

LITTLE THINGS

Henrietta Wilson, 1852

Little Duties

Little Kindnesses

Little Efforts

Little Cares

Little Pleasures

Little Sins

INTRODUCTION

There is in many people an undefined dread of paying attention to little things, as if they thought that doing so was the sign of a little mind; and that by neglecting *trifles*, as they call them, they show themselves to be superior in intellect. It is far from my intention to justify, or even excuse, that wearisome attention to minutiae, that incessant fidgettiness about trifles, which all must have at some time or other suffered from; but I would wish, if I could, to convince some of my fellow Christians, that all things are not trifles that are called so, and that, as "little things" may have great consequences, they are well worth attending to.

For small things as well as great, the Christian's rule should be, to "do all to the glory of God;" and if we are enabled from this motive . . .

to perform our little duties,

to bear our little cares,

to strive against our little sins —

we surely will run no danger of degenerating either into *anxious carefulness* about trifles, or *careless neglect* of them.

In the adorning of the person, or the decoration of a room — it is the little finishing touches that give elegance and grace. Just so, in the adorning of our profession as Christians, it is the little things that make or mar the beauty of holiness. Attention to them is part of the duty commanded, when we are told, "Let your light so

shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven." A neglect of them dims that light, and may be a stumbling-block in the path of others.

Chalmers' expression, "*the power of littles*," has become almost a proverb, and may be applied to many other subjects than contributions of money; for who has not felt how much power there is in "little things," to act either as *constant sweeteners of life*, or as *perpetual sources of discomfort and annoyance!*

Let our attention to these smaller matters be thus guarded by high motives against becoming trivial; let us sincerely endeavor to seek the good and the happiness of others; let us regard all our daily recurring little cares and duties as part of our appointed work set by our heavenly Father.

And surely none can say that "little things" will not be ennobled by this consecration of them to "Him in whom we live, move, and have our being."

LITTLE DUTIES

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do — do it all for the glory of God!" 1 Corinthians 10:31

Under this head I would wish to enforce, not merely the doing of little duties, but *the doing of these little things as duties*; for many of them are irksome and seem trifling, and therefore require all the more that they be performed under a sense of duty. It does indeed require no small amount of energy to perform little duties regularly; they seem so small, that we think omitting them this *once* can signify little, it seems hardly worth while to summon up our energy for such a trifle, and so by degrees self-indulgence prevails. But when once little duties are neglected, discomfort and discontent invariably follow.

The acquiring *habits* of method, order, and punctuality, can scarcely be classed among little duties, for these habits are required on every occasion of life, the great and important, as well as the small and insignificant; but I am convinced that much

of the irksomeness and worry sometimes attendant on "little duties," would be lessened or removed — were they performed punctually and methodically — all things kept in their proper *place*, and all things done at the proper *time*.

The first little duty I would mention, is one on which so many of the others depend, that on that account alone it must be acknowledged to have a strong claim — I mean EARLY RISING; and a difficult and most disagreeable duty it is generally acknowledged to be! Who does not know how readily *excuses* are listened to in the morning on this subject? Who has not suffered from lack of *constancy* and *resolution* in this matter?

I doubt if any grown-up person likes early rising; they may and do like being up, having the bright, quiet morning hours all undisturbed to themselves, and they may feel this to be well worth the struggle of rising — but a struggle it is, and in most cases a daily one. But there are times when anyone can rise early and without much difficulty — when going on a journey for instance, or taking our place at a sick-bed, or even while anxious to get time to pursue some pleasant occupation for which we have no leisure otherwise. "*Where there is a will, there is a way,*" is true here; but how to get the will, is the difficulty. And even where *habit* makes it *easier*, it seldom, I suspect, makes it *pleasant*. We must urge it on ourselves as a duty, by every motive that we feel influential:

it is good for the health,
it redeems time more than any other plan,
it is a daily opportunity of self-denial, and
it promotes cheerfulness and happiness.

Besides, securing a quiet and uninterrupted time for prayer and reading the Scriptures is an all-important reason for rising early. For by this means we not only benefit our souls, by seeking our daily-needed supply of grace and strength, but we are striving against those foes of the soul — sloth and self-indulgence.

The duties that generally devolve on *housewives*, are among the little duties that it may be expected I should refer to here. But as these must vary in different households, all I can say of them is to

enforce the necessity of their being performed with *punctuality* and *method*, and as *early* in the day as possible. There should be a *fixed hour* for these domestic duties — by a little *foresight* and *method* in planning, the little needs and cares of the day may be anticipated and provided for, and the machinery of the household set a-going in a much shorter time than those can believe who work without a plan, and leave each need to be supplied when it occurs.

Method and *order* generally go together, and in little duties both are indispensable; for where *order* alone prevails, there is often a worrying, fidgetty way of being perpetually engaged in putting things in order, or interrupting others by doing things at wrong times. But where there is *method* and *punctuality*, the plan for the day is laid, and all little duties are done at their set time. It does require a little energy to acquire the *habit of doing things at the right time*, by resolutely laying aside whatever we are engaged in, and actively getting through little, though it may be irksome duties. But if anyone doubts its being a duty to do so, let them spend a short time in a house where this is not attended to, and see if the discomfort there produced is not sufficient so show how essential attention to these little duties is.

Punctuality is one of the duties most frequently neglected — by this I mean *minute punctuality*. I do not think that in greater matters, such as going on an important journey, we are unpunctual. It is in the daily and hourly small occasions that we are apt to fail . . .

just to be a little too late for meals,
not quite ready when it is time to leave,
just a quarter of an hour behind our engagement, and so on. And because it is so small a matter, we forget that its constant recurrence makes it most *annoying* to others.

One great cause of this fault is the eagerness to finish something we are doing — the unwillingness to lay aside some favorite occupation. And another is, a sauntering way of getting ready, an idle way of putting off our time, for it is almost always the *idle* who are *unpunctual*.

Connected with this duty of *punctuality*, is the still rarer habit of never *procrastinating*. I do not believe there is one human being who is faultless on this point; but I will have more to say on this subject, when I come to speak of procrastination as one of our "little sins;" so here I shall merely urge as a duty, the resolute striving against this fault in little things.

Letters to answer,
a small account to pay,
a stitch in time,
a trifling service to be rendered to another —
who is not apt to procrastinate in these things?

No one can be punctual, or attain to "the virtue of reliability," who does not struggle against the encroachments of this foe. There are so many little things to do, that need not be done at any particular time — that we are very apt to fall into this fault. But if we felt the duty of being faithful to our own resolutions in small matters, we surely would not make light of our frequent failures, owing to *this vile habit of procrastination*.

Some people are naturally more punctual and orderly than others; but every woman should endeavor to learn all she can of the little arts that make life comfortable for her family. No doubt the same qualities of method, order, and good management, will show themselves in every department of duty; but much may be gained by observation, and a desire to learn, from whatever source. There are some people who never go from home without bringing back some useful hint in housekeeping, in the arrangement of a room, the order of the table, or, it may be, the planning and planting of the flower garden. These are the people who know the best way of doing everything; their homes may be known by the air of *comfort* and *elegance* they contrive to give by *attention to little things*, not merely by tidiness — but by tasteful arrangement, and a degree of attention to decoration.

Someone speaks of the little things that mark the tastes of women — flowers especially do so; and trifling as some may think it, I uphold it as one of our little duties, to make our homes not only as *comfortable*, but as *pretty* and *pleasing* as possible. There are

some people who pay no heed to niceties of this kind, either esteeming them beneath their care, or not having taste enough to feel the lack of them.

Their *rooms* have a blank, uncomfortable, uninhabited look; their personal attire is always a bit disheveled; they never seem to notice any improved way of managing little matters — or they do not like the trouble of learning and practicing it; and it is ten chances to one, that by beginning with despising decoration and taste, they end by neglecting comfort and tidiness.

I hope I may not be mistaken as advocating any dangerous legalism, if I suggest, as one of our little duties, what may be called *small self-denials*. There are few *duties*, indeed, which do not involve self-denial in one form or another; but what I mean now, is self-denial, for self-denial's sake, as a means of strengthening the character, and of keeping under control self-indulgence, sloth, love of pleasure, and love of our own way.

Many people deny this to be a duty at all, and others deny that there is any self-denial involved in the little matters referred to; but I suspect these latter have never tried the experiment, and many of the former mistake self-denial for some kind of legalism. Of course, in this light, I would consider self-denial to be as erroneous as it would be inefficacious; but if we are not to deny ourselves in little things, what mean the frequent exhortations of Scripture to this effect: "Take up your cross daily and follow me." "I discipline my body, bringing it into subjection." "Endure hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

I think there can be no doubt that *little self-denials* in comfort, ease, or food, have the good effect of making us less dependent on these things — less selfish, and more energetic when action is required; while a conscientious watch kept up on the subject of personal expenditure, will convince most of us how much we stand in need of this duty.

There is often a restless desire to buy something we *think* we *need*, or, at all events, that we wish for — which, if habitually indulged, leads to extravagance, and is one of the most

deceptive forms of self-pleasing. Compel yourself to wait, to see if you can do without it, if you *really need* it — or whether your eager desire is not just a passing fancy. You will find this exercise of self-denial sometimes not a small one, but always a useful check upon an impatient and covetous spirit.

Another exercise of self-denial that may be mentioned, is, not uttering a sharp retort, however witty or well-deserved it may be. This helps us more to attain to a mild and Christian spirit, than almost any exercise of gentleness I know. This last piece of self-denial leads to another, and, alas, much-neglected little duty — I mean *forbearance*.

How does it come to pass, that while we all allow the duty of *forgiveness*, so few of us think as we ought of the kindred duty of *forbearance*! The command is plain, "*Forbear* with one another, and *forgive* one another." Well may forbearing be put first, for I am sure if there was more *forbearance* exercised, there would be less *forgiveness* required.

Perhaps the expression, "making allowances," may more clearly express what I mean. The *aged*, we admit, are entitled to this; the *young* generally obtain it. How much harm is done by the lack of a little kindly *forbearance*! Some are provoked by another's vanity or pride; some by their caprice; some are exasperated by a dictatorial manner; while others cannot put up with such a one's egotism.

Oh, let us learn to make large allowances for others, let us cultivate a forbearing spirit in trifles, for it is there we too often fail most; remembering how much we need it ourselves, and looking in this, as in every duty, to the example of our Divine Master, whose *forbearance* and patience with His disciples in their waywardness and ignorance, is left us as an example that we should "follow His steps."

The duty of being always in a *cheerful disposition*, is so important, that I hardly should enumerate it among little things; but all else is almost valueless without it. It is like the soft balmy air and bright sunshine of a summer's morn, which when we feel

and breathe, we think no other enjoyment can equal; without which the finest landscape lacks a charm, and with which, the dreariest moorland is bright and beautiful.

Great duties, great kindnesses lose much of their virtue and power to benefit others, if not performed in this spirit. Little duties and little kindnesses are indeed nothing without the sunshine of a cheerful disposition, to gild and adorn them.

Akin to this is the duty of cultivating a congenial disposition — a disposition to be *easily pleased*. There are people to whom this seems natural, who are always pleased — and we all feel how much more agreeable it is to have anything to do with them, than with those who, either from indifference or discontent, are seldom or never pleased.

By this duty, however, I mean rather more than merely not being discontented — I mean the disposition to show that we are pleased, a kind way of receiving little services, a readiness to admire what we see others wish us to like, and a willingness to "do unto others as we wish they should do unto us" — the reverse, in short, of a grumbling fault-finding spirit.

It may be alleged that a careful attention to some of these little duties may lead to an irksome eccentricity, a scrupulous habit of forever putting to rights, and to a neglect of more important concerns. This will never be the case, however, if we remember to perform little duties with a large spirit, and consider first the comfort of others.

If done as duties, they must also be done without fuss or ostentation, and above all; let us remember that while we thus, as it were, "tithe mint and anise and cummin," we must beware of neglecting "the weightier matters of the law." The warning against doing this, is, however, followed by the words, "These you ought to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

LITTLE KINDNESSES

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, *kindness*, humility, gentleness and patience. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Colossians 3:12, 14

"Be *kind* and compassionate to one another" Ephesians 4:32

"Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble." 1 Peter 3:8

I think, if we examine our own hearts, we shall all feel ourselves to have been sadly negligent in this branch of the "little things." How often, from lack of thought and attention, do we see people, really kind people, fail to make others happy or comfortable. How often do we see, in families who would do anything to oblige each other if the matter were a *great* one — such a total neglect of the little kindnesses of life, that by degrees they become selfish, and are unable to perceive wherein they fail, or that anything else ought to be expected of them than what they perform? How often do we hear kindly-feeling, well-intentioned people, regretting that they can do nothing, that they have nothing in their power — while all the time these *little kindnesses* are unnoticed and unperformed.

Life affords but few opportunities of doing *great* services for others; but there is scarcely an hour of the day that does not afford us an opportunity of performing some *little*, it may be *unnoticed* service. Careful and earnest attention to little things of this kind, is of great advantage to our own characters. *We can seldom perform little kindnesses without little self-denials.* Once the habit is formed of daily attending to others, and trying to please and serve them — it is of inestimable use in repressing our natural selfishness.

I speak advisedly, when I class trying to please others as among the little kindnesses we should study to perform. It is a command in Scripture, "Let each one of us make it a practice to please his neighbor for his good and for his true welfare," and I fear it is a duty oftener neglected than trying to *serve* others.

Among the many ways of pleasing others by our little kindnesses, I may mention *kind consideration of the peculiarities of others*. There are few families where there are not some members who require to be studied a little, and if the "peculiar one" is the head of the house, or an aged member of it — this attention is generally given.

But between brothers and sisters, or between friends, how little of this *kind forbearance* do we see! How often do we feel it hard to be the one that must always give up! How apt are we to be provoked at the peculiarities of others, instead of endeavoring to forbear, and please them rather than ourselves!

Attention to each other's peculiarities is rare enough. There is much lack of knowledge of each other's characters to be met with in families, and from this sometimes, I think, proceeds the *careless indifference* about pleasing them.

The study of character may be apt (unless pursued in a Christian spirit) to lead us into critical and censorious thoughts and feelings; but if we study others, that we may know how best to *please* them, and make them happy — I cannot think it can be otherwise than a profitable study.

One of the little kindnesses I would enforce, is "allowing people to be happy in their own way." Never insist upon your way, and your way alone, as being the only one that can succeed in giving pleasure. For in doing so, you will too often only torment and annoy those you wish to serve; and sometimes this spirit, when yielded to, becomes a *perpetual petty tyranny* over others.

Remember also that different ideas of pleasure are entertained by the aged and the young. For while, in general, to *old* people, quiet and a regular undisturbed routine is most pleasant — variety and a certain degree of restless excitement, are liked by the *young*.

There is no little kindness more generally felt, than a readiness to promote the plans of others, an entering into their feelings, and an endeavor to smooth down all difficulties in the way.

To the young especially, this sort of kind sympathy is valuable; and how soon you may discern, in a family, which individual is in the habit of showing it, by the ready and constant recurrence of all to her as the one who always helps forward a plan, sympathises in a little pleasure, and enters into all the excitement of an enjoyment which perhaps she is neither to share, nor, (on her own account,) would care to partake of.

How worse than tiresome is the "wet blanket," who, on these occasions, thinks it will rain — is sure you cannot be spared from home — or, absorbed in other things, takes no interest, and will not be put out of her own way for anyone!

Look around among the families you are intimate with — and see which member of each family is the one to whom all the others go in little difficulties; which is the one that studies to make the others happy, forgetting *self* till she really becomes the "one who cannot be spared from home" — and you will generally find that that one does not confine her attentions to home, but is always the person who thinks of *little kindnesses* to be done to others — gifts of flowers to the sick — visits to those confined to the house — the loan of a book — or the earliest inquiries about absent friends.

I remember one who was thus distinguished for *little kindnesses*; she was not what is generally termed intelligent or wise, but I never knew any one so quick at finding out what people liked, or so ready to do it, or get it for them. Her means were limited, but she gave more little gifts than anyone I knew; her time was much occupied at home, and her kindness made her friendship much sought after. She could always find time to visit those who were apt to be overlooked, and to show a little kindness to those who had no claim on her. I remember her getting herself introduced to an old lady who lived alone and had few friends, that she might go sometimes and play chess with her; and many an hour which she might have spent in her own amusement, she bestowed on this old lady, cheering her lonely lot by her kind cheerfulness.

Little presents are said to be always acceptable; they lay no one under obligation, and they mark a *kind remembrance* of you when absent, or a desire to supply some little need you have expressed.

And as their value is seldom great, the giving and receiving of them is one of the many *little kindnesses* we should practice and indulge.

"The sacred duty of giving pleasure," may be practiced daily. And, oh, if we could but feel what a sacred duty it is, surely we would wish and endeavor to make and find opportunities of practicing it!

Is it not a sacred duty to make life as happy as we can to the *young*, before life's trials and troubles come upon them? Is it not more so to those who are enduring the heat and burden of the day? And do not all feel it to be so toward the aged, who perhaps have little left to cheer them, and may have suffered and undergone much during the weary days of their pilgrimage?

Let us seek out opportunities, let us slight nothing as too trivial or minute, not even the keeping a favorite seat at the fireside for one we know has a fancy for it; or the most trifling arrangement of household matters, if it may give pleasure to others.

The desire of *showing little kindnesses* proceeds often merely from an obliging disposition; but I think the habit of it must be formed on Christian motives, and on a habitual course of self-denial and thoughtfulness. It may be called the habit of "preferring others before ourselves."

To the young I would earnestly say, Endeavor to acquire this blessed habit. Do not, because you can do so little for others, do nothing.

Look around you, first in your own family, then among your friends and neighbors, and see whether there is not someone you can show kindness to — someone . . .

whose little burden you can lighten,
whose little cares you may lessen,
whose little pleasures you can promote,
whose little wants and wishes you can gratify.

Cheerfully giving up our own pleasures to minister to others, is one of the little kindnesses and self-denials of Christian living.

Doing little things that nobody likes to do, but which must be done by someone, is another.

Doing a thing, and saying nothing about it, is also a kindness; for I dare say we all know how irksome it is to be told that this, that, or the other thing, was gotten for us, or done on our account; and how ungrateful we are apt to feel for kindnesses thus thrust upon us.

A willingness to lend books, or personal items, to those who will take care of them and return them, is also a mark of kind feeling.

It may seem to many, that if they avoid little unkindnesses, they must necessarily be doing all that is required. But it is not enough to abstain from sharp words, sneering tones, petty contradictions, or daily little irritations. We must be active and earnest in kindness — not merely passive and inoffensive.

In these little things it is really more from the *manner* in which they are done, than from any great value in the services themselves, that we see the *kind* and *Christian* spirit. All must be done *cheerfully*, as if it were a pleasure, not merely a duty. And above all, we must never allow anyone to feel or see that we have made a sacrifice of our own will or wishes on their account.

It is contemptuously said to be a "Scotch present," when anyone, in bestowing a trifling gift, tells the receiver that it is of no use to the giver. But it has often struck me that there is much true delicacy and kindness in this, for it is evidently designed to prevent the recipient feeling laid under any obligation; and this is one of the little kindnesses I am recommending.

Attending to anyone who is overlooked in society, from whatever cause, is another of the kindly offices that may be classed under this head. Few do not feel this when the person is overlooked on account of *poverty* or *old age*, or singularity of appearance. But do we consider it sufficiently, if the unfortunate individual is guilty of being tiresome and boring? Yet a little self-sacrifice on these occasions is certainly both kind and right, as we are all ready to acknowledge when we see any one cheerfully

undertaking the burden of talking to, or worse, of listening to, one who is generally voted a bore.

LITTLE EFFORTS

"She has done what she could!" Mark 14:8

It has often struck me, in reading the parable of the Talents, that the servant who was slothful and hid his Lord's money, was not one of the more richly endowed, but one who had but one talent. Is it not too often so yet? How frequently do we feel, and act upon the feeling, that we would do more good, were it not that we can do so little? There really seems a peculiar danger to those possessed of but one talent, to neglect the exercise of it; and it were well, if, while excusing ourselves for doing nothing, because we cannot do much — we recollected that the slothful servant who buried only one talent was condemned for so doing, and would have been proportionally rewarded, had he, like the others, traded with, and increased his lord's money.

It is too often indolence under the guise of humility that causes us to act thus. Little efforts are troublesome to make, and we prefer dreaming over what we *would* do if we were rich or great, or endowed with talent — to honestly and steadily doing what we can. There is no one, I believe, however straitened in circumstances, or inferior in capacity, who has it not in his or her power to do *some* good, while hundreds who are neither the one nor the other, neglect this duty because they think they can do but little.

Do that little faithfully, look out for opportunities, count no effort too little — and assuredly you will find the truth of the promise, "For everyone who has will be given more." If you are sincerely desirous to be useful, and willing to begin with humble efforts — do not fear but that larger and more extended spheres of duty will open before you. Or if you are one of those who really do possess but one talent, and endeavor to employ it for God's glory — do

not doubt His gracious acceptance of your smallest services, for He has promised that *even a cup of cold water* given in His name, shall be rewarded.

To many who feel humbled and grieved that they can do so little for the Savior's cause on earth, or for the good of others — it should be an encouraging thought, that "God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be." The small stones of the temple are as useful in their place as the more imposing parts of the building; and let them be assured that He who commended Mary who anointed His head, because "she had done what she could," will not despise any attempt, however small, to serve and glorify Him.

For instance, in visiting the abodes of the poor, especially in sickness, we are apt at first to feel painfully what seems to us the absence of all comfort; but it is then that we learn how small an addition to their little stock will prove a comfort to them, and how many things which we thoughtlessly waste or put aside as useless, might be made serviceable to them. Little efforts to do good in this way, may be thought of by every one. As trifling as these may be, it is humbling sometimes to see the gratitude felt for such small services.

There are many cases in which, in giving clothes to the poor, it is an additional assistance to send them ready-made or mended; for, often the hard-worked mother cannot find time to sew, and the younger members who might assist, are at school or in places, and too often have not the ability to do much for themselves in this way. No doubt those who are in circumstances to do so, can generally contrive better for themselves in this respect than we can do for them, and a handy person will turn almost any old thing given to them to good account. And at all events, the trial may be useful to someone who is wondering what they can do to help the poor.

Where there are cases of sickness, too, it is amazing how *very little* is a comfort and support in the way of food, or little delicacies. Much, indeed, is wasted by the wealthy, that might, were they so inclined, be made useful to the poor. But

sometimes the trifles or fragments we have to give them seem so small, that we think it is not worth while to send them. Were we more in the habit of kindly personal fellowship with the poor of our neighborhood, there are many little services of this kind we might render them, and gratefully are they received.

I have heard many speak warmly of such kindnesses shown them by a humble minded follower of Christ, who had not much to give, but who, as they expressed it, "never thought anything too little to take the trouble of bringing it." These *little personal kindnesses* often open the hearts of the poor, so that a word of counsel, or even of reproof, is kindly taken, and opportunities of speaking "a word in season" are thus often procured, where otherwise it might be felt intrusive.

Many who are desirous of doing good to the souls as well as the bodies of others, and yet feel painfully conscious that they cannot — may benefit them by giving or lending books. And sometimes this plan gives an opening for conversation on the book, and frequently a word of warning and rebuke may be thus conveyed, and make an impression — where a direct appeal or personal address would offend.

Reading a few verses of Scripture, even without a remark, is also one of the *little efforts* that may be blessed, for, "the entrance of His words gives light."

These are but meant as hints to those who really desire to begin this good work; but once begun, not only will *opportunities* of doing good increase, but the *ability* to do so will grow likewise. You will find a use for many a little thing you now cast aside, you will become quick in suggesting and supplying little comforts; and while thus following His example who *went about doing good*, you will experience the truth of the promise, that "He who waters others, shall be watered also himself."

Under this title of *little efforts*, I may also class *endeavors to improve ourselves*. I believe many neglect the important work of self-education after they are grown up, from the erroneous idea, that because they can do little, they need therefore do nothing.

Even when our *time* is not much at our own disposal, when domestic and social duties demand a large share of attention — I believe a great deal might be done by *a careful employment of the fragments of time* that so often run to waste.

Southey has an amusing calculation of how much may be learned by a regular application of ten minutes a day. In fifty years seven languages may be thus acquired, so as to read them with facility and pleasure, if not critically, and to travel without needing an interpreter. But without attempting any such effort as this, the hint is worth attending to; for, as Southey says, "Any man who will, may command ten minutes." And if there is any truth in the idea, it may serve to show that little efforts for our own improvement, where greater efforts are not in our power, should not be despised and neglected as useless.

Besides this careful redeeming of our fragments of time, however, we must remember that no efforts, great or small, will be of much avail, unless they are **continuous**. If even *great* but intermittent efforts are useless — then how powerless must *little* efforts be, unless steadily and perseveringly carried on! If only little efforts are in our power, we must endeavor to make up for their *insignificance* by their *frequency*.

It is not to be denied that sometimes it requires a greater exertion to make a little effort, than one of a more important nature, but the *power of habit* will go far to aid us, if we were once but aroused to the importance of making these efforts.

May I give a hint on what may be called little exertions, that in some cases may be found useful; I mean, in slight feelings of indisposition. Exertion, active exertion, is often the best remedy for these feelings, but it is one we are not always willing to apply, for even when we can plead no bodily ailment, everyone must have felt at times a tendency to boredom, or a listless weariness, without any definite cause. Then it is that we should arouse ourselves, and by a little exertion we can do so, and after a short time of active bodily or mental exercise, we shall find these feelings disappear.

LITTLE CARES

"Casting all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you." 1 Peter 5:7

"Commit your trifles unto God, for to Him nothing is trivial."

These fall much within a Christian's sphere of duty, and are of almost daily occurrence to him; yet they are often of so trifling a nature, that one feels ashamed to mention them, or even to allow that they are cares.

I would make a distinction between little *cares* and little *annoyances*; for the latter, if disregarded and cheerfully borne, generally disappear. But our little cares cannot be so easily gotten rid of, and sometimes arise so much from constitutional causes, that they require the exercise of religious principle and trust, to keep them within due bounds.

To all who feel the tendency to "be worried and troubled about many things" — who have a Martha's spirit — the gentle rebuke of our Savior may still be applied. For does not an earnest heed to the *one thing needful*, make all little earthly cares take their subordinate place in our esteem?

What I would wish to impress upon my readers' mind is, that we are warranted by the word of God, to carry all our cares, however trifling, to Him — to cast all our burdens, however small, on Him who has graciously promised to sustain us if we do so.

Our great cares must often seem small in the eyes of Him to whom "the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust." And our small cares will not be beneath the notice of Him, by whom the "very hairs of our head are all numbered."

Along with this, I think that a methodical distribution of time, letting each duty and occupation have its appointed time to be attended to — does much to keep down that absent, anxious

spirit, which little cares are so apt to produce. By resolutely doing each duty as its time occurs, by resolving that, except when necessary, we will not let our minds dwell on them (for truly "sufficient for the day is the evil thereof"), and by trustfully committing our way unto God — we may relieve our minds of many of our little cares, and in some cases get free of them altogether.

I allude chiefly to such as are almost inseparable from a women's duties — the little cares of the children and the household.

And I would also include those cares which may exist chiefly in our own over-anxious and nervous temperaments.

There is a class of little annoyances such as we *make for ourselves* by a complaining, or an overly fastidious temperament. There are some who make such a fuss about trifles, tormenting themselves, and worrying others by a perpetual fault-finding and discontent — as every trifling irritation is magnified to a mountain — that all pleasure is spoiled by their presence!

It is a good rule in little things, as well as great, that "what can't be cured — should be endured" — and endured cheerfully!

I am not advocating slovenly and careless endurance of little vexations which may be remedied — let them be set right by all means, and the more quietly as well as quickly, the better. But I have observed people who were most ludicrously discomposed by trifles which neither they nor anyone else could remedy, and which should have been overlooked with a smile, if noticed at all.

There are many overly finicky people in the world, who groan over such trifling irritations. It is really ludicrous to hear the gravity with which some people will allude to the fact of the road being dusty, even alleging that as a reason for not going a walk; others are as much afraid of a shower; others of too much sunshine; some are terrified at the idea of being over-heated.

There is no end to these idle fancies and fears! If you laugh at these miserable people — then they think you are unfeeling. If

you sympathize with them — then they multiply and increase their petty annoyances.

Let us all beware of making much of little irritations. Let us learn to laugh at them, remembering how very annoying such complaints are to others, as well as bothersome to ourselves.

A cheerful person who refuses to notice trifles or be aggravated by them — soon ceases to feel them. While to those who seem to find a perverse pleasure in dwelling on, and being daunted by them — these little discomforts will actually become real cares, and will eat out half the comfort of their lives!

"All the days of the despondent are miserable, but a cheerful heart has a continual feast." Proverbs 15:15.

"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." Proverbs 17:22

LITTLE PLEASURES

"God, Who gives us richly all things to enjoy." 1 Timothy 6:17

"You are wise and shall find comfort,
If you study your pleasures in trifles.
For slender joys, often repeated,
Fall as sunshine on the heart."

"Happiness is made up of little pleasures."

I could multiply extracts to prove that little pleasures are the great sweeteners of life. The theme is trite and commonplace; we know all that can be said in favor of common and simple pleasures, and say we believe it; and yet how few, when past the age of childhood, really do enjoy themselves by means of little pleasures?

It is generally agreed that the man who has a hobby is a happy man, however trifling his hobby is; and though I by no means wish to advocate an earnest pursuit of trifles as a means of

enjoyment, it is no doubt the case that the happiness of the man with a trifling hobby is caused mainly by his power of giving his mind to it, of being occupied by it.

The *pursuit of pleasure*, and the *finding pleasure in little things*, are, however, very different. For, while the *pursuit of pleasure* is perhaps the most selfish of all ways of wasting time; the *finding pleasure in little things* is a duty we owe both to ourselves and others.

There are many little varieties in our daily life that might be made pleasures of, were we so inclined. A country walk, a little excursion, making trifling alterations in domestic arrangements, preparing some little surprise for an absent member of the family, obtaining some little thing we have long wished for, any innocent variety or change in our everyday life — may be made a source of pleasure. Happy, indeed, are they who keep this child-like spirit in mature years.

To those who are continually *seeking their own gratification*, there can be little enjoyment of pure and simple pleasures — for these soon lose their effect, unless combined with self-denial and a steady adherence to the rule of "duty first, and pleasure afterwards." And though, no doubt, the capacity of little pleasures to give pleasure, depends more on the mood of our own minds, than more striking incidents do — yet to those who cultivate the disposition already alluded to — of being *easily pleased*, it is wonderful how many are the sources, and how frequent the occurrence, of little pleasures,

"The common air, the earth, the skies,
To them are opening paradise."

To those who have a *love of nature*, there never can be any lack of varied and simple pleasure. To some, the mere sight of green trees and hedges suffices; and even where the grander and more picturesque forms of beauty are lacking in the scenery, the true lover of nature will find much to enjoy. It is one great argument in favor of intellectual cultivation, and the acquiring knowledge, that

to a well-stored mind the effect of little pleasures is greatly enhanced.

A love and knowledge of nature, however slight, increases the pleasure of all country excursions. While to those less favored individuals, whose lives are spent in cities and amidst the works of men — an acquaintance with, and interest in, any branch of knowledge, adds to their more limited stock of pleasures tenfold.

We are too apt to turn from the *pleasures that lie in our daily path* — and to sigh after others that seem to us unattainable. Many people long for the pleasures of traveling, and envy those who have the means and time at their command to go abroad, or to visit the more remote parts of our own country. But do they relish as they might the pleasure of those little excursions which come almost within everybody's power now-a-days?

If an inhabitant of a town — is a few hours' occasional excursion to the country thoroughly enjoyed, or a walk through beautiful grounds, or a visit to a friend's garden? Or are these *simple pleasures* despised because they are so *common*, or turned from in discontent, because they are only to be enjoyed for a short time?

To a cultivated and observant mind and taste, there is scarcely a scene in nature, which does not afford food for thought, or for the exercise of kindly feelings, or something to lay among memory's stores for future enjoyment.

The more the mind is cultivated, the greater will be the amount of small pleasures, and the keener the relish for them. For you will turn from all that is base, and enjoy with a grateful and contented spirit the many flowers that grow in your daily path, but which sometimes must be sought for in this spirit before they are found.

"How much real enjoyment there may be in modest pleasures, with little variation from what is within everyone's reach."

LITTLE SINS

"As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so *a little folly* outweighs wisdom and honor." Ecclesiastes 10:1

"Catch all the foxes, those *little foxes*, before they ruin the vineyard, for the grapevines are blossoming!" Song of Songs 2:15

What are little sins? Surely a Christian ought to consider all sin as an offence against a holy God, and therefore the term little can never be applied to it. Yet we all look lightly, even tenderly, upon some 'fault' as we would gladly call it; we all incline to claim indulgence for some 'failing' under the plea, "Is it not a little one?" Genesis 19:20

I fear this distinction which we make of *faults* and *sins*, helps to blind us to the real nature of many little evil ways, and prevents our admitting that *what has the essence of sin in it, is sin* — be it in ever so small a degree.

Faults we may have besides, and these should likewise be striven against, for they are very apt to grow into *sins*. And even at the best, when they are what is called "allowable faults," why should we cherish them and annoy others — as what a slight degree of watchfulness and resistance would enable us to conquer altogether.

For instance, under this head of faults, how strict, and properly so, are those who have the care of young people in checking all faulty habits, rude manners, careless ways, waste of time by trifling, inattention to what is said to them, slovenliness, and all the many little *faults of manners* which offend against the rules of courtesy. Yet we who are grown up, and are aware that many of these faults are to be found in ourselves — too often excuse ourselves by alleging that we mean nothing wrong, that it is but our way, that it is merely a bad habit, and so on; as if we could not, or should not, strive against and conquer faults in ourselves, which we expect children to watch over and subdue.

Were we in the habit of tracing our *little sins* up to their *source*, we must feel convinced that they originate in those sinful propensities, which, if followed out to their full extent, we admit to be exceeding sinful.

Some of these little sins may not be the seeds of greater — too often, however, they are so. And because we think we can stop in time, because we think it does no one harm but ourselves — ought we, dare we, to indulge any habit or feeling which even we admit would, by a little excess, become sin?

I suspect also that we are apt to deceive ourselves as to the ease with which we can conquer these little sins. If it were so, our indulgence of them is the more culpable; but the daily and hourly watch against them, the steady resistance to the pleading from within of "just this once," "is it not a little one" — is no easy task, and in some respects is a harder one than those greater occasions of temptation, when we guard ourselves by putting on the whole armor of God, that we may be able to stand in the evil day.

What should come first in our catalog? There is one sin, or fault, call it what you will, of which we all admit we are guilty, against which we have all made many resolutions, and which visits us in so many different ways, and with so many excuses for its indulgence, that it may in most people be called their besetting sin, I mean PROCRASTINATION. And who dare say: My hands are clean, I never procrastinate? When some sad result has followed from our habit of procrastinating, or when we feel conscious that it was sheer indulgence and dislike of duty, which caused us to put off doing anything — we do feel how wrong this habit is.

But in the daily little matters, such as answering letters, settling small accounts, executing little plans for the good or even the amusement of others — which of us feels as we ought, that we are indulging a fault that, if carried just a little further, will bring confusion and discomfort into all our worldly affairs, and which too often ends in causing us, Felix-like, to delay until a more convenient season, the concerns of our immortal souls.

Method in the arrangement of our time, so that each hour brings its own duty, would help us much against this sin. For it often arises from having so little to do, that we think we can "do it any time," and this is generally found to be no time. The *busy* rarely procrastinate, it is the idle and indolent who do so. There is no

more effectual way of rooting out the miserable sins of *idleness* and *indolence*, than by a daily hourly struggle against procrastinating in little things.

Whenever anyone is heard to complain of lack of time, we generally find such person is guilty of *procrastination*, as well as of *idleness*. The hardest-working men complain least of this; and all, or almost all, who have distinguished themselves by industry, and by the amazing amount of labor they have got through, must have done their work when they had it to do, and not merely when they felt *inclined* to do it.

Resolve, then, that when you have anything, however small, to do — you will do it *now*, or at the very first time set apart for that duty. And remember that in steadily striving against the idle or indolent wish to procrastinate, you are strengthening your character, and improving your habits in more than one particular.

Idleness is a fault we all condemn in the young, and too often indulge in without remorse ourselves. There is a *busy idleness*, which sometimes blinds us to its nature — we seem, to ourselves and others, to be occupied, but what is the *result* of it all? What Hannah More calls "*a quiet and worthless frittering away of time*," whether it be in "unprofitable *small talk*," or in constant *idle reading*, or sauntering over some useless piece of work — is surely not "redeeming the time." And yet how many days and hours are thus unprofitably wasted, and neither ourselves nor others benefited!

All who have much leisure time, are liable to this fault. And besides its own sinfulness, for *surely waste of time is a sin*, it encourages a weak, unenergetic frame of mind, and is apt to produce either apathetic contentment in trifling occupations — or a restless desire of excitement and amusement.

Those who have their time entirely at their own disposal, with perhaps no definite duty to occupy them, should guard resolutely against *waste of time*.

Make duties for yourselves.

Fix hours for your different occupations.

Do with all your might, whatever your hand finds to do.

Carefully, conscientiously ascertain which of your employments is not worth all this care.

Have a *motive*, a *reason* for all you do — and frequently examine yourselves as to what you are doing.

Surely you must find *time* too precious to be either *squandered*, or *frittered*, or *idled away*.

While *idleness* must be thus guarded against, both in its spirit and its results — *indolence* in its various shapes must also be considered as an insidious foe. If the *idle* need to be roused to redeem the time from trifling and frittering occupation — the *indolent* too often need to be roused to the duty of doing anything at all.

But it is against *the little forms of indolence*, that we must watch, remembering how encroaching it is, and how surely it grows from bad to worse.

Slovenly habits and ways of action, are the result frequently of indulged indolence; it is not because we know no better, that we allow ourselves in many little slovenly ways, and indulge ourselves in a *lazy manner* of doing what we have to do. *Sloth* and *love of ease* are too often looked upon as little sins, and *indulged* in and *excused* accordingly.

Besides that, they are decidedly opposed to the *spirit of self-denial* inculcated in Scripture.

How seldom do we stop short, satisfied with small indulgences! If we begin by consulting . . .

our *love of ease*,

our dislike to trouble,

our slothful desires in trifles —

what security have we that we shall not end in that *self-indulgence* which is regardless of anything but its own comfort and gratification; which will not be denied, and is insatiable in its demands; and which, when indulged, makes a man more useless

in mind and body, than almost any other of our so-called little sins!

Bodily and mental indolence do not always go together, but both must be guarded against; and perhaps the temptation to the latter is stronger in us than the former. How few feel it a sin to neglect the cultivation of their mind! Any book or subject that requires the exertion of thought, is set aside, because they cannot be troubled with it. This mental indolence, this dislike of mental exertion, increases and craves indulgence, quite as much as bodily indolence does — until at last the mind will submit to no control but that of amusement and excitement — or sinks into rusty, useless apathy.

I have seen a plan recommended, as a check upon what may be called *busy idleness*, which might bring some to consider whether they might not indeed make a better use of their *time*, than frittering it away in trifling occupations, and perpetual visiting or sauntering. It is to *keep a faithful record* even for one week of all that has been done, summing up the hours thus spent, and honestly and seriously seeing what has been the result to ourselves and others. If we would but do this, a stop would be put to much idle trifling, and we would learn to put more value on our time than we do.

Among the various forms of self-indulgence, is one which is apt to assume, like many of our little sins, an appearance of virtue — I refer to a *dislike of finding fault* even when it is our duty. I allow that it is disagreeable, that it is difficult, that it requires both temper and tact, and that a perpetual fault-finder is a nuisance not easily borne. But still it is sometimes a duty, and where this duty is neglected, domestic discomfort, if not more serious consequences, are sure to follow.

How often do we hear it said with an air of complacency, "I wish now I had spoken before, and not allowed matters to go to this length; but I so dislike always finding fault." These complaints chiefly refer to children and domestic concerns, while I believe we ought rather seriously to reproach ourselves for neglect of duty in this matter, and resolve henceforward to obey the apostle's

command, "He who rules, let him do it with diligence." Do not find fault unnecessarily, or when irritated; but do not pass by faults or faulty ways of doing work, merely because you dislike to find fault.

Then there are the tribe of faults that come under the head of THOUGHTLESSNESS. Daily and hourly the source of little neglects, little debts, little unkindnesses, which we never see in their true characters, simply because we never think about them at all. They are, however, all *transgressions of the law of love*, and as such, are little sins to be watched and striven against.

If we would but remember that all thoughtlessness of others is selfishness; if we could but feel it as a reproach, not as a palliative, to have to say, "I never thought of it" — then surely we would strive to think, to remember little services at the right time; to avoid the thoughtless word or jest that may pain another; to put ourselves sometimes to the slight inconvenience of going out of our way to pay a visit; and to be punctual and prompt in paying small debts.

Carelessness in expenditure, and idle waste, are as frequently caused by thoughtlessness as by willful extravagance — but the result is the same. And who that has ever seen the distress and discomfort arising from not thinking on these subjects, will deny the duty of steadily guarding against sins of thoughtlessness at their commencement.

To be *inconsiderate of others* is universally allowed to be a most unamiable trait, but I fear it is one of which all thoughtless people are more or less guilty; and unless watched against in the young, it will be apt to end in the more determined form of self-seeking, and neglect of others altogether.

Can I class BAD TEMPER among *little* sins? Some think not; but why is it, then, that, go almost where we may, we meet with little manifestations of this many-sided evil, which seem to be yielded to without shame, and excused as of little consequence? It is true that, except in childhood, we rarely meet with violent fits of passion, or determined attacks of 'sulkiness' — for even where

religious principle does not suppress such sinful displays of temper, shame, and a regard to the opinions of others, would prevent indulgence in such degrading and absurd manifestations of displeasure.

But there are ways and means of letting others feel that we are out of humor, and of indulging and betraying temper, that we are apt to think too lightly of, and to class among our little sins, if indeed we class them among sins at all.

One frequent excuse is, that it is just our bad manner. If it is merely a bad manner, surely that is under our own control, and may be more easily amended than the deeper-seated evil from which in reality it springs.

No one would judge harshly those, who, from ill health, or worrying and anxious care, are betrayed into irritability — though those who are thus situated, ought to watch and strive against yielding to it. But the consideration of the duty of bearing with the tempers and caprices of others, and of making allowances for them, is not the question at present; my wish is rather to warn and arouse those who are hardly conscious, it may be, of how annoying their *little indulgences of temper* are to others.

Who does not know the symptoms of this evil in others — the cold averted look, the monosyllabic dry reply, the utter lack of interest shown in what you are saying or doing? Or, worse still, the short snappish voice and manner, the sullen gloom, the determination not to smile or be pleased, the air of being a martyr, or of having suffered some deep offense, the talking *at* but not *to* the offender, the quiet sneer, the mock humility, the desire to be neglected?

Who has not seen and grieved over such manifestations of the evil spirit within another — yet perhaps gone and done likewise, ay, and justified herself, saying, "*We do well to be angry!*"

One reason why *bad temper* is not felt to be sinful, perhaps is, that it is frequently disguised under some other name, and excused to our own hearts, as even *an amiable weakness*. A fit of regular snappish irritability perhaps, can hardly be thus disguised, though we may try to excuse it as "impossible to help being angry." But for the more silent and sullen indulgences, how often do we plead hurt feelings, or that we are too sensitive, are often misunderstood, or that we only wished to awaken others to a sense of how badly they had treated us.

Akin to this, is . . .

the liability to take offence,

touchiness,

a quickness to imagine slights, and

to magnify small, and often unintentional slights into great offences.

We must avoid *giving* offence, but still more carefully — to guard against *taking* offence.

The worst of all these little exhibitions of temper, is, that we too often indulge in them only towards those we love, only at home, and to our own family! The presence of a *stranger* enables us to repress them, or rouses us up to cast them aside; for we are rarely petulant, snappish, gloomy, sullen, or discontented, except in the home circle. These things ought not to be so! It is most evil, thus to poison our own and others' domestic enjoyments.

"Be courteous," is God's command, and is meant to be applied to our daily home-life, as much as to strangers and acquaintances.

In some cases, perhaps, it is more the *manner* that is in fault, than the *temper*. But if a bad manner irritates others, and is thereby an occasion of sin — ought we not sedulously to guard against it? How few, for instance, are not provoked to resistance by a *dictatorial* manner, a laying down the law as if there could be no appeal from our opinion or judgment — or fretted by a sharp manner of rebuke or remonstrance, as if the person speaking were personally injured — or checked and chilled by the gruff and

ungracious manner in which some little service has been received, even when the recipient was gratified by the kindness.

Many, indeed, and various are the defects of manner; and in too many cases, we shall find, if we trace them honestly to their source, that *they spring from our selfish disregard to the feelings of others*, and would be checked and improved, were we more loving to each other with genuine affection.

The habit of *viewing everything in a ridiculous light*, is one of the family failings that I would warn against. It too often leads to an unamiable desire to detect and hold up to ridicule the faults of others, and it almost always destroys the finer feelings of admiration for what is beautiful, and the tender and more lovable qualities of putting the best construction upon the actions of others. A critical, censorious, fault-finding person is a most unamiable being; and let us not conceal the true odiousness of such propensities in ourselves, under the guise of a sense of the ludicrous.

In many families, however, where both love and good temper prevail, there is what may be called an *irksome*, rather than a sinful, mode of *carping and contradicting one another*. No harm is meant, and no offence is taken; but what can be more irksome, than to hear two sisters, for instance, continually setting each other right upon trifling points, and differing from each other's opinions, for no apparent reason, than a habit of contradiction! And such a habit does it become, that one may sometimes see people who have acquired it, contradict their own statements just made, the moment anyone advances the same opinion.

It is generally on such *trifles* that this bad habit exercises itself, that it may seem needless to advert to it; but it is a family fault, and should be watched against, for it is an annoyance, though but a petty one, never to be able to open your lips without being harassed by such contradictions as "Oh, no, that happened on Tuesday, not Wednesday!" Or, if you remark that the clouds look threatening, to be asked with a tone of surprise, "Do you think it looks like rain? I am sure there is no appearance of such a thing." If one narrates an incident — every small item is corrected. If

another offers an opinion — it is wondered at or contradicted. If another asserts a fact — it is doubted and questioned. Until at length, everyone keeps silence in despair.

It may seem too solemn a view to take of such little things; but are we not in all things, in whatever we do, to glorify God? Surely, then, nothing is too trifling to be made the subject of prayer and watchfulness.