

*dowments and qualifications*, and even to a certain extent by our *inclinations*. What a man *ought* to do must depend greatly upon what he *can* do. It is possible that some of us may have come under the influence of a form of Christian ethics which did not hesitate to lay down the rule that a man was bound to fulfil certain duties, and that this obligation was not in the least diminished by his utter inability to meet it. It is hardly possible to imagine a theory which should ultimately be more destructive of a sense of duty, and which should more effectually engender an utter disregard of all moral restraints. Thanks be to God, it is but seldom now that doctrines so nonsensical and pernicious are put forth by Christian teachers. We hold, as the very basis of the throne of righteousness, that responsibility is limited by ability, that a man is accountable up to the measure of his strength.

On the other side, our qualifications should always be allowed great weight in determining the kind of work which we decide to undertake. Some one has said a man enjoys doing a work which he does well. But it is equally true that a man is more likely to do his work well if he enjoys the doing of it, and if he feels a kind of fitness for it and a tendency towards it. How many men would have escaped the shame of utter failure if they had had regard to this plain dictate of common sense! How many a man might have employed profitably and fruitfully time which has been utterly wasted, if he had only considered how many things there were which he was capable of doing, and that there were some that he had very little qualification for performing!

4. One other consideration should not be overlooked, namely, the *actual circumstances of our life*; or, to put it in another and certainly in a better form, the *leading of God's providence*. It is not too much to say that in most

cases this is the safest guide—in many cases it is the only guide. There are multitudes of human beings who do not seem to have special aptitudes for any particular kind of work, who will yet do almost any ordinary work fairly well, if they can only come to see that it is their duty, and will really give their minds to it. In such cases, and they are very numerous, let it be said to a man, "Do what you are set to do, and do it as well as you possibly can, and your life will be honourable and even dignified."

People often imagine that because they have failed in life, or done their work very indifferently, they have therefore mistaken their calling, and that they would have succeeded in some other profession or business. Most of us are sometimes tempted to think that we might have excelled in some work which we have had no chance of trying, although we may scarcely have attained to mediocrity in that which we have attempted. Undoubtedly there are such cases. Mr. Carlyle laments that the world could find no better work for the poet Burns than setting him to gauge ale-barrels. Scattered through the sorrowful history of the human family there are instances not a few of men who have been what we should call utterly thrown away.

But these cases are exceptional. Few men have the right to assume that the case is their own. Very few men will be justified in thinking that the reason why they have not succeeded in life has been the mistake they made in choosing their work. It will be safer to attribute their failure to the defective manner in which they have undertaken and carried out their work. A man who does one thing badly is likely to do many things badly. A man who does one thing well would probably do many things well if he had them to do. Dean Stanley relates that when he was appointed to a canonry at Canterbury,