

Contributed.

Thoughts on the Closing Year.

Dear Sisters of the Messenger:

Let us draw our chairs around our warm fires and have a pleasant chat before we say a final good-bye to the old year. Without the blasts sweep by; but let us not allow the chill frosts of winter to freeze our hearts and make them cold and selfish. Let cheerfulness and kindly feeling like the glowing fire fill our hearts with love and warmth toward our fellow beings. Oh that all homes could be as bright as the cheery blaze in our rooms. But there are some where sorrow has hung such a heavy cloud, that it seems there is nothing that can light up its gloom; and in others such want and poverty of faith that I fear no brightness either of fire or heart exist; while in other stately homes the hearts are sometimes so cold and wrapped in self that there is little reflected light and warmth to even make happiness in the family circle. Homes such places are not, only houses to stay in, repulsive often to some of the inmates, who will spend as little time there as possible. Perhaps if parents, sisters and brothers knew the wrong they often do by thus selfishly acting they would not be so careless and indifferent.

How pleasant to turn from such pictures to happy homes that we know where love-light reigns. Let us hope there are many many such to balance the sad, cold and lonely ones. It was not this I meant to talk of however, but the old year which is slowly and solemnly moving away. I have been watching its seasons as they passed, each filled with its peculiar phase of life. Spring with its brightness and summer complete with its climax of beauty before any shadow of decay, and lovely autumn with its invigorating coolness and its harvest of good things for our nourishment through the coming winter. Are they not like the seasons of our life? The joyous spring of early childhood with its smiles and tears chasing each other so rapidly, its undeveloped beauty and promise of what is to come. The maytime of our youth with its flowery hopes. A little farther on the June days of our existence, when happiness seems complete before the late summer heats of life have scorched and withered its joys, or shown that sorrow must be mingled with the happiness of all. Finally the gradual fading of life's beauties and interests, especially in what interests the young, the falling leaf by leaf of old friends, of old joys, of old ties that bound us to the world. I say happy those whose hearts do not grow cold with the winter of age. And this year so soon to be numbered with those departed forever, how much of both joy and grief have its days and months been freighted with. Well for us indeed if the griefs have been unmingled with bitterness or remorse, for true sorrow rightly borne softens and strengthens and ennobles us. Chastened sorrow brings us nearer our great Head—the compassionate One who was called "a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief." He did not frown on grief, though he would not have us sit idly down and give up to it, but bids us cast all our care on the Lord, for he careth for us; and out of some sorrows grow the brightest heavenly joys in the end. Joy, what different meanings are attached to that word by different ones. Some call mere pleasure by that name. Pleasure seems to me the feeling natural to the young on any happy occasion. But joy I hold to be an emotion dwelling deep in the heart, welling up from springs of pure happiness and sending radiance over one's whole life. A solemn tender thing, which no man taketh away. In a book I was reading some time ago, I found the following passage, which spoke to me with deep meaning. "She had learned to do without happiness and instead

had found blessedness," and I believe this would be the case with many if they would cease looking for and expecting it as if they thought it was their right or as if it were their main thing in life.

A dear old year this has been to me, although cares and sorrows have marked some of its days. But I have met many friends whose kindness has given me strength, which makes life look different from what it did only a few years ago. I feel ready to take up whatever work there is for me to do earnestly and willingly, ready, I think, to live out the days and years that are best for me, whether many or few; sure that there is some work for every one of them, however little or humble it is, always trying to be guarded in word or deed that would do harm, for it is the unguarded word which oftenest proves a root of bitterness. I know we cannot be too careful in the exercise of a wholesome restraint over our tongues and intercourse with each other, if we would preserve the mutual respect of everyone.

So I say good-bye to the year just going with a tender loving feeling, yet not regretfully for the hope comes that the new year may be better still—I am ready to welcome it with a hopeful courageous heart and see the wheels of time, without a pang crush into nothingness the old year's unfulfillments.

M. B.

What is Trouble?

There are few words of common use that are less understood in their scope and force than the word "trouble." The Bible tells us that "man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble," and that "man is born unto trouble, as surely as the sparks fly upward." And in our ordinary speech we refer to our troubles, and to the troubles of others, with the widest and most varying range of meanings. Sometimes we speak of being troubled with indigestion or the rheumatism; again of being troubled by poor servants, or by house-cleaning and the painters and plasterers; again, of our children's troubles with their playmates or their studies; of a good woman's trouble with her intemperate husband; of labor troubles, and financial troubles, and political troubles, in the community at large. Yet again we say, in a general way, that a certain man has a great deal of trouble, or that a certain other man seems remarkably free from trouble—perhaps that "he never knew what trouble was." What is included in this term "trouble," that makes it applicable to all these different spheres of personal or social experience? What is trouble? How would you define it?

Why, in the Bible itself, there are more than twenty different Hebrew words, and a dozen additional Greek ones, all translated "trouble" in our English version. These words include the idea of labor, pressure, agitation, weariness, fear, sorrow, wickedness, and various kindred experiences. The root idea of the English word which comprehends them all is: a whirling disturbance; that state of being which makes one whirl round and round instead of standing quietly, or of going straight ahead. That is trouble: to be in such a whirl that you can neither rest composedly nor move forward unwaveringly. Trouble, then, is an effect, and not a cause; it is the inside result rather than the outside pressure; it is a condition of being, instead of the fact of any particular incidents of life. Just here is where the true nature of trouble is more commonly lost sight of; and because of its misconception those about us are misjudged as to the extent and severity of their experiences of trouble.

We say, sometimes, that children know nothing of real trouble. There couldn't be a greater mistake than

this. No troubles are more real than children's troubles—whatever be their cause. Children's hearts ache, and children's hearts sometimes break, with their troubles. Many a little child has deliberately put an end to his despairing life, because of trouble that was terribly real to him, however trifling its occasion may have seemed to others. We may sneer at a loss which troubles a child, as perhaps only "a broken toy," but that toy, with its associations, and with the investiture of his imaginings, may have been a very dear and sacred thing to the child. Can we even say that our standard of values is always superior to the child's. Do we now put no false estimates on toys? We might, it is true, call a loss which well-nigh broke our hearts, "a shattered idol," instead of "a broken toy," but the consequent trouble would be no greater, nor any more real, to us, in the one case, than to the child in the other.

After all, it is the childish troubles which are severest to most of us—especially to those who are most sensitive, and hence are capable of keenest suffering. What is it which just now troubles you above all things else? Is it that which the world would say was worst of your first thought, and ought to occasion you most anxiety? And what was it that made you so unhappy, so unfitted you for the practical duties of life, a year ago, and again only last month? Does it seem to you now quite as important as it then appeared? Can you even remember exactly what it was? Whether you can or not, and whatever you think of the reasonableness of it as a cause of trouble to you, you cannot question that your trouble over it was very real at the time—as real as any trouble you ever had, or ever could have. Trouble is not the less real for being childish and unreasonable.

Not what comes to us, but the light in which we look at it, settles the question whether we have trouble over it or not. The coarser grained man shrugs his shoulders, when he is sharply rebuked by a companion, and says laughingly, "High words break no bones." He is not troubled by anything of that sort. The man of finer grain reads in the countenance of a friend whom he loves and honors a censure of some careless word of his and his heart is pierced with pain. To him—

"A clouded face,
Strikes harder than an angry blow."

And he has trouble day and night until that face is bright again. One man loses a few hundred dollars, and it troubles him sorely. Another finds all the slow accumulations of years swept away in an hour, and it brings him no serious sense of loss; yet he is in constant trouble because of his loved son's misdoing. Is it either of those men to measure the force of the other's trouble?

What folly to say, "that man has no trouble to be compared with mine; because he has no experience that duplicates mine!" What if he is free from such physical pain that racks my frame? Are you sure that he would not rather be in physical pain until the day of his death, than endure the trial of his remorseful memories? What if he seems supplied with all these sources of comfort—in family and property and popular favor—the lack of which is the cause of all our trouble? Can you say that he would not have felt less keenly the death of the dearest to him, and the loss of property and popular favor, than he feels the bitter betrayal of a trusted friend, or the failure to be true and noble on the part of one to whom he had given the highest place in his heart, as a lofty ideal?

Ah! how little we can judge of the hidden troubles of our fellows, by the calm exterior and the untroubled appearance which they present to us. The firm-set face may represent a con-

stant struggle to be firm. That glow of holy beauty may be from the light of the refiner's fire which is burning day and night in the heart below. Those cheerful words and smiles may be the rich harvest from seeds which were not quickened unless they died, and were not fruitful except as they were nourished from hidden graves.

As Charles Kingsley puts it: "How many sweet and holy souls, who look cheerful enough before the eyes of man, yet have their secret sorrows. They carry their cross unseen all day long, and lie down to sleep on it at night; and they will carry it perhaps for years and years, and to their graves, and to the throne of Christ, before they lay it down; and none but they and Christ will ever know what it was."

Trouble is not on the surface. Trouble is not alike to all. Trouble is not to be measured by one man for another. There is a basis of truth for either of us in the negro refrain:

"Nobody knows de trouble I has;

Nobody knows but Jesus."

There is less of truth underlying the despairing cry for any one of us: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me." "The heart knoweth his own bitterness." Each soul knows its own trouble—and only its own. It is not for us to expect that others can measure our trouble; nor have we the ability or the right to pass upon theirs. We cannot understand the cause or the extent of the whirl in their hearts that makes it seem as if the very foundations of the earth were being swept away; nor can we realize how we can have quite as severe trouble from quite a different cause. But to them and to us there is comfort at every such time in the thought that One who fully knows our trouble sympathizes with us in it all most tenderly and is able and ready to bring us safely through it.

"God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.

Therefore will not we fear through the earth be removed,
And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled,

Though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.

The Lord of hosts with us,
The God of Jacob is our refuge."

Lord give us help from trouble; for vain is the help of man.—S. S. Times.

The Fighting Element of Life.

After all, what would life be without fighting, I should like to know? From the cradle to the grave, fighting, really understood, is the business, the real, highest, honestest business of every son of man. Every one who is worth his salt has his enemies, who must be beaten, be they evil thoughts and habits in himself, or spiritual wickednesses in high places, or Russians, or border-ruffians. It is no good for Quakers, or any other body of men to uplift their voices against fighting. Human nature is too strong for them, and they don't follow their own precepts. Every soul of them is doing his own piece of fighting, somehow and somewhere. The world might be a better world without fighting, for anything I know, but it wouldn't be our world; and therefore I am dead against crying peace when there is no peace, and isn't meant to be. I am as sorry as any man to see folks fighting the wrong people and the wrong things, but I'd a deal sooner see them doing that, than that they should have no fight in them.—THOMAS HUGHES, in *True Manliness*.

—Very touching and tender was the memorandum left by the late Dean Alford: "When I am gone, and a tomb is to be put up, let there be, besides my indication of who is lying below, these words, and these only: 'The inn of the traveler on his way to Jerusalem.'"

Result of a Practical Joke.

BY GEO. B. GRIFFITH.

The mischief that thoughtless boys sometimes do by their practical jokes is immeasurable; and as often unknown to them. A while since, a lady was conversing with a dear friend, who made the remark that "she had never been the same person since her fall."

The lady answered that she had never been informed in regard to any injury from which she was suffering.

"I thought I had told you," she replied. "It happened twenty years ago. You notice the scar upon my forehead. It is from the wound I then received. We were moving, and I went out in great haste, and was walking very briskly, when I stumbled over a cord that some boys had fastened across the street, where the workmen were repairing the gas-pipes. I fell directly into the trench, striking upon my forehead and also breaking my left arm in three places, so that the bone pierced through the flesh. I was taken up senseless, the blood streaming from my mouth, nostrils and ears; and, as we were in a new neighborhood, no one recognized me, and I was taken to a saloon near by and seated in a chair upon the sidewalk. Of course, I was soon surrounded by a curious crowd, among whom came a poor old woman, whom I had befriended in her poverty. Through her exertions my husband was found and I was taken home. Several physicians were summoned, all of whom advised that I be allowed to die in peace, my injuries being considered fatal. But at the entreaties of my husband and friends, operations were performed, and as I lived through them, the physicians took courage. At four different times the probes were introduced into the forehead to relieve the pressure upon the brain. As the use of chloroform was then unknown, I had to endure to the utmost the excruciating torture the operations inflicted.

"I was insane for weeks, and it was three months between the first and last operations. So you can judge of the extent of my sufferings."

"Since you make no allusions to the broken arm," said the lady friend, "I infer that it gave you less trouble than your head."

"My arm healed very well, but has been comparatively useless ever since. I was formerly a fine pianist, but since the fall cannot use my hand at the piano and it is so weak that it is of little use for most practical purposes."

"Were the boys ever discovered?" inquired her visitor.

"No. A reward of a hundred dollars was offered, but they were not found. Possibly they never knew the evil their thoughtlessness caused. But that little cord across my path has already caused me twenty years of suffering, for I have not seen a well day since."

Now, boys, you who have read this incident, pause and ask yourself if ever you were guilty of a thoughtless deed like this.

It is not by any means an uncommon thing for boys to do in the city, this stretching of cords across the sidewalks; and we have known several people to be injured by them.

Let this unfortunate lady's experience be a warning against all practical jokes that are liable to inflict injury. Many boys do not distinguish between mischief and fun. Whatever can injure another is mischief. Humanly speaking, death would have been preferable to the fearful pain and life-long suffering caused by the boys who inflicted such injuries upon that lady.

I might tell you how beautiful she was at the time of her fall; how happy as a young bride; how kind, and benevolent, and Christian she still is; how especially tender toward children; and what a friend to the poor. And yet all her life has been embittered by mischievous boys.—*Golden Days*.