

Listening Again To Our Lord

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THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS WITHIN.

MAKING ONE'S OWN SUNSHINE.

SOMETIMES or other we all have to make our own quota of sunshine. Life resembles our Irish climate, a little sun and plenty of rain; but nowhere else do cattle "the little feet of the Tain" fall so softly; no other country has the wondrous cloud and sky panorama and the ever-changing beauty of mountain and hill and valley, stream and lake and river. So, there are compensations. Had we continual sun, our grass would not be the vivid emerald green it is or our trees canopies of soft luxuriant leaves. Similarly with life. All lives have their need of sunshine and mist but mist may predominate. God sends us just as much of each as He sees good for us.

There are natures that continuous happiness would make blind to the existence of God, just as there are persons whom the constant glare of the tropical sun makes blind. Moreover their satisfaction with life and the pleasant places in which their "lives have fallen" would blind them to the needs of others, to the good they could do if they sought out those who are crippled mentally, morally or physically by life, or those who are only temporarily maimed by its hurts. Such lives of constant sunny happiness suffer from arrested development. They have not that maturity of understanding or that capacity for sympathy which familiarity with the rains and mists of time gives. In so far they are deficient. They lack the fellow-feeling that makes us wondrous kind.

SUFFERING IN LIFE.

To have met with nothing but happiness is, as far as life is concerned, to trail along on broken wing incapable of swift and lengthy flights into the wide expanses of Heaven where a proper perspective of the earth and its trials is obtained. Nothing so enlarges one's outlook, extends one's horizon to the uttermost limits, as does suffering. Its effects on inanimate objects too is beneficent. Seeds must be let rot and die in the ground before they can produce; trees must be pruned of their overgrowth and even of healthy branches; human beings must endure pain to be purified and to reach their potential stature. It is one of the marvels of life, all the good that pain does to the human heart if pain be rightly borne. It both purifies and develops just as the beneficent rain washes away dust and impurities from foliage, fruit and flowers and getting down to the heart and roots, feeds them with the growth-producing moisture.

The writer once knew a teenager with a lovely voice who sang like a thrush and with as little feeling, glorious notes but empty. Sweet sounds, no more. She heard that same singer twenty years later when the girl had endured, "a woman's fate of tears" and pain, but now it was a delight to listen to the mellow flute-like voice enhanced by the deep feeling that suffering had given her. The prettiest face or the one with classic regularity of feature is not the most attractive; it is the face whose lines show that joy has triumphed over sorrow, peace over pain, resignation over desire, the face where the shadows serve to emphasize the sunshine — a face to love and to trust.

LONELY SOULS.

There are many in this world compelled to make regularly, and systematically their own sunshine, to squeeze a modicum of happiness out of a monotonous, dreary life: the lonely whose relatives are few or none and whose friends, having their own separate interests and occupations, can look in on them but once in a while; the sick who in addition to the pain of their illness have necessarily to bear the pain of being left often alone; the ill-matched couple who having no family have got on each other's nerves, or who have them 'family reared' and scattered; those other unfortunate ones who are thrown constantly with uncongenial masterful companions who persistently try to arrange their life for them and are critical of all they do and say; the sensitive who are being flayed alive, metaphorically, by unrefined, loud-voiced colleagues from whom they cannot get away and whose thoughts and ways belong to a different sphere from theirs; the middle-aged employee who has a harsh dictator-boss and has no home of her own, etc. Is not life full of such lonely souls?

Now what do we all do, on a persistently wet day bereft of even a faint flicker of sunshine? Do we not try to forget the dreariness and the heaviness by burying ourselves in our duties, looking forward to the warmth and glow of a blazing fire at evening and the society of some congenial friend or of one of that larger and more faithful world of companions — a book! Is not the coziness of the picture enhanced to our mind's eye and ear by the incessant pattering of the raindrops on the window-panes?

A BRIGHT SIDE TO EVERYTHING.

Similarly, when life's clouds overshadow us blotting out for the time the sunshine of happiness, we can prevent the mist and the "blinding rain" from damping our spirits. It is no consolation to tell us that somewhere the sun is shining if our outlook is drip, drip, drip. But there is always a bright side to everything if we are happy-minded and look for it. Our peace of mind is our own inalienable possession, and we are fools if we allow anyone or anything destroy it.

Suppose we have been blamed in the wrong, blamed for something we would not stoop to do, or have had to listen to words that raised blisters on our sensitive skin, or have to put up with the bumptious criticisms of the ignorant, "the spurns of office, the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely" we can surely let the matter not penetrate our "middle ear" much less our mind and heart. The Chinese say: "You cannot prevent the birds of sorrow from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building nests in your hair." We can dismiss it from our minds as unworthy of our consideration, finding if possible an excuse for the offender on the plea of ill-health, the crabbedness of age, lack of breeding or of education. We would be foolish indeed to give the offender the gratification of seeing by "the dejected behaviour of our visage" how much he has wounded us. If he regrets it (how few, even of the better-reared, express nowadays their regret for the pain they have caused!), he will be glad to see it did not affect us badly; if he does not regret it, our indifference will be our best corrective since it deprives him of any gratification, and our seeming invulnerability will shield us against future attacks. But to let him see that he has blotted the sun out of our heaven is to give him a handy weapon for future use.

LISTEN AND SMILE.

There is only one way with the professional critic and fault-finder who seems to have an asp under his tongue — just listen and smile. Not to take up the matter is what such people dislike most. If you defend the person or action attacked, you give them what they are itching for — cause for an argument, for showing off their supposed clear-sightedness into the inner meaning of the words and

deeds of others. A smile is most effectual in making them realise that you consider their judgements trivial and unworthy of argument. That silences them, unless they are quite thick-skinned.

It is more often, strange to say, the trifling annoyances caused by the words and actions of others that dim if not completely blot out our sunshine. We are all brave enough to face the big troubles of life, like the loss by death or separation of those we love, the lack of health, of necessary money; the waywardness and bad behaviour of relatives; the injury done to us by slanderous tongues. These we take from the Hand of God as somehow essential to life. Heavy crosses strike us dumb, but the little things make us voluble with indignation because they are little and therefore avoidable if others had consideration and ourselves more virtue and patience. We fail to realize, till too late, that these too come from the Hand of God, indirectly but by His permission, for our good. We see only the human hand and tongue behind them, and that is where we make a mistake. The human side merits only to be ignored while we readily accept all as from our Father, God. Moreover, we have to bear them. There is often no redress in this modern world of proletarian dictatorship where often self-assertion vaults into the saddle and cannot be remonstrated with unless you want to be ridden down. How foolish are we then to let such things affect us! "What is without remedy should be without regard." Endure them we must as long as God wills and "In His Will is our peace" as Dante found out long years ago.

GREAT SOULS ARE TRIED BY SORROW.

Have you ever met anyone who has not many difficulties to put up with? Has anyone all that his heart desires? Seen from afar, the lives of others are apparently serene and all their paths are peace. Is this true? You and I know it is not, for:

"Into each life some rain must fall Some days must be dark and dreary!"

People put up a brave show before the world for their own sake and also because the world expects it. It has trouble enough of its own without having to contend with yours. No one likes a grouser who complains of the little things that he should have the courage to despise if he is unable to overcome them. Surely, we know someone who is bearing a great trial with heroic patience and submission to the Will of God — not that all our trials come from God. Far from it. But they all have His permission, and from each of them He expects us to draw profit and to lay up a store of eternal glory. Great souls are tried by afflictions but little souls turn trifles into big afflictions, as irritation turns a sore into a cancer.

When you think of it, how little others can do to destroy one's happiness! They can take my wealth, my health, my home, my friends, my reputation, but they cannot touch the inner core of me, my conscience, my mind, my character, my opinions, my peace. The external ME can be humiliated, beaten, dragged in the mire, imprisoned, even executed, but the real ME is untouchable. They can dub me liar, knave, thief, but if I am none of these things such persons are beating their heads against a rock. They are hurting only themselves. Tyrants all down the ages have had to endure this bitter sense of defeat when up against a martyr of Christ or a confessor. They realised to their chagrin that only the shell of the person was in their power. Enclosed within that was a something they could not destroy. Martyrs like Saint Thomas More and Saint John Fisher went gaily to their death, for the sunshine of God's Presence irradiated them always. Only a guilty conscience could destroy that. I too can enjoy that Sun if I keep my conscience free from sin. If my little world be dark and gloomy, I can raise my drawbridge and withdraw into the fortress of my soul, and enjoy

the sunlight of God. My peace no man can take from me if my peace be founded on the rock that is God.

SUBMISSION TO GOD'S WILL.

There is only one way for bearing the heavy crosses life brings in its train, and that is complete submission to God's Will. When such a cross is laid on us God lends a helping Hand and shares its weight with us. Religion tells us, and also our own experience, that often what we consider a great trial will turn out in the future to have been a blessing in disguise. The mother who sees her son disgraced and sent to prison for embezzlement would surely have preferred that he had died when young and innocent. Eternity will demonstrate this to our satisfaction about all the trials we have endured on earth. But we must bear them patiently and submissively and if we can — happily — as being God's arrangement in our behalf. We must travel the King's highway of the Cross with sunny cheerfulness. We see only the inch of time in front of us, God sees all. He will judge what is best for us, and He is our Father and loves us. He will work things out for our good no matter how hopeless they seem now. How often one hears the old asserting this fact! But when God looks down on those carrying big crosses with heroism, how small you and I must seem in His Eyes when we childishly resent some trifling annoyance, even allowing it to blot out our sunshine!

VALUE OF SQUALLS.

And if at times a transient breeze

Break the blue crystal of the seas.

What of it? Can you not admire the beauty of variety? Can you not fix your mind on the commingled charm of light and shade, sunshine and shadow? Your life was hitherto a blue sunlit expanse of water, it will be so again. A squall that breaks up the calm of lake or ocean is but a passing event. It will soon be over. What a boon to you if you could only try to see the beauty in it for there is beauty apparent or latent in all things if only the eye be trained to discern it.

The seething waters and foam-capped billows, the howling wind and bellying sails — is there not a majestic fury about them that is of interest? Anyway, do they not give a thrill? You can't be bored while a squall lasts. The monotonous quiet has been rudely shattered and scope given to a set of different sensations. If you can perceive no good behind the sudden onslaught of a tempest at least be content knowing you will survive it and that life will resume its quiet steady flow after a little.

BREASTING THE STORM.

How much richer you will be if only you have offered up the squall to Him Who with a "Peace! be still!" calmed the turbulent waters of Galilee! How much nearer you will be to His Sacred Heart if only you have gone through the squall with skill and honour; taken proper precautions to save your boat from destruction and to lose no spar of virtue! What matter if the boat be chipped, the sails torn and rather draggled, the masts slightly out of gear — these are but signs that the boat has been through a trying time and has weathered the storm effectually.

What a much nobler vessel it is than the freshly-painted, spick and span — oh, yes, but quite untried — vessel now proudly sailing out of dock in all its virgin beauty and — ignorance! Yours has come triumphant through opposing forces which were out to wreck it if possible, and the few scars are but the marks of its victorious struggle. So be comforted. Dock your vessel for repairs. Treat it kindly. See in what it has failed so as to be better prepared for the next tempest — tempests are part of life!

Study its weak points while not forgetting its strong points, and foresee and plan future tactics. Lay up a store of requisites that will enable you to overcome more easily the next storm, for come it will on the circumscribed lake that is your home.

To drop metaphor — throw yourself at the feet of the merciful Saviour Who watched your behaviour all through the trial. Ask Him to show you clearly, in what you failed, in what you could have done better. Ask pardon for the faults committed; the natural upset to your equipoise, the rending of the crystal of your soul, the break-up of your usual imperturbability. You did not go out to seek the storm; you were forced into the thick of it unprepared, flung into the maelstrom by another's quick anger at perhaps nothing. That you have not been submerged by sin is due entirely to the living protection of Christ; that you have not committed even a deliberate venial sin, (oh let this be so,) is due also to Him.

The little faults of surprise, the chipping your boat got, the scratching of its smooth surface, the spoiling of its fresh paint might all be a great deal worse. Take note of them. Ask God's forgiveness and His help to avoid them in future. Study what measures are best to be taken in such circumstances so that next time — there's sure to be a next time while faulty human beings inhabit this earth — you may ride triumphant over the billows like a seabird poised on crested wave.

NEVER LOSE HEART.

Suppose you have failed badly — lost your temper, said things you should not have said, allowed your poor heart to be submerged for hours and days with waves of hot anger at the bitter wounding words, waves of bitter resentment of the cruel things said to you so unjustly and so rudely, suppose that instead of keeping the matter to yourself you've gone about pouring it out on others and causing uncharitable feelings in them — even so do not be dejected. God saw the provocations you got; saw in how far each of you was guilty. Rome was not built in a day, and perfection is a mightier structure. Take heart. It is not easy to withstand an onslaught like that. It is the work of a lifetime, and a long lifetime, to learn how to come triumphant — virtuously triumphant I mean of course — out of such a trying situation.

Persons more experienced than you have come out of a similar crisis with nothing to boast of. You'll do better by degrees. Yes, that implies many a renewal of the conflict. Well, what else are you here for? How long must a wrestler or runner practise his art? What a trying apprenticeship everyone — artist, musician, sculptor, architect, engineer must undergo before he knows his profession. And yours is the most important profession in the world — to become Christ-like. Why only for God's goodness, the splendid way He imparts knowledge to us and helps us to understand and remember it, we would not learn the 'A. B. C.' of it in the longest life time.

"CONSUMMATUS IN BREVI".

MADE PERFECT IN BREVITY.

Clever pupils like Saint Aloysius, Saint John Berchmans, the Little Flower, [Blessed] Marie Celine [1878-1897] assimilated the teaching at once. A little tuition from the Divine Master and the lesson was theirs for ever. They went ahead so rapidly that they were "finished" in a short time and their school days over. But dense, unwieldy pupils like you and me have to go slowly, learn painfully line by line, and alas! notwithstanding the labour spent, we easily forget the facts we had acquired with such trouble. The lesson is hammered in day after day, by trial after trial, and theoretically, we know what we should do and how we should conduct ourselves in certain circumstances, but when the

testing time comes, puff! all the knowledge vanishes before a storm of emotion and human frailty. It is only in the chilling coolness of the reaction that we remember what the Master had taught us, and expected us to do. How easy it is to lose our heads! How wise we are after the event! How well we know the little word or term that precipitated the crisis, though scarcely meant at all! And ah! how ashamed we are at failing the Teacher so badly. How pained He must have felt at that General Inspection with the whole court of Heaven looking on! Little pride He can take out of His pupil!

GOD KNOWS ALL.

But unlike earthly teachers, He is not annoyed. He knows how hard the lesson is. He is not disappointed. He knows the floodtide of anger swept us off our feet and that we did not really mean to hurt Him and disgrace Him. His Mercy is above all His works, and if we only acknowledge our fault and ask His help, He will begin all over again patiently with even greater detail in His explanations. So good is our God to us, so loving a Father, so patient a Teacher, so true a Friend.

Unlike the earthly teacher who perhaps overrates our ability, who certainly overrates the clearness and excellence of his own explanation, the dear Lord knows of what clay He made us, knows every weak spot in our nature, knows every hereditary defect, every acquired defect and sympathises with us in all as long as we struggle against them.

If we could only hear Him after a defeat, He would say: "Courage, Child, you could have been worse. You will do better next time, now that you recognise the danger and your weakness. Lean on me and lean hard. My grace is sufficient for you, if only you trust in Me for everything and love Me."

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE.

Pride is exaggerated self-esteem, self-complacency, belief in our own powers because we consider them our own and not merely lent to us by God. Pride is almost ineradicable; we are apparently all born with it as with our blood-vessels. Some get a lot of it knocked out of them if they are lucky enough to be born into a houseful of brothers and sisters; others get rid of it only in old age, if even then. And the proudest are those who think they are humble and that they have no pride. If I might venture an opinion it would be that it is ousted only by the love of God and the realisation — attempt at realisation, that is, — of His Divine perfections and powers. The one thing that He asked His followers to imitate in Him was His meekness and humility of heart. "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart." A great help for us is the sight of humility in others, humility that goes hand in hand with trained knowledge or skill or excellence and achievement in some walk of life. To meet persons who did things and know things and yet remain humble in word and deed has a very telling effect.

It might be thought that an offensive display of pride and arrogance in another would so disgust us that we ourselves would practise humility. But it does not always work out that way. While we are amused — or disgusted, at the obnoxious display, we are far more inclined to humility by a show of genuine humility in others.

A STRIKING LESSON.

To see a successful musician, thinker, sculptor, painter, teacher, inventor listen attentively and humbly to the opinion of another on his own special work, and even subject his own opinion to that other's gives one a striking lesson. No one has any patience with the great Pooh-Bah who withers the enquirer with scornful glance and hurtful word, intimating if not actually saying like Milton's

Satan that "not to know him" for the Authority he is on the subject is "to argue oneself unknown:" Even ordinary breeding rules out behaviour like this. Still how often we see it!

In some small area X poses as the authority on pearls or prunes, the violin or the Jew's harp, painting a picture or a chair, and dare any lesser star even meekly insinuate that he too knows something of the subject — that way annihilation lies. If he does and if others show signs of beginning to believe it then the Authority on the subject by a word here or a smile there proceeds to shatter his bubble reputation concerning the matter. And the Pooh-Bah does not realise how ridiculous he looks. You and I and many of us are as petty and as envious as all that!

Lord, keep me from making a fool of myself like this in the little province I have learned to regard as my special territory! Make me realise that my knowledge of the matter, my handiwork, my skill are infinitesimal compared with that which others possess! In the land of the blind, the man with one eye is King, but he loses all claim to distinction when with the possessors of two eyes.

"WHAT IS THERE THAT YOU HAVE NOT RECEIVED?"

Any gift I may have — gift sounds too big a word — Let me say, any little knowledge or capability I may have, has been by God, and it is only a pebble on the shore of His knowledge of the same matter, and even on that of countless other human beings better informed than I. None of us, let us be as proud as Lucifer, is so foolish as to compare our vaunted perfection with that of God — a rush light to the sun! No, but we compare it with that of others. We think we are more intelligent, more witty, more cultured, more foreseeing, more business-like, of greater wealth or bluer blood than others, and we make the comparison where the advantage is easily on our side. Above all, we compare ourselves with others in some small department or section of a department in which we have been moderately successful and flatter ourselves that we are master of the whole art. We rear roses well and we think ourselves prize gardeners; we make a "light" eatable cake and deem ourselves chefs, cordons-blues; we bring on beginners well at music and consider ourselves virtuosi; we run a few boards together for a hen-house and deem ourselves a great builder; and so on. Any little success serves to inflate our pride to balloon size.

It is very funny to see how we exalt ourselves above others the moment we get charge of anything, be it only a broom or a mouse-trap. "I got charge of it. She did not!" At once, we assert our superiority by keeping the article under lock and key, and requiring the others to come and ask us deferentially for the loan of it. "The key is in my pocket, not hers. She has to ask ME for it." What a splendid victory! We get a back stairs to sweep and we scarcely allow anyone to tread on it and woe betide them if they spill even one drop of water on it! We are up in arms and altogether forget ourselves — or is it that we remember ourselves and our lofty dignity? How God must smile at our childish folly, so like that of the cock-a-doodle-doo who chases every other cock and hen off his particular scrap-heap!

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST.

Christ chose, deliberately chose, to appear a carpenter's son when He could have chosen to appear the Son of the most powerful Ruler of the earth. He spent His childhood and youth running and fetching for His Mother, picking up the tools Saint Joseph wanted, gathering shavings off the floor, carrying back to the owners the mended stool or cart-wheel and which of us would deliberately choose that lowly station and occupation, especially if our intention was to reform and reclaim the world? And if that is the station into which we have been born do we not as soon as ever we can, cut

the painters and steer for another country where we hope to be unrecognised and to rise above all that?

God resists the proud and gives His grace to the humble. He withholds His blessing from the haughty man. He rejects him, disowns him, leaves him to himself so that his works finally crumble. Nothing he does can meet with permanent success for he is not a child of God, but spawn of the devil. He has made himself the centre of things, glories in his words and deeds, is filled with reverence for his achievements and wants you to be so too, acts and talks as if he had made himself and achieved a masterpiece. His whole bearing proclaims, "I am not as the rest of men!" Christ in his parable of the "Pharisee and the Publican" exalts the humble self-despising sinful Publican (tax-gatherer in the East!): above the proud arrogant and apparently good-living Pharisee. We too have that much of good in us that we abhor the pride and self-glorification of the Pharisee, and are glad it was the humble tax-gatherer that Christ praised. But — do we apply the lesson to ourselves? Does it not take the cauterising iron of forty or fifty years of life and humiliations to burn the lesson into us? Even that does not suffice to teach some of us. As an act of humility I may let people literally step over my prostrate body but while I lie there may I not be thinking how humble I am to let them do it or how heavily 'A' takes the necessary step over my body and how much more agilely and gracefully I could do it if positions were reversed! Theoretically, I know that exterior acts of humility are worthless without interior acts of self-abasement. But the devil tries to make me poison with self-satisfaction and pride every good act of mine. That's his job.

"URIAH HEEP".

He even tries to make me assume the cloak of humility to ape it, to put it on as a top-dressing that will win the esteem of others. How often we hear people belittling their manifest good qualities or attainments so as to attract praise. How nauseating to hear a good singer or musician or poet or cook declare that they are devoid of voice or music or poetry or the ability to cook! How much more glory they give to God if they say simply: "I can sing or play or cook but I am hopeless at languages" or something else. To deny God's gift is a churlish thing as well as a lie: We make no impression on others except one of lack of candour and simplicity, plus one impression that we are so proud of the talent (that is really an unacknowledged gift from God) that we are simply inviting laudation for ourselves.

False humility is pride and deceit; true humility recognises its gift and thanks God, its Giver. But it also sees its defects as defects, its limitations as limitations. This is a task that takes a lifetime. How inclined we are to give a nice-sounding euphemistic name to an ugly quality when we ourselves are the possessors of it: our love of power and of interfering in everything becomes helpfulness; our hurtful bluntness becomes candour; our over-care of ourselves a desire not to give trouble; our lack of sympathy and kindness a love of silence and of the hidden life; our selfish engrossment with ourselves alone a love of retirement; our volcanic temper a righteous indignation, and so on. The longer we live the more we recognise that not merely is romantic love blind but that self-love is as blind as a bat. We never "see ourselves as others see us," and hence we are never free from "foolish notions" of our own perfections, like the religious who being told than she was very deep replied, "yes, but it is a nice deep!"

What is it but this "foolish notion" that makes a person who cannot sing or act or read aloud or play the violin etc., insist on doing it? No one dare even hint that her attempt is not a "howling success." You just have to endure while the attempt goes on, and try to switch your mind on to something

pleasant. No one will dare tell us the truth because the truth will not make us "free" but — mad! And even with that, we won't believe it.

It takes at least two lifetimes to acquire a lowly opinion of ourselves, and one may count on one hand the number of humble persons one has met in a long life. It has happened that someone you counted as humble while in the shaded backwaters became when exposed to the glare that beats not upon a throne but a mere ant-hill, a veritable dictator. Only God knows the heart for what it is. "He knew what was in man" but loved him in spite of it as we love a deformed child. It is probable we acquire humility only when the searchlight of God's knowledge and judgement is turned on us at death, and reveals us as we are.

The wise man is known by the fewness of his words, the fool lifts up his voice. "What I say is this" etc., the tone of voice indicating capital letters! That is one of the outward signs of pride — the raised voice and imperious tone. Other signs are the itch to be talking and giving out one's opinions, the constant correction of others, even of those older and above us in rank; the irritation manifested if our opinions are not agreed with; the high dudgeon if something we do is condemned; the contempt for the opinions of others; the boasting of our little bits of success at this and that; the scornful laugh holding others up to ridicule; the debunking clause put in when others are praised.

"Lord, as far as I see, all these defects are mine and have long been. But I suppose this acknowledgment is only momentary. If others should attribute to me even the slightest of these defects, I would probably go up in flames. Make me realise, Lord, my weakness, my faults; let me see myself as others see me but give me the grace to bear the revelation. Give me courage to "take it" like a saint and to set about acknowledging and correcting my many faults, while passing over in silence what I see wrong in others. Jesus, meek and humble of Heart, give me even a spark of your meekness and humility!"

Yes, don't become a "Uriah Heep". "Uriah Heep" was a fictional character created by Charles Dickens in his novel "David Copperfield". The character is notable for his cloying humility, obsequiousness, and insincerity, making frequent references to his own "humbleness". His name has become synonymous with being a 'yes man'.

PREJUDICE.

Prejudice is deadly, is annihilating in its effects. A prejudiced mind will never allow that there is any good in the person or thing it is prejudiced against. It may even allow you to state your "case for"; it may allow you to build up a strong defence but it will finally level it all, with an atomic utterance like: "Nothing good can come out of Nazareth". Pride is bad, but as far as I see, it does not wreak such destruction as prejudice. It is more a personal affair and so latent that one can ignore it and discount it. But prejudice is insidious. Like the tide, it creeps in stealthily far back through creeks and inlets, and with devastating effects, or like a river in spate spreading over the land and leaving slime in its wake.

Prejudice as its name indicates, is a judgement formed before it is reasonable. If people give us reason to dislike them then our dislike is not prejudice; but when we suddenly take a dislike to a person without being able to account for it or for some silly reason like this — "we always disliked Kerry people or Kildare people, or that we once were badly treated by a person of the same name, and when we allow nothing good to be said of that person, then we have prejudice. We cannot account for our harmless likes and dislikes but prejudice does not enter in until we applaud all a

certain person does just because we like him, or disapprove of all he says or does just because we dislike him.

I do not like you, Doctor Fell, The reason why I cannot tell

But this I know and know full well,

I do not like you, Doctor Fell.

FAVOURITES.

Prejudice is nearly always taken to be against a person, but blind prejudice in favour of someone has equally deleterious results, for those listening to our commendations of the favourite and sensing our prejudice for the other will discount all we say, and probably become prejudiced against him. Action and re-action are equal and opposite, they tell us! The world is full of people given to both sorts of prejudices, and it is often hard to see which is the worse, for both breed evil. We dislike the man who will believe his favourite can do no wrong, closing his eyes to every defect of character, but we lose all patience with the man who sees no good whatever in his *bête noire*. The reasonable person, the level-headed person will build up his judgement by slow degrees, weighing the good against the bad and believing that no one is wholly white or wholly black but that each of us is only a dim and dusty grey.

It is anything but a sign of level-headedness to see nothing good in those we dislike without cause; it is as if they were always focused on the blind spot of our spiritual eye for good. We are stone-blind to any good in them. Everything they are and do irritates us, their manner, their talk, their walk, their dress, their sentiments — we even dislike their cat and their dog!

AN OFF-SHOOT OF PRIDE.

Prejudice is of course an off-shoot of pride. The humble of heart and of mind are never intolerant. They question their own opinions, they doubt their conclusions, they weigh things in the clarifying light that humility always gives, and thus they are able to adjust and alter their opinions. They are open to conviction. Prejudice never alters, never gives in. It is as obstinate as it is unreasoning. That's why it is prejudice.

We all respect a man who will say of his *bête noire*: "though I dislike him I can see that he is good and charitable," or "just towards his employees" or "straight in his dealings." We value the fair-mindedness of such a speaker, but if he launches forth into philippics, accusations, without foundation "like the baseless fabric of a vision" we pay no heed to anything he says. It is all the poisonous froth of prejudice. To distrust all red-haired people because one red-haired person deceived us, or everyone called Macintosh because a Macintosh once let us down is ridiculous.

THE GOOD OPINION OF OTHERS.

There is a danger that prejudice even though "a little wave, will beat admission" sometime, somewhere working great wrong to the victim of it. We all have a right to the good opinion of others. We all are obliged to think well of others until we are definitely sure of their misdeeds, and even then, if we cannot give them the benefit of the doubt, we are bound to excuse them on the ground of lack of instruction, or of proper bringing up, or of education or of self-control. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." But it is manifestly unjust that a man should let his mind be poisoned against another simply because of what a prejudiced person told him. To be fair we should take people as we find them, not as X found them, though prudence will tell us to keep

what X said in the back of our head, if he were not a prejudiced person. To let ourselves be taken in as X was taken in and after he had warned us would be folly. X's opinion was not the outcome of prejudice but of experience.

We must not be biased by what prejudice instills into us but form our own judgement slowly and after long experience. Can we do this? Often it is impossible, for our friend's biased opinions will keep occurring to our minds and tingeing our opinions. But we should make an honest effort to be fair.

MAKING ENEMIES FOR ANOTHER.

The victim of prejudice may turn out to be a very decent fellow, though his enemy cannot see it. It may be that these two ruffle up each other's feathers, while I can get on with either. What an awful lot of unhappiness would be, and is, caused by one person making enemies for another! How miserable it must be to feel that someone who is a perfect stranger to you has been impregnated by a third person with unreasoning dislike of you! What a severe account will have to be rendered by the person who communicates his prejudices to another, poisoning the other's mind against some one who never did him any harm! One such prejudice communicated may be the starting point for innumerable feuds and countless mortal sins. Often uneducated people ignore this, or are ignorant of it.

By spreading prejudice and thereby robbing another's life of its mead of happiness, or depriving him of the friendship and esteem of others or the position he has a right to expect is to him a serious injustice and one which will bring down on the doer the punishment of Heaven.

And what incalculable harm we do ourselves by indulging our prejudices! There is no form of uncharitableness so hard to forgive. We can excuse the man who hates his enemy and injures him; he has some cause and some reason on his side. To him God has said: "Forgive your enemy till seventy times seven times," and he knows definitely where he stands. But the prejudiced man has no reason on his side, and possibly excuses his blind dislike by the plea that it is one of those innocent dislikes for which he is not accountable. It would be innocent if he suppressed it, but does he?

Grant, O Lord, that no one may ever suffer through any unreasoning dislike of mine, that I may never influence others to dislike those I dislike! And if ever prejudice gets the upper-hand of me, rebuke me, O Lord, lest I offend you, and endanger another's welfare!

GLOOMING IN THE GLOAMING.

In the dangerous forties, the devil often tempts us to get introspective, to ask ourselves if we have got the best that life can hold. While never doubting our God-sent "call" we wonder if we have missed the best turn in following that disembodied Voice; if there were in His service other softer, greener paths we could have taken and avoided the rough and rutty road we took so nonchalantly. In our eagerness to develop whatever intellectual gifts we possessed and to make ourselves models of efficiency and usefulness, were we not unconsciously a little tactless in handling the human element, a little 'Roma locuta est' ('Rome has spoken') mannered in order to get our work done, forgetting the sensitive mimosas in our path. Perhaps a business-like manner that others took for brusqueness rubbed many up the wrong way and made enemies for us for life that time, especially the Setting Sun, amply revealed, one now, one again. Or is it the old and true saying that he who never made enemies never made anything?

"You have no enemies you say,
Alas! my friend, the boast is poor.
They that have mingled in the fray
Of duty that the brave endure
Must have made foes."

How much of it is our fault, how much the natural resentment for useful work accomplished? Would it have been better (as some have done) to have glided noiselessly along the grassy path getting quickly out of others light and way than to have trod firmly and resonantly along the concrete road open to all, thinking only of the task to be performed?

Do young people ever suspect that there can be so much jealousy of success in life, that their little role is of such importance as to rouse anyone's ill-will? I don't think they do. They are too simple, too unsuspecting.

THE REFINING EFFECT OF TRIAL.

God sends this trial to smoothen and round off the rough texture of our life work. It is now ready to be crowned, by Him, as an 'opus Dei', 'a work of God'. Without the refining effect of the trial, the work would have been only commonplace and third rate. That unconsciously we may have caused this hostility does not make it any easier to bear, for looking back we remember only the attraction of the work, the *joie de vivre* with which we threw ourselves into the fray in order to win through for our side. That it would in later life assume the appearance of a scrum, we had not the faintest idea. Those with and for whom we did the work may be long since gathered in the courtyards of Paradise, a fact which adds to our pain as we must needs forego their sympathy and understanding of the situation. And when we knew them and worked with them in the gaiety of our youth we had no conception that life would have this brick ready to shy at our grey head. Consequently, we are unprepared for it, except in so far as we have come to realise that many surprising things, not by any means all gracious and beautiful, lie folded in the rose-petals of Time. On then, brave heart, put your shoulder under the arm of His Cross as He drags it uphill. One grateful glance from those Divine Eyes will repay for all.

"FOLLOW ME."

He lived through 33 years of misunderstanding and contempt, ingratitude and obloquy; can you not endure it for a few years? You have His help and love and sympathy, His complete appreciation of every factor. He had no one's but His Divine Father's, for no one else exactly understood the situation. The human race for whom He was enduring everything remained aloof and indifferent when they were not actively hostile to Him. For thirty years of His life people passed Him by, barely glancing at Him, and if they had to become conscious of His Personality it was in a vague, disinterested way; asking each other: "Who is this that He is? Is He by any chance the Young Man Who is the Son of Joseph, the carpenter?" On Calvary He looked down from the Cross on a sea of malignant faces — excepting the few, I will name four, faithful Ones, Mary His Mother, Mary Magdalen, Mary of Cleophas and Saint John. Many were quite ignorant of the Great Redemption of the Race taking place on Calvary.

Many asked what was all the fuss about, only to be told probably that it was nothing but some malefactors meeting with their just deserts, or that an agitator, a dangerous young man who had

been stirring up the people and causing trouble was at last being dealt with as he deserved, or that it was a would-be reformer, a quack miracle-worker and healer, an associate of sinners, a carpenter's son with queer ideas who had fallen foul of the Governor and High Priests, and so on! It is easy to imagine what ignorant or malicious tongues poured out. Let me just think of this when my little world sums me up disdainfully as a good-for-nothing, a dreamer, a shirker or — worse!

Harsher names, more unjust names can never be given me than were given the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the Redeemer of mankind, Who shed to the last drop of His Blood to save us when a sigh of His would have sufficed to atone to His Father for our iniquities. But love of us made Him give all. As He looked down the ages for nearly 2,000 years how few He could see who really loved Him for Himself! How few willing to give Him all — their life, their love, their possessions material and spiritual! "He trod the wine-press alone." He says by the voice of the psalmist: "My heart has expected reproach and misery, and I looked for one that would comfort Me and I found none." (Psalm 69: 20-21, it is Psalm 68:21-22 in the Vulgate). I have no right to expect better treatment from the human race than my Lord and Master received. "We indeed justly," "but He — "!
