

THOUGHTS FOR THE QUIET HOUR

by John MacDuff, 1895

**A treasury of godly wisdom, suitable
for personal or family devotions.**

Building air-castle upon air-castle!

He who goes about **whining all day long** about some imaginary drawbacks in the sphere which Providence has assigned him—when all the while he is situated so much better than thousands around—is **a suicide of his own happiness!** He is also impeaching the faithfulness of the Supreme Ordainer and Disposer.

One half of life's enjoyment is eaten out by this sinful craving after what cannot be obtained—**the desire for something supposed to be better.** Yes, but when "the better" is reached, there is the yearning for an imagined "better" still. This is **building air-castle upon air-castle!**

If in these days there be one household demon more than another which needs to be exorcized—it is **the demon of discontent!**

Oh, for the spirit of **Paul**—poor and lonely **prisoner** in Rome as he was—an apparent bankrupt in all that the world deems wealth and affluence—yet who could make this entry in his letter to his Philippian friends—"I have learned to be **content** whatever the circumstances. At the moment I have all I need—more than I need!"

One throw of the dice and the great game of life is lost!

How many there are with whom the labor of long years is a failure! They are engaged building some favorite edifice, material or mental, literally or figuratively. They dream not that it rests on shifting sands, or on the edge of a muffled volcano!

A **teacher** bestows his fondest assiduous care on a pupil—a young life full of high intellectual promise. A sudden illness comes and sweeps him away!

A **parent** lavishes his tenderest love and affections, thought and time and money, in raising his child; but, by-and-by, the life of his prodigal son, is to the parent, worse than death.

Yes, often are fondest hopes, best laid plans, glad aspirations, thwarted; the glowing visions of success clouded with misfortune—calamity—ruin—the grave! **One throw of the dice and the great game of life is lost!**

Not so with **imperishable riches**—"the hope laid up for you in heaven"—bliss beyond the accidents of capricious fortune, bonds that can know no dissolution. "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever!" Psalm 73:26

The golden key that fits all locks!

"If I have not love, I am nothing." 1 Cor. 13:2

What a magic spell there is in love!—the absolute devotion of a beautiful soul that loses itself in the hallowed mission of radiating peace and joy and sympathy all around.

Many dull, unsusceptible ears, when other charmers have failed to charm, have been arrested and won by **the music of kindness**. By it . . .

old-age renews its youth,
sick pillows are smoothed,
burdens are eased,
tears are turned into smiles,
dirges are turned into songs.

Love is, of all magical charms, the most irresistible.

Love is the golden key that fits all locks!

"If I have not love, I am nothing." 1 Cor. 13:2

This most beautiful grace

"All of you, clothe yourselves with **humility**." 1 Peter 5:5

You who are young, with life's hopes and hazards, its risks and failures before you, let the possession of **this most beautiful grace** be your habitual aspiration. It is a garment beautiful for all, but whose folds droop with a special propriety and loveliness on the youthful pilgrim just entering on the great journey.

Beware of rash, self-assertive ways, petty jealousies, sinister dealings; above all, tampering with servile vices which may end in their tyrannical sway.

Don't grumble!

"**Don't grumble** against each other!" James 5:9

What an unhappy phase and condition of soul that of **the chronic grumbler!**—moping over petty troubles, magnifying worries; to use the common but expressive figure, "making mountains of molehills"; seeing no sunshine in existence, while, in reality, there are only a few clouds floating on an otherwise clear horizon!

Poorly will such be able to grapple with life's real and sterner troubles when they come.

"**Don't grumble** as some of them did, for that is why God sent his angel of death to destroy them. 1 Cor. 10:10

Over-sensitiveness

Over-sensitiveness to supposed injury and wrong,

has wrecked many a fair life, and doomed it to unsympathetic isolation.

"Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another**, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." Ephesians 4:32

That heathen marksman

In vain had Ahab disguised himself. He was borne in his chariot bleeding from the fray—for "an Aramean soldier **randomly** shot an arrow at the Israelite troops, and the arrow hit the king of Israel between the joints of his armor!" 1 Kings 22:34

No, not in the true sense of the word "randomly."

That heathen marksman was only an instrument in accomplishing the fulfillment of "the word of the Lord which He spoke by the mouth of Elijah the prophet." **A Greater had feathered the fatal shaft, and sent it home!**

Grievously wounded in the spiritual battle

"A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out." Matthew 12:20

Never deal too harshly with those who, in some unguarded, unsuspected moment, have fallen out of the ranks, or by their own folly or cowardice have been **grievously wounded in the spiritual battle**.

Encircled in the consciousness of His love

Eternal summer canopies the soul which is at peace with God. Happy those who are thus **encircled in the consciousness of His love**. Even when there are passing clouds and shadows, the sun is always behind them.

A parent's lip kisses all fear away

Trust—what is it?

Go to that child's couch when the storm is raging, moaning among the tree-tops and strewing branches on the lawn, the blackened sky echoing with the artillery of heaven. A parent's hand draws the curtain and smoothes the ruffled pillow; **a parent's lip kisses all fear away**.

Such is the trust and confidence of His children inspired by their Heavenly Father in the hour of anxiety and dismay, "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence, and His children shall have a place of refuge." Proverbs 14:26

As each part does its work

"From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, **as each part does its work**." Ephes. 4:16

In a gigantic piece of machinery the **small** wheels have their place and purpose as well as the **large** ones. God gives His weak ones work to do, for which even His strong ones are unequal.

Troubles and perplexities

In the tumult and discord of human **troubles and perplexities**, how blessed are the balm-words of Christ, "Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things!" Matthew 6:32

Vapid, superficial, selfish pleasure

Thousands live their whole life for **vapid, superficial, selfish pleasure**; a wanton and wasteful expenditure of available strength and purpose. How far better to work for God and for the good of men! Not the exacted toil of the fretted and fettered slave, but the consecration of the willing heart, the service which is perfect freedom—**life, animated by the inspiring motto**, "This world is fading away, along with everything it craves. But if you do the will of God, you will live forever!" 1 John 2:17

A dirge of superhuman anguish

"Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears." Hebrews 5:7

There are three distinct pictures given us of **the tears of Jesus**.

We see Him weeping in the **family**, with the sisters of Bethany. We see Him weeping on the mount of Olivet over a ruined **city**. We see Him, last of all, weeping in the moonlit shades of Gethsemane—but now it is "strong crying and tears"—**a dirge of superhuman anguish**, not over families or cities, but over mankind!

But we see a more favored spot of grass

As the sheep of His pasture, He has allotted our portion for us. **But we see a more favored spot of grass** on the opposite valley. The sunbeams are playing upon it. We imagine the herbage is greener and more luxuriant. We cross to the other valley. The sun gets behind a cloud. The bright patch is found to be in reality no better than that which we had left!

What **divine philosophy** there is in the Apostle's injunction, "Be **content** with such things as you have; for He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you." Hebrews 13:5

The father's halls, and heart, and home

"The boy became so hungry that even the **husks** he was feeding the pigs looked good to him." Luke 15:16

Garbage could not stop the rage of hunger in the "far country." **The father's halls, and heart, and home**—the "bread enough and to spare"—alone could do that.

"I will go home to my father!" Luke 15:18

The Infinite overcome by the finite

"You have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." I know not a more wondrous incident in Bible story—**Omnipotence overcome with the pleadings of weakness; the Infinite overcome by the finite**; a mortal man wrestling with Deity in prayer, and that prayer prevailing—"I will not let You go, unless You bless me!"

Happiness

Happiness is not dependent on place, or locality, or social position—but on the state of the heart and its relation to God.

As the bleakest field is ennobled by the sunshine, so, in spite even of hampered circumstances and adverse surroundings, that soul must be radiant, which enjoys an habitual response to the prayer—"Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance!"

There are no great things and small things with God.

"He made all the **stars**—the Bear, Orion, the Pleiades, and the **constellations** of the southern sky." Job 9:9

There are no great things and small things with God.

He who guides the **constellations** in their magnificent marchings, watches the sparrow's fall.

"Are not two **sparrows** sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even **the very hairs of your head** are all numbered." Matthew 10:29-30

Morbid, sullen, panic-stricken

"He will not break the bruised reed; He will not quench the smoking flax." Matthew 12:20

See the Prophet **Elijah**, so recently a hero of heroes, confronting, unabashed, the savage yells of Ahab's myrmidons and the crowd of Baal priests, now seated, with moping countenance, under the desert juniper-tree or amid the rocks of Horeb—away from duty; **morbid, sullen, panic-stricken**; oblivious of the encouragements of Carmel and the miracles of Cherith—indulging in the ungrateful soliloquy—"It is enough; take away my life; God has forgotten me; I am no better than my fathers."

Does Jehovah take him at his word? Does He leave or commission the desert whirlwind to extinguish the expiring flame of former consecration? No! "What are you doing here, Elijah? Go, anoint Jehu; go, anoint Hazael. Back to your appointed work and labor. I will yet make you a burning and shining light in Israel."

The fall of a leaf—or the destruction of kingdoms

Whether it be **the fall of a leaf—or the destruction of kingdoms**, it is "God over all."

"You alone are **God over all** the kingdoms of the earth. You alone created the heavens and the earth." 2 Kings 19:15

What a magic, magnetic power

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, **kindness**." Galatians 5:22

What a magic, magnetic power there is in **kindness!**

How it smooths furrows from the brow!

How it raises the soiled blossoms of the battered flower!

How it carries music to the heart of the lonely and sorrowful, and makes old age for the moment forget its infirmities!

Many a little child has thus proved a seraph in human form!

"Be **kind** and compassionate to one another." Ephes. 4:32

Found in the shady nooks of the valley

"Clothe yourselves with humility." 1 Peter 5:5

The greenest, tenderest, loveliest graces are
found in the shady nooks of the valley.

"Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness,
humility, gentleness and patience." Col. 3:12

Past faintings and falterings and failures

"But one thing I do: **Forgetting the past**, and
straining toward what is ahead" Philippians 3:13

Let **past faintings and falterings and failures**
only stimulate to increased ardor in the race.
With the goal in view, press on!

O dreamer of vain dreams

"Be content with such things as you have." Heb. 13:5

"My **own** vineyard I have neglected." Song 1:6

Let us accept **the allotments of Divine Providence**—
our varied spheres in life—at the hands of Him who
fixes the bounds of our habitation.

How many there are who have a strange, perverse
satisfaction in looking out from their window, with
longing eyes, on one or other of the varied modern
shapes which Naboth's vineyard assumes! Their
soliloquy is—'Were it mine, what a vintage I would
have there! What oil and wine I would have from
these grapes and olive trees; and what a prudent
and bountiful use I would make of them, which
their present possessor never does!'

God says to such—'No, **O dreamer of vain dreams**,
remain no longer gazing through a false and distorted

medium. Envy no longer your neighbor's choicer territory. Go cheerfully down to your own assigned, though more restricted, garden-plot. It may have neither vines nor olives. It may be devoid of floral wealth. It may be possessed of nothing but the commonest plants.

But there is your place! It may be "little among the thousands of Judah." It is that, nevertheless, which I have staked and fenced out for you. I have not made you keeper of others' vineyards; see that your own vineyard you do keep. You can serve Me and glorify Me with the one entrusted talent, as well as with the ten. On the Great Day there will be as ample a recognition of faithfulness over the few things as over the many things.'

By Him the mite is accepted; and the heart—when there is no mite to give.

Beware of wasted moments!

The marvels and triumphs of the printing-press have now made accessible to peasant and laborer, the wondrous blessing of **Christian literature!** Neither Croesus nor Plato—the two old-world representatives of wealth and thought—had a library to compare with what is readily available to us.

Let the young especially prize this splendid inheritance, making it alike a privilege and obligation to devote some hours to reading and garnering mental stores. Let them **beware of wasted moments**—golden ingots—too often mortgaged to . . .

sloth,
frivolity,
idleness,
voluptuous ease and
degrading passion.

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Eph. 5:16

Eternal pleasures

"You have made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with **eternal pleasures** at Your right hand." Psalm 16:11

Why walk through life with an aspect of sadness, as if religion and gloom are identical? Every true believer should have in this world, his foretastes of coming bliss.

Sips, at the Fountain **here**.

There, "**eternal pleasures**."

My creation!

How **the love of nature** survives and lingers despite of the decrepitude of age, growing indeed stronger as years advance, and taking no heed of the dimming eye!

It recalls the testimony of a gentle poet—"It seems to me, the world was never so beautiful as now, when I am about to leave it."

"Be glad; rejoice forever in **My creation!**" Isaiah 65:18

That demon scramble for riches!

That demon scramble for riches! Generally speaking, "Meaningless! Meaningless!" is the disappointed confession when the hoarded wealth is secured!

Little more than a creed of sanctified selfishness

It is a poor religion—**little more than a creed of sanctified selfishness**—which regards salvation mainly as an escape from divine punishment, and the assured getting into heaven at last.

True religion is an active, transforming principle. Salvation is a present triumph over the forces of evil and powers of temptation. It aspires after obedience to the divine will—assimilation to the divine image and character in its truth and purity and love.

Yes, that is a stunted utilitarian faith—the faith of the Koran rather than of the Gospel—whose hopes and prospective blessedness are all for an eternal sensual paradise.

Flaws on the sculptor's white marble

Listen to the bell, **warning** off submerged rocks and perilous whirlpools. Beware of tampering with the fine edge of **conscience**, and blunting moral perceptions. These are like the **flaws on the sculptor's white marble**—scars which cannot be easily erased.

The irreparable past

Do not mope with morbid spirit over **the irreparable past**, but gird yourself with heroic resolution for a future in which lost hours and lost opportunities may yet be redeemed.

A November drizzle

A November drizzle is often the cause of soul-depression. Do not treat spiritually what, in a thousand cases, is purely physical. Take the most brilliant of our flowers out of the sunshine and set them to confront the east wind. They

will be certain to mope. There is an amazing harmony and analogy between the natural and the spiritual.

Ignoble wounds in life's battle?

"I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more!" Hebrews 8:12

Who among us, in the retrospect of existence, have not the memories of unworthy **thought** and unworthy **deed**, it may even be of **ignoble wounds, in life's battle?** What of that? Are we for a moment to allow these sins, grievous as they may be, to create an insuperable, impassable gulf between us and the **Great Forgiver**? Thoughts, far more merciful than our own, are expressed and reiterated in the divine words, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more!"

An instinctive love of the beautiful

Happy those who have **an instinctive love of the beautiful**—the beautiful in nature, the beautiful in grace; and far transcending these, the beautiful in Him who was Himself incarnated Beauty—the chief among ten thousand, the Altogether Lovely one!

A chequered life

Each of our lives is a plan of God. Let us be thankful for the thought that our own plans—crude, faulty, mistaken, sometimes sinful—are not infrequently counteracted and superseded by His. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" Jeremiah 29:11

Often in the retrospect of **a chequered life** is the glad and grateful avowal made, and the Psalmist's experience endorsed, "He led them forth also by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation." Psalm 107:7

If the golden prize has eluded our grasp

God is a God of equity. He will exact according to what a man has, not according to what he has not. He will not look for figs or grapes where He has only given common herbs. He will not expect pounds where He has only given pence—talents where He has only given mites. If we have little—limited and restricted means and opportunities—let us remember it is because He has withheld more. **If the golden prize has eluded our grasp**, it is because He saw we would be better without it. His gifts and benefactions are many and diversified. Let it be our endeavor to be "good stewards" to the extent of our responsibilities.

The world's joys

"Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again." John 4:13

The world's joys are fitful, uncertain, precarious—brooks which dry in their channels—their silver ripple ceases often just when they are most needed.

Gospel streams provided for the refreshment of God's pilgrims, are, on the other hand, fed from the eternal glaciers—the hills of heaven. They are fullest when all others are emptiest.

"He will refresh her as **a river in the desert** and as the cool shadow of a large rock in a hot and weary land." Isaiah 32:2

"I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs. I will even make a way in the wilderness, and **rivers in the desert.**"

Isaiah 41:18-19

An Infinite Friend

How it would, with us, hallow every season of prosperity; how it would take the sting from every season of sorrow, and the bitterness from every trial, to have at all times the sublime consciousness that **an infinite Friend** is with us who joys with us in all our joys, and metes out for us all our woes!

"Be sure of this: **I am with you always**, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:20

The sweetest of life's curfew chimes

The sweetest of life's curfew chimes is the closing one—"To depart and to be with Christ."

It is a sad thing

It is a sad thing when lives and friendships once in harmony become sundered—drifting from their old sacred moorings—the little breach gradually, but fatally, widening, until it is irreparable.

"Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." Ephesians 4:32

The uncaging of the spirit

At death there is no interruption in the continuity of life. It is simply **the uncaging of the spirit** to

permit its free, unhampered soarings. There is a wonderful comfort and significance in the words of Christ, "I assure you, anyone who obeys My teaching will never die!" John 8:51

The distinctive message of the Gospels

God's love of the loveless is the distinctive message of the Gospels.

"When we were still **powerless**, Christ died for the **ungodly**." Romans 5:6

"While we were still **sinner**s, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

"For if, when we were God's **enemies**, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son." Romans 5:10

Yes, you are in a mazy labyrinth

"My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will, not mine." Matthew 26:39

Yes, you are in a mazy labyrinth. But keep fast hold of the thread—the golden thread of your Divine Father's love. Thus will you, in due time, come forth to breathe again the fresh air, and welcome the blue sky of heaven!

He died fighting for His enemies!

What a contrast between the unselfish consecration of Jesus in His great work and ministry on earth, an

the selfishness and self-seeking so often characteristic of the race for whom He died!

There are many in this world, embarked in gigantic enterprises. Stand in one of our busiest thoroughfares; see the crowd hurrying past, each with deep-furrowed lines of care on his brow. These are builders; not builders in stone or steel, but figuratively rearing some huge pyramid with unremitting labor.

One is toiling at the Pyramid of **Riches**—tier on tier riveted with silver and golden clamps.

Another is engrossed with the Pyramid of **Ambition**—heedless of the intervening work that he may reach more speedily the coveted summit, and crown it with Fame blowing her bronze trumpet.

Another is busy at some **Intellectual** Pyramid (choicest of all), raising piles of mental treasure—laborious thought.

How few among these could say with an honest heart, "I have no ulterior motive in all my labors. I have no selfish interests to subserve—I am doing it all, neither for the good of myself nor my family, but for others."

It would be a happier world if the use and design of our pyramids had not been like those of Egypt—built to glorify himself while living, and to cover his dust after death.

Different, how different, was the retrospect of Jesus! "Christ pleased not Himself." Unselfishness in its noblest type and form was the characteristic of His Redemption. >From the infancy in Bethlehem's cradle, to the expiring prayer on the bitter tree, all was **the purest unselfishness of a loving heart**. "He saved others, Himself He would not save!" On His cross was engraved, not the superscription of earth's boasted heroes—"He died fighting for His **friends**"; but, "**He died fighting for His enemies!**"

Temptation

Temptation may be biding its time for the unguarded moment. Do with it as you would do with the place you know to be haunted by ravenous beasts of prey—"Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way."

Proverbs 4:15

Absolute and flawless perfection!

"**One** who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens." Hebrews 7:26

When one sees, so often and so painfully, the shortcomings and imperfections of the best of people—how far they fall beneath even their own aspirations—irresolution and inconsistency, indolence, self-seeking, and vainglory in some; lack of patience, lack of courtesy, lack of zeal, lack of love and sympathy in others; in a word, the too evident traces of fallible and fallen human nature—how it magnifies the **absolute and flawless perfection** of the Great Master!

As we all thus mourn, too truly and self-consciously, our **defects** and **deficiencies**, our **blots** and **failures**—what a wonderfully inspiring thought is that given by John, that the day is coming when perfection shall be attained! "Yes, dear friends, we are already God's children, and **we can't even imagine what we will be like** when Christ returns. But we do know that when He comes **we will be like Him!**" 1 John 3:2

Personal tastes

How varied are the types and temperaments of the human family—from the nervous to the lethargic!

Let us make ample allowances for those not cast in the same mold as ourselves, and kindly recognize those who may not share **our personal tastes and sympathies**.

This lesson is embraced in the Apostle's widely

inclusive exhortation, "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble."

1 Peter 3:8

Fascinating dreams

Many of the world's old religions and philosophies are **fascinating dreams**, brilliant coruscations, beautiful webs of thought, which the best intellect and purest devotion had laboriously spun. We dare not depreciate them. But there is only one philosophy that is from God. "The wisdom of God is wiser than men."

Greece had her Mysteries, with their esoteric doctrines. But these could shed no real ray of light on the awful problems of life and of the future. The longed-for "mystery hidden from ages and generations" was fully revealed and manifested in the person and words of Incarnate Wisdom—"I came that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.":

"Don't let anyone lead you astray with empty philosophy and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the evil powers of this world, and not from Christ." Colossians 2:8

Love-shafts

God's words are not bolts of volcanic fire, but golden arrows—**love-shafts** from the quiver of His promises.

What is the lesson?

Unexpected calamity, sudden death, as we have

seen this week within palace walls, comes often like an lightning-bolt from the calm blue of the heavens; or like the earthquake shock when all is lapsed in security, when birds are singing and fields are waving with plenty.

What is the lesson?

"Prepare to meet your God!" Amos 4:12

I have no key to God's hieroglyphics

"There are **secret things** that belong to the Lord our God." Deut. 29:29

You say, "Interpret the **mystery**." **I have no key to God's hieroglyphics now**. Eternity will read and decipher all.

"For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts higher than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:9

Wounds from a friend

"**Wounds from a friend** can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." Proverbs 27:6

The true friend is not the honeyed flatterer. He who possesses the hall-mark of that noblest of relationships is rather the confidential adviser, or, it may be, the faithful censor, who, with delicate tact and yet bold freedom, can point out the peril or shortcoming to which we ourselves are blind—the undiscovered weak joint in the armor.

Inestimable is the worth of such outspoken, unselfish, trusted sincerity; faithful the wounds of such friends.

Serfdom and beggardom to Satan?

You have often seen, in the sky of opening summer, the struggle between sun and cloud. One or other comes off at last victorious. Is it to be **sun or cloud with you?** Is the higher or lower nature to conquer? Is it to be the ground turned into a crop of noxious weed—the thorn and the thistle? or that which gives birth to fragrant flower and golden grain? Is the future to be purity or passion, loyalty to God or **serfdom and beggardom to Satan?**

Child of sickness and pain!

Child of sickness and pain! whose eyes for long weeks have been unable to endure the garish sunlight, by whose sleepless pillow the dim lamp has been flickering with weary monotony, be still!

God has His own methods of mysterious dealing and discipline. He can make that chamber of suffering a Bethel. A ladder is oftentimes there set between earth and heaven, traversed by the angels Faith, Resignation, Hope, and Peace.

A lurking assassin

Envy is the basest of human passions. It might well be impersonated as **a lurking assassin**, dagger in hand, haunting the darkest chambers of the soul; disguised, too, with iron mask, to conceal, as best it may, its own vile features and malignant thoughts.

The Bible speaks of **envy** as one of a dastard, unlovely triad—"envyings, murders, drunkenness."

It is a miniature hell wherever the foul fiend of **envy** has been allowed to intrude. Hence no nobler moral victory, yet no more difficult one can there be, than exorcizing this demon of the abyss, tortured and maddened by the sight of goodness it cannot reach, its impotence to tear the wreath honorably won from brows better and worthier than its own, and turn it into ashes.

"From **envy**, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, Lord, deliver us!"

Foul fiends or beneficent angels?

Words are impalpable couriers of good or evil. They may be **foul fiends or beneficent angels**.

The prayer of Agur

There is a true and deep philosophy in **the prayer of Agur**—"Give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs." Prov. 30:8

The soul's best music

"From the depths of despair, O Lord, I call for your help." Psalm 130:1

It seems contradiction and paradox, but **the soul's best music** often comes from a broken harp, its best incense from the broken vase of alabaster.

Every turn in the pilgrimage path!

"Show me the path where I should walk, O Lord;
point out the right road for me to follow." Ps. 25:4

Unfold and interpret for me **every turn in the pilgrimage path!**

Running out like the grains in a sand-glass

What! these hours of a limited, vanishing existence **running out like the grains in a sand-glass**, and nothing yet done for Christ or those for whom Christ died!

There are many loveless things in the world

There are many loveless things in the world, but few more so than that of unkindness—the gall and wormwood of injured and unrequited friendship, a cold cynicism the recompense of beneficent deed or generous gift.

How easy, how gracious, on the other hand, is "that most excellent gift of love!" While it "seeks not its own," it is a deposit paid back in compound interest. No other forces of the soul can compensate for the lack of love. Amiability and courtesy, benevolence and sympathy, outlive the more heroic virtues.

"In her tongue is the law of kindness." Proverbs 31:26

The soul's hardest lesson

"Not my will, but Your will," is **the soul's hardest lesson**; and, when learned, it is its highest achievement.

Kind words and holy deeds

I like to think of the perpetuity of moral and spiritual influences. **Kind words and holy deeds** cannot perish. Goodness is indestructible. That man you speak of died twenty years ago. No! he still lives in the hearts of those his character brightened and refined!

Nothing but a gentle, sympathetic soul

Let none say, "There is no work for me to do, in my limited and restricted sphere. I cannot aspire to a position of conspicuous usefulness. I am no Asahel, swift-footed in the race. I am dwarfed in means, destitute of all claims to intellect. I am but a common soldier in the great army—a mere hewer of wood and drawer of water."

Accept the assigned position. Never despise nor minimize "**the power of littles**." Do what you can. God asks no more, and expects no more. With Him, lowly work is worship. Only, what you do, do it heartily, cheerfully. Be not repelled by the smallness and insignificance of the mite you cast into the treasury.

You can teach a child its letters. You can read to a poor invalid. You can carry a ray of sunshine with you into the hospital ward. You can send a posy of violets or rosebuds to the bedside of the invalid. You can give a word of heart cheer to the struggling youth, and aid him in entering the stern battle of life. You can indite a letter of wise counsel and warning to the tempted child of poverty, and help to fetch back the prodigal from his or her wanderings.

You can do the most Godlike and Christlike thing in the world—that which needs neither purse nor learning—**nothing but a gentle, sympathetic soul**. In ministering to the broken and lacerated heart, torn, it may be, with bereavement too deep for tears, you can give "beauty

for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness."

"Who has despised the day of small things?"

True, genuine friendship

"A friend loves at all times." Proverbs 17:17

You cannot force a half-hearted friendship into life. Where there is incongruity of character, feeling, and ways, let it simply lapse into acquaintanceship; and if even this be an effort, let it, without either violence or discourtesy, die a natural death.

True, genuine friendship must not only be spontaneous, but, to be lasting, it must be based on congeniality of tastes, pursuits, interests, as well as on affection.

"There is a Friend who sticks closer than a brother."
Proverbs 18:24

You hypocrites!

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, **you hypocrites!** You clean the **outside** of the cup and dish, but **inside** they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the **inside** of the cup and dish, and then the **outside** also will be clean."

Matthew 23:25-26

The Jerusalem Pharisee is not extinct. He has his true representative and descendant in our time. He still in spirit makes broad his phylactery. He has his trumpet sounded before him. He has his unctuous shibboleths. He is punctilious in creed and tradition. He refuses to speak to a Samaritan.

Yet that man's **inner life** and **home**, as was the case with his ancient prototype, confute and confound his

pretensions. There, he is often **cold, cynical, selfish, moody, morose, imperious**. He would keep all the world right, but he is himself like the sepulchers he whitewashes. It is outer garnish and no more. **God save the Church, from such a travesty as this!** Oh for genuine, transparent, unmistakable reality!

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, **you hypocrites!** You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the **outside** but on the **inside** are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the **outside** you appear to people as righteous but on the **inside** you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness." Matthew 23:27-28

Truth that leads to godliness

"The knowledge of the **truth that leads to godliness.**"
Titus 1:1

Doctrine is nothing, dissociated from deed.

Abstract truth is poor, compared to living principle.

The tiny glowworm and the shining star

The eye of the Almighty takes in at a glance—
the tiny glowworm and the shining star,
the blade of grass and the towering Alp.

"He covers the heavens with **clouds**, provides **rain** for the earth, and makes the green **grass** grow in mountain pastures." Psalm 147:8

"He determines the number of the **stars** and calls them each by name." Psalm 147:4

Remove the Bible from school and university

God help this nation if it be drifting to **secularism!** Our people may be made **giants in intellect;** but severed from the religious element, divorced from religious training, the chances are they may become **demons in depravity!**

Where, moreover, are remedy and panacea to be found for the anguished heart in its time of sorrow?

Philosophy and science, noble factors as they are, can never heal the wounds of humanity, erase the furrows from the woe-worn brow, or light up the shadows of the final valley. They can never curb the madness of the nations, subjugate the demon of war, and "ring in the thousand years of peace."

Remove the Bible from school and university, and in that saddest of battles, the struggle of conflicting principles, where the godless and Christless creed is the triumphant one, there can be nothing but the death-knell.

This spirit from the pit

How SELF in its protean shapes—
self-will,
self-seeking,
self-elation,
self-assertion,
leaves its dents and stains on the shield of faith!
Happy the day when **this spirit from the pit** shall
be exorcized forever!

Old Testament history

Taking the **Old Testament history** alone, how suggestive are its names and memories of the Christian's varied and chequered experience!

Here is his **Bethel**—the rough, stony pillow of hardship and suffering; but it is at the base of a heavenly ladder, passing up and down which are angels of consolation.

Here is a **Marah**—the bitter pool of sorrow, but wherein the divine healing Tree is cast.

Here are **Palms and Wells of Elim**, symbolic both of shadow and refreshment in pursuing life's wilderness march.

Here he has reached **Rephidim**, also with its double emblem and significance; the combination of the two factors in the believer's life—the active and the passive—work and prayer—Joshua fighting in the valley; Moses, Aaron, and Hur in supplication on the mountain summit.

Here is the gloomy **border-river**; but through its flood the true Ark of the Covenant precedes the hosts of Israel, conducting in safety to the land of promise.

We can write over all, "They shall abundantly utter the memory of Your great goodness." The last of these memories is sung in heaven—"They went through the flood on foot—there did we rejoice in Him!"

Living sacrifices

The Christian's heart should be a holy altar, and his life a **living sacrifice**.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as **living sacrifices**, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship." Romans 12:1

The house collapsed, and all your children are dead!

"Suddenly, a powerful **wind** swept in from the desert and

hit the house on all sides. **The house collapsed, and all your children are dead!**" Job 1:19

The wind is often contrary, and God means it to be so.

"He let loose the east **wind** from the heavens and led forth the south **wind** by His power." Psalm 78:26

"He causes the clouds to rise over the earth. He sends the lightning with the rain and releases the **wind** from His storehouses." Psalm 135:7

The grandest picture in the Gospels

The grandest picture in the Gospels—let us hang it up on our deathbeds—is the father clasping the prodigal and welcoming him home.

"And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him." Luke 15:20

The loveliest plants of the Gospel

The loveliest plants of the Gospel grow in the valley of humility.

"Be completely humble and gentle." Ephesians 4:2

Little sympathies and little kindnesses

We need not always be on the outlook to do great services. **Little sympathies and little kindnesses** are always possible.

"Since God chose you to be the holy people whom He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted

mercy, **kindness**, humility, gentleness, and patience."

Col. 3:12

"Finally, all of you should be of one mind, full of **sympathy** toward each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds." 1 Peter 3:8

Amid the discords and disharmonies of life

Amid the discords and disharmonies of life,

the fitfulness of human friendships,
the wreck of fond hopes,
the havoc of death and the grave,
we can cling with unfaltering confidence to
the fidelity of God. Here is safe anchorage
that defies all storms.

"All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful."

Psalms 25:10

"Your unfailing love, O Lord, is as vast as the
heavens; Your faithfulness reaches beyond
the clouds." Psalm 36:5

The gauntest of all gaunt spectres

The gauntest of all gaunt spectres is that of **cold ingratitude** and **unrequited love**—sacred altars of friendship turned into a pile of dead ashes.

A series of strange surprises

"Why, you do not even know what will happen
tomorrow!" James 4:14

Life consists of a series of strange surprises—a
constantly shifting complex succession changes.

Nothing so sure as the unexpected.

What is earth's greatest joy and privilege?

"Comfort, comfort my people," says your God. "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone and that her sins are pardoned." Isaiah 40:1-2

What is earth's greatest joy and privilege? It is to bring a ray of comfort to the broken heart.

"He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us." 2 Cor. 1:4

The old, the weak, the decrepit, the bedridden

How prone we are presumptuously to calculate on the continuance of life! "My pulse is vigorous. My eye is undimmed. My natural strength is unabated. The race is to the swift—I am one of them. The battle is to the strong—I am one of them. **The old, the weak, the decrepit, the bedridden**, will and must before long be swept down like the seared leaves of autumn. But I am as a green fir tree. The spring's verdure is only now clothing me. The summer's zephyrs have yet to fan me. The autumn skies have yet to canopy me. The axe may be laid to the root of others, but I shall bring forth fruit in old age—I shall be fat and flourishing. The morrow shall be as today, and much more abundant!"

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? **You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes!** James 4:13-14

I will go home to my Father

"I will go home to my Father." Luke 15:18

In your moments of deepest darkness and alienation, never lose sight of the truth that God is your Father. The prodigal, in his season of dejection and despair, speaks of his "Father" still.

"I will go home to my Father." Luke 15:18

Trust God in little things

Those who **trust God in little things** are often answered by Him in great things. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will direct your paths."

Proverbs 3:5-6

Praise Him, all you twinkling stars!

"Praise Him, all you twinkling stars!" Psalm 148:3

These myriad stars in their luster, have been spoken of in poetry as "sparks from God's anvil." There is a defect in the figure. Sparks, brilliant as they are, are momentary, evanescent scintillations—a flash of atoms, which die in the darkness and are seen no more.

The starry host of heaven are glorious worlds, which move, not capriciously, but in obedience to great cosmic laws—tenants of a realm, not of confusion, but of design and order. Let science speak of this as "laws of nature." Call, rather, these thronged illimitable spaces—the domain of a thinking, living, intelligent Creator and Sustainer; replete with evidences of His sovereignty and omnipotence.

No modern speculations, be what they may, can ever dim

the brilliancy of **those gems in the Almighty's diadem!**

"Praise Him, all you twinkling stars!" Psalm 148:3

And he went outside and wept bitterly!

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."

"No!" Peter insisted. "Not even if I have to die with you! **I will never deny you!**" Matthew 26:34-35

Look at Peter! Who stronger than he? the honored and trusted Companion of Incarnate Love, filled with sincere loyalty to the gracious Master. "What! others may deny You, but I—never! **Never shall 'traitor' be branded on my brow**, or the guilty denial tremble on my lips!"

See, before long, **the presumptuous boaster in an anguish of remorseful tears**, a moral and spiritual shipwreck. "How the mighty have fallen!"

"And he went outside and wept bitterly!" Luke 22:62

What will heaven be

What will heaven be, but the development of present character? "He who is righteous let him be righteous still" Revelation 22:11

Helping struggling souls in the battle of life

We wish that ministers of Christ, who wield the marvelous power of the pulpit, instead of pursuing, Sunday after Sunday, the round of **purely doctrinal sermons**, would understand the necessity of sympathetically **helping struggling souls in the battle of life**; teaching them how to fight the good fight of

faith when the hour of conflict comes. The Sunday discourse ought to impart strength and heart-cheer to the combatants, young and old, in the spiritual arena.

Like a bird parting with its wings

To neglect prayer is like a bird parting with its wings.

"Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart." Colossians 4:2

The gates of death

To the true Christian, **the gates of death** open up the magnificent vistas of eternity.

"Write this down: Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they are blessed indeed, for they will rest from all their toils and trials!" Revelation 14:13

Commonplace, everyday experiences

"The Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in Him." Psalm 32:10

God is with His people, not only in the crisis-hours and great emergencies of life, but in its **commonplace, everyday experiences**.

"Just as the mountains surround and protect Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds and protects His people, both now and forever." Psalm 125:2

"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:20

It is not the cuckoo-cry of alarmists

It is not the cuckoo-cry of alarmists when we say that our age seems to emphasize the warning words, "In the last days **perilous times** shall come."

We are walking on a muffled volcano—faint mutterings are heard in the hollow beneath our feet. Happy those patriots, philanthropists, governments, that can wisely read the signs of the times, help to open safety-valves to prevent the sudden and, when it comes, uncontrollable outburst—maddened forces direr than Nature's direst.

Strange that the jets of sulphurous smoke here and there polluting the moral atmosphere carry with them so little premonition. We seem to have no eye but for the green grass, the enamel of flowers; smothering prophecies of disaster. Other words of Scripture have a political as well as a spiritual meaning—"When they are saying, **Peace, peace**—then sudden destruction comes!"

Helpless seafarers! indulging in mirth and song, when their ears should be open to the roar of the breakers!

That man only begins to live

That man only begins to live, in whom **self** dies.

Orthodoxy "falsely so called"

Let us beware of an **orthodoxy "falsely so called"**; verbose and often pretentious—the orthodoxy of upturned eye, and conventional phrase, and dead dogma—the orthodoxy which is at no pains to be authenticated by . . .
living faith,

loving word,
gentle deed,
generous service.

Home and rest in the ocean of Infinite Love!

That mountain rivulet, released from the iron shackles with which winter has bound it, goes onward, singing in concord of sweet sounds, to the sea—its final goal of rest. It owes its emancipation to the beams of the **sun** of early spring.

Picture of the **Sun of Righteousness**, shining on frigid hearts, waking up slumbering forces, melting icy indifference, reviving generous impulses, transforming life into a joyous, beneficent stream, whose waters find at last their haven—**home and rest in the ocean of Infinite Love!**

Undying music

Posthumous influence! There can surely be nothing more solemnizing than this—that a man may continue to live on—no, does live on—after death, either as a curse or a blessing! Happy those who survive to make **undying music** in the world.

Through the agonies of great trial

"You, O God, have **purified** us like silver melted in a crucible." Psalm 66:10

As the olives must be **crushed** for the oil to flow;
as the grapes must be **bruised** in the wine-press
that the vats may be filled; as the **gold** comes out
refined from the furnace—so, **through the agonies**

of great trial, the best Christian graces are developed.

"I have refined you in the furnace of suffering."
Isaiah 48:10

The Great Craftsman

God is permitting us to work the shuttles of life apparently as we may. But He, **the Great Craftsman**, in His own calm world, is supervising all.

"He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth." Daniel 4:35

The sob of universal humanity

"I am the Lord who heals you." Exodus 15:26

Christ was the true Jehovah Rophi. What diverse crowds flocked to this Divine Physician of old, and "He healed them all"! No numbers baffled Him; no variety bewildered Him. The inquiring **Nicodemus**; the rash **Peter**, boisterous as the waves of the sea; the loving and meditative, yet impulsive **John**; the strong-willed, skeptic **Thomas**—each had a niche in the Great Living Temple.

Penitents crept abashed to His feet, and wept out their shame and sorrow. **Blind men** on the wayside called aloud for help. **Lepers** in piteous tones—outcasts, spurned and evaded by all others—claimed Him, and found in Him a brother. Hearts crushed and broken with **bereavement** were in His presence conscious of a combined sympathy and power which dried their tears and restored their "loved and lost."

There was thus response in His bosom to the sob of universal humanity. Every bird of weary wing and

wailing cry, abroad on earth's waste wilderness of waters, "seeking rest and finding none," had shelter and safety and peace in this Ark of God!

A wonderful satisfaction

There is **a wonderful satisfaction** in the consciousness of one good deed done. How happily do you close your eyes at night when you have helped during the day to lift a load of sorrow, calm a palpitating heart, or heal a wounded spirit! Such deeds are their own recompense and their own reward.

"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me." Matthew 25:40

The epitome of the Christian life

"Enoch walked with God"—**the epitome of the Christian life.**

Desolating bereavement

At the first moment of **desolating bereavement**, the eye is too dimmed to see either God's wisdom or love in the chastening. But the **ear of faith** in due time is enabled to catch the word and to cleave to it—"Be still, and know that I am God!" Psalm 46:10

The raft of God's promises

Lashed, like the drowning mariner, to **the raft**

of God's promises, you will ride out the storm.

"Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" Ps. 119:117

Gold, silver, jewels

Now anyone who builds on that foundation may use **gold, silver, jewels**." 1 Cor. 3:12

There is a variety of work, and of capacity for work, in the Christian Church.

"Gold"—pure, noble-hearted and open-handed men, of position and influence, who use that influence for the highest ends; holy in thought, word, and deed.

"Silver"—True men, not so talented, or wealthy, or influential, but who do their part faithfully and unostentatiously.

"Jewels"—Those of special gifts, brilliant attainments, whose endowments of nature and grace are consecrated to their great Lord.

The choicest of the Gospel's crown jewels!

"My Father!" That is **the choicest of the Gospel's crown jewels!**

The first deflection

The first deflection from the path of virtue, or honor, or duty—how prophetic of further doom and disaster!

What a temple for adoration and praise!

Who does not esteem the manifold teachings of Nature?

Who does not love . . .

her forest haunts, tremulous with music;
her flowers, swinging their censers of incense;
the brooks and streams and birds her choristers;
the blue dome of heaven her magnificent canopy?

What a sanctuary of holy thought!

What a temple for adoration and praise!

"The heavens tell of the glory of God.
The skies display His marvelous craftsmanship.
Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make Him known."
Psalm 19:1-2

The inheritance of the believer

The inheritance of the believer—

"All things are yours!" 1 Cor. 3:21

The angels of affliction

From that dull, dead block of marble, there is evoked
by the artist's tools a form radiant with beauty.

The angels of affliction are often God's best sculptors.
By their sharp chiselings, stroke after stroke, loveless
lives have been made lovely, common people have
become great, dead lives have been quickened into
the likeness of Christ—transformed into His image.

No! not, as we have said, "angels." The Lord of angels
delegates this work to no subordinates. And when the

shaping and molding and fashioning are completed, the legend is inscribed—"Made perfect through suffering!"

Our life-ministries

"Each with his assigned task." Mark 13:34

Never let us quarrel at the lowliness of our tasks or the limitations of **our life-ministries**. The still **pond** does not complain because it has not the music and ripple of the stream or the swell and surge of ocean. It is content, in its simple way, to supply the needs of the cottage home, or refresh the weary toiler in the field, or give drink to the thirsty beggar.

The **violet** blushing unseen in the woods does not envy the cedar with its evergreen foliage or the oak with its giant limbs and mighty shadow. It is content to occupy its assigned place, away, it may be, amid the loneliness of forest aisles.

God has given to each of us our positions and appointed our tasks—humble as well as conspicuous, lowly as well as mighty. Little-hearts as well as Great-hearts are "ministers of His to do His pleasure."

Habitually to realize

How it would soothe in trouble, nerve for duty, make difficulties easy and crosses light, elevate above the fretting anxieties of life and lead to calm uncomplaining submission, were we able **habitually to realize**, in all its fullness, the assurance, "God is my Father, and I am His child."

War!

Happy the nations who are exempt from "**the grievousness of war**"—its inherent cruelty, its often demon selfishness; who are delivered from the tyranny of those who make the crouching nations a perch for their ambition—dragging the innocent from their ploughs and vineyards, their peaceful employments of life, their intellectual avocations, their homes of affection, in order to reap a misnamed "glory" they seldom or never share, set in deadly array against those towards whom they feel no hostility.

Never is responsibility greater than that of rulers who, in wanton recklessness, nurture the war-spirit. "The roll of conquering drum" is no music in the ears of the widow and the orphan. Well may the cry ascend to heaven to exorcize the foul fiend—the direst curse that can visit a country or afflict humanity.

"Give peace in our time, O Lord!" The day will surely come when, with sheathed sword and reversed spear, the prayer will no longer be heard, because no longer needed, "Scatter the nations who delight in war!" Psalm 68:30

Demon or angel?

We are all sculptors, with the soft, pliant, formative clay molding into shape our own futures—**demon or angel**.

In the great game of existence

Sad the case of those who had the possibilities of a good and useful existence, but have lived fatally and hopelessly given up to . . .

sloth, or
flippant pleasure, or
engrossing selfishness.

Those fugitive, precious moments we are forgetting and wasting, cannot be recovered.

In the great game of existence many are staking all and losing all—drifting to hopeless, irremediable bankruptcy. That is a solemn word—a dreadful truth—**the irreparable past!**

Death will dissolve many a 'fairy vision' that has lured and charmed us. Death will sweep down many 'flimsy cobwebs of earth' that we have laboriously weaved—**poor tawdry things** we have so often clung to and clutched!

God's dealings

God's dealings are . . .
sometimes penal,
sometimes disciplinary,
most often remedial,
always loving.

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