

A CHRISTMASTIDE SPINNING.

ALL OF US know something of what we call common-life heroisms. We like to hear of them, in the rounded-out periods of the sermon or lecture. Surrounded by all the pleasant accessories of a comfortable church or lecture hall, in the temporary freedom from home and business cares, and inspired by the eloquent utterances of a brave, candid, sinewy speech, from attractive genius, or gifted religious experience, these heroisms appear simple enough, easy enough of assimilation. Under such circumstances, the dullest of us come into some sort of actualization of our accountability and responsibility. We catch at the fact that all endeavor regenerates by units, and that we are some of the units; that from hearts braced to the true instincts of the nobility of life germinates the flower and fruit of real heroism. And yet, how often has it happened, that, the instant the speaker ceased, and the chill air of the every-day, matter-of-fact aspects of our lives struck us, the whole thing dissipated as a dream. We have found it easy enough to be virtuous, and honest, and manly, and helpful, in theory, but once under the stress and strain of a practical test, we have bowed to the assumptions of fashion, or the kingdom of Satan within us, and shut out from our sympathy and support, some one, who, under the speaker's broader law of humanity, was entitled to our assistance.

We are fond of hearing of that heroism of manhood which saves a man; not that heroism, put away on Sunday night with rustling silks, soft laces and twenty-button kid gloves, or the best broadcloth suit; but the energy and manliness that stem the tide of misfortune, discouragement and doubt, all the things which make up the vast, pathetic music of mankind, are quite another thing. It does not require any very great effort to talk about high purposes and heroic deeds, but when it comes to coining that talk into daily character and doings, we discover that it is far from easy. Perhaps the majority of people miss the blessing there is in doing a kind, serviceable action, because they are always waiting for the time when they shall be especially fitted for some great work. The little needs lie all along the way; the cups of cold water; the sympathetic pressure of the hand; the kind, cheery word; the fragment of flower sent to a sick child; the word of favor for another, all these are close at hand; the afterwards may never come. Great deeds stand like isolated islands in the sea. Out of these little things, which daily rise in the eastward of our lives, we shall get the content of homes; the exquisite delight of love and friendship; a genuine sweetness of living; strong and trustworthy love of country, characteristics

by which we shall find each other in the everlasting community beyond.

Husbands are plentiful enough who find it necessary to maintain a strong grip upon themselves in order to keep from doing something of the heroic for their wives; yet these same husbands can not be depended on to split the family kindling wood. They fail to realize that husbandship, like good, honest christianity, is a matter of pots and kettles; of little things manfully done. It is not the acreage, but the kind of cultivation we are giving our soil. A man in this splendid valley may have a hundred acres, and be heir to all the bird songs and rain-drops that come upon his spread-out fields, yet he must steadily cultivate them if he would have a harvest. He may have ten thousand acres of moral, christian and intellectual life, and get nothing from them but weeds; perchance a little volunteer grain, that will now and then force itself into the most neglected life. Another may have a mere garden patch, yet by that tilling which invites the Creator's interest, make it yield richly for all the future. The most splendid gift of the Creator to man is opportunity. He never gives man new faculties nor perfected plans. He can not give us back lost opportunities. Men like the fictitious. They like fictitious sorrow and woe. We go wild over a thing in art that we avoid in nature. We pay a dollar for the box at the theater in which to weep over the represented sorrow of "Two Orphans," instead of taking our tears and sympathy and money to No. 900, tumble-down tenement house, where real orphans are actually dying of hunger, where it would, indeed, be heroism to labor. We do not care to find out the sparrows of humanity, who, morally and physically unclad, thirsting, shelterless, and out in the wintry air of indifference, are dripping away through the coarse sieves of discouragement and doubt. It is so much more pleasant and congenial to sit down before the open grate fires, and have flame-framed pictures of that moral and intellectual Arcadia, which is a beautiful trust, a cloud-city dream, that comes out of the drone of a lazy summer afternoon, and toward which the sentimentalist stretches the pinions of his lore and fancy. Most of us find it easy enough to help a certain class of poor. Here, for instance, is a family, refined in habit, correct in speech, polite, shabby genteel; they are clean. If they could bake or stew or fry refined habits, and sauce it with politeness, they would all be fat and independent. But the carpet is worn and patched; the clothing has been much made over; the cupboard is a sort of Mother Hubbard affair. Why, almost any of us will help such people. But over there is another case. The man is brutal in speech, and beastly in habit. He is filthy to the touch. He has been educated to beef and beer and dog fights. He is repulsive. It is human nature to kick him. Nine times out of ten we do kick him.

You and I know highly respected and respectable people whom it would be wholly unsafe to take literally, because we know that they could not be absolutely honest in principle nor candid in speech. They may be