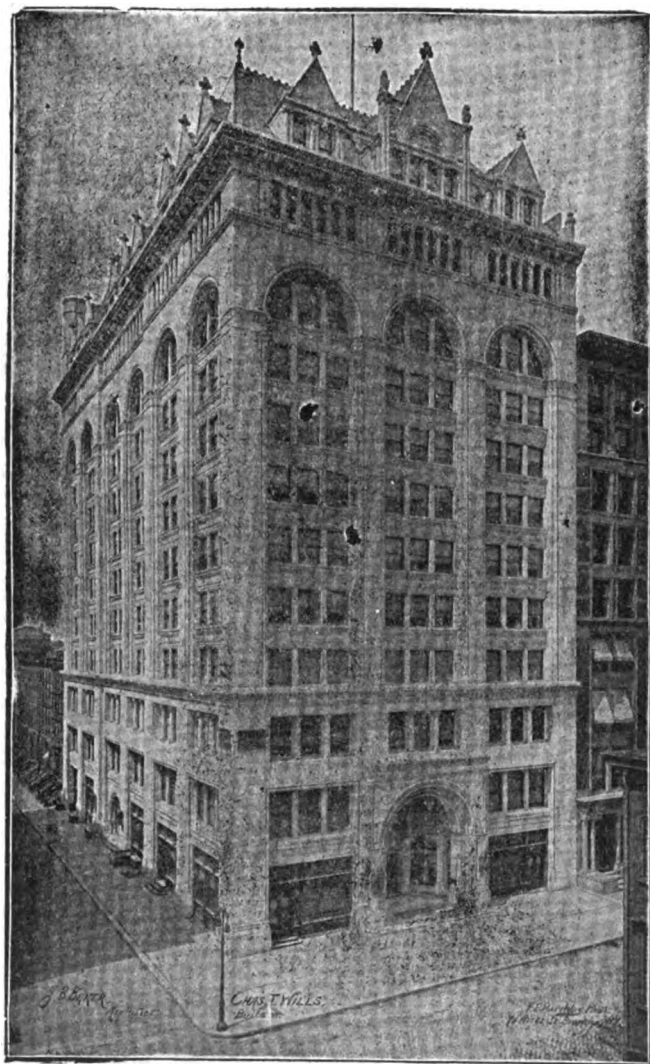


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Busy Doing Nothing

CHARLES W. WELCH

Right from the days when, for our edification, virtuous precepts were set at the head of the pages of our copy-books, we have accepted the dictum that in the race of life the dawdler and idler get badly left. "The sluggard will not plant by reason of the cold; therefore he shall beg in time of harvest, and have nothing." "Defeat waiteth for laggard feet." Such are the sentiments which, supported by a wealth of testimony, find almost universal endorsement. And we order our lives accordingly. What, however, we are lamentably prone to forget is that it is quite possible to be the utter reverse of a sluggard, and yet never get anywhere; that it is a perfectly easy matter to fill our days and years with innumerable inconsequences, which count for absolutely nothing in the end; to be always doing something, yet accomplishing nothing. The bane of life as it is lived in this our time and generation, is not that we do too little, but that we do too much. It is not so much a matter of industry or idleness which is thus involved. We are everlastingly doing something—but of the wrong sort. It is our powers of discrimination and selection that stand indicted. We are all busy—most of us doing nothing.

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One of the choicest of Henry James' shorter stories is "A Madonna of the Future." It was written many years ago, but as a study in temperament is not excelled by anything the great American has written in recent days. It concerns an episode in the life of an American tourist visiting Florence for the first time. On the night of his arrival he went out into the streets to view the beautiful city by moonlight. In the great plaza opposite the Palazzo Vecchi he met and entered into a conversation with an artist who, as he expressed it, "could not sleep until he had communed in the moonlight with the genius of Buonarrotti." A friendship sprang up between the two men, and one day the artist told the tourist that he contemplated the painting of a Madonna that would dwarf into complete insignificance the grandest conceptions of mediæval times. "There is a woman living here in Florence," he said, "whose beauty utterly transcends that of any model who has sat for the Maiden Mother. One day I am going to paint her, and my picture and her beauty, will take Europe by storm and be the toast of the whole wide world of art." The weeks and months went by. When asked about his picture the artist would reply: "I am preparing myself for the supreme effort, steeping myself in the traditions of the character, mellowing my contemplated method of treatment, saturating myself in the beauty of my model. Soon, now, I shall start upon my canvas. It is to be the Madonna of the world."

* * * * *

A year went by—then two—and the miracle hung fire. The man never produced his masterpiece. One day the traveler begged to be taken to see the woman whose beauty was to astonish the world. Then it was that he understood the immensity of his artist-friend's illusion; how one by one the noiseless years had ebbed away and left him in charmed inaction, forever preparing for a work forever

deferred. The woman had grown old! There might once have been a dim, spiritual light in her face; but if there had, it had long since waned. Traces of former beauty were there, but the crow's feet had gathered about the corners of her eyes, and her hair was flecked with gray. The man had been busy for years dreaming—just dreaming—and his Madonna had grown old. "My poor, poor friend," said the tourist, "You've lost time in profitless contemplation. Can't you see that your model is an old woman? If you painted her for a maiden mother she would be the laughing stock of Florence. You have been busy doing nothing." The poor fellow's sense of wasted time and vanished opportunity surged in upon his soul in waves of darkness: "Old—old?" he said, brokenly. "Answer me solemnly. Does she really appear to you as being old?" "I should be sorry to say you are blind," replied the traveler, "but I think you are most unfortunately deceived. You have worshiped too long—you have loved too well." The revelation, brought with some difficulty to the dreaming artist's deluded vision, finally broke his heart. The traveler buried him in a little hillside cemetery, and, returning one day from visiting the poor artist's grave, he encountered a man selling plaster monkeys and cats. "Cats and monkeys," he shouted, "monkeys and cats. All human life is here, signor. Monkeys and cats!" The clay modeler, at least, had made something, while the man who was to paint the world's Madonna slept in a dreamer's grave. Busy doing nothing!

* * * * *

I shall not attempt to point the moral of Mr. James' story. That were a superfluous task. What I want to say right here, with as much emphasis as I can muster, is that a life given over to Christ is the only one likely to be free from the penalty of being busy doing nothing. Contact with Him alone begets in us that sacred passion for service, that superiority to the transient and the visible, and that enthusiasm for the unseen and everlasting, which are the stuff of which heroes are made, and martyrs. In short, it brings the soul within the sweep of a whole world of facts and avenues of possible service greater than any that are born of time and sense. I speak only literal truth. Judge for yourselves. Is it not your experience that contact with God adds a fresh region or department to life, inspires new thoughts, quickens new emotions, suggests new motives, and place before a man new ambitions? And it is characteristic of this contact that it gloriously discovers and develops the hidden Divine in every man to whom it comes with power, and fills commonplace natures with the energy of a life worth while. That is why it has proved itself, again and again, to be the author of the most powerful movements the world has known—working in and through common clay like our own. The strength of religious incentive and conviction working in the minds of burghers, or farmers, or peasants—say in Huguenot France, in Holland, in Puritan England—has been sufficient to create whole communities and confessors unto blood. The life of these people, otherwise undistinguished, had been touched from above, and in the closet exercises of their faith it learned to run in

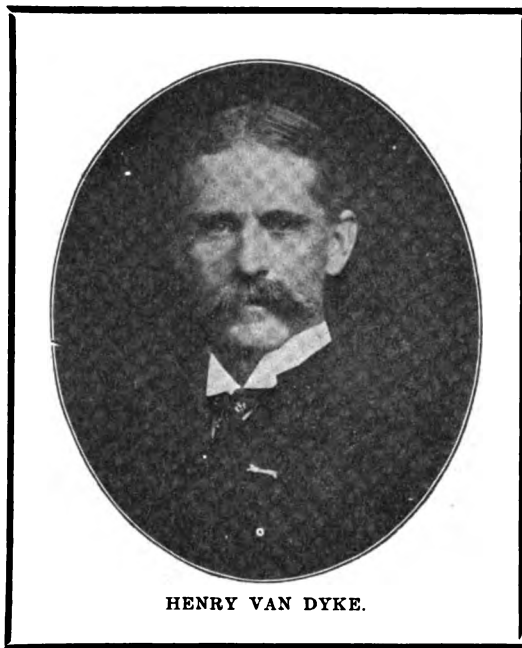
Professor Henry van Dyke, D.D., LL.D. Preacher, Essayist, Story-teller, Poet

BY S. EDWARD YOUNG, D.D., Pastor Bedford Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn

MIGHT we not say Providence gave us Dr. Henry van Dyke in order to show the world that the best literature may appropriately be the artistic expression of an ideal Christian gentleman, gleaning inspiration from performing well his daily tasks and enjoying keenly his diversions? However much those who know him may admire van Dyke, the author, they like van Dyke the man better than anything he ever wrote or spoke. The Princeton class of 1911—students are judges neither blind nor gentle—voted him their favorite professor and his course the most popular in the University, besides dedicating to him the Yearbook, *Bric-a-Brac*, which, from the Princeton viewpoint, was no small honor. Harvard and seats of learning the country over covet the privilege of placing his name on the list of university preachers. A pastor known far and near for sane judgment, uttered the sentiment of a host of others in this fashion: "I would rather go fishing with Henry van Dyke than with any other mortal—and that is the highest praise of which I am capable." Men are appealed to by that fine sense of honor, blazing into indignation upon due provocation, making also his half-promise good as anybody's whole promise and sending him at whatever cost to return a friendly service. Then, too, that scorn of mere financial compensation for his work is refreshing in our day. He will not write a line, or any number of lines, just to gratify the capacious maw of the publishers or the clamor of the public. Unless a church is wealthy, he will accept no money compensation for "working" a Sunday in its pulpit and, when an honorarium is received, will forward it to a needy missionary enterprise. A year's preaching he gives to his beloved Brick church, New York city, as a Christmas present. All of which may sound trifling to some; but is like a breath from Lebanon on a sultry day to others who wish Paul could be repeated oftener in this matter of helping the churches free of charge. Men take to Dr. van Dyke's spirit of fairness, that independence, that willingness to tone down on the non-essentials and that Gibraltar unyieldingness on essentials. They like his frankness and fighting qualities and his readiness to shoulder his full share of every load. Nor are they inappreciative of his always stingless wit and his deep reverence of the holiest things. For a long time we fellow-workers in the religious sphere have known that he holds a key to a hall of fame wherein gather the elect of literature; but we have never found him in a hurry to leave us for them. He is pastor eighteen years in a most exacting city pastorate, toils on our committees, joins in the ecclesiastical battles, moderates the General Assembly, leads in preparing the Book of Common Worship, that grows in favor daily. He is the best of good fellows in our social circle or by our fireside.

If this meager sketch were allowed, "for the sake of the argument" to stand as a sort of frontispiece and if we imagined all Dr. van Dyke's publications as collected into one set, we might label the first division, "A Preacher's Output." These would comprise his "Sermons to Young Men," "The Gospel for an Age of Doubt," "The Gospel for a World of Sin," "The Reality of Religion," "The Story of the Psalms," "The Christ-Child in Art," "Out of Doors in the Holy Land," and other productions not always, as indeed most of these are not, in sermon form. A second division could be entitled "Essays," consisting chiefly of those contained in the volume "Essays in Application," and the lecture-essays in "De Genie de L'Amerique." Many con-

sider these and such separate papers as "The National Sin of Literary Piracy" to be Dr. van Dyke's most important productions. A third caption could be "Religious Stories," including "The Other Wise Man," "The First Christmas Tree," and more which were read first in the pulpit. A fourth group could be called "Tales of Many Kinds," embracing "Little Rivers," "The Ruling Passion," "Fisherman's Luck," "The Blue Flower," "Days Off" and others. A fifth might be headed "Literary Criticism," containing "The Poetry of Tennyson," "Counsel on Books and Reading" and selections from editorial prefaces. The sixth would be entitled, "Poems," comprising those just now published in the volume, "Poems of Henry van Dyke." Any appraisal of Dr. van Dyke's value to literature must take account chiefly of these poems. He first won literary prominence and the ardent friendship of Tennyson by his critique of Tennyson's poetry and to the end his own best expression will be in poetic form. For originality of conception and power to range the entire gamut of the emotions, "The House of Rimmon," ranks with the masterpieces of dramatic poetry. Speaking generally, Dr. van Dyke's literary work is characterized by *definiteness of aim*. To say he is always preaching would possibly be both unkind and untrue; but to say he is always making a point is to state a fact. He never consents to be a mere entertainer. He uses his art—his art never uses him.



HENRY VAN DYKE.

You could write *Quod erat demonstrandum* at the end of many of his freest fancyings. There is a satisfying feeling that you have arrived at destination.

Two further characteristics are succinctness and finish. You will have a hard time discovering the line or word that might as well have been left out. The craftsmanship bears no hint of the haphazard. He could have said the thing a whole lot of ways; but this, for reasons discernible usually by the penetrating reader and in his mind beyond a doubt, is preferable. Another characteristic is *the van Dyke diction*. Pure Saxon has great innings here. Once in a while an unfamiliar word delights you by its fitness and the fact that you know it well, though you have so seldom seen it. Very rarely there is a word technical enough to send you to the dictionary, only because no other would convey that shade of the idea. A marked characteristic is *the atmosphere of each story or poem*. No syllable or reference or meter is allowed to bring other than the true coloring and setting. This is exquisitely illustrated in the "Way-faring Psalms," those suggested by the author's Holy Land trip transporting the reader completely into the Palestine customs and scenes and climate. A characteristic one learns to watch for is the *surprise climax*, exemplified, for instance, in "The Vain King." We are carried along pleasantly and kept guessing until the solution of the mystery, precisely the right one and yet one we never dreamed of, flashes out in the last seven lines:

"Wrathful, the King the magic sentence heard;
He strove to answer, but he only chirr-r-ed:
His royal robe was changed to wings of blue,
His crown a ruby crest—away he flew!

"So every summer day along the stream
The vain King-fisher darts, an azure gleam,
And scolds the angler with a mocking scream."

In the nature realm Dr. van Dyke speaks authoritatively. He

is one of the initiated. He and the feathered and finny tribes are *en rapport*. There is no danger lest a bird or beast—or a scientist, for that matter—get the laugh on him because of ignorance or inadvertence on his part.

Perhaps our author's prime characteristic is an honest effort to be understood in every line and it is not exaggeration to add he has succeeded. The Browning Society need not ever be called in to make an interpretation.

From a letter received the other day are taken these words in which Dr. van Dyke indicates his working-creed: "Don't suppose that I undervalue craftsmanship and art and a good style and all that. They are well worth toiling for. You wouldn't put a cargo that you prized into a poorly-built ship. But idealism in the conception and realism in the details—that's the secret of writing. And no school can teach it. You have to learn it yourself with just such powers as God has given to you. And when your bit of work—your poem or your story—is done; when you have made the best boat that you can, and put your cargo into it, what then? Why, then, let it sail on God's ocean as far as He pleases. Don't sit down on the shore to listen to the praise or the blame of the onlookers. Profit by your own experience, and learn from your own mistakes. Pick up your tools, get some new ideas and some more timber, look at your good old models and draw some new designs, and then set to work on another boat and try to make it better."

Well, of all the keels this boat-builder has laid, his poems bid fair to push their prows farthest o'er the vasty deep, his drama being probably as good a boat as any to wager on, and now, that he has proven his skill and the building-time with him ought to be only fairly under way, shall we not hope for a launching yet from his yards that will beat his own splendid record for prolonged and daring voyage?



SUNSHINE

Put a bit of sunshine in the day;
Others need its cheer and so do you—
Need it most when outer sky's dull gray
Leaves the sunshine-making yours to do.

Give the day a streak of rosy dawn:
Give it, too, a touch of highest noon;
Make the ones about you wonder why
Sunset crimson should appear "so soon."

Sunshine-making is a blessed task;
Cheery hearts, like lovely mild, blue sky,
Banish weary gloom and give fresh hope,
Check the rising tear or thoughtless sigh.

Put the golden sunshine in each day;
Others need the cheer that comes through you—
Need it most when outer sky's dull gray
Leaves the sunshine-making yours to do.

—Junia Stafford.



THE BEST IS YET TO BE

For all men, small as well as great, even for those who have succeeded, and conquered apparently all honors, it is true that the best is yet to be. Heroic Paul, earth's most intrepid and earth's sublimest spirit, standing forth in old age, with a thousand victories behind him, knew that he had not yet attained. No matter what your success, I appeal from the seed to the coming sheaf, from the acorn to the coming oak, from this little spring to the future river, from your ignorance to wisdom, from your fragmentary tool or law or custom to perfect virtue, from the broken arc to the full circle, from the white cloud to the stars that are above the clouds. Because life is in a series of ascending climaxes, and because it waxes ever richer and richer, for every man, whether young or old, it is better farther on, and the best is yet to be.

NEWELL DWIGHT HILLIS.

THE BOOK HUNGER OF THE CHINESE

By the Rev. F. W. Bible.

One busy morning two callers were announced, and entering the living room, I was greeted by two well-dressed and courteous gentlemen. I soon found difficulty in understanding them; that in itself is not an unusual experience, but these men were evidently speaking one of the northern dialects, so I asked my teacher to join us. After the usual polite preliminaries, one of them said that they had called to buy one of our Sacred books and a few books which explained the teachings. I was struck at once by the form of the question. There is a certain more or less technical vocabulary which is very early taken up by ordinary inquirers or those who have had much contact with Christians, which in the conversation of these men was almost entirely lacking. Since we carry several different editions of the Bible, I asked what kind they wished to buy, explaining the various sizes and prices. Then I asked what Christian books they wished and how many? "About a dollar's worth," they replied, "and of any kind which you recommend." Evidently they had not come from any of our evangelists or Christians or the inquiry would have been more specific. So in the most elaborate and polite phrases which I could master, I asked how it happened that my most unworthy home should receive a visit from two gentlemen so honorable and distinguished? They came the story.

The two gentlemen were wine merchants, evidently on a large scale. Their home was in one of the provinces north and west from us. In a district some fifty miles from Hangchow, they had a wholesale purchasing branch, where they had been for some time. They were now in the city making a large shipment of wine to the north. This business, it seems, had brought them into contact with a certain official, whom I shall call Mr. Tsang. Mr. Tsang is in charge of a department in the internal revenue office of the province, and in some way the export of the wine brought these men to his office. The Inn at which they stopped was near his home and he invited them to call in the evening. They had done so and had witnessed a most remarkable thing. Instead of finding a company gathered for a social evening, they found his household, including servants, and a group of his friends and neighbors gathered in a room, and Mr. Tsang was reading from a foreign book and explaining to the group the meaning of what he read. They had been invited primarily to hear this book, because Mr. Tsang seemed to attach an extraordinary importance to the book and its teaching, thinking evidently that it was really a vital matter that all Chinese should know it. They had had opportunity for only a couple of the readings and could not get very clearly in mind just what that teaching is, but they had never seen anything like this man Tsang. He seemed almost possessed with the idea of this book and its teachings. It seemed to be the most important thing in his life.

Mr. Tsang had told them that I kept copies of the book and of little books which explained the teaching, and so they had come to me. After a simple talk I selected some books, called their attention to the fact that there was a chapel in the town where their branch is located, and, taking their names and addresses, bade them good-bye. Then I began inquiries about Mr. Tsang. I recalled that a number of times a messenger had come with a request for certain books and that the servants had once said that he came from the Yamen or official residence. I found that Mr. Tsang was of rather high rank, though his present office was not of great importance; that he was reading and expounding the Scriptures in his own home almost daily; that by all the external evidence he was a follower of Jesus Christ, but was not in connection with any church and did not wish to be. He is in close touch with one or two Christian laymen and knows several of the pastors. He came to some special evangelistic meetings and brought some friends. But for church membership he would wait until the church should become more distinctly a Chinese institution. His position is taken quite openly, and so far as I can learn, it has not subjected him to any criticism on the part of his superiors. Strangely enough, the story leads back finally to a young Chinese girl, a student in a school maintained here by the C.M.S. She is a niece of Mr. Tsang. Her home is in a distant province. Through the influence of the teachers in the school she came to