

The two questions seem almost to run the one into the other, but yet there is a distinction between them. The one points to the interior springs of the life of holiness, the other to the external body and manifestation of that life as lived among men.

And so this question goes by and the former, which demands a promise that you will diligently labor to maintain the communion of your own soul with God, while this demands a vow that you will let your light shine before men, as an example and pattern; an example and pattern wrought after the matchless lineaments and perfect beauty of the Great Exemplar, Jesus Christ, so that those amongst whom your lot is cast may see reflected in you the attractive beaties of the holiness and love of Christ.

This question, then, brings most important matters to our consideration. It reminds us that the conduct which we and those closest to us set before men becomes not only an example for them to follow, but an example which is of greater force to influence their lives by reason of the very position which we hold.

This we find to be inevitable, as servants of God and as stewards of His mysteries our lives are mixed in mens esteem with our doctrine, lifting up unto heights of holiness upon which we ourselves love to dwell, or drawing them downwards towards that study of the world and the flesh which we have sworn to avoid.

Every true, earnest devout, humble, self-denying man is daily permeating others with the brightness of his own life. By his example he is doing perhaps far more than by his more direct attempts to benefit men. For this influence is ever increasing, whereas his direct conscious efforts are numbered and limited.

Such a man moves among his fellows with an unconscious influence for good, which like "the very shadow of St. Peter," heals some of them as he passes by. And as it is with good so it is with evil. The man who lives at a low level, who is careless, indecent, selfish or openly ungodly, is ever poisoning the moral atmosphere around him, and men who would resist his slightest whisper are unconsciously imbibing the taint of his example.

"Our many deeds, the thoughts that we have thought
They go out from us thronging every hour,
And in them all is folded up a power
That in the earth doth move them to and fro;
And mighty are the marvels they have wrought
In hearts we know not and may never know."

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The very air about us is vital and carries the secret pulsations, and the most unconscious influences of our lives far abroad; and not only so, but these influences sweep away into eternity.

This is true of all men, but the most true of us who are called into the official ministry of Christ's Holy Church, our lives have no privacy. Our life is ever teaching one way or the other, far more eloquently than our direct words or most fervent exhortations.

Even a heathen philosopher could exclaim:—"Longum iter per praecepta, breve et efficax per exempla." If we would succeed in our ministry we must enter upon it as George Herbert did on his, determining above all, to be "Sure to live well, because the virtuous life of a clergyman is the most powerful eloquence to persuade all that see it to reverence and love, and at least to desire to live like him; and this" he resolves "I will do because I know that we live in an age that hath more need of good examples than precepts."

Let us, then, briefly outline what must be the effect upon our people of a life which falls, in any respect, below our ministerial teaching.

First, then, how will it affect the un-godly in our parishes? It is the interest of every man who is living in sin, to prove the faith of Christ to be a cunningly devised fable; for that faith condemns and threatens him. Now, what argument against Christianity can at all be equal in price to this, that they who teach it manifestly dis-believe their own doctrine? What, therefore, can more help the ungodly in their miserable work of self-destruction than our inconsistencies? For whatever we may think, such an one is sharp sighted to detect them, and from them he gathers readily that our sermons and our teaching are nothing better than professional declarations, the hollowness of which we feel secretly, and therefore exhibit in our lives.

The same effect, too, in its degree, is produced in others by a careless ministerial life. It must certainly harden in sin that large number in every parish, who entertain no doubts about the truths of Christianity, but are ever trying to combine enough of it to quiet their consciences with an earthly, ir-religious life. They always expect rather more of us than they think themselves bound to render, and if the spot of worldliness or ir-religion appears in our life, they can easily excuse its stain in theirs. This danger is, moreover, increased both for ourselves and for our flock by the fact that, so far from such a life alarming our people or repelling them from us, it will frequently minister rather to our immediate popularity. Open iniquity in us would indeed shock and disgust them. If we yielded to gross sins we should lose the character of spiritual guides; we should be no pattern at all. But if we are respectable enough to serve as an easy pattern we may almost certainly secure a great amount of general favor. For the world loves that easy and respectable worldliness in us, which so far from stirring consciences and awaking souls, makes it more easy for its votaries to veil over the sharper and severer truth of Christianity, to combine a decently religious appearance with an absorbing love of the things of the world.