlier to maturity. But most of the world's great men have done their supreme achievements in middle age. Wellington at Waterloo defeated Napoleon, who was born in the same year, when he was forty-six. At that age, also, John Lawrence disarmed the Indian mutineers and reconquered India. Nelson reached the glorious zenith of his career at Trafalgar at forty-seven. Sir Walter Scott wrote *Ivanhoe* and gained the high-water mark of his fame at forty-eight. Milton sat down to write *Paradise Lost* in his fiftieth year.

When we think, not of the illustrious but of ordinary people, we find the years of middle age, between thirty and fifty, marked as a rule by the same characteristics. A man has found himself. He can grasp a situation. He is not afraid of assuming a new responsibility. He can put through his work with ease and expedition and thoroughness. Certain outward advantages also belong to those years. If things be right, a man discovers that a measure of deference is paid to him :

positions of honour and influence are offered to him : usually, also, he has won independence and comfort in worldly circumstances and has built up a home. For all these reasons the years between thirty and fifty might well be reckoned the very best years of life. Yet one seems to be nearer God at other times.

An ingenious commentator on Scripture interpreted the phrase of the 91st Psalm "the destruction that wasteth at noonday" as descriptive of the perils of the middle-aged. If life be described under the figure of a day, as we so often picture it ("life's little day"), the morning is the natural image of youth and the evening of old age. Noontide is left to represent the years between thirty and fifty ; and it is from the perils of that period we ask to be delivered, when we pray to be shielded from the "destruction that wasteth at noonday."

Youth and age have, of course, their own perils. But the young and the old have each a peculiar tie to the spiritual world that is weakened in the intervening years.

The sensitive fresh mind of the young is peculiarly the home of spiritual aspiration. It has already been said that there is less value in the American enquiry by "questionnaire" about the periods of religious experience than is commonly attached to it. Of 1784 persons who gave their testimony to Starbuck—men and women of various ranks and degrees of education—it was discovered that the average age at which they came under religious impression was 16.4. Whatever worth is to be given to such statistics, it is probable that if a man is to feel deeply the power of the spiritual world, it will be in the innocent, impressionable, sensitive days of youth.

Who, again, has not seen that, as old age gathers round a man, and he contemplates Death as no strange and impossible visitor, but as a kindly friend whose step is heard at the door, a certain serenity and simplicity of faith seems to return to the old man's spirit? His converse with the Unseen becomes more intimate and unrestrained: some breath of heaven seems to bathe him and win him already to the blessed life beyond. Thus does religion arch over life, touching with closer contact its early and its aged years.

It can hardly be questioned, on the other hand, that it is more difficult for the middle-aged to maintain their correspondence with Heaven.

In the full tide of business activity a man tends to become mechanical, the drudge of an occupation, narrowed to the interests of his daily toil.

A crust of selfishness is apt to form round him and his household. Sir Walter Scott quotes in his *Journal* the saying of Thomas Moore: "More mean things have been done in the world under the shelter of 'wife and children' than under any pretext worldly-mindedness can resort to." "Wife and children" is the favourite excuse of the middle-aged man when a demand is made upon his money or his time.

In those years also the relish grows for food and drink and comfort. If a middle-aged man be not careful, then is the time when self-indulgence binds him as a slave.

With the clearer view of life and human nature which these years bring, there follows also a disillusionment which easily degenerates into cynicism. So many shams have been found out that the man is tempted to suspect all women's virtue and all men's honour, and to develop that frame of mind,

of all others the most unchristian, which is called "knowingness."

The worst is that he has found himself out. If he has any judgement at all, a man of forty knows what he can do, and what he cannot do, what positions are for ever unattainable, what ambitions vain. The big things which a lad dreamt of are not to be. The middle-aged man knows that he will never be a leader or a commanding influence. People will not turn their heads to look at him as he passes. The commonplace claims him as its own.

The religious peril of all this is evident. It is very often about forty that a man gives up going to church. The language of worship has become an unknown tongue to him, and much of religious sentiment unreal to the verge of being displeasing. It is not necessary to say that such a man is an unbeliever. He is still convinced that it was not he who made the world, and it is not he who rules it. And death—the most solemn of all the objects which religion contemplates—did not become an actuality to him until quite recently. Few people really begin to believe that they will die till they are forty.

It can hardly be doubted that middle age is not the chosen home either of romance or of religion. The period has peculiar dangers of its own which well may make a man or woman who has reached it wish that they may not die then.

Another reason for clinging to life in middle age is the feeling that big things are going to happen and men of ability want to see them.

Thou shalt arise, and mercy yet
Thou to Mount Zion shalt extend:
Her time for favour which was set,
Behold, is now come to an end.

Some such feeling is strong in the middle-aged who have their hold on the reins of life, at whatever period of the world's history they are cast. It could not be stronger than in our own time. People feel that they are on the brink of great discoveries and achievements. They want to see them before they die.

If, for example, a man is a doctor, he knows that one by one the secrets of the great diseases are being wrested from nature, and he believes that in time these diseases can be so counteracted that the normal term of life may be extended to a hundred years. Can it be wondered at that such a man would deplore that he should not be spared to the utmost limits of the appointed time in order that he might witness, even if he did not share in, the conquest of these enemies of man?

So does an earnest Churchman expect great and happy changes within a generation. Not to speak of intellectual and spiritual gains, he looks for the accomplishment of some measure of Church Union. He wants to see it before he dies.

A son's or a daughter's success in life, the floating into useful beneficence of some cherished scheme, all such achievements as a man believes to be imminent, make their appeal in his impassioned desire for a complete life.

What is the Gospel for middle age? It can be summed up in two words. The first is "God."

It fortifies my soul to know
That though I perish truth is so
That howsoe'er I stray and range,
Whate'er I do Thou dost not change.
I steadier step when I recall
That though I slip Thou dost not fall.

“Underneath are the everlasting arms” has been the message to frail mortality ever since those profound and passionate believers from whom we received the Old Testament found their refuge in the Eternal God. To check the impatience of middle age at a premature death there is no thought so powerful as the thought of God. That great teacher, Thomas Arnold of Rugby, died before he was fifty. The last entry in his Diary was this: “The day after to-morrow is my birthday, if I am permitted to live to see it—my forty-seventh birthday since my birth. How large a portion of my life on earth is already passed. And then—what is to follow this life? How worthy my outward work seems, contracting and softening away into the gentler employments of old age. In one sense, how nearly can I now say ‘Vixi.’ And I thank God that, as far as ambition is concerned, it is, I trust, fully mortified. I have no desire other than to step back from my present place in the world and not to rise to a higher. Still, there are works which, with God’s permission, I would do before the night cometh.” The good man’s life was ended on earth soon after these words were written. The words are full not only of direct reference to God, but of that spirit of thankfulness to Him and of submission to His will which is the true corrective both of the sins and of the fruitless desires of middle age.

The second word of the Gospel for middle age is “Christ.”

Christ had scarcely more than entered on middle age when the call to the Father’s side was heard. He died at thirty-three. Already, however, He had shown how the perils of that period of life can be overcome. His spirit knew no dulling of enthusiasm, no weaken-

ing by the way. The easy couch of self-indulgence into which middle age is tempted to sink held no allurements for Him. The presence of God was not veiled from Him by the activities of life, nor made distasteful by its crudities. Man, His brother, was no less His brother because Christ's eyes were open to the sins and the frailties of His race. And when He saw with certainty that what the world calls "failure" was to crown His mission, there was no hint of surrender. There was not a moment's pause of resolution and of faith. So Christ met the incipient perils of middle age. When in the midst of His days He was taken away, can we not see that the Everlasting Arms received Him to make Him for ever the Lord of quick and dead—the Monarch of our souls?

THE FAMILY.—The idea of home presents itself to most business and professional men in three successive phases. Women for the most part only see it in two phases.

First, there is the old home—our parents' home. Looking back on it now, we can discern the mistakes we made. We are not a little inclined to follow the example of old Dr. Samuel Johnson, who went to the market place at Uttoxeter and stood there bareheaded for an hour as some sort of atonement for a disrespect he had shown to his father many years before. Most of us would admit that we came short of a son's, a daughter's, part in ways which now grieve us to remember. We were not nearly frank enough, for one thing. We did not realise what a delight it is to a parent's heart to have the simple confidence which does not stop to say, Is this worth telling? or, Would it be

wise to tell that ? We were sullen too. Outsiders got our good manners and our cheerfulness, while any sort of silent or ungracious conduct was thought good enough for home. The consciousness of ability, which is often prior to common-sense, made us impatient of what seemed old-fashioned, irksome, even absurd ; and we chafed at rules which seemed obsolete. How much sorrow we may have caused we can only guess. But there are few of us who are not aware that we caused some sorrow. Looking back on that home, however, we can see what a fine school it was for character. Compromise and courtesy and forgiveness were taught in it as nowhere else they could be taught. If we are not more angular and prejudiced and absurd than we are, it is because of the fearful candour of the home where our faults were freely told, and because of the wholesome humour by which they were laughed away. Then suddenly the old home ceased. It was only then that the truth about it dawned upon us. We saw the pictures and books and furniture we had been accustomed to since childhood put up to auction, and handled by strangers, and the gaunt stripped rooms crowded with bargain seekers ; and we turned away sick from the doors of what once had been our heart's refuge. So we said good-bye to the old home.

About all that period of human life our Lord Jesus has left the most beautiful and affecting example. What He was to Joseph and Mary, what He must have been to the other children of the Nazareth home, there are sufficient indications in the Gospels. But they are so familiar that it is needless to dwell upon them. All that need be said about it is that any young man who thinks about his father's house, and treats it as if it were only a dormitory or a restaurant or a bank,

has something to answer for beside the example of Him of whom it is written that He went down with His parents, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them. And His mother kept all His sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

The second stage in the life of most professional and business men is when they have no real home. They go to the City or the University; they pass from lodging to lodging, with only a few books and clothes as all their personal belongings—free, nomadic, restless, unsettled adventurers upon the ocean of life. Most of men know something of these years in lodgings. The time is not so dangerous to character as it might seem to be. For there is something essentially wholesome in the air of liberty, and indulgences which there is no one to deny lose something of the attraction of “stolen waters” and “bread eaten in secret.” Yet the solitary man meets perils enough. There is a risk of the man in lodgings losing his care for the refinements and amenities of life. Even when his conduct is not vicious, it is apt to be merely self-regarding. In those years habits are formed which gravely affect all the issues of his after life. Those who have influence with young men at this stage of experience should counsel them to value highly the attractions of such good houses as are open to them. An able set of like-minded men, grouped in debating societies or in athletic clubs or in the manifold organisations of the Church, give a field for the exercise of energies which need expression. There is something wrong with the man at such a time of life who has no instinct for friendship, and who hears no whisper of that call to social service which is the most insistent voice of our time.

It is to that man without a home that Jesus comes the nearest. For most of His life it was true of Him that "the Son of man had not where to lay His head." These words must not be exaggerated into the meaning that Jesus had to sleep in the open air for want of a bed to lie on. The words only mean that He went from one lodging to another; from the shelter of one friend's roof-tree to a refuge in the house of some other acquaintance, which yet He could in no sense call His "home." Young men have never failed to discover this affinity between them and their Master. The loneliness, and yet the stimulus, of an unfettered freedom was His as it is theirs. Everything that is generous in youth has been wont to respond to the appeal of that Example. Here, they have seen, was One who cared nothing for self-indulgence and pleasure; here was One whose burning and consuming passion was to make the world better; here were genius and every beautiful and attractive quality, everything that could command admiration and achieve success, consecrated without a dream of personal advancement to the cause of mankind. Till the Judgement Day dawns it will not be known how many men in lonely lodgings, in the apprenticeship of life, have been shielded from evil, and stimulated to a generous and helpful life, because of the present and powerful thought of the Man of Nazareth who "had not where to lay His head."

The third stage of experience for men—it is often only the second for women—comes. They make a new home of their own. Does Jesus fail them then? It seems, indeed, that His example is no longer with them; for He never formed the sacred ties of marriage and fatherhood. But, curiously enough, it is just to this

third stage of man's experience that Jesus devoted the most affectionate detail of His teaching. He who dealt so little in rules of conduct framed a minute and stringent marriage law. And, strangely enough too, that very relation of which His own experience knew nothing is consecrated by the noblest exposition of the sacramental meaning of the marriage bond that ever eloquence uttered, when St. Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians declared that the parallel of the relation of husbands and wives is the bond that unites Christ to the Church.

If we seek from our Master His teaching regarding the new home which love builds it will be summed up briefly in two words, "Stability" and "Goodness." Joshua, the hero and leader of Israel, living in a more distant day under a light that was comparatively dim, summed up the two secrets of a Christian home when he said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Stability is the first thing. In a hundred spheres of activity we know the value of such a frame of mind—what one may call the "freedom of constraint," the relief of knowing that a second course need not be debated because one course is indubitably plain. Even in so apparently secular a matter as our vote at the polling booth at an election, we go in an easier and a happier frame if we do not stand hesitating between policies and parties; we have settled the matter with ourselves, we have taken our side and are sure. It was the same satisfaction of an ordered and chosen path that made St. Paul say, "Henceforth let no man trouble me: I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." There is no use attempting to influence a man who is so evidently decided.

Such a course is a wise one for a young man as he makes a new home. Let him make it plain that his mind is made up. Let him be a Communicant, standing on the Lord's side ; and a hundred difficulties as a consequence disappear. He himself and others know where he is, what he wants to do, where is the goal that he would travel to. Especially should the testimony of the Lord's Table be urged on all young married people. It is thus they consecrate their happiness. They say by their presence at the Communion, " As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." A married life, begun in such a spirit, with such a resolution, will be saved from many of the perils before which others fall—the perils of a merely selfish pleasure-seeking life, of a foolish ostentation, of a senseless and stupid rivalry in hospitality or dress or surroundings. From the beginning there will be the elements of happiness in such a life which alone are permanent—and the very stability of the decision will itself be a source of unspeakable peace.

All such illustrations serve to make clear that great doctrine of the stability and permanence of the marriage tie which is at the root of the teaching of Jesus. If one was to believe the writers of popular novels, the failure of marriage is one of the commonest tragedies of modern society, and an easier and quicker refuge in divorce would be the most wholesome social reform that governments could provide. In the United States of America the governments of some of the States have already made divorce so simple and inexpensive that the whole teaching of Jesus regarding the stability of marriage seems to be deliberately denied. No public danger with us of which the politicians speak is so serious as the growth of a

sentiment opposed to the permanence of the marriage tie.

There are individual hardships under the rigorous law of Christ. Men and women are set sometimes in that position in which George Eliot was set, with such a disastrous result to her reputation for altruism and public spirit. Doubtless also among the marriages that are made "lightly or unadvisedly" there are some every year which are soon recognised to be tragical mistakes. Yet our Lord's teaching was that—except for one reason, and the records are not unanimous that He even allowed that one reason—the bond of marriage is not to be broken. That very stability and permanence of the relation has worked more than anything else for its happiness. Most married people have had their "differences." Cowper said :

The kindest and the happiest pair
Will find occasion to forbear,
And something every day they live
To pity and perhaps forgive.

But the knowledge that the bond cannot be dissolved saves the "tiff" or the whim or the foolish humour of an hour from wrecking two people's happiness. Something of the solemnity of a lifelong bond strikes down even into the giddiest and the shallowest mind, and arouses suggestions of gravity and duty which never else might have sprung there.

Our Lord would have repeated with His august approval the note of the Christian home as it was expressed by His ancient servant Joshua: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." The root of the happiness of the home is in goodness. Not every home can be rich, beautiful, or even comfortable.

Indeed, wealth has little to do with home-making: how little can be seen from such a ghastly picture as Hogarth's "Marriage of Convenience." On the other hand, all Scotsmen know from that loving interpreter of our national life, Robert Burns, how the "Saturday Night" in a cottar's humble dwelling may be the very embodiment of ideal domestic bliss. The four pillars on which a home rests are Love, Purity, Unselfishness, Order. If these pillars stand firm, the roof-tree covers a happy home. If they break down, there may be chilly wealth or enervating comfort, but true domestic life there cannot be; and it is only in a shocking irony that the dwelling-place can be called a "Home." One hears much about those divorces that make the daily journals such unpleasant reading. But of what proportion of marriages is it that we know that they have failed, and that for one reason or another they have become tragedies? How small a proportion it is! All over Scotland to-day are happy homes—fathers, mothers, children, their hearts sure of each other, their inglenooks bright with a pure domestic affection, the sorrows of life incalculably mitigated for them because a deep well of mutual sympathy springs up to comfort and refresh them, and daily the unspoken prayer is being offered to God that happiness so exquisite, so serene, so satisfying, may in His mercy be prolonged. Jesus spoke more of the family than of any other aspect of human life; He laid down for it His most stringent law. Amid all the evils which desolate our social system, the Christian family as it is found in millions of homes pleases the Lord's heart.

OLD AGE.—Few people like the thought of growing old. To some it is a cause of constant dread. Some

men, and perhaps even more women, try to disguise from themselves the inevitable fact. They dye their hair, and wear juvenile clothes, and would fain shut out even from their own eyes the symptoms of advancing years.

The reasons for such a dread of old age are manifold. The weakening of physical powers which age brings is often distressing; but it is not so distressing as the failure of memory, and the difficulty of assimilating new ideas.

The solitude of old age also is often pathetic. Life is like a triangle—broad at the base, but narrowing steadily as we reach the top. At the base there are many around us, kindred and friends. They drop from our side one by one as we ascend the triangle. As we get to the top we find ourselves almost alone, the old familiar faces having disappeared.

What is dreaded in old age more than anything else is its seeming uselessness. Younger people press into the charge of the world's business. Their elders feel themselves "shelved," as the common phrase has it. They seem to have no share "in all that's done beneath the circuit of the sun." There are not many who could truthfully repeat for themselves the well-known verses—

Wouldst thou be young again?
So would not I.

Ever since man appeared on the earth he must have been seeking some Gospel for old age. Literature is full either of moans over departed youth, or of philosophical suggestion of the compensations which the aged find. Perhaps the best known treatise on the subject in literature is Cicero's famous tractate, *De Senectute* ("Concerning old age"). Cicero answers one

by one the four charges which are brought against old age: (1) That age makes men useless for the world's work; (2) that it weakens the faculties; (3) that it deprives men of the capacity for pleasure; and (4) that it overshadows men's minds with the thought of death.

As against the first charge Cicero has no difficulty in showing that many old men are extremely useful, their wisdom being more valuable than callow enthusiasm.

He is less successful in defending old age against the second charge of failing powers, though there is universal value in Shakespeare's counsel of the prudent conduct of early life if old age is to be vigorous and happy—

In my youth I never did apply
Hot and rebellious liquors in my blood ;
Nor did not with unbashful forehead woo
The means of weakness and debility ;
Therefore my age is as a lusty winter,
Frosty but kindly.

Cicero accepts willingly the third challenge that age disables from many pleasures. He rejoices in the fact. Age, he declares, renders no finer service to humanity than its deliverance from the bondage of desire. In this contention, however, Cicero did not deal with all the facts of human nature. He shut his eyes to the existence of wicked old men—such as the Emperor Tiberius in Rome, or such as Thackeray has represented for us in the Marquis of Steyne. But he was on solid ground when he pointed out that, if advancing years deprive us of some enjoyments, other pleasures, such, for example, as are given by conversation and literature, and above all by contact with nature, become serener with old age.

As for the fourth charge, that death preoccupies and

overshadows an old man's mind, Cicero is right when he declares that the natural and inevitable cannot be an evil, and that to live well is the purpose of the soul rather than to live long. He is nearer still to the faith of Christ when he sees in death the gate of life, and makes his aged hero rejoice that he cannot be far off from the time when he will behold again the great and good men he has known who have entered before him into rest.

Such, in brief compass, is the Gospel for old age as it was preached by one of the subtlest and most eloquent men of antiquity. If one says that, compared with the Holy Scriptures, Cicero's gospel is like a candle beside the sun, it is not to make little of the candle-light.

But the Bible's teaching about old age is like the sun. It gives a picture of an ideal old age, unique in its mellowness and meekness and moral grandeur. It is not only that the Bible—like all Oriental literature—is reverent of the hoary head; there is a spring of life in it which seems to make the passage of time irrelevant, and to open for our frail humanity the sources of a vigour ever fair and ever young.

One of the great quests of the mediæval times was for an Elixir of life—a certain ruby which the alchemists believed could arrest the course of the years and make a man of threescore agile and ruddy like a boy. The Elixir of life was but a figure of the secret of perpetual youth which the Bible long ago had found. "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age: they shall be full of sap and green." Nor is there any mystery about the secret of youthfulness. It is stated in plain words in the 92nd Psalm: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree." "They that are

planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God." That is, Goodness and Faith are the answer to the question, How shall we keep young ?

Goodness—or, as the Bible loves to call it, "Righteousness"—is the first element of character that arrests decay, and makes even old age bear fruit. It is because the life of man is kept in contact with the unchanging scheme of things—that purpose of good which is ever transforming and renewing itself, and, though it has pervaded the universe since time began, has on it still the dew of its youth. The man or woman who really grows old is the man or woman who has lost the soul of goodness within. Set before one such a picture of a *blasée* woman of society as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu revealed herself when she wrote: "Society is good: but I have seen society. What is the use of talking or of hearing 'bons mots'? I have done both till I am tired of doing either. I have laughed till I have no wish to laugh again, and made others laugh till I have hated them for being such fools." There is something terribly grim and old in such a worldly woman's words. Contrast her with such a man as John Wesley, young at heart at eighty years. Contrast her with some men and women we have known, about whom we could scarcely believe that the register was right which told of portentous age; they seemed to us so full of vitality, of humanity, so hopeful and buoyant, themselves in touch with life and the source of life to others. The secret of the difference is always the same. It is Righteousness. The eternal remains every moment present to us, and old age is not useless, as sometimes we fear, but a testimony of the worth of the ideals, of the pre-eminence of duty over every

other aim, of the rejuvenating power of Righteousness. Thus, as St. Paul said, "though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

The second element of character which keeps the heart young is Faith. Faith implies a hold upon the spiritual: an outlook upon issues wider than personal pleasure or gain: a vision and a gleam. It was in this sense of the word "faith" that Oliver Wendell Holmes—who himself kept into a fine old age all the sympathies and the courage of youth—said, "It is faith in something, an enthusiasm for something, that keeps life worth living." There could not be a more wonderful illustration of it than the story of the men whom we think of as distinctively the old men of the world—the patriarchs of Holy Scripture. A wonderful age had gathered over them before they set out on their heroic ventures. Abraham must have been at least seventy-five when he left his home at the Divine bidding to seek a country: "and he went out not knowing whither he went." Moses, according to the usual computation of his career, must have been eighty when the call to ransom his people from bondage caught his heart. Other people might have been thinking of their graves when those men of faith were girding themselves for high endeavours, like youthful knights before the tourney.

There is an illustration quite as marvellous in modern times of the power of faith to keep the heart young. The great Russian, Tolstoi, was not always a believer: up to middle age he was a sceptic, and his scepticism made him as grim a cynic and pessimist as could be. But then faith in a gospel, which, whether we agree with it or not, is at least a great, unselfish, and command-

ing programme of life, seized him, and there was not a younger heart in Europe than that which beat in the bosom of that wonderful old man. There is not a sadder figure in the world than that of an old man who has lost his faith. But if there still be the soul of aspiration in a man, if he live upon the shall be and feed upon the future, the snows may gather on his head and his feet may go haltingly, yet "shall he still bring forth fruit in old age: he shall be full of sap and green."

The closing days of a beautiful life have often been compared to the autumn of the year, the slow-dropping mellow autumn which follows a summer rich and glorious. And a strain of melancholy has often mingled with the reflection. In many ways that is the saddest season of the year, the fullest of regrets. The ingathering of the sheaves preaches silently concerning the harvest of our sowing, and the bare stubble fields are an apt enough image of a spirit-world left desolate of fruit. The earliest impulse is to bind the thoughts of age and autumn together, and read sorrow over both. But two poets who have seen deeper into the meaning of nature than any who have used our English speech have taught us better. Each of them has left us an inspiration of hope.

In his famous poem on the "Intimations of Immortality" Wordsworth sorrowed over the passing of the radiance of youth, and of that buoyancy and joy of life which only the youthful know. But as the autumn mood gathered over him, and threatened his Christian faith with its message of decay, he rallied his soul with the recollection of the indestructible and tender bonds with which age and youth alike are tied in the great family of humanity.

We will grieve not, rather find
 Strength in what remains behind ;
 In the primal sympathy
 Which having been must ever be ;
 In the soothing thoughts that spring
 Out of human suffering ;
 In the faith that looks through death,
 In years that bring the philosophic mind.

Such was Wordsworth's gospel for autumn and old age. There is a poem by Shelley, less known but equally near the heart of truth and hope—the "Ode to the West Wind." He wrote it at Florence, in a wood that skirts the Arno, one day when the west winds of autumn drove before them the falling leaves. On him came the autumn melancholy ; for he felt himself no longer, as in boyhood, the comrade of the west wind in its frolic and gaiety ; rather did it seem to blow his life abroad as ruthlessly as it scattered the leaves. But Shelley rallied himself out of such autumn gloom. His heart expanded to the thought of the wide world to which the west wind blew, and his aspiration was that, even as the dead leaves were the soil and the nourishment of a new life of nature, his thought and fancy might be used as a contribution to the life of the great world of humanity that was to be.

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
 Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth !
 And, by the incantation of this verse,
 Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth,
 Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind !
 Be through my lips to unawakened earth
 The trumpet of a prophecy !

Scarcely thus can meaner mortals venture to speak of themselves. Yet in such a way in their own

measure may all who grow old feel that autumn does not mean an ending of the year : they may bring forth fruit in old age which shall be for the healing of the nations. Not grieving over decay, not thinking as the autumn wind blows that our labours are dissipated and useless, but remembering the glorious part our Master has given us in the Kingdom of God, let us yield our lives into the general harvest, our contribution to the future to which we belong, in that great faith which Shelley expressed in his "Ode to the West Wind":

O, wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind ?

LOOKING AROUND.

There is nothing more marvellous in the teaching of Jesus than the reconciliation which He effected between different ways of looking at life—the realist's and the idealist's way : the individualist's and the collectivist's way.

He showed that there is no real conflict between a reasonable idealism and what is realistic. There are people who think of an idealist as only a visionary out of contact with life and dwelling in a world of dreams : a man who is so much occupied with the thought of the many-mansioned home in Heaven that he forgets the thousands of his fellow-creatures who are huddled under nameless conditions in the one-roomed houses of the poor. Jesus was not an idealist of that sort ; and He cherished no illusions about human nature. When He described human nature in His parables He spoke of a piece of money lost among the rubbish of a house, of a sheep wandering

among the hills in the darkness, of a son who had become a prodigal. He knew how wealth lulled men into selfish forgetfulness, and how poverty drove men into horrid crimes, so that a man could be shockingly ungrateful in order to wring three hundred pence out of a debtor, and for the sake of thirty pieces of silver a traitor could betray His cause.

Knowing all the hard and grimy facts of life, Jesus set Himself to alleviate them so far as might be. He, the supreme Teacher, the Thinker, the Dreamer, was content to go about doing good among poor people, just as a village doctor goes about. If we seek for the meaning of His miracles of healing, there is no better explanation of them than this:—He worked those miracles of healing in order to teach that we must not omit the effort to make life a little more tolerable for those whom we can immediately benefit, all the time that we are cherishing visions of a world from which sorrow and sin have gone. The way to reach an ideal is not to dream over it, but to do the little that is in our power to help it on.

Our Lord raised a ladder, like Jacob's, whose top reached the Heaven, yet its base, like Jacob's, was firmly set on the facts of life. In short, in order to be a realist, He taught that a man must be an idealist too. The men with the muck-rake who peer about among the garbage, and fancy that they are seeing life, are not in truth realists. There are flowers as well as offal on the face of the earth, if they took the trouble to discover them; and there are stars clear shining in the sky as well as mud for our feet to splash in. "Man liveth not by bread alone" is the testimony of One who saw life whole. Over all the meannesses and the petty passions of men the

true thinker and teacher sees the sky of Heaven over-arching, and he believes that out of the age-long struggle the Kingdom of God will emerge.

Thus Jesus takes His place at the head of all those who have cherished visions of a better world—a realist because He knows things as they are: an idealist because He believes in the

far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves.

Life is only rightly understood when the real is suffused in the glory of the ideal, and all that makes us dissatisfied and sorrowful in the present is informed with some knowledge of the Plan—some glimpse of understanding into that Purpose of God which is working out through all.

It is marvellous also to discover how Jesus reconciled the attitude to life which is taken respectively by the individualist and the collectivist. We, shallower thinkers, find it necessary to take one or the other point of view. But the Great Master showed that truth is in the reconciliation of the two. Jesus begins with personality; but He adds, "You find your personality by losing it." He tells a man of the infinite worth of his own soul—"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world but lose his individuality?" But then, just when one might have fancied that one's first duty is to turn to the task of a personal salvation, He says, Whosoever will save his individuality will lose it; and whosoever is willing to lose his individuality will assuredly find it in the Kingdom of God.

The individual is the unit with whom the Saviour deals. Nothing is more remarkable in the Gospels

than the way in which Jesus seemed to shun crowds and to prefer to spend the treasures of his wisdom on a few disciples in an upper room, or a solitary Pharisee at nightfall, or a bewildered and scarcely comprehending woman at a well. It could not be without this significance—that if the kingdom of God is to come in this world it will be through the mediation of convinced and holy believers. Not the aggregate but the individual soul is the Saviour's first concern.

Here is the error of many teachers and dreamers of our time. They are talking so much of reforming society that they forget the need of reforming themselves; and amid all the anxious problems concerning the housing of the poor and the improvement of the conditions of life, they cease to lay stress on the old fact of sin which is at the root of much of life's misery. Could the drinking habits of our community be changed—that is, if this and that individual would overcome a besetting sin—a renovation would be wrought on the face of society greater than any political revolution could cause. We are in danger of forgetting that. But it is at the foundation of sound teaching. "You will never make the golden age," said Mr. Herbert Spencer, "out of leaden men." When they tell us of possible reconstructions of society, and a better division of wealth than under the present industrial system is possible, we can only answer that a better era might possibly be thus inaugurated; but it would not be with the existing men. The root of all prayer for the coming of the Kingdom of God is in a right understanding of that saying of the Master, "The Kingdom of God is within you."

Yet Jesus makes a reconciliation with the collectivist.

He tells us that salvation is essentially social, and men come to the realisation of themselves not as individuals but as members of a social order. The day was when these were phrases of philosophy. When people spoke of the "solidarity of the race" they employed a term which was only understood by those who had studied Auguste Comte and the teachers of his school. But the word and the thought of solidarity have come down to the masses of mankind. Nothing is nearer to modern interest, and not least among the manual workers, than the idea of a social system in which we are all inextricably bound. It is strange indeed that the Church of Christ has been slow to adapt herself to the thought. For in her sacred books there is the record of Moses, who identified his own life so deeply with the life of his nation that he prayed that the punishment of a people might be on him; and of St. Paul, who was willing to be an outcast from the mercy of God if his race might be saved; and woven through the very texture of our religion is the story of One who died that in Him all might be made alive. But, strange as it may be, it is the fact that the Church has presented her Gospel overmuch as an individual salvation, and the task of saving our own souls has been exalted above the Lord's vision of a Kingdom of God.

Thus for a while the Church has lost some earnest souls, especially among the workers with their hands, who identify her too much with questions of ecclesiasticism and quibbles about insoluble problems, and see her too little as the greatest agent in the world for advancing God's Kingdom among men. The Church needs a great revival of what has been called the "social conscience"—that moral sense whose reference

is not to individual conduct merely but to the general good of men.

It is impossible to live in any city without learning the need for such a social conscience. There are manifest tokens on every hand that people are slovenly and selfish, and have been thinking of their own immediate gratification with no adequate sense of the discomfort or the danger of their fellows. In the most obvious of duties—that of doing one's best to avoid the spreading of infectious diseases like consumption—such a conscience would make a welcome change. The question of the feeding of poor children, and the training of their physique, would present itself to such a social conscience with an instant appeal. The reproach would lie heavily on any man of leisure and ability who had developed such a conscience if he were taking no part in charitable work or in the public administration. The future of children unborn would then have a meaning for reckless parents that hardly now suggests itself. And any one can see how such a conscience towards the community would react upon the individual character, and a man would realise himself as generous, magnanimous, refined, as never he would have become had his interest been self-centred, and his care been only for his pleasure and his ease. Whosoever will lose his individuality thus will find it unto life eternal. Thus does the Lord reconcile two views of life apparently opposed. The only wise selfishness is seen to be that from which the thought of self is banished, and the cravings for personal expression are merged—merged and satisfied—in the wider aim of the Kingdom of God.

A familiar figure has been many a time used to illustrate the imperfection of our reading of history.

We stand at one side of a loom while a great carpet is being woven : we see nothing but a tangle of threads and loose ends : the ignorant and unbelieving might fancy that some irresponsible engine was making a jest with a mass of heterogeneous wool. But could we stand at the other side of the loom, we should see the pattern working out, orderly and beautiful and all as the design for it had been. So the history of our race may be to the eyes of those within the veil : so it may be to us on a better shore on some future day : so certainly to the all-discerning Eye it is now. He sees the tangled web of human destiny working out into that Plan set for it from all eternity, for whose fulfilment the Master bade us pray and say, "Thy Kingdom come."

LOOKING FORWARD

DUTY TO THE FUTURE.—It is probably harder to realise our relation to the future than it is to accept the truth about the past. A hundred signs, bodily, mental, spiritual, assure us that we are the heirs of the ages, that generations before us have made us what we are. Our diseases are inherited, and it is not difficult to believe that the whole texture of our mind has been woven for us by the experience of those who have gone before. Thus our indebtedness to the past has become a commonplace of thoughtfulness. Few are utterly oblivious of it.

It needs somewhat more of imaginative effort to realise that the present is an eternal mother as well as an eternal daughter—that generations unborn will be influenced by our conduct now. When we see an oak, it is not an incredible thing to us to be told that

it sprang from an acorn. But when an acorn falls into the soil, it wants a strain of fancy to see in it the future oak. Such a defect of imagination has perhaps more to do than selfishness with the common failure to discern our duty to posterity.

It is the part of all good men to rescue themselves from this dullness of vision, and to contemplate their life as not ended with themselves, as that man believed who asked that they should bury his influence in his grave. To a quickened intelligence the links grow visible that bind the generations together.

There are, however, certain great human instincts which war against the selfishness which thinks only of the present and is content if things will last our time.

In most men there is at least the desire to be remembered, and in most the desire to be favourably remembered. The present lecturer saw recently in Cairo the contents of the tomb of Tutankhamen. He could not resist the impression that they leave of a man's dread of being forgotten. Vague and pagan the desire may be, but it helps to restore the dignity of life. Almost any attitude to time is better than that which is obsessed by its boundary, and says, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

The instinct of parentage is the most helpful human emotion in carrying service beyond the hour we live in and the places we see. A woman writer gave utterance to the cynical opinion: "There is something pathetically absurd in this sacrifice to their children of generation after generation of grown people." "Absurd!" It is the most beautiful thing in mankind, its nearest reach to the heart of God. The nation that loses it approaches the frame of mind which says—What does it matter about posterity?

things will last our time. It was probably inevitable that education should be made free in Scotland. Probably, also, there are other public boons that lighten the responsibility of parents towards their children which can be advocated on grounds of public policy. But those who know what the spirit of sacrifice for the sake of children has done for the making of our Scottish people are suspicious of anything that discourages it. Who has not known some peasant father and mother who have pinched and toiled and saved for years that their lad should have a college education, and a chance in life that never came to themselves? If we read in monthly magazines of the "pathetic absurdity of the sacrifice," we only want to think of such fathers and mothers counting it the joy of their life to have laboured not for themselves—to have a good time ere they die—but for a career that is to be useful and honourable long after they lie in the country churchyard, oblivious of it all. In greater or less degree, but to some extent always, the unselfish passion of parentage helps to carry imagination and service beyond the present, and to save the soul from that degradation which is content if things only last our time.

Deep planted in our mystic frame there is also a social instinct that makes posterity not indifferent to us. Goethe, in his mighty egotism, once wrote: "The man who has life in him feels himself to be here for his own sake, not for the public." That always seems to be true of Goethe which was said of another: "His soul was like a star and dwelt apart." Yet there seems to be manifest proof that humanity at its best has not realised itself as Goethe did, as being here for its own sake. One does not think of

the saints and martyrs only, but of the great, dim, innominate multitude which seems ever to have felt an overpowering sense of indebtedness, and to have scorned a time-limit of its obligation, and to have laboured and planned and builded not for itself but for generations yet to be. There are a hundred logical arguments against the contentions of Mr. Kidd in his well-known book, *Social Evolution*; but its main doctrine stands true—that the hope of progress is in the subordination of the interests of the present to the interests of the future. The nations in which the social instincts are the deepest and the firmest are those with whom the conquest of the world lies.

Such instincts, “naturally Christian,” have been planted in humanity to overcome its baser inclination to narrow interest within the mortal years. They are immensely reinforced by the example and teaching of Jesus Christ. Perhaps there is no more characteristic saying of the Master than that which St. John’s seventeenth chapter records: “For their sakes I sanctify myself.” If any want the message of Christ’s life succinctly told it is in two words ‘for others.’ Could any blasphemy be more horrible than to put on Christ’s lips the words, “I am well content if things last my time”? Was there ever unbelieving critic of the life of Jesus who would have ventured to represent Him as thinking or speaking so? To paint the crucifixion of our Saviour has been the loftiest task to which religious art has turned: some degree of failure marks the noblest and most triumphant effort: but the measure of success may almost be indicated by this test—How far has the painter succeeded in showing that it was not a bare incident

of ancient history that he was depicting, for there is a look on the Sufferer's face which seems to pierce the veil of futurity, and intimate for millions that are to be that for them also a Saviour died ?

Just as we get near the mind of Jesus such a sensitive apprehension of the meaning and the duty of influence will grow and fasten on our minds. An Italian peasant once met the great St. Francis of Assisi. "Art thou," he asked, "Brother Francis ?" "Yes," was the answer. "Then," said the peasant, "try to be as good as all think thee to be : because many have great faith in thee : and therefore I admonish thee to be nothing less than people hope of thee." Some such tender warning is spoken to every Christian man as he learns from his Master the relation he bears to the generations that are to come.

Large and vague words like "altruism" are not pleasing : they veil under loose conceptions the insistent practical duties of life. The duty to posterity begins at the nearest—in our homes. If fathers and mothers have heard the call of Jesus, and have known what He meant by saying "For their sakes I sanctify myself," the relationships of home will take on for them a new solemnity ; they will see, not in merry children's faces only, but in those same faces, grown lined and grey in coming years, the example, the teaching, the tone which are around them now.

As we look beyond our homes to our country, and then beyond that still to the great community of mankind to which we are bound by so many inextricable ties, is it with some such enthusiasm for the victory of the right side that we contemplate our death ? Can we say "I die happy" if we see that life is to be made sweeter, in worthier and more dignified

conditions, for my fellow-countrymen, for my fellow-creatures in the coming days? Does the dream of progress enthral us, and the hopes of humanity hold our heart? Then somehow, in our degree, we are understanding what Jesus meant by His great life-message, 'for others.'

Thus, the essence of the Gospel is its missionary motive: its great message is the missionary appeal. There is no use in picturing the darkness and oppression of many heathen lands, the hopelessness of many heathen creeds: the secret of missionary purpose is nearer and more vital. If we know Christ at all, we know that we cannot save our souls alone: we can only save our souls by service. The question is, not what the world can give us, but what we can do for the world. And as of old, when men say "Who is my neighbour?", hesitating to do anything because there is no definite instruction where to begin, the answer is in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Its crucial teaching is that all need our help to whom our help can be given—the poor at home and the fallen, and the ignorant and the sick; and abroad, the poor, the fallen, the ignorant, the sick—and not these only who are alive to-day, but the myriads to be born, and the great human family that cries to us out of the mist of the future, telling us that their fate depends on our worthiness to-day. If the world is to be made a Christian world for them to be born into, it will be because we are awake to our duty to posterity now. It is easy to shut the ears of our imagination to that call. Who can have less claim on us, people might ask, than those who are not yet born? "After me the deluge," said Louis the XVth of France. "When I am dead, let the world be

mixed with fire," said the Emperor Nero. "Is it not good if peace and truth be in my days?" said King Hezekiah. It is easy to be as careless about the future as they. But Jesus looked down the long vista of the years, and heard the unborn children of Asia and Africa and Europe calling to Him; and as He prepared Himself for His sacrifice He thought of them and what He might do for them, and He said "For their sakes I sanctify myself."

Our life is described in one of the best known Psalms as "a tale that is told"—what might be reckoned of less moment in the world than that? Before its telling there was a little curiosity; while the telling went on there was a little amusement; when it was done there was a little applause. That was all; and that, said the Psalmist, is life.

More bitter words than his come to mind. In his last hours, when Macbeth heard of the death of his Queen, he moralised on the worth of being:

Life's but a walking shadow: a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

The Psalmist would have hated the bitter words of Macbeth. "A tale that is told" is one thing, and sad enough; but there is a whole world of difference between it and "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." For consider what the figure implies.

It speaks of the romance of life; and there is nothing sad in that. A tale may end tragically or it may end happily; but at least it has the charm of old

romance at its heart. Of most of the world's great stories this might be said to be the brief epitome: "There was a man, a woman, and an obstacle." In older days the obstacle was invariably overcome; and the tale closed amid the peal of marriage bells. A more pessimistic age watches the sun set amid gloom and blighted hopes. That great writer Thomas Hardy closes his narrative of a broken woman's life with the epigram, "The President of the Immortals had ended his sport with Tess." But let life be a tale of sorrow or of joy, at least it is big with meaning. The novelists reach a varied standard of attainment; but all of them have something to suggest of the charm of life—the colour and joy of being. The cruellest of them, whose aim is only to picture the blistered conscience and the maimed purpose, do not fail of making the world a place of adventure and enterprise and the surge of passion and the wide gamut of emotional experience. That is why of a hundred books taken out of a library eighty are works of fiction. People want to see their life reflected in the books they read; and they know that the best mirror of life, as the Psalmist said, is a tale. The strange passions which lurk under uneventful incidents make the novels of Jane Austen a photographic illustration of ordinary life. Dreams of chivalry haunt prosaic people, and make commonplace men and women have visions of war and tournaments and the courts of kings; and they find Sir Walter Scott or old Dumas the interpreters of the impossible to their longing hearts. George Meredith and the rest of the psychologists awake the unreflective to the real motives of their actions. Even the romance of crime and its detection has something to bestow upon grey lives of the lust of

strife, the terror of force and cleverness, the hot taste of being. When the Psalmist spoke of our life as "a tale that is told," at the very least he suggested something of the significance of life and its romance. At the very least he spoke of days that are not dull, but are crowded with all the material out of which comedy and tragedy and melodrama are framed.

The very fact that the tale is told adds a new poignancy to the figure. For the dullest are made dignified by death. The end crowns the work. And out of the climax of the story—be it a short story or one that needs seventy years to work out its plot—the unity of life is found. Just as one is tempted to turn to the end of a novel to anticipate its excitements, so do we marvel over the issue of human lives. And, just as a settled and satisfied judgement occupies our mind when the last page of the story is read, so a verdict often different from that which would have been pronounced earlier is reached when the tale of life is told, and over a finished career we discern the guiding principle of the whole. Take it how we will, there is something not unworthy in the estimate of life in terms of literature—the description of the Psalmist that it is "as a tale that is told."

Consider how the figure starts at once the suggestion that story-telling may rise—as in the world's history it has risen—to the noblest heights of genius. If a tale can be (as most truly it can be) a magnificent work of art, then a life also can be made illustrious and beautiful and an inspiration to all who see it. Of course, one knows that all stories are not told as by a master. There are some who have the gift of imagination, but little restraint of taste and little aptitude for the use of that marvellous instrument of thought, the

English tongue. There are people who can devise situations, but are too illiterate to give them charm. But when imagination has a deft hand, and the student of human nature is an artist also in language and in the shades of feeling, then the tale-teller can be a minister of instruction and refined pleasure above any man of genius, other perhaps than a great poet.

It is such a figure we are encouraged to transfer to life. Not only does the fact that our years are like a tale suggest the varied interest and romance of human lives; it makes us think also how they may be like a great work of imagination—they may be a masterpiece of the art of living. They may be rounded, unified, complete; they may be satisfying to the critic's eye, warming to the heart of the simple lover of life; they may stir all those emotions of tenderness and pride and joy and passionate ambition which the greatest works of art arouse.

A curious sense of finality is the first implication of the phrase "a tale that is told." All seems to be over and done with. The last echo of the story dies away. "Finis" is read on the closing page; and the book is shut and done. But is that really a true impression of the effect of the great tales of the world's literature? When the tale was told was its impression gone? A useful and interesting study might be made of the effects that have been produced by some famous novels. There spring to one's mind a few conspicuous illustrations. *Nicholas Nickleby* sealed the doom of the wretched old private schools in England. *Le Juif Errant* resulted in the expulsion of the Jesuits from France. *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* built a People's Palace in the East End of London and led to measures for ameliorating

and brightening the lot of the poor in many other cities of Great Britain. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did more than anything else to free the slaves of America. *Hard Cash* produced a wholesome public opinion regarding the subject of asylums for the insane. It would be easy for any one with a knowledge of fiction to expand such a list with illustrations still more pertinent and convincing.

If, then, in such obvious ways a story has been influential, it is apparent that the last word is not pronounced about it when it is said that "the tale is told." It goes on retelling itself, reproducing itself, re-creating in far-off minds the ideals and duties by which originally it was inspired.

I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell to earth, I know not where,
For, so swiftly it flew, the sight
Could not follow it in its flight.

I breathed a song into the air,
It fell to earth, I know not where ;
For who has sight so keen and strong
That it can follow the flight of song ?

Long, long afterwards, in an oak
I found the arrow, still unbroke ;
And the song, from beginning to end,
I found again in the heart of a friend.

That is a true description of the permanent influence of literature—of truth embodied in a tale. The words go silent ; but the deep mark on the mind remains.

When the Psalmist spoke of life as "a tale that is told," we take up the quaint and bold analogy. Then also life is not done when it seems to be done.

Its power abides. The high, purposeful noble lives are like great works of literature—living epistles known and read of all men—quickenings generations to come to nobler impulses. Even the less illustrious are remembered and leave their mark. In a world where the “Conservation of Energy” is a law, the tale that is told finds at least one immortality in “minds made better by its presence.” Probably few people realise their duty to the future so deeply as they own their obligation to the past. A hundred signs tell them that they bear out of remote years the destiny which others prepared for them. But the gravity of the meaning of their own life for the babes unborn, for the people of Scotland that are to be, hardly impresses them so profoundly. Yet if there be one lesson more urgent than another, it is suggested by the influence which a good or a bad story has upon the years to come. Let a foul tale be given currency; worse still, let a man of genius like Byron devote his genius to the circulation of such an evil and suggestive tale; the fruits of corruption which grow for centuries are lush and ripe and plentiful. Let a pure and high imagination like that of Scott enrich our literature, and the tales that he told will make winter fires the brighter for ages of the future, will quicken the pulse of chivalry in the men and women of years to come of which we can only dream. So let an evil life be lived and ended as it seems to end; its miasma spreads over illimitable fields. Let a fair, pure, manly life find its close; when the tale is told:

Sweeter shall the roses blow

In those far years, those happier years,

And children weep when we lie low

Far fewer tears, far softer tears.

Just to the extent in which a man is spiritually educated does the appeal of the generations coming reach his heart and make him pray, "When my time is done, and the book is closed, and the tale is told, may the children who come after me and their children's children be the better for their reading of a pure and a tender page."