

LOWLY SERVICE.

John 13:1-17.

Most people of middle life in the rural South can remember the great annual gatherings of the Primitive Baptist churches called "Foot Washings." In some rural communities these services are still held. The Primitive Baptists washed each other's feet in obedience to what they believed was the Lord's command. They observed this ceremony as a sacrament. No doubt those who kept it in sincerity received a blessing from it. It certainly did no harm, even to those who did not believe in it. But, with all respect to the religious opinions of others, I believe those who make a sacrament of this service miss the great lesson it was meant to teach.

It was Wednesday evening. Christ and His disciples had been on the hot dusty streets and roads all day. With only sandals buckled around their feet it is easy to imagine how soiled and grimy they were. All the wealthier homes of their day had a servant whose duty it was to wash the feet of each member of the family in the evening. No doubt the disciples had been used to this little luxury from earliest childhood. We know they often visited homes in company with the Master where this little ministry of comfort was provided for every member of the family and all guests.

Having the feet washed after a long walk in sandals,

no doubt, was as comfortable and refreshing as a warm bath after a long hot day. But on this occasion there was no servant to perform the lowly task. Every man missed the little detail of personal comfort. Small things like this make up a large part of the comforts of life. Did you ever go away from home, where there was no barber shop, or when you did not have the money to pay for a shave, and find you had forgotten your razor? I suppose after a man's beard gets three inches long it stops itching. I have never tried it. The longer I wear mine the more uncomfortable it gets. After becoming used to a bath tub and running water, did you ever visit in a home where these conveniences were lacking? If you have, you remember how you missed them.

No doubt every one of the disciples missed the cool refreshing comfort of a foot bath. Their feet were grimy, tired, and burning. To have this much desired comfort it was only necessary for some one to get a basin of water and a towel, but not a man moved to the task. Every man knew that it ought to be done, but something held them back. This task was usually performed by the lowliest servant in the house. Washing a person's feet was like shining shoes in our day. Every man felt that he would be compromising his dignity to do it.

Then, to their utter confusion and amazement, they saw the Master filling up a basin with water. Next they saw Him lay aside His cloak and gird Himself with a

towel, just as some lowly servant would prepare for the task. Did you ever hold back from a task, thinking it would lower your dignity to do, and then see some one much greater than you come and do it? What a difference it makes in a task when you see some people doing it. There are some people who would look great and majestic on a garbage wagon.

Too dumbfounded to speak, and greatly shamed at their own petty pride, the disciples sat in humbled silence while the Master unfastened their dirth sandals, bathed their hot burning feet in cool water, and wiped them with a towel. Only Simon Peter objected. "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" If ever men had their pride rebuked by a noble example it was then. It was like the story of George Washington and the little corporal. "Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet."

There are many sublime and wonderful things about the religion of Jesus. One is its simplicity. It is always practicle and easily understood. When some men talk about religion we are charmed at the beautiful flow of words. We listen and try to understand, but when they have finished we wonder what it was they were talking about. Did you ever have a Christian Scientist try to explain to you the power of spirit over matter? Did you ever have a Resselite try to explain why the great Millennium is

is already here, or a Roman Catholic the purification of a soul in purgatory, or a Seventh Day Adventist the meaning of the Great Trumpet's Sound? Even great men like Luther, Calvin, Bunyan, and Wesley have labored at great length to explain some deep mystery in which men now see no light at all. But when Christ speaks of religion He does something with His own hands, feet, or lips, and we know at once that this is religion. It is so noble, kind and great it could not be anything else. It may be a common task like washing a neighbor's feet, but it fills you with admiration. Is it any wonder that men have grown tired of empty metaphysical questions that lead nowhere? Is it any wonder they have grown tired of endless arguments over religious questions, so called, while from India's "coralstrand" and from "Greenland's icy mountains" comes the cry, "Tell us of the Christ."

If this is not religion, then what is religion? We know that prayer, taking the sacrament, and attending divine service all have their place in religion. But what are these worth if they do not make us more willing to help each other?

Of all the services we are called on to render our neighbor the little drudging services so necessary to our comfort and happiness are the hardest. It takes more religion to feed a man when he is hungry, to nurse him when he is ill, or to wash his feet when he is tired than it does to preach to him or pray for him either. How our proud selfish hearts shun the lowly tasks of

life. Even in business and in the every day walks of life men always shun the lowly places. We all want to be the boss. We are getting to where we are not so particular now. But in the days of our high prosperity a man had to be way down on the social ladder to make his living with the pick and shovel. But it didn't last. No wonder. Prosperity built on such a selfish foundation never lasts. Even in this machine age of ours there is still a great deal of our comfort depending on loving hands.

If a man sits down to the table and grabs the juiciest piece of steak or the choicest peice of fowl before any one else has been helped we say he is selfish. But our mad scramble to avoid the lowly tasks of life is just as selfish. In every line of work there are a few little extra tasks that a man owes to his job. How the selfishness of men stand out in these little things. It is always the big unselfish men on the job that do the little extry tasks that mean so much to the happiness of all. Take a dozen men out on camp, where the comfort and wellfare of the whole group is dependant on what they can provide with their own hands, and you will learn some surprising things about human nature. It is always the big unselfish man that cuts the wood, builds the fire, and provides the little extra comforts for all. Nothing shows the true nobility of character like a willingness to share in the hard and lowly tasks of life.

One of the most charming books of modern times is

"Little Women." I think the secret of its charm lies in the devotion of every member of the "March" family to the comfort and happiness of all the rest. No wonder men and women have raved over this story for two generations. It is a picture of a perfect human society. A society where every member is so devoted to the comfort and happiness of all the rest that hard tasks become a joy and pleasure.

In our age much of the drudgery of life once performed by human hands is now done by machines. Many thoughtful people deplore the passing of hand labor. They know how much strong noble character has been built into the human race by toil. Ghandi is one great man who looks on the passing of hand labor with regret. It is easy to see Ghandi's viewpoint. But his efforts to restore the loom and wheel of the fathers will be a failure. You can not turn the clock of time backwards. No matter how much men may regret it, hand labor as our fathers knew, it has passed forever. It is noble and unselfish to share a hard task with a neighbor. But it is neither noble nor unselfish to share the same task with a machine.

I was once a rural letter carrier on roads so rough I had to use a horse and buggy. I used to get out and walk up the hills. The old horse got to where he would stop at the foot of the hill and wait for me to get out. I started just walking up the long hills, but the rascal got to where he wanted me to walk up all of them. I

think it was a humane thing to do. If I were carrying the mail with a horse I suppose I would do it again. But if I were carrying the mail with a six-cylinder car I would not. If I did the thing might get away from me.

Our problem is not to restore hand labor, but to see that all get the benefit of the machine. The machine in the hands of selfish and privileged groups may rob men of a chance to work. But rightly used the machine makes work for men. No matter how common and universal the use of machinery there will always be a great deal of our comfort and happiness depending on the labor of loving hands. We do not need to turn tback the clock of human progress to minister to our neighbor. If Christ were here today He would not wash men's feet. But He would find just as many noble unselfish things to do for men as He did two thousand years ago. His unselfish deeds of kindness did not spring from the condition of the times, but out of His own unselfish heart.