

WITHIN SIGHT OF HOME

by Forbes Winslow

Forbes Winslow's series of readings for the elderly examining both the challenges and blessings of old age from physical, emotional, and spiritual perspectives as believers approach eternity.

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Almost There! THE DARK SIDE OF OLD AGE The Light and the Darkness When we look at a beautiful picture all glowing with light and color, we are apt to forget the fact that there are two sides to that picture. On the side turned towards us, we may see a wonderful representation of some event in the life of our suffering Lord, which moves us almost to tears by its pathos and feeling. Or we may be brought face to face with a stirring incident of history, which strangely quickens the beating of our hearts, and makes us hold our breath as if we were real spectators of the scene. Or, again, we may gaze upon some vast expanse of country, our eye may roam over fertile hill and dale, as seen in the lovely summer time. The mirror by the artist's skill is so held up to nature, that we forget for the time being we are only looking upon a picture. We imagine we breathe the scent of the new mown hay, we are wandering beneath the shelter of over-arching trees, we hear the white-crested waves of the distant sea murmuring on the beach. But take this picture, so full of life, pathos, and poetry down from the wall, and turn it round, what do we see there? A piece of common, unattractive canvas, darkened and made dingy by age and dust and dirt!

We are going to treat old age as a picture; to look on its two sides, its two aspects. One we shall find full of sadness, and melancholy, and darkness; the other abounding in joy and consolation.

We shall consider the dark side first, so as to bring the bright side into greater contrast.

Let not, then, my dear readers be discouraged at the first part of this book, for I am only following out the plan upon which our heavenly Father works—He keeps the best things until the last; He causes us to sow in tears, hereafter to reap in joy; He tells us that sadness endures for the night—but joy comes in the morning.

After speaking of the troubles and trials and sorrows of old age—I shall speak of its infinite consolations. After showing you the dark, somber, unattractive side of the picture—I shall turn it

around and show you the canvas all glowing with light and life and color: old age displayed thereon as shining in the reflected light of our true home, as rejoicing in trials, as already enjoying the first fruits of its assured victory. The Weary Road

Every human being has his own peculiar sorrows and trials, known very often only to himself, unsuspected even by his dearest friends—but none the less hard to bear for all that.

We can understand how a poor man can have trouble after trouble, as his whole life is made up of one continual struggle. When we look around his mean, squalid home, bereft of the commonest decencies of life, and see his pale-faced children, and anxious, care-worn wife—we can indeed feel for him and give him our best sympathy. We must not, however, forget that the poor man is not the only one who suffers in this world—that all ranks and conditions of man have their own especial trials, varying of course with circumstances—but all very real and hard to endure. As the rich lady rolls by in her carriage, cozily wrapped up in the warmest of furs—the half-starved laborer's wife standing at the cottage door, shivering as the winter wind pierces through her scanty clothing, cannot help thinking, "Oh, if my husband and I could only have but a few of those comforts which that lady enjoys, how happy we would be! " And yet that rich lady is not a true object of envy; she has a beautiful house, a grand park, handsome children, and a large body of servants at her beck and call—but with all this, she has her cares and anxieties. Most gladly, had she the chance, would she change places with the humblest cottager on her husband's estate. The more the wealth—the greater the responsibility; the more talents God entrusts to our stewardship—the more serious will be the last final account.

Every profession has its especial anxieties. The farmer regards with anxious gaze—the sky, the wind, and the clouds—for his daily bread depends more or less upon the weather. The parish rector has numberless anxieties perpetually weighing him down as he goes about his parish. He is continually asking himself how he can best do his duty by his people, and so render to God a good account of his stewardship. He is indeed troubled as he finds how hard it is to get at the heart of a hardened sinner, to counsel an erring soul, to bring back a wanderer to the fold of Christ. The doctor's life is one of continual care, as he goes from one scene of suffering and sorrow to another.

Go into the streets of London and watch the crowd of business men pass by, you will see a strange troubled look upon the faces of nearly all. No wonder, poor souls, many of them are anxious, for upon their labors and success many helpless ones depend.

Now what is true of all ranks and conditions of men, is also true of all periods of human life. Each successive stage of our existence has its trials and troubles.

Childhood, freed from anxiety for the future—yet has its peculiar troubles. The tears soon vanish away, the sobs soon give place to smiles—but nevertheless the little ones have troubles of their own—troubles that arise out of weakness and feebleness, and for the most part unreasonable and uncalled for according to our matured experience—but none the less genuine for all that.

Boyhood and girlhood have also their troubles: the first separation from our home, the awakening to the somber realities of life, the first acquaintance with sin. What a gloom comes over us, as our bright daydreams vanish into thin air, as we find that everybody is by no means so good, kind, or considerate as we first imagined; as we learn, too, that life is a real battle-field in which the

weakest fall to the ground, and there is no mercy shown to him who cannot hold his own. As life goes on, and we become what is termed "grown up," our anxieties and cares grow up with us too. Every day, every hour, has its troubles; were it not for the grace of God—we would be vanquished and utterly cast down.

Finally, as old age comes upon us, the tale of our sorrows increases, and makes the road over which we are passing so weary and so sad.

Often in the early morning have we set out on a journey to some distant spot; the buoyancy of our spirits, the freshness of the air, the radiance of everything around us, carried us on for many a long mile without weariness or thought of fatigue. By-and-by, as the day drew towards its end, and much of our journey yet lay before us, as the brightness faded out of the sky, and our limbs became jaded, our spirits fell, and we began to count every step, and to long for our journey's end.

Such is it with life: it easily, rapidly, life passes away, until the last few steps, the last few days, oh how long, how weary they are! The brightness and freshness of the morning of life have vanished away, the sun is setting in the western sky, darkness is closing in around us, our companions have passed us or have fallen away, we are alone in a strange land—wearied, worn, and sad.

Broken Reeds

We do not value our youth, health, and strength—until we have well near lost them; and yet what priceless blessings they are. To be so robust and strong that the hardest day's work is a pleasure; to be so full of joyous expectation, as to take all troubles with a light heart; to be so healthy as not to know a moment's illness—how grateful our young people ought to be for all this! As life goes on—a change takes place in the very strongest of us, according to the law which works throughout nature, and causes all things to tend to decay. As we become aged: our health and strength begin to fail us, unaccustomed pains seize our limbs, we are easily fatigued, our memory is impaired, our hands shake, our sight is dim, our hearing imperfect; we begin to feel that we are shut out from the world, that we are out of date, that we are looked upon by our young people as belonging to a distant generation of beings, as uninteresting relics of the past.

We are not unprepared for all this; we have seen the same infirmities taking possession of our parents and grandparents—but still when we ourselves follow their example—it all seems so strange, so unexpected. This is especially the case with those who become aged before their time—of whom it may be said:

"The faded form is often marked with sorrow more than years; The wrinkle on the cheek may be the course of secret tears; The mournful lip may murmur of a love it ne'er confessed, And the dimness of the eye betray a heart that cannot rest." The saddest of all sights is a man or a woman prematurely old, struck down suddenly in the prime of life by some grave calamity.

There are times in the eastern seas when all is peace and calm; in the safe anchorage of the bay the stately merchant ship is resting after its going to and fro; its tapering masts, and snow-white sails, and spotless decks, and graceful lines, cause the eye to linger upon it with pleasure and pride. The sky suddenly becomes overclouded, a fierce tornado rushes down the bay, the vessel becomes hid in mist, the sea is lashed to foam, all is confusion and dismay. Suddenly the storm ceases, the mist clears away, the sea becomes calm—but how changed in that brief hour is that

goodly merchant ship, her owner's pride and boast! Gone are her tapering masts, her white sails are torn to shreds, her deck is split into fragments, and she lies on the shore—a helpless wreck. So is it with many souls: bright, congenial, cheerful—they show no traces of the handiwork of time. But suddenly a storm of life comes down upon them and closes around them; when it has spent its force, they are but the shadows of their former selves—helpless ruins, broken reeds.

Aged people who are continually changing their residences, or who reside for the most part in busy crowded cities and towns, are not, by reason of the excitement in which they live, so susceptible to their infirmities; they forget themselves and their troubles in the animated stir of human life they see around them. But it is different with those of us who live in the country, who remain like trees rooted to one spot, who live and die within the confines of the same parish, often under one and the same roof; we are reminded on all sides, of the changes which have come over us.

Nature's changes are so gradual that we scarcely can trace on her the mark of time; we are therefore driven back upon ourselves. Something has changed; the everlasting hills stand up as of yore in the morning and evening sun; the stream runs on as it has ever run within the limits of our remembrance; the pastures and the woodland tracts present the same sunny appearance as in the merry days gone by. And yet, as we totter out into the lanes, and wander slowly up the hillside or by the banks of the running stream—we feel a marked alteration has taken place. Amidst all the surroundings, we cannot awaken the feelings of the past. Ah! dear friends, the change is in ourselves! We are in the sear and yellow leaf, we can no longer conceal from ourselves what others have seen for some time past—that our course is nearly run, that we have entered upon the evening of life.

There is undoubtedly sadness in the acknowledgment we have to make at last, that we are broken reeds, no longer able to do that which we have done all our lives, obliged from henceforth to abstain from the active pursuits of our trade and profession, compelled to be on our guard against sudden chills, to keep watch like sentinels against dangerous foes, ready to assail our health at the first opportunity; unable to think for any length of time without pain or suffering.

Such are some of the trials of old age. Most truly, "Care keeps his watch in every old man's eye."

Oftentimes, too, a stout heart is linked to a feeble body: the mind has not aged, though the limbs have; in the spirit we are up the mountain heights drinking in the fresh, balmy air; in the body we are crouching before a fire, vainly endeavoring to infuse a little warmth into our shivering frames.

I never can visit a collection of wild beasts and birds without a feeling of compassion for the poor inhabitants of the narrow dens; and this feeling comes to its height when I stand opposite the caged eagles, as I note their heavy, languid eyes and drooping feathers and general aspect of sadness. I cannot help feeling ashamed of the cruelty that has shut them within the narrow limits of their cage. Remove the bars, and they would soar up as of old into the dizzy heights, would make their home the mountain solitudes, would proclaim themselves lords of the air.

So, too, there are many ardent spirits that are caged in and confined by the prison bars of the flesh. The cry is sent up as by David of old, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! that I could fly away and be at rest!" Unwearied in mind, undaunted in spirit, fresh and vigorous as in the early days, they long to be freed from the wreck and ruin of their earthly tabernacle, wherein they lie enclosed

as in a prison house. The Days That Are No More

Every nation has its tradition of a Golden Age; its remembrance of a time in the early childhood of the world, when everything was bright and radiant; when the earth was a heavenly paradise; when the air was full of the sweetest odors, the trees laden with the choicest fruit. In this happy age, so we are told, peace and harmony reigned supreme over the earth; men and women had grand, noble, generous natures.

Whether this tradition is, after all—but a fond fancy on the part of mankind or not, it is certain that most of us who are advanced in life have our Golden Age, to which we look back with sadness and regret. The days that are no more, constitute our Golden Age.

Once, we remember, how brimful of happiness our existence was. We were, indeed, like Adam and Eve in Paradise, shut out from all the cares and troubles of the world. Fenced in from all harm by the loving protection of fond parents, we were as happy as the day was long. Oh, the sunny memories of those early days! How blue the skies! How glorious the flowers! How soft the mossy grass! When the day dawned, we were awake, like birds, to greet the rising sun. When the hush of evening came, and the bright stars twinkled in the darkening sky, how happily we went to our rest!

One charming feature of those bygone times was the exquisite pleasure which everything afforded us. A stone, a piece of common wood, a tiny bit of colored glass, a flower, would afford us occupation and amusement for hours.

We could sit on a bank and picture it our throne, and conjure up out of the depths of our imagination a host of fairy courtiers. We could climb trees, and fancy ourselves the happy owners of castles and palaces. The birds, the insects, the clouds, the winds, all had a message for us—all weaved soft spells of happiness around us.

How full of faith and trust we were! There was a little child once, whose father was helmsman on board a ship; to accustom him to a sailor's life, he used to accompany his father on his voyages. One day, when the good ship was overloaded with passengers and merchandise, a terrible storm arose; the sea dashed over the vessel's sides, and all was dismay and terror. Amidst all the confusion and fear, this little child, lashed by his father to a mast, seemed placid and unmoved. One of the passengers came up and said to him, "My little one, you do not seem frightened as we all are, and yet we are in great danger. Why are you so quiet and still?"

"I do not fear, sir," the little child answered, "for father is at the helm."

Such was our faith once. Sometimes we heard faint whispers of troubles and sorrows in the great outer world—but they only made us nestle closer to our parents; for under their protection we felt secure. There, too, was the untried world before us. Unacquainted with the dangers to be encountered, the obstacles to be surmounted before success in life is to be obtained, we imagined ourselves easy victors in the strife, already crowned as conquerors.

While we can recall all this, we must not forget that there are some poor unfortunate beings who have had no Golden Age to look back upon; whose childhood has had no graceful and pleasant surroundings; who were born into a home darkened by shame, sorrow, and sin; whose first visions of the earth were visions of cruelty and wickedness; whose first greetings were words of blasphemy; whose bright life was nipped in the bud, cut off before it had begun to bloom, withered

by the keen frosts of misery and wretchedness. Oh, what compassion should we feel for such as these! However, they are not without their consolation. They are spared the sadness with which we look back upon "the days that are no more." The Golden Age soon passes away; the rosy clouds, the glorious light, soon fade into nothingness; the daydreams vanish into thin air; our faith and trust are sorely put to the test; our eyes are opened, and we discern good and evil; the happy part has forever gone. In vain, as I have said, do we visit the haunts of our youth; in vain do we wander down shady lanes or running streams, in the hope of reviving old feelings. The freshness of life has departed; and the face of nature, still wearing the old expression that we remember in times gone by—but brings home to us the sad change that has taken place within, for "Our hearts like muffled drums are beating Funeral marches to the grave!"

Once we were surrounded by a mirthful group of companions; once we were the center of a bright and happy home circle. Now, we are alone! A man is not born to live alone. It might have been necessary, in the early ages of Christianity, for men to separate themselves from their fellow men. The world was so corrupt, temptations did so abound, godliness was so hated, that we can understand how those who wished to live near to God were obliged to take refuge in solitary places, in dens, and caves, and lofty mountain recesses; but, for all this, we are meant to assist and support one another by our close association and sympathy.

What help and what consolation it is to have those near us who can sympathize with us. When the world cannot understand us, and says hard things of us, and imputes things to our charge which we know not; we come home disheartened, and there find one heart which can feel for us, which can by its tender love make up for all the hard usage we have suffered.

By-and-by our friends fall off like autumn leaves. From one cause or another, they are parted from us. The chairs in the family circle become vacant; the bright faces, the joyous voices, vanish one by one, until we are left alone—alone to our griefs, alone to our sorrows, to think with sadness of "the days that are no more."

Reaping What We Have Sown

It is God's unchangeable law in the spiritual as well as the natural world, that "whatever a man sows—that shall he also reap;" that the harvest we reap—depends upon the character and nature of that which we sow. A farmer who understands his business is not only particular, after he has prepared his land, to sow a special kind of seed in accordance with the well-known laws of the rotation of crops—but he is also very careful as to the quality of the seed he sows, knowing that the value of his future crop depends upon the care he exercises in this matter. So in the spiritual life—we reap in kind and in quality—that which we have sown. This harvest is not confined, as so many appear to think, merely to the next world. Not even in this respect, do we have free licence to do what we like and to defer the consequences until a future state of existence. The great majority of our sins find us out in this world. We, many of us (putting out of sight, of course, the final Judgment of the future), have even in our lifetime, received the just reward of our deeds. This is what gives such additional bitterness to old age, that in our persons, our thoughts, and feelings, and even our circumstances, we are reaping the sorrowful harvest of the past!

We sin on the spur of some sudden temptation, for the gratification of some evil passion, and because no immediate punishment seems to follow, because a period of time has well-near driven

its remembrance from our minds, we think we are forever done with it. But just as surely as a chance seed, dropped into the ground and entirely forgotten by the sower, will in the course of time manifest itself, so will our sin bring forth its fruit in due season, and entail upon us the sad consequence of our guilt! Every immoderate indulgence of appetite and passion in early youth and mature manhood, has its corresponding punishment in old age. We sin at one end of our life—and God takes it off at the other. Often, too, we are not allowed even to see old age, for the wicked shall not live out half their days. Temperance, sobriety, godliness, would have ensured for us that brightest of blessings, a happy old age, the hoary head, which is the crown of righteousness; by our folly and madness we have cut our life short.

Often and often I have been called to the dying bedside of a young man or young woman; in the ordinary course of nature a trivial illness has come upon them—but has found them unfitted for the contest. Their past excesses, their over-indulgence in lamentable sins, have shattered their constitutions, and when the crisis came, they were found unready for the fight, and sank vanquished into an early grave.

There are many, however, who, by virtue of robust constitutions and unawakened consciences, can sin with impunity in their youth—only to suffer the more in their old age.

Let us now consider a few of these fruits of early sin—the harvest of guilt which those who have lived away from God, reap in their latter days.

There is fruit of all the memory of the past. The thought of "the days that are no more," even when there is no remorse, no guilt attaching to those bygone days, is full, as we have seen, of sorrow and sadness; but how bitter is the remembrance of the past, when the stain of sin, the pollution of evil deeds, mingle with other memories—when at the self-same time that we recall our dear mother's tender love, our father's compassionate care, and all the sweet surroundings of our childhood, we have to reproach ourselves bitterly for our ingratitude, for the sin that caused darkness to come over those happy days, that brought those dear grey hairs down with sorrow to the grave, that separated us from those who had so loved and cherished us. Would to God, we could undo the bitter past! We have received our reward—the pleasure, the excitement, the novelty of wrong doing—and now we have to bear the punishment. What would we not give, could we be as innocent and as unoffending as we once were—could we have our consciences freed from the knowledge of sin, our hands pure from the blood of some weak brother or sister for whom Christ died; could we put out of sight that awful Book in which the records of our past life are written! We are carrying the hideous secrets of that life down with us to the grave—but "nothing is hidden which shall not be revealed."

Soon will the exposure of our guilt take place. And yet, in spite of all our sinfulness, we were not left alone; we have wearied, we have grieved, we have sorely pained our dear Savior; and yet He came to us time after time, seeking an entrance into our hearts, pleading with us—oh! so tenderly and sweetly—and yet we would not listen to His voice. Ah! it is, indeed, a dark old age which ends thus in gloom: which has nothing to cling to, nothing to lean upon; nothing hut a fearful looking back into the bitter past; nothing but a terrible looking forward into the awful future—a life wasted, a soul lost forever and ever!

Then again, we have to reap the scorn and contempt of the world. If we have lived a godless and selfish life—in our latter days, none will be found to come near us. Much of our life has been hidden from the world; sufficient is known, however, to stamp us as most undesirable company. Our neighbors have stories to tell of our turning that poor orphan into the road on that winter's night because she could not pay her rent at the moment it was due. They shake their heads still at the tales of our wild doings in days gone by, of our hardness and cruelty to those over whom we had any power, of our breaking our parents' hearts, of our bringing disgrace upon an honored name. Now we are objects of pity indeed, living alone, the miserable wrecks and ruins of the past, subject to every infirmity that man can be subject to, haunted by visions of evil deeds, without one gleam of sunshine to lighten up our dark home; but still the world is inexorable, there is no compassion, no pity for us.

Lastly, there are the feelings which possess the minds of unholy old people. Feeling and emotion are produced by habit, as are other things. By continually indulging in certain thoughts and acting in certain ways, we fashion our minds—just as the sculptor fashions his subject out of the hard marble by the blows of his chisel. Accordingly, those who have lived in sin and in the contemplation of evil thoughts and the indulgence of wicked passion, find that they have laid up for themselves a fearful recompense in their old age. The ability and the power of committing sin have passed away—but the inclination remains. The worst torments of hell have been described as the overpowering longing which the lost souls will feel for the commission of sin, and their utter inability to gratify that longing. But does not hell sometimes begin this most fearful torment—even in this world? What more hideous and awful sight can be seen on the face of the wide earth—than an unholy, unchaste old man, the victim of fearful thoughts and temptations, without one feeling of shame or repentance?

See the hard cruel man of the world in his old age; mark the bitter words that fall from his lips; watch his greed for gold. What can be more sad or sorrowful? Once he was a happy, innocent, generous child; now he is hated even by those most dependent upon him for their daily bread. Such is the harvest that too many lay up for their old age. THE BRIGHT SIDE OF OLD AGE And Yet I Am Not Alone

Just as we awaken out of troubled dreams, and rejoice to find that we have been dwelling among the mere vapors of a distempered brain, so, too, we experience a wholesome sense of relief in turning from the dark side to the bright side of old age. Just, too, as we rush to the window and throw it wide open, and there immediately enters the fragrance of sweet jessamine and honeysuckle, and the bright morning songs of the birds; so, too, we will strive to admit fragrance and melody and brightness and sweetness into our thoughts of those aged servants of God who are indeed "within sight of home."

We have spoken of the sadness which old people experience as time and circumstance bereave them of their friends, and leave them in their last evil days alone. While this is no sentimental source of sadness (for there can be nothing more trying than to be deprived of human love and sympathy, just when we most need it), I hope to be able to show that we can exclaim with our Savior, at the moment He was contemplating His being forsaken by His earthly friends, "And yet I am not alone."

Yes, the aged disciple of Christ is never by the tenderness of God, left entirely alone. To all outward appearance the commonest lot of humanity may be his, and passers-by may pity the poor old man without companions for his solitude; they cannot look into his heart and see the gracious provision which his heavenly Father makes for this, his time of need.

We who have served Jesus are not alone in our old age, first of all, because of the tender memories of the past. We know well enough that we have been unprofitable servants. On looking back over our past lives we are humiliated at the thought of the little we have done for Christ—and yet the past is not without its comfort and its consolation. We know that the fragments have been gathered up that nothing should be lost; we are assured that we have served no ungrateful Master; we believe that every lament or prayer, every act of contrition, every deed of love—is not without its unspeakable reward.

I have felt sometimes when it has pleased God to bless my ministry to any soul, and that soul has been called rejoicing into its Maker's presence, nothing can touch the joy which will be mine for the salvation of that soul; it is safe from all peril and all harm. We have borne in times past, faithful testimony to Christ, we have by our example led others to join His army, we have in the days of our youth consecrated ourselves to His service, and have continued steadfast therein. No merit attaches to this, for it was His grace simply and solely from beginning to end that helped and sustained us. Yet there is deep happiness in the thought that we have done what we could. And then, apart from what we have done for Christ—there is the thought of what He has done for us. We are looking back out of the chastened experience of a long life; we have tried and tested the love of God in every conceivable manner; we have passed through times of adversity and prosperity; we have been in cloud and sunshine. What are the lessons we have learned? That the Lord is true to His promise—that He has never left or forsaken us. An infidel lecturer, at the conclusion of his lecture, in a large hall in London, gave a challenge to anyone who gainsaid or disputed his arguments against Christianity, to come on to the platform and have his say.

He hoped that, as usual, some headstrong youths whose zeal was greater than their knowledge, would step forward to be easily vanquished by him, who had all the arts of rhetoric and controversy at his fingers' ends. To his utter amazement, and that of his audience, a poor, meanly-dressed old woman came tottering forward and slowly mounted the platform. Turning to the lecturer, she commenced—

"I came to this hall because you promised to tell us something better than the religion of Jesus—but you have deceived us, and caused us both to waste our time and money. I am only a poor, weak, feeble woman—but I could not sit in this hall and hear my Master spoken against without standing up for Him. I was left many years ago a young widow with ten children; in my extremity I cast myself upon the tender mercies of my God, and He heard my prayer and sent me friends in my need. Some years after I was brought to the verge of death, with my heart breaking at the thought of leaving my poor fatherless children. I cast my burden upon the Lord, and He sustained me. I am an old woman, as you see, trembling on the edge of the grave, with every motive for speaking the truth, and this is the experience of my life—that Jesus has been with me in every trouble, every trial; that I had but to go to Him to be comforted. This is what my religion has done for me; has your religion done as much for you?" The infidel lecturer was dumbfounded, and the large audience left the hall, convinced that after all there was something in a religion which

could produce such results as that.

We, too, were we called upon to do so, could give like testimony to the love and sympathy of Jesus. We have found Him true to us in all circumstances of our life, and the remembrance of His many acts of love, and the thought of His continual presence with us, takes away the bitterness of our loneliness and enables us to say, "And yet I am not alone." When we are left much to ourselves, we get great comfort out of the treasures of knowledge we have accumulated. It is not everybody who makes sufficient use of his eyes and ears as he passes through the world—but if we are wise enough to use the opportunities God so freely gives to us in our youth, great is our reward in after life. When we are old we have not much to learn, our duty rather is to arrange what we have learned.

Botanists and geologists go out for a tour of some weeks among the mountains in search of wild plants or rare rocks. As long as their tour lasts they place the plants, and the works they discover, in an apparently confused mass, into whatever bag or basket most conveniently comes to hand. When they arrive home the work of classifying really begins; each plant is carefully taken out and examined and arranged under its particular species, each rock is likewise placed in the cabinet, with a paper underneath describing the locality where it was found and its peculiar formation.

We, too, when age comes upon us, and we have to retire from the work of the world, have to tabulate our experience and gather up and classify the scraps of knowledge we have acquired in our passage through the world. This is to many of us a real pleasure, and most wonderfully relieves the tedium and the constrained idleness of age. We are enabled now to form a truer estimate of what we have read and observed. We have outlived many foolish fancies, we have passed out of the region of thoughtless enthusiasm, we can look at things calmly, deliberately. We can now see our mistakes, we can now correct our false conclusions. Of course, I know that all old people have not intellect or intelligence, or having both—have not the power, by reason of infirmity, of exercising them; but nevertheless the fact remains that a thoughtful, reflective, intelligent old age is one of the greatest blessings which can fall to man's lot. To die in harness, with all one's mental energies actively employed, able to hold communion with the great master spirits of genius who delighted us in our youth, able, like Milton, when blindness came upon him in the composition of his magnificent poem, to draw out of the recollections of the past, treasures new and old. Who would not covet such a glorious termination to one's life? Our lonely life is also cheered by the grand doctrine of the communion of saints. When we go to church and listen to the old hymns, and the familiar prayers, when we meet round the table to commemorate our Lord's death and Passion, and to partake of the "Rich Banquet of His Flesh and Blood," our hearts overflow as we murmur gerltly, "And yet I am not alone." It is there that we realize our fellowship one with another; it is there that we put away the thought that we are fighting the battle of life alone; we are after all but individuals in one great body. The soldier at the distant outpost, within almost speaking distance of the enemy, takes great comfort in the thought, that although he is keeping watch through the long night by himself, yet behind him, ready to come at once to his assistance in case of emergency, is another outpost, and then another, and finally the large main body of his fellow soldiers; and although his position is one of great danger, apparently defenseless as he is, he is cheered by the thought of his not really alone. So with us; at times we may feel as if we were fighting all by ourselves, yet there is the main-body close at hand. We are but units in one great mass, we are but members of one grand Church. We are all united together

for one object, with one aim in view. Our conflict, our temptations, our trials are the same. Peter tells us to "resist, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."

We also extend this doctrine of the communion of saints, from the Church on earth—to the Church in Paradise or Heaven. We know absolutely nothing about the future state; we know nothing about the condition of departed spirits, and we are content to leave the matter, until it pleases God to lift up the veil. This, however, we do know, that those who have fallen asleep in Christ are in perfect joy and felicity; that they are in a state of the most supreme happiness.

Sitting by our lonely fireside, we are haunted by many memories of departed friends. It seems but yesterday they were with us. Are we wrong in believing that, now they are absent from our sight, they care for us and love us as of yore? Do not all the instincts of our nature protest against that cold, hard belief entertained by many, that when once God has called the loving spirit home, and the grave has closed over its mortal remains, there is a complete separation of the living from the dead: that sympathy, interest, and feeling are at an end so far as we and the departed are concerned? We find great happiness in the thought that they are pleading for us before the throne of God, and supplicating for us as they did when they were on earth; no longer beset with infirmity, dimness of vision, or imperfection, and therefore pleading with more faith and more earnestness. We are cheered by the thought of their sympathy, sustained by the assurance of their love, and comforted by the certainty of soon seeing them in our Redeemer's kingdom face to face.

Quiet Resting Places

Old age is the time for rest. The battle of life has been fought, the long campaigns, the weary marching to and fro, have been endured; but a little time remains, and then the Christian soldier shall enter into the full possession of his hard-earned victory. We are like victorious soldiers who have conquered in fair fight, and to whom in consequence is conceded a triumphant entrance into the city we have been besieging; before, however, we can finally enter in, a few arrangements have to be made, and we in the meanwhile encamp outside, within full view of the beautiful city into which we are longing to march in triumph. Our few remaining days of camp-life are spent in burnishing our arms and accouterments, in recovering our strength, in preparing to make our entrance as glorious and as triumphant as befits the victories we have won.

We will in this chapter consider how we can best enjoy and perfect that brief period of time that remains to us, by dwelling upon some of those quiet resting places, upon which we may repose, until the final summons to enter the joy of our Lord. The first resting place is Contentment. Contentment is one of the most important elements of true happiness. This was the secret of Paul's unwavering constancy, his brightness and vigor under perils and anxieties which would have crushed any ordinary man. "I have learned," he says, to the Philippians, "in whatever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." At no period of life have we greater need of this spirit of contentment, than in old age—and yet at no period is the manifestation of it so sweet and enchanting. Contentment in youth and in middle age exists as a matter of course—but old age is proverbially querulous, complaining, and dissatisfied. And if we have no strong principle to lean upon, it is no wonder that we should be discontented, as the infirmities of age close around us.

We are weak and feeble, the wrecks and ruins of our former selves; we are subject to numberless pains and sufferings. We are dependent upon the kind offices of others, not always the most considerate. We feel that we have outlived our time, that we cannot sympathize with the aims and objects of the rising generation. Of the past nothing remains to us but painful and sorrowful recollections; our brightest memories containing a tinge of sadness. We are the last it may be of an old stock; we see the old house and the old possessions ready to fall into the hands of strangers—and we cannot prevent their doing so. All this nourishes with us a feeling of discontent which finds vent in feeble, plaintive peevishness.

How different are our last days—when we look upon the bright side of everything, when we determine that we will set like the sun on a calm summer's evening, in the midst of radiance and glory; when we recognize our weakness and feebleness as God's ordinary law, by which all things, even the strongest, most powerful empires, tend gradually but surely to decay, in preparation for another and grander order of things. In the words of an American preacher, "There may be no color in the cheek, no luster in the eye, no spring in the step, no firmness in the voice—and yet around the head of every old man, whose life has been upright and Christian, there hovers a glory brighter than ever shone on the white tops of the almond tree. If the voice quivers, it is because God is changing it into a tone fit for the celestial choral. If the back stoops, it is only because the body is just about to lie down in a peaceful sleep. If the hand trembles, it is because God is unloosing it from worldly disappointments to clasp it on ringing harp and waving palm. If the hair has turned, it is only the grey light of heaven's dawn streaming through the scant locks. If the brow, once adorned by a luxuriance of auburn or raven hair, is smitten with baldness, it is only because God is preparing a place to set the everlasting crown. The falling of this aged Christian's staff will be the signal for the heavenly gate to swing open."

Manners and customs have differed since we were young; views both religious and political, which were matters of faith in our early days, are now laughed to scorn; we cannot sympathize with the present, having so great a portion of our being in the past; yet let us at least be fair, let us acknowledge that progress is possible, nay probable, let us not be so wrapped up in our self-conceit as to reject everything because it is new. Some of the young people sorely tempt us to do so by their loudly expressed contempt for what is old fashioned; let us, who are wiser and older, be content for the old things to pass away if their day is come. The cry of the human race is for more light; let us not, out of a spirit of contradiction, oppose that cry, it is never too late, even for us old people, to learn.

Then, as to the bitter recollections, it may be we are suffering for past sins, and are reaping to a certain extent what we have sown. Let us be thankful to God it is so; much better "bear those ills we have—than fly to others that we know not of."

If we anticipate in this world in any degree the harvest we have to reap, if we have to suffer here, our joy is more assured hereafter, supposing of course that we are really at heart faithful disciples of Christ.

There is another thought, too, which should make us content. We wonder why old people live on and on, spectacles of suffering and weakness and infirmity. Apart from the natural causes upon which depends the duration of life, is it not because there is a discipline of age—as there is a discipline of youth and maturity?

Old people are generally those who have not mastered the lessons God would have taught them in life; and just as the master of a school, when play-time has come, keeps back those who have not learned their lessons and have been disobedient and unruly—so we may imagine that God detains for a time from entering into the full joy and happiness and freedom of the other world—those who have failed to learn the lessons of life. Old age looked at from this point is full of instruction and meaning.

Peace is repeatedly spoken of by Holy Scripture, as one of the greatest blessings which can be conferred by God on man. The Gospel is called the Gospel of Peace; the kingdom of God is joy and peace; Christ preached peace to those who were afar off; the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, and peace.

We find, too, peace held out as a reward to King Josiah in his old age: "Because your heart was tender, and you have humbled yourself before the Lord—Behold therefore, I will gather you unto your fathers, and you shall be gathered into your grave in peace."

It was old Simeon's cry after he had had the desire of his heart, and had held our blessed Lord in his arms, "Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace according to Your word." Peace, then, may well be considered as a resting place for old age.

We have long ceased to have dealings with the world; its pleasures cannot tempt us, its vanities are not able to seduce us. We have drunk sufficient of the cup the world offers—to know that there is bitterness in the dregs thereof. Ambition vainly endeavors to make us restless; we have done enough for fame; our place in the world's history is already known. From our resting place we can see the conflict going on, and hear the din and tumult of the fray; the battle we leave to the young and strong; sufficient for them are our sympathies and prayers; our duty lies in another path, that of making and securing our peace with God. When the sun sets on a calm summer's evening, and light gradually fades away from the rosy clouds and the bright sky, and darkness slowly but surely closes in all around, what a glorious compensation is afforded to us by the countless stars shining and sparkling in the heavens! We lose sight of one world, and we obtain vision of myriads of other worlds. So it is with old age: darkness gradually closes around it, shutting it out from sympathy and contact with this world—but giving as a recompense the sight and vision of another. This is indeed the source of our peace, that we live much in the other world: our hopes, our desires, our longings are no more earthly; we are wearied of the ways of sinful men, and yearn for the companionship with the spirits of just men made perfect, for the full and complete vision of our Redeemer. Oh, how happy is old age when possessed of this peace. This peace is often the slow growth of years. A gradual weaning from the world and things of the world, an imperceptible calming down of life's passions and storms. As friend after friend falls away from us, slowly but surely are we led to repose upon the truest Friend; we must lean on some loving heart; we must be sustained by some loving arms; we turn in our extremity to Jesus, and find in Him all we need.

Occasionally, however, this peace is not found until our course is well-near run. The infinite love of God, which has been patiently abiding its time, finds us out at the last. On this a spiritual writer has beautifully written: "God often comes to men in their old age. They have lived for that which only comes when real life seems past. What a divine meaning there is in all this! The significance of a whole life comes uppermost only in the preparation for death. Our destiny only begins to be fulfilled after it appears to have been worked out. Who knows what he is intended for? What we

have dreamed was our mission is—of all things the least likely to have been such. For missions are divine things, and therefore generally hidden, generally unconsciously fulfilled. If there are some who seem to have done their work early and then live on, we know not why, there are far more who do their real work later on, and not a few who only do it in the act of dying. Nay, is it not almost so in natural things? Life, for the most part, blooms only once, and, like the aloe, it blooms late."

I have seen several remarkable instances of this: of old people who have lived near to God and have honored Him with their lives—but yet have never been in the full assurance of peace and joy in Christ, passing in the last few days of a lingering illness from darkness into light. Finding the Savior Whom they had been seeking—and rejoicing in His wondrous love—the clouds, the distress, the anguish, have all passed away, and there was a great calm.

I remember once visiting a district which had been very much neglected. In the course of my round, I came to a cottage where there was a poor old man sitting alone by the fireside. He had been for many years a constant attendant at the church—but, being very deaf, could derive but little comfort or instruction from what went on. I spoke to him very simply of the love of Jesus, and left him. Some time afterwards I was called to visit him on a bed of sickness, and he said to me, "Oh, sir, I am so happy!" I asked him what the source of his happiness was, and he told me the belief he had, that Jesus had died for him. I then asked him how long he had been happy, and received for answer, "Ever since the day you spoke to me." I tested his faith all the time I was in that parish, and he remained steadfast to his assertion of his happiness, tracing it to that day on which I had first visited him.

I had left the parish for some years and had lost sight of my old friend, and when I returned to it for a short visit after a long absence, I thought I would like to see the old man, if he were still alive. I found him working feebly in his garden, decidedly nearer to his last end. On my asking him about himself, I received the self-same answer I had years ago. If ever my old friend and I meet in heaven, one of the purest joys to which I look forward will be to see him among the redeemed and to hear him say, "Oh, sir! I have felt so happy ever since the day you spoke to me!" Here was an instance of a man living to a good old age without the knowledge of God and the possession of peace; the work of Jesus Christ for his salvation had never been brought home to him. Sitting by his fireside a message is brought to him by the minister of Christ; he listens, and accepts it at once with the simple faith of a little child, and from thenceforward is full of happiness and peace. Can anything be more beautiful and touching than the wondrous love of God which sought out and found this poor old man in his last days? A final resting-place of old age is love. This love is twofold—love of MAN and love of God. Old age need never be lonely. It can surround itself with bright memories of loving, grateful hearts, and solace itself with recollections of deeds of love done for Christ's sake; it can make itself revered, honored, and respected, so that the approach of the stooping form and the whitened hair shall be a source of the purest joy. Little children will come instinctively to nestle close to one whose voice is so gentle, whose manner so kind; his very progress shall be a triumph, for all cannot help loving one who so loves them, and testifies to his love by deeds as well as words.

What else is joy—but the spreading joy? If we can make others happy; if we can introduce a beam of sunshine into their darkened homes; if we can lighten their burdens and relieve them of their

cares, there is no greater happiness on earth than this; and such is the province of old age.

We must rest, too, on the love of GOD. Our church is indeed our home, for it is there that we find our God. We find Him, as we know in other things, for we have learned to find Him everywhere; but still to us old people who live in the country the church is our true home. It is there we were baptized; there, too, kneeling before the marriage altar did we commence our sweet family life. Our whole existence is associated with our church. There we have been year after year to hear the Word of God, and to sing His praises. Dearly do we love our church, our ways are counted old-fashioned, our old hymn and psalm books are pushed aside, the services are carried on in what many consider a brighter, heartier way than of yore. We mind not the changes as some do; we have the same old church, the same faith, the same assurance of the loving Presence of Jesus as we always have had. We may alter, our ways and modes of worship may change, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Our hearing is imperfect, our sight dim, we can no longer sing the sweet hymns as in times gone by—but yet we have a greater hold of the things unseen; we can feel, as we never used to feel, the great bond of fellowship that exists between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven. Our worship is for us a solemn reality, the foretaste of our future worship in heaven. What joy is ours when we draw near to the Lord's Table to take the Holy Sacrament! We seek not to pry into God's mysteries, we feel that words cannot explain or set forth the especial manner of our Lord's Presence in the sacrament of His love. We believe He is there—though we see Him not, ready to be found of those who seek Him.

How that love of God goes back with us from our church—to our homes. We are persuaded that nothing shall separate us from that love; it has borne with us so long, it has been such a constant companion of our weary pilgrimage, that we are assured of its continuance when we pass through the deep waters.

Working for God Can the aged do any work? Are not their hands too feeble, their feet too weak? Is not their mind too infirm to admit of work? Have they not entered into rest? Feeble as old people are, still they can do something; they are entitled to rest, and no one would deprive them of that which they have dearly earned—but rest is not idleness or inactivity. We shall have our perfect rest in heaven—but no one dreams of a sensual heaven of idle enjoyment, without the glorious privilege of working for God. Our immortal energies will not, we feel assured, remain dormant or unexercised. The first work that old people can do for God is the work of prayer. We may not be able to visit the sick and afflicted, nay, we never may be able even to get to church, being confined to the walls of our home—yet our hearts are free, our spirits are unfettered, we can plead with God in prayer.

There was once a parish which seemed as if a spiritual blight had settled upon it. No work for God attempted there ever brought forth fruit, both rector and people seemed dead, all the forms of worship and of religion were very carefully gone through—but no blessing seemed to attach to anything. After this deplorable state of things had lasted some years, a change suddenly took place, the Holy Spirit descended with power, the lips of the rector were unsealed, and he taught with marvelous force and earnestness; his congregation was aroused and quickened, and the work of God was made manifest. Where before there had been death—was life, many confessed their sins with tears, and acknowledged Jesus as their Savior. Whence this wondrous change?

There happened to be in the parish a very godly, pious old woman, who believed much in prayer. She had been bedridden for many years, and could consequently never come to church—but she had heard of the lamentable deadness and torpor which pervaded everything. As she could do nothing else, she resolved to pray. Accordingly she used to spend several hours every day in prayer to God that He would quicken, and revive the drooping spiritual life of both minister and people. Ordinary Christians would have been discouraged, as the years rolled by, and no answer was vouchsafed to her petitions—but being a woman of most ardent faith she was not. After wrestling with God for many years at last the answer came, and a whole parish rejoiced at the blessings won for them by the simple faith of a poor bedridden old woman. The lesson is plain, let us who can do nothing else, at least pray; let us make intercession with God for the salvation of sinners, the advancement of His honor and glory, the good of His Church. So might each one of us be a real center of blessing in the place where we live, and mightily strengthen the hands of those who are fighting the Lord's battles.

Another work in which we are to engage is the exercise of our experience for the benefit of those around us.

We have learned and suffered much in the past. It would not be right for us to go down into the grave in silence—with all the knowledge we have so painfully acquired locked up in our breasts. From the lofty standpoint we have reached, we can be of much service to the younger generation. We can warn them against the pitfalls which lie in the way, we can tell them to what termination many of the roads along which they are passing will assuredly lead. Living in an atmosphere of calm, peaceful thought, we can correct many of their hasty conclusions, and partial judgments. We must not expect, however, to be received as universal mentors; men will taste of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for themselves, and it will only be by passing through the self-same sad experience as we have—that our children, and grandchildren will learn wisdom.

We can also use our influence for good. Old people and children draw very near together; there is some strange bond of sympathy between them, some common ground which is referred to perhaps in that definition which is given half-contemptuously of old age as "second childhood." By God's merciful provision we renew the dreams of our childhood in our old age—dreams lit up by many years' experience—but yet withal unearthly, as they derive their luster from on high. Our faith becomes simple as it once was, we turn to our Father in the old loving, trusting way, and enter the long-sought Kingdom of Heaven as little children at the last.

Such being the attraction that old age has for childhood—can we not use it aright? If God mercifully disposes the little ones to listen to us, to place the little hand confidingly in our hand—can we not guide the lambs of the flock to some peaceful place of shelter? We may smile sadly as we see the enthusiasm and ardor of youth—but can we not sympathize with the vigorous, healthy life, and see in the young, beaming faces around us a reflection of our past life.

What a treasure a youthful old age is! An old man with all the buoyancy, and perhaps elasticity, of youth; able to secure the respect and also the love and affection of the young; able from temperate habits and a vigorous constitution, to lead his grandchildren in their games, to enter into all their little plans, and share with them in all their childish delights. Some of our greatest men have not thought it beneath their dignity to be seen playing with their children. It is a rare art, an unusual gift, this marvelous power of sympathy; but yet how charming is it to see the first and the second

childhood go thus lovingly hand in hand. Someone may think that all this scarcely comes under the heading of "Working for God," but all good work, whether directly religious or not, is more or less work for our Father.

One more feature of our work, is our careful preparation for the great change that is to come so shortly upon us. We are going to be clothed with immortality, we are going to be called within the veil, we are going to embark upon a mysterious voyage into the region of the unknown. Such a voyage needs preparation, and that of the most serious and solemn kind. Now is the opportunity for testing our faith, for making sure that we are resting upon the true foundation, for acknowledging our shortcomings, and approaching as sinners to the Cross of Jesus. Have you, dear reader, done this? have you thrown yourself down at the feet of Jesus, and implored His pity and compassion? God be thanked, it is never too late to turn to Him, who is willing to save to the uttermost those that flee to Him.

Granting, however, that we have peace, there is still much to be done. Are we sufficiently withdrawn from the world to appear into the immediate Presence of God? Have we not still some faults and imperfections adhering to us? As we have passed along the King's Highway has not some of the dust of the road attached itself to our garments? Travel-stained as we are, are we in a fit state to sit down at the banquet of the Lamb? Let us use the few hours that remain to us—by seeking more conformity to our God and greater detachment from the things of this life—then shall the summons find us not unprepared.

Almost There!

I once was called to visit a dying woman. I found her in a condition of the most abject poverty and wretchedness, dying of a most painful disease, without any one to minister to her needs, but that a kind neighbor would occasionally look in to see if she needed anything. When I questioned her as to her spiritual condition, she answered me with a look of unspeakable joy, "The Lord has finished the work long ago, I only have to go to glory now." This answer struck me as a most marvelous example of the power of true religion. Here was a poor woman, utterly broken down, forsaken, so to speak, by the world, breathing out her last few breaths on a miserable bed of sacking, and yet sounds of the grandest triumph burst forth from her lips. The work was finished; now she had to look forward beyond this world of poverty and suffering and shame—to glory.

We, too, like her may now look out to beyond this world. We have been dwelling much at the commencement of this book upon the infirmities, the trials, the difficulties of old age, and even in the after part there has been a vein of sadness running through much that was intended to be bright and encouraging; let us now in this our last chapter—think upon ourselves as "Almost There!" as travelers who have accomplished all but the last few steps of their journey; as mariners who have come within view of the white cliffs of their dear native land; as children who have, after many wanderings, come within sight of home!

We are standing, like Moses, on the summit of Mount Pisgah, and are looking over into the Promised Land. Not with regretful eyes, however, as having forfeited the right to enter therein—but as those who are about to cross the narrow river that like a silver thread lies at our feet—to obtain possession of our rightful inheritance!

Even here, at the distance we are from our final resting place—we can see enough to make our hearts leap for joy! There, shining in the light of the Lamb—is the Holy City, the end of our weary pilgrimage. See its streets gleaming with sheen of gold. Count its pearly gates, its buildings, its courts, and its walls with their foundations of all manner of precious gems. Mark its white-robed inhabitants, now passing in joyous procession down the crystal streets. As we stand gazing, do we not hear the musical ripple of the water of life mingled with the distant echoes of the Redemption song? Is it fond fancy? or do we not see forms and faces lost to us for many long years now shining with unearthly beauty, and beckoning us onward—heavenward—homeward? But a few more days—but a few steps onward, and perhaps we shall be there! Our infirmities will come to an end, this worn-out tabernacle of the flesh will fall off, then will be renewed our youth, our health, our vigor! Then will have passed forever away—pain and suffering, temptation and sin; then shall we once more clasp the beloved ones in our arms. Oh, the joyous welcomes, the happy gatherings, of that distant land! Then shall we see as we are seen, and know as we are known. Then shall be unfolded to us the joy of that tender love which has followed us all the days of our life, and has brought us safe home at last. Then shall we see Jesus face to face, and gaze with our own eyes on His wounded side and pierced hands and feet. Oh, joy of all joys, nothing shall separate us from His love! We shall be in His presence for evermore!

Oh, happy old age, blessed in the thoughts of the past, full of true peace in the present, occupied with joyous anticipation of the future, because it is "Within sight of Home!"

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