

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### THE LAW OF CHRIST AS APPLIED TO THE ORDINARY BUSINESS OF LIFE.

(Continued.)

The application of the principle is specially obvious in the sphere of charity; but it is quite as applicable to business relations. Does any one say "Because I must love my neighbour as myself, I must therefore supply him with goods at half their value, or, after he has got them, let him off with paying half the price?" My reply is that this would be entirely inconsistent with my duty to God, and even to my neighbour, as set forth in the law of love. It would, indeed be a treble wrong, or rather a wrong in every conceivable direction. It would not only be bad for myself (and the law forbids me to wrong myself, if it forbids me to wrong my neighbour; for it is as myself that I am to love him), but it would be bad for the man with whom I am doing business, and bad for society, and manifestly against the will of Him who "rules among the inhabitants of the earth, and is "the Author" of order and "not of confusion." As we remarked at the beginning, righteousness is the broad and deep foundation of the law of Christ and the law of love comes in to reinforce it and to supplement it, to animate it with life, to fill it with soul; but never in any degree to abrogate, annul, or supersede it. Or we may put it in another way which may be still more obvious. When rightly looked at, all legitimate business, honestly done, is done on the principle of loving one's neighbour as one's self. Take the familiar case of buying at a certain cost, and selling at an advanced price. Why is the buyer willing to pay a higher price than the seller has paid? Because of the benefit the seller does him in the shape of saving him the trouble of going a distance to get what he wants, or the waste of buying a larger quantity than he needs, or some such convenience. It is far better, manifestly, for a Leicester man to buy a small piece of Nottingham or Manchester goods at a small advance in price than it would be to go himself to the manufacturer in Nottingham or in Manchester, and then find that to get any he must take ten or a hundred times what he wants. It would, in fact, be better for him to pay a very much larger advance than he does pay, rather than to be left to his own resources in the matter. But here the laws which regulate trade come in to cut down the advance to the lowest point, so that he pays very little indeed for a great service. And it may be remarked, in passing, that few of us realize at how little cost we obtain the very needful and valuable services which are done us on all hands by our neighbours. According to the working of these laws, it comes to pass that the services rendered by the different persons engaged in business are set off against each other in very fair equivalents; so that, if only strict honesty be observed, each man gets, in the main, just what his services are worth—no more, no less. And, therefore, in demanding and accepting the fair market value of what he has to offer, he is literally going upon the principle of loving his neighbour as himself. If he were dishonestly to ask more, he would be sinfully turning the balance on his own side; if he were foolishly to take less, he would be unwisely turning the balance on his neighbour's side. And this shows, by the way (it is well to note it as we pass), that it is just as contrary to the law of Christ for the buyer to endeavour by undue means to beat down the seller, as it is for the seller to try to get more than its worth for what he sells. But the point we are making now is this, that in fair buying and selling a man is carrying out as nearly as possible the divine law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." And the same principle applies to all kinds of business (where services are rendered and equivalents accepted, either as wages or as profits. But it manifestly does not apply to what is familiarly known as "speculative" business. I know that it is very difficult to draw the line between legitimate and speculative business, and that one who is not thoroughly acquainted with what he is talking about must be very chary of condemning this or that way of making money, which may seem to him to partake of the nature of speculation. But there can be no mistake in standing by the manifest application in all cases of "the royal law according to the Scripture." This law, as we have seen, does not forbid us to enrich ourselves in the ordinary transactions of exchange; for in these the gain of A is not the loss

of B, but the price which B willingly pays for the benefit A does him. But it does forbid our enriching ourselves at the expense of others, as, for example, is manifestly done when an "operator" in grain makes an artificial scarcity in the market for the purpose of raising the price. In the legitimate transaction the profit of the grain merchant is the equivalent he receives for the benefit of bringing the grain to those who need it, in the other case, his profit arises from the loss inflicted on the community by his holding it back from them. In all ordinary business transactions a man simply gets a fair equivalent for certain services he renders to his neighbour; and in rendering the service and accepting the equivalent, he is, as we have seen, manifestly keeping the law which tells him to love his neighbour as himself, but when his gain, instead of being a reward for services rendered, is a penalty paid by his neighbour for a disservice which he has done him, it is seen to be a serious violation of the law of love.

Thus we find that the law of Christ, while it would undoubtedly be death to some ways of making money which public opinion only too feebly censures, is the very life and soul of all legitimate business. Now that objections to the law of Christ have been dealt with, and its practicability maintained, it remains to show the immense advantage of laying stress upon the higher, rather than on the lower law. We have already indicated in a general way the advantage of the method of Christ as one that, instead of merely lopping off the branches, cuts away the roots of the tree of evil—one that prefers to deal with the deep-seated disease rather than to confine attention to the treatment of its outward symptoms, but we may now look at it somewhat more closely. The causes which lead to commercial immorality are mainly these two—covetousness and extravagance, too great eagerness to get, and too great eagerness to spend. Each of them is a spring of action, which is apt to grow into a habit, urging on him who indulges it with ever increasing force. Each of them is a stream of tendency, which not only readily becomes an idolatry, but which, when it has engrossed the life, is very apt to sweep away the barriers in its path. Conscience is a strong barrier to resist the outbreak of the evil waters, but when the whole force of a man's life presses in one direction, the barrier needs to be very strong indeed—far stronger than it is, or can be expected to be, in the average man—not to give way at some point, not to admit of little leakages here and there, which speedily prepare the way for something more serious. Now, what does the law of Christ do? It does not simply fortify the barrier. That it does, but it does a great deal more. It diverts the stream of evil tendency, or rather, so changes it that it becomes a stream of most blessed tendency. It insists on a man's pouring his life into another channel altogether. It calls upon him to "seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness." Thus it not only keeps him from directing his life in such a way as to press and surge against the barrier which conscience erects against evil, but it aims to make conscience itself a master passion of the soul, by insisting that he shall "seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness." And if he do this, if he even honestly try it, it is impossible for his eagerness to get rich to gain dangerous headway. He is not only fortified against temptation, but kept out of temptation's way, kept in a region of life where the temptation to anything like deceit or dishonesty cannot reach him.

It is much the same with the other great source of temptation—namely, extravagance. The law of Christ, indeed, allows in moderation the desire to enjoy the goods things of this life, but it not only forbids a man to live beyond his income (which the lowest code of honesty forbids him to do), but it keeps him far away from the vulgar motives to extravagance. The commandment of these—namely, ostentation—it utterly condemns, making it a first duty to be "meek and lowly in heart." It renders a life of mere self-indulgence impossible to all who will, with any honesty, try to keep either its first or second commandment, to say nothing of the attempt to keep them both, with out which, indeed, no one can fairly consider himself a Christian at all. The attempt, we say, for it is very important to notice that the mere attempt, if only it be an honest and earnest one, to keep the law of love, will be almost an absolute safeguard against any form of dishonesty. For the objection might be urged, "It is all very well to say that if a man only loved God supremely, and his neighbour as himself,

dishonesty would be impossible; but, seeing that no man can do either the one or the other perfectly, what does it all amount to?" But what we say is, not that the perfect keeping of the law of love, which no one can do, but the honest attempt to keep it, which any one can make, will be as near a safeguard as it is possible to come to with human nature as it is. The same could not be said of honesty. If a man's honesty, indeed, be absolute, perfect, immovable, his conscience above the reach of all blinding or blunting or befogging influences, then it is quite certain that such an one will not fall into any doubtful practices. But of what man living can this be said? Or, if it can be said of any, of how very few!

In order to see this more clearly, let us distinguish between a principle and a passion. Principle has the strength of an embankment, or a rock, as the case may be, passion has the force of a stream or a torrent, as the case may be. Principle belongs to the statics, passion to the dynamics of character. Now, common morality looks to principle, and in this it does wisely, but it neglects passion, and in this it falls fatally short. It is quite sound on the statics of virtue, but its dynamics it almost utterly ignores, and just as running water, if only the current be strong enough, will wear away a strong embankment or even the hardest rock, so, if the passions be allowed to get force sufficient, they will carry away any mere principles that may stand in their way. Now, the law of Christ does not neglect the statics of character, but it gives special attention to its dynamics. It makes much of principle, quite as much as any moralist can, but it makes still more of the passions of the heart. It does not at all attempt to suppress the enthusiasm and energy of human nature; but it turns it in a direction in which it can safely flow in all its strength—turns it in a direction in which the more energy and ardour and enthusiasm the better for the man himself and for all interests concerned. It forbids the disastrous passion for money. It forbids the similarly disastrous passion for display. It calls out a passion for God and his righteousness. We have already seen how our Saviour deals with the ordinary business of life in the Sermon on the Mount, but before He comes to it, He says: "After this manner pray ye," and then furnishes a prayer. And "with a prayer" The first petition, "Hallowed be thy name", the second petition, "Thy Kingdom come", the third petition, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven." And then, and not till then, the petition for daily bread, expressed, not only in such a way as to suggest studied moderation, but in such a way as to keep in view the claim of our neighbour—"Give us this day our daily bread." A prayer, therefore, which no one can possibly offer in sincerity without at least trying to make the glory of God his chief ambition, and to keep all selfish desire in strict subordination and in such moderation as the golden rule requires. Now, may it not be asserted, without the slightest fear of contradiction, that where a man only tried to live a life, the desires of which are represented in the Lord's Prayer, it would be simply impossible to issue a lying advertisement, simply impossible to make or encourage the making of a false invoice, simply impossible to represent goods as better than they really are, or as having cost more than they actually did cost? Would it be possible, think you, for such a man to have any thing to do with the getting up of a bubble company, or to encourage in any way the risking of people's money by hopes of dividend held out which the projectors know to be absurdly extravagant? Would it be possible for such an one to trade on other people's capital, or to expose the property of another to a risk to which that other had not consented? Would it be possible for such an one to tempt his neighbour to sin, as is done by those who offer to young men in their employment commissions on amounts realized from the sale of otherwise unsalable stock, without any inquiry as to the means by which the said stock has been got rid of? Would it be possible for such an one in any way to take advantage of the ignorance or weakness of any with whom his business led him to deal, in order to gain an unrighteous end? All such things would manifestly be out of the range of possibility for any man who put even the smallest degree of real earnestness, day by day, into that prayer which teaches us what the deepest desires of our hearts should be.

It is sadly to be confessed that there are Christian people—so called, at least—among the number of those who are guilty of mean and dishonest practices.