

The Background of Sympathy.

BY THE REV. J. R. MILLER.

The true nature of sympathy is not always understood. It is more than pity. There are some very perfect echoes in the world. You stand before a cliff, and every sound comes back to your ear. If a child cries, the cliff sobs back. The murmur of a soft song returns again, like a melody sung by some far-away singer. The notes of speech are heard echoing through the air. The cliff is sensitive to every wave of sound, and responds to it. And there are human hearts that are similarly sensitive to every touch of human experience that plays upon them. They are so full of emotion that they respond to every note of joy or sorrow that strikes their chords. They echo back the merry laughter, the voice of tenderness, and the wail of sorrow. But they are only echoes. Only the surface of their hearts reflects the tones of other lives. No depths are stirred. They know nothing of real sympathy.

Sympathy is more than an echo. Its background is experience. Even Christ was not fitted to sympathize with men until he had entered into human flesh, and lived an actual human life. One would say that his divine omniscience certainly qualified him for sympathy. He knew already every phase of experience, in the sense that his eye saw into every nook and cranny of every human heart, and discerned and understood every play of emotion, every struggle, every pain. And yet omniscience did not prepare him for true sympathy. He must become a man. Nor was that enough. He must have taken humanity upon him, and then have passed at once into the glory of heaven. But he must live an actual human life. His nature must be enriched by experience. He must know life by having passed through it himself. And this is the background of that precious doctrine of Christly sympathy. He was tempted in all points, and therefore he can be touched by the feeling of our infirmities. No matter what the phase of trial or struggle, on which he looks down upon this earth, he can say, "I understand that. At Galilee, or Bethany, or in the wilderness, or in Gethsemane, or on Calvary, I passed through that same phase of experience."

So the tenderest human life, the most responsive to external emotional influences, cannot truly sympathize with other lives until it has been enriched by experience of its own. The young man, brought up in a sequestered home, away from the mad excitements of the world, cannot understand, nor sympathize with, the struggles of the man who is wrestling with the sore temptations of a great city. The young woman who has never herself suffered, who has never had a wish ungratified, nor a hope thwarted, nor has ever endured a pang or a grief, is not fitted to sit down beside a sister woman in sore agony over a shattered joy, or a crushed hope, and understand her feelings, or enter into actual sympathy with her.

We know how fruit ripens. There are a thousand influences that play upon it all the summer through,—influences of climate, of sun and rain, of cold and heat, of darkness and light. Some fruits wait, too, for the frosts of autumn to come, to complete the process of ripening. In some such way human life ripens. There are countless influences,—trial, joy, struggle, hardship, toil, ease, prosperity, adversity, success, failure,—and at last the character is mellow and gentle.

The old people understand this. Disappointments, bereavements, anxieties, tender joys, and the deep plowing of the heart by afflictions, and all the diversified experiences of three-score or fourscore years—how they enrich the heart that is held close to

Christ all the while, under the warmth of his love! This is one of the blessed qualities of a ripe and beautiful Christian old age, that we sometimes overlook or underestimate. How much the aged know about life, if they have lived it well! What a power of helpfulness such an enriching puts into their hearts! No ministry in this world is grander than that of those who have learned life's secrets in the school of experience, and then go about, inspiring and strengthening and guiding younger souls who come after them.

A heart thus disciplined is prepared for sympathy in the deepest, truest sense. It needs no labored words of explanation to enable it to understand the stress and strain of trial, the bitterness of sorrow, or the burden of infirmity. It has felt the same, and now is thrilled by the experience on which it looks. Sympathy is a wonderful thing. It has a strange and mighty power of inspiration in it. How strong it makes us to go on with our work, to know that others care for us, and are interested in us! There is something in the simple touch of a friendly hand, or the look of a kindly eye, or the emotion that plays on an earnest face, that sends a quickening thrill through our souls. When one is in deep sorrow, how he is strengthened to bear it by feeling the pressure of a warm clasp, which tells him, better than any words could do, of sincere sympathy! It cannot bring back his dead. It cannot calm the storm that is raging about him. It cannot remove a straw of the burden, nor eliminate one line of the chapter of grief. But there is another human heart that feels for him. There is a loving presence creeping up in the darkness close beside him. There is companionship; he is not alone. And this blessed consciousness makes him strong.

If we would, then, be fitted for this blessed ministry, we must be content to learn in the school of experience. Even Christ learned by the things he suffered. Angels are not fitted for sympathy, for they know nothing about human life. In a picture by Domenichino, there is an angel standing by the empty cross, touching with his finger one of the sharp points in the thorn-crown, which the Savior had worn, and on his face there is the strangest bewilderment. He is trying to make out the mystery of sorrow. He knows nothing of suffering, for he has never suffered. There is nothing in the angel nature, nor in the angel life, to interpret human struggle or pain. And the same is measurably true of untried human life. If we would be sons of consolation, our natures must be enriched by experience. We are not naturally gentle to all men. There is a harshness in us that needs to be mellowed. Human uprightness, undisciplined, is apt to be stern and severe, and even uncharitable toward weakness. We are apt to be heedless of the feelings of others, to forget how many hearts are sore and carry heavy burdens. We have no sympathy with infirmity, because we do not know from experience what it means. We are not gentle toward sorrow, because our own hearts have never been plowed. We give constant pain to sensitive spirits, by word and act, because we have not learned that gentle delicacy and thoughtful tenderness which can be learned only from the careless wounding of our own feelings by others. These are lessons we can learn in no school but that of personal experience. The best universities cannot teach us the divine art of sympathy. We must walk in the deep valley ourselves, and then we can be guides to other souls. We must feel the strain, and carry the burden, and endure the struggle, ourselves, and then we can be touched and can give help to others in life's sore stress and poignant need.—S. S. Times.

A Visit to the Sages.

Years ago we heard a white-haired man (hasn't Bronson Alcott always had white hair?) tell, with the sincerity of friendship and the pardonable pride of a fond companion, of the little coterie which has made Concord famous. True, the town itself has a history. It was baptized first by the blood of freedom. It holds the first British soldiers who fell in the War of the Revolution moldering in its sod. It has a river as dreamy as the Nile, a lake as clear and poetic as Como, and meadows as dainty as any in Old England; but what if there had been no Emerson to write of the "shot heard round the world," or Thoreau to picture Walden; or Hawthorne to idealize every hill-top and valley? There may be poetry, but what if there be no singer?

What shall be said of Concord now that the historic places have become Athenian groves, and Plato, and Aristotle have a band of pupils—not from little Greece, but from broad America? And why should not four women make up a party to go and learn from the lips of the sages?

It has been said again and again that the sisterhood can not be in time for the cars, or make journeys alone and accomplish the thing desired. But facts prove otherwise. From Illinois, Ohio, and two different parts of New England four of us came together; were in due time; had a charming ride through a varied country; and, after arriving at our destination, hired a carriage, with the agreement that the driver should tell us everything he knew and all that he had forgotten, both of which were not inconsiderable.

The day was perfect, the grass not dried in the fields, the flowers still fresh and fragrant, the air balmy and the birds not tired of singing. Soon we reached the Old Manse, a two- and a-half-story brown gambrel-roof house, away back from the road, grand old trees leading up to it and the Concord river flowing lazily in the rear. We seemed to see again Hawthorne and his gentle wife, Sophia Peabody, as they came directly after their wedding, almost forty years ago. Here Emerson's father was born, and here lived his grandfather, the young preacher who joined the farmers meeting-house green, April 19, 1775, and for whom and his bride this fine house was built.

Only a few rods from here, through a double line of elms, maples and pines, we come to the battle-ground on Concord Bridge. On either hand stretches the beautiful river, its edge covered with water-lily leaves, which sway gently with the passing breeze. At the left, in a little spot hedged in by granite posts and chain, lie the bodies of some British soldiers. Just across the bridge stands the Minute Man of young Daniel French—a soldier, with gun in hand, his sleeves rolled up, veins in his arm swollen near to bursting, his plow left at his side, and his eager soul kindling in his face. Beneath are Emerson's famous words:

"By the rude bridge that curbed the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmer stood
And fired the shot heard round the world."

A single granite shaft, with appropriate inscription, "In gratitude to God and in love of freedom," marks the scene of the action. From this point we drive through the pretty town. Here is the broad two-story drab house of Emerson, with its old trees and cheerful air, which seems to bid us welcome. Here Margaret Fuller inwrought her own beautiful life into the lives of those about her. Here in the quaint and simple library filled with valuable books, have sat Sumner and Phillips, Whittier and Longfellow, and scores more who have honorably gained fame in the New World and the Old, and who, like Barry Cornwall, have carried Em-

erson's "Conduct of Life" in their pockets, to read in their leisure moments. In the roomy pasture back of the house is the little donkey so well known by the villagers, because Miss Ellen, the poet's daughter, rides upon him.

"A scene for an artist she makes," said our young guide; "but she is the best lady in the town everybody loves her," he added, with the real pride that all Concord feels for anything Emersonian.

We drive past the oldest elm in the place, said to have been used as a whipping-post, the rings for fastening the culprits still found in its sides, and past the old Wright Tavern, where Major Pitcairn wished he might stir the Yankee's blood as he stirred his wine, and succeeded in a different manner from what he had expected.

A little way from the town, through a forest of oaks and pines, we come to the beautiful lake which Thoreau has immortalized, clear as Lake George, and set in as pure emerald as the lakes of Killarney. It is a restful place, with no sound save perchance the dipping of an oar or the note of a bird, which the lonely man loved so well. Here on the shore is the spot where he built his house, twelve foot square, and lived for two and a half years, giving to the world what he desired others to give his inner self. "I require of every writer, first or last," he says, "a simple and sincere account of his own life: * * * for, if he has lived sincerely, it must have been in a distant land to me." Here is his bean-field, where he used to hoe from five in the morning till noon, and made as he said, an intimate acquaintance with weeds and a pecuniary profit of \$8.71. There on the hill-top is the open sward where under a few grand old trees, he used to entertain friends from over the sea, as well as those nearer home. Where his house stood is a plain a cross and a pile of stones, to which each visitor reverently adds one. Here he still lives, though his body lies over in the cemetery, near to Hawthorne's; lives in every ripple of the lake or tremor of a leaf—the strange, true man who followed the rule he laid down for others: "Every man is tasked to make his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most exalted and critical hour."

And now we come back to the old Orchard House, set in its frame-work of grand trees, it walls and doors even, daintily covered with May Alcott's sketches; its every room and hall echoing to the cheer of the author of "Little Women," and besides all, rich with the presence of the white-haired philosopher, who has lived to see what he has all his life-time planned—an Athenian school is rugged, New England. The room where the savans are gathered is low and square, buff paper on the walls, crimson lambrequins over the windows, and cool white matting on the floor. The pictures of Emerson and Alcott are both younger by a score of years than the originals—both poetic and somewhat ideal.

Prof. Harris, with eyes that look to his mind, rather than out upon his audience, sits at the crimson-covered table and talks of the limits of physiological psychology; Dr. Jones, the Illinois platonist, sits beside Mr. Alcott, their white hair almost blending as they listen eagerly to the speaker; Frank Sanborn, with his tall form and kindly face; Dr. Bartol, with his musical voice; Emerson, getting heavenward, but not getting old; Elizabeth Peabody, her gray curls straying about her face; Ednah Cheney; Lucy Stone Francis E. Willard; Mr. Watson; Prof. Davidson; and scores of others, ministers, editors, thinkers are easily recognized. The Concord School of Philosophy has been a success, and will be held again next summer. May the white-haired men who have graced this feast of reason and flow of soul be present then, and not have been called up higher.—Independent.

How the Ancients Engraved Gems.

We must remain as yet some little in doubt as to the methods employed by the old artists to perfect these miracles of taste. We have, however, the absolute certainty that these ancient masters were familiar with the diamond, and that their best work was made by using this, the hardest of all substances, as a tool. A splintered fragment of the diamond served as a scraping tool, and they were well acquainted with the drill. Prehistoric man worked a drill at the very commencement of his existence. A Phœnician gem—a lion attacking a bull—shows how the drill was used. A number of circular depressions are found in the gem, which mark the extremities of the figures. This was done not only for the sake of effect, but to show the artist the limit of his work as to depth. After the holes were sunk, the artist united the various portions of his work by scratching. Now the use of the diamond point or splinter, fixed in a style or iron socket, allowed a certain flexibility of handling, which our modern processes of gem-engraving do not permit. To-day the work is done by means of a minute rotating disk of copper, which is whetted with oil and diamond dust. On the least application of the substance to be cut to the disk, which bites into the stone. The difference in manipulation is, then, that to-day it is the stone which goes to the tool, and not, as in olden times, the tool to the stone. It is more convenient, then, in 1879, to bring the cart to the horse. It can now be readily understood why, in modern work, time and labor being spared (the art conception not entering for the present into the subject)—why this work of to-day is inferior to the art which is past. It is purely a mechanical process now, for a rotating disk will no more draw lines which have feeling than will photographing processes paint pictures. It has been stated that we are not entirely acquainted with the methods employed by the old glyptic artists. This becomes quite evident from this fact, that their best work seems to have been both cut and polished at one and the same time. To-day we have no tool, no substance, which will accomplish this double feat. Mr. King, dwelling on the diamond point, says "its extensive use is the great distinction between the antique and modern work."—BARNET PHILLIPS, in *Harper's Magazine* for September.

The Best Left.

God's faithful promise is, that though the outward man perish, the inward shall be renewed day by day.

Dr. Jessup, Moderator of the Northern Presbyterian Assembly, in welcoming the delegates of corresponding churches, furnished a beautiful and impressive illustration of this when he said: "My own sainted father, if I may be allowed a personal allusion, once prominent as an elder in the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church, was affected during the latter years with a paralysis of a peculiar character. His memory was cleft in twain. His memory of secular things was gone. His legal knowledge, his great law library, his court-house, his old associates, on the bench of Pennsylvania, and even the names of his own children were forgotten. But the Bible, the family altar, the church, the missionary work, and his Savior, Jesus Christ, were all fresh in memory as ever. The worldly and perishable part had gone. The spiritual and enduring remained. As on the gold bearing quartz mountains of our Pacific coast, beaten upon and worn by the storms, and suns, and frosts of ages, the earthly and perishable was worn away and destroyed, leaving the pure gold standing out toward heaven. The dross will be purged away. The pure gold will abide forever!"—Ex.