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## OBSERVATIONS.

**Prayer and the Weather.**

Agnostics, atheists, and all grades of disbelievers in one god pray to him instinctively, when they are on board a sinking ship, when they are in extreme agony, when the surgeon's knife is severing nerves and muscles, or in the last breaths of consciousness before the anaesthetic has dulled sense. Those who die from disease are apt to expire in a state of coma or in that kind indifference to living or dying which has gradually, without frightening or startling the doomed ones, taken the place of an eager desire for life. These do not pray hard, like the strong man or woman in perfect health and sanity who is suddenly threatened with death. The strong man whose mind and body are normal, revolts from death. He will not have it so. The gentle voices and welcoming airs which the slowly dying hear, he has not heard; and soul and body are in arms against death. By entreaty or energy or defiance, the man who loves life and is confronted with sudden and unexpected death, tries to avoid it. He may be a brave man, but a sudden and an unexpected attempt to deprive him of life, by an element, as of fire or water, throws him into a panic of fear. And this horrible fear is the worst part of death. The rest is easy.

You cannot pick out the believers from the unbelievers among the passengers of a ship which is sinking. They are all praying to one god. They pray as to a responsive, sympathetic, sure-to-help divinity. There is no mention of an all-pervading force or energy. The agnostics and atheists have forgotten all the fine phrases about an impersonal, unresponsive force with which they

amused themselves all their lives until the boat sprung a leak or caught fire. For the moment, which may be their last, they are convinced that, close at hand, there is a loving and protecting divinity only waiting to be convinced of their love and loyalty, before he places them in safety on dry land or on another boat.

Whether the prayers make any difference in the fate of this boat and its passengers, I do not know. The sea is strewn with skeletons of men and ships. Phoenician galleys, viking long-boats, and transoceanic steamships with their crews lie in heaps on the bed of the ocean. The galleys in which the Phoenicians and Greeks sailed are a little further down in the layers of the museum which has preserved samples of all the styles of boats that have ever been launched on it. It was not for lack of praying that they sank. For man acknowledged God before the first log was found to be buoyant, launched and straddled by the first sailor.

It seems to me that storms on the deep and droughts on land are caused by the operation of natural laws, and that miracles are rare. Nevertheless, if I were on board a sinking boat I could not take a general and philosophical view of the situation but would be with all the passengers and crew, praying for a special miracle or act of intervention for that one time and for me.

Last week Governor Savage of this state, in response to very urgent requests from a few, set aside a day for prayer, last Thursday, to be spent by devout citizens in prayer for rain. Lincoln is a city of forty thousand inhabitants, the second city of the state. It contains perhaps fifty religious bodies and two universities. Whether the latter add to the depth of religious feeling or not is a matter of opinion. At any rate, if prayer could improve the meteorological conditions there was imminent necessity for the whole people joining in the supplication. The First Congregational church of this city of forty thousand was considered large enough to accommodate all petitioners, protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Mahomedan, Buddhist or theosophic, who would come. The church seats several hundred people and sixty came. Unquestionably all the well people who thought that prayer would make any difference came. Because there is not a business man, nor any one whom his earnings support who would not immediately gain by a copious rain. Among all the citizens who have been watching the skies for rain for six weeks only sixty answered the call to prayer. This shows that the other 39,940 either did not believe in the efficacy of public prayer for rain, or that they were disinclined to go to so little trouble to obtain it. The latter is inconceivable. It may be that the one-half inch of rain that fell Saturday night was in answer to

the prayers of the sixty righteous and credulous ones who assembled themselves to pray publicly a prayer which men and women by the million have been praying many times a day for six weeks as they went about their affairs. It may be that if the sixty had not come together in a church formally dedicated to religion, and prayed in the designated forms and phrases of prayer, that we would still be covered with the dust of six weeks.

The innumerable petitions for rain which come from the dusty-dry throats of Nebraskans every summer, the informal, sometimes inarticulate petitions from the farmers, merchants, insurance agents and grain-dealers are not sent from a church. They are dispatched many times a day from the wheat field, shop, office or street and the harvest fails only once in a cycle. To be sure, even God likes to be asked and thanked.

This observation is not intended to discourage prayer but to remind the faithful sixty that prayers can be mailed anywhere, inside a church or out of it. The service is absolutely perfect and no petition has ever been returned marked, "No such address."

**The House-Maids' Union.**

The housemaids of Chicago, Cincinnati and Wilkesbarre have formed unions, signed articles and agreed upon certain conditions to which every maid is entitled. If labor unions improve the condition of the laborers and educate employers to respect the point of view of their laborers, the unions are indisputably beneficent; and if for laborers in general, then for hired girls especially, whose relations with the mistress of the house are so intimate and isolated from other forms of labor that petty tyranny is easily imposed. Wherever two women meet the chances are that within ten minutes of the salutation the conversation will be devoted to the deficiencies of their "help." If the hired girls talk so much about their mistresses, this one relationship is more discussed than any other. The hired girls, though, have their beaux, church affairs and lately, clubs, to talk over; and besides they think that talking shop is bad form, and among the most fastidious maids complaints of mistresses are not allowed. In spite of the discussion the situation and the relations between mistresses and maids do not improve. The inability of mistress and maid to consider the subject from both sides hinders the evolution of the relationship and the development of the calling. In-so-far as unions make a calling more respectable and dignified, the amalgamation of domestic servants is a step towards its final solution. In-so-far as unions tend to increase the suspicion existing between the employed and the employers, this new expression of organized labor is only adding to the perplexities and unsolved and nearly un-

solvable riddles of the labor question.

The "Working Women of America" have adopted the following rules:

Rule I.—Work shall not begin before 5:30 A. M., and shall cease when the evening's dishes are washed and put away. Two hours each afternoon and the entire evening at least twice a week, shall be allowed the domestic as her own.

Rule II.—There shall be no opposition on the part of the mistress to club life on the part of the domestic. Entertainment of friends in limited numbers shall not be prohibited, provided the domestic furnishes her own refreshments.

Rule III.—Gentlemen friends shall not be barred from the kitchen or back porch. Members of the family shall not interrupt the conversation during said visit.

Rule IV.—Domestics shall be allowed such hours off on Monday as will permit them to visit the bargain counters of the stores and enjoy the same privileges enjoyed by the mistress and her daughters.

Rule V.—All complaints shall be made to the business agent of the union. The question of wage shall be settled at the time of employment and no reduction shall be made.

Domestic service is hard to reduce to a system because of the unusual number of emergencies which arise in it. Children are magicians of the unexpected; and hard and fast rules made to apply to them, and which depend upon them for their regular operation, get the worst of it right along. Then the unforeseen accidents of sickness and company prevent any woman from agreeing to abide by these rules or any others absolutely. The rules themselves are very simple and just.

Most of the domestics of Lincoln enjoy a much greater latitude than those enumerated in the foregoing schedule. Some domestics are addicted to company in working hours; and company in business hours is a nuisance in office, counting room and shop, as well as in the kitchen. Some patient mistresses are obliged to make "jell," cake, and perform many of the special season and special occasion kitchen duties before the eyes of a young woman who is calling upon her deprecatory cook. The eyes of the visitor, more or less critical and curious, follow the nervous lady of the house about the kitchen, until she gets so rattled that she burns her syrup, puts salt in her cake instead of sugar, and makes other fatal errors for which she will be twitted when she tries to induce her unsympathetic family or friends to eat the result of that morning's embarrassed work.

In shops the workmen are not allowed to receive company in working hours. Social amenities and labor are incompatible. Many an employer has longed to tell the bores who, having nothing to do themselves, drop in to gossip with him, that the rules of the house forbid visitors; but the employer is usually the court of last resort and must bear the burden of all dismissals. The rule in regard to visitors being allowed on the back porch should specify when.