

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

THE TRUE TEST OF MANHOOD.

But what is it for which consciousness and the best experience of our race unite in saying that the immediate advantage and pleasure of the senses must be surrendered. Jesus described it to His tempter as "The Word of God." "Not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." And the word of God includes two notions, one of revelation and one of commandment. Whenever God speaks by any of His voices, it is first to tell us some truth which we did not know before, and second to bid us do something which we have not been doing. Every word of God includes these two. Truth and duty are always wedded. There is no truth which has not its corresponding duty. And there is no duty which has not its corresponding truth. We are always separating them. We are always trying to learn truths, as if there were no duties belonging to them, as if the knowing of them would make no difference in the way we lived. That is the reason why our hold on the truths we learn is so weak. And we are always trying to do duties as if there were no truths behind them; as if, that is, they were mere arbitrary things which rested on no principles and had no intelligible reasons. That is the reason why we do our duties so superficially and unreliably. When every truth is rounded into its duty, and every duty is deepened into its truth, then we shall have a clearness and consistency and permanence of moral life which we hardly dream of now.

Every word of God, then, is both truth and duty, revelation and commandment. He who takes any new word of God completely gets both a new truth and a new duty. He, then, who lives by every word of God, is a man who is continually seeking new truth and accepting the duties that arise out of it. And it is for this, for the pleasure of seeing truth and doing its attendant duty, that he is willing to give up the pleasures of sense, and even, if need be, to give up the bodily life to which the pleasures of sense belong. As a man keeps or loses his capacity of doing this, of weighing these two against each other, and deciding rightly which is the more precious, he keeps or loses his manhood. The real first question that you want to ask about any new man whom you meet, and whom you desire to measure, is not whether he is rich or poor, fashionable or unfashionable, learned or unlearned, but whether he has kept his capacity; whether if God showed him that something was true and out of that truth there issued some duty for him, he would be able and willing to put his comfort aside, and take the duty and perform it. I think that one of the most interesting things about our relations to our fellow-men is the way in which we feel in them the presence or the absence of this capacity. I do not say that our feeling about them is unerring. Again and again we find ourselves mistaken. But about almost every man whom we know, I think we have some feeling of this sort. To each one we apply this test. Two men are living side by side, in the same comfort, in the same easy business. Every want of each is satisfied completely. How is it that I know about these men that if God were to make known to both of them together the truth that a multitude of His people were being wronged, and the consequent duty were plain to both of them that they ought to brave everything and sacrifice everything to claim their rights for the oppressed, one of them would certainly leave his house and all his luxuries without a moment's hesitation to go and do the work, and the other would refuse the task, and let the wrongs go on unrighted till the judgment day? Why is it that we feel the difference? Why is it that we cannot help thinking whether every man is living by bread or living by the word of God? It is because that is the real fundamental mark of manhood. It is because all other distinctions between man and man are superficial and insignificant. That alone lets us see thoroughly what sort of men they are.

NAAMAN THE LEPER.

He was a man of position and dignity, captain of the hosts of Syria, "a great man with his master, and honourable." He was a skilful general, for "by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria; but he was a leper." With all his honour and dignity and wealth he was a miserable man, and without hope, for

his disease was, by natural means, incurable. What did all these things profit to a man who was a leper? Our day has its honourable and successful men. Fortune smiles on them, and they are the envy of the envious; but they are lepers. The leprosy of sin is on them, and it is incurable by any natural means.

Naaman was wise in his readiness to hear advice. When the little maid who waited on his wife told of the prophet in Israel, and when word was brought to him, he heard and acted upon it. Many men would have treated lightly the talk of a child, even though it promised healing.

Naaman erred ignorantly in going for a cure to the king of Israel, and not to the prophet of whom the little maid had spoken. He knew little of the God of Israel, and thought only of the royal power, obedience to which, in his own land, priests and prophets alike accorded. The letter written to the king was, "I have sent unto thee my servant Naaman, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." A mistake not unlike his is that of troubled souls who seek salvation, not of Christ, but of the Church. They recognize the outward appearance of power, and would find a cure in forms and ceremonies as powerless to help as was the king of Israel to heal the Syrian leper.

Naaman erred again, and more seriously in his anger at the simple method of the prophet. He had arranged in his mind a programme. He was an important man. The prophet would know him as the general-in-chief of mighty armies, and would do him honour, would "stand before" him and "pray unto the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." This programme seemed reasonable and good, and when the prophet simply "sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times," he "was wroth," "and turned and went away in a rage." Many persons, like Naaman, have their own plan of salvation arranged. They think, surely there will be first alarm and dread of punishment, then will follow so many hours of conflict, followed by repentance, deep and bitter, then suddenly light will break in, and they will rejoice. Other conversions have been in this order. Indeed, it is the approved and usual way. The word comes "believe," "come unto me." There is no programme or ceremony, but a simple plan which requires simple obedience. He who hesitates because he has not proper feelings, or is not fitted by passing through all the proper stages, or cannot do some great thing for his own salvation, commits like folly with Naaman, who was angry because the cure was according to God's plan, and not his.

The same readiness to hear advice which led Naaman first to seek the prophet, saved him now from his own anger. His servants saw his folly, and pleaded with him. He heeded, and was saved. His desperate need, no doubt, induced him to hear and try every remedy proposed. So the sinner, in his need, should heed the voice which calls him, and lay hold of the only hope.

RELIGIOUS HABITS.

Right habit is like the channel, which dictates the course in which the river shall flow, and which grows deeper and deeper with each year. Right habit is like the thread on which we string precious pearls. The thread is, perhaps, of no great value, but if it be broken, the pearls are lost.

We have need to cherish all our right habits and to keep them inviolate. We need to have habits for the employment of our time, for our sleeping and our waking, for our work and our resting, for our eating and our drinking. The housekeeper who does not have habits (which, indeed, is but another name for system) will find that the week's work lags frightfully, and is achieved only at a great and needless expense of toil and pains.

We need to borrow the force of habit in the discharge of our religious duties. Devotion should be a habit. We should have a place of prayer and an hour of prayer. We should read the Scriptures with system, not opening here or there, as may chance.

Our benevolence should be a habit. We should give, not at the impulse of feeling, not under the spur of a stirring appeal, but in the pursuance of a habit, conscientiously formed and persistently maintained.

Religious labour should be a habit, whether it be labour in the Bible school or individual labour by the wayside. We should minister to the sick, the poor, the ignorant, habitually. Going to the house of the

Lord and to the prayer meeting should be a habit, a habit not broken in upon by aught save absolute necessity. Not seldom one feels, "I would like to attend that concert, or to accept this invitation to spend the evening with a friend; no harm can come of my being absent this once from the prayer meeting;" or, "I am tired and sleepy; and I will stay at home this morning." It is not much, perhaps, in one sense, but it breaks the thread, and the pearls will be scattered.

And when we speak of attendance at the prayer meeting and the place of worship, we do not refer to wandering about, going to this or that church because there is some new light there, or some flaming evangelist; going to this or that prayer meeting because there is some special interest. We mean going to your own stated place of worship, your own prayer meeting, filling your own place, not some one else's place. Although you may now and then forego what would seem a great pleasure and privilege, yet in the long run you will find yourself spiritually the gainer, and will be doing vastly more good. The place where you are needed is not where the crowd is, but where the crowd is *not*.

The wheel of an engine has dead points and centres, where the engine can exert no direct power over the machinery. The wheel has to rely on the impulse already received to carry it past the dead point. It goes over this point by the force of habit. The soul reaches dead points in its spiritual history. Perhaps some great trial has come, some change in circumstances; perhaps there is a temporary loss of interest; if one considers only the state of his feelings to-day, he would desert his closet and the place of prayer. Of course the effect of this would be to aggravate the spiritual ill from whence it comes. Then is the time when religious habit is invaluable. It carries the man past the dead point, keeps him in the path of duty; and soon the way of duty becomes also the way to happiness.

EACH IN HIS OWN WAY.

All great works are done by serving God with what we have in hand. Moses was keeping sheep in Midian; God sent him to save Israel, but he shrank from the undertaking. We sympathize with Jethro's herdsman, alone, a stranger, owning not a lamb that he watched. He had nothing but his shepherd's rod cut out of a thicket, the mere crab-stick with which he guided his sheep. Any day he might throw it away and cut a better one. And God said: "What is that in thine hand?" With this rod, with this stick, thou shalt save Israel. And so it proved.

What is that in thine hand, Shamgar? An ox-goad with which I urge my lazy beasts. Use it for God, and Shamgar's ox-goad defeats the Philistines. What is that in thine hand, David? My sling with which I keep the wolves from the sheep. Yet with that sling he slew Goliath, whom an army dared not meet. What is that in thine hand, disciple? Nothing but five barley loaves and two little fishes. Bring them to me, give them to God; and the multitude is fed. What is that in thy hand, poor widow? Only two mites. Give them to God; and behold! the fame of your riches fills the world. What hast thou, weeping woman? An alabaster box of ointment. Give it to God. Break it and pour it upon the Saviour's head, and its sweet perfume is a fragrance in the Church till now. What has thou, Dorcas? My needle. Use it for God, and those coats and garments keep multiplying, and are clothing the naked still.

You are a manufacturer, or a merchant, or a mechanic, or a man of leisure, or a student, or a sewing woman. God wants each one of you to serve Him where you are. You have your business, use it for God. Order it in a godly manner. Do not allow any wickedness in it. Give godly wages; preach Jesus to your clerks, not by a long face but by being like Him, doing good. Use your profits for God, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, comforting the wretched, spreading the gospel far and wide. What a field you have to glorify God in, just where you are! If you have nothing, use your tools for Him; He can glorify Himself with them as easily as He could with a shepherd's stick, an ox-goad, a sling, or two mites. A poor girl who had nothing but a sewing machine used it to aid a feeble church; all her earnings above her needs were given towards building a house of worship, and in a year she paid more than others a hundred times richer than she. So you can do if you will. Think of the widow with her two