

has condemned no one to absolute stupidity. That comes from the gradual unmaking of an originally divine handiwork. If the finer sides of life are a blank to any, the fault is largely their own. You can soon tell whether a man has cultivated exact and careful habits of reflection or not; whether he has learned off, like a school boy, his lesson; whether he really thinks, or only thinks that he thinks. We all have room for some regret over the wasted hours that might have made us wiser men. For the brain in this regard is just like any other part of the body; that if you exercise it aright, it grows more vigorous; if you neglect it, it falls into atrophy and decay.

Is it not natural, then, to suppose that the same law which obtains in the physical and mental realm will obtain likewise in the moral realm, and that there, too, strength will come only through strenuous and constant self-discipline? Even if there were no such thing as evil in the world, I don't know that we could afford to go about in *deshabille*. In any case, it seems to me, that mysterious narrative of Jacob wrestling with the angel would fitly image the struggle of the finite spirit, not, indeed, to avoid the lowest penalties, but to attain the highest rewards of life. Even Jesus Christ knows the meaning of certain kinds of temptation, and—reverently let us say it—exercised Himself unto godliness. Is it likely, then, that we frail, erring men in the midst of surroundings not always favourable to growth in righteousness will escape the need of constant effort to keep our moral fibre firm and strong, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand?

The word which Paul here used when he says, "I exercise myself," is a most suggestive one. From it are derived our English words "ascetic" and "asceticism," and the curious thing is that while these words usually imply abstinence from ordinary methods of living and the ordinary interests of humanity, this is not at all the idea which Paul wishes to convey. Some words lose caste in the course of time and fall away from their true significance, and this word "ascetic" is one of them. In its original sense it had nothing to do with the soured visage which affects to despise this present world, and gives itself over to fruitless reverie upon the joys of heaven. It is so much easier to adopt a change of method than a change of principle. But "life develops from within." The real strength of the Puritan lay not in his clothes, but in his conscience. Paul's asceticism was the asceticism of the soldier, who, with steady perseverance, trains himself for the noblest tasks of manhood; and because some men have mistaken the issue, and imagined that the less they had to do with ordinary affairs the better for them, that is no reason why we

should miss the great truth that self-discipline is absolutely necessary to the development of individual character, and that the best place to acquire that discipline is in healthy contact with our fellows amid all the varied scenes of earthly life.

When Paul tells us to put off "the old man with his deeds," he does not mean that we are to put on the old woman. The idea undoubtedly exists in some minds that if youth wants to have its fill of living, it had better postpone the adoption of Christian principles to some more convenient season. And, perhaps, the cant and sour visage and portentous piety which, now and then, are seen in the church may be in part responsible for such an error. Young men are not likely to be attracted by stock phrases which have come to mean nothing, nor by mournful goody-goodyism, nor by Pecksniffian saintliness. Christianity is, indeed, "the higher life." But if, in order to obtain the higher life, we must needs affect contempt of everything that has to do with mundane affairs, then give me the lower, the life in which I can feel playing around me the fresh time-breezes, where I can move about, sometimes falling, sometimes overcoming, yet with a heart that beats in sympathy with all that is best and noblest, and that feels some throb of genuine comradeship with my fellow-toilers throughout the world.

It is by such self-training as this in life's arena that wisdom, in every age, has been justified of her children. It has a naturalness about it which cannot but appeal to every earnest mind. We know perfectly well that we cannot get along anywhere without some attempt to govern ourselves, and to bring out the powers which often lie dormant within us. And this effort must not be a spasmodic one. "I keep exercising myself," said the Apostle. We all have our "off" days when it is hard to work, hard to think, and, perhaps, harder still to be good. Virtue seems to clamor, at times, for a short vacation, and to chafe against the monotony of right-doing. We would like an occasional slippered ease after the long watchfulness and prayer lest we enter into temptation. Possibly we cannot always be at our best in the matter of moral achievement any more than in other things. But, O let us take care that we are never our worst! For amid all our changing moods the moral law runs on in unbroken continuity, and it is at the very time when we feel it irksome that we most need to exercise ourselves to the triumph of obeying it.

And if any one does not find it hard, sometimes at least, to control the baser forces within him, he has either reached a high rank of sainthood, or else he has ceased to be alive at all. But this is to be remembered, that the more moral exercise we take,