

Pictures in the Heart

by J.R. Miller

Our hearts make our world for us, and the things we behold are but the shadows of the things that are in us.

Scripture: Proverbs 4:23, Matthew 6:22

Topics: "Inner Peace", "Perception of Life"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes that our hearts shape our perception of the world, using the example of Niebuhr, who, despite his blindness, found joy in the memories of beautiful landscapes stored in his heart. He illustrates how individuals perceive their surroundings based on their inner life; those with a cheerful heart see beauty everywhere, while those with a somber heart find gloom even in lovely scenes. Miller encourages us to recognize the blessings in our lives and to appreciate the beauty around us before it is too late, as often we fail to see the worth in our experiences and relationships until they are gone. Ultimately, he asserts that true happiness and contentment come from cultivating a positive spirit within ourselves, which will reflect in our external world.

Transcript

Niebuhr, the distinguished traveler, became blind in his old age. But, having traversed many lands, amid the fairest and loveliest scenes of the world, he had stored away in his memory, countless pictures of landscapes, mountain-scenery, valleys of rare beauty, and great and splendid cities. Then, as he lay upon his bed or reposed on his easy-chair, his face would often brighten into a rich glow, as if some inner light was shining through. He was pondering once more, some splendid scene he had looked upon in the sunny Orient. The chamber-walls of his memory were hung all over with pictures which filled his darkened years with joy and beauty. It mattered not to him--that the light had gone out, leaving thick gloom all about him. His heart was his world, and there was no darkness there. No putting out of sun--could obscure the pictures that hung in that sacred house of his soul.

In a far truer sense than many of us are aware--do our hearts make our world for us. The things we behold--are but the shadows of the things that are in us. If we have bright pictures in our heart--the whole world, wherever we go, will be a lovely picture-gallery! Every scene--will be a panorama of beauty. The most repulsive objects--will wear a tinge of loveliness. On the other hand, a somber, cheerless heart--clothes the whole world in shadow and gloom.

A writer says: "A cold firebrand and a burning lamp started out one day to see what they could find. The firebrand came back and wrote in its journal, that the whole world was very dark. It did not find a place

wherever it went, in which there was light. Everywhere was darkness. The lamp when it came back wrote in its journal: "Wherever I went--it was light. I did not find any darkness in all my journey. The whole world was light. The lamp carried light with it, and when it went abroad it illuminated everything. The dead firebrand carried no light, and it found none where it went."

Just so, men and women go through the world, and, returning, write records of observation just as diverse as these. Some find only gloom--in the fairest paths; and amid the lovely scenes--nothing beautiful. Others find nothing but beauty and brightness, even in the deepest valleys of earth. Each one finds--just what he takes out in himself. The colors he sees--are the tints of his own inner life.

Many people move amid unbroken music, hearing not one note; so, in a spiritual world full of heavenly presences, men remain unconscious of the love and companionship that linger about them. Having eyes--they see not; and having ears--they hear not. Their sorrows go uncomforted, while the Comforter stands close beside them. The world seems dreary and cold, while tender warmth and rich beauty lie close around them!

This is true in our commonest life. How many of us find all the good there is in our lot? Do we extract the honey from every flower that blooms in our path? Do we find all the gold that lies in the hard rocks over which our feet stumble? Do we behold all the beauty that glows along the ways of our sore toil? Do not many good things pass through our hands and slip away from us forever, before we even recognize their loveliness or their worth? Do not angels come to us unaware in homely disguise, walk with us, talk with us, minister to us, and then only become known to us--when their place is empty and they have spread their radiant wings in flight which we have no power ever to recall?

The baby seemed very troublesome as it broke your night's rest with its cries, and you were compelled to rise and care for it. But when it lay bashed and still, forever among the flowers--what would you not have given to have heard it cry again? We never see the beauty of our friends--until they are vanishing out of our sight. While they were with us--we were impatient with their faults. Their habits fretted us. But when death touched them--it clothed them in a garb of brilliant beauty. They appeared transfigured. Out of the dull, faulty character, sprang a radiant angel-form, and hovered just beyond our reach forever. What joy and blessing it had brought to our lives, to have seen the beauty and the worth--before the vanishing!

So it is in all life. It really takes but very little, to make anyone happy--yet there are many who cannot extract even a reasonable happiness from a world of luxuries and blessings. There are some who see nothing to admire--in the most magnificent collections of rare works of art, while others stand enraptured before the crudest picture.

There are those who will go through a forest on a June morning when a thousand birds are warbling--and hear not one note of song; while others are thrilled and charmed by the coarsest bird-note that falls out of the air. One man sees no beauty in the most picturesque landscape; another finds some tender bit of loveliness in the barest and most ragged scenery. One cannot find pleasure or contentment amid the most lavish abundance; another finds enough in the sheerest poverty, to give deep happiness and evoke hearty praise.

In nothing does this distinction come out more clearly than in the way the ills of life appear. One class of people see nothing but ills. Everything wears to them a somber aspect. Smallest trials are magnified into crushing disasters! All troubles look exaggerated to their vision. These see nothing but adversity in all their days. They find some cause for discontent in the serenest circumstances.

Then others find only blessing wherever they go. Their sorrows are struck through--with the glory of God's love. In the chapel at Pisa the dome is so constructed that sounds uttered below come back in a delightful response of melodious music, and even a discord is converted into a harmony as it floats up into the resonant vault and returns to the ear. Such a dome hangs over these souls. Even the painful and discordant things--are changed into rich harmonies!

Life seems different to different people--because their hearts differ! One man listens to thrilling music--and is not moved; under the same strains--another feels his soul kindled into rapture. The first has no music in his own bosom to interpret the melody that strikes his ear from without; the other has a singing angel in his heart, that responds to every sweet note that breathes through the air about him. "You must have the bird in your heart," says someone, "before you can find it in the bush."

It is not, then, half so much the outward in life that we need to have changed--as the spirit of the inner life. The cause of discontent is not in men's circumstances--but in their own spirit and temper. Get the song into your heart--and you will hear songs all about you. Even the wailing storm will but make music for you. Get the beauty and the good into your own soul--and you will see only beauty and good in all things. Get the peace deep into your own life--and you will find peace in every lot.

Our hearts make our world for us. The things we see around us--are but the shadows of our inner experiences, which are cast outside. The things we hear are but the echoes of our own inner thoughts and feelings. Pictures in the heart, fill all the world with ugliness--or loveliness!

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