

"ONE SOWETH AND ANOTHER REAPETH."

By J. STRANG.

OH, I have sown with lavish hand,
Increasing in the world's wide fields,
And yet the hard and barren land
No rich response of harvest yields.

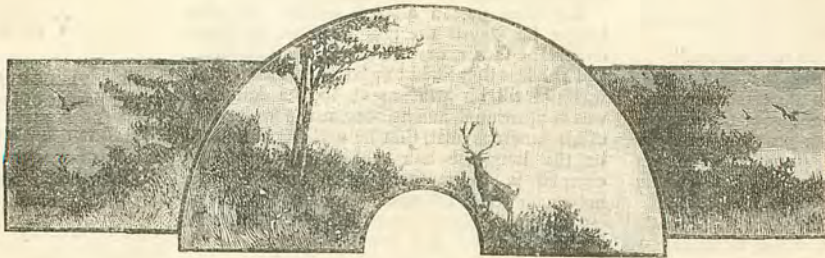
And I am weary with the pain
Of patient watching, and I fear
My scattered store of golden grain
Will never spring to blade and ear.

And yet who knows? At last, though late,
The kindly rain and sun may bring
To other eyes that watch and wait
Sweet tokens of a blessed spring.

When we who toiled no longer keep
Our mortal watch on fields below,
Glad hearts and joyous hands may reap
The fruit of seed they did not sow.

Oh, weary sister, who hast sown
Thy seed with daily tears and toil,
And dreamest that no grain has grown,
But died in darkness in the soil;

My sister, still at morning sow,
Nor in the evening stay thy hand;
Thou dost thy Father's work, and, lo!
Hereafter thou shalt understand.



PARISH WORK.

By ALICE KING.



NORTHERN folk lore tells a story which describes how, on a day, the fairy queen assembled the ladies of her court to give them various commissions. One was to guard the flowers, another to keep

bright the dewdrops, a third to teach the young birds to sing. A whole band were sent to watch over the mountain streams, and tune their murmurs into sweetest melody; a second troop were to fan the air with their wings, that it might bear health and freshness through the land. Each one was to be true to her own task, giving it her every power and her every energy, and each one was to undertake exactly what she would do best, and what would most suit her capacities.

When the fairies had all received their different charges, and were waiting, on poised pinions, longing to depart, and only staying for a word which would be their signal to go, the queen bade them all remain a few moments more, for she had still something to say, something which concerned every one of them. They turned in surprise, and many of them in impatience, towards her throne. Surely each had had her special duty sufficiently plainly pointed out to her. Then the queen told them that she had one thing for them all to do in addition to their other work. The lazy fairies began to grumble at these words, the weak ones to cry. The queen, however, only smiled, saying that what she was now going to bid them do would make their other tasks the lighter. Then she

explained to them that as they flew hither and thither, performing their varied work, each one keeping to her own sphere, they were all equally to do one thing—they were to gather upon their wings every sunbeam they could catch, and then, as they passed over the earth, they were to scatter them wherever they went, and the joy that would come to them from watching the effects of the brightness they spread abroad would more than compensate for the little additional labour. The dutiful fairies did their mistress's bidding, and soon found that her words came true.

Let our Christian girls of to-day gain radiant and wholesome teaching from this old fairy story. In THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER there has often been occasion, over and over again, to bid our girls each take in hand only what she has a real talent for, but the subject of this present article is one which concerns all girls alike. Parish work must be slipped in among other work, without ever hindering it, without causing it ever to be neglected, and must be regarded as something which sheds a gleam of brightness and beauty over all other tasks. Why is it that parish work must thus be thought of, and thus looked upon by Christian women, as an uplifting spell, even while the everyday commonplace name of work is given to it? It is because it is the work of the Master above.

The woman whose life is given to the high task of educating the young; the woman who makes literature, in full, deep earnestness, her profession; the woman who is a born musician; all these have great and beautiful tasks to do in God's world; but between the performance of them, they all have certain extra work to do for their heavenly King, the work of visiting, and helping, and influencing

His poor. The married woman, with family cares and family duties crowding round her, is not exempt from this Christian labour of love; however full her home may be of work for her, she must give at least a small portion of her time to it, if she will have a blessing showered down upon her household and herself. The most highly cultivated, most gently-nurtured ladies are most especially required to take this Christ-like work upon them, because they should bring their education and their high breeding to bear, with peculiar power, upon the task, as no one can do it so well as themselves.

The first point for a girl who means to undertake parish work, and to undertake it earnestly, is to economise her time. Parish work, as we have said above, is work which must be added, for the Master's sake, to the other work of life; this other work is not to be neglected for it, but both are to go on side by side, the work done specially for God hallowing and uplifting the more secular tasks.

It is this necessity for the two paths of work to run evenly with each other, that makes the careful use of time so essential for the woman who would fulfil both classes of duties thoroughly. Every spare half-hour of the day must be given by the Christian girl to her parish work; there must be no desultory loitering, no aimless dawdling, in the whole day, for if there is, no such half-hours will be found. The hat and mantle must be quickly thrown on; the feet must move rapidly and with a will; the spirit must be brave and brisk, and then parish work, and work of other and different kinds, will fit in together like the pieces in a beautiful mosaic picture.

There must be rule and method in parish work, if it is to be done completely and

thoroughly; it must not be taken as a sort of serious amusement. It is a grave thing to go from house to house in a town or a parish, caring for the bodies and souls of Christ's people; and it cannot be done in a careless, disorderly spirit. When a girl has a certain number of cottages put under her special guardianship, she must begin by arranging all those dwellings in classes, which are to be attended to each regularly in turn. Each day must have its own appointed group of houses to be visited in the course of it, and there must be no departing from the fixed rule for slight, trifling reasons. In order to secure regularity in this respect it, is a good plan to keep two or three religious periodicals going in the district, and the weekly delivery of these at certain appointed houses will ensure a given number of visits being made.

In house-to-house parish visiting, which is one most needful and important branch of parish work, a girl must always make a strict law for herself in one respect. She must never, when she has settled any parish duty, such as a meeting, or a class of some sort, let an engagement of amusement or pleasure step in to prevent the performance of the real, earnest work which she has promised to do. Young ladies are inclined, in general, to guide themselves by the slackest reins on these points. If a girl is asked to a picnic or a lawn-tennis party, on the very day that she has given her word to read at a mother's meeting, or superintend the sewing at a school, she coolly throws aside the parish appointment, and accepts the invitation to pleasure. The parish work is regarded by such young ladies in the most diletant spirit; it may be done or left undone, just as it suits their fancy. Now let us tell our girls plainly that parish work, undertaken in such a fashion, is simply no work at all; under such circumstances it becomes a mere vague, sentimental playing at being useful, without the faintest shadow of real usefulness existing in it. Let our brave Christian girls, who mean noble, earnest work for God and man, when they take in hand parish work, avoid, with resolute firmness, setting about their task in such a manner; for them all parish engagements must be real binding promises, all parish duties things which cannot be left undone. When they have once made up their minds to do their parish work in this serious spirit, they will have made one step at least towards becoming good and thorough parish workers.

One most needful quality for a house-to-house visitor among the poor, is delicacy of feeling; there are many ladies, active and efficient in their way in such work, who do not, however, sufficiently realise this fact. It is no unusual thing to find the lady district visitor think that she may leave all her lady's manners behind her in her drawing-room when she goes out to pay her daily calls at the cottages of her poorer neighbours. There is no greater mistake than this in the whole sphere of parish work. People of the working classes, and more especially the women who belong to them, have in their rank and degree quite as many tender, delicate places in their hearts and minds, and quite as much proud reserve as the highest lady in the land. Therefore, when a woman of position and education far above their own enters their houses pouring forth questions full of noisy curiosity, or sits by their fireside criticising freely their dress or furniture, or rooms, unasked, all over their dwellings, prescribing all sorts of improvements and changes, they naturally enough either grow rude and impertinent, or else shrink into a shell of timid, injured silence. Thus the work of the district visitor in town or village becomes at once a thing of no effect, or sometimes even worse, a mischievous power which only breeds evil results.

Let our girls, then, remember, when they

undertake this part of parish work, to carry the sweet graces, and thoughts, and feelings of their ladyhood with them just as much into the poorest garret as into the most spacious gilded saloon. There are many and many things in a poor woman's daily life which it is impossible for a lady fully to understand—many temptations, many trials. The lady cannot, it is true, take her back with her into her drawing-room and teach her to sit elegantly on a sofa, and how to be interested in clever books and difficult music, and how to express herself with taste and ease; but she can bring her lady's refinement, and lady's culture, and gracious, gentle, lady's ways and words into the cottage home, and as she sits there and talks and smiles, or speaks with tender gravity, she will imperceptibly lift up her struggling, and perhaps suffering, sister, and instil into her something of the perfume of her own high stamp of womanhood. Her frequent presence will become, gradually, a freshening, purifying power, which will pervade the lowly, dingy dwelling, filled with a stifling atmosphere of ignorance and poverty, and it may be of sja, like a morning breeze gliding in through door or window. Sooner or later, too, the mistress of the cottage will learn to confide in her lady visitor who thus comes to her, and will breathe into her ear her troubles and difficulties, and the lady will be able to minister advice and comfort in return—advice and comfort which may, with God's help, change the whole life of a working man's home.

Another essential requisite for a house-to-house visitor, and indeed for all those ladies who have dealings with the working classes in parish work, is tact. It is perfectly wonderful—wonderful, indeed, beyond the belief probably of those unused to such work—what a crowd of prejudices, and strange fixed notions fill the minds of the masses of the labouring people of England. Those ladies who go among them, meaning to help them and raise them up, must, before anything, be careful never to touch these prejudices and these notions with a rough hand. Such a touch does nothing towards rooting them out; far from that, it only makes them sink deeper in. Our girls, when they begin parish work, must be especially careful on this point, for their youthful eagerness and thoroughness are very likely to make it a stumbling-block for them. They must never say a word or look a look which will shock the preconceived ideas of the working man and his wife. It would, no doubt, be well and most desirable that such prejudices and settled, narrow opinions should be swept away at once from among our poorer classes; but such a result will only be reached by long years of superior mental cultivation. Meanwhile, the Christian lady who goes among the masses striving to raise them and pour in light upon them, can but work on in faith and hope, seeking to sweeten and to lift up, but never trying hastily and rudely to clear away, the twilight to which the eyes of their less favoured neighbours have been accustomed for centuries.

If a lady, in her parish work, sees that her duty makes it incumbent on her to speak some word of blame or warning to those she goes among, she must perform the task with the utmost delicate care; if she begins it rashly and abruptly, she had far better never try to do it at all. It is difficult sometimes to find fault in a way that will do good, even with an equal in position and education; what, then, must it be in the case of a superior with an inferior; yet still it must often be done by the parish worker, if her labours are to have any abiding effect. We should advise our girls, when in the course of their parish work this has to be done, to begin with prayer for guidance and help, and then to go on with prudence and tenderness leading all their

acts and words in the matter. When they go into the house where the word of warning has to be spoken, when they reach the person who, for their soul's good, needs blame, they must on no account rush into the painful subject at once. It is best first to sit down and speak of some indifferent matter with special kindness of tone and manner, and then gradually and gently to lead towards the thing which is wrong, and which needs to be righted.

A girl, when she sets about parish work, must be especially careful on one point; she must never let the men or women of lower rank she goes among grow too intimate with her; if she is to do any real service to them, she must keep a certain distance between herself and them, so that their respect for her will not and cannot fail. This must be done, however, without any coldness and stiffness of manner and bearing, for coldness and stiffness will prove quite as fatal to her influence among the poor as undue familiarity. One of the first things a girl will have to learn when she begins parish work is, so to balance and tune her manner that the labouring classes will, at the same moment, equally love and reverence her. She must so behave that it will be utterly impossible for the slightest liberty to be taken with her, and yet that the working man and woman will have such trustful affection for her, that they will confide in her in every sorrow and trial of their lives.

Our girls, as they go about their parish work, must most resolutely avoid ever joining in, or even listening to, any gossip. They must never pause for a moment to hear what the woman in No. 5 says of the woman at No. 9. They must never form their opinions of the poor from what they say of each other. Above all these things, the lady parish-worker must move as a being from a superior sphere; she must learn to form her own estimate of those she has under her care and influence, and must act quietly but firmly upon it.

There are two other things which our girls must never do in parish work; they must never have favourites, and never lose their tempers. If they have favourites they will arouse a spirit of jealousy which will literally flame from cottage to cottage; if they lose their tempers they will place themselves at once on a level with those they should teach to look up to them, and will immediately destroy all the advantages given by their higher position and education. We have no space here to dwell on the different kinds of parish work which are open to ladies, but the remarks we have made above are suitable to all, most especially, however, perhaps to that of house-to-house visiting.

Most of all, let our girls recollect, when they undertake parish work, that there is no other work that comes to their young hands in which the duty lies so solemnly and earnestly upon them of doing it all in and for the Master. In His might, in His love, in His Spirit, let our girls go forth into our village lanes, into our crowded city back-alleys, and they shall be bright, earnest bearers of the Gospel message, whose reward shall be an eternal one, even a crown of light.

