

Messenger and Visitor

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The Duty of High Thinking

It is quite generally recognized that persons are justly held accountable for their acts and for their words, but there is probably much less readiness to recognize that one is accountable for his thoughts. Yet there is, no doubt, accountability in the latter case as truly as in the former. It may be admitted indeed that the accountability is not to the same degree in each case, for one cannot so fully and decisively control his thoughts as he can his deeds or even his words, and yet, because it is plain that one can command his thoughts and can in a very considerable degree determine upon what subjects he will meditate, it is equally plain that, so far forth, he is accountable for his thoughts as well as for his words and his actions. It may be natural for us to think base, selfish and unholy thoughts, but we are not shut up to that, for there are many subjects of thought upon which our minds may lay hold, and which are pure, wholesome and elevating. And, feeding upon these, the soul is lifted above the level of the brute life, in which it is too prone to grovel, into a diviner life to which it is invited to aspire. It is not only by trampling beneath their feet each deed of shame, but by banishing each shameful thought, that men shall rise to higher things.

"All thoughts of ill; all evil deeds
That have their roots in thoughts of ill,
Whatever hinders or impedes
The action of the nobler will,—

"All these must first be trampled down
Beneath our feet, if we would gain
In the bright fields of fair renown,
The right of eminent domain."

Evidently Paul considered it possible for Christians to control their thoughts, and he would have them so direct their meditations as to possess their intellectual and spiritual heritage, and thereby enter into a fuller and closer fellowship with truth and God. Accordingly we find him writing to the Philippians: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things." As a man thinketh, so is he. As the base designs through which men wreck their manhood in the service of Satan have their roots in thoughts of ill, so out of pure thoughts and exalted meditations are born those noble purposes by which men realize what is highest and best within the sphere of possible attainment. The temptations to low thinking are many and subtle. They come partly from within and partly from without. A thousand influences are at work upon every young man and woman to poison the fountains of thought and to debase the powers of the mind to unworthy and unholy service. But the nobler way is possible. There are ancient and modern founts of inspiration, undefiled and inexhaustible, at which every eager soul may drink, and find strength for noble, joyous service for God and humanity. Let us be careful then with what food we feed our minds—careful as to books, as to companions, as to all imaginations and meditations that are suggested from within or from without, for issues of the most profound importance depend upon the subjects and the character of our thoughts.

Sensible counsel this which W. Robertson Nicol gives in the British Weekly:

The preacher who is put down by the cry that congregations will have young men is not much to be sympathized with. Congregations will have young men, and they are right in this, but they must not reckon youth by years. Try to make every year a year of growth for mind and heart. There is one way worth trying. Take one great teacher and give him the best part of your winter. Have a Wesley winter, a Maurice winter, a Wordsworth winter, and you will find that the company of great men is adding cubits to your stature. We are dead when we cease to grow; we cease to be ministers of Christ when we cease to be students of divinity.

Beware of Covetousness.

If men needed to be warned against the sin of covetousness 1900 years ago, as the teaching of Jesus recorded in our Bible lesson for the current week clearly indicates, the need for such warning is no less emphatic today. There is perhaps no sin which can be more truly regarded as the sin of this age than covetousness. There is no lesson which the people of this time have greater need to learn than that which our Lord here teaches, that a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses. Men and women are so apt to think that their welfare depends upon—that their life consists in—eating and drinking and being merry, and that to secure an abundant supply of things which minister to their physical appetites and personal enjoyment here, is to insure a satisfactory provision for their welfare. This man who came to Jesus with his request about the division of the inheritance may have wanted nothing more than justice from his brother. But a man who is attracted to the Divine Teacher only because he hopes he may thereby obtain assistance, in securing an earthly inheritance, is evidently thinking more about the bread that perishes than that which endures unto life eternal. It may be a wholesome question for us to ask ourselves,—Why am I attracted toward Christianity, why do I attend the church and support the preaching of the gospel? Is it because of its spiritual and eternal value to me, or because Christianity ministers to my comfort, respectability and wealth in this present life?

There are two great and fatal errors in the covetous man's philosophy.

In the first place his life is falsely centred in self. His grand aim is selfish, vitiating all his work and its result. His thought is all for himself and not for others. How clearly this appears in the parable! The man's questions all centre about himself and his own personal interests. The increase of wealth in his hands suggests to his mind no benevolent or philanthropic purpose. When his barns and storehouses are all full to bursting with the fruits of his ground, he does not think of others whose barns are pitifully empty, or of the multitudes around him in abject poverty. This abundant increase of goods does not appear to him in the light of opportunity and ability to relieve the distresses of others. All his thought is to increase his own fortune, to make larger and more secure the means for his own personal gratification. And if this parable was a true picture of many lives of men who lived in the days of Christ, it is no less, in its essential features, a true picture of many lives today. We are glad to believe indeed, that the world has learned much from the Great Teacher. The spirit of philanthropy has been developed. Rich men—Christian men especially—feel more sympathy for the poor and the unfortunate than was known in the long-past centuries,—and yet how many there are today who see in the increasing wealth bestowed upon them—not a means of blessing others, an opportunity to promote great Christian undertakings for the redemption and the upbuilding of humanity—but rather a means to the accumulation of great fortunes for the promotion of their own enjoyment, power and aggrandizement. The false philosophy that makes self the centre and selfish ambitions the aim of life, may not be theoretically very popular today, but in practice it does not lack for devotees.

The second fatal error of the covetous man is his ignoring of what is coming after this life. Our Lord makes it very clear here as elsewhere that, according to his teaching, this life does not end all. The man of the parable persuades himself that with his "much goods laid up"—he can say to his soul "Eat, drink and be merry," careless as to the end. Our Lord declares that this is the conclusion of a fool who turns away his eyes from the most certain and significant of facts. A man may have much goods laid up and may use it as he will to promote his enjoyment or his ambitions, but no man can be certain of the possession of these things for "many days," or even for a single day. There is surely no man who more deserves to be called a fool than he who puts his wealth in the place of God, and lets it hide from him the tremendous facts of death and judgment. "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." So is he that gathers together a little perishable wealth on which to pamper a perishable life, and has no fellowship with God, no recognition of stewardship under God and no assurance of treasure laid up in heaven.

Editorial Notes.

—It seems to be necessary to repeat occasionally what has been so often said before, that no attention can be paid to matter sent for publication in this paper unless the writer's name accompanies his contribution.

—Many who were students at Newton during the years that Professor Ezra P. Gould occupied the Chair of New Testament Exegesis there will have heard with deep regret of his death, which occurred at White Lake, N. Y., August 22. Dr. Gould was a man in whom a stalwart physique was united to a strong will and a vigorous, logical mind. Change of opinion on some subjects seemed to make it impossible for him to remain at Newton and in connection with the Baptist denomination, and his later years were accordingly spent in connection with another denomination. The volume on the Gospel by Mark in the International Commentary is a worthy monument to Dr. Gould's ability as an exegete.

—President Harper of the University of Chicago, discredits the ability of the small college to prepare young men for a fair start in life. But Dr. Harper is himself one of a large number of living instances which go to show that the preparatory work of the small college is not to be despised. While its equipment is frequently such as to leave much to be desired, the small college has this advantage, that it brings the student in close touch with the teacher, and if the teacher's personality is strong and healthful, the advantage is of great importance to the student during the years when he is laying the foundation for his education.

—Late despatches from Shanghai contain terrible accounts of murders—preceded in many instances by the most shameful outrages and fiendish cruelties—inflicted by the Chinese on Christian missionaries in different parts of China. In some cases, it is asserted, lady missionaries have suffered terrible things at the hands of the Chinese mobs. Shanghai despatches are apt to be of a sensational character and are justly regarded with suspicion. It is to be hoped that at least the worst that is being reported may prove to be untrue, but, considering the prevalence and intensity of anti foreign feeling and mob violence in China, there is too much reason to fear that in some instances at least these terrible reports may be confirmed.

—The article from the pen of Ian MacLaren, which will be found on our third page, indicates one way of bringing about a better condition in a church in which the tide of spiritual life has reached a low ebb and whose pastor is evidently not doing the best work of which, under better conditions, he is capable. Perhaps many churches might find a solution of their difficulties by the same method. If any church is contemplating the ungrateful duty of intimating to its pastor that his usefulness in his present relations is at an end, it might be well worth while to try what an expression of cordial sympathy and hearty co-operation will do for the minister and for the cause. A church cannot get from its minister the best he can give unless it is also giving its best.

—Of the one million pounds sterling which the Wesleyan Methodists of England have undertaken to raise as a Twentieth Century Fund, more than \$800,000 have now been raised, and judging by the enthusiastically generous spirit manifest at the recently held annual Conference of the body, the remainder will be forthcoming. This is a great sum for the denomination to raise in addition to its ordinary benevolences, and it must involve sacrifice on the part of many of the contributors. Commenting on this fact the British Weekly remarks: "Better that it is so. Giving is blessed when it means sacrifice, and in proportion as it means sacrifice. There is, as we have often said, too much of pessimism in religious circles. God is always rebuking us by showing how deep are the foundations of the Christian church in this land. . . . The example of Methodism in this great enterprise cannot fail to quicken immensely the spiritual life and hope in all our churches. By God's grace we begin the new century full of courage and hope, and living and laboring in that spirit we shall see, past all doubting, the kingdom of God come."

—The terrible ordeal of famine through which India has been passing the present year, may hold for that stricken land blessings in disguise. The famine has afforded to the missionaries and the Christian people whom they represent, an opportunity, of which generous advantage has been taken, to demonstrate to famine-stricken India the unselfish and philanthropic character of the religion which the missionaries preach. It is gratifying to observe that this lesson is not lost upon thoughtful Hindus. The Outlook quotes from an article in the Bombay Spectator by an eminent Parsee, Mr. Malabari, who says, in reference to the famine relief work done by the missionaries of the American Board: "We cannot find adequate terms to give expression to our admiration of the manner in which the missionaries of the Christian religion are spending themselves during this terrible crisis for the sake of the people of this country. They are acting on the principle that the gift without the giver is bare."

—The Brussels Street congregation must greatly enjoy the results of the renovation which the interior of their house of worship has undergone. The walls and ceiling have been sheathed in metal, the front of the gallery newly painted, the pews and other wood work varnished, and a new baptistery placed in the corner to the left of the platform. On the wall above the baptistery will be placed a painting of Christ's Baptism in the Jordan, to be executed by Mr. Alexander Watson. The colors of the walls and ceiling blend harmoniously, and the whole gives a very cheerful and pleasing effect. Pastor Waring and his people are certainly to be congratulated on the appearance of their new audience room. The acoustic properties of the building, which were always good, have been made still better, it is said, by the metallic sheathing. With such a church full of people eager to hear the gospel, a minister could scarcely desire a better place to preach in. We trust that a great blessing may rest upon the Word preached in the old Brussels St. church, and that during the coming month's Pastor Waring may have frequent occasion to use the new baptistery.

—The church and congregation of Main Street, St. John, with the assistance of other friends in the city, gave their new pastor, Rev. Alexander White, a very

pleasant and last week, filled to the Baptist past other denon pated in the address to M sented by encourage ministers p suitable res was furnis St. John fro eight year churches faithfulness that he may home amon unties of w repay, the when Rev. of the Carl the first of N will be supp that, with t churches, la

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