

Brothers and Sisters

by J.R. Miller

Brothers and sisters have the potential to create a beautiful and harmonious home life, but it requires effort and care to cultivate this potential and to be close friends.

Scripture: Proverbs 17:17, Ephesians 4:2, 1 John 4:7

Topics: "Family Relationships", "Love and Affection"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the vital role of brothers and sisters in cultivating a loving and joyful home life, comparing neglected family relationships to barren land that can bloom with affection and care. He urges families to recognize the hidden treasures of love and friendship within their homes, advocating for a nurturing environment where siblings support and inspire one another. Miller highlights the importance of mutual respect and the responsibilities siblings have towards each other, suggesting that true friendship should flourish among them. He warns against taking familial bonds for granted and encourages families to actively cultivate their relationships to avoid bitterness and strife. Ultimately, he calls for a transformation of homes into gardens of love, where the beauty of sibling relationships can thrive.

Transcript

One warm spring day, a gentleman tore down an outbuilding that had stood for thirty years. When all the rubbish had been cleared away, the spot looked very bare, like a bit of arid desert in the midst of the rich garden that surrounded it. But soon rain fell and then the sun poured down its beams, and in a few days there sprang up countless lovely little flowers, where for thirty years there had been neither life nor beauty, covering the unsightly place and making it one of the fairest spots in all the garden. The seeds must have been lying there in the soil all those years--but, having neither light, moisture nor warmth, they had never grown.

In like manner, many a roof covers a home-life that is bare of beauty and joy. Yet all the elements are there which are needed to make it a true image of heaven, in its blessedness and peace. In the children growing up together, there are the possibilities of a very rich life, with deep joys, fond ties and mutual inspirations. All that is needed to bring out all these possibilities, is the mighty transforming power of affection! Surely it is not right that so much blessing should be lost. There is not so much happiness in the world that we can afford to leave our homes desert spots--when they might be blossoming gardens. Certainly it is worth while to think of the matter, for each of us honestly to inquire whether in our home there are not seeds of beautiful things which are yielding no beauty; whether there are not treasures

hidden in our family life, which we have never yet discovered; whether we are not blindly passing by Heaven's richest gifts to us--of friendship and tender affection lying within our own doors, while we press our quest into other fields and vainly seek for satisfaction.

In every home where there are brothers and sisters, there is a field which needs only wise, patient culture--to yield life's richest and loveliest things. Are we cultivating this field or is it lying neglected, covered, perhaps, with weeds and thorns, while we are spending all our strength in trying to make harvests grow on some bare, rocky hillside?

A complete family is one in which there are not only both parents and children--but also both brothers and sisters. A family with boys alone or with girls alone is incomplete. Its life is not full. In either case, however happy the home may be, there is something lacking. If there are boys only, the coarser, cruder elements are likely to prevail--without the softening, refining influence which comes from girl life in the family. An English writer says: "Families that are composed only of boys grow up crude and selfish, very hard, brusque and unfeeling. The process of education, which begins as soon as a child is born, loses all its tenderness, all its sweetness, when girls are lacking. Then, if there are girls only, they on the other hand miss the strengthening inspiration which comes from association and companionship with brothers." Though this statement is too absolute in its terms, yet it is true of many cases, and certainly expresses a tendency in all.

A full and complete family, is one in which brothers and sisters all dwell together in tender love. We all know such homes, where the family life is full--and the family fellowship close, caring and happy; where parents and children, and brothers and sisters--live together in sweet accord, and where the music of the daily life is like an unbroken song of holy peace. Wherever there is such a home, its blessedness is almost heavenly!

But it is not thus, in every household. There are families which are complete, so far as numbers go, with both brothers and sisters in the circle--but whose home-life fails to realize the peace and love which I have described. Something is lacking. There may be bitterness and strife--or there may be only the absence of all tenderness and of all true holy fellowship. In either case the story is very sad. The great possibility of happiness is either neglected and despised. Such a home ought always to be not merely happy--but happy in the deepest, richest, fullest sense. If it fails to be so, great must be the guilt of those who are responsible for the failure.

Brothers and sisters have an important duty in the making of the home-life. What is their part? Here is a household in which there are two or three sisters, and as many brothers, growing up together. What does each owe to this home? What do they owe--the one to the other? How should they live together? What should sisters do for brothers--and brothers for sisters? How should sisters help their sisters--and brothers help their brothers?

These are a few of the questions which I would like to raise in the minds of young people who are living together in the home of their parents. It is not so much matter whether I answer the questions myself or not. If I can merely start them in the minds of those whom they concern, so that they shall go on thinking about them and trying to answer them practically in their lives--this will be far better than the fullest, completest and wisest answers on the pages of this, or any book. I shall be quite content therefore, if I can merely set up a few emphatic interrogation points in this chapter.

What should be the home fellowship of brothers and sisters? What should they do toward the home-life? How should they live together? These questions may be answered in general by saying that a close and tender friendship should exist between them. This sounds like a very commonplace remark. Of course brothers and sisters should be friends, and should live together in an intimate relationship as friends. No one denies it. But do we universally find this warm, living and tender friendship where there are young people in home? We often find strong ties and attachments, mutual affection and interest, and much that is very beautiful; but when we come closer and look for friendship in the true sense, it is lacking. The brothers and sisters may love one another very truly--but they seek their friends outside the home. They go outside for warm sympathy, for close intimacy, for confidential companionship.

It is not hard to find reasons for this. Living always together and knowing one another from infancy, members of the same family are apt to grow uninteresting to one another. The sameness of the society, day after day, takes away its freshness. The common life which they all lead under the same roof, with the same pursuits, the same topics for conversation, the same incidents and experiences, the same hopes and fears, the same joys and sorrows, the same books, the same social life, renders it difficult for the members of a household to impress one another in continual repetition and ever freshly kindle inspiration and emotion the one in the other, as friends from other homes can do, coming in only now and then.

Then the fact that it is home and that the ties are natural and thought to be secure; that the members are sure of each other, without making any effort to win confidence and regard; that love between them is a matter of course, as if by nature, without winning it or cherishing it or troubling themselves to keep it--this is another of the causes for the absence of real friendship among brothers and sisters. They imagine that family affection is a sort of instinct, not subject to the laws which control other affections; that it does not need to be sought or gained or won, as affection must be in others, by giving affection in return and by the countless little tendernesses and thoughtfulness which are shown to others whom they desire to win. They forget that the principle, "He who has friends must show himself friendly," applies in the family just as well as outside of it. They forget that friendship anywhere must be cherished or it will die; that indifference and coldness will cause it to wither as drought causes summer flowers to wither. They imagine, in a word, that the love of the family is so sure and strong that it needs no care, no pains, to keep it safe. So it is that in very many homes brothers and sisters come and go, day after day, and year after year, mingling in all the life of the household--but never really forming close friendships among themselves.

Friendships in the family require care and culture--as do other friendships. We must win one another's love inside the home doors just as we win the love of outside friends. We must prove ourselves worthy; we must show ourselves unselfish, self forgetful, thoughtful, and kind, tender, patient, helpful. Then when we have won each other we must keep the treasure of affection and confidence, just as we do in the case of friends not in the sacred circle of home.

If we have a friend whom we respect and prize very highly, we all know at what pains we are to retain his friendship. We are not sure of it, regardless of our treatment of him. We are most careful never to do anything to make us seem unworthy of the friendship. We try to prune from our own character, anything that would displease our friend. We cultivate assiduously those qualities of heart and life which he admires. We watch for opportunities to do kindnesses and show favors to him. We guard against whatever would wound him or cause him pain. We give him our confidence; we trust him and prove our affection for him in countless ways.

Let no one suppose that home friendships can be won and kept in any other way. We cannot depend on nature or instinct to do this for us. We must live for each other. We must gain each other's heart by giving just what we expect to receive. We must cherish the friendship that we have won. Unless we do, it will not grow. We must watch our words and our conduct. We must seek to please and take pains never to wound or grieve. We must deny self and live for one another. We must confide in one another. We must cultivate in our own hearts and lives whatever is beautiful, whatever is tender, whatever is holy, and whatever is true. Friendships in our own home, to be deep and true and heart satisfying, must be formed by the patient knitting of soul to soul and the growing of life into life, just as in other friendships.

Is it thus in most of our homes? There are distinguished exceptions; there are homes which shine like bits of heaven dropped down upon this sin-cursed earth. In these, natural affection has grown into a holy web of real and sacred friendship, binding brothers and sisters in closest bonds. There are brothers who have no friends so close as their own sisters; there are sisters who confide and trust in their own brothers as in no other friends.

One of the tenderest as well as saddest stories of all literature, is that of Charles and Mary Lamb. In a fit of insanity the sister had taken the life of her own mother. All her life after this she was subject to periods of frenzy, when it was necessary for her to be confined in an asylum. Then it was that her brother's affection showed itself. He lived for his sister in unselfish devotion. When she was in her right mind she lived with him, and he watched over her with a care that was most touching.

When the fit of insanity was coming on there were premonitory symptoms; they would then start off together for the asylum where for a time she must be confined. One of their friends relates how on one occasion he met the brother and sister weeping bitterly as hand in hand they slowly paced together in a little foot path across the fields, and joining them he found that they were taking their solemn way to the accustomed asylum. This was not something that occurred once or twice only--but frequently, and was liable to occur at any time; it was not for a year or two only--but for thirty-five years, until death separated them. He "did not nerve himself to bear his awful charge for a month or for a year; he endured his cross through life, conscious that there was no escape from its burden and from its pains." The indescribable pathos of this story is equaled only by the matchless devotion and constancy of the brother to his sister in all her sad and terrible lot and by her tender, all absorbing affection for him. No doubt there are many such deep and real friendships between brothers and sisters.

There is another example of a devoted and loving friendship between brother and sister in the Korner. The brother, Paul Korner, holds no mean place among German poets. He died at twenty two, falling in battle. His life was blessed by his sister's devotion, and her strong affection was nobly returned by him. They lived in mutual confidence. Their friendship was itself "a rare and lovely picture of grace and beauty." His premature death killed her. She could not bear the shock nor live without him. She survived him only long enough to complete his portrait and to draw with the pencil of love, a sketch of his last resting place. They sleep side by side, so that in death as in life they are not divided.

The history of life is not all written. Here and there in many a quiet home, there is a friendship between brother and sister, on which God's angels look with admiring love, which realizes all that is tender and beautiful in human attachment and affection. Yet I do not think I write a rash word when I say that such friendships are rare. Ofttimes the fellowship of brothers and sisters in the home lacks even the graces of ordinary civility. As soon as the door shuts them within, restraint is thrown off; selfishness comes to the surface, courtesy is laid aside. There is no pleasant conversation. Neither lives for nor tries to please the

other. The speech is crude or careless and the whole bearing cold or indifferent. The better nature is hidden--and the worse comes to the surface. Instead of a tender picture of grace and beauty--the fellowship of brother and sister is a harsh and painful discord. It should not be so. Brothers and sisters should live together as intimate friends, should carefully win and sedulously keep each other's love, dwelling together in unity and tender affection. There is no friendship in the world so pure, so rich and helpful, as that of the family, if only it be watched and tended as it should be.

Why should not a brother make a confidante of his own sister rather than of any other? Why should not a sister look to her own brother for counsel, for protection, for advice, for intimacy, rather than to any other? Why should not brothers be proud to have their own sisters' lean upon their arms, and why should not sisters be proud to look up into the faces of their brothers and feel secure in the shelter of their manly love? But instead of this, what do we often see? The brothers turn away from their own homes to find their companionships and friendships in other circles. As if their own sisters were not worthy of them, or it were a shame for a young man to devote himself in any measure to his sisters, as soon as they are old enough to be their companions they begin to seek other friendships. The sisters are then left to go unprotected or to accept that courtesy and shelter from others which their own brothers have failed to give.

That is the picture as too often it is. What it ought to be, however, is different.

A young man should be more polite to his own sister than to any other young woman under heaven; and a young woman should ever turn to her brother as the one nearest in all this world to her--until a husband stands by her side.

Brothers and sisters are each other's natural keepers. If they fulfilled their duties in this regard, the one to the other, life would show fewer wrecks. They should shield each other. They should be an inspiration to each other in the direction of all noble thought and better life. They should be each other's guardian angels in this world of danger and of false and fatal paths.

Sisters may be their brothers' angels. There is a picture of a child walking on a path that is covered with flowers. Along the edge of the narrow way is shrubbery which hides from the child's sight a deep precipice. The child is unconscious of danger, charmed by the flowers and not seeing how one misstep would hurl it to death. Over the little pilgrim's head hovers a shadowy angel form, scarcely visible--but with eager, loving interest in his eye, while his hand gently touches the child's shoulder; his mission is to guide the child's steps, to shield it from danger and to keep it from falling. The picture represents a truth in the loving providence of God. There are angels who guard, guide, shelter and keep God's children. They are ministering spirits. They keep us in all our ways. Over each one of us a guardian angel hovers unseen evermore. But there is also a most blessed angel ministry of sisters in behalf of their brothers.

There is no need to paint here any picture of the perils to which young men are exposed in this world. It makes the heart bleed to see how many of the noblest of them are destroyed, dragged down to ruin, their fair lives blackened, their godlike manhood debauched. They go out of the home pure, with lofty aspirations, with high hopes, with brilliant promises, challenging the admiration of all who know them; they come back, how often stained, degraded, hopes wrecked, promises unfulfilled. Every young man who enters life, enters a fierce battle in which no truce will come until he either lies down in final defeat or wins the last victory and enters into joy and rest. Life is hard. The young enter it without thought, without concern, without serious or solemn sense of danger, because they are not conscious of its true meaning. But it is one prolonged struggle with enemies and with perils.

"What is life, father?"

"A battle, my child,

Where the strongest lance may fail,

Where the wariest eyes may be beguiled,

And the stoutest heart may quail;

Where the foes are gathered on every hand,

And rest not day or night;

And the feeble little ones must stand

In the thickest of the fight."

To every young man, life is specially hard. As he goes into it he needs the sympathy of all who love him; he needs the prayers and the help of all his friends. For lack of the strong support of love, many a young man goes down in the battle and many who come through victorious, owe their victories to the holy affection of truly loyal hearts that inspired them with hope and courage in all their hours of struggle. The value of strong friendships never can be known in this world.

Next to mother and father, there is no one who can do so much to help a young man to live nobly, as his own sister. She cannot always go with him. Her weak arm could not always shield him if she were beside him. But there is a help which she can give him that will prove mightier than her presence. It is not the help of good advice and earnest words--these should have power, too--but the help rather of silent and holy influence, gained in the home by a life of unselfishness and beauty, and then held as a potent charm outside and beyond the home walls. There is a power over her brother possible to every true sister, which would be like the very hand of God to guide him and restrain him in all the paths of life. All sisters, however, do not have this power over their brothers, and alas! Sometimes the power is for evil rather than for good.

May I try to tell you, dear girls, how you can indeed be your brothers' guardian angels? Show them in your own lives at home--the perfect grace and beauty of a true, noble and lofty womanhood. Strive after all that is delicate, all that is pure, all that is tender, all that is holy and sacred in the divine ideal of womanhood. Show them in yourselves such perfect loveliness that they will turn away ever after from everything that is unlovely. Make virtue so attractive to them, as they see it embodied in you, that they will always be repelled by vice. Let them see in you such purity of soul, such sweetness of spirit, such divine sanctity, that wherever they go your influence will hang about them like an armor of defense, or, like an angel, hover above their heads in perpetual blessing. Be as nearly a perfect woman, each one of you, through Christ's help, as it is possible for you to be. Then when temptations come to your brother, there will rise up before his eyes such visions of purity and love. that he will turn away from the tempter with loathing.

But oh! If you are not such angels of true womanhood to your brothers, if you do not fill their souls with visions of purity and sweetness, what help do you hope to be to them when they stand in the face of sore temptations? If you are deceitful, if you are selfish, if you are false, if you violate the holy proprieties of modesty and true refinement; if you are frivolous and trifling; if you follow pleasure, turning away from

everything serious; if you are careless or heartless--do not deceive yourselves with the vain hope that you can be in any high sense your brothers' guardians in the day of danger. You may advise, you may persuade, you may implore with tears and every token of tender love, when they begin to yield--but your entreaties will avail nothing because your own life has failed to stand the test, and to exhibit before them a lofty ideal of womanhood. But if you will only be true, noble, unselfish, gentle, womanly, in the highest, purest sense; if you only are thoughtful and considerate and live for a purpose, making your character decided and strong, you will throw over your brothers a silent, imperceptible yet mighty influence, which will be a shield to them in danger, a panoply in temptation, and which will fill their hearts with the purest, loftiest aspirations and aims.

A writer has truthfully said in speaking of a sister's influence upon her brother: "Woman is to him an object of respect or contempt, according to what he sees of his sister's mind and heart. She cannot therefore be too careful in teaching him to respect as well as love her. She cannot confer on him a greater kindness than by giving him an exalted idea of womanhood. She cannot inflict a greater injury than by leading him to think that all women are trifling and heartless, indolent except in the pursuit of pleasure, and greed of admiration."

Brothers should also be their sisters' guardians. Every young man knows what true gallantry is, and what it requires of him. He is to honor every lady, whether rich or poor, whether of higher or lower station, and show her every respect. He is to be to every woman a true knight, ready to defend her from danger, to shield her from every insult, to risk his own life in her behalf. There is not better test of a gentleman, than his treatment of women.

Now, to whom ought every young man to show the highest, truest gallantry? To whom ought he first of all to be a most true and loyal knight? To whom--if not to his own sisters? Do not they come first in the circle of those to whom he owes honor? Have they not the first claim on his affection? If he is not a true gentleman to his own sisters, can he be at heart a true gentleman to any other woman? Can a young man be manly, and treat his own sisters with less respect and honor than he treats other young ladies? Hence a still higher test of a gentleman, is his treatment of his own sisters. His chivalry must show itself first toward those who are closest to him in natural ties. He must show them the truest deference. He must treat them with that delicate regard, that gentle, affectionate respect, which tells of the loftiest gallantry. He must consider himself their true knight, whose office it is to throw about them every needed shelter, to serve them, and to promote their highest good in every way.

Of course there is no young man with one spark of the honor of true manliness in his breast, who will not instinctively defend his sister, if she is insulted in the street. He will put himself instantly between her and the danger. Neither is there any brother worthy of the name who will not defend the honor of his sister if vile tongues asperse it. But more than this is required of a loyal brother. He should make himself a wall about his sister to shield her from every evil and unholy influence. Every young man knows other young men; he knows their character, their habits, and their good and evil qualities. He knows the young men whose lives are impure, who are licentious, and who consort with harlots. He knows those who indulge in strong drink, those who are godless and profane, and those whose lives are stained with the filth of debauchery. Can he be a true brother and permit such a young man to be the companion of his pure and gentle sister? Can he allow her in the innocence of her heart, to accept the attentions of such a young man, to lean upon his arm, to look up into his face with trust? Can he allow her to give her soul's confidences to him? Can he see a friendship forming, strengthening, between his sister and such a young man--and remain silent, uttering in her ear no voice of warning or protest, and yet be a loyal and faithful

brother to her?

This is a place for plain, strong and earnest words. Surely young men do not think of this matter seriously, or they would require no argument to convince them of their duty. Put the case in the strongest possible form and bring it close to home. You have a sister--as pure as a lily. She has grown up beside you in the shelter of the home. Her eyes have never looked upon anything vile. Her ears have never heard an impure word. Her soul is white as the snowflakes that fall from the clouds. You love her as you love your own life. You honor her as if she were a queen. A young man seeks to win her regard and confidence. He stands well in society, has good manners, and is attractive, intelligent. But you know that he frequents resorts of evil, that his secret life is unchaste, that his soul is stained with base and vile sins, that he is the victim of habits which will bring ruin and dishonor in the end. Your sister knows nothing of his true character. Can you permit him to become her companion? Are you not bound to tell her that he is not worthy of her? Can you do otherwise and be a faithful brother?

Besides this standing between his sister and danger, every brother should also show her in his own life--the ideal of the truest, purest, most honorable manhood. If it is true that the best shield a sister can make for her brother is to show him in herself the loftiest example of womanhood, it is true also that the truest defense a brother can make for his sister is a noble manhood in his own person. He must exhibit before her continually a character without spot or stain, with high aspirations, with generous sympathies, with pure, true, unselfish, Christlike spirit and disposition. If he is going to shield his sister from the impure--he must not be impure himself. He must show her in himself such a high ideal of manhood, that her soul shall unconsciously and instinctively shrink from everything that is vulgar, crude or evil. There is no other defense so perfect. Let no brother think that he can be a shelter from evil to his sister--if his own life is not unsullied and true.

It must be said also that young ladies should accept, and even seek, the counsel of their brothers with regard to their companions. Let the brothers be true to their sisters, setting before them a lofty example; let them be ready to shield them from danger and to be their wise, faithful counselors; then let sisters look to their brothers for protections and for advice, and be quick to heed the warnings they give and to shun the dangers they point out. Are young women always wise in this regard? Do they desire or receive the counsel of their brothers with regard to companions? Are they always careful enough even when they know young men to be immoral?

When a young woman falls into sin--the stain always stays upon her name. She can never rise again to her former place. She is excluded from society. She carries the burden of her tarnished name wherever she goes, and though more sinned against than sinning, though the victim of the basest betrayal, she stands thereafter outside the gates, friendless and neglected. Though she repents of her sin and creeps to her Savior's feet and find forgiveness; though the wounded, stricken lamb be laid in the Shepherd's bosom and borne back into his fold; though she is numbered among the children of the Father--yet society still has no forgiveness for her. Her own women friends have no mercy for her, no place for her by their side or in their circles.

But what of her betrayer and destroyer? Is he also excluded from society? Is he shunned by the pure who look with so much scorn upon his victim? Is he not still allowed by many young ladies to hold his place, to be honored and welcomed, as if there were no stain upon his soul, no crime branding his brow? Are young women true to themselves when they receive to friendship and intimacy, one who has proved himself so unworthy of confidence? Let them seek counsel from their own brothers as to the character and fitness of

other young men before they receive them to companionship, and accept as friends only such as are worthy of their regard and confidence.

In like manner every young man who has a true sister, will do well to take counsel of her concerning other young ladies with whom he would form close friendship. She knows far more than he can possibly know of their real character, and is competent to advise him. He will prove his wisdom by seeking her counsel, especially in forming intimate relationships, which may have so much to do with his whole future.

Indeed, there is not phase of his life into which a young man will not be the better, and his life the cleaner and richer--for the influence and the help of his sister. Washington Irving wrote these moving words concerning the loss he had sustained in his life from having no sisters: "Often have I lamented that Providence denied me the companionship of sisters. Often have I thought that had I been thus favored I should have been a better man." There is many a man who would have been better if he had been blessed with sisters. Every brother who has a sister should cherish her and let his heart go out to her in loyal, manly love. He should prize her love for him as one of the sweetest flowers in the earth's garden, one of the most sacred and precious things in life, and he should love her with an affection deep, tender and strong.

Since so much has been said in this chapter of the sister's influence and of the wondrous and subtle charm of her power over her brothers; it ought also to be said that not every sister possesses this power. There are many who throw it away. No sister can keep this powerful influence, and be frivolous and trifling. No one can keep it and be a silly butterfly of fashion. To retain it, she must be a true, thoughtful, noble woman. She must have a character that shines like crystal in its purity, its sincerity, its simplicity. The power she has and retains, must be the power of true womanliness, whose strength is gentleness and whose inspiration is purity of soul.

There is no better place than this, to say a few earnest words to young girls on the cultivation of their own hearts. Among all the elements of beauty in the character of a young woman--none is more essential than purity of mind and heart, and none gives such grace to the whole life and spirit. Here are a few sentences taken from a private letter: "True refinement is not mere outside polish. It goes deeper and penetrates to the very foundation of character. It is purity, gentleness and grace in the heart, which, like the perfume of flowers, breathe out and bathes all the life in sweetness. It is not merely mental culture; there is true refinement often where education has been limited, where in the speech you may detect faults and errors. On the other hand, there is sometimes high intellectual furnishing, without any true refinement. That which really refines--is purity of mind and heart."

These words are very true. It is not possible even to think of true womanhood, without purity. It was as easy to think of a rose without beauty--or of a lily without whiteness. Amid the wreck of this world, wrought by sin, there are still some fragments of the beauty of Eden, and among these, none is lovelier than the unsullied delicacy of a true woman's heart. It is possible, too, to preserve this holy purity even amid all this world's sin and foulness. I have seen a lily floating in the black waters of a bog. All about it lay stagnation and vileness, but in the midst of all this, the lily remained pure as the robes of an angel. It lay on the dark pond, rocked on the bosom of every ripple, yet never receiving a stain. It held up its unsullied face toward God's blue heaven, and poured its fragrance all about it. So it is possible, even in this world of moral evil, for a young woman to grow up, keeping her soul unstained in the midst of it all--and ever breathing out the perfume of holy, unselfish love.

"Keep me pure; make others great." This is a fit prayer for every young girl. She should prize nothing in this world so highly as her purity of heart, of thought, of soul. She should be willing to lose anything else--pleasure, wealth, reward, rather than lose this richest jewel. She should guard her imagination, her heart, and her affections, that no breath which would sully, may ever blow over her life.

There is need here for earnest warning. There are dangers to which every young girl is exposed. There are indications in society of the lowering of the tone of girlhood. There are things in some circles that are painful to every sensitive heart. There are magazines and books offered everywhere, and read by too many, which leave a trail of stain on the fair flowers of maidenly refinement. When on a winter's morning you breathe upon the exquisite tracery of frostwork on a window pane, it melts down, and no human hand can ever restore it. Still less is it possible to restore the charm of purity to the soul that has lost it. If a young girl would grow into the most spotless womanhood, radiant in every feature with the loveliness of Christ's own image--she must from her earliest youth, through all the experiences of her life, maintain unsullied purity of heart.

So far the duty only of brothers to sisters and sisters to brothers has been considered. It ought to make a young man's heart exult to have a beautiful and noble sister to lean upon his arm and look up to him for protection, for counsel, for strong, holy friendship. And a sister ought to be proud and happy to have a brother growing into a manly strength, to stand by her side, to bear her upon his arm, and to shelter her from life's storms. Between brother and sister there should be a friendship, which is deep, strong, close, confiding and faithful.

But the home presents opportunities also for friendships between brother and brother, and between sister and sister. Why should not the brothers of a family stand together? They have common ties, common joys and sorrows, common interests. The same mother gave them birth and taught their infant lips, to lisp the words of prayer. The same father toiled and sacrificed for them. The same home roof shelters them. Why should they not be to each other, the loyalist of friends? When one is in trouble, to whom should his instincts teach him first to turn--if not to his own brother? Where should he think to find quicker sympathy and readier help--than in his brother's heart and hand? Who should be so willing to give help as a brother?

But do we always find such friendship between brothers? Sometimes we do. There are families of brothers who do stand together in most loyal affection. They share each other's burdens. If one is in trouble, the others gather close about him with strong sustaining sympathy--as when one branch of a tree is bruised, all the other branches give of their life to restore the one that is injured. The picture is very beautiful, and it is what should be seen in every home in which brothers dwell. But too often it is not seen. Frequently they drift apart, even while they stay under the home roof. Each builds up interests of his own. They seek different friends outside. Sometimes over a father's grave, they quarrel about petty questions of property, and unholy feuds, build walls between hearts and lives, which should have been bound together inseparably forever. With so much in common, with the most sacred ties to bind them together, and the most holy memories to sanctify their union--brothers should permit nothing ever to estrange them from each other. No selfish interest, no question of money or property, no bitterness or feud, should ever come in to sever their hearts. Though continents divide them and seas roll between them--their love should remain faithful, strong and true forever.

In like manner, the sisters in a home should maintain their friendship for each other, through all the changes and all the varied experiences of life. This they do, more frequently than their brothers. There are many very beautiful sisterly attachments. Their life within the home holds them together more closely, than

brothers are held in their outside life. They have better opportunities for the cultivation of friendship among themselves, in the many hours they sit together at their household work. The interests of their lives, are less likely to separate them or start differences between them. Nothing is lovelier than the picture of sisters locked in each other's arms, their lives blending in holy love, the one helping the other, giving comfort in sorrow, strength in weakness and help in trial.

Are the brothers and sisters who read these pages realizing in their own lives, the ideals which have here been even so imperfectly sketched? Are they living together in tender love in their own home? If they are, Heaven's blessing will fall upon their hearts and lives, like a baptism of holy peace. If they are not, where is the fault? What can be done to correct it? Too many blessed possibilities of joy, of love and of helpfulness lie in these sacred relationships, to be neglected, or ruthlessly tossed into the dust. Life is too short to be spent in strife and discord anywhere, especially in the holy circle of the home. Strifes and alienations here, are the seeds for a harvest of sorrow. Sad, sad will it be to stand by the coffin of a brother or a sister, and while we look at the cold, silent clay, remember that we were ever unkind to one who stood so near, that we ever failed in acts of love, or that we ever allowed anything to estrange us or make our fellowship cold and formal.

Have you brothers or sisters living anywhere in this great world? Have you allowed the friendship to grow cold--or the ties to be forgotten? Have you permitted all fellowship to be broken off? Lose not a day until you have done the first thing, taken the first step, to gather up the shattered links--and reunite them in a holy chain. If they are far away, write to them in words of love. If they are within reach, go to them in person. If you are still living side by side in the old home, and if your life together has not been close, intimate, confiding and helpful--seek at once by all the wise arts of a loving heart to make it what it ought to be.

Then, not matter how plain, simple or old fashioned your home may be--the sacred friendships beneath its roof will transfigure it all. Poverty is a light cross--if there is love at home. Toil, hardships, care sacrifice and even sorrow lose their ruggedness, bleakness and severity--when tender affection entwines over them--as cold, bare, rugged rocks are changed into beauty, when green and gentle smiling flowers, grow from every crevice, and fill every black nook and fissure.

"Dear moss," said the thatched roof on an old ruin, "I am so worn, so patched, so ragged; really I am quite unsightly. I wish you would come and cheer me up a little; you will hide all my infirmities and defects, and, through your loving sympathy, no danger of contempt or dislike will be pointed at me." "I will do this," said the moss; and it crept up and around and in and out, until every flaw was hidden and all was smooth and fair. Presently the sun shone out and the old thatched roof looked bright and fair, a picture of rare beauty in the golden rays. "How beautiful that roof looks!" cried one who saw it. "How beautiful that roof looks!" said another. "Ah!" said the old roof, "rather let them say, 'How beautiful is the loving moss which spends itself in covering up all my faults, keeping the knowledge of them all to herself, and by her own grace making my age and poverty wear the garb of youth and luxuriance!'"

Is your home plain and bare? Must you meet hardships and endure toil? Have you cares and privations? Do you sigh for something finer, more beautiful, less hard? Call up love to wreath itself over all your home-life. Cultivate home friendships! Bind up the broken home ties. Plant the flowers of affection in every corner. Then soon all will be transfigured! You will forget care, hardships and toil, for they will all be hidden under lovely garments of affection. Your eye will see no more the troubles, the hardness, the anxieties, the toils--but will be charmed with the luxuriance of love that shall cover every blemish!

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