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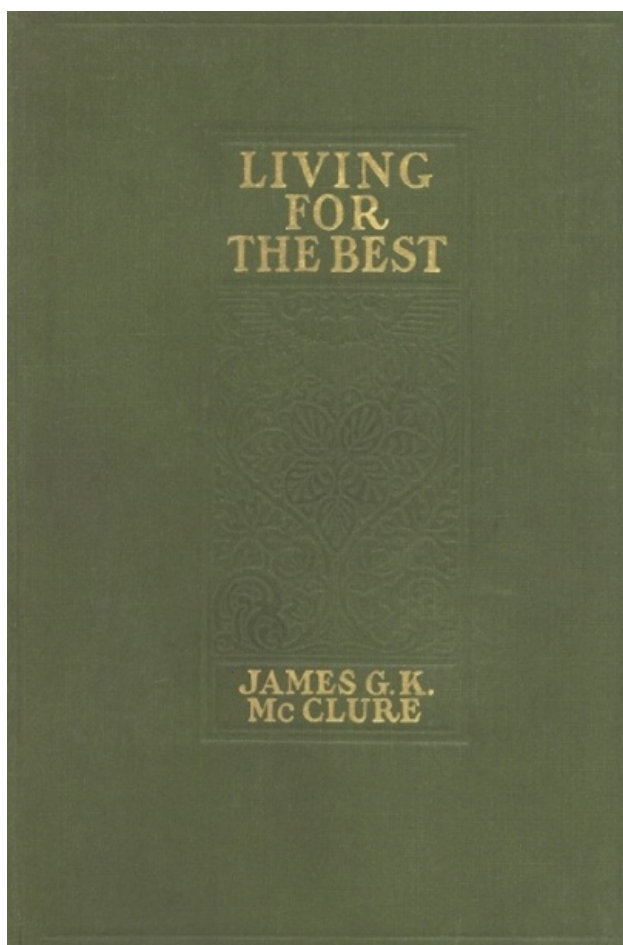
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Living for the Best

By

James G. K. McClure

Author of "A Mighty Means of Usefulness," "The Great Appeal," "Possibilities," etc.



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PREFACE.

The publisher of a large metropolitan journal, a most effective man in reaching and influencing his fellows, once expressed to me the thought, "From what I know of myself and others, were I a writer or speaker desiring to enforce truth, I would always try to vivify that truth through illustration and story. The every-day intelligence of man rejoices to have truth put before it in living form."

It is with these words in mind that this book is written. Its purpose is to set forth great ideas, and so to set them forth, each one illustrated by a historic life already familiar, that these ideas shall be made luminous, and even vivid, to the reader. The characters chosen for such illustration are from the Old Testament—those men of ancient times whose humanity is the humanity of every race and clime, and whose experiences touch our own with sympathy and suggestion. May these old-day heroes live again before the mind of him who turns these pages, and may the ideas which they are used to illustrate be an abiding power in the memory of every reader.

JAMES G. K. McCLURE.

LAKE FOREST,
ILLINOIS.

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OPEN TO THE BEST.

"If every morning we would fling open our windows and look out on the wide reaches of God's love and goodness, we could not help singing." So it has been written. So Luther thought. When he was at Wartburg Castle, in the perilous times of the Reformation, he went every morning to his window, threw it open, looked up to the skies, and veritable prisoner though he was, cheerily sang, "God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present Help." Then he carried a buoyant heart to the labor of the day.

The joy of a glad outlook was well understood by Ruskin. His guests at Brantwood were often awakened early in the morning by a knocking at their doors and the call, "Are you looking out?" When in response to this summons they pushed back the window-blinds a scene of beauty greeted their eyes. The glory of sunlight and the grandeur of forest dispelled care, quieted fret, and animated hope.

Scarce anything in life more determines a soul's welfare than the nature of its outlook. If spiritual frontage is toward the shadow, the soul sees all things in the gloom of the shadow; if spiritual frontage is toward the sunlight, the soul sees all things in the brightness of the sunlight. [12]

The preliminary question of character is, What is the outlook? Let that outlook be wrong, and opinion and conduct in due time will be wrong; let it be right, and whatever the temporary mistakes of opinion and conduct, the permanent tendency of character will be toward the right.

"From a small window one may see the infinite," Carlyle wrote. This was Daniel's belief. He acted upon his belief. The windows of his soul were always open to the infinite. In that fact lies the explanation of his character—a character of which every child hears with interest, every youth with admiration, and every mature man with reverence.

To-day in eastern lands the Mohammedan, wherever he may be, turns his face toward Mecca when, seeking help, he worships God. To him Mecca is the central spot of Mohammedan revelation, and is the focus of all Mohammedan brotherhood. So in olden times the Israelite, wherever he might be, thought of Jerusalem as the place where God's worship was worthiest and where Israelitish fellowship was heartiest. The name "Jerusalem" strengthened his religious faith and stirred his national patriotism. To open the windows of his soul toward Jerusalem was to open the soul to the best thoughts and impressions that the world provided. [13]

As the premier of the great Medo-Persian empire Daniel had his own palatial residence. The windows of the different rooms fronted in their special directions. There was one room that was his particular and private room. It was an "upper room" or "loft," somewhere apart by itself. The distinctive feature of this room was that its windows opened toward Jerusalem. Into this room Daniel was accustomed to go three times a day, throw open the lattice windows, look toward Jerusalem, and then in the thought of all that Jerusalem represented, kneel and talk with God.

Such was his custom. If the matters of his life were comparatively comfortable, he did this; and if those matters were seriously unpleasant, he did the same. Should, then, an occasion much out of the ordinary arise, an occasion involving a crisis in his life, it would be perfectly natural that he should, as he had invariably done, go into his retired chamber and open the windows. [14]

Such an extraordinary occasion arose when Darius issued the decree that the man who prayed to other than himself should be cast into a den of lions. In itself the decree seemed justifiable. It was customary for the Persians to worship their kings as gods. Ormuzd was said to dwell in every Persian king. Accordingly, divine authority was attributed to Persian kings, and whenever one of them issued a law, it had the force of infallibility. So it was "that the law of the Medes and the Persians published by a king altereth not."

At this particular time a decree commanding all people to bow to the king was perhaps a matter of state policy. The kingdom of the Medes and Persians had just been established. Here was an opportunity of testing the loyalty of the entire realm to the new king, Darius. If the people far and wide would bow to him, then they were loyal; but if they refused so to bow, then they evidently were disloyal. [15]

There was, however, an ulterior motive lying back of this seemingly rational decree. Many of the state officials envied Daniel. He was a foreigner, and still he held higher place than they. They desired to bring him into disrepute. They could not accomplish their purposes through charges of malfeasance of office, for his actions were absolutely faultless. They therefore resorted to the securing of this decree, believing, from what they knew of Daniel's habits and character, that he would, as he always had done, pray to Jehovah and not to Darius. In such case he would violate the decree and expose himself to the penalty of death.

Daniel knew that the decree had been issued. What would he do about it? The envious officials watched to see. When Daniel went to his palace their eyes followed him. Perhaps they had spies in the palace. In any case, some eyes tracked him as he passed from room to room until he came into his "loft," his "upper room," and then they saw him open the windows toward Jerusalem and kneel before Jehovah! So much was it a part of Daniel's life to keep the windows of his soul open to the best, that the direst threat had no power to divert him for an instant from his wonted course. [16]

Daniel kept the windows of his soul open to the best *religion*. To him Jerusalem stood for the best religion on earth. From the time, as a boy of fourteen, he first went away from home, he had lived among peoples having different faiths. He had known the religion of the Chaldeans, and had seen its phases under Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. It had much in its favor: its temples were beautiful, its ceremonies ornate, its feasts imposing. It had much however that was not in its favor: its heartlessness, its impurity, and its deceit. He had known, too, the fire-worshiping religion of the Persians. Many of its features appealed to him. The sun then as always was an object of admiration. As it rises above the horizon, moving with a stately progress that no cloud can check, no force of nature can retard, and no hand of man can withstand, it is the personification of majesty. As it causes the birds to sing, the beasts of the field to bestir themselves, and mankind to issue forth to labor, it is the emblem of power. As it makes the grass to grow and the flower to bloom, and as it draws skyward the moisture of lake and ocean that, like a great benefactor, it may send accumulated showers to refresh the parched earth, the sun is a very life-giver. It was no wonder that the Persians of Daniel's day, with their imperfect knowledge, bowed before that sun and worshiped it; nor was it a wonder that they worshiped all fire that has within itself such transforming and beautifying and energizing power.

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But though Daniel knew this religion, and the many other religions that in his time had their votaries in Babylon, he kept his windows open toward Jerusalem. Other religions might attempt the answer to the soul's inquiries concerning the meaning of life, other religions might have their beauties and their deformities, other religions might help him very materially in his political career, but to him one religion was the highest and the best, and to the influence of that religion he opened his soul. Jerusalem stood for one God—an invisible Creator who formed all things and was Lord over the sun itself as well as over man. This God, an unseen Spirit, was spotless in his character, and would dwell in the heart of man as man's friend and helper. To Daniel there was no such religion anywhere as the religion that taught this incomparable God—a God without a vice, a God who forgives sin, a God who never disdains the weakest soul that comes to him in penitence—and still is "Lord of lords and King of kings," the only wise and only Eternal One.

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Once a distinguished thinker, addressing students, said: "I have found great benefit in my own experience by emphasizing a very simple principle, one which never fails me when it is applied to questions of the spiritual life: '*It is always best to believe the best.*'"

Then he illustrated his meaning. The religion that teaches that all events are guided by intelligence toward a goal of love, rather than by blind and remorseless force, enables us to live in hope. It makes existence, not a prison-house, but a place of broad and splendid horizons; it makes the service of humanity a prophecy of blessing for all; it makes the discipline of the race a means toward a beneficent end. The religion that also teaches that we all are children of a good God, and that to the weakest and humblest of us there may be deliverance from all evil, transformation into all holiness, and finally reception to immortality in the presence and service of regnant perfection, such a religion is the best—the best in its hopes, the best in its inspiration, the best in its purposes, and the best in its results. Because it is the best, it is best to believe it; best to believe it, because through believing it we are helped toward the noblest manhood and are enabled to face life and death alike, with bravery.

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All this Daniel realized. Accordingly, amid all the distractions and appeals, and even temptations, of other religions, he kept his heart's windows open to the influences of God's religion. That was the wise attitude for him. It is the wise attitude for all. It is a man's duty, if he be true to his own soul, to keep an open mind to the best religion. Christianity claims to be the best, and asks acceptance on that ground alone. It welcomes study of every other religion. It rejoices in a "Parliament of Religions," wherein the advocates of different religions may present the claims of their religions in the strongest language possible. It listens as one religion is praised because it can secure calmness of mind, and as another is praised because it can secure heroism of life. As it listens, it delights in every word of encomium, *so long as each speaker and hearer keeps an open heart toward the best religion*. Then, when its own opportunity comes, Christianity presents itself, and asserting that the evil that is in any other religion is not in Christianity at all, that the good that is in any other religion is in Christianity far more abundantly, and that there are blessings in Christianity that appear in no other religion whatever, it claims to be the transcendent religion.

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In the activity of intellectual life common to all awakening and thoughtful minds it is inevitable that doubts will arise concerning the worthiness of Christianity. Every age finds the special doubts of its own age peculiar to itself. In this present age questions are in the air concerning the authorship of the Bible, concerning the person of Christ, and concerning the authenticity of the records of Christ's earthly ministry. Men are asking whether this world is impelled by a blind, resistless, heartless force, whether we are merely a mass of atoms, whether we may be delivered from the thralldom of sin, and whether when we die we become dust and dust alone. What shall we do in the face of all these questions? *Keep the windows of our souls open to the beliefs that are best for our life's grandeur and for humanity's uplift*. That is what we may do, what we should do, and what if we so do, will invariably lead the mind to a higher and higher valuation of the pre-eminence of Christianity.

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Daniel kept his windows open to the best *commands* of the best religion. His daily surroundings from the hour as a youth he entered the king's palace at Babylon were demoralizing. The ideals of his associates were low. The religious life of his fellow-students was a mere form. Domestic life all about him was unsound. Public life was dishonest. Looseness of character everywhere prevailed. Impurity was alluring. Bribery was considered a necessary feature of authority. The

weak were crushed by the mighty. Selfishness characterized both king and people.

The difficulty of his position was great: to breathe malaria and not be affected by it. He was in the whirl of worldliness and still he must not be made dizzy thereby. His one resource for safety was his daily consideration of the commands of God. Those commands charged men to be upright, to be clean, to do duty faithfully, even though it was duty to a heathen master, and to make life serviceable to the welfare of others. Again and again all through the years of his exile it was necessary for his soul's welfare that he should ponder these commands of God and not let the atmosphere that surrounded him lower and destroy his ideals. [22]

On that day when the unalterable decree was issued Daniel was in imminent and unescapable peril. Jealous officers already rejoiced in his anticipated death. The danger of weakening threatened his heart. He remembered that Abraham once in Egypt surrendered his principles and thereby saved his life; that the Gibeonites once falsified and so preserved themselves alive. He might have reasoned, "Why should not I, in this special matter, yield, and give up recognition of Jehovah until the storm of persecution is past?" He could easily say, "Perhaps I am making too much of this whole subject; what difference will there be if I, away off here in Babylon, hundreds of miles from home, call this a case of expediency, and temporarily relinquish my ideals?" The temptation was a fearful one. Many a man has gone down before it. Cranmer did, Pilate did; but not Daniel. He kept his eyes on God's commands—those commands that told him to do the right and scorn the consequences, those commands that told him that faithfulness to principle, though it ended in martyrdom, was essential to place in God's hero list. He remembered Joseph, who would not sin against God in doing evil. He remembered God, that bade him bear his testimony, sealing it if necessary with his life's blood. So remembering he kept the faith and proved invincible. [23]

Many a man, like Daniel, exposed to a peculiar temptation, has been made brave as he has remembered the standards set for him by another. He has thought of the wife perhaps, who charged him to meet his duties as a man of God, though godliness should involve them both in disgrace, and thus thinking he has stood firm before evil. Or as a youth, away from home, in a school or factory, with deteriorating influences all about him, and his feet well-nigh gone from the ways of uprightness, he has turned his heart toward that mother who would rather have him die than be false, and the remembrance of her has roused his self-assertion and made him master of the environment. [24]

The commands of God summon men to *principle*, to *fidelity*, to *serviceableness*, to *self-renunciation*, and to *holiness*. The man has never lived, nor ever will live, who can fulfil these commands of God unless his windows are continually open toward Jerusalem. We need, we always need, to have our ideals kept large and our standards kept high if we are to be noble souls.

Daniel kept the windows of his soul open, too, to the best *promises* of the best religion. Even though the prince of the eunuchs was kind to the home-sick captive, and a king was gracious to the interpreter of dreams, Daniel was always exposed to discouragement. Like the missionary of to-day, alone in a foreign land, he was surrounded by the depressing influences of heathenism. As he advanced in power there was no one to whom he could go for religious fellowship. The aids of comradeship and the aids of public worship were wanting. There were no audible voices summoning him to trust, and there was no tangible evidence of the existence of a people of God. He therefore needed every day to go to God Himself, and find in Him a refuge for his heart; needed to hear God's reassuring voice telling him that God was with him, was watching over him in love, and would provide for him as occasion might require. How often Daniel must have been comforted and heartened as he opened his soul to the promises of God! [25]

But what an hour of need that was when he was tracked to his upper room! Every power in the great Medo-Persian Empire was arrayed against him. No friend, no helper, was at hand. He stood alone before his fearful crisis. Brave and determined as his spirit might be, he was still a man—a man of flesh and blood. He needed strength: needed, as Christ afterward in Gethsemane needed, supporting and encouraging sympathy. He turned his soul toward the promises of God's protection and help. He let those promises flood his heart. Those promises made his will like adamant.

We do well when we front our hearts to God's promises. Every earnest soul, trying to make this world better, meets severe discouragements. Then let the soul open itself to God's assurance that the ends of the earth are given to Christ and that good shall indeed come off victorious. Every weak soul struggling to subdue its sin comes to hours of weariness. Then let the soul open itself to God's assurance that He giveth power to the faint and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Every sorrowing soul, sighing for the loved and the lost, has days of loneliness. Then let the soul open itself to God's assurance that life and immortality are brought to light in Jesus Christ. Only as the needy world of humanity opens its heart to God's promises can it walk in light and possess the peace that passeth understanding. [26]

There is always danger lest men let the windows of their souls be shut toward God. Our particular *sins* cause us to shut these windows. We do not like to look into God's face when we are conscious of cherished evil. Adam and Eve hid themselves from God when they knew they had done wrong. Those who condemned the reformers to death, often put wax in their ears so that they might not hear the testimony given by those reformers at the stake. *Cares*, too, cause us to shut these windows. We have so much responsibility to absorb us that we have "no time to look out to any distant tower of a sanctifying thought." All sorts of sights are before our windows— [27]

society, business, pleasure, study—but not God. Our life seems to open in every other direction than toward the holy city. We do not go alone into a private place and expose ourselves to the influences God stands ready to send to our hearts. It would be far better if we did. We should find that almost as gently as comes the sunlight, ideas, inspirations, and aspirations would be suggested to our hearts. They would enter our hearts, we would not know how; and if we cherished them, they would correct our false estimates of life, would re-mint our courage, would clarify the vision of our faith, and would prepare us, as they prepared Daniel, to discharge all life's duties with integrity, humanity, and composure.

It is a blessed, very blessed, way to live, this way of keeping our hearts open to the best. We all can so live. We can have a secret chamber—a very closet of the soul—into which we can go, whether we are with the multitude or are alone; and if through the broadly opened windows of that closet we look out toward the best—distant as that best may seem—back from the best will come the light that never fails and the strength that never breaks.

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WINNING THE BEST VICTORIES.

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CHAPTER II.

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WINNING THE BEST VICTORIES.

Success in life is determined by the victories we win. Only he who triumphs over obstacles is a successful man.

There are as many kinds of victory as there are kinds of obstacles. Some kinds of obstacles call upon us for the use of our secondary powers, and some for the use of our primary powers. When the obstacles bring into play the very best powers of our natures, and those powers conquer the obstacles, then we win our best victories.

David is a most interesting illustration of the winning of victories. The Bible evidently considers him one of its greatest heroes. While it gives eleven chapters to Jacob and fourteen chapters to Abraham, it gives sixty-one chapters to David. It thus asks us to pay great heed to the story and lessons of David's life.

Almost our first introduction to David represents him in a fight. He is a mere shepherd lad, out in the wilderness, perhaps miles from another human being, when a lion springs forth and seizes a lamb from the flock he is guarding. It was a fearsome hour for a boy. He might have deserted the flock and fled, preserving himself. But not so. He faced the lion. He even attacked the lion. He wrested the lamb from its mouth, and he slew the lion. Again, when, under similar circumstances, a beast of another kind, a bear, laid hold of a lamb, David stood up to the danger, and with such weapons of club and knife as he had, fought the bear to its death.

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Some years ago in Alaska, in a house hundreds of miles from any other white man's home, I saw a bearskin lying upon the sitting-room floor. The son of the house, out hunting, had suddenly come upon a bear, that rose up within a few feet of his face. The boy lifted his gun, shot, aiming at the bear's heart, and then, trembling with terror, ran for home. The next day the boy's father took associates to the spot, found the body of the bear, and brought the skin home as a trophy of the boy's skill and pluck. And a trophy it was! But when David, scarce armed at all, a boy, brought down his lion and his bear, in an actual face-to-face encounter, the skins of the lion and of the bear were trophies indeed!

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The next scene in David's life is when he meets Goliath. David is still a youth. The ruddy color has not yet been burned out of his cheeks by the Oriental sun. This meeting is different from any he has faced. It is not with a beast, but with a man—a man armed, a man experienced in combat, a man of much larger size and weight than himself, a man who had an assured sense of his own strength, a man whose voice, manner, and prowess put fear into the heart of every fighter in the army of Israel. In David's previous contests there had been an element of suddenness, so there was no time for hesitation, and so no time for the cowardice often born of hesitation; in this contest there was delay, and during that delay David was twitted with the foolishness of even thinking of facing Goliath, and an effort was made to break down his courage. Right manfully, however, did he stand up to the danger. Instead of a lamb, an army was in peril. The cause was worthy of a great venture. He made the venture. He took smooth stones from the brook, he used his shepherd's sling, he conquered Goliath, and Goliath's sword and Goliath's head became trophies of a splendid victory. The youth had rescued an army from paralyzing fear, and had saved the glory of Jehovah's name! He deserved credit then. He received it then. And he became forever an inspiring example to all youth who would fight their country's battles, and win laurels for the God of battles.

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These two scenes are suggestive. The one with the lion and the bear speaks to us of pure physical bravery. David has such muscular strength that he, by the power in his hands and arms, can hold beasts and fight a winning fight with them. David's strength makes the killing of a lion or bear with a rifle, whether at long distance or even near at hand, seem small. It makes the ordinary successes of those who contest in the athletic trials of our day seem insignificant. Still it glorifies those successes. Physical bravery is most desirable. People believe so. They love to see contests of physical endurance. They will go miles to watch such contests, and they will cheer the victors to the echo. In so doing to-day they follow the example of all preceding generations. Barbarian, Greek, Roman, Indian, every man everywhere is interested in muscular power. It fells trees and wins victories over the forest; it plows soil and wins victories over the fields; it breaks stone and wins victories over roadbeds. Physical victories are not to be gainsaid. May every life win them if it can against nature, against other lives in fair athletics, against any one who would rob a home or burn a house. The ambition to win muscular victories, in a right way, for the defense or honor of a worthy cause, is to be commended. Victories so won make their winners heroes. Waterloo is said to have been fought and won on the foot-ball ground of Rugby.

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The other scene is likewise suggestive—of David with Goliath. It is that of a youth fighting for his country and his God. It is still a physical contest, but it is now skill and muscle combined; or rather, muscle directed by skill. The contest, physically considered, is unequal. David is no match for Goliath. They are in different classes. But a calm mind, a dexterous hand, and a high purpose are David's, and they more than compensate for lack of physical force. The strongest battalions do not always conquer. The strongest physical force is not to conquer in this instance. Patriotism may so nerve the heart that one man is equal to a hundred, and resolute purpose may develop such skill and sturdiness that a few can put a thousand to flight. It has always been so—in days of Marathon and in days of Bunker Hill—and it always will be so. The men who win such victories may well be lauded. It was right that David's name should go into the ballads of his country and be repeated again and again to stir the heart of patriotism. Any man who can fight the battles of trade or of manufacturing or of invention—any man who can head a great industry, who can write a strong book, or who can make an eloquent speech—any man who conquers the difficulty of his position by skill and energy, and succeeds, has indeed won a great victory. For a mere shepherd youth to conquer a trained fighter was superb; and it is superb to-day when a poor boy honestly wins his way to wealth, and a stammering boy learns to speak like a Demosthenes, and a seeming dunce becomes a brilliant Scott. All soldiers conquering like Grant, all discoverers succeeding like Columbus, all investigators searching like Darwin and writing like Spencer, deserve crowns of recognition for victories they have won.

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As a result of these two scenes in David's life many other scenes of a somewhat similar nature occurred. As occasions arose, David led many another attack upon the nation's foes. He possessed the rare power of creating a well-disciplined force out of outlaws. He so combined skill and leadership that none of the enemies of Israel could resist him. The story of his battles is a long and a glorious one. He was a fighter of whom the nation might be proud. If physical prowess and military skill and administrative force and legislative provision are essential to kingly success, he had them. Victory after victory, in all these lines, were written upon his banner.

But David's fame does not rest upon the victories he won over beast or fellow-man, interesting and great as these victories are. The reason that the Bible gives him the space it does, and the reason Christ is said to be David's son (though never the son of any other Old Testament hero), is because of the victories David won over himself. In the sphere of his own heart he found his greatest difficulties, for in that sphere he found his strongest foes; but in that sphere he wrought out his greatest victories. The best element in David's life is not his physical strength, not his intellectual skill, not his ability as a singer, a general, a judge, a builder, or a king, but the best element is his conquest of himself.

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What a victory of *magnanimity* that was, when Saul, who was bitterly persecuting David, entered the cave in whose dark recesses David was concealed, and lay down for sleep! David had him in his power. He could have killed him instantly, and forever ended the persecution. He was even urged to do so by his followers. But he conquered his enmity, he looked upon the sleeping Saul with pity, and he left him unharmed. It is a mighty soul that can pity and forgive. Here was a king pursuing an innocent subject who had no other thought than of loyalty to his king—pursuing him relentlessly. The whole transaction on Saul's part was unjust and cruel. But David, deeply feeling the wrong he was suffering, crowded down the bitterness of his heart, and treated Saul magnanimously.

How many men, otherwise splendid men, have failed just here. They could fight bravely as sailors or soldiers, but later they could not treat a rival graciously. They could win successes socially or commercially or scholastically, but they became jealous of their places and their recognitions, and they wished no good to the one who in any way stood in their path. But David, knowing that he himself was anointed to be king, and that Saul's persecution of him was unjustifiable, still rose so far above all thought of preserving his own dignity and insisting on his own rights, that when his enemy lay helpless at his feet, he treated him with deference! Now we begin to see why David is called "a man after God's own heart." Was it because he could fight beast and man well? No; but because he could fight his own jealous, bitter heart and make it generous and kind and magnanimous.

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What a victory of *penitence* that was when David sinned in the matter of Uriah and Bathsheba! He did sin. No one exculpates David. The Bible does not exculpate him, nor will any sane man exculpate him. He did a wrong that brought incessant sorrow on his heart and home. During all

the remaining years of his life he had cause to regret his wrong. It might have been alleged that he did only what king after king, situated like himself in that Oriental land, with its despotic power and its manner of life, had done before him and would do after him. He might have justified himself by the custom of the day and by the prerogative of royalty. The probability is that he acted impulsively, allowing in an unguarded moment a wicked suggestion to conquer him. But when a prophet of God, Nathan, brought home to his soul the fact that he had sinned, what a victory that was, as the man fought down all the voices within him, calling to him to "brave it out," to "show no weakening before the prophet," to "justify himself to himself on the score of a king's right to do as he pleased," and in conquering these voices, humbled himself before God, making the one voice that triumphantly rose above every other voice the voice of penitence—"Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight. Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me!" [40]

There is nothing in our world that shows high victory better than penitence. Mankind does wrong. Sometimes it knows the wrong. Then perhaps it confesses its wrong in the hurried words, "I have sinned." So said Pharaoh, and immediately did again what he had done before. So said Saul, and never gave up the wrong that forced the confession from him. So said Judas, and went out to hang himself. But when David said it, he said it with a broken and a contrite heart. The man who having sinned conquers all the passion and pride of his soul and becomes a sweet, true, pure penitent is a victor over whom angels rejoice. Thousands of men who have made a success in their own field of labor fail to win life's best victories because they never bow before God and say, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner." They are as stout-hearted as the Pharisee, and as self-deceived. They forget the bitternesses they have cherished toward their fellow-men, they overlook all the omissions of goodness that have marked their lives, they do not consider how terrible is their present and their past ingratitude to God for all His goodness to them, and so they lack that gentlest, most beautiful, and most exalting virtue of penitence. [41]

What a victory of *humility* that was, when David, forbidden to carry out the supreme desire of his heart in the building of a temple, exerted all his power to help another to build it! The erection of a temple that should be the richest structure of its time was David's dream. It was to be the consummation of his effort. Enemies should be subdued, laws should be passed, government should be sustained, and foreign alliances made—all to this end. He looked forward to the day when the temple would crown Moriah, as the happiest day of his life. But God told him that another, not he, should build the temple, and that it would be known, not as David's Temple, but as Solomon's Temple. Should he then withdraw all interest from the undertaking? Should he say, "This is not my matter, it is another's; let another then carry its burden, as he will carry its glory." He was sorely disappointed. The one thing he had aimed to do was denied him. But he rose above his disappointment; he conquered it. He who was to take secondary place, threw himself into the help of him who was to have first place. He devised plans, he organized forces, he started instrumentalities, he gave his money by the millions, he animated others to follow his example, and he did all that chastened devotion could do to help another to complete the building which should forever sound the praises of Solomon. [42]

Humility is not a virtue easily won. The virtue of sweetly accepting minor place when we wished major place, and of working as earnestly for another as for ourselves, is very rare. In the army of Washington there was a general, Charles Lee, who again and again was conquered by his own jealousy, and would not do as the interests of Washington, his commanding officer, demanded. He would have fought to the death for his own reputation, but not for the reputation of Washington. Self-made men find it exceedingly difficult to be humble. David won a far higher victory when he cheerily went about all the self-imposed tasks of gathering material for Solomon's temple than when he fought the lion or Goliath, or led an army into battle. The man that does justice does well; the man that does justice and loves mercy does better; the man that does justice and loves mercy and walks humbly before God does best. And no man, whoever he may be, strong, reputable, industrious, scholarly, wealthy, ever wins his best victories until he walks humbly with his God. [43]

And what a victory of *unselfishness* that was when David, in the time of the numbering, called upon God to lay all penalty for the sin upon himself! Again the lower propensities of David's heart had misled him. He thought that he would number his military forces and let the nation know how strong and ample its army was. The thought was a mistaken one. Safety lay, not in numbers, but in the virtues that spring from obedient trust in God. The deed of numbering, however, had been done. Then the plague came. God would show that in three days the army could be so reduced by sickness as to make it, however large its numbers, utterly impotent. David saw the angel of destruction as the angel drew near to the threshing-floor of Araunah. With a heart overflowing with unselfishness, he cried to God, "I have sinned, I have done perversely, but these sheep, what have they done? Let Thy hand be against me, and against my father's house." He would die himself—to have others live. [44]

This was perhaps his very best victory. Winkelried opened his breast to receive all the concentrated spear thrusts of the enemy, that thus the army behind him might have chance to advance. The self-immolating life is the noblest. True love comes to its expression in self-sacrifice. Christ reached His highest glory, not when He battled with wind and wave and conquered them, not when He battled with disease and demons and conquered them, not when He battled with lawyers and dialecticians and conquered them, but when He poured out His life for others. [45]

There are victories to be won at every step of our life's progress. No one of them is to be

underestimated. Victories of mere brawn, wrought worthily in proper time and proper place, are good; victories of intellectual skill, wrought worthily in proper purpose and proper spirit, are good; but the best victories any life can win are the victories won within a man's own heart. These are the most difficult victories, and they are the most glorious victories. Each person, equally with every other, has opportunity for such victories. Whenever David failed to carry God and God's help into a battle he lost; but whenever he fought under God and for God he won. David's life knew many and many a failure, but he rose from every failure and made a new effort. As a result, victory crowned his life, and he died a man of God. Victory, too, may crown our lives, however weak they are, if like David, after every fall, we penitently turn to God, and in His grace strive once again to win the victories of faith. [46]

MAKING THE BEST USE OF OUR LIVES. [47]

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CHAPTER III. [49]

MAKING THE BEST USE OF OUR LIVES.

The great Humboldt once said, "The aim of every man should be to secure the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole." Another thoughtful man, Sir John Lubbock, also said, "Our first object should be to make the most and best of ourselves."

Prominent among the historic personages who have made the best use of their lives is Joseph. Touch his career at any point that is open to investigation, and always Joseph will be found doing the very best that under the circumstances can be done. When his father tells him to carry food to his envious brothers, he obediently faces the danger of their hatred and goes. When he is a slave in Potiphar's house he discharges all his duties so discreetly that the prison-keeper trusts him implicitly. When his fellow-prisoners have heavy hearts, he feels their sorrows and tries to give them relief. When Pharaoh commits the ordering of a kingdom to his keeping, he governs the nation ably. When foresight has placed abundant food in his control, he feeds the famishing nations so that all are preserved. When his father and his brethren are in need, he graciously supplies their wants. When that father is dying, the son is as tender with him as a mother with her child. And when that father has died, the son reverences his father's last request and carries Jacob's body far up into the old home country at Machpelah for burial. [50]

There were many occasions in Joseph's life in which he might have failed. At least, in any one of them he might have come short of the best. Seneca used to say of himself, "All I require of myself is, not to be equal to the best, but only to be better than the bad." But Joseph aimed in every individual experience to be equal to the best. In that aim he succeeded wondrously. Going out, as a young boy, from the simple home of a shepherd, becoming a captive in a strange land, subjected to great temptations in a luxurious civilization, tested with a great variety of important duties, exposed to the peril of pride and self-sufficiency, given opportunity for revenge upon those who had injured him, he always, without exception, carried himself well, doing his part bravely, earnestly, and wisely, and making of his life, in each opportunity, the best. [51]

It is not every one that is called to such a vast range of experience as was Joseph. Even Christ never traveled out of His own little environment of Judea, that was a few miles north and south, and still fewer miles east and west. The great majority of lives never come into public prominence. They have no part in administering the affairs of a kingdom or in managing large mercantile transactions. Even among the apostles there were some whose history is almost lost in obscurity. We scarce know anything of what Bartholomew said or Lebbeus did. It is not a question whether we can make a great name for ourselves. That may be absolutely impossible. Many a beautiful flower is so placed in some extensive field that human eyes never see it and human lips consequently never praise it. But the question is, whether we are doing the best that can be done with our lives such as they are.

Every human life is like the life of some tree. Each tree is at its best when it well fulfils the purpose for which it was made. There are trees which must stand as towering as the date-palm if they answer their end, and there are other trees which can never expect to be towering, for they were made, like the box, to keep near the ground. Some trees are for outward fruit, as the apple, and some for inward fruit, as the ash. Fruit is "correspondence in development with the purpose for which the tree exists," is "production in the line of the nature of the tree." When, then, the orange tree produces sound, sweet oranges that refresh the dry lips of an invalid or ornament the table of a prince, the orange tree does well; and if it produces such fruit to as large a degree as possible, and for as long a time as possible, it has done its best. So, too, does the pine do well when it produces wood wherewith a good house for family joy may be built, and the spruce does well when it brings forth a fiber that may be fashioned into paper on which words of truth can be printed, and the oak does well when it develops a grain suitable for the construction of a vessel that plowing the waves shall carry cargoes of merchandise. If the pine, the spruce, the oak, grow [52]

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to the extent of their opportunity, and become all that they can become in the line of their own possibility, each and all have made the best use of their lives.

But how varied are the opportunities as well as the missions of trees, of the garden cherry and the forest poplar, of the swamp tamarack and the plantation catalpa! Trees of the same genus may be so differently placed that one can attain an abundant growth while another must strive hard simply to exist. An elm along a river bottom, fed by constant moisture, lifts wide arms to the sunlight, while an elm on a rocky hill, scarce finding crevices for its roots, necessarily is small and stunted. And still that stunted elm may, in its place, make or not make the best use of its life.

Human lives are as diversified in their natures as the growths of the field and forest. Our tastes, our aptitudes, our memories, our imaginations, widely vary. The world is made up of thousands upon thousands of different needs, that must be met if mankind is to prosper. Every function necessary for the world's welfare is an honorable function and becomes, when attempted by a consecrated heart, a sacred function. The world cannot live without cooking, nor can it live without building, nor without bartering, nor without teaching. How to make the best of the function or functions that are his, is the question every human being should ponder. [54]

A man may make a *bad* use of his life. He may throw away his opportunities, he may wreck his powers of mind and body, he may tear down that good in the world which he was put here to build up. This *is* a possibility! Every life should understand that it is a possibility. John Newton held in his hand a ring. As he was leaning over the rail of an ocean vessel he had no thought that perhaps through careless handling he might drop that ring and lose it forever. His mind was entirely on the ring, not on the danger of losing the ring. Suddenly the ring slipped through his fingers, and before he could get hold of it again, it was in the depths of the sea. It is for this reason that the book of Proverbs is constantly calling to men to see that the priceless jewels of opportunity are "retained," and that Christ's word, "not to let our light become darkness," has so much significance. Men often squander fortunes. They also squander virtues and reputation and aptitudes and opportunities. Jails, reformatories, houses of detention, drunkards' graves, the gathering places of tramps, all tell us that people can make a miserable use of life. So does many a beautiful banquet-hall, many a luxurious home, many a speculator's resort, many a student's room, tell us that those we see there have had powers of mind and body and opportunities of social position and of wealth which they have thrown away. They have wasted their good as truly as a prodigal who has spent his all in riotous living. They are Jeroboams; dowered with gifts that might have been used for their own development and the welfare of others they have let mean and low and unworthy attractions secure their gifts, thus spoiling their own characters and causing Israel to sin. Every blessing that a man has may become his curse, and drag him down and drag others down with him. [55]

This truth is well known. The other truth is not so well known, that a man may make an *inferior* use of his life. This is exactly what that Seneca did who declared that his ambition was, "not to be equal to the best, but only to be better than the bad." He gained large knowledge, he wrote and spoke much that was philosophical and moral, he pointed out many of the perils of a misuse of wealth, he was better than the bad, better than the Nero who would kick his mother, kill his wife, make merry over his own indecencies, and gloat in the crucifixion of martyrs. Seneca was better than the man who never made effort to cultivate his mind, was better than the man who spent his days in orgies, yes, was far better than the man who was blind to the beauty of gems, of poetry, and of architecture. But all the same he made an inferior use of his life. His library, his furniture, his precious stones, his worldly wisdom, were very great. Let him be tutor even to an emperor, an emperor that was a "Cæsar"! And still, better than the bad, he made a lamentable misuse of life when he let luxury enervate his righteous principles, let the pleasures of the table rob him of his integrity, and let his own hand, in an hour of humiliation, end the life which was not his to end. Seneca was the man who let an inferior standard decide his purposes, and thus vitiated his powers. Any standard lower than the highest produces poor material. Second-rate standards make second-rate goods and second-rate men. Second-rate men are brought to hours of emergency calling for first-rate principles. In such hours second-rate men go down. A man satisfied to live for anything less than the best of which he is capable may stand well for a considerable time, but before his days are over he will be found to be an unsuccessful workman, a disappointing teacher, a weak financier, an inaccurate student, an untrustworthy friend. [56]

But while we may make a bad or inferior use of life, we also may make the *best* use of it. To do this should be our ambition. It should be the underlying, all-pervading purpose that quietly but regnantly dominates our being. The best use of our life will never be secured apart from such ambition. It will not come of itself. We do not drift into a best use. The best use is a matter of toil and perseverance, of thoughtfulness and devotion. It cost Joseph hours of consideration, days of application, and years of adaptation to make the best use of his life. He found himself in new positions constantly. The boy naturally had looked forward to being a shepherd. To that end he studied the lie of pasturage lands. When his father sent him to his brethren he knew the way to Shechem and Dothan, and he found his brethren. [57]

But with his forced departure into Egypt, probably into the city of Memphis, all his surroundings are new and untried. The shepherd boy is given the duties of a household servant, exchanging the freedom of the field for the confinement of the palace. But he takes up his new duties, magnifying them as an opportunity of development, and he makes the best use of them. Later, he who has known only a tent and a palace is in a prison, and is charged with the work of a prison guard. Right well he does that work, studying it, giving himself to it, and making a success of it by his heartiness and fidelity. Later still, he who has only tended sheep and ordered a household [58]

and enforced discipline is called to be a comforter to souls. He summons his sympathy, he persuasively approaches those whose hearts are sore, he obtains their confidence, and relieves their anxiety. Still again, this prisoner, this shepherd boy, this household servant, this man with pity in his eyes, is called to a new adaptation. He must appear before a Pharaoh and as a courtier have interview with him! That underlying purpose of his heart, always to make the best of the hour and place, stands him in good stead, and the courtier conducts himself so wisely that he is advanced to be an Egyptian viceroy. Later still this viceroy must become a minister of agriculture and charge a nation when and how to sow the fields. Still later he must become a secretary of the treasury, purchasing grain and building store-houses. Still later he must be a great premier, both providing for present need and making arrangements for future taxation. Later he must be a brother with a true brother's heart and a son with a son's gentleness toward an aged and perhaps imperious parent. Later he must be a mourner, then a traveler, and then as an orphan son he must assume again the heavy burdens of statesmanship.

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What strange varieties of experience Joseph thus met! How those experiences kept changing every little while! Why did he succeed so well in them? Because in every one of them he made the best use of himself that the occasion allowed. He magnified the opportunity he had. The thing that was at hand to do he did with absolute fidelity.

We do not forget and we must not forget that at the very bottom of his life was a *belief in God* and an intention to do what God sanctioned and only what God sanctioned. He would not disobey what he believed to be a wish of God! Somehow, in that far-away country, surrounded by temples and idols, meeting the thousands of priests of Isis, hearing the daily services of heathenism, and seeing the unceasing vices of the land, he kept God and God's principles in his soul. Those principles in general taught him purity and honesty; in particular they taught him *fidelity* in the service of others and *desire to benefit* his fellow-men. Such fidelity and helpfulness—united with dependence on the aid of God—enabled him always and everywhere to make the best use of his life. He trusted God when doors were shut as well as when they were open. Privation as truly as prosperity was to him an opportunity.

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Accordingly, *heartiness* went into his opportunities. The spirit of grumbling never appeared in his career. No hour came too suddenly for him, no task was too small nor too great, no occasion too low nor too high, no association too mean nor too noble. As a household servant he did his work as under God and for God, and as a ruler of a nation he did it as under God and for God, and as an obedient son he did it as under God and for God.

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A physician whose life has been beautiful in good deeds and in a high faith once said, "My happiness and usefulness in the world are due to a chance question from a stranger. I was a poor boy and a cripple. One day, standing on a ball-field and watching other boys who were strong, well clothed, and healthy, I felt bitter and envious. The friends of the players were waiting to applaud them. I never could play nor have applause! I was sick at heart.

"A young man beside me must have seen the discontent on my face. He touched my arm, and said, 'You wish you were one of those boys, do you?' 'Yes, I do,' I answered quickly. 'They have everything and I have nothing.'

"Quietly he said, 'God has given them money, education, and health that they may be of some account in the world. Did it never strike you that he gave you your lameness for the same reason, to make a splendid man of you?'

"I did not answer, but I never forgot the words. 'My lameness given me by God to teach me patience and strength!'

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"At first I did not believe the words, but I was a thoughtful boy, taught to reverence God, and the more I considered the words, the clearer I saw their truth. I decided to accept the words. I let them work upon my temper, my purposes, my actions. I now looked on every difficulty as an opportunity for struggle, every situation of my life as an occasion for good. If a helpless invalid was cast on me for support, or whatever the burden that came to me, I resolved to do my best. Since then life has been sweetened and growth into peace and usefulness has come."

Soon after the death of Carlyle two friends met: "And so Carlyle is dead," said one. "Yes," said the other, "he is gone; but he did me a very good turn once." "How was that," asked the first speaker, "did you ever see him or hear him?" "No," came the answer, "I never saw him nor heard him. But when I was beginning life, almost through my apprenticeship, I lost all interest in everything and every one. I felt as if I had no duty of importance to discharge; that it did not matter whether I lived or not; that the world would do as well without me as with me. This condition continued more than a year. I should have been glad to die. One gloomy night, feeling that I could stand my darkness no longer, I went into a library, and lifting a book I found lying upon a table, I opened it. It was Sartor Resartus, by Thomas Carlyle. My eye fell upon one sentence, marked in italics, 'Do the duty which *lies nearest to thee*, which thou knowest to be a duty! The second duty will already have become clearer.' That sentence," continued the speaker, "was a flash of lightning striking into my dark soul. It gave me a new glimpse of human existence. It made a changed man of me. Carlyle, under God, saved me. He put content and purpose and power into my life."

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"The duty lying nearest" was the duty Joseph magnified. He accepted that duty as divine, and he performed it under God faithfully, serviceably, and cheerily. Any and every life that meets duty as Joseph did, will make the best of its life. We may be placed in low position or in high position; we may have menial or kingly responsibilities; we may have temptations of all possible kinds about

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us; but if we look to God for guidance, and carry faithfulness, serviceableness, and cheer into each and every duty, we shall have made of life the best.

PUTTING THE BEST INTO OTHERS.

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CHAPTER IV.

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PUTTING THE BEST INTO OTHERS.

There is nothing more worthy than the desire to perpetuate the good. That desire implies that the person cherishing it has good within himself, and that he wishes that good to live and flourish after his death. If a man thinks that his views are the best that can be held, then, if he is a noble soul, interested in the world's welfare, he longs to have his best enter into other lives, and so continue to bless the world.

This longing characterized Elijah. He came upon the scene of human life at a time when the worship of the low and debased threatened to dominate the people of Israel. The priests of Baal, an impure god, were in the ascendant. Vices, as a consequence, prevailed. These vices controlled even the court. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel were impiously wrong. Elijah had stern work to do. He must reprove the people for their errors. He must face the priests of Baal and show them and show the nation that their god, as compared to Jehovah, was powerless. He must tell those in high places, even the king and queen themselves, that their sins, if persisted in, would surely be visited by Jehovah's wrath.

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His was a difficult task. It required courage, persistency, and determined purpose. It would have been folly for him to undertake it unless he felt that his ideas were essential to the nation's good. He would be resisted and hated. Hours would come when he would seem to stand wholly alone, and the cause he represented would appear to him hopeless. Still, difficult as his task was, he undertook it. All this worship of Baal and all these vicious practices of the people were wrecking the nation. As a patriot, as a lover of his fellow-man, as a good servant of God, he must do and he would do whatever was in his power to replace the wrong with the right, to implant in the lives of the people, from peasant to king, the truest and purest ideals. Accordingly he faithfully taught the will of God, called upon God to reveal Himself on Mount Carmel, reprov'd Ahab and Jezebel, and did his best to put the best into the life of his day.

But he could not live forever. At any hour he might be stricken down by the hand of an enemy or by the power of some illness. Like a wise man, loving the cause he had espoused, he looked about for some one who, in case of his disability or death, could take up his work and carry forward his ideas. His mind turned toward one special man, perhaps just coming out of boyhood into maturity, a man who seemed to have the inherent power of development, and he set his heart on putting into him, Elisha, the best thought and the best principles that he had. He came upon Elisha in the full vigor of youth, plowing with twelve yoke of oxen. The distinctive garment of Elijah's mission was his mantle. That stood for Elijah's special work of speaking the truth of God and calling the nation to righteousness. Upon seeing Elisha in the field, Elijah passed over from the caravan path that he was traveling, and threw his mantle upon Elisha's shoulders! The action carried its own meaning. It indicated to Elisha that Elijah wished him to take up his work and stand for his ideas. Elisha instantly realized the meaning of the act, and, in briefest time compatible with filial duty, he answered to Elijah's wish.

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One little sentence in the story of these two men's lives is very instructive. "They two went on." It is a very brief summary of what was occurring for days and months and years before Elijah died. "They two went on." They were together. They talked together. They thought together. They prayed together. Little by little Elijah imparted to Elisha his views of life and imparted to him also his enthusiasm for the welfare of Israel. When the time came for Elisha to step forward and do his part for Israel's good, he was ready to act. He became and long continued to be a wise, helpful, instructive benefactor to Israel. The best that had been in Elijah's life was perpetuated in Elisha's life.

It is a beautiful way to live, this way of putting the best into other lives. It confers such a blessing on the particular *individual* who is thus helped. We cannot say with positiveness that the world might never have known the full force of Elisha's character had not Elijah cast his mantle over Elisha's shoulder, but the probability is that it was Elijah's interest in Elisha and his success in educating him toward his own ideals that gave the world Elisha's elevated personality. Paul acted similarly with Timothy. Timothy was undoubtedly a good boy of many worthy parts, and with many noble views of life. But Paul laid his hand and heart upon him, and claimed him for the special purpose of continuing the ministry of the gospel, and educated him to be a faithful representative of the truth. Often there is much hesitancy to be overcome, even in worthy people, before natural endowments will be put to the best use. Such may have been the case with both Elisha and Timothy. They needed encouragement. They needed inspiration through a sense of

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responsibility. This was the situation with John Knox. He, humanly speaking, never could have come forward as an advocate of Christ's truth and religious freedom had it not been that another approached him, put his hand on his shoulder, and said, "You have powers of good in you. You must use them in standing up for God and Scotland."

Wonderful resources are often developed in others through this purpose to put our best into them. No one knows the power latent in another life. The most unpromising looking people may have faculties that, once awakened, directed, and called into action, will do a blessed part in the world's advance. Every school whose history can be followed for fifty years has had pupils that at the outset seemed absolutely unpromising, that seemed even incapable of appreciation or development, but who, under the devotion and inspiration of some teacher or fellow-pupil, became so aroused and so efficient that their names are an honor to the school. The glory of every Ragged Boys' Home in a great city is that former inmates who were thieves, parentless and friendless, were so reached by a patient, loving man or woman that they became industrious and honorable citizens, holding positions of power in the city itself or possessing prosperous acres in the country. It is the boy picked up in the streets of New York and sent West to be a member of a farmer's household that was led by that household's interest into such character that he was appointed governor of Alaska. "I have made," said Sir Humphry Davy, "many discoveries, but the best discovery was when I discovered Michael Faraday." There is scarcely any joy comparable with the joy of discovering to himself and to the world the best elements possible in another's life. The one who brought about this discovery gladly sinks into the background, and rejoices to let the field be occupied by the one discovered. It would seem as though God Himself must have rejoiced when, after all His patient teaching of Moses on the side of Horeb, He saw Moses showing his superb power of leadership in Egypt, and that God must have similarly rejoiced when He saw Paul responding to His charge and manifesting traits of love, forbearance, and humility that Paul had not thought he possessed. To put one Elisha into the world's arena, there to stand and battle for the right, was the crowning glory and the crowning joy of Elijah's life. The men or women that can take the best that is in them and put it into another, so that another shall live the best, honor the best, and glorify the best, can ask no higher privilege in life.

But beyond the good secured to the individual by putting the best into him is the good secured to the *world* thereby. It was not merely that Elijah inspired a new life in Elisha's soul and transformed a man, it was also that he set in operation a new *influence*. The influence was not exactly like his own. It was like Elijah's in that it was righteous, safe, and helpful, but it was unlike Elijah's in its temper and expression. Elijah was a great destroyer of evil: Elisha was a great uplifter of good. Elijah's earliest proclamation was, "There shall not be dew nor rain these years": Elisha's earliest miracle is, "There shall be from hence life and fruitful land." Both were alike in their general purpose, both alike in their courage. Neither one of them could be moved from the path of duty by fear of man or men. But each was himself, as distinct as two mountain peaks in the same range or as two ships on the same sea. Elijah imparted his best to Elisha, but that best took shape in Elisha according to Elisha's individuality. Elisha was not Elijah over again, but he was Elijah's best in a new form—a new form that was demanded by the needs of a new day. Elijah had laid blows of condemnation on the nation: Elisha was to apply the balm of healing where those blows had fallen. Elijah was an agitator: Elisha was a teacher. Elijah was denunciatory: Elisha was tolerant. Each in his place held the best views held by any man of his time, but each in his place was called upon to hold those views according to his own temperament and express them according to the need immediately at hand.

No parent, teacher, or friend can possibly reproduce himself in another. It is God's law that, however alike plants may seem in reproduction, no child shall see life exactly as his parents, nor shall a pupil see it exactly as a teacher. This law is most wise. The same work is never given to any two people to do. It may be work of the same general nature, but never work the same in all particulars. Different types of men, actuated by the same motives, are required for different types of work. Any man who endeavors to be a pure copyist of another gone before him, always fails of individual development and fails of usefulness. Elijah could not foresee the changed circumstances in which Elisha would live, when many of the vexatious questions of Elijah's day would be settled and new questions of morality and public welfare would arise. All that he could do, all that any man can do, is to give the best he has to another, and send him forth to use that best as well as the other can in the new place. The beauty of human history is that the work the best man of one age could not accomplish, another coming after him does accomplish, and he accomplishes it, not because he is any better than his predecessor, but because he is the man for this hour as his predecessor was for the hour before this. There is always work to be done. There are always tasks left over from a previous generation. There are always ideas hitherto unemphasized that to-day must be emphasized, else society will not know its duty. For this work and task and emphasis new men are needed, men who do not see exactly as their fathers saw, nor pronounce nor act exactly as their fathers did. To provide such men, to inspire them with a great sense of duty, and send them out into life with open minds toward God and open hearts toward their fellows, and then withdraw our hand and let them do their own work, in their own way, this is our blessed privilege.

We may endeavor to put the best into others *directly*. A parent is a parent largely for this particular purpose. The father and mother have this end as their greatest and highest responsibility. They cannot shirk it without hurt to themselves and to their child. No one can and no one should influence a child as directly as does a parent. The parent may temporarily place the child beneath the influence of a nurse, a pastor, or a teacher, but the abiding influence should be and is the parent's. Little by little, line upon line, precept upon precept, conduct upon

conduct, the parent should endeavor to set before the child the highest ideas of life. Skill is requisite in stating these ideas, in illustrating them, in making them attractive, in persuading to their acceptance. The evil or the inferior lodged in the child's heart needs to be forced out, that the best may enter. Happy the parent whose forcing process is like the incoming of light into a darkened room, a process that is gentle and conciliatory, a process that never boasts of victory and never leaves a pain.

This is the parent's greatest hope and greatest reward, to have a child who shall in the child's own time and place be an advancer of the world's good. A thousand spheres of opportunity open before each new generation. Into any one of them the child may carry the best his father or mother ever thought or said. Many parents wish their children to do in life work of the very same type that they once did. It was therefore a gratification to their ministerial fathers when they saw their own sons enter the ministry, Henry Ward Beecher, Jonathan Edwards, Frederick W. Farrar, Charles H. Spurgeon, John Wesley, and Reginald Heber. But other ministerial fathers likewise might be gratified when they saw their sons helpfully laboring in noble spheres not specifically "the ministry," as in poetry, Joseph Addison, Samuel T. Coleridge, William Cowper, Ben Jonson, Oliver Goldsmith, Alfred Tennyson, James Russell Lowell, Oliver W. Holmes, John Keble, and James Montgomery; as in literature, Matthew Arnold, Bancroft, Froude, Hallam, and Parkman; as in art, Joshua Reynolds and Christopher Wren; as in law, Lord Ellenborough, Stephen J. Field, David J. Brewer, David Dudley Field; as in statesmanship, Henry Clay, Edward Everett, Sir William Harcourt, John B. Balfour, and William Forster; and as in invention, Samuel F. B. Morse.

But while the great opportunity of putting the best into others is the parent's (and men out in earnest usefulness thank God most of all for their mothers and fathers, especially as they grow older and realize how early in youth it was that their characters received determining impressions), still others, besides parents, may use direct means toward this same end. Here is the teacher's opportunity. A plastic, receptive mind is before him. It says to him: "I am here to be taught. Teach me the best—the best way to see, to reason, to act, the best way to do my part in society and the world." Many a teacher has looked on that opportunity as sacred; has valued it as much as Elijah valued his opportunity to cast his mantle on Elisha. Such teachers have wrought out most valuable results. They have put ideas, methods, principles, and a spirit into pupils that have made those pupils a blessing to the world. The pupils may not recall much of what the teacher said—perhaps they cannot recall one particular truth that the teacher enforced—but they recall a purpose that dominated the teacher, and the pupils now are endeavoring to fulfil what they feel would be the wishes of that teacher if the teacher to-day could stand beside them.

And why should we stop with parents and teachers in speaking of this direct effort to put the best into other lives. Nurses in homes have endeavored to give little children the truest knowledge of God and of beauty, and have succeeded. The world owes them much for its best men and women. Had they not seconded parents, had they attempted to uproot the good implanted by parents, all would have been ruined. So, too, have friends, masters, employers, writers in the press, writers of books, lecturers, and preachers aimed at this same end. They have felt a great desire to give their fellows beautiful thoughts, strong principles, supporting comforts, and heavenly ideals. They have felt that their heart's supreme wish would be met if they could only cause a double portion of their own spirit—aye, a four-fold, a hundred-fold of their good purposes to rest upon others—and to this end they have prayed, given money and counsel, spoken to employees and friends and comrades, written, sung, preached, labored, and died. The company of those who have wished to put the best into others is a glorious company, the company of prophets, apostles, saints, martyrs, workmen in every sphere, in every clime, in every age. Surely this host is the host of the elect, the choicest ones of all God's people on earth and in heaven.

Apart from and beyond our direct effort to put the best into other lives is our *indirect*, our unconscious influence to this good end. Personality is more potent than words. Men and women impart ozone to the atmosphere without knowing what good they have done. They become standards of righteousness and are all unaware that any one looks at them to gauge his own opinion or shape his own conduct. They are like regulator clocks, by which the watches of the world seen to be wrong are set aright and are kept aright. To try to live the best in the hope that somehow one can put the best into the very air, and get it into the life of the school and community, and have it become a part of public sentiment, that surely is noble. That is the way to live. No one ever lives in vain who so lives. Some one is helped by him. Some one tells of him. Cecil's saying of Sir Walter Raleigh, "I know he can toil terribly," is an electric touch.

In one of my pastorates there was a farmer's son, living two miles from the church. Almost all the young men of his age in the village and congregation were careless, selfish, and a little fast. His father was out of sympathy with religious earnestness. But the son resolved that he would put his best into others' lives. He thought, prayed, worshiped, to that end. Through snow and rain and mud he came where earnestness and high ideals were in the air. He did a manly, helpful part in his home, in his village, and in his church. Then, thinking that he knew farming and could teach it, he volunteered to go to an Indian school in Indian Territory, and as a farm manager, teach farming. He went, on almost no salary, and lived and labored, that through his words, conduct, and spirit he might put the best into others' lives. Thus he lived and labored till he died, two thousand miles from home, and was buried there, the only one of his family not placed in the village graveyard. But his work has not died. It lives in all who know of it. They think of it again and again, and it always makes them wish to fulfil to the best all their opportunity for the good of others.

There are many, many hearts so conscious of the help they have received from others that they

read with appreciation the commemorative tablet placed by the distinguished Pasteur on the house of his birth: "O my father and mother, who lived so simply in that tiny house, it is to you that I owe everything! Your eager enthusiasm, my mother, you passed on into my life. And you, my father, whose life and trade were so toilsome, you taught me what patience can accomplish with prolonged effort. It is to you that I owe tenacity in daily labor."

"Others shall sing the song;
Others shall right the wrong,
Finish what I begin,
And all I fail of, win.
What matter, I or they,
Mine or another's day,
So the right word be said,
And life the sweeter made."

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DEVELOPING OUR BEST UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

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CHAPTER V.

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DEVELOPING OUR BEST UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

There is nothing in this world that more appeals to my admiration than a man who makes the best of himself *under difficulties*. Robert Louis Stevenson deservedly has many admirers by reason of his writings, but what in him most appeals to my admiration was the struggle he waged with difficulties. "For fourteen years," he wrote the year before his death, "I have not had a day's real health. I have wakened sick and gone to bed weary. I have written in bed, written in hemorrhages, written in sickness, written worn by coughing, written when my head swam for weakness. I am better now, and still few are the days when I am not in some physical distress. And the battle goes on—ill or well is a trifle, so as it goes. I was made for a contest, and the Powers have so willed that my battle-field should be this dingy, inglorious one of the bed and the physic bottle. I would have preferred a place of trumpeting and the open air over my head. Still I have done my work unflinchingly."

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The story of many a strong and useful life is very similar to this story of Stevenson's.

Parkman wrote his histories in the brief intervals between racking headaches. Prescott struggled with blindness as he prepared his volumes. Kitto was deaf from boyhood, but he wrote works that caught the hearing of the English-speaking world.

It sometimes seems as though God never intended to bring the best out of us excepting through pain and pressure. The most costly perfume that is known is the pure attar of roses, and one drop of it represents millions of damascene roses that were bruised before the sweet scent they contained was secured.

"The best of men
That e'er wore earth about him was a sufferer."

The sphere of difficulty is usually the sphere of opportunity. "I was made for contest," Stevenson said. We all are made for it. As we let the contest overpower us, we fail; as we overpower the contest, we succeed.

One particular personage of the Old Testament is in mind as illustrative of these thoughts, Jeremiah. He always reminds me of a violet I once saw growing on Mount St. Bernard in Switzerland. The snow was deep on every side, excepting on one little slope a few feet in width, exposed to the eastern sun. There, so close to the snow as almost to be chilled to death by the cold atmosphere about it, was a violet sweetly lifting its head and blooming as serenely as though it knew nothing of the struggle for life.

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Jeremiah was a mere youth when the conviction came into his heart, "God wishes me to be his mouthpiece in teaching the people to do right." He lived at Anathoth, three miles from Jerusalem, the distance of an hour's easy walk. His father was a priest who probably in his turn served in the duties of the temple at Jerusalem. But though he came of religious ancestry, and though he heard much of the religious exercises of the temple, this call from God to be his mouthpiece in teaching the people to do right, broke in upon his life as a disturbing force. The times were worldly, and even wrong. Nobles and princes, merchants, scholars, and priests had put the fear of God away from their eyes, and were acting according to the selfish impulses of the hour. The general outward life of the nation was pure, but it was the pureness of mere formality. Beneath the surface ambitions and purposes were cherished that uncorrected would surely lead the people into selfishness, idolatry, and transgression.

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It was no easy thing for Jeremiah to answer "yes" to this call of God. The call involved a lifetime

of brave service. Matters in the nation were sure to go from bad to worse. Difficulties after difficulties therefore, as they developed, must be faced. He stood at what we name "the parting of the ways"; if he did as God wished, his whole life must be given to the work indicated; if he said "no" to God's call, he would drift along with the rest of the people, leaving them to their fate, he no better and perhaps no worse than they.

In some respects there is nothing better than to be *forced* to a decision on some important matter, particularly if that decision is a decision involving character. It was a choice with Jeremiah whether he would live unselfishly for God or selfishly for himself. That choice ordinarily is the supreme choice in every one's life. It is the supreme choice that the Christian pulpit is constantly presenting. Present character and eternal destiny are shaped according to that choice. [91]

In Jeremiah's case there was a native reluctance to do the deeds which he saw were involved in obedience to God's call. He was by temperament modest and retiring. He shrank from publicity. He did not like to reprove any one. Severe words were the last words he wished to speak. It would have been a relief to him if God had simply let him alone and imposed on others this duty of trying to make the people better. Some men seem to be adapted for a fray, as Elijah was, and as John the Baptist was. But Jeremiah was more like John the beloved. He would have been glad to live and die, simply saying, "Little children, love one another."

It is God's way, however, again and again, to take lives that to themselves seem utterly unfitted for special duties and assign them to those duties. Almost all the best workers in God's cause came into it reluctantly, and against the feeling that they were fitted for it. We are bidden ask the Lord of the harvest to *thrust* men into the fields of need. Jeremiah felt in his heart this "thrusting." He did not kick against it. He yielded to it.

But with what results? The first result was *estrangement*. His goodly life and conversation soon made the people of his village and even the brothers and sisters of his home feel that he was different from themselves. They chafed under the contrast of their carelessness and his earnestness. He found himself left out of their pleasures and chilled by their indifference. The estrangement developed until his fellow-townsmen were eager to rid themselves of his presence, and his own family were ready to deal treacherously with him. [92]

It is just at this point that so often a good purpose breaks down. When a man's foes are they of his own household or comradeship, he is very apt to give up his good purpose. It is more difficult for a beginner in the religious life to resist the insinuating and depreciating remarks of near acquaintances than to face a mob. It must have cut Christ to the heart's core when his brethren said of him, "He hath a devil!" "I would rather go into battle," said a soldier newly enlisted as a Christian, "than go back to the mess-room and hear what the men will say when they know of my decision."

Jeremiah started his obedience to God amid estrangement. It was not long before estrangement had given place to *threatening*. His duties as he grew older called him to Jerusalem. The youth become a man must leave the village, go to the city, and in the larger sphere of need, speak the messages of God. In Jerusalem he assured the people that if they did injustice, oppressed the poor, built themselves rich houses out of wages withheld from servants, made sacrifices to base idols, and strengthened the hands of evil-doers, God would bring a terrible overthrow upon them. His task was made the more difficult because in his words and attitude he stood alone. He had no following among priests or prophets to back him. With one consent they affirmed that he was wrong and that a lie was on his lips when he predicted desolation if present practices were continued. [93]

It is a great hour in any man's life when he is obliged to stand up alone and state his case or defend his cause. What an hour that was in Paul's history when before the Roman officials "no man stood with him," but, dependent as he was on sympathy and fellowship, he stood alone! It is when a man is absolutely left alone, in danger or disgrace, that the deepest test of his character is reached. That is the reason why the night-time, which seems to say to us "You are alone with God," has its impressiveness, and why the death hour has a similar impressiveness. [94]

Jeremiah felt his loneliness. There was nothing of the stoic in him. He could not school himself to be brazen-hearted. He was so human, so like the great majority of people, that every now and then some cry of weariness would escape his lips. "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me, a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth. I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me." Sometimes his outbursts of mental agony make us feel that the man has almost lost his bravery. "Cursed be the day wherein I was born! Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?" But glad as he would have been to escape the responsibility of rebuking people, and glad as he would have been to hold the affection and regard of his companions, he never for a moment kept back the truth, nor for a moment did he distrust God's blessing on his life. "All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him." "But the Lord is with me," he declared, and so declaring he was immovable before his adversaries. [95]

There came a third experience into his life, which carried his difficulties one degree higher. It was the experience of *disdain*. He knew full well that the wicked course of the nation was inevitably leading to destruction. Unless the evil of the people should cease the powers of Babylon would come and would destroy Judah. He was debarred an interview with the king. He therefore wrote his message on a roll, put it in the hands of a messenger, Baruch, and in due time

that roll was carried into the king's presence by Baruch and read to the king. The king was sitting in his winter house. The weather was cold. A fire was burning before him in a brazier. As the king heard the words of Jeremiah that called him and the people to penitence, his anger was aroused. He seized the roll ere three or four of the columns had been read, cut it up with his penknife, and cast the whole roll into the fire to be utterly consumed therein. He did this in the presence of his court. He did it with a disdain and contempt that made every man present feel that Jeremiah and Jeremiah's words were to be despised.

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It never is a pleasure to be despised. Contempt usually embitters a man or suppresses him. The derisive laugh against a man is more powerful in breaking him than the compactest argument. Many men can remain steadfast to convictions in estrangement or in opposition who give way when they hear that their words and actions are the subject of twitting and ridicule. "Who is this Jeremiah, and what are his words, that we should think of them a second time? I will cut these words into fragments even with my pocket-knife, and then I will burn them in this little brazier, and that shall be the last of them!" So said and did King Jehoiakim. And his princes heard and saw.

But whatever the effect produced on others, the effect produced on Jeremiah must have been to the king a great disappointment. Jeremiah heard God's voice saying in his heart, "You must write those same words of truth again." And again he wrote them on a roll. And just here comes out one of the sweetest and most characteristic features of Jeremiah's character. The ordinary man, if he has made up his mind to retort or to ridicule, says to himself, "Now I will pour out my wrath on my adversary." But such was Jeremiah's self-control and peacefulness of temper that perhaps he would have erred on the side of leniency unless God had charged him, not to soften or to suppress one part of the message, but to write *all* the words that were in the former roll and add thereto other special predictions. To this charge, whatever his obedience might lead to, Jeremiah immediately and completely responded.

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Then came Jeremiah's fourth experience. His persistence in duty now cost him *imprisonment*. Not an ordinary imprisonment, but such an imprisonment as Oriental monarchs employ when they wish to place those whom they dislike in a living death. The king first put Jeremiah in a dungeon-house where there were cells. This was not very bad. Then, when Jeremiah still was true to his testimony, the king put him in the court of the guard, giving him a daily allowance of one little eastern bread-loaf. This also was not very bad. But later the king, when the princes claimed Jeremiah for their victim, as afterward the rabble claimed Christ from Pilate for their victim, gave Jeremiah into the hands of the princes to do with him as they pleased. Then it was that they with cords dropped him down into a deep subterranean pit, whose bottom was mire, so that Jeremiah sank in the mire.

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How many people in the time of the Inquisition, when they were racked to pieces, when thumb-screws agonized them, when water drop by drop fell ceaselessly on their foreheads, and when pincers tore their flesh little by little continuously, renounced their faith and so saved themselves from slow torture! It was not an easy thing to die from starvation in a dark, damp pit, with mire creeping up all about him. It never has been easy to die slowly and alone for the faith; to die for a testimony; to die for a message that involved others much more than one's self. All that was needed to protect him from pain and to preserve his life was silence. If Jeremiah would keep quiet all would be well. But for Jeremiah to keep quiet would be to prove disobedient to a sense of duty implanted by God in his heart. So this gentle nature, that shrank from the horrors of the miry pit, horrors more to be dreaded than the lions' den or the fiery furnace or the executioner's sword, went down into the pit unbroken—precursor of those sweet natures in woman and child that all the beasts of the Colosseum could not dismay, and that all the fires of martyrdom could not weaken.

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One more experience awaited Jeremiah—*deportation*. So far as we know, it was the closing experience of his life. The dauntless soul had not been suffered to die in the pit. Patriotic men who realized the folly of letting an unselfish, high-minded citizen perish so terribly, and who realized, too, the desirability of preserving alive so wise a counselor, secured permission from the vacillating king to take rags and worn-out garments, and let them down by cords into the pit. "Put now these rags and worn-out garments under thine arm-holes under the cords," they said, "and Jeremiah did so. So they drew up Jeremiah with the cords." Once again he was in his position of responsibility as God's messenger. In that position he held fast to his faithfulness.

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Then came his final experience. Judah had passed through trial upon trial. Jeremiah had shared in her trials, never running away from them, but always bearing his full brunt of burden and loss. Then he was forced to go away from the land of his love and his tears to Egypt! He did not wish to go. He assured those who headed the movement that it was folly to go. But they took him with them, and carried him, like a captive, off to a foreign land.

All this would have meant little to some men, but to Jeremiah it meant everything. Jerusalem and the land of Judah were dear to his heart. He had lived for them, spoken for them, suffered for them, and well-nigh died for them. In older years the land of one's birth and of one's sacrifices becomes very dear. "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!" Into that deportation we cannot follow him. We only know that up to the very last minute in which we see him and hear his words, he was unceasingly true to his God, and true to the people around him, loving his Master and loving his brethren, with an unflinching devotion.

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But this we do know, ignorant as we are whether he died naturally or was stoned to death, that in

after years this Jeremiah became among the Jews almost an ideal character. They saw that all his words predicting the destruction of the holy city and the captivity were fulfilled. They learned to revere his fidelity. They even called him "the greatest" of all their prophets. They well-nigh glorified him. In times of war and difficulty they used his name wherewith to rouse halting hearts to bravery and to lead the fearful into the thick of perilous battles.

Here, then, is a life that came to its best and developed its best under difficulties. "Best men are molded out of faults." So was this man molded to his best out of faults of hesitation and unwillingness and impatience. No one knows the best use we can make of ourselves but the One who created us and understands our possibilities.

In the struggle against difficulties we have Christ's constant sympathy. Were not *estrangement, threatening, disdain, imprisonment, and deportation* His own experiences? And did not they come in this same order? And does not He realize all the stress through which a soul must pass that would fight its contest and advance to its best? Certainly He does. And when He lays a cross upon us, it is that through our right spirit in carrying that cross we may become sweeter in our hearts and braver in our lives, and thus change our cross into a very crown of manliness and of usefulness. [102]

To many a man there is no object in this earth that so appeals to his admiration as a person who makes the best of himself under difficulties. We may well believe that to Christ likewise there is no human being so prized and admired as he who advances to his best through the conquest of difficulties.

THE NEED OF RETAINING THE BEST WISDOM. [103]

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CHAPTER VI. [105]

THE NEED OF RETAINING THE BEST WISDOM.

No one can read the story of Solomon's life, as given in the Bible and as given in eastern writings, without wonder. That story in the Bible is amazing; that story in the historic legends of Persia, Abyssinia, Arabia, and Ethiopia is still more amazing. It is said of Solomon that "those who never heard of Cyrus, or Alexander, or the Cæsars have heard of him," and that "his name belongs to more tongues, and his shadow has fallen farther and over a larger surface of the earth than any other man's. Equally among Jewish, Christian, and Mohammedan nations his name furnishes a nucleus around which have gathered the strangest and most fantastic tales."

Almost at the beginning of his public activities he made a prayer to God that may well be the prayer of every one. In a dream God appears to him, asking what he most wishes God to confer upon him. Humbly and earnestly he asks for a discerning mind—a mind capable of distinguishing between good and evil. He passes by long life, passes by wealth, passes by victory over enemies, and he asks only for such understanding as shall enable him to know the right from the wrong. [106]

We cannot call this prayer a surprise to God, but we can call it a delight to Him. There are very many kinds of wisdom, but in God's judgment, the best wisdom is that which always discriminating between the good and the bad, the true and the false, the permanent and the fleeting, prefers the good, the true, and the permanent. It surprises us that Solomon was wise enough to make the desire for discrimination the one petition of his heart. He was comparatively young, he was inexperienced in life's responsibilities, he was at the threshold of what promised to be a great, almost a spectacular career. Most men, under such circumstances, given the opportunity of asking for anything and everything they pleased, would have said, "Give me many, many years of mental growth; give me much, very much material wealth; give me great and constant triumphs over all who in any way oppose me." But Solomon asked only for a discerning mind that could see the difference between right and wrong, and in asking that, he asked for the best wisdom any human life can ever have. [107]

Solomon had other kinds of wisdom. How they came to him we do not know. Perhaps he was born with a large degree of mother wit and with a very strong mental grasp. Perhaps his father, himself a thoughtful man and a brilliant writer, provided the best teachers that wealth could procure for his son. Perhaps his mother, who had eager ambition for her son, constantly urged him on to large intellectual development.

Explain his case as we may, the facts are that he had *scientific* wisdom. He knew nature so well that careful writers have even called him "the father of natural science." He knew trees, from the lordly cedar-tree that graced Lebanon to the little hyssop that springs out from between the stones of a wall, as I once saw it in an old well near Jerusalem. He knew beasts of the field, fowls of the air, animals that creep on the ground, and fishes that swim in the water. Such is the brief résumé by the Scriptures of his acquaintance with nature. The legends of the East add that he could interpret the speech of beasts and birds, that he understood the hidden virtues of herbs, [108]

and that he was familiar with the secret forces of nature.

He had also *literary* wisdom. He was a beautiful, trained, and forceful writer. The seventy-second Psalm, beginning "Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son," is ascribed to him. So is the one hundred and twenty-seventh Psalm, opening with the words, "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." Much of the book of Proverbs is written by him or compiled by him—a book whose concise, striking, intelligent, helpful utterances are a monument of literary skill. Ecclesiastes, with its philosophical dissertations on the fleeting and disappointing elements of human life, is also assigned to him. So is the Song of Solomon, which breathes a wealth of poetical fervor, that understood and applied spiritually, is as sweet as the voice of the meadow lark soaring skyward in the light and beauty of a summer day. Yet these writings are only a part of what he produced. His songs were a thousand and five, his proverbs not less than three thousand. What we have in the Bible simply suggests the variety and power of his literary style, the force and sagacity of his sound sense, the brilliancy and fitness of his practical wisdom. Solomon's words are such that to this day, in this land, and in every land of the earth, they are competent to teach prudence, economy, reverence for parents, self-protection, purity, honesty, and faithfulness to duty. The boy that learns them and carries them with him as a vital principle of being and of conduct will move unsoiled and unhurt wherever he may go. The home that places them at its center and reveres them will be cheerful and brave. The grown man that carries them with him into every detail of business and care will be upright and beautiful.

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The wisdom of Solomon was *commercial* as well as scientific and literary. He recognized the advantages of trade. He extended it. He sent ships so far away to the east that passing through the Red Sea out into the Indian Ocean they brought back the treasures of Arabia and India and Ceylon—gold and silver and precious stones; nard, aloes, sandalwood, and ivory; apes and peacocks. He sent other ships along the Mediterranean coasts to the north, where Hiram, king of Tyre, lived, and then to the west, out between the gates of Hercules, past the present Gibraltar, up the Atlantic Ocean to the north until they touched at southern England, at Cornwall, where they found the tin which, combined with copper, formed the bronze for armor and for all so-called "brazen" furniture. Not alone through ships of the sea did he seek out the best treasures of all the accessible earth and beautify Jerusalem with them, but also through ships of the desert—camels—did he do the same. He caused the great caravan routes of the day to pass through Jerusalem, and he levied duties on the objects transported from Damascus on the north to Memphis on the south, and from Tadmor in the east to Asia Minor in the west. He put himself into contact with all the thought and purposes of other nations than his own, he learned what their kings and queens, their merchants, their sailors, their writers, were saying and doing, and thus he brought home to his mind the leading ideas of his time. His knowledge of men, of methods, and of enterprise became vast.

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Nor did his wisdom stop with commerce; it included government also, and was *political*. He took the throne at a time when government was weak, or almost disorganized. David's last years were years of physical disability, wherein he could not curb the rebellious spirits that were gaining influence in many quarters. Solomon, upon his assumption of rule, judiciously subdued all rebellion of every kind, united the entire kingdom, and started that kingdom upon the period of its greatest glory. He made treaties that bound adjacent principalities to him and caused them to pay tribute. He held such power that nations did not care to fight with him, and so he became a king of peace. He laid taxes on his own people that brought in large revenue. It was indeed the golden period of Israel.

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The effect of Solomon's wisdom was great and extensive. His *reputation* went far and wide. People made long journeys to see him, ask him questions, and honor him. Even one like the Queen of Sheba came with a great retinue, up through the desert, past village and town, to bring him costly gifts and talk with the man who knew so much. His *influence* became pervasive. It entered into the legends of people who never saw him, and became so fixed a part of those legends, that those legends, repeated until to-day, still sound his praise. He was known in tent and in palace as the wisest man that had ever lived, and the most exaggerated statements were made and received of his insight into the mysteries of the spirit world and his power to control the supposed spirit forces of the air. His *wealth* became almost incredible. Nothing like it has ever been known—not in the time of the Roman emperors, nor in the time of to-day. The fabulous magnificence of Mexican and Peruvian kings helps us to realize Solomon's glory. "The walls, the doors, the very floor of the temple, were plated with gold, furnishing gorgeous imagery for John's description of heaven." Two hundred targets and three hundred shields of beaten gold were held by the guard through whose lines Solomon passed to the temple or to his house of the forest. His throne of ivory, as were its steps, was overlaid with plates of gold. All his drinking-vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest were of pure gold, none were of silver. He was able to make the temple the costliest structure for its size the world has ever seen. Hundreds of millions of dollars went into its erection and decoration. When to-day the traveler visits Baalbec and sees stones over seventy feet in length and fourteen in width and in depth—stones quarried, conveyed, raised up into high walls and securely masoned there; when to-day the traveler sees the golden jewelry gathered from ancient Grecian graves and placed on exhibition in Athens; and when to-day the traveler examines the massive work done in Egypt, whose ruins are overpowering in their grandeur, and seeing these stones, jewelry, and structures remembers that Solomon knew all the skill, wealth, and buildings of the whole Mediterranean world, then he can understand how Solomon, with his resources, built a city like Palmyra, and a house of worship like the temple, and made silver to be as stones in Jerusalem.

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Ah, if this Solomon, so brilliant and so powerful, so "glorious," as Christ called him, could only have preserved the best wisdom all through his years, whose name—except Christ's—would be comparable to his!

He asked God for the wisdom that discerns between the good and the evil. God answered that prayer and gave him such wisdom. How clearly he saw at the first! If two women came to him, each claiming to be the mother of a little child, and asking for the child's possession, how skilful he was in ordering that the child be cut in twain in their presence, thus causing the true mother to cry out in love for her child and then giving her the child unhurt. The traditions of the east—some of them perhaps once a part of those lost books mentioned in the Bible, The Book of the Acts of Solomon, The Book of Nathan the Prophet, The Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, The Visions of Iddo the Seer, tell again and again how quiet and accurate Solomon's perception was in distinguishing real flowers from artificial, in distinguishing girls from boys though dressed alike, and in deciding case after case of legal perplexity. He did have a discerning heart when, in his early days, he knew who his enemies were and he crushed them, who his true counselors were and he listened to them, what his supreme duty was and he built God's house, what his sinful heart needed and he shed the blood of atonement for it. It was discernment when, though he made his own house rich, he made God's house richer; when he counted his gift of millions of dollars to God's honor a delight; and when he would let neither knowledge nor pleasure nor pomp nor glory withdraw his supreme affection from God. [114] [115]

Would that he had always continued as he was! Would that he had remembered that the prayer offered to-day for a blessing in character must be offered again to-morrow if that blessing in character is to be retained! Prayer is not so much a momentary wish as a continuous spirit. His momentary wish and the resolve that sprang from it were at the time all that God or man could desire. A mind distrustful of its own omniscience, humbly waiting on God for discernment, is the wisest of all minds. That mind was once in Solomon, but not always. When grown to maturity he talked philosophy, still he was wise. But when he came to act upon his philosophy, he was unwise. He failed to discern between the value and the curse of wealth. He became a lover of money for money's sake. He laid taxes on the people that they could not endure. He treated them no longer as a father, but as a master. He ceased to distinguish between the beauty and the disease of luxury. He built gardens and palaces, and made displays, not with the thought of any praise they would be to Jehovah, or to the establishment of God's people on a sound financial and political basis, but for the honor and recognition that would come to him. He became a captive to the love of magnificence and to the desire for display. He made marriages that were matters of state expediency and were not matters of heart conviction, and thus put himself under the influence of those whose religious purposes were wholly opposed to his own. He filled his palaces with women whose presence indeed was a great indication of Oriental affluence, but whose presence was a menace to clear vision of integrity, and was a woeful example to the nation. He grew blinder and blinder to fine perceptions, not alone of what was good in taste, but of what was right in principle. He became so broad in his religious sympathies that he seemed to forget that there can be but one living and true God. He even went after "Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcar, the abomination of the Amonites." And as a last blind act of folly, he even raised within sight of God's holy temple "an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, and for Moloch, the abomination of the children of Ammon, in the hill that is before Jerusalem." What men like Daniel would not do, what men like Shadrach would not do, what martyrs in after days, asked to say the simple word "Cæsar" and throw a grain of corn on an heathen altar, would not do, though death awaited them, Solomon did. He gave up the fine distinction between the true and the untrue, between God and idolatry, between divine principle and human expediency. And with this loss of the best wisdom came loss of manliness, loss of peace, and loss of the favor of God. Wealth, power, luxury, praise, glory, were still about him, but he had made the most serious of all serious mistakes. Later he recognized his mistake. We hope that he repented, genuinely repented, of his mistake, and before his death turned back to God and the best wisdom. But whether he died repentant or unrepentant Solomon is the man who is forever the example of unparalleled wisdom and of ruinous folly—of ruinous folly because his wisdom failed to retain the element of the discerning mind. [116] [117]

Here, then, is a lesson: "With all thy getting, get understanding." Life is not a best success, whatever else it may have in it, unless it draws fine lines of separation between good and evil. The wealth and learning and glory of the wide world cannot make up for a lack of sensitive conscientiousness. The study and ambition of life must be applied to the securing and retaining of fine powers of moral discrimination if we are to be truly wise. Every one can have this discerning mind, at least to such a degree as shall enable him to avoid the fearful mistake of palliating evil and of becoming enslaved to evil. A little child may in this respect be wiser than the oldest man; the simple peasant may be safer than the most cultured scholar. Not even libraries of knowledge can save the character of the man whose vision of good and evil is blunted. [118]

Youth is the time to make this prayer for true wisdom—when life's decisions are first opening before us. Youth is the time when God can best answer and when God cares most to answer prayer for the discerning mind. We need to start upon our careers with hearts exceedingly sensitive to the least variation from right. As the gunner cultivates his aim and notes his least deviation from the true line to the target, so should we cultivate clearness of moral perception. We need the "practiced" eye and the "practiced" heart, for safe judgment. [119]

"The grand endowment of Washington," wrote Frederic Harrison, "was character, not imagination, not subtlety, not brilliancy, but wisdom. The wisdom of Washington was the genius

of common sense, glorified into *unerring truth of view*."

Almost the same tribute can be paid to Victoria. When, six months after her accession, Victoria drove to the House of Parliament, there was not a hat raised nor a voice heard. But when sixty years later her jubilee was held, such pæans of admiration and love swelled in London's streets as never before had greeted any sovereign's ears—and all because the people saluted in Victoria's person the *discrimination* that had shunned vice, corrected abuses, exalted integrity, and glorified religion.

What every one needs, Washington, Victoria, and all—and what every one should crave—is such wisdom, as all through life shall keep him from confusing moral principles and shall make him see, choose, love, and follow the best. [120]

THE BEST POSSESSION. [121]

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CHAPTER VII. [123]

THE BEST POSSESSION.

What is the best possession a human life can have? Judging from the efforts made to secure wealth, fame, and power, the answer would seem to be that they—wealth, fame, and power—are the best possessions any one can have. Observant and thoughtful people know, however, that such possessions do not necessarily nor ordinarily make their owners happy. They therefore argue that there must be better possessions than these. So they say, eloquence is perhaps the best possession, or knowledge is, or ability to do great deeds or express great thoughts is. But the wisest book that has ever been written says that something not yet mentioned is the best possession, and says that that something makes life the happiest, and even makes it the holiest. That something, in the language of the Bible, is *love*. The man that in his heart has love, true, pure, lasting love, has the best possession that can be secured.

It is for this reason that Jonathan is such an inspiring character. The story of his life, hastily viewed, seems almost incidental, but scholarly examination of it shows that its light and gladness are in marked contrast to the darkness and sorrow in the careers of Saul and David. The story of Jonathan's life has probably done more to suggest and arouse the unselfish devotion of man to man, than any story, apart from that of the Christ, that has ever been told. If we wish to find one who really had the best possible possession, Jonathan is that one, a man whose heart was bright, whose deeds were noble, and whose death was glorious. [124]

Jonathan was a physical hero. He had both muscular strength and muscular skill. The way he could throw a spear and shoot an arrow made him famous. He had rare courage. Assisted only by his armor-bearer he once made an attack upon a whole garrison at Michmash, slaying twenty men within a few rods and putting an entire army to flight. He had great self-control. Found fault with by his father because in an hour of weariness he had tasted honey—in ignorance of his father's wish to the contrary—he opened his breast to receive the death penalty vowed by the father, and stood unmoved until the soldiers cried to Saul that the deed of blood must not be done. He was no weakling. Rather he was a mighty man, able to command military forces and call out their enthusiasm. Men rallied about him for hazardous undertakings, saying, "Do all that is in thy heart; behold, I am with thee according to thy heart." In the field or in the court he was equally acceptable. His father, the king, had implicit confidence in him, and took him into all his counsels. In the language of poetry, he was "swifter than an eagle, he was stronger than a lion." Israel might well look forward to the day when this stalwart, inspiring, wise son should succeed his father and be their king. His name, in time of battle, would be a terror to their foes. [125]

But better than Jonathan's strong arm and clear intellect and winsome personality was his loving heart. He never had read Paul's description of love as given in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, nor had he read Henry Drummond's exposition of love as "The Greatest Thing in the World," nor had he ever seen the devoted character of Christ, nor known any of the beautiful examples of love created by the Gospel. He was living in a selfish age—an age of strife and tumult and blood—and still his whole being seemed pervaded by that love which is "unselfish devotion to the highest interests of others." Such love was his joyous and abiding possession. [126]

The first time we have an opportunity of reading his inmost heart is when David, having slain Goliath, stands before Saul, holding Goliath's head in his hand. Here we see the *generosity* of love. It was an hour when every eye was turned from Jonathan and centered upon an unknown stripling who had carried off the honors of the day by a startling and brilliant deed. Hitherto Jonathan had been the national hero; now he was to be set aside, and David was everywhere to come into the foreground. How should all this transfer of honor affect Jonathan? Should it sour him, making him look askance on this new competitor for the public recognition, and influencing him to send back David to his father's flocks, away from further opportunity for martial deeds? Any such method would be what is called "natural." Men usually try to get rid of competitors.

They do this in business and in games. Opera singers often keep back, if they can, the voice that once heard will supersede their own voice in popular favor. We do not like to have another outshine us. Praise is sweet. People hate to lose it. Plaudits transferred to another leave a painful vacancy in the ordinary soul. We crave favor, and when that favor passes from us to rest upon another we are severely tried. Many a man has thought himself kindly disposed until he found that some one else was obtaining the recognition previously so secure to him, and then to his own surprise he has found himself grudging the other that recognition. How much of the unhappiness of human life comes from the fact that persons do not speak to us or of us as they do of others! How apprehensively many people protect their place—social, political, or commercial—lest another shall in any wise encroach upon it! Jonathan might easily have recognized that, so far as his interests were concerned, it was far better that David should be dismissed to the sheep pastures than allowed to stay near the court. [127]

But in spite of what Jonathan recognized, Jonathan's heart warmed to David. By the time he had heard the story of David's home and family, the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. The interests of David became his interests. He wished David to succeed. Praises of David sounded sweet in his hearing. He showed such wish to have David stay right there, at the heart of the nation's capital, where people could see him and honor him, and where David could have new opportunity for public service, that Saul would not let David go back to the distant and quiet pastures. Jonathan even made a covenant with David, promising to be his friend and helper. To show the sincerity of that covenant, or rather in the expression of that covenant, Jonathan took off his robe and his garments, even to his sword and to his bow and to his girdle—stripped himself of them—and gave them to David. Jonathan wished David to be ready for possible opportunities of military success, and therefore he armed him with his own chosen and well-tried weapons. [128]

So their friendship began. It was a friendship that was all "give" on one side and all "take" on the other. There never was a clearer illustration of what love is than the relation between Jonathan and David. It is always said that "Jonathan loved David," but no emphasis is placed on David's love for Jonathan. David appreciated Jonathan, but Jonathan loved David, and loving him, unceasingly aided him. "I call that man my friend," a noble poet declared, "for whom I can do some favor." Love exists only where costly kindnesses are conferred upon another. [129]

Turner, England's honored painter, exemplified love when he was on a committee on hanging pictures for exhibition in London and a picture came from an unknown artist after the walls were full. "This picture is worthy; it must be hung," he said. "Impossible; the walls are full now," others asserted. Quietly saying "I will arrange it," Turner took down one of his own pictures and hung the new picture in its place.

The second scene of Jonathan's devotion to David reveals the *protection* of love. David's life was in danger. Saul, jealous of David's popularity, desired to be rid of David. He even wished to kill him. He let his servants know his wish. David was encompassed by peril. What would Jonathan do now? When others were turning against him, would he also turn against him? The current was all setting one way. Any kindness to David would now be in direct opposition to a ruler's will and to the sentiment of the court. Interest in another often becomes luke-warm under such circumstances. "There is no use of resisting the tide of events," people say. They therefore leave the man that is down to himself and to his fate. How lovers fall away in the hour of disgrace and danger! How difficult it becomes to speak favorably of a man when every other is condemning him! In periods of excitement when the motives of men are called into question and innuendo is in the air, how reluctant we are to avow our confidence and try to still the cries of opposition. [130]

But what was the effect of this situation on Jonathan? His heart warmed all the more to the imperiled man whose one crime was that he was a deliverer to Israel. Jonathan delighted much in David. Jonathan revealed to David Saul's purpose to kill him. Jonathan provided for David's immediate safety and took means to anticipate his future safety. Then he went to the king and *plead* for David. That was a splendid piece of work. It was much as John Knox plead with Mary, Queen of Scots, for Scotland. She did not wish to hear Knox's words. She was bitter against Scotland and Scotland's religion. He risked much in venturing into her presence and interceding. But he loved Scotland and Scotland's religion. He would rather die than have Scotland suffer, and so he braved Mary's tears and entreaties and commands, and he spoke for Scotland. Love is a very expensive thing; it often summons us to surrender our personal ease, and surrender, too, our closest comradeships. It may cost us obloquy, it may cost us loss of standing with king and court, it may cost us the disdain of the world, but cost what it might, Jonathan plead for David's safety, and temporarily secured his wish. [131]

Later the love of Jonathan was to be subjected to a more subtle and more difficult test. It was to be called upon for *self-effacement*. Saul's misdemeanors and incompetences had so weighed on Saul's mind that Saul actually hated the David whose conduct was always irreproachable; Saul's mind, too, at times had lost its balance, and he had done the insane acts of a madman toward David. Saul, now half-sane and half-insane, was irrevocably determined to kill David. He learned that Samuel had quietly anointed David as king, and that David in due time would succeed to the throne! Saul's heart was aflame with bitterness—the bitterness that is born of chagrin and envy. David knew of that bitterness, and knew that Saul's persistent enmity left but a "step between him and death." Then it was that Jonathan ventured to interview his father and see whether his father's hatred could not in some way be appeased and David's safety be secured. [132]

But with the first revelation of Jonathan's interest in David came an outburst from Saul that

showed the utter implacability of Saul's rage. Saul even tried to inflame Jonathan's temper, charging him with perversity and rebellion, and with acting undutifully; and then, when he hoped that Jonathan was excited, he introduced the thought, "This David, if you let him live, will seize the throne which is yours as my son and heir! Will you suffer David to live and take your throne?" It was an appeal to Jonathan's envy, and that appeal touched on the most delicate ambition of Jonathan's heart. What a fearful thing envy is! History is full of its unfortunate work. It hurts him who cherishes it as well as him against whom it rages. Cambyses killed his brother Smerdis because he could draw a stronger bow than himself or his party. Dionysius the tyrant, out of envy, punished Philoxenus the musician because he could sing, and Plato the philosopher because he could dispute, better than himself. "Envy is the very reverse of charity; it is the supreme source of pain, as charity is the supreme source of pleasure. The poets imagined that envy dwelt in a dark cave; being pale and lean, looking askint, abounding with gall, her teeth black, never rejoicing but in the misfortune of others, ever unquiet and anxious, and continually tormenting herself." [133]

When such an appeal to envy as that subtly made by Saul to Jonathan comes to most human hearts they are conquered by it. Few, very few, men hail the rise of the sun that pales their own star. But Jonathan could not be overpowered by this appeal, however wily the king drove it home. He stood true to David, though by so doing he imperiled his own life. For with his quick perception of Jonathan's fixed adherence to David, Saul hurled his javelin at his own son's breast and would have slain him on the spot. [134]

In the days that followed this stormy interview, when the king's wrath against David was still at white heat, and when one turn of Jonathan's hand could have ended all possible rivalry between himself and David for the throne, Jonathan sought David, said gladly to him, "Thou shalt be king in Israel, and I shall be next unto thee," and saying this, made a new covenant of love that should bind themselves and their descendants to all generations!

I know not what others may think, but as for me, nothing in this world is sweeter, stronger, nobler, than an unselfish friendship. We have used and misused the word "love" so often that we have dragged it down from its high meaning. We have flippantly passed it over our lips when by "love" we meant mere interest, or sympathy, or fondness, or even a mental or a physical passion. We have belittled it and even smirched it in the mire. But next to the word "God" it is the greatest word of human life, and is associated with God as no other word is. The man that can and will prove a generous, unselfish, devoted friend is the highest type of man. The man that can cherish a sweet, uplifting love that is beyond the reach of envy, and that will lay down every treasure but itself for another, is the noblest specimen of manhood that can be produced. More and more it becomes clear that genuine devotion to the highest interests of others is the solution of the world's social problems. Love makes its owner happy. It is a giver and a sustainer of joy. There is no bitterness in its root and no acid in its fruit. By nature it is the sweet, the healthy, the sane. The absence of love always means the presence of the selfish, or of the vain, or of the proud, or of the self-seeking, or of the cruel. Envy is a thorn in the soul. Love is content and cheer, a radiant flower whose perfume is refreshingly fragrant. [135]

"For life, with all it yields of joy or woe,
And hope or fear,
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love—
How love might be, hath been, indeed, and is."

To the very end of his days Jonathan stood true to David. He accomplished what might seem to many an impossible task, but what by his accomplishment of it is shown to be possible. He was true to two persons whose interests were opposite, proving a friend to each. He loved his father. He knew his father's weaknesses. They tried him seriously. When his father threw the spear at his head, and maligned his mother, and charged him with ingratitude, his whole being was stirred; he went out from his father's presence "angry." But that anger was merely a temporary emotion. He soon realized his duty to his father. He returned, placed himself at his father's hand, continued to be his adherent, counselor, and helper, went with him as one of his lieutenants to the battle on Gilboa, and fought beside him until he fell dead at Saul's side! [136]

There is nothing weak in this character of Jonathan. Let him who can reproduce it. Christ said of John the Baptist, "There hath not been born of women a greater than he," because John, free from envy, was so full of love that he rejoiced to see Christ come into a recognition that absolutely displaced John. By these words of Christ John is made to loom up as no other character of his day. Jonathan was John's prototype—a massive man, a man of momentum, a man of absolute fearlessness, whose virtues were crowned by his generous, protecting, self-effacing love. No wonder that when word reached David that Jonathan had been slain in fierce battle his heart poured out the greatest elegy of history—an elegy that has been sung and resung for thousands of years—"How are the mighty fallen! I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant hast thou been unto me. Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen and the weapons of war perished!" Noticeable it is that the supreme elegy of the Old Testament is on the man who had a heart of unselfish devotion, Jonathan; and that the one elegy of the New Testament pronounced by Christ, is likewise on the man who had a heart of unselfish devotion, John the Baptist. The greatest possession any one can have is a loving heart—a heart that generously recognizes worth in another and tries to make place for that worth; a heart that guards another's interests, even though such guarding costs intercession; a heart that gladly surrenders its own advantage that another may advance to the place which might be its own. [137]

No one can tell another how and when the heart of love should show itself. All that can be told is this: "Let any one be pervaded by love as Jonathan was, and in that one's home, in that one's business, and in that one's pleasures God will provide him occasion upon occasion for living that love." The love that a man gives away is the only love his heart can retain. The man that has such a heart of love has the sweetest, happiest, gladdest possession that can be obtained on earth or in heaven. All the money in the world leaves a man poor if his heart is bitter. All the poverty that can come to a man finds him rich if his heart is glad and strong. Love is the only possession that a man can carry with him to heaven and always keep with him in heaven. He lives for eternity who lives for love.

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"The one great purpose of creation—love,
The sole necessity of earth and heaven."

USING ARIGHT OUR BEST HOURS.

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CHAPTER VIII.

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USING ARIGHT OUR BEST HOURS.

Every writer who has described what we call opportunity has insisted upon the necessity of seizing opportunity as it flies. We are told that there is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at its proper moment leads us on to fortune. It is also asserted that once at least there comes into every one's life a special hour which used aright has much to do with assuring his permanent welfare.

Universal experience bears witness to the truthfulness and force of these sayings. Every human being who has studied the history of the race is aware that now and then decisive hours come to his fellows, and according as those hours are used to advantage or to disadvantage, is the success or failure of his fellows. We know this fact applies also to ourselves. All our hours are not the same hours, either in their nature or in their possibility. Some hours are special hours when, for one reason or another, crises are present; if we meet these hours aright we advance, if we fail to meet them aright we fall back.

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Such hours are the supreme opportunities of our entire existence: the hours when duty appears more clear than is its wont, or hours when the heart is strangely moved toward the good, or hours when a new and very uplifting sense of God's presence is felt. It is not asserted that such hours are equally bright and glorious to every one. They may not be bright at all. They may be dull and heavy. But they bring us a conviction of what is right, a sense of obligation to do the right, and an assurance that God's way is the way our feet should tread. Given any such hour, whether it be on the mountain or in the valley, and a man has his best hour. All other hours, as we plod or play, may be good, but the hour when a soul is brought face to face with duty and with God is the best hour in that particular period of our life.

It was simply and only because Jacob used aright his best hours that he rescued his name from disgrace and crowned it with glory. If ever a man started in life handicapped by unfortunate characteristics and unfortunate environments Jacob was such a man. One of the modern sculptors, George Grey Barnard, has a life-sized marble, showing what he names "Our Two Natures," two men, one the good and one the evil, coming out of the same block of stone, and struggling, each to see which shall gain the ascendancy over the other. Such two natures are in every one; but they appear with special prominence in Jacob. The question of his life was, Which is to conquer, the good or the evil? The struggle of the good for ascendancy was prolonged and severe. It was a struggle in which there were disgraceful defeats, but in which there was also a persistency of purpose and a reassertion of effort whereby the good finally triumphed. And this triumph, it may safely be asserted, was secured through the use Jacob made of a few supreme hours in his life.

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When we first begin to notice Jacob, we see him participating in the deception of his aged and almost blinded father, Isaac. We do well, in studying that deception, to bear in mind that the mother, before Jacob's birth, had been told that Jacob should inherit his father's blessing. So she had probably taught Jacob that this blessing belonged to him, and that she and he were justified in securing it in any way they could. And we do well also to bear in mind that the mother recognized a certain undeveloped but capable fitness in Jacob for this blessing, a fitness that Esau lacked. Esau was a lusty, out-of-doors, happy-going man who would not control his appetites, and who, however pleasant he might be to have around when merry-making and sport were in the air, was not prudent enough and judicious enough to be the head of a great people. Rebekah, and Jacob, too, may have felt that it would be the height of family folly to leave the family blessing with Esau, who probably in a short time would squander it; it ought, therefore, to be diverted from him. Besides, the age was one in which fine distinctions between right and wrong, as we to-day see these distinctions, were not clear. We thus can understand some of the

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reasoning which lay back of the fraud practiced on Isaac when Jacob made believe that he was Esau bringing the desired venison, and so secured the blessing.

But we do not mean to justify the deception. It carried—as every sin carries—fearful consequences, and those consequences affected all of Jacob's future life. As he had deceived his father, again and again his children deceived their father. Even immediately upon its [145] perpetration Jacob's life became endangered. He was obliged to flee from enraged and threatening Esau. Then it was that Jacob, at nightfall, coming alone to rocky Bethel, and lying down to sleep—a wrong-doer, a fugitive, homeless, friendless, and in peril—had his dream. He saw heaven opened over him, with angels ascending as it were by a ladder to God and then descending by that ladder from God to his resting-place. The dream bore in upon his mind certain thoughts. One was, that God had not forsaken him, but was with him. Another was, that God was ready to forgive him for his sin and bless him. And still a third was, that God would take even his life and so use it, if he should be consecrated to Him, that he, Jacob, should some day come back to Bethel as its owner and be the head of that people through whom the whole world should be blessed. And a fourth thought was, that however long the delay in fulfilling the promises, God certainly would fulfil them, and He would watch over Jacob until they were fulfilled.

As Jacob awaked from his dream those four thoughts were in his mind: of God's presence, of [146] God's forgiveness, of God's call, and of God's protection. Up to this time the hour of this awakening was the best hour of his life. Thoughts stirred in his heart different in degree and different in quality than any he had ever had. There came a new sense of the wonderful love of God. What had he done to deserve it? Nothing. Why should not the heavens be closed, and be dark and forbidding to a defrauder like himself? That certainly was what one like himself might expect. Did not the cherubim drive sinful Adam and Eve out of the garden, and stand with flaming sword forbidding their return? But here was God appearing in mercy, assuring of His readiness to pardon transgression, and calling upon the wrong-doer to repent, to be earnest, and to make his life a benediction rather than a curse. Here, too, was God pledging His unflinching aid to Jacob if Jacob would struggle toward success!

What should Jacob do with these thoughts? He might have brushed them away from his heart as [147] he brushed away the morning dew from his eyes, and thus immediately have banished them. He might have pondered the thoughts for a day or two, being softened and comforted by them, and then let them pass out of his mind forever. Many men have acted in such ways. A wicked man opened a letter from his mother, and with the sight of her penmanship there came to him the memory of all her interest in his purity, integrity, and godliness. He crushed the letter in his hand and threw it into the fire burning on the hearth. But another man, many another man, though moved by good impulses, and even touched to the quick by them after a while has let such impulses glide away from his heart and carry with them their helpfulness. That is what Darwin says that he did. The thought of God came to him now and then in special hours of his earlier life, but he did not hold fast to it, he let it escape, and the thought of a personal God who watches over and blesses never became the cheering possession of his soul.

But it was not so with Jacob; and because it was not so, hope of betterment dawned upon his character. He *valued* the thoughts that had come to him. He was awed. Awe, or reverence, is the [148] originating spring of worthy character. His was not a simple mind easily affected. Jacob was a cool, calculating, careful, worldly-wise man, almost the last type of man that finds it easy to be awed. But to him—with whom money and sheep and slaves and retinue were now and were long afterward to be very prominent objects of ambition—there was a feeling that, after all, God and God's blessings are the supreme things of life. So he did not let the awe of the hour pass unimproved. He acted on that awe. He then and there as best he could confessed God and his faith in Him, raising a pillar of stone in God's name and anointing it with oil in significance that the spot upon which it stood was consecrated to God. Thus he erected the first of all those tabernacles, temples, synagogues, churches, cathedrals, chapels, that have been a testimony to faith in God all over the earth. And then, as though an outward thing was not enough, but some inner thing of character was now required, he vowed a vow—the best vow probably that he, with his idea of God and of money, knew how to vow. He vowed that if God who had thus shown him [149] his opportunity and duty would be true to His promises and would take care of him as covenanted, he, Jacob, would uphold the worship of God and would give a tenth of all he might ever obtain unto God.

That vow laid hold on Jacob's life. It began to work a change that only many, many years advanced toward completion. But it began the change. When a soul, in a best moment of life, seeing duty clearly, or beholding a new revelation of God, crystallizes the emotions thus aroused by a vow that consecrates its dearest treasures to God, then the soul has taken its first step toward strong and beautiful character. Here it was that Esau failed. He seems to have had more traits that men would name attractive than had Jacob. An open-hearted, open-handed, out-spoken man, rough but kind and generous and ready, he at life's beginning appeared to have more in his favor than this grasping, secretive brother. When Esau's best hours came—hours when the sense of his own misdeeds rankled in his heart and when he was aware that repentance and reformation and a new application to duty should be his—he felt his situation deeply; he even, as a man of his temperament could do, shed tears of grief over his mistakes and losses. But he did not realize with awe the gravity of his situation, nor did he turn to God and to duty with a [150] softened, chastened spirit, and vow his life in devotion to God. Jacob's right use of his best hours set Jacob's face towards God and character. Esau's wrong use of his best hours set Esau's face away from God and character.

But Jacob's life needed, as every life needs, more than one best hour. Off in Haran where he dwelt for twenty years he was among heathen people. As he served seven years for Leah and seven years for Rachel and six years beside, he preserved many of the ideals and purposes that came to him in the morning hour at Bethel, but not all of them. These purposes seem to have kept him from idolatry and to have given him patience and fortitude and prolonged endurance. Laban treated him deceptively and unkindly. Jacob showed much self-control and much generosity. Laban's flocks increased beneath Jacob's care until Laban became a very rich man. If a lamb or a sheep was injured in any way Jacob bore all the expense connected with its hurt or its death. Had Laban recognized the value of his services, then perhaps Jacob would not again have come under the power of his own crafty, calculating, money-making propensities. But Laban treated Jacob like a slave, and Jacob retaliated with meanness. He speciously secured from Laban a large proportion of Laban's cattle, and with his wealth thus gathered started away from his angry master toward the old-time Bethel, that somehow was always in his memory. There was a sense in which he deserved every sheep and goat and servant that he had: he had earned them all; they ought by right of service to be his. But in another sense he had tricked Laban and was going away with ill-gotten gains.

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Now is to come the second great crisis in his life. Jacob is to venture into the country where Esau is, Esau who for years has been cherishing hatred against Jacob. Hatred cherished sours and becomes malice. Esau was a difficult one to meet—fierce, strong, and determined. It was then that another great hour came to Jacob. To the east he had parted company with Laban, who had become reconciled to Jacob and who had given him his farewell blessing. To the west, where Bethel lay and whither his heart called him, is Esau. How shall he meet Esau? He does now what seems, from the night at Bethel, to have become more or less of a custom with him; he consults God. He lays the situation as it lies in his mind before God. He thus tries to see the situation as it actually is when seen in the presence of One who is omniscient. As he thus studies the situation he deems it wise to send ahead, in relays, goodly parts of his flocks, which, as they pass Esau, should be announced as gifts to Esau. It is the same cool, calculating Jacob still at work. Then he sends forward all his family and all his cattle, over the Jabbok, toward the country where Esau is. This done he remained behind alone.

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Again it was the night-time. There was darkness, the darkness that often is so conducive to earnest thought and clear vision of the right. Light is indeed essential that men already in the path of duty may walk safely therein, but the path of duty itself is more often discovered when we look out of darkness than when we stand in the sunlight.

It was a time of uncertainty and almost of fear on Jacob's part—a time of heart searching in view of the past and of hesitation in view of the present. Such a time can come only to one who has ceased being a mere child and has entered into the experiences of manhood. The great questions of the nature of God and of the protection of His providence stirred in Jacob's heart. His had been a sinful career. Still he had repented, and repenting had grown in grace. But even yet his faith was fearful and his trust hesitant. Was God really on his side? Would this God, the God that had promised to bring him back to Canaan and give him a place there, surely preserve him? Then it was, while these questions were throbbing within him, that in the darkness one like a man grappled with him in wrestling. Should he be faint-hearted and cowardly, distrusting God's promise of protection, and let this stranger throw him, kill him, and so forever end the possibility of God's fulfilling His promise? Or should he lay hold of God's promise to sustain him, and do his best to throw this stranger, and thus preserve his life and accomplish his mission? It was a decisive time. Luther had such a time the night before the Diet of Worms, when he had to wrestle with the thought "Shall I be distrustful of God's providence and recant to-morrow, or shall I hold fast to my faith in God and stand by the truth to-morrow?" Hamilton had such a time the night before he decided that he would be burned at the stake rather than deny the truth. Such times come into many lives, when great questions about a right or a wrong marriage, a right or a wrong business, a right or a wrong amusement, must be decided.

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Jacob *would* not surrender to fear! He *would* trust God to continue his life. He therefore relaxed no hold on the stranger, but wrestled with him as best he could. Then came the revelation. The stranger simply touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh and by that touch put it out of joint! Here was an Almighty One wrestling with him! Jacob realized that *God* had come to him! With that revelation, even in his weakened condition, he clings the closer to the stranger; he *will* hold on to God. "Let me go, for the day breaketh," cries the stranger. "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," Jacob replies. Jacob cleaves to God. Jacob longs for God's blessing. He has found God very near to him. He will avail himself of His nearness. The face of God is turned upon him in love. He will not let this hour go without getting from it all the inspiration and help he can obtain.

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And he did obtain the best blessing that ever came to his life—the blessing that assured him his character was to be completely changed, and made beautiful and strong for God. Christ once said to a weak, impulsive, oft-falling man: "Thou art Simon, son of Jonah"—that is, the "listening" son of a weak "dove," unreliable, changeable, frail—"thou shalt be Peter"—that is, a "rock," firm, stable. Christ thus indicated that he would make of weak Simon a resolute, trustworthy Peter, as He did. Just so God in this hour said, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob"—the "supplanter," the tricky, the calculating—"but Israel"—a "prince of God," a man that has power with God and men, a man that even *prevails* with God and men!

What a benediction that was, one of the choicest in all history! No higher designation could be promised to such a man as Jacob had been, than "Israel"! I would rather—under God and for God—have that name given me by God than any other name that can be named upon a weak, frail

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man: "Israel"—a man who can *prevail* with his *fellows* and with *God for human good!*

All this came about because Jacob used aright his best hours; because when God was near him, he held on to God; because when he was discouraged and heavy-hearted and the prospect was dark, he trusted God; because when he was weakened and brought low, he would not let God go unless He bless him. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him," Job said. "Even if God will not deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, still we will not disobey Him," said the three prisoners at Babylon.

Henceforth in Jacob's life there would still be vicissitudes. Troubles, responsibilities, disappointments, sorrows, needs, would come. His children did not always treat him aright. Joseph was mourned as dead. Benjamin was taken from him to Egypt. He had cares and burdens, as all men must have them, until life's end. But the thought of God became increasingly precious to him year by year; his spirit sweetened and softened; his memory was full of the loving kindnesses of God, and his hope laid hold on a blessed future. Down in Egypt as he draws nigh to death he triumphantly speaks of "God, before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, and the Angel which redeemed me from all evil." He died a man of God, honored in his day, and honored since—a man who had such faith in the promises that he charged Joseph to carry his body to the Holy Land and bury it there where the Christ was to come. He started life with most unfortunate traits of character and in most unfortunate surroundings of environment, but he came off a victor, not a perfect man, but a successful man, a man whom we may well praise, a man who preserved the faith and blessed the world, and all because he made a right use of his best hours. [157]

Where the highest thoughts are in the air, where the holiest persons gather, where the loftiest influences of God's Holy Spirit breathe, there we do well to go. There we do well to stay. Any voice that calls us nearer God should be followed, any motion of our heart toward duty should be obeyed. God is sure to send us, one and all, special hours in which His wishes are clear to our understandings and His promises are reassuring to our wills. Those are the golden hours of existence. Even God can provide no better. If we use these best hours aright, our whole moral nature is changed, and the weakest of us becomes a mighty "prince of God." [158]

GIVING OUR BEST TO GOD. [159]

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CHAPTER IX. [161]

GIVING OUR BEST TO GOD.

God asks every man to give to Him his best. It is God's way, God's undeviating way with each individual to say to him, "Whatever in yourself or in your possessions is best, that I ask you to devote to Me."

Students of God, in all ages, have recognized this fact. They have understood that a human life cannot wholly follow God unless all the holdings of that life are consecrated to God. They have also understood that a man's "all" includes his best, and that unless that best is God's, the man's real heart and the man's strongest purposes are not God's.

Abraham realized these truths. Accordingly, when Abraham, pondering his personal relation to God, asked himself whether he was a perfectly devoted man, the thought of his son Isaac crept into his mind. Isaac was his only real son. He dearly loved him. He was the supreme treasure of his heart. Abraham's hopes centered in Isaac. His ambitions and his joys were bound up in that son and in that son's life. [162]

Was Abraham willing to give to God his best treasure, his Isaac? That was the question Abraham found himself called upon to face. In facing it he was affected by the theories of consecration that prevailed among the surrounding nations. Those theories asserted that consecration meant sacrifice—that to consecrate a lamb to a god meant to slay the lamb upon the altar of that god, and that to consecrate a child to Jehovah would mean to slay the child upon the altar of Jehovah.

As he thought on these things and knew God wished him to give to Him his best, there came to him a conviction that spoke to his heart with all the authority of the voice of God. "Abraham, if you are ready to give Me your best, you will take Isaac, your son, your only son, whom you love, and in Moriah offer him there for a burnt-offering."

That was the most searching command that could have entered his soul. It asked of him the sacrifice of the dearest object of his life.

Nobly, even sublimely, did he meet the test. Believing, according to the ideas prevalent about him, that perfect devotion to God and to God's kingdom called him to lift his fatherly hand and plunge the knife of death into the heart of his child, Abraham lifted his hand for the sacrifice. In that act God, who ever stood ready to correct Abraham's misconception of method, had evidence [163]

that before Him was an absolutely loyal soul. Here was one who to all generations might deservedly be called, "The father of the faithful." Accordingly, with the man who would give Him his best and who thus became a worthy example for all mankind, God made a covenant; "In Abraham and in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed."

This impressive scene heads the very beginning of the salvation of the race. It is the prelude to the definite record of the world's redemption. It ushers in that line of history that starting with Abraham advances through a chosen people until a Christ is come and in Him and through Him and for Him all people are asked to give their best to God and to the world's help.

What is a person's best? Sometimes the question can easily be answered. In Malachi's time, when people were bringing their offerings to the temple, and those offerings were the blind, the lame, and the sick of the flock, it was evident that these imperfect creatures were not the best. The best were the clear-eyed, the strong-limbed, and the vigorous-bodied sheep that were left at home. Of two talents or five talents or ten talents, all in the possession of the same owner, it is clear that the ten talents are the best. The thing that to a man's own heart is the dearest is to him his best. The thing that for the world's betterment is the most helpful is to that world the man's best. Usually these two things are the same thing; a man's dearest treasure consecrated to the world's uplift is the best thing he can give to the world's good. Whatever carries a man's undivided and enthusiastic heart into usefulness is the best that he can offer to God and to God's world. [164]

For a man is at his best when in utter self-abnegation his heart is enlisting every power of mind and body in devotion to a worthy cause. Moses was good as a shepherd. The rabbins love to tell of his protection of sheep in time of danger and of his provision for them in time of need. But Moses was at his best when, under God's call, he conquered his fear and reluctance, resolved to do what he could to rescue Israel from cruel Pharaoh, and throwing his heart into the effort, undertook the redemption of his race. Joshua was good as a servant and as a spy, but he was at his best when he took the lead of armies, won glorious victories, and wisely administered government. Paul was good when he sat at the feet of Gamaliel and studied well, and when, grown older, he was an upright citizen of Judea, but Paul was at his best when, under the inspiration of a cause that inflamed his whole life, he pleaded on Mar's Hill, wrote to Roman saints, and triumphed over suffering in prison. [165]

It is not easy for a youth to know what is his best. He is uncertain of his aptitudes. He is not sure that he *has* special aptitudes. His marked characteristics have not become clear to his own eye, if they have become clear to the eyes of others; nor does he understand what power is latent in his distinctive characteristics, whose existence he is beginning to suspect. Such a youth need not, must not, be discouraged and think he has no "best." He has a "best" that in God's sight individualizes him, a "best" that God wishes consecrated to him. Whatever is most precious to that youth, whatever he least likes to have injured and most likes to have prosper, that is the element of his life that he should lay at God's feet. If the most treasured possession of his being is thus given to God, God in the due time will develop its aptitudes. He will provide a place or an hour when those aptitudes shall be given opportunity. No Moses—competent for mighty tasks—is ever allowed to remain unsummoned, provided such competency is wholly given to God. There are many marvels in human history, but no marvel is greater than the coming of the hour of opportunity to every man to do his best and to reveal his best. It is not so much a question of what is our best, as it is whether we are willing to consecrate the thing we prize most to the service of God's world. [166]

That world *needs* our best. The problems of human society and the wants of men can never be met by the cheap. What costs the giver little, accomplishes little with the receiver. Skin deep beneficences never penetrate beyond the skin of those helped. The woes of the world lie far beneath the skin. When we study them, we are amazed by their depth; we see how futile many of the efforts of mankind to relieve them are. The failure of so many of these efforts causes some souls to question whether it is possible for any one ever to relieve humanity's needs. That question will always suggest a negative answer, so long as the superficial, the secondary, and the merely good are brought to the relief of mankind. It is only when the best that an individual can give or society can provide is offered men that men will be redeemed. [167]

The existence in our world to-day of so much sin and sorrow is most significant. It exists and will continue to exist so long as we bring anything less than our best to its help. There was no cure for the lepers of Palestine so long as men threw them coins that they could easily spare, gave them food that cost them little self-denial, and said under their breath, "How pitiable those lepers are!" But when One came who gave *Himself* for them, who risked being put out of synagogue and temple and all society by *touching* them, who even ceremonially defiled Himself with their defilement, and thus did the best He possibly could do for them, the lepers were healed. [168]

The best men in the world are not too good for the world's needs. The streets of cities and the lanes of towns will never be purified by any instrumentalities of usefulness that are less than the best. The heathen world has not a village in which the wisest, noblest, purest man or woman will not have to battle hard before the work to be done can be done. Inexpensive apparatus may avail where operations are simple, but the most expensive apparatus that can be found is required where operations are intensely complicated.

It sometimes seems as though even intelligent people had not comprehended these facts. They talk of the foolishness of casting pearls before swine. But the woes of humanity are not the woes of swine. They are the woes of men and women in bondage to wrong—and pearls are none too

good to set before them that thereby the beauty of life may be seen by them and thereby that earthly condition of society whose every gate is one single pearl of purity, may be desired by them. If in a home we cannot be a comfort to the sorrowful, or in a school be an inspiration to the laggard, or in business be a cheer to the discouraged, without giving the very best out of our hearts that we can give, how shall we expect that the great mass of evil congested in dense centers and compacted through ancient custom, will ever be purified, unless we take the best resources we can command, in ourselves and in others, and bring those best resources face to face, yes, heart to heart, to that mass of evil. The world will never be saved until we offer our Isaacs upon the altar of its needs. [169]

That world *deserves* our best. We never can repay to this world the good this world has done us. The richest man on the earth is the most heavily indebted to his fellows. All our knowledge, culture, and safety are gifts from others. Our schools are the product of men who for a hundred generations have thought and labored for us. "Every ship that comes to America got its chart from Columbus. Every novel is a debtor to Homer." The more of treasure any man has, the more of toil others have borne for him. The best elements of our homes, our business, and our civilization reach us through the tears and blood of others. Were the man who has two hundred millions of dollars to attempt to meet his indebtedness to the world by the expenditure of that sum in charities, he would not *begin* to discharge his indebtedness. Every single benefit we enjoy cost many men their best. [170]

The nobler our type of manhood the gladder we are to acknowledge this indebtedness and the gladder we are in our present place and time to give our best for others.

"Fame is what you have taken,
Character is what you give;
When to this truth you waken,
Then you begin to live."

Something of fineness and of greatness is lacking in the person who thinks himself above his neighbors and their needs. The better and the larger a man becomes, the readier he is to declare himself a brother to suffering humanity and to feel that no sacrifice he can make of himself is too costly if thereby he can elevate others. It is "angelic" to be a ministering spirit sent forth to minister to those who may be made heirs of salvation.

The highest examples possible to our emulation confirm this theory of the gift of the best. Christ Himself withheld not any treasures He possessed, but He gave them all and gave them cheerily for foolish humanity. He laid upon the altars of the world's need His best wisdom, His best power, His best glory. He even laid upon that altar His own precious life, and He laid it there, in all its spotlessness, subject to the very curses of men. [171]

So, too, did the Father unhesitatingly give His best for the world's welfare. He gave His Son, His only begotten Son, in whom He was well pleased, to save the lost. He gave that Son to any and to every pain involved in the cheering of the sorrowful and the strengthening of the weak. Not even from Gethsemane, no, nor from Calvary, did He withhold His best. What Abraham was ready to do, but what God spared him from doing, that God Himself did—and God's Isaac was stretched upon the cross and died there a sacrifice.

It is the gift of the best that touches the heart of the recipient. Superficial kindnesses are impotent, but kindnesses that involve the surrender of the giver's treasures sway the soul of the recipient. This is not always true, but it is true as a principle. "They will reverence My Son." Yes, though they pay no heed to mere servants and prophets, and though some unappreciative men slay even the Son, other men, the great multitude of men, when they realize that the Son is God's best possession, and realize that in His gift of Christ God exhausts the treasury of His heart, will reverence His Son. The cross is sure to win the whole world to God, because the cross stands for God's gift of His best. God's way of doing good should be our way. It is the only way that has assurance of success. Our wisest learning, our best possessions, our choicest scholars, our dearest children, our brightest hours, our largest abilities—all must be given to the service of humanity, if the needs of humanity are to be met. [172]

Look where we will, the souls of men are waiting for help. Thousands upon thousands of lives will not suffice to provide this help. Millions upon millions of dollars may be expended, and still, in this land and in other lands, there will be the destitute, the afflicted, and the enslaved. It was not Abraham's gift of his sheep nor of his shekels that made him the forerunner of the Christ, but it was his gift of Isaac. Our gift of the best alone will put us in line with Abraham and Christ, and make our service a power for salvation. [173]

Only a large-hearted life will give its best to God. Small hearts cling to their best treasures. Achan puts God's name on every object found in fallen Jericho excepting the most valuable; that he hides in his tent. Saul devotes to Jehovah all the cattle conquered from the Ammonites but the best; those he reserves for himself. It was the mark of the greatness of her nature that when to the widow there came a man of God asking for food, and her meal was only enough to bake a cake for her son and herself ere they died, she took that meal, obedient to what she considered to be a call from God, and made of it, her best, her all, a cake for the man of God. God honored that gift and paid back into her own life the blessing of His unfailing provision. He always honors any such gift. A man like Joseph gives his best and keeps giving his best to God all his days, and God never suffers Joseph to lose his spiritual vigor. But if Solomon only gives his best in his early life, and withholds his best in his later life, that later life becomes weak and meager.

The proof to which God put Abraham is the most soul-searching proof that ever comes into human lives. If we answer to it as did Abraham, we are immediately brought into a new and sweeter relation to God. God withholds no blessing from him who offers Him his best. God enters into a dearer and closer fellowship with such an one. He declares to him that His name is "Jehovah-Jireh," "The Lord will provide," assuring the man that though he does make great sacrifices for God, God will provide for him abundantly more than he has thus sacrificed. The young ruler went away from Christ sorrowful when he declined to give Christ his best, but no soul ever can be sorrowful that gives its best to Christ. "You shall have a hundred-fold more in this world and in the world to come life everlasting." It was because the disciples gave their best to Christ that they became so efficient in his service. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." Accordingly Paul became mighty to the upbuilding of the kingdom of his Master and was always joyous. [174]

Let every one look into his life and find his best. "What is it I prize most? What is it that gives me largest place among my fellows?" Then let every one consecrate that best to God. That best may be the enthusiasm of our youth, or the wisdom of our maturity, or the wealth of our age. It may be a child in our home, or our hope of advancement, or some special attractiveness we possess. Whatever our best may be, God asks us to consecrate it to Him. Whoever so consecrates his best will find God dearer, life sweeter, and service richer than ever before. [175]

"There are loyal hearts, there are spirits brave,
There are souls that are pure and true;
Then give to the world the best you have,
And the best shall come back to you.

"Give love, and love to your heart will flow,
A strength in your utmost need;
Have faith, and a score of hearts will show
Their faith in your word and deed.

"For life is the mirror of king and slave,
'Tis just what you are and do;
Then give to the world the best you have,
And the best will come back to you."

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE:

The word *repentence* on page 149 was changed to *repentance*.

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