

Ideals

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1907

As a boy Marius Dale was a dreamer. A backwoods farmer's son, usually occupied in hoeing corn, watching sheep, hauling wood or weeding the garden, he still dreamed—dreamed of beauty, or greatness, of power, of achievement, and with it all, of love and kindness to his fellow-creatures. Little he knew of the need for love and kindness out in the struggling, cruel world, but the light of a divine yearning toward all suffering beings, dwelt in his soul from the first. Many of his dreams were vague and purposeless, but sometimes when his work was done and he lay on the grass by the brook, looking up into the blue and white skies above him, his dreamings would seem so real, his ideals would become persons who would hover around him and invite his love.

Truth came with calm, grave, inflexible mien, and stood near him.

"I am not always kind," she said, "and you will be made to suffer for my sake. But if you love me, I will be the best and dearest companion along your pathway in life." He thought he grasped her hand and vowed to be true to her as long as life lasted.

Then the spirit of Universal Brotherhood floated near, with kindly, sorrowful eyes and a tender mouth, beckoning also.

"I, too, will make you suffer; men will revile you and laugh at you for walking too close to me. You will probably forget me when brighter and more alluring shapes flock around you. But if you will love me I will bring you nearer to the Heavenly Father."

Marius reached forth his hand and felt it clasped in a warm, close grasp.

Purity stood at his side, in spotless white, with her fair, sweet, ethereal face turned toward the sky. Her voice was cold and silvery as she spoke. "It will be very hard for you to keep me in sight.

I am easily crowded aside by others, and Pleasure and Luxury and Passion do not often love my presence. But if you follow in my pathway, you will reach higher and diviner joys than these can give you." And Marius vowed to keep her ever near him.

As he grew older, his dreams grew more vivid and his ideals brighter. He determined to devote his life to the service of humanity in some form, and as he neared manhood he came to believe that to go forth and preach the gospel of Christ, to turn people from their evil ways to lives of godliness, would be the highest work he could undertake. So he left the hayfield and the plow and worked his way through school, studying and toiling through all his waking hours. Truth, Integrity and the Spirit of Universal Brotherhood were still his ideals; he was true, sincere and good, and prayed daily that he might be endowed with power to touch the hearts of men aright. He labored hard to be able to express every shade of beautiful and holy thought, and studied

night and day that he might be able to tell the gospel story with truth and effectiveness. Finally he was ordained, and preached his initial sermon.

Every listener was stirred to the depths of his soul. Every one was moved—the young preacher was talked of and admired throughout the vicinity. He received several calls to preach, but at least accepted the humblest charge, one in which the poor, the ignorant and the depraved predominated.

He worked faithfully among them, and succeeded in turning many a poor, wretched soul toward the light of God's smile. But still Marius was not satisfied. He could minister to a sin-sick soul and help it on its way to spiritual light, with a power that seemed divine. But there was a dark spectre ever haunting him, ever coming between him and the good he would accomplish. Its name was —Poverty. Between him and the criminal he would rescue, it crowded and hurled its victim back into the old degradation; the woman whom he dragged from the cruel street and set, repentant and purified before God's altar, was pushed out again by this implacable shadow. The child that he saved from evil surroundings and turned in the right direction who would gladly have walked in righteousness and virtue, tottered and fell under its dark spell and sunk again out of sight.

So, then, he began to study this dark monster. He determined to know the reason for the existence for such a being in a world God had made so bounteous. Nature had not been niggardly in any respect and the brains and hands of each and every man could produce ten times more than he could possibly consume. No man should be poor then, except the thoroughly idle man; yet Marius found that the idle man possessed the most and the hardest toilers had the least. Evidently charity was not a remedy for poverty. The cure must go deeper than that, and he could never be satisfied until he should understand it and bring it to bear on the wretchedness he saw around him.

The Spirit of Universal Brotherhood grew dearer and dearer to him. While one fellow-being suffered from injustice he could not be happy, and he preached Truth and Justice ceaselessly. He began to grow popular, for though he made enemies by his plain speaking, his eloquence, his startling originality, his sincerity and truthfulness attracted people and his influence began to be widely felt. He received a call from a richer and more populous church and the offer of a good, comfortable salary for his work.

Marius hesitated a long time. If he accepted the call, he must give up his charity work among the poor, and he might be tempted to slur over the truth when it promised to hurt his rich parishioners. Perhaps he would himself forget his ideals, and become lazy and luxurious. But on the other hand, he would be afforded a chance to talk to more intelligent and influential people and more of them; he could discuss causes and remedies with them, and thus hasten on the day of true reform. His charitable works could be done by others as well, and charity was but a makeshift, a mere dealing with effects, after all. Finally he resolved to make the change, vowing greater loyalty to his ideals than ever, and determining to put new zeal and earnestness into his work.

In his new field, Marius did not fail to speak the truth as he understood it. Many of his hearers were shocked and angered by his bold denunciations of usually accepted practices, and by his vivid pictures of needless poverty—and oppressed toil. But they came again and again; men who grew pallid under his burning words dared not go away lest they miss other burning words; and always the fascination of some possible new and startling truth to be heard which would scorch and wither yet entrance them, kept crowds flocking around him. He was a very popular and much hated man; he was both admired and feared. Rich men, engaged in shady deals, came,

heard and trembled; rushed away angry and came again. Frivolous women who spent fortunes they had never earned on pug dogs and monkey dinners, were moved to hysterics, wanted him executed—yet heard or read his every sermon. He was called a “blasphemer!” an “anarchist!” a “brawler!” and yet they came to hear him in multitudes. His nearest friends warned him again and again but he spoke as his soul dictated. And finally a crisis in his life arrived.

One night a committee from his own congregation waited on him, to warn him as to his extreme utterances. They said he might preach against the wrongs in society in a general way, but he must not illustrate so much from real life; he might be as eloquent as he liked concerning new theories, but he must not try to pull society down about their ears. If he did not conform somewhat to the demands of conventionalism, they would be forced to ask him to resign. They offered him plenty of time to think over what they had said before he made a decision, then left him.

That same evening, two gentlemen from a very wealthy church in a distant city called to make him a very advantageous offer as far as salary and position were concerned, but there were conditions, and these were that he was not to mention the prevailing methods of getting rich, or condemn prominent business men of the community for having succeeded particularly well in accumulating fortunes. He was to preach the gospel as interpreted in the Apostles’ creed without innovations, and to confine himself to strictly doctrinal subjects. But the salary would be a magnificent one, his position would be one of highest honor, and he would attain a world-wide reputation in the exalted place in which they would install him. Having stated their propositions clearly, the gentlemen departed, giving him time to think over what they had said.

Afterward he sat long by the fireside, gazing into the glowing depths and dreaming — dreaming as he used to dream when he lay on the grass by the brook with his face to the sky. He thought presently that Truth in person stood beside him, clear eyed and immovable, while the Spirit of Universal Brotherhood smiled down at him from the other side, and Purity, cold and beautiful, floated above him and pointed to a narrow, rocky path leading through dark canons and wild forests, but finally losing itself in a dim, distant glory.

Then there approached between these forms, a being, holding aloft a sceptre and wearing glittering garments, pointing upward to where a shadowy throne in the midst of a vague light appeared. Mai ins somehow knew this being was Ambition. Then another form presented itself, who was busily pouring gold from one hand into the other and back again. He gazed at them, fascinated, attracted, almost absorbed, and his old Ideals slowly receded and grew faint. He saw them going at last, and stretched out his hands to them. “Why cannot I have all of yon?” he cried. “Are wealth and Ambition incompatible with Truth, Purity and Brotherly love? Think what good I could do with money and power! What an influence I would wield—how soon I could bring about my dearest reforms!” But his old familiar spirits came no nearer, and at last, he thought he rose and followed Ambition through an open doorway into the street.

He found himself presently, preaching in a magnificent church, richly decorated with all that wealth and art could contribute to beauty and elegance. Rare jewels, silks, plumes, embroideries, shone and wavered amid the sea of faces before him; an air of artistic refinement, of beauty and sweet sanctity floated around him, and low, rich music from an organ was wafted softly to his ears. Then suddenly, he saw three strange figures creeping up the broad aisle, until they stood directly before the altar, the ushers apparently unheeding them. One was a ragged, trembling, dirty tramp, another, a pitiful wreck of womanhood just crawl

ed from some gutter, the other was a little, distorted, pallid, emaciated child, one withered arm ending in a ghastly stump just below the elbow. The tramp stood still, raised his hand as if in command of attention, and spoke aloud: "Oh people, I claim the right to be heard in this the supreme hour of my life. You, oh high priest of the church! claim to preach a free salvation to all, and your members claim that they are washed clean and sinless in the blood of the Lamb. Yet you will preach your corrupted gospel only for fifty thousand dollars a year; your blood-washed members grind gold out of the flesh and blood of their fellow-creatures. I have been refused a chance to work until I am starved, depraved, crushed out of the semblance of manhood. That woman you have robbed of her birthright and driven into a worse hell than you picture for future punishment of sinners! This little child you caught ere it began to play, fastened it to a machine, twisted its fair young life into a monstrosity, tore off its limbs, that you might pile up gold and power for yourselves. We are the legitimate fruits of your corrupted, commercial religion, and we are your punishment. Already you are wondering what you will do with us. Christ taught the universal brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God, but you have forgotten that, and have put in its place a ghastly mockery of His religion. Upon your own heads be the consequences!"

The tramp tottered forward, staggered, fell—and was dead. Then a great commotion arose, Marius tried to move, and suddenly—awoke. The room was dark and chilly, the fire had nearly gone out and he was alone. But the dream—the strange, vivid dream, was still before him, and he could not banish it. Long, long he pondered upon it and at last he said:

"Yes, I must leave the pulpit altogether if I would be true to my ideals. The Christ spirit has been forgotten—his religion has been perverted. To be true to primitive, real Christianity, I must leave the organization that claims to represent it, and go out into the world alone. I will be maligned, I will be persecuted and misunderstood. But Truth and Purity will be my guides and companions, Universal Brotherhood will be my bosom friend, and the redemption on earth of all mankind will be the end!"

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Retrieved on 28th May 2023 from www.libertarian-labyrinth.org
Published in *The Blacksmiths Journal* 3 no. 2 (February 1907): 1-3.

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