

find ministers of grace compassing our path and our lying down. Verily He has given His angels charge concerning us : perchance, the angel of pain, to purify ; or the angel of disappointment, to humble ; or the angel of loss, to enrich. But all His angels work together for good to them that love Him.

T. H. DARLOW.

“THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM.”

“For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”—*Heb.* xii. 2.

WE read a great man’s biography mainly to understand what kind of man he was. We try to get behind his titles and trappings, and to touch the man himself. We pass over the mere details and accidents in his career ; we want to discover the ideas which inspired him, and the ambitions which controlled, to see into the passions and sorrows which struggled in his breast, and so to realize what it was that moved him along the path he trod.

And we read the New Testament amiss unless it teaches us something about the motives of Jesus Christ, unless it opens His inward life to our gaze, and makes us understand not only His words and deeds, but also, by help of these, what manner of man He Himself was. The sacred biography will profit us little, except as it admits us into the heart of the Son of Man, so that we sympathise with His feelings, and grasp His purpose, and rejoice with Him as He rejoices, and weep with Him as He weeps.

Now we are hindered from this sympathy with Christ’s human experience, in part by our theological prejudices, and still more by our moral defects. For spiritual secrets are spiritually discerned ; and we are not good enough to understand His goodness. We are not simple enough nor pure enough, to realize how simply pure and how purely simple His mind and His motives were. We cannot imagine a man so perfect that He could always obey His natural impulse, because His impulse was always right. Jesus Christ always did exactly what it was natural for Him to do. And half our explanations of His words and deeds miss the mark because they are so clumsy and far-fetched and elaborate and artificial. The truth about Him is generally so simple that we

are not child-like enough to take it in. Consider, for instance, His first miracle, when He was a guest at the marriage feast of one of His friends. Probably the bridegroom was a working man, perhaps one of the crew of Peter's boat, or, it may be, another young carpenter who had worked at the same bench with Jesus Himself. At that feast, whether from absence of forethought or presence of poverty, we read that "they wanted wine." And at once Christ supplied the need, so quickly and quietly that the guests themselves did not know what He had done. It was an act of pure and simple kindness. We need not invent cumbrous explanations of it. He would not let His friend sit ashamed and confused because the wine had run short on his wedding day.

And I believe that the motives which prompted most of our Lord's miracles were just as simple and natural. They were not performed as portents, or carefully calculated to impress the bystanders; He wrought them out of pure pity, because He felt the same impulse of compassion that we feel when we come face to face with distress. Only, with Him, the wish to help and the power to help went hand in hand. Christ went about doing good just because it was natural to Him, because He loved to do it. He enjoined silence on so many whom He healed, from the same instinct which makes every modest man unwilling that his left hand should know what his right hand doeth. And when Christ was held back from using His power, it was by the same kind of motive which still holds back every man who is wise as well as kind, when often he longs to help, but may not, and can only pass by. However rich you are, you dare not scatter your wealth broadcast among the needy, to do them incalculable harm. And, in like manner, our Lord was constantly checked in the exercise of His power, because He *could* only help those who were fit to be helped. He was far too kind to cure men's bodies at the expense of their souls. He desired to say "thy sins be forgiven thee" in the same breath in which He said "arise and walk." But often He was hindered by the evil in the men whom He longed to bless, and "He was able to do no mighty work because of their unbelief."

Jesus Christ rejoiced in doing good. Alike in the exercise of His power and in its restraint, He followed the simple prompting of His own overflowing tenderness, His own instinctive wisdom. But though doing good was natural to Him, it was never easy. Be-

yond the opposition and unbelief of men, every miracle seems to have cost Him an effort. Virtue went out of Him as it went into the weak. By mysterious sympathy, He took the sicknesses that He cured, and bare the infirmities that He ended, and suffered for the sins that He forgave. In all our human affliction He was Himself afflicted: it pierced His heart; and though He saved others, He could not save Himself. He never had one thought or wish to save Himself; His delight was to spend Himself for the world. He went about doing good, simply and naturally, because He loved the work in spite of its unspeakable cost. Christ's supreme gladness was self-sacrifice. The Man of Sorrows was happy—happy to live and labour, to suffer and die as He did. “*For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame.*”

“*And behold He hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*” For the heart of God Almighty is opened to us in His Son. The blessedness of heaven is the same blessedness which made Christ eager to endure that He might redeem. In that Divine life and death we see revealed the eternal nature, the eternal beatitude. God shows us what is the root and ground of His own Being. We learn how love must always delight itself in sacrifice; we understand how God Himself is love.

And this, which fills the throne of heaven, is also the highest bliss we can know on earth. Here is the supreme experience, the star-like rapture worth all the world beside; it is born out of pain willingly endured for love's sake. Even in this life it is possible to gather grapes of thorns; and when we taste the wine which Christ's hand has pressed from that strange vintage, we find how no other wine, that maketh glad the heart of man, is worthy to be compared with it. God has prepared many good things for us, here below; but the immortal joy which, for love's sake, can endure the cross and despise the shame, far, far transcends them all. When once we set our lips to the cup of its sacrament, we can only say, “Thou hast kept the best wine until now.”

T. H. DARLOW.