

FAILINGS OF THE GOOD.

HOW ABUSED BY THE GUILTY.

[FROM 'Life-Lessons in the School of Christian Duty,' a forthcoming work by a minister of the Presbyterian Church.]

'Guilt and sin love to quote the failings of a good man, a thousand times more than even the elegant eulogies of vice from the lips of a bad one, because more powerful and effective. They never exult as they do when they see that good man stumble. His fall is the fall of that majestic statute of holy example that has looked upon them with a withering frown, and when it lies prostrate like the fallen Dagon on the threshold of his own temple, mutilated and broken, they regard this misfortune to virtue as a triumph to themselves. That example has been to them what the Prophet Micaiah was to Ahab, and if their lips were bridled, their hearts said as plainly as that wicked king, 'I hate him, for he prophesieth not good of me but evil.'—Example is indeed a prophet. It may even make the devil stand abashed and feel 'how awful goodness is.' Men who are not satisfied with themselves, who feel that they are doing wrong, seek an excuse for themselves in the weakness of another. If a good man errs, they deem themselves privileged. They will wrap themselves up in a cloak of his failings, and so lay the flattering unction to their souls. They could not contend on the 'principles of a perverted morality, with any verbal apology for their sin, however well expressed; they want an example they can quote.—Frequently they are only too successful in their search. Good men are often weak, and blindly cling to an error that thus becomes a stumbling block to others.

In the early history of the temperance cause a man who had been addicted to intemperance rose in a temperance meeting, and related his experience in regard to the influence of temperate drinkers of respectable standing upon the habits of the drunkard.

'Many a time,' said he, 'have I gone to Captain Johnson's tavern and waited for half an hour or an hour for some respectable man to come in and go to the bar and call for liquor. After a while, deacon Barnes would come and call for

some spirit and water. Then I could go up to the bar and do as he did.' Deacon Barnes hearing of this asked him if it was so. 'It is,' said the man. 'Well,' said the Deacon 'you shall hang on me no longer. I joined the Temperance Society yesterday.' 'Did you?' 'Yes!' 'Well then I will join to-day, for I can do without liquor as long as deacon Barnes can.'

How vain to cherish the hope of being able to abolish the arguments of the Sabbath breaker, the theatre goer, of the intemperate man, of the votary of fashion, while they are fortified by the example of those who esteem themselves good men, and in some cases possibly are! Well may we ask is it not a divine wonder, a miracle in attestation of the truth of Christianity, that it has manifested itself in the world for eighteen centuries and made progress when domestic traitors have so often stabbed at its vitals with poisoned daggers, when they have kissed, with profession, a cause they betrayed by example?

But what if many do sin; what if the majority do cast off the fear of God; what if it is fashionable to travel the broad road; will you therefore be the suicide of your soul? Will fashion take away the sting of the undying worm? Will fashion put out the flames of the quenchless fire? What if many would laugh at you for being odd; is their ridicule worse than God's frown? Is your own conscience such a torpid thing that sin may trample on it by mere force of numbers? Are your convictions to be voted down by majorities? Have you entolled yourself in that democracy of darkness, where numbers are instead of God.

There are good men who err and set a bad example; there are great men whose intellectual eminence flings a flood of splendor over the ruinous vices or the contemptuous follies in which they indulge; there are men whose names we would utter with a certain degree of reverence against whose example we would put you on your guard; for the splendor of genius cannot atone for its errors, and, if it did good sense should warn you of the presumption of supposing that because you have the errors you have also the genius. Great men, and even good men, have been characterized by gross weakness. They have shown themselves unsafe guides. The