

J H Jowett-Daily Meditation 12

J H JOWETT'S
DEVOTIONALS

JANUARY JULY
FEBRUARY AUGUST
MARCH SEPTEMBER
APRIL OCTOBER
MAY NOVEMBER
JUNE DECEMBER

MY DAILY MEDITATION

for the Circling Year

by John Henry Jowett

DECEMBER

DECEMBER The First

A FAITHFUL FRIEND

Proverbs 27:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

"A FAITHFUL friend is a strong defense."

He is a gift of God, and therefore a "means of grace." The Lord's seal is upon his ministry. How we impoverish ourselves by separating these precious gifts from their Giver? We desecrate many a fair shrine by emptying it of God. We turn many a temple into just a common house. When we think of our friend let us link him to our Father, and fall upon our knees in grateful praise.

He is God's minister in his encouragements. When he cheers me, it is "the Sun of righteousness who rises with healing in His wings." All radiant words are just lamps for "the light of life." All genial speech carries flame from the altar fire of heaven.

And he is God's minister in his reproofs. He uses a clean knife: there is no poison on the blade. And when he does surgeon's work upon me, it is clean work, healthy work, the relentless enemy of disease. Some men cut me, and the wound festers. There is malice in the deed. My friend wounds me in order that he may give me a larger, sweeter life.

DECEMBER The Second

THE LORD AS A FRIEND

John 15:8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17.

YE are my friends!"

In my Lord's friendship there is the ministry of sacrifice. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." This great Friend is always giving His blood. It is a lasting shame when professed Christians are afflicted with spiritual anæmia. And yet we are often so fearful, so white-faced, so chicken-hearted, so averse from battle, that no one would think us to be "the soldiers of the Lord." We need blood. "Except ye drink my blood ye have no life."

And in my Lord's friendship there is the privilege of most intimate communion.

"All things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." He takes us into His confidence, and tells us His secrets. It is His delight to lift the veil, and give us constant surprises of love and grace. He discovers flowers in desert places, and in the gloom He unbosoms "the treasures of darkness." He is a Friend of inexhaustible resource, and His companionship makes the pilgrim's way teem with interest, and abound in the wonders of redeeming grace.

DECEMBER The Third

ARMS AND THE MAN!

1Thessalonians 5:4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

WHAT wonderful armour is offered to me in which to meet the insidious assaults of the devil!

There is "the armour of light." Sunlight is the most sanative energy we know. It is the foe of many a deadly microbe which seeks a lodging in our bodies. Light is a splendid armour, even in the realm of the flesh. And so it is in the soul. If the soul is a home of light, the eternal light, evil germs will die as soon as they approach us. They will find nothing to breed on. "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me."

And there is the armour of "faith and love." The opposite to faith is uncertainty, and the opposite to love is cynicism, and who does not know that uncertainty and cynicism are the very hotbeds for the machinations of the evil one? When faith is enthroned the soul is open to the reception of grace, and when love shares the throne the sovereignty is invincible.

And there is the armour of "hope." Even in a physical ailment a man has a mighty ally who wrestles in hope. And when a man's hope is in the Lord his God all the powers in the heavenly places are his allies, and by his hope he shall be saved.

DECEMBER The Fourth

CHILDREN OF LIGHT

1Thessalonians 5:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.

CAN we think of a more beautiful figure than this—"children of light"? As I write these words I look out upon a building every window of which is ablaze with light, every room the home of attractive brightness. And my life is to be like that! And I look again and I see a lighthouse sending out its strong, pure, friendly beams to guide the mariner as he seeks his "desired haven." And my life is to be like that! And I look once more, and I see a common road lamp, sending its useful light upon the busy street, helping the wayfarer as he goes from place to place. And my life is to be like that!

And if my soul is all lit up in friendly radiance for others, the light will be my own defence. Light always scares away the vermin. Lift up a stone in the meadow, let in the light, and see how a hundred secret things will scurry away. And light in the soul scares away "the unfruitful works of darkness"; they cannot dwell with the light. Light repels the evil one; it acts upon him like burning flame. Yes, we are well protected when we are clothed in "the armour of light."

But how can we become "children of light," holy homes of protective and saving radiance? Happily, it is not our lot to provide the light, it is ours to provide the lamp. If we offer the lamp the Lord will give the flame.

DECEMBER The Fifth

THE SECOND-BEST FOR GOD

1Chronicles 17:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.

SO the best was for man, and the second-best for God! The cedar for self-indulgence, and the curtains for the home of worship! It is a marked sign of spiritual awakening when a man begins to contrast his own indulgences with the rights of God. There are so many of us who are lavish in our home and miserly in the sanctuary. We multiply treasures which bring us little profit, and we are niggardly where treasure would be of most gracious service.

"I dwell in a house of cedar," and yet I am thoughtless about God's poor! For I must remember that the poor are the arks of the Lord. "I was naked, and ye clothed Me not."

"I dwell in a house of cedar"; my liberties are many and spacious; and yet there are tribes of God's people held in the tyranny of dark and hopeless servitude. I dwell in England, but what about the folk on the Congo? I dwell in a land of ample religious freedom, but what about Armenia? Do my sympathies remain confined within my cedar walls, or do they go out to God's neglected ones in every land and clime?

DECEMBER The Sixth

THE GRACE OF LOWLINESS

1Chronicles 17:16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27.

IT is by such lowliness that we arrive at our true sovereignty. All spiritual treasures are hidden along the ways of humility, and it is meekness which discovers them. The uplifted head of pride overlooks them, and its "finds" are only pleasure of the passing day.

Lowliness is the secret of spiritual perceptiveness. I find my sight in lowly places. The Sacred Word speaks of “the valley of vision.” I usually associate vision and outlook with mountain summits, but in spiritual realms the very capacity to use the heights is acquired in the vale.

Lowliness is the secret of spiritual roominess. It is only the humble man who has any room for the Lord. All the chambers in the proud man’s soul are thronged with self-conceits, and God is crowded out. Our Lord always finds ample room for Himself wherever the heart bows in humility and says: “I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof.”

DECEMBER The Seventh

CHOSEN AS BUILDERS

“Take heed now, for the Lord hath chosen thee to build.”

—1Chr 28:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

AND how must he take heed? For it may be that the Lord hath also chosen me to build, and the counsel given to Solomon may serve me in this later day. Let me listen.

“Serve Him with a perfect heart.” God’s chosen builders must be characterized by singleness and simplicity. He can do nothing with “double” men, who do things only “by half,” giving one part to Him and the other part to Mammon. It is like offering the stock of a gun to one man and the barrel to another; and the effect is nil. No, the entire gun! The “perfect heart”!

“And with a willing mind.” For the willing mind is the ready mind, and God can do nothing with the unready. I never know just when He will call me to add another stone to the rising walls of the New Jerusalem, and if I am “otherwise engaged” I am a grievous hindrance to His gracious plans. He must be willing and ready who would be a builder of the walls of Zion. And to that man the Lord will entrust the privilege of responsibility.

DECEMBER The Eighth

JUDGED BY OUR ASPIRATIONS

“Thou didst well, it was in thine heart.”

—2Chr 6:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.

AND this was a purpose which the man was not permitted to realize. It was a temple built in the substance of dreams, but never established in wood and stone. And God took the shadowy structure and esteemed it as a perfected pile. The sacred intention was regarded as a finished work. The will to build a temple was regarded as a temple built. And hence I discern the preciousness of all hallowed purpose and desire, even though it never receive actual accomplishment. “Thou didst well, it was in thine heart.”

And so the will to be, and the will to do, is acceptable sacrifice unto the Lord! “I wish I could be a missionary to the foreign field,” but the duties of home forbid. But as a missionary she is accepted of our God, even though she never land on distant shore. Our purposes work, as well as the work itself. Desire is full of holy energy as well as fruition. The wish to do good is good itself; the very longing is a minister in the kingdom of our God. If, therefore, we are to be judged by our aspirations, there are multitudes of apparent failures who will one day be revealed as clothed in the radiance of spiritual victory.

DECEMBER The Ninth

NATIONAL BLESSEDNESS

“Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound.”

—Psalm 89:1-18.

BLESSED is the people who love the sound of the silver trumpet which calls to holy convocation! Blessed is the people who are sacredly impatient for the hour of holy communion! Blessed is the people “in whose heart are the highways to Zion.” And in what shall their blessedness consist?

In illumination. “They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance.” The favour of the Lord shall shine upon them when they walk through rough and troublous places. There shall always be a sunny patch where the soul is in communion with its Lord.

In exultation. “In Thy name shall they rejoice all the day.” There is nothing like sunshine for making the spirits dance! Light is a great emancipator, a great breaker-up of frozen bondages. It thaws “the genial currents of the soul,” and the stream of life sings in its

progress.

In exaltation. "In Thy righteousness shall they be exalted." They will be lifted up above their enemies. In elevation they will find their safety. God lifts us above our passions, above our cares, above our little fears and tempers, and we find our peace upon the heights.

DECEMBER The Tenth

THE ONLY WISE BEGINNING

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

—Psalm 111:1-10

If I want to do anything wisely I must begin with God. That is the very alphabet of the matter. Every other beginning is a perverse beginning, and it will end in sure disaster. "I am Alpha." Everything must take its rise in Him, or it will plunge from folly into folly, and culminate in confusion.

If I would be wise in my daily business I must begin all my affairs in God. My career itself must be chosen in His presence, and in the illumination of His most holy Spirit. And in the subsequent days nothing must be done that is not rooted and grounded in Him.

If I would be wise as a teacher I must begin with God. I must not merely call Him in to bless my lesson when my labour is done. The very beginnings of my thinkings must be in Him. Our Lord will not write an appendix to a volume about which He has never been consulted. "They who seek Me early shall find Me." And so it is with the varied activities of our multitudinous life. If we would have them shine with quiet wisdom we must light them at the Sun of glory.

DECEMBER The Eleventh

THE SPEECH OF THE INCARNATION

"He hath spoken to us in His Son."

—Hebrews 1:1-14

AND that blessed Son spake my language. He came into my troubled conditions and expressed Himself out of my humble lot. My surroundings afforded Him a language in which He made known His good news. The carpenter's shop, the shepherd on the hill, the laden vine, a wayside well, common bread, a friend's sickness, the desolation of a garden, the darkness of "the last things"—these all offered Him a mode of speech in which He unveiled to me the heart of God.

He came as the Son to make me a son. For I had made myself a slave, and called my bondage freedom. I wore my badge of servitude with unholy pride. But when He came and spake to me, my lost inheritance dawned upon my wondering eyes, and I knew myself to be enslaved. But His was the glorious mission not only to awake but to emancipate, not only to unveil lost splendour but to recover it. He came to set us free, "and if the Son shall make you free ye shall be free indeed."

"This my son was lost and is found." Has that great word been spoken concerning me in the Father's home of light? "Lord, I would serve, and be a son. Dismiss me not, I pray."

DECEMBER The Twelfth

RELATING EVERYTHING TO GOD

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do,

do all to the glory of God."

—1Corinthians 10:23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33.

AND so all my days would constitute a vast temple, and life would be a constant worship. This is surely the science and art of holy living—to relate everything to the Infinite. When I take my common meal and relate it to "the glory of God," the common meal becomes a sacramental feast. When my labour is joined "unto the Lord," the sacred wedding turns my workshop into a church. When I link the country lane to the Saviour, I am walking in the Garden of Eden, and paradise is restored.

The fact of the matter is, we never see anything truly until we see it in the light of the glory of God. Set a dull duty in that light and it shines like a diamond. Set a bit of drudgery in that light and it becomes transfigured like the wing of a starling when the sunshine falls upon it. Everything is seen amiss until we see it in the glory! And, therefore, it is my wisdom to set everything in that light, and

to do all to the glory of God.

DECEMBER The Thirteenth

THE HOLY AND THE PROFANE

“Put difference between the holy and the unholy.”

—Leviticus 10:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

THE peril of our day is that so many of these differences are growing faint. The holy merges into the unholy, and we can scarcely see the dividing line. Black merges into white through manifold shades of grey. Falsehood slopes into truth through cunning expediences and white lies. Lust merges into purity through conviviality and geniality and good-fellowship. So is one thing losing itself in another, and vivid moral distinctions are being obscured and effaced.

There is only one way to keep these native contrasts in vivid relief, and that is by living in the unsullied light of God’s holy presence. “In Thy light shall we see light.” Things are seen in their true colours only when we bring them before the great white throne. Fabrics seen in the gas-light reveal quite other shades when we bring them into the light of day. We must not make our distinctions in the gas-light of worldly standard and expediency; we must take them into His presence before whose radiance even the angels veil their faces, and we shall see things as they are, and we shall know “the difference between the holy and the profane.”

DECEMBER The Fourteenth

THE SACRED USE OF LIBERTY

“Take heed lest this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling-block.”

—1Corinthians 8:8,9, 10, 11, 12, 13.

THAT is a very solemn warning. My liberty may trip someone into bondage. If life were an affair of one my liberty might be wholesome; but it is an affair of many, and my liberty may be destructive to my fellows. I am not only responsible for my life, but for its influence. When a thing has been lived there is still the example to deal with. If orange peel be thrown upon the pavement, that is not the end of the feast. The man who slips over the peel is a factor in the incident, and my responsibility covers him.

I am, therefore, to consider both my deeds and their influence. How does my life trend when it touches my brother? In what way does he move because of the impact of my example? Towards liberty or towards license? To the swamps of transgression or to the fields of holiness? These are determining questions, and I must not seek to escape or ignore them. My brother is a vital part of my life. I must never shut him out of my sight. How is he influenced by my example? “If meat make my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth.”

DECEMBER The Fifteenth

WHAT IS MY TENDENCY?

“Whether we live, we live unto....”

—Romans 14:7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21.

INTO what? In what direction are we living? Whither are we going? How do we complete the sentence? “We live unto money!” That is how many would be compelled to finish the record. Money is their goal, and their goal determines their tendency. “We live unto pleasure!” Such would be another popular company. “We live unto fame!” That would be the banner of another regiment. “We live unto ease!” Thus would men and women describe their quests. “Unto” what? That is the searching question which probes life to its innermost desire.

“For whether we live, we live unto the Lord.” That was the apostle’s unflinching tendency, increasing in its momentum every day. He crashed through obstacles in his glorious quest. He sought the Lord through everything and in everything. When new circumstances confronted him, his first question was this—“Where is Christ in all this?” He found the right way across every trackless moor by simply seeking Christ.

DECEMBER The Sixteenth

THE GREATEST WONDERS

Hebrews 11:30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40.

THE greatest wonders are not in Nature but in grace. A regenerated soul is a greater marvel than the marvel of the spring-time. A transfigured face is a deeper mystery than a sun-lit garden. To rear graces in a life once scorched and blasted by sin is more wonderful than to grow flowers on a cinder-heap. If we want to see the realm of surpassing wonders we must look into a soul that has been born again and is now in vital union with the living Christ. Even the angels watch the sight with ever-deepening awe and praise.

As the spiritual is the home of wonders, so also is it the field of brightest exploits. It is not what men have done by the sword that counts in the esteem of heaven—such deeds mean little or nothing; it is what they have done “by faith.” Weak, frail men and women have put their faith in God, and have done the impossible! Faith unites the weakling with almightiness! Faith makes a lonely soul one with “the spirits of just men made perfect,” and with them he shares “the power and the glory” of the eternal God.

DECEMBER The Seventeenth

GOD’S PRESENCE OUR DEFENCE

Exodus 15:11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

WHEN we invent little devices to protect us against the evil one, he laughs at our petty presumption. It is like unto a child erecting sand ramparts against an incoming sea. The only thing that makes the devil fear is the presence of God. Our money can do nothing. Our culture can do nothing. Our social status can do nothing. Only God can deal with devils. “By the greatness of Thine arm they shall be still as a stone.” When Thou art with me “I will fear no evil”; the fear shall be with my foes.

It is, therefore, the divine in anything which endows it with a strong defence. If the holy God dwells in our culture, then our culture becomes like an invulnerable fort. If God abides in our recreations, then our very sports are armed against our foes. If “the joy of the Lord” is in our festivity, then our very merriment is proof against the invasion of the world. When the Lord is in us, fear dwells in the opposite camp. “Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be shaken in the heart of the seas.”

DECEMBER The Eighteenth

THE SINNER’S GUEST

“He is gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.”

—Luke 19:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

IT was hurled as an accusation; it has been treasured as a garland. It was first said in contempt; it is repeated in adoration. It was thought to reveal His earthliness; it is now seen to unveil His glory. Our Saviour seeks the home of the sinner. The Best desires to be the guest of the worst. He spreads His kindnesses for the outcasts, and He offers His friendship to the exile on the loneliest road. He waits to befriend the defeated, the poor folk with aching consciences and broken wills. He loves to go to souls that have lost their power of flight, like birds with broken wings, which can only flutter in the unclean road. He went to Zacchæus.

Yes, the Lord went to be “guest with a man that is a sinner,” and He changed the sinner into a saint. The worldling found wings. The stone became flesh. Gentle emotions began to stir in a heart hardened by heedlessness and sin. Restitution took the place of greed. The home of the sinner became the temple of the Lord. “To-day is salvation come to this house forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham.”

DECEMBER The Nineteenth

THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

“A light to lighten the Gentiles.”

—Luke 2:25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40.

THAT was the wonder of wonders. Hitherto the light had been supposed to be for Israel alone; and now a heavenly splendour was to fall upon the Gentiles. Hitherto the light had been thought of as a lamp, illuming a single place; now it was to be a sun, shedding its glory upon a world. The “people that sat in darkness” are now to see “a great light.” New regions are to be occupied; there is to be daybreak everywhere! “The Sun of Righteousness is arisen, with healing in His wings.”

“To lighten the Gentiles!” And thus the heavenly beams have come to thee and me, to Europe and America, and to all the nations of the earth. The amazing privilege is our personal inheritance. We are born to glorious rights in Christ Jesus. But a wealthy heir may neglect this inheritance. We may have the light and neglect our garden. We may have all the favours of a blessed clime, and yet

our life may be like a wilderness. The Gentiles may have the light, and may yet be children of the darkness. It is ours to believe in the light that our lives may become "light in the Lord."

DECEMBER The Twentieth

THE COMING OF THE LORD

John 1:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.

MY Lord came as "the word." He came as the expression of the mind of the eternal God. Ordinary words could not have carried the "good news." Ordinary language was an altogether inadequate vessel for this new wine. And so the mighty news was spoken in the incarnation of the Lord.

My Lord came as "life." "In Him was life." But not a mere cupful of life, or even a cup running over. He came as "the fountain of life." Nay, if I had the requisite word I must get even behind and beyond this. For He was the Creator of fountains. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well." Yes, He was the fountain of fountains!

The Lord came as "light." "The life was the light." True light is always the child of life. Our clearest light comes not from speech or doctrine, still less does it emerge from controversy. It is the fine, subtle issue of fine living. And my light is to "shine before men" by reason of the indwelling life of the Christ.

And my Lord came as "power." "To them gave He power." All the power I need for a full, holy, healthy life I can find in Him. Every obligation has its corresponding inspiration, and I am competent to do His will.

DECEMBER The Twenty-first

THE LORD OF WORKING MEN

Luke 2:8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20.

AND so the good news was told to shepherds, to working men who were toiling in the fields. The coming King would hallow the common work of man, and in His love and grace all the problems of labour would find a solution.

The Lord of the Christmas-tide throws a halo over common toil. Even Christian people have not all learnt the significance of the angels' visit to the lonely shepherds. Some of us can see the light resting upon a bishop's crosier, but we cannot see the radiance on the ordinary shepherd's staff. We can discern the hallowedness of a priest's vocation, but we see no sanctity in the calling of the grocer, or of the scavenger in the street. We can see the nimbus on the few, but not on the crowd; on the unusual, but not upon the commonplace. But the very birth-hour of Christianity irradiated the humble doings of humble people. When the angels went to the shepherds, common work was encircled with an immortal crown.

And it is in the Lord Jesus that all labour troubles are to be put to rest. If we work from any other centre we shall arrive at confusion confounded. "I have the keys."

DECEMBER The Twenty-second

THE LORD OF THE WORSHIPPER

Luke 2:25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35.

AND so the good news was taken to the worshipper bowing within the gates of the Temple. The soul of old Simeon was filled with holy satisfaction and peace. The cravings of the heart were quieted, and its desires found the coveted feast in the holy Child of God.

And thus the Lord Jesus was not only to dignify the body but to gratify the soul. He was to be most efficient where He was most needed. And this has been the unflinching experience of the years. There is a hunger in my soul for which I can find no satisfying bread. I have tried many breads; I have tried nature, and art, and music, and literature, and I have tried human fellowship and social service. But my soul is hungry still! And the Lord Jesus comes to me, as I reverently grope in the vast temple, and He "satisfies the hungry soul" with good things. His "bread of life" is very wonderful; it lifts the soul into the restfulness of strength, and gives me a strange buoyancy, and "the glorious liberty of the children of God."

"My soul, wait thou only on Him!" He is thy hope, thy strength, and thy salvation! He is "the desire of all the nations."

DECEMBER The Twenty-third

THE LORD OF THE STUDENTS

Matthew 2:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

AND so the good news came to “wise men,” shall we say to students, busying themselves with the vast and intricate problems of the mind. And the evangel offered the students mental satisfaction, bringing the interpreting clue, beaming upon them with the guiding ray which would lead them into perfect noon.

Yes, our wise men must find the key of wisdom in the Lord. In a wider sense than the meaning of the original word it is true that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” To seek mental satisfactions and leave out Jesus is like trying to make a garden and leave out the sun. “Without Me ye can do nothing,” not even in the unravelling of the problems which beset and besiege the mind.

If my mental pilgrimage is to be as “a shining light shining more and more even unto perfect day,” I must begin with Jesus, and pay homage to His Kingly and incomparable glory. I must lay my treasures at His feet, “gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.” Then will He lead me “into all truth,” and “the truth shall make me free.”

DECEMBER The Twenty-fourth

ENTERING IN AT LOWLY DOORS

“Unto us a Child is born.”

—Isaiah 9:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

HOW gentle the coming! Who would have had sufficient daring of imagination to conceive that God Almighty would have appeared among men as a little child? We should have conceived something sensational, phenomenal, catastrophic, appalling! The most awful of the natural elements would have formed His retinue, and men would be chilled and frozen with fear. But He came as a little child. The great God “emptied Himself”; He let in the light as our eyes were able to bear it.

“Unto us a Son is given.” And that is the superlative gift! The love that bestows such gift is all-complete and gracious. And the Son is given in order that we may all be born into sonship. It is the Son’s ministry to make sons. “Now are we the sons of God,” and we are of His creation.

“Lord, I would serve, and be a son;

Dismiss me not, I pray.”

DECEMBER The Twenty-fifth

CHRISTMAS CHEER

“Good will toward men!”

—Luke 2:8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20.

THE heavens are not filled with hostility. The sky does not express a frown. When I look up I do not contemplate a face of brass, but the face of infinite good will. Yet when I was a child, many a picture has made me think of God as suspicious, inhumanly watchful, always looking round the corner to catch me at the fall. That “eye,” placed in the sky of many a picture, and placed there to represent God, filled my heart with a chilling fear. That God was to me a magnified policeman, watching for wrong-doers, and ever ready for the infliction of punishment. It was all a frightful perversion of the gracious teaching of Jesus.

Heaven overflows with good will toward men! Our God not only wishes good, He wills it! “He gave His only begotten Son,” as the sacred expression of His infinite good will. He has good will toward thee and me, and mine and thine. Let that holy thought make our Christmas cheer.

DECEMBER The Twenty-sixth

DAYBREAK IN THE SOUL

Isaiah 9:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

IT is a lonely and a chilling experience to sit in the darkness. And the gloom and the cold are all the more intense when there is death in the house. In such conditions we are in great need of light and fire.

And that is how the children of men were feeling before the Saviour came. They “sat in darkness” and in “the shadow of death.” The world was cold, and sin and death were in it, and they longed for light and cheer. And “the great Light came,” and His wonderful Presence not only illumines the house but banishes the fear of sin and death. “They that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,

upon them hath the light shined.”

Where can we get this living light except in the Lord Jesus Christ? Everything else is candle-light! It fails us in the midnight. It flickers amid conflicting currents. It goes out in the rough blast. The light of art and of literature fails me when I need them most. When I sit in the darkness, with death in the house, these kindly ministers have no effective beams. I turn to the Master, and He shines upon me, and it is daybreak in the soul!

DECEMBER The Twenty-seventh

THE SUNNY SIDE OF THINGS

1John 1:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

I HAVE just come out of a gloomy room into a sunny room to write these words. I had my choice. I could have stayed in the sombre room, but I choose to come into the sun-lit room and the warm, cheering beams are even now falling upon my page. “Walk in the light!” And I make my choice, and how often I choose to walk without Christ in the unfertilizing and unfruitful gloom of self-will! In the light of the Lord I could have a garden of Eden; how often I choose the dingy wilderness where I can grow neither flowers nor fruits.

“Walk in the light.” The Lord’s companionship always makes the sunny side of the street. It may be that the way is rough and stony and difficult, but in His company there is light that never fails, compared with which the world’s noontide is only as the gloomiest night. And the souls that “walk in the light” gather “sacred sweets” all along the way. Heavenly fruits grow for the children of light, fruits of love and joy and peace, and the favoured pilgrim plucks them as he goes along. “All I find in Jesus.” The way of light is the way of delight, and “the joy of the Lord is our strength.”

DECEMBER The Twenty-eighth

IN HIM WAS LIFE

John 1:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

I HAVE heard men speak of “wanting to see a bit of life,” and I found that what they meant was to see a bit of death. It is as if a man should go to the hospital to see a bit of health, or as if he should go to a gory battlefield to see the human frame. It is like going to a refuse-heap to see a bit of garden. Life is not found in fields of license; it is not found among the wild oats of a dissipated youth. Life is found only in Christ, and if we want to see a bit of life we must go to Him.

“In Him was life”; and that not merely to be looked at but to be shared. He is the well to which everybody can bring his pitcher, and take it away filled. And my pitcher is just my need. “All the fitness He requires is to feel our need of Him.” The Life is all-sufficient for the needs of the race. This Life can vitalize all that is withered and dead; it can make decrepit wills muscular and mighty, and it can transfigure the leper with the glow and purity of perfect health.

“Thou of life the Fountain art,
Freely let me take of Thee.”

DECEMBER The Twenty-ninth

THE LOVE OF GOD

1John 4:7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14

LET me more assiduously think of God’s love. Let me sit down to it. In the National Gallery can be seen two sorts of people. There are the mere vagrants, who are always “on the move,” passing from picture to picture, without seeing any. And there are the students, who sit down, and contemplate, and meditate, and appropriate, and saturate. And there are vagrants in respect to the love of the Lord. They have a passing glimpse, but the impression is not vital and vitalizing, and there are the students, who are always gazing, and who are continually crying, “O the depth of the riches of the love of God in Christ!” “His riches are unsearchable!”

And God’s love is the creator of my love. “While I muse the fire burns.” I am kindled into the same holy passion. That is to say, contemplation determines character. We acquire the hues of the things to which we cling. To hold fellowship with love is to become loveful and lovely. “We love because He first loved us.”

And then, in the third place, it is through my love that I know my Lord. “Everyone that loveth knoweth God.” Love is the lens through which I discern the secret things of God.

DECEMBER The Thirtieth

THE BLESSEDNESS OF FORGIVENESS

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven.”

—Psalm 32:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11

IT is the blessedness of emancipation. The boat which has been tethered to the weird, baleful shore is set free, and sails toward the glories of the morning. The man, long cramped in the dark, imprisoning pit, is brought out, and stretches his limbs in the sweet light and air of God’s free world. Black servitude is ended; glorious liberty begins.

It is the blessedness of education. For when we are freed we are by no means perfected. We are liberated babes; and our Emancipator does not desert us in our spiritual infancy. The foundling is not abandoned. “Having loved His own He loved them unto the end.” He begins with us in the spiritual nursery, and He will train and lead and feed us until we are “perfect in Christ Jesus.”

Therefore is it the blessedness of exultation. The babe is resting on the bosom of the Lord, and “the joy of the Lord is his strength.” It is not my emancipation that ensures my joy; it is the abiding Presence of the Emancipator.

DECEMBER The Thirty-first

THE REAR-GUARD

“Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. ”

—Psalm 23:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

BUT why “follow” me? Why not “go before”? Because some of my enemies are in the rear; they attack me from behind. There are foes in my yesterdays which can give me fatal wounds. They can stab me in the back! If I could only get away from the past! Its guilt dogs my steps. Its sins are ever at my heels. I have turned my face toward the Lord, but my yesterdays pursue me like a relentless hound! So I have an enemy in the rear.

But, blessed be His name, my mighty God is in the rear as well as my foe. “Goodness and mercy shall follow me!” No hound can break through that defence. Between me and my guilt there is the infinite love of the Lord. The loving Lord will not permit my past to destroy my soul. I may sorrow for my past, but my very sorrow shall be a minister of moral and spiritual health. My Lord is Lord of the past as well as of the morrow, and so to-day “I will trust and not be afraid.”