

# Garden of the Heart - Part 1

by J.R. Miller

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of keeping our lives clear of weeds and full of beautiful plants and flowers, symbolizing a life of beauty and blessing to others.*

**Scripture:** Song of Solomon 4:16, Isaiah 61:3, Galatians 5:22

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Service and Sacrifice"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the metaphor of the heart as a garden, urging believers to cultivate their inner lives by removing weeds of sin and nurturing the fruits of the Spirit. He illustrates how God desires to transform our hearts into beautiful gardens, filled with love, joy, and peace, akin to the resurrection of Christ in a garden. Miller encourages prayer for the 'winds of God' to awaken dormant spiritual gifts and to embrace both the north wind of conviction and the south wind of divine love. He reminds us that true glory in life comes from service and sacrifice, reflecting Christ's example as the ultimate servant. The sermon calls for self-examination and a commitment to live out the potential that God sees in each of us.

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## Transcript

Garden of the Heart

J. R. Miller, 1906

A Heart Garden

A writer tells of an old woman who said: "My heart is a little garden--and God is planting flowers there." Every heart should be a little garden. We should keep it always clear of weeds--and full of sweet and beautiful plants and flowers. A garden spot is not only a thing of beauty--but is also a blessing to all who see it. Even a window box filled with its bright color is a blessing. God means that we shall make our lives so beautiful, that they will redeem one spot of the world from dreariness, and transform it into loveliness.

The picture of a garden runs through all the Bible. The first home of the human race was a garden. Jesus was buried in a garden. When He arose, the first Easter morning spring flowers were blooming all about His grave, filling the air with fragrance. There is a legend, too, that as He walked away from the open tomb lilies sprang up in the path on which His feet walked. It is true; at least, that wherever His feet have walked all these centuries, flowers of joy, of hope, of peace, of life, of love have grown. He is changing the wilderness, into a garden of roses.

The life of each one is a little garden which he is to dress and keep. In an ancient Bible song, the story of such a garden is told. It is not some other one's garden we are to keep--but our own. Some of us find it easier to look after the gardens of our neighbors, than our own little patch. But that is not our duty.

The ancient song further represents this garden, as not at its best. Then there is a prayer to the winds that they may come with their awakening breath, to blow upon it, to call out its beauty and sweetness. Without over spiritualizing, this prayer may be taken to suggest what is needed in very many lives. "Awake, north wind! Come, south wind! Blow on my garden and waft its lovely perfume to my lover. Let him come into his garden and eat its choicest fruits." Song of Songs 4:16

The suggestion is that the trees, plants, and flowers in the garden are still lying in the clasp of winter. We know how it is, just before spring comes. The trees are bare--but there are thousands of buds only waiting for the breath of the warm sunshine to make them burst into living blossom. The rose bushes are bare and briery and without beauty--but it needs only spring's genial air and gentle rains to clothe them in marvelous loveliness. The fields are dreary and without life--but there are millions of green roots waiting only for the wooing of spring skies, to make them rush up into greenness and verdure.

It is such a picture as this that is suggested in the prayer to the winds: "Awake, O winds, and blow upon this wintry scene--to call out the beauty, the fragrance, the life."

Is this not also a true picture of many of our lives? Are not our gifts and powers lying in unopened buds? Are we living at our best? Are our lives as beautiful as they might be? Are we as useful, as thoughtful, as helpful to others, as obliging and kind--as we could be? Is there not need that we pray this prayer continually: "Awake, O winds of God, and blow upon the winter locked garden of my heart that the chilled life in it may flow out"? The prayer suggests that only the Spirit of God can call out the gifts and graces of our lives. We cannot wake up the love for others in our hearts, without the divine inspiration.

When Henry Martyn reached India he wrote in his journal, "I desire to burn out for my God." Such a passion can be kindled only by the divine breath. The beautiful qualities of Christian character are not mere natural abilities and virtues; they are spoken of in the Scriptures as fruits of the Spirit. If our garden is to come to its true beauty--our prayer must be that the winds of God may awake and blow upon it. Nothing will bring out the life of the gardens and fields after the chill winter--but the warmth of the sun. Nothing but the love of God will woo out the spiritual powers and possibilities within us. Even the Disciples of Christ, after being with Him for three years, were not ready for service--until the wind of Heaven blew upon them on the day of Pentecost.

Two winds are called upon here, or rather one wind in two kinds of effect: "Awake, north wind! Come, south wind!" The chill north wind is needed to clear and purify the air. In spiritual life, there is need also for the north wind to prepare for the breath of the south wind.

There is the north wind of conviction. We must become conscious of our sinfulness and realize our need of Christ, before we are ready to turn to Him. David became penitent and said, "I have sinned!" and Nathan said to him, "The Lord has also put away your sin." A Jewish myth relates that at the place where David wept a day and a night over his great sin, an incense tree sprang up. Incense is the emblem of praise. The joy of salvation comes out of the sorrow of penitence. Where the volcanic dust from Mount Pelee settled after the terrible eruption, sweet flowers soon began to bloom. The ashes from great calamities, make fruitful soil in human lives in which the graces and virtues grow luxuriantly. The north wind of conviction prepares the air for noble life and strong character.

Then there is also the north wind of sorrow. We dread sorrow--but we have the Master's word--that it is those who mourn who are blessed. Christ's marvelous comfort cannot come--except where sorrow has been. The north wind must blow with its keen, cleansing blast--before the south wind can bring its blessing of love and fruitfulness. When Lord Houghton had lost his wife, Tennyson wrote him this letter: "I was the other day present at a funeral, and one of the chief mourners reached me her hand silently, over the grave--and I as silently gave her mine. No words were possible. And this little note which can do really nothing to help you in your great sorrow--is just such a reaching of the hand to you, my old college comrade of more than forty years' standing, to show you that I am thinking of you."

What a thrill of comfort these simple words gave the mourner! His friend poured upon the great wound in his heart--the healing love of his own heart. It was the richest, divinest gift Tennyson could have given to his friend. But this he never could have given to him--but for the sorrow which opened the way. Likewise, we cannot get God's wondrous blessing of comfort--His love, sympathy, tenderness, strength, healing--until sorrow has prepared us for receiving it. The north wind must blow upon us with its sharp, biting breath--and then we are ready for the warm south wind to come with its breath of heavenly life. "Come, O south wind! Blow on my garden and waft its lovely perfume to my lover."

Some who are reading these words understand the meaning of this prayer. There was a day when there was in you a cry for life which was answered. The garden of your heart was winter-locked. There was capacity, almost measureless capacity for beauty, for spiritual fruitfulness, for sweetness--but all these wonderful possibilities were slumbering within you. You were not living at your best. Your life lacked richness, sympathy, tenderness. You were not giving out love in service to others. Your character was lacking in winsomeness and charm. Your garden was full of trees and plants that had in them possibilities of fruitfulness and fragrance--but it was only winter yet, when the time for summer was at hand.

Then came sorrow. You remember the day; you never can forget how the north wind blew upon your heart with its biting breath. At first it seemed that every living thing in your garden must be destroyed. But soon the warm south wind began to pour its soft, gentle breath upon you. It was the love of Christ. It was the breathing of the divine Spirit. "Come, O south wind! Blow on my garden and waft its lovely perfume to my lover." Your prayer was answered. The winter melted, and the fragrant plants and trees gave out their sweetness. Life has meant a thousand times more to you--since that day of great sorrow. Many others are feeding now on the fruits of your love. The world is richer for your life and your ministry.

What month is it in which we are living today? We say it is October. But is it really October in the calendar of our spiritual life? October is the time of ripe fruitfulness. The farmers are gathering in the products of the summer. October means ripeness. But is it October in our life? Is it really past March yet? March is the month of bare trees, unopened buds, imprisoned beauty, and slumbering life. Is it March--or is it October with us? If it is only March, shall we not pray for the winds of God to blow upon us and waft its sweet graces to Jesus!

### The Awakening of Life's Glory

Not one of us ever dreams of all the possibilities of his life. The plainest of us, carries concealed splendors within him. If we knew what noble qualities are lying undeveloped in us, what virtues are waiting to be called out, what fine things we may achieve in the years before us--it ought to inspire us to our best life and effort. Perhaps no one ever does reach in this world--all that he might attain.

In one of the Psalms is a suggestive call to awake. The writer cries to himself as one calling another from sleep; "Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp." His harp had been hanging on the wall silent, its strings untouched, and he would rouse himself--that the harp might awake. All of us at times need to make this call upon ourselves. The harps are lying silent in our hearts. We do not rejoice any more. No songs break from our lips.

The figure of instruments of music sleeping--is very suggestive. They are capable of giving out rich strains--but not a note is heard from them. Sometimes it is sorrow which silences the song. Sometimes it is weariness. Sometimes it is discouragement. Whatever the cause, it is not fitting that we should remain songless. The ideal Christian life is one of joy. Christ Himself always rejoiced, though His life was so full of sorrows. He sang a hymn of praise as He was leaving the upper room for Gethsemane. His harp never was songless. We are not like our Master when our hearts do not sing. We should call upon our silent harps to awake.

But there is a wider application. Our lives are to be songs--but music is not all. "Awake up, my glory." What is this glory which is in a man, and which needs to be wakened up? When we think of it, all life is glorious in itself and also in its possibilities. Glory is a great word. In the dictionary it has many definitions. It means brightness, splendor, luster, honor, greatness, excellence. It always has in it, a suggestion of something divine. The word is fitly used of human life. It would take a whole library of books to answer the question, "What is man?" An old writer speaks of man as being "not only the noblest creature in the world--but even a very world in himself." Merely to describe the mechanism of the human hand--and to give a record of the wonderful achievements the hand has wrought, would require a volume. Or the eye with its marvelous structure, or the ear with its delicate functions, or the brain with its amazing processes, or the heart, or the lungs--each of the organs in a bodily organism is so wonderful, that a whole lifetime might be devoted to the study of anatomy alone--and the subject would not be exhausted.

Then that is not all of man. Think of the intellectual part, with all that the mind of man has achieved in literature, in science, in art, in invention, in music. Think of the moral part, man's immortal nature, his spiritual nature, that in man which makes him like God, capable of holding communion with God and of belonging to the family of God. When we begin to think even most superficially of what man is--we see an almost infinite meaning in the word "glory" as defining life.

No one in the highest flights of imagination, has ever begun to dream of the full content of his own life, what it is at present--and then what it may become under the influence of divine love and grace. Even now, man is but "a little lower than God." "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be." The full glory is hidden, unrevealed, as a marvelous rose is hidden in a little bud in springtime. All we know about our future--is that we shall be like Christ. We are awed even by such a hint of what we shall be, when the work in us is completed.

The call to awake, implies that the glory in us is asleep and needs to be awakened. For one thing, not one of us has more than the faintest conception of the potential greatness, the beauty, the power of his own life. We do not think of ourselves as enfolding splendors. We travel over seas to look at scenes of grandeur, to study works of art, to see wonders of nature--while we have in ourselves greater grandeur, rarer beauty, and sublimer art--than any land has to show us. We should pray to be made conscious of our own glory!

Then we should seek to awake all these marvelous powers. The harp is standing silent--when it might be pouring out entrancing music. The hand is folded and idle--when it might be doing beautiful things--painting a picture that would charm the world, doing a deed of kindness that would give gladness to a gentle heart, visiting a sick or suffering one and winning the commendation, "You did it unto Me." The power of sympathy is sleeping in our hearts when it might be adding strength to human weakness on one of life's battlefields, making struggling ones braver, and inspiring them to victory.

If we would have our glory waked up when we must seek to have all the best that is in us called out. There is a familiar story of Cromwell, that coming upon twelve silver statues he asked, "What are these?" "The twelve apostles," he was told. Then he gave orders that they should be melted down and coined, and the money distributed among the poor. He said the real apostles went about doing good, and would not be pleased to see their statues standing up in niches, merely as ornament. The glory of our lives is not given us for admiration, for adorning--but for service. Consecration means becoming a living sacrifice.

In one of Paul's letters to Timothy, the old apostle gave this young man a most earnest charge. He bade him stir up the gift of God that was in him. Timothy was not doing his best. The glory in him was not shining out, was not warming and brightening the world as it should. The picture in Paul's mind as he wrote, was that of a fire covered up, smouldering, and he bade Timothy stir it up that it might burn into a flame. There is no lack of spiritual gifts with splendid possibilities in the hearts and lives of Christian people--but they are not at their best, and need to be stirred up.

We hold ourselves back from the full service to which the Master calls us. We do not like to make sacrifices. We have not realized that there is no true glory in life--until it has reached the point of sacrifice.

One was speaking the other day of another who for years had professed faithful friendship--but whom the moment that friendship demanded an act of self denial--had failed and fell back. Nothing ever really begins to count as worthy living--until love passes out of commonplace expression, into the splendor of sacrifice. There is no true glory in life--there may be beauty, there may be winsomeness--but there is no glory, in any service for Christ--if it stops short of sacrifice. When we cry, "Awake up, my glory," we must be ready to go out to self denial, to hunger and thirst, to suffering, to death. It is said that when Dr. Temple was Bishop of London he sent a young man to a position involving much hardship. The young man's friends tried to dissuade him from accepting it, and he went to the bishop and told him that he believed he would not live two years if he accepted the appointment. Dr. Temple listened and replied somewhat in this way: "But you and I do not mind a little thing like that--do we?"

We have been used so long--to easy-going self-indulgent ways--that our ideal of true Christian life is low. The best in us never has been called out. Perhaps none of us ever has risen to his best in anything. The boys and girls have not reached their best in school--they might have done better. The artist's picture might have been a little more beautiful, a little more artistic in its technique, a little finer in its sentiment. The singer might have sung her song a little better, with more heart, more sweetly, with less of self consciousness. The best day any of us ever lived--we might have made a little purer, fuller of duties done, more sacred in its memories. In Christian life, not one of us is as good, as useful, as unselfish, as thoughtful, as holy in influence, as we might be. We should get this great word "glory," as defining our life, so fixed in our minds--that we shall never forget it. The word calls us to our best. No other living is worthy.

Recently a Swiss vase, about sixteen inches in height, was put up at auction. No history of it was given. But the vase was so exquisite in its beauty and so surely genuine, that it brought more than twenty

thousand dollars. Yet this rare thing was once a mere lump of common clay with a few moist colors on it. The value was in the toil and skill of the artist who shaped and colored it with such delicate patience. He did his best, and the vase witnesses today to his devotion and faithfulness.

The frieze on the Parthenon at Athens was chiefly the work of Phidias. The figures were life size and stood fifty feet above the floor of the temple. For nearly two thousand years the work remained undisturbed. Near the close of the seventeenth century the frieze was shattered and its fragments fell upon the pavement. Then it was seen that in the smallest detail the work was perfect. Phidias had wrought for the eyes of the gods--for no human eyes could see his work. We should do perfect work, even when we work most obscurely, for nothing less is worthy the glory of our own life. We should set higher ideals for ourselves. We are not worms of the dust--we are immortal spirits, and this dignifies the lowest thing we do. Sweeping a room for Christ, is glorious work. Cobbling shoes may be made as radiant service in Heaven's sight--as angel ministry before God's throne. The glory is in ourselves, and we must express it in all that we do.

We should never rest content with any achievement or attainment, as if it were the best we can reach. We never attain our largest opportunity--there is always new land to discover beyond that which we have taken possession of.

There is no end to the sky. There is no limit to life. There is always something beyond. He, who thinks there is nothing further, nothing beyond where he is now, does not understand the meaning of the glory of life. The ancients wrote, "Nothing more beyond." On the Pillars of Hercules. That was the end of the world, they said. But one man heard the interminable whisper, "A continent beyond. Go and find it," and Columbus sailed away and discovered a new world. We settle down in our little circle of life and opportunity, and suppose we have done our best; but the glory which is in us, ever whispers of something greater and worthier, and calls us to go out to find it!

#### The Servant of the Lord

The Messiah is spoken of in the Old Testament many times--as the Servant of the Lord. This may seem a strange name to give to one of such high honor. We believe that He was divine. How then could He be the Servant of God? Is there not here a contradiction in terms? A servant fills a lowly and a subordinate place. He is one who does the will of another. He does not belong to himself. He cannot make and carry out his own plans. He represents another and comes and goes at the call of another. He receives directions and must obey without question, without liberty of choice. How then could the Son of God be the Servant of the Lord?

We have but to turn to the New Testament to find that Jesus gladly accepted the name and the place of servant. He was the Servant of the Lord in His submission of His life to His Father's will, and His Father's plan. His first recorded words were: "Don't you know that I must be about My Father's business?" At the last He declared that He had accomplished all that the Father had given Him to do. He never did His own will--but always God's will.

Then, in His relation to men--He was also a Servant. When, at the Last Supper, His disciples contended among themselves as to who was greatest, Jesus told them that the world's standard was not to be the standard among them. "But he who is greatest among you--let him be as the younger; and he who is chief--as he who does serve." Then He added: "I am in the midst of you as he who serves." Rising from supper, and girding Himself as a servant, He then washed His disciples' feet, thus doing the work of the

lowest and most menial servant.

There is no contradiction, therefore, between the truth of the divine Sonship and this, that He was also the Servant of the Lord. Service is not lowly--it is divine. God Himself serves. Those highest in rank in this world--are those who serve the most cheerfully, the most self forgetfully. "Ich dien" is the motto of the Prince of Wales. The origin of the motto dates back more than five hundred and fifty years. It was originally the motto of John of Luxemburg, King of Bohemia, who was killed at the battle of Crecy in 1346. Edward found the King dead on the field, with the royal flag on his breast, and on his crest were the words, "Ich dien"--"I serve." Edward gave it to his son, and now for more than five hundred and fifty years it has been an adopted sign, a heritage of voluntary service. There could be no more royal motto for one to wear, who is preparing to rule. A true ruler, is the nation's first servant. The noblest and most manly man in any community, is he who most devotedly, most unselfishly, with sincerest love and interest--serves his fellow men.

If we would but get this law of service into all our home life--it would make us sweetly thoughtful of everyone, and lead us to countless attentions and services which would change our homes into places of heaven-like love. If we would learn to serve as Christ did--it would make us think of others around us, not as those from whom we may get some gain, exact some attention or promotion--but as those to whom we may impart some good, render some service.

In one passage in Isaiah there is a wonderful picture of this Servant of the Lord. He works quietly. "He will not cry out, nor lift up His voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street." That was not true in those times of the great men of the world, who sought to make an impression. They gathered armies and made the earth tremble with their tread. Men were supposed to be powerful according to the display they made. But of the Messiah it was said, "He will not cry out." Jesus wrought quietly. He went about among the people--but moved quietly. He never advertised Himself. He knew that there was no real power in noisy cries, that the power was in the words spoken, and not in the scream or shriek with which they were uttered.

Jesus said one day to the people gathered about Him: "Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It was a quiet word, quietly spoken--but it had in it tremendous power--power which has been going out over the world ever since, like a breath of God, falling into human hearts, wooing weary ones to Christ. Yet that was only one of Christ's countless quiet words. He did not cry out, He did not scream or shout, yet never has the world heard such words as He spoke. "You can paint fire," said an old writer, "but you cannot paint heat." Yet, it is the heat and not the flame which warms a room. It is not the noise, the elocution that touches people's hearts and changes their lives--it is the truth which the speaker's voice gives out.

Another feature of the Messiah's work was that "His voice was not heard in the streets." Jesus did not look favorably on the street displays of religion in His days. He did not like the way some men prayed on the highways, making long prayers in conspicuous ways--to be seen of men--to be thought pious and devout. He condemned the giving of alms, when men as it were, sounded a trumpet in the streets to call people to come and see how they gave, the real purpose being that they might have glory of men. Jesus had only condemnation for piety which sought to impress people so as to get the world's praise.

No man heard His voice in the streets. This does not mean that He never spoke on the streets. It means that He did no religious act for display. In His own personal devotions He sought the cover of the night, or rose up a great while before day, and went away to the mountains or into the depths of some quiet

garden, or into the desert, when He prayed. He also bade His disciples to enter into their closets and shut their doors when they prayed. This does not mean that they were never to pray in public--we are oftentimes to make our voice heard on the streets, both in prayer and in speech for God. But the meaning is that we are never to seek to advertise ourselves, or our religion--but are to seek always to get people to see Christ--not to see us!

The Messiah is described also as very gentle. "A bruised reed will He not break, and a dimly burning wick will He not quench." He does not pass by a bruised reed--as either worthless or hopeless. He says that it can be restored, and that it is worth while to mend it and make it whole again. Of course we understand that it is not mere reeds which the Prophet had in mind. No doubt Jesus was gentle even to broken and bruised plants. His heart is wonderfully loving and kind. We cannot think of Him, even as needlessly bruising a rose, or the tiniest flower. But what the Prophet means, when he refers to bruised reeds, is lives which have been bruised or hurt by sin or sorrow.

Take the other metaphor, "He will not quench a dimly burning wick." There is no longer any flame in the lamp--there is only a little smoke curling from it, pouring into the room oftentimes offensive odor. This represents a man out of whose life has gone nearly the last influence of the divine Spirit. There seems nothing of hope left, not a trace of anything good. Still there is a faint spark of the life of God remaining in the man's heart. This spark, Christ will not quench. No soul is ever without hope if only it is committed to the love and care of the Servant of the Lord.

J. H. Jowett has given us a beautiful suggestion about the bruised reed. He says it is a common custom in Syria, to cut a reed and use it for a staff to lean on when walking. As one climbs a hill, however, and bears more of his weight on his staff, it sometimes gives way and the reed becomes cracked and bruised. All a man can do then with his shattered staff is to break it altogether off and throw it away as a worthless thing. These poor reeds are symbols, Mr. Jowett suggests, of people on whom we have leaned and who have failed us. We trusted them and helped them in some time of need in their lives, and they did not prove loyal and true. We showed them kindness when they were in trouble and turned to us for help--but they forgot the kindness. They broke their word to us. The staff became a bruised reed.

Now what should we do? Should we deal harshly with them? Should we cherish vindictiveness towards them? Should we cast them off and say we will have nothing more to do with them? What would Jesus do? "A bruised reed will He not break." We need the gentleness of Christ, in dealing with those who have failed us or proved ungrateful for our kindness.

Someone says: "It is more God-like to love one little child purely and unselfishly, than to have a heart filled with a thousand vast, vague aspirations after things which we cannot understand." It is more Christlike to keep on loving still and being patient with and kind to one person who has failed us and treated us meanly and ungratefully, forgetting our kindness to him in his sore need, and breaking his promise to us--it is more Christlike to keep on loving one such person than it is to go about for a whole year doing kindly things for those who are always good to us. Anybody can be kind to those who are kind to him! A Christian should be kind to those who fail him and hurt and wrong him!

This wonderful picture of Christ's gentleness and kindness to men in their last resorts of need, suggest to us that we should always live kindly and helpfully toward others. People about us need nothing so much as simple kindness. Hundreds are dying for it--for just such little common kindness as you could show--if only you would. One writes:

"So many gods, so many creeds,  
So many paths that wind and wind,  
When just the art of being kind  
Is all this sad world needs."

Another quality in the character of this Servant of the Lord, is that He never grows disheartened. "He will not fail nor be discouraged, until He has set justice in the earth." Good Christian people sometimes lose heart as they labor faithfully and see no results--as they sow diligently and gather no harvests. It is a splendid tonic for such faintness, to read that the Christ is never discouraged; that He will never fail--but will surely finish His work. Let us take this splendid optimism anew into our own hearts. Many of us get disheartened too easily. There is always hurt and danger in discouragement. One hour of losing heart, does us harm from which it takes us days to recover. Yielding to disheartenment, even only once, may be the beginning of a weakening process which shall grow into a habit in us--the end of which shall be the loss of all power to be brave and strong any more. The greatest kindness any teacher can do to those he teaches, is to help them always to live a life of faith and courage--a victorious life.

There are two little rules which, if we would observe them, would work a marvelous change in most of our lives. One is, "Never be discouraged." The other is, "Never be a discourager." We do not dare to be discouraged, for instantly then we become a discourager, and we can never know the harm we may do the other lives, by uttering our fears and doubts.

#### Christ's Call for the Best

Christ knows what is in man. When He looks upon us, He sees not only what we are--but also what we may become. The gardener in the early springtime, when he looks at the bare, briery bush in his garden, sees in it a vision of glorious roses--what it will be in June under his culture. Christ looks upon a young life as it stands before Him and sees in it, beneath its unattractiveness, a vision of splendid manhood, and calls for its fulfillment.

When Simon was introduced to Him, Jesus looked upon him intently and said: "You are Simon... you shall be called Peter." He saw the best in the old fisherman. Nobody else saw in him what Jesus saw. Other people saw only uncouthness, an over measure of self confidence, a sort of rugged but undisciplined strength, rashness, impulsiveness, a certain coarseness and rudeness. Nobody saw in Simon of the fishing boat anything great or beautiful. But Jesus saw in him large possibilities, elements of power--all that he man afterward became. In the rough, impetuous Simon--He saw the firm strong, and masterful Peter of the apostolic days.

Jesus always saw the best in every man or woman. He saw the possible good there was in the publican, Levi, under all his greed and dishonesty, and called him to be one of His friends. He saw the vision of a white soul, in the outcast woman who lie at His feet, and spoke to her, words of mercy and hope which saved her. He saw the good waiting to be brought out in every one who came into His presence.

There is something good in every life. Some people never see anything beautiful in any other one. They see, instead, the faults, the blemishes, the follies, the frailties. They see these lacks and flaws because that is what they are looking for. So long as we look upon people in this hopeless way--we cannot do anything to make them better. We must have an eye for the best that is in men, and be able to find beauty

and good in every life--if we would inspire them to reach their best.

The new name which Jesus gave this fisherman had in it a vision of the man that was to be. The giving of the name, with its prophecy of strength, security, and worthiness was the Master's call for all that was good in Simon. It would have been a bitter disappointment to Him if the rough fisherman had never become anything but what he was that day. Then what a loss to the world it would have been!

Yet Simon's character was not changed instantly--it was the work of years, even in the hands of Christ, to make the transformation. Work on lives is always slow. Some people speak as if becoming a Christian were a sudden matter, the work of a moment. The beginning of a Christian life may be sudden--one minute not a Christian, next minute a Christian. But this is only the beginning, and there is a great deal after that. The beginning is only an unopened bud--it takes time for the bud to open into the full, rich beauty of the rose. It often takes God many days to open a little flower. It takes Him much longer to bring a life to its full bloom and beauty.

A child had been playing in the garden one day, and when she came in her mother said, "What have you been doing, my dear?" "Helping God, mother," said the little one. "How have you been helping God?" asked the mother. "I saw a flower going to blossom, and I blossomed it," answered the child. There are some people who think they are helping God when doing just what this child did. God does not want help in opening His buds and blossoming His roses. The buds must be opened and the roses blossomed in nature's gentle way, in God's way. To blossom them before their time, would be to ruin them.

We need to be most careful in our culture of spiritual life in other, especially in children. Violence and forcing may do incalculable harm. Many a child's life fails of its rarest beauty, because its development is hastened. Rosebuds need only air, sunshine, and rain to bring out their beauty. The best thing we can do to develop spiritual life is to give an atmosphere of love and purity to those we seek to bless.

The beginning of new life in Simon, was when he met with Jesus. A new human friendship oftentimes colors all one's future. To know that somebody cares for us, that somebody is interested in us, means a great deal to any of us. A Christian man tells of finding a poor lame boy in the school he was teaching. The boy was lonely and a cripple. He told the teacher one day, a little about himself. His father had been killed in the mill and the family was poor. "I want to be somebody," said the boy, and he won the teacher's heart by his longing. The teacher spoke to him encouragingly, laying his hand upon the boy's head and saying, "I want you to know that I love you and will be your friend."

That was a divine moment for the little fellow. "Did you say you loved me?" he asked, later. "Yes," replied the teacher. "O sir, if you love me, I will be a man yet, by God's help." It was the love of Jesus for Simon, shown that day in His interest in him and His encouragement, which was the beginning of a new life in him. Then the giving of the new name meant a great deal. Jesus loved him, and that thrilled him with a new hope.

One of the finest secrets of helpfulness, is the power to encourage others. Discouragement quenches many noble possibilities--but encouragement is inspiring. You think that you cannot make much of your life, that you cannot do anything good or beautiful. Your friends seem to think so, too--and you settle down to a hopeless feeling of insignificance. Then someone comes who sees capacity in you, who catches sight of a gleam of gold in the sand, who discovers possibilities in your life which you never imagined were there, and tells you what he sees. You know what that means to you. Jesus saw a Peter in the rough Simon before Him. Then Simon began to see the Peter, too.

"You are Simon--you shall be called Peter." That is what Christ says to every one of us when we come to Him. He sees in us possible beauty of character and possible power for service--and at once seeks to call out the hidden things in us. The process is not always easy--sometimes it is very hard. It will help us to get it clearly in our minds, that the aim of Christ in all the experiences of our lives is definitely this--to train us for fine and worthy manhood. It will steady our faith and help us to trust in time of suffering and trial, if we understand that nothing is purposeless, nothing accidental, that nothing is meant to harm us, that everything is intended to help us toward noble character and fuller, richer life.

Sorrow sometimes staggers us. There is a mystery about it which we cannot solve. One was telling of the intense suffering of a father. He could get no relief from his pain, except under the influence of strong opiates. At times his pain was almost unendurable. "I cannot understand why God permits it," said his daughter. "He has always been such a good man, so gentle, so kindly, so unselfish, and so faithful! Why is it that now he has to endure such suffering?" No one can answer this question definitely, to say just why this good man suffers so sorely--yet we know that blessing and good will surely come out of the experience. Possibly he is suffering that his own life may be made more pure, more radiant. Possibly he is permitted to suffer as a witness for Christ--his patience, trust, and joy being the fruit of the Spirit in him. In some way at least we know that pain is meant to yield blessing--to him who endures it, or to those who look on and note the courage and victoriousness with which it is borne. Of one thing we may always be sure--it is because God loves us, that we are called or permitted to suffer. Indeed it was in the same way that the best in Jesus Himself was called out; for we read that He was "made perfect through suffering."

We should get it settled in our minds, that the purpose of God for our life on earth, is to have us grow into Christ's image. The divine purpose for Simon, from the day he was first brought to Christ, was to have him become Peter. The master has the same vision for each one of us. We are not in this world merely to accomplish a certain amount of work--but to be fashioned into strength and beauty of character. If we would always remember this, we would not be perplexed so often by the mysteries of our lives.

If joy is ours--it is to make us better and a greater blessing to others. If sorrow is ours--it is to purify us and bring out some line of Christ's image in us more clearly. If our hopes are disappointed, it is because God has some better things for us, than that which we so earnestly desired. If we are called to endure pain, it is because the best in us can be called out only by pain. If bereavement comes and we are left without the strong human arm we have leaned upon heretofore, it is because there are elements of strength in our life that never could be developed unless the human supports were taken away. If our burdens are heavy, it is because we grow best under burdens. If we are wronged by others, it is to teach us better the great lessons of patience and sweet temper. If our circumstances are uncongenial and our condition hard, it is that we may be disciplined into self control, and may learn to be content in whatever state we are. The Master is always teaching us new lessons, making us into the beauty of the pattern He has set for us, and preparing us for greater usefulness and better service.

Christ calls on everyone for his best. We have not yet reached the best. There are qualities slumbering in us which, if waked, and called out--would make us nobler, worthier, and more useful. There are gifts in us, even unsuspected now, which if discovered, developed, and given to Christ--will add immeasurably to the value of our lives. Think of this old fisherman, pulling ropes, dragging nets, selling fish, blustering, swearing, uncouth, uncultured--yet having in him, undreamed of either by himself or by his neighbors--all the splendid powers which afterward were brought out by Christ's teaching and training, making him one of the mightiest forces for good the world has ever known.

There are many Simons today, men and women, moving in the commonplaces of life, not doing much for the Master, or to make the world better--yet having in them undiscovered qualities, unimagined powers, which if found and brought out would make them great blessings in the world. The Master is looking upon them with love, saying: "You are Simon, only a common man, with little beauty of character, with small powers of usefulness, not doing much good, filling now only a little place; but you shall be called Peter, revealing splendid capacities for service and for usefulness, and blessing the world with your ministry of love."

### What Christ Expects of Us

Christ expects a great deal of His followers. He is not satisfied to have them just as good as other people--He wants them to be better. "What do you do--more than others?" is the question with which He tests them.

There are many reasons why Christians should surpass others in their life, and in their character and service. One is, because they have such a leader as Jesus Christ. Leadership is important in all work. Poor leadership is responsible for many a failure. It is so in business. It is so in civic affairs. It is so in war. It is so in church life. We have One going before us--who is wise, safe, strong, courageous, and unconquerable. With such a leader, Christians should surpass all others in their own personal lives, in their attainments and achievements, in their spiritual growth, in their splendid service, in their heroic struggles, in their victories.

Then Christians should be better and do more than others, because Christ gives ability and strength as well as leadership. His message is not merely, "Follow me" it is also, "Because I live--you shall live also." He puts His own divine life into those who follow Him. He is reincarnated in them. In themselves they have no more strength than other men, no more wisdom, and no more ability. But with the grace of Christ in them, they can accomplish what without Christ's help, would be impossibilities. "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me," said Paul. With divine life in them--they should do more than others.

The Sermon on the Mount, is a summary of duty in the kingdom of heaven. It is Christ's own interpretation of the commandments. That is the way our Master would have His followers live. We do not read far into this sermon, without finding that He expects from us a very lofty life. At the very beginning we have the Beatitudes. One says to a young friend: "I want to help you to be as beautiful as God meant you to be--when He first thought of you." That is what Jesus says to His followers in the Beatitudes. He makes it very plain that He is not content with ordinary religious standards in His disciples. "I say unto you, that except you righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven." The common religious life of the day, was not the ideal for them.

In His interpretation of the sixth commandment Jesus taught that every bitter thought or feeling is a violation of the law. Anger is murder, hatred is murder. The religious teachers of that day said that men should love their neighbors--but they defined neighbors to mean only a few congenial people. They said expressly, that no enemy was their neighbor, and they read the law thus: "You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy. The new interpretation, however, reads: "I say unto you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." The meaning of the words was illustrated further: "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the publicans the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you more than others? Do not even the Gentiles the same?" There is a higher standard for Christians, than for other people.

The teaching may be applied to home life. The Christian's home should be in every way--happier, sweeter, and holier, than the home which is not Christian. When Jesus sent out His disciples, He bade them say at every door which opened to them, "Peace be to this house." We are at much pains to please the honored and beloved friend who stays with us for a day or a week. We give him the best room. We shape all our household life, our engagements, our occupations, our hours, our meals, our pleasures, our conversation, to make him happy. We try to be at our best in our behavior. We seek to make the home atmosphere congenial to him. What kind of home should we make ours when Christ, the Son of God, is our guest? Love should abound. Jesus was glad to be guest in the home of Martha and Mary. If there is any nagging, wrangling, contention, strife, unrest in that home, would He have continued to come and to stay there?

Love should find expression, too, in the Christian home. One writes from a home which is described as beautiful, luxurious, with everything in it which taste can desire, which money can buy, with plenty, with all adornments. But in the center of all this, the letter reveals a hungry heart, crying out for love. All was cold and stately, and without tenderness. A Christian home should be sweetened by affectionate expression.

Home should also be a place of prayer. They say family worship is dying out in many Christian homes. Where family worship dies out--the loss to the home is incalculable. It is in prayer, that we get the grace we need to make our own life sweet, pure, gentle, kindly. In prayer we call down heaven's peace and love. The gate of prayer opens into heaven--and then heaven's pure blessing pours in. At the time of the great darkness in the land of Egypt, there was light in the homes of Israel. There should be light in every Christian home--while the near by worldly home is dark. The Christian's home should be happier, brighter, and heavenlier, than the one next door where Christ is not a guest.

The same test should be applied to business life. Is the Christian's store a different kind of store from that of his neighbor who is not a Christian? Is the business done in a different way, a way that distinctly characterizes it as ruled by a heavenly spirit? Are different methods employed? Are people who buy goods any surer of being honestly dealt with in Mr. Christian-man's store--than they are in the store of Mr. Worldly-man, on the other side of the street? Do they receive more courteous treatment? Is there a higher standard of business honesty in it?

Is the Christian carpenter a better carpenter, and does he do more skillful and more conscientious work, than the carpenter over the way who does not follow Christ? Is the Christian builder a better builder, than the one who is not a Christian? Does he put more honest work into his houses, better materials, better masonry, better carpentering, better plumbing, better roofing--than the other man does? "What do you Christians--more than others?

A successful business man was asked for the primary rule of Christian business life. He answered, "To think of the other man." He said, in explanation: "I can afford to lose in a transaction--but I cannot afford to have my customer lose. I may be the victim of misrepresentation--but I must never allow him to suffer from false statements or from any concealed defects in the goods I sell to him. He must learn to trust me implicitly and to know that I would a hundred times rather suffer loss myself--than to cause or allow him to suffer loss." This is the only wise business policy, as well as the only right thing to do. A business man cannot afford to take advantage of his customer. It is suicidal for him to do so. He may pocket a little more money once or twice--but he has lost his reputation, which is his best asset. While this is good business, it is also good religion. We must think of the other man's interest--as well as our own--before our own. How is it in fact, among Christian people? What do Christian business men do--more than those who are not Christians? Does the world see any difference?

The same rule should apply in our personal relations with others. Is there anything in our life and character and conduct, which distinguish us from those with whom we associate who are not Christians? Are we better than they are? Are we more patient? Are we more thoughtful and unselfish? Are we kinder and more helpful as neighbors? A Christian woman said: "That rule of conduct that has done most for me in my life--I found the other day in a newspaper. It is this: 'Make yourself good--and make other people happy.'" We are first to make ourselves good, to hold ourselves to a most rigid devotion to high ideals. Some people are a great deal more anxious to make other people good, rather than themselves. They would reverse this rule, and make others good--and themselves happy. But that is not Christ's way.

It is a bad sign when a Christian is heard complaining about others not being good. It suggests the parable of the mote and the beam, which cannot be too often called to mind by Christian people. It suggests also the Master's word, "Judge not--that you be not judged." We should look after our own life--that is the only life for which we shall have to give account. We should watch our own temper--this will give us quite enough to do. We should be sure to be honest ourselves, not watching to see if others are honest. We should be holy, loving, and true--ourselves. Then, as to others, we should do all we can for them, to help them, to cheer and strengthen them. We should be their friends, to serve them, giving up our own ease to assist them. We should seek to make others happy.

Do people see Christ in us--in so marked a way, that they know we must be His friends? Are Christian young people so different from young people who are not Christians, that no one needs to ask if they are Christians? Do they show by their lives that, though in the world--they are not of the world? Are they less selfish than those who are not Christians? Do they do more deeds of kindness? Are they more reverent? Their names are on the church roll, and they are seen at the communion: are there any other things in them that unmistakably distinguish them from young people whose names are not on any church roll, who are seen at no communion? What should the difference be?

Jesus said: "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples--if you have loved one to another." "Love one to another" means a great deal. It means gentleness, kindness, charity, thoughtfulness, helpfulness, patience, and forbearance. Does the Master see this mark in the young people who call themselves His followers? Is their love so unselfish that its influence pervades the neighborhood where they live, like a sweet fragrance? Are they better than the world's young people? "What do you do--more than others?"

The word "do" in the Master's question should be emphasized. Jesus does not ask, "What do you believe--more than others?" It is well to believe right. Wrong beliefs lead to wrong living. But that is not the test our Master sets. "What do you do--more than others?" is His question. There are some who believe splendidly, but do almost nothing. It is doing that is the distinguishing mark of those who love Christ. Others hear; these do. Those who please Christ are those who do His will. His followers are sent out into the world, not merely to know, to believe, to make profession of His name, to dream--but to do. "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them." Knowing is well--but doing must follow. He who only hears Christ's words and does them not--is like a man who built his house upon the sand. But he who hears the words of Christ and does them--builds on the rock, and his life shall be secure forever.

### The Lesson of Perfection

Many people stumble over the word perfect, as used in the Bible. It occurs frequently. Yet we know that the perfect men of the Bible were not sinless. Noah became drunk. Abraham certainly equivocated, if he did not lie directly. Job got provoked and said bitter things against his friends. Then Paul, in the same

chapter in which he speaks of himself and others as perfect, says: "Not that I am already made perfect--but I press on."

Perfection, therefore, does not always mean sinlessness. Sometimes it means the final, complete attainment; then sometimes the word is used only relatively. Noah was perfect in his generation--but if he had lived in these Christian days, his life and conduct would have fallen woefully below the true standard of saintliness. A teacher says of her little pupil, "She plays perfectly." She means that the pupil has mastered her exercises and has played them without making a mistake. But the child has been taking lessons only one term. "Perfectly" refers to the pupil's work as a beginner, while there yet are years and years of study and practice before her. A green apple may be perfect as any green apple--but it is not a perfect apple yet; it is not ripe, mellow or luscious, as it will be weeks or months later. A child Christian may be perfect as a child Christian, untempted, undisciplined, untrained, inexperienced as yet, and beautiful in its innocence and simplicity, with hard lessons yet to learn. But forty or fifty years later its life will mean far more.

A mother and her child sit side by side in the same company. Both love Christ and are following Him. The girl is sweet, beautiful, a picture of grace. She never has known a struggle, has scarcely ever been called to make a sacrifice, and has never found it hard to do right. Her face is fair, without a line. The mother has had cares, struggles, and fights with evil, has endured wrongs, has carried burdens, has suffered, has had bitter sorrow, has been misunderstood, has poured out her life in love's sacrifices. One would say that the child is the more beautiful, the fairer and lovelier in her life. But as the two appear in the eyes of Christ, while both are beautiful, the mother wears the holier loveliness. She has learned in suffering. She has grown stronger through her enduring struggle. The lines on her face which seem blemishes on her fair beauty, are the marks of Jesus Christ.

The recruit who entered the ranks only yesterday, and who never has seen a battle, seems by far the handsomest soldier in the regiment, with his mirthful dress, clean armor, and unscarred face. But the old soldier who is the veteran of a score of battles, though his uniform is soiled and torn, his gun blackened with powder, his face marked with wounds and scars--is not he the more perfect soldier?

In the passage in which our Lord sets the ideal of perfectness for His followers, He is referring to the way God loves. Men's love is imperfect, partial, and incomplete. Men love only those who love them. But that is not worthy of being called love at all. God loves in a complete perfect way. He loves the unlovely--He loves sinners, enemies. "You, therefore, God's children, ought to love as your Father loves."

It was the teaching of our Lord's times, that men should treat others--as others treated them. "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." Jesus gave a new interpretation, however: "But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Just what did He mean? It is not often in our times--that one slaps another in the face. But what kind of actual treatment does face slapping stand for? It may be regarded as a type of any kind of personal insult, wrong, or injury. If we would know just what Jesus wanted us to understand by His words, we have only to turn to His own life. When, on His trial, an officer struck Him with his hand, did He literally turn the other cheek? No; He quietly asked why He had been smitten. He did not return blow for blow. He bore the insult without resentment, without bitterness, although He challenged its justice. When we follow the life of Jesus carefully, and note His conduct--we find that He was always most gentle and patient in dealing with ill treatment. He did not resent evil; He did not contend for His rights. He endured wrong, and even insult, without complaining. When He was reviled--He reviled not again. There are certain trees which, when struck with an axe, only

bathe with fragrant sap the axe which cuts into them. Injuries and hurts inflicted upon Jesus brought out the sweetest qualities in Him. They drove nails through His hands--and then the blood that they crushed from Him became the blood of the world's redemption.

We can scarcely find a place in this world, where personal injuries and wrongs will never touch us. People will not always deal with us kindly and fairly. There will always be somebody who is not gentle, or who misunderstands us, somebody who says bitter words which hurt our feelings, one who slights us, does not invite us to some social function, nor does something which seems to us to be like a slap in the face. What should we do as Christians? Should we act just as the world's people act in similar cases? Christians belong to Christ. They wear Christ's name. They live by a code of heavenly laws. If they are not different from other people, they are falling below the glory of their calling. People think that meekness and patience in enduring wrongs, are marks of weakness. No; they are marks of strength. That is what Christians are for.

There are some people who exact a great deal of their friends. It is so even in some homes. One of the specific illustrations Jesus gives, tells how to treat such exactions. "Whoever shall compel you to go one mile--go with him two." In every life there are compulsions--things we have to do, not of choice--but of necessity. There is much selfishness in the world, and there are those who must endure its grind. There are two ways of submitting to these impositions and exactions. We may do it sullenly, with bitterness and repining; or we may do it cheerfully, with a song, in the spirit of love.

The Master also says, that we are to do even more than we are required to do. We only make life harder for ourselves, when we do unpleasant duties in a bitter, sullen way. We take the unpleasantness out of our unwelcome tasks--when we do them in a loving, cheerful way. Some people have a hard time getting along with others, because they measure everything, and insist on never going a step farther, and never doing a thing more than the strictest interpretation of duty requires. There are husbands and wives who live that way--careful, on the one hand, to exact of each other every particle of duty, yet careful also, on the other hand, never to do a particle more than the letter of duty demands.

Yet that is not love's way. If one mile is down in the compact, love goes two--and goes cheerfully. If courtesy requires a little attention, love shows twice what is called for. We are to overdo our kindnesses, rather than make them exact fulfillments of rules of etiquette. We are to give help, not merely to meet pressing need--but to more than meet it. That is the way to carry out the lesson: "You therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Or take the other duty used by the Master in illustration--loving one's neighbor. "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy." Certainly--but they reserved the privilege of deciding who their neighbor was. He must be a congenial man, a man who belonged to the same sect. He must be a man who would not fail to return kindness in a generous way, showing favor for favor. "But I say unto you--Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." The words are quite familiar to us--but do we try to live them any more than the Jews in our Lord's time did? How many of us really love our enemies? How many of us actually pray for those who persecute us? That is what we must do--if we are going to learn our lesson: "You therefore shall be perfect--as your heavenly Father is perfect.

It is easy enough to love certain people and to be kind to them. It is easy in our evening prayer to ask God to bless those who have been kind to us during the day, who have spoken approvingly or encouragingly to us, who have helped us over the hard places, whose love had brightened the way for us. But is it as easy

to pray for the man who was angry with us, the one who spoke falsely of us, or the other who refused the favor we asked and tried to injure us? Yet that is the way the lesson runs: "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." When we have learned really to do these things, we are drawing very near to God. Then the word is being fulfilled in us: "You shall be perfect--as your heavenly Father is perfect." But while we still hate others, while we are bitter against them, or while we are envious or grudging--we have made little progress toward perfection. "For if you love those who love you--what rewards have you? Do not even the publicans the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do--more than others? Do not even the heathen do the same?"

Here we have the test question of Christian living: "What do you do--more than others?" It is not enough that Christians shall be just as good as other people--Christ expects them to be better. What are people Christians for, if not to do more than others? "You therefore, shall be perfect."

Christian love ought to show itself in all holy service, in thoughtfulness towards others, in kindness, in readiness to help. It is said that when Dr. Temple was head master of Rugby School, he visited the boys one day when they had been sent to clean out the pigsties. One of the boys went to him and said: "Am I forced to do this dirty task?" "I suppose not," he replied; "you are not exactly forced." "May I go, then, sir?" asked the student. "Yes," answered Dr. Temple slowly. "Give me the rake." He was going to do the dirty work himself. The student said: "I don't want you to do it, sir." "Somebody must do it," was the reply. The young man took the rake and did the work, and never grumbled anymore.

Thus it was that Christ took His place in life--as one who served. He took the lowest place. When none of His disciples would do the servant's part, when they shrank from it and asked, "Must we do it?" He answered: "No; you are not forced to do it. Give me the basin and the towel." And before they knew what He was doing--He was on His knees, washing their feet. How the Master's lowly service shamed the proud disciples that night! How it ought to shame us today, when we are still too proud to take the servant's place and do the hard and lowly things! Let us learn the lesson as the Master Himself illustrated it: "You therefore shall be perfect--as your heavenly Father is perfect." If we are ever to reach that blessed attainment, we must begin to do the things of perfection now and here.

### Following Our Visions

We call certain men visionary. They are always seeing visions and dreaming dreams--but their visions and dreams are never realized. Raphael was once asked how he painted his wonderful pictures. He answered: "I dream dreams and I see visions--and then I paint my dreams and visions." That is what we should do with all the beautiful and noble things which come into our hearts and minds, as we think and ponder. Everything lovely that rises before us in thought and feeling--we should set to work to make true in our life and character.

We see heavenly visions sometimes in books, as we read th

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