

HAPPINESS

By THOMAS A. DAVIS

VI 1952

I HAVE now reigned above fifty years in victory or peace, beloved by my subjects, dreaded by my enemies, and respected by my allies. Riches and honor, power and pleasure, have waited on my call, nor does any earthly blessing appear to have been wanting to my felicity. In this situation I have diligently numbered the days of pure and genuine happiness which have fallen to my lot; they amount to fourteen."

Thus wrote Abd-er-Rahman III, caliph of Córdoba, ten centuries ago. As I read his words I wondered, "What about the other 18,236 or more days? I wish he had recorded just what occurred on the fourteen auspicious days, or what he did to make them so happy." And from there I was led to muse on that peculiar quality we call happiness.

"Isn't it the strangest thing," I thought, "that a man may have anything his heart longs for—wealth, influence, ability, position, friends—and yet not be happy. Why?"

I can imagine someone's saying, "Perhaps it is because selfishness is the primary motive in the life of that person."

Yes, perhaps selfishness *is* the reason for that unhappiness, but *why* should it be? Selfishness indicates the satisfaction of

self. If self is satisfied, it would appear that happiness would result. Is not satisfaction the major part of happiness? Yet seldom, if ever, does happiness result from the sole gratification of self. Why?

Someone has said that if happiness really were attainable through the doctrine of everyone for himself, the whole world would be a happy place. And that would seem to be true. It appears reasonable to me to think that if an individual could have possession of all creature comforts, and attain to every personal ambition, happiness would be assured. Yet it is frequently seen that when we should be most satisfied we are most dissatisfied; and when we should be most comfortable we are most uncomfortable. So again we voice the query, Why?

One answer presents itself to me, and that answer establishes more firmly my faith in the existence of God and in His wisdom and mercy and love: The fact that happiness is not found in self-gratification indicates that God has, in His infinite knowledge of human nature and in His great compassion, placed within our hearts a divine dissatisfaction, which sets us warring against ourselves and militates against our own naturally selfish inclinations.

This truth is beautifully portrayed by

Francis Thompson in his poem "The Hound of Heaven." In it he relates how he unavailingly sought to escape from the constraining influence of God, and to find happiness away from Him. In one part of the poem a Voice is represented as saying to him, "Lo! naught contents thee, wilt thou content'st not Me." And that is one reason why man would still be unhappy, even if he could make the perfect world, the Utopia, where everything would be "nearer to the heart's desire," which he still thinks of in his more fanciful, day-dreaming moods. He would still have his old selfish heart and the divine dissatisfaction implanted there by God.

The words of the caliph of Córdoba quoted previously almost seem like the echo of the words of another, spoken a score of centuries before him, reverberating down the dim and dusty halls of time. King Solomon was in many ways a counterpart of Caliph Abd-er-Rahman. Like the caliph, Solomon had "riches and honor, power and pleasure." And every "earthly blessing" seemed to have as bountifully come his way.

The experience of this wisest king is a familiar one. After having allowed the world to seduce him from God, he himself tells us that he deliberately decided to enjoy all that it had to offer. In the second chapter of Ecclesiastes he tells us of his decision: "I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure."

For many years Solomon sought satisfaction from the world. But in spite of the fact that he had all to which his fancy could aspire insofar as the world was concerned, happiness was not included with it. In fact, so little satisfaction did he derive from all his works and his follies that at last, driven to desperation by the elusive phantom, Happiness, he exclaimed vehemently, "I hated life."

In his later years, having discovered that in self-gratification no satisfaction is to be found, Solomon recorded his sad experience for the benefit of all future aspirants.

But if happiness does not come through the satisfaction of self, then how does it come? To answer this question, I would like to draw upon the canvas of your imagination two contrasting pictures. The first I saw some years ago when I was a little boy. It portrays Satan seated upon a rugged mountainside. His chin is cupped in one hand, and upon his face a sardonic smile plays. In the other hand is a large jewel, which he holds out suggestively. From the many facets of the gem are reflected glittering rays, as from a thousand suns. At his feet is a gloomy chasm, which falls away into nothingness. Across the chasm are a multitude of people, each desperately attempting to grasp the tantalizing jewel. Some fall when they seem about to grasp it. Others, old and weak, have not the strength to drag themselves

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R. Leinweber, Artist

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close enough, but lie prostrate and spent. Still others are trampled by the crowd, and not one ever reaches the goal, seemingly so close, but never attained.

The other picture is that of a room. Around a table is seated a group of twelve men, while Another takes a towel and washes the feet of each of them. Then He says: "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. . . . If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

Here in this last picture we find the answer to our question. Happiness comes only through service for others. In trying to gain happiness by catering to our own desires, we reach for a glittering bauble, held before us by Satan, which is always just beyond our reach. "Seek not for happiness, for it is never to be found by seeking for it," is the counsel of the messenger of the Lord, for at last, unless we turn from the folly of our ways, we fall, disillusioned and embittered, into the yawning chasm of hopelessness and death.

These facts many of us find very hard to learn. The most natural thing in the world is to do what pleases ourselves, and even after we have been told again and again, our actions testify that we have not learned. To many the fact that we have to expend our lives for others in order to be happy, continues to be another of those seeming contradictions, akin to that expressed by Christ, "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

But the truth is crystal clear, for, as Mrs. E. G. White has written, "all things both in heaven and in earth declare that the great law of life is a law of service. . . . As the hillsides and the plains open a channel for the mountain stream to reach the sea, that which they give is repaid a hundredfold. The stream that goes singing on its way leaves behind its gift of beauty and fruitfulness. Through the fields, bare and brown under the summer's heat, a line of verdure marks the river's course; every noble tree, every bud, every blossom, a witness to the recompense God's grace decrees to all who become its channels to the world."

The world today is desperately in need of service rather than selfishness. Opportunity's horizons are endless, and thus the ways to happiness are endless to those who travel the royal road of service. Youth of the last generation, let us accept this challenge!