

IDEALS OF EVERY-DAY LIFE.

No. I.

Is it yet so settled *what life is*? Has experience long since tried and made the most of it? Shall the son plod on in the footsteps of the father? Shall the first child's blunders be fastened upon his children's children, and the experiment of the ignorant first-comer be law to all them that come after? Is there no room for improvement? May not life, in all its forms, be lifted up, and hackneyed drudgery be inspired with an idea, an energy, a heartiness, which shall make it drudgery no longer? Must man forever continue the slave of habit, doing things for no more convincing reason than custom, and positively *making* life a dull thing, lest he should be guilty of finding it in his experience not quite so dull as represented (for it would be a shame to differ from all the world in such a comforting conclusion)?

Let us see then. There are certain things which fall to the lot of all humanity; certain things which every man must do and bear. In what spirit does he do them and bear them? In what spirit does he work, walk abroad, talk with his neighbor, bury his dead, store himself with knowledge, betake himself to the house of worship? According to the spirit with which he does these things, will the field or shop, the school or study, the walk, the fireside circle, the church, the scene of suffering, be to him dull, discouraging, and degrading, or beautiful and full of ever increasing interest and hope. The Christian finds his heaven in each of these; and each of them may be enumerated among the pleasures of religion.

1. First, then, behold the religious man *at work*. The first question asked about every one is: What does he *do*? What is his business? And this very justly; for, until a man have something to do, he has no right to be *thought* of in any other relation.

It is the law of nature, that man must *work*. An outward necessity, if not an inward one, compels him to it. Two causes keep us always active. A restlessness of our own, an inward natural tendency to do things, or what is

called an active impulse, keeps us busy always, with one or more of our faculties, creating or destroying; keeps us working for the pleasure of it, whether profitably or not. But should this inward impulse fail, Want, our stern task-master, threatening to cut off our supplies, still warns us from without that we must either work or die. All men work, then, somehow, either because they love to do so, or because they must. Labor affords the only means of keeping ourselves alive; and when life is secured, labor still becomes the first condition of enjoying it. Yet labor is full of hardship. It is oftentimes degrading, narrowing, and enslaving to the mind. It is so precisely in proportion as it is the labor of necessity, rather than of choice. Man's daily occupation may be a dull routine, to which he dooms himself, although a weariness; or it may be a cheerful, entertaining, instructive, and improving exercise. Most men only *support* themselves by labor. A wise man both supports and educates and amuses himself by it. To one it is all drudgery, to another a delight. One man by the labor of his hands is rendered coarse and ignorant, the slave of habit, slow to detect opportunities of improvement, unaware of his own resources and capabilities, blind to the beauties there are around him, uninteresting for lack of thought, with nothing to say for himself when he meets his friends, a weariness to himself and others, a mere *hand* on the field, a mere eater and sleeper at home, to whom life is an old story altogether, slightly varied from day to day, but always growing duller, want and vexations of all sorts continually pressing upon him without, balanced by little mental faculty or cheerful occupation of the mind within. The slave of circumstances he, spending all his life in these dull arts of keeping himself alive. Another man from the same labor gains strength and dignity and intelligence, and becomes more and more a *man*, with every task to which he stoops. His labor is occupation not only to his hands, but also to his mind. His observation grows more active, his judgment more sound, his heart warmer and stouter; he learns to rely upon himself, he finds what resources he has within himself to draw from, he sees the significance of common sights and sounds, nature becomes full of meaning to him, the beauty of the world increases upon

him, God is manifest to him in every shifting cloud, or opening flower; in the mysterious processes of growth he traces analogies and correspondencies with his own mental and moral growth, his soul fills with wisdom, his heart with hope and confidence, and to him life becomes more new and beautiful and interesting, the longer he lives.

So different a thing may the same work be to two men working side by side. It is the end that dignifies the means. The meanest occupation, through which shines a lofty purpose, becomes glorious. No work is low or degrading in itself. The coarsest handicraft is as honorable as the most respectable profession, when the laborer respects himself, and is working for a noble end, namely, the perfection of his own nature, or the happiness of those he loves. Let a man propose to himself the higher object for which to live, and all he does partakes of the dignity of his life-plan, of his being's end and aim. Then the toil which looks immediately to bread and subsistence, looks farther too, and becomes in a higher sense part of the eternal culture of the soul; and the fruits of one's labor are not only bread to eat, but bread of life.

The religious man lives for one great object;—to perfect himself, to unite himself by purity with God, to fit himself for heaven by cherishing within him a heavenly disposition. He has discovered that he has a soul; that his soul is himself; that it changes not with the changing things of life, but receives its discipline from them; that man does not live by bread alone, but that the most real of all things, inasmuch as they are the most enduring, are the things which are not seen; that faith and love and virtue are the sources of his life, and that he realizes nothing, except he lay fast hold upon them. For these, then, he lives. And, whatever may be his trade, to whatever work, impelled by physical necessity, or the habits of his neighborhood, he turns his hand, this purpose of his life appears in it. He extracts a moral lesson, a lesson of endurance or of perseverance, for himself, or a new evidence of God and of his own immortal destiny, from every day's hard task. He builds up not only his fortune, but himself by it; he stores not only his garner, but his mind. As he drops the seeds into the earth, all-instructive nature having caught his eye, drops other seeds, that bear

fruit more than once, into his soul. As he clears the ground of weeds, with unseen hand the while he pulls away the weeds of prejudice and wrong desire, that are growing up to choke the plants of Paradise within the garden of his heart. The sunshine on his fertile fields looks doubly clear to him, because of the sunshine of conscience in his breast. And, as he reaps his golden grain, his soul reaps golden hopes and golden approbation in the field which he is tilling for his God.

Drudgery is one thing. True labor is another. No man has any right to be a drudge; no man was ever made for that. If true to himself, he cannot *but* be something more. The seeds of something more are in him. In his very nature there wait faculties to be unfolded, which he has no right whatever to neglect, faculties religious, moral, intellectual, in exercising which he lifts himself above the sense of want, above the power of fear, of fortune, or of death, feels his immortality, becomes himself, what God intended him to be. In any kind of business or labor he can find sphere for the exercise of these, his greatest faculties; if he cannot, he is bound to labor somewhere else. No one has a right to live, merely to "get a living." And this is what is meant by *drudgery*. Drudgery is not confined to the labor of the hands, not to any one class of occupations. There are intellectual and fashionable drudges. And there are hard-working, humble laborers, more free, more dignified and manly, in all they do, or look, or think, than any who look down upon them. Some soil their hands with the earth; others soil their minds indelibly by the pride and vanity which keep their hands so delicate. The true man "stoops to conquer." The vain man wears his head aloft, while the rock is wasting from under his feet, and the glow of disinterested activity, the beauty on which he prides himself, fades from his face.

The Christian makes his business, of whatsoever sort, contribute equally to his acquisition of knowledge, to his amusement, to the trial of his faith, the growth of his affections, no less than to his health and his support. Into all his work he carries *thought*. He makes it a science; and so saves time for other things, while he makes his labor interesting, not the same old story every day, but

full of new and valuable suggestions to his mind. To his curious mind the work of his hands, becomes a practical illustration of principles; and so the thorough-going *doer* becomes the healthy *thinker*. He thinks for whom and for what he labors and his faith and his affections are increased. Haply, too, his imagination, his sense of beauty, becomes quickened. Daily conversant with nature, the glorious scenery of his labors, a quiet enthusiasm kindles in the heart of the farmer, and a new source of happiness is now unlocked to him. An intelligent farmer is certainly the happiest of men. His daily toil is reconcilable with every kind of higher culture. He may make himself in every sense a man. He need not be a mere *hand*. He may trace out the laws of nature, and let the sight of principles inspire him. He may be a philosopher on the field. He may cultivate a sympathy for all men, while everything around him may fill him with sweet gratitude to God. The all-surrounding beauty make take possession of his soul, till in his heart unconsciously he becomes a poet. To ensure this, it only needs a religious spirit, a spirit of constant self-improvement. For religion unlocks all the fountains of the soul, and puts a man gradually in possession of all his powers. He first finds out what he is and what is in him, when he devotes himself to God. If he is truly religious, he will grow intelligent, free, and happy; and life to him will never lose its interest; rest will not be idleness; toil will not be drudgery. But while he bends to his work, he will be seeking truth, loving his neighbor, and communing with his God.

In labor, too, the Christian feels a sweet renunciation, when he makes himself independent of his comforts; and so is he both happy in himself without them, enjoying the triumph of his own spirit; and he returns to them with keener zest. We know not the sweetness of any pleasure, until we can forego it; we appreciate none of our advantages, until we cease to depend upon them. All things become more beautiful to us, when we find we can do without them. There can be no rest where there has been no labor. There is no sabbath to him who has not had his week of work.

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