

SELF-POSSESSION

By self-possession we mean the faculties of the whole man well in hand.

True self-reliance implies self-possession; the latter cannot exist without the former. He who would concentrate all his powers upon the accomplishment of an all-absorbing purpose, must be self-possessed. Interruption, surprises, and even surrounding confusion, will not throw him off his base. He keeps cool, labors on with a will, and never loses sight of the goal at the end of the race.

This is a valuable quality in the common walks of life. It is needed in all pursuits, and every day. For the want of it, both men and women, both old and young, become disconcerted, and fail when they ought to succeed. Unexpected experiences and startling casualties confuse them, and they know not what they do.

A woman, whose house was on fire, threw a looking-glass out of the window, and carried a pair of andirons several rods, to a safe place beside a stone wall.

A man, suddenly awakened from his sleep by the cry of fire, leaped from his bed to find that his own house was in flames. Instantly he proceeded to throw out of door and window, crockery, shovel, tongs, chairs, bed-clothes, mirrors, flour, meal, pies, etc., but forgot the trunk in which were deposited all his money, jewelry, gold watch, and valuable keepsakes, and it was consumed.

A mother, alone in her house with her little child, was so confused by the clothes of the little one taking fire, that she ran into the street, crying frantically for help, leaving the child to perish.

A self-possessed mother would have quenched the burning dress and saved the child.

A pleasure party on a small lake were enjoying themselves, when a young lady changed her position so suddenly that the boat dipped a little water. She uttered a scream, and sprang to the other side; others did the same, upsetting the boat,

and drowning several of the party. Presence of mind would have averted all these disasters.

A schoolhouse in New York was discovered to be on fire by one of the teachers. At once she communicated the fact to the teachers in the other rooms, who announced the session closed, directing the pupils to leave the house orderly. Every room was emptied, and the pupils in the street, before the latter knew the cause of their dismissal. Had the teacher shouted, "Fire! Fire!" when she made the discovery, there is no doubt that lives would have been lost in the general rush for the doors. The self-possession of the teacher prevented a catastrophe.

A farmer's wife of our acquaintance was left at home on a Sunday with her three children, while her husband went to meeting. The latter had scarcely passed beyond the call of his wife, when a shout from one of the children told that the youngest, three years old, had fallen into the well. There was no man on the premises, and no neighbor near, as the mother well knew, and her first cool thought was, "If that child is saved, I must save her!" Running to the well, and seizing the windlass to lower the bucket, she called, "Nellie, darling! Don't cry; mamma will lower the bucket."

Fortunately, the water was so low that the bucket could be dipped with difficulty, and it went down carefully, but quickly.

"Now, Nellie, dear, get into the bucket, and mamma will draw you up. Don't be afraid; mamma will draw you right up to her."

There was not the slightest appearance of alarm in the tone or words of the mother, for, in her remarkable self-possession, she meant to remove the child's fear, and encourage her to get into the bucket. Nellie obeyed her mother, crawled into the bucket, and in a minute more was locked in her mother's arms. Presence of mind saved the child. Maternal love, for the time being, held nerves, muscles, mind, and soul in complete subjection, in its indomitable purpose to save the child.

Courage is not self-possession. There may be courage without self-possession, and there may be self-possession without courage.

A gentleman of very nervous temperament, yet known for his great presence of mind in danger and emergencies, claims that he has cultivated this quality by much reflection. "I have planned what I should do if awakened in the night by my house on fire; how to dress quickly, what to do first of all, how to give the alarm, how to save my family, clothing, etc." He believes that similar forethought about burglars, accidents, and other surprises, begets coolness, and hence method and effectiveness of action.

We know a clergyman's wife who forecasted these possibilities to such an extent that on taking a journey, she supplied herself with bandages, court-plaster, and one or two remedies, in case of injuries by railroad accidents. Once her tact and efficiency were put to the test on the train, when an accident injured several passengers, and such was her coolness and success that her services became a matter of public record.

"Presence of mind and courage in distress are more than armies to procure success."

"Gaining Favor with God and Man" by William Thayer, pp. 231-233