

MUSINGS OF A RECLUSE.

I.

I HAVE seen, after three or four days of still summer rain and gray sky, a most glorious lighting up, though gradual, for the clouds had so long hung together that they were slow and loth to part, and they lingered in the heavens all day, rolling here and there their silvery white masses, or floating lazily through space, dark, heavy, and dull together; when parted they became bright glorified bodies. What a moral might be drawn from them for dull, low-hanging, heavy clusters of human beings.

II.

How often do we hear enforced the necessity of watching, guarding, and arranging our actions; our duty illustrated by that of military men, who cannot gain a battle by merely grand general views of victory without attending to minute details, or by the agriculturist, who is watching the growth of various portions of the soil he cultivates, and so forth. Is not the difference between spiritual and material things just this; that in the one case we must watch details, in the other keep alive the high resolve, and the details will take care of themselves? Keep the sacred central fire burning, and throughout the system in each of its acts will be warmth and glow enough.

III.

How like an imprisoned bird is christianity! The teachers of Humanity have been, and always are, gilding and adorning its cage, cleansing and sprinkling it with perfume, improving its drinking vessels, and calling us around it to gaze and see how beautiful the captive is, and admonishing us to plume our wings just so; not for flight, but that they may look decorous. Though one of delicate preception may detect something sweet and soothing in the poor bird's gentle note, and something cheering in its bolder melody; yet there is an unhealthy moaning in its music, and a lifelessness in its drooping wing, which separate it from its free and exulting mates of the woods and hills. Where is he who, with pious but not timid hand, may gently unlock its prison-house and say, "Go forth, patient sufferer, and cheer the world with thy free and joyous song. Warble it in the ear of the young and

happy, chant it melodiously at the window of the sufferer, till an answering strain is heard throughout the universe."

IV.

Jean Paul has said, "our convictions can never be so firm that they may not become firmer by their beautiful correspondence with those of another mind. The rain is not less reviving to water plants in the midst of their stream than to those growing on the bank." Not to him who awakens new thoughts, but to him who confirms us in the convictions which are the result of our thinking do we feel ourselves most indebted. When this confirmation of belief extends over a wide range of subjects, and is uttered in a few select words of deepest wisdom, we no longer accept it as cheering sympathy, but bow to it as high authority. When after years of careful observation and deep study of incongruous things, we have detected a principle that ranges them all in beautiful order around its centre, and are rewarded for our toil by the discovery, and we attempt to unfold this principle to others in the selectest language we can command, how are we impressed by finding in one short sentence of a sage or bard of far off ages, our slowly obtained experience uttered as the every-day thought of his deeper wisdom. Could we find any record crowded with such oracles, it would be to us divine, it would be to us revelation. Such revelations do we find in the Gospels of Christianity. However earnestly each may contend that the evidence most convincing to his own mind is the only true testimony; so surely as each mind conceives a God of its own, so surely must each individual mind find its own evidence and its corresponding faith. Do I need a miracle to prove the divinity of the teachings I am listening to, I take a miracle for my evidence and my faith itself is a miracle, not the simple growth of my unfolding powers; if confirmation of my own experience, and deeper penetration into life than I have yet attained, be the evidence I demand, I gladly welcome that higher teaching, and exclaim with as heart-felt joy as the shepherds, who received the angelic visitors, "Glory to God in the highest!"

Amid all the bewilderments of this bewildering life, nothing perplexed me so long as to find the right place for its trifles; tinsel, gewgaws as one class terms them; its elegan-

cies, luxuries as they are named by the other. I never had any affinity with those undraped souls, who, stern in principle, reject all that cannot at once be transmuted into their own granite formation, and frown incessantly on all the graceful shapes of minor form in which life flows out. Neither do I join that other company, who value every lighter grace of intellect, and every fair form that wit creates, but prune away those slighter and more common manifestations of beauty which lend a charm to every-day life. I was sure these trifles had their meaning, and if their meaning, their place; too deep a meaning for those to interpret, who live and move and have their being in them. A few years passed, and the love of perfection became my religion, the quiet striving for it my aim; then all things in Heaven and earth took their true proportions. The trifling elegancies of life assumed an importance, not dreamed of by those who live in them. They became expressions of a thirst for beauty that nature alone can satisfy. The rose-colored curtain of my boudoir was a reflection of the evening cloud, my velvet couch in winter became my summer's bank of turf, perfumes my flowers, jewels my stars, the more brilliant the more star-like. The shade of my ribband, the proportion of my shoe-tie, had to do with the harmony and order of the Universe, which I had no right to mar. Nothing was mean, and with this self-discovered truth came interpreted to me the command, often lightly passed over before, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," and when these minor temporary charms of life have faded, the spirit, which they have helped to enrich, will open to you everlasting habitations.

V.

Yesterday was to me a most glorious day of revelling. Weary and perturbed by dusty every-day cares and turmoils, I stole from them for a while, for a good long reading in Bettina's journal. For hours I bathed and floated in the sea of her beautiful thoughts; rather in the flood of her gushing rapture-feelings, from amid whose golden or moon-light waves arose thoughts like green islands thickly scattered. Bettina is a most rare creature, expanding from her earliest years generously and freely, without hindrance from out-

ward obstacle or inward strife; one who was born to tell us the secrets of nature, and reveal to us what she may become to every child-like, loving soul. Bettina grew up in her lap like a pet infant, kept apart from every other influence, that we might see how wise are the teachings of our mother. This is the first time I have ever seen written out in poetry or prose the best that can yet be said of this Universe, that lies about us, or even my own narrow experience of its inexhausted power, and yet this is only the beginning of its many-sided history. This little heroine is the first I have ever known, who thoroughly understood, and used what we all enjoy. Nature was the loving nurse of her infancy, and though she sometimes showed to her favorite her sterner features they were mantled in a smile, for her which won a confiding trust; she was the playmate of her youth and the companion of her early begun womanhood, when she felt that her circle of life was incomplete, till she met the kindred mind from whose fulness the richness of her own might be doubled, and who might teach her with his elder wisdom more than she yet had learned of the universe and of herself. Not as interpreter of nature within and without her, did she adopt him, for before the unclouded vision of her innocence no awful mysteries presented themselves without, and within all was clear and bright. Goethe was to her the expression of the divine soul in humanity. It might have been another, perhaps Novalis, perhaps some one else, for it was not an individual, it was being in a form which charmed that she demanded. Nothing could be more original and yet more natural than her passion for her Jupiter, Apollo all in one. It was a perfectly pure and sanctifying feeling of worship. In him was concentrated the spirit of the universe, life, as it had looked out to her before from trees and brooks and flowers, and spoken to her in the hum of insect and song of bird. He was the light of life to her, and she expanded in it. It asked no return, it could not be returned, it would have been disturbed and limited by an answering fervor; it only needed a protecting benignity, a placid, grateful permission to be. He was human and with the hope and expectation of return would have come disappointment, perhaps despair, at best incompleteness. The stream must flow at its own sweet will into all the nooks and crevices of the flowery, grassy bank it bathes,

and fill it to the brim with its own fulness, and flow back again laden with sweet odors and dancing with livelier joy; but if the bank move to meet it, it repels and hems it in, and changes it from a calm flowing river to a wild torrent. With a little more of trust and kindness there would be something almost as beautiful in Goethe's calm way of encouraging Bettina's passion, as in the passion itself. He met it in the only way it could be met, and most gently breathed upon it. The profound wisdom of the little maid is as striking as her ardor. She never raves, and her extravagance is of the most healthy kind. She revels in the universe and in her love, but accepts the conditions to which the Infinite has subjected the finite, understands the limitations of humanity, and unrepiningly submits, knowing that what she most cherishes is illimitable in its nature and will presently burst its fetters. Perhaps it were well if many ardent natures should expand under such influences as Bettina's. It is certainly most favorable for a noble free spirit to be attracted by the noblest it can find, and undisturbed by any restless craving for sympathy, love and admire at too great a distance from its object to perceive imperfections, but near enough to feel the sunlight of what glory it may possess, and thrive therein. Then the condition of hopeless love, from being the most degrading into which innocence can fall, would become the noblest. To be uncomplaining but ardent was Bettina's high praise, and her love was so generalizing, so little occupied with the details of admiration, that its dignity is sustained, and we hardly feel it to be a delusion.

No one should read this journal, who is not at once so deeply interested in the unfolding of Bettina's rich nature as to lose sight of the thought, that after years had passed she could translate the record of her love into a foreign language, and spread it abroad over the world. Yet when we have learned to love her, this thought becomes less revolting. We reverence the youthful trust that still clings to her, and permits her to expose her intimate heart's history to the multitude, for the sake of the kind ones who will welcome it. She is so absorbed in the object of her passion, that perhaps she did not regard the tale as her own history, but rather as a worthy monument to him who inspired it.