

this weakness—causes arising from an over-keen and ready perception of all the bearings of the question in hand, or from mere feebleness of character, rendering all grasp of a subject, all effectual hold, impossible. It may be an intellectual or a moral failing, one due to a judgment paralysed by extent of choice, or to a conscience made slippery by habitual disregard of its first monitions; but in either case its effects upon a man's character and career are patent to others. People may have many faults which work in secret, which observers only guess at by seeing their consequences; but irresolution works in the open, and is sooner detected by the looker-on than by the man himself who is a prey to this enervating influence. What seems to the irresolute temper the mere exercise of a profound judgment or a refined taste is detected by those who are inconvenienced, irritated, or injured by it, as the slip and blemish which weakens, loosens, renders futile the whole course of life and action. The irresolute man, whatever his position or his powers, not only fails to himself, but is felt by those about him to be useless for the parts of counsellor, supporter, or advocate. He is essentially incompetent for these offices. His own course is determined, not by intention, but by chance; his judgment wants the education of personal experience. No one can remain eternally suspended between two courses of action, for the world moves and situations change however much a man may desire to keep them at a standstill till his mind is made up. Something irrespective of his judgment steps in and takes the matter in hand. While he deliberates on the highest conceivable best—the best in itself or best for him—while he fluctuates, accident settles the matter, with little regard for his credit or interest. It is difficult, La Bruyere says, to decide whether irresolution makes a man more unfortunate or contemptible, whether there is more harm in making a wrong decision or in making none at all. A step which a man is driven to take under the compulsion of external circumstances is seldom taken at the right time. Owing to this demand for action, even in the most vacillating—this impossibility of eternal indecision where other men and other interests are concerned—irresolution is necessarily allied with precipitation. The man incapable of a final immovable resolve decides at length on an impulse which has nothing to do with choice. Irresolute men are rash men; prone to act on the spur of the moment in order to defeat their infirmity and put it out of their power to hesitate and shilly-shally.

There are cases where these contending qualities play somewhat fatally upon one another. Thus the impulse of the moment commits a man to a course of action. Knowing his weakness he is precipitate in making promises; but then steps in the habit of his mind; he deliberates and hangs suspended, when the slower process of performance ought to follow. Irresolution splits into two, or into many parts, what should be only one act. With the healthy reasonable mind a promise involves its performance; but irresolution never considers anything as settled so long as change is possible. Every hindrance, every difficulty is an argument for a reversal, or breach of contract, either with oneself or others. As a fact, all important undertakings and promises engaged in under strong impressions and warm feeling are followed by a change of temperature in the undertaker and promiser. The habit of keeping to your word because it has been passed, whether to yourself or another, alone sustains the will under the reaction. "What terrible moments," said Pope, "does one feel after one has engaged in a large work! In the beginning of my translating the Iliad I wished everybody would hang me a thousand times." It is of course this relaxation of the mind's fibre which lies at the bottom of all decent forms of jilting, whether in man or woman. The promiser awakes to the fact that he has done a tremendous thing. This may happen to the firm as well as to the weak, but the irresolute are in the habit of vacillating, and also in the habit of justifying it as reasonable deliberation. It comes easily to them to hesitate or to betray hesitation. The constant mind knows that it is in for it, and instantly recovers from the temporary panic. It is no time to weigh the question when the step is once taken; thought and deliberation have finally given place to action.

In smaller matters promises become habit to the irresolute, as being dissociated from performance. A man gives or accepts an invitation in one mood, and backs out of it when he thinks over the inconvenience he may incur. He promises a gift, and, when the moment of parting with what he values arrives, he finds himself a different man from the rash donor, his former self. The arguments which should be silenced by a strong will press with gathering force and grow in weight as the notion of the imminence of a crisis possesses the mind; with him the fulfilment of a promise is the crisis, not the making it. Whether justly or not, Garrick's friends considered him as a framer of good intentions which he had not resolution to keep. Foote said of him that he often set out with the design of performing a generous act, but the ghost of a halfpenny meeting him at the corner of a street sent him home again. The pain of fulfilment is the only cure for this vacillating temper, the only lesson of any avail. Mere regrets, mere penitence for past imprudence, will do nothing. Promises become a habit unless they are sternly held to performance. Nor will the conscience long warn against them, for all the pleasures of benevolence can fill a mind of this class quite apart from the fulfilment of airy intentions.—*Saturday Review.*

## CORRESPONDENCE.

Letters should be brief, and written on one side of the paper only. Those intended for insertion should be addressed to the Editor, 162 St. James Street, Montreal; those on matters of business to the Manager, at the same address.

To the Editor of the CANADIAN SPECTATOR:

SIR,—Would you kindly insert amongst the books as given by you in answer to Question No. 99 of the Historical Questions:—

"Ordinances made for the Province of Quebec by the Governor and Council of the said Province, since the Establishment of the Civil Government." Quebec: Printed by Brown and Gilmore, near the Bishop's Palace. 1767.

The above book is in my possession, so there can be doubt of its existence, as is the case with some other works relating to Canada.

St. Lambert.

December 9th. 1879.

## "LIFE IN A LOOK."

To the Editor of the CANADIAN SPECTATOR.

SIR,—The system of newspaper puffing seems to be almost, if not quite as bad as when Macaulay impaled Robert Montgomery. The *Gazette* informed us a few days ago, in a rather doubtful compliment, that Canon Baldwin had again rushed into print, and that his new work was marked by that "force and eloquence characteristic of the Rev. gentleman." A couple of Saturdays ago the *Witness* (wisely refraining from comment) gave us a quotation from the book itself, which, it is to be hoped, was not chosen to hurt the Canon's reputation as a theologian, and which, let us be charitable enough to suppose, is not a sample of the book throughout.

"Mr. Baldwin," says the *Witness*, "gives this striking illustration." Then follows the illustration. A man is pictured as going to the cemetery to employ a number of hands in order to fill a contract. He wants the hands of dead men. The man is mad. Not more so than that preacher who addresses "a whole congregation dead in trespasses and sins, and, taking all the precepts of the Christian life, asks those who have not yet begun to breathe to carry them out in their daily lives."

Canon Baldwin is an excellent artist. He draws the portrait, and then looks around to find the human counterpart, and finds him at last in his own imagination.

But even if such men as the above quotation describes could be found, is there still no good attained by the labours of those in the Church who are not yet, in the highest sense, children of God? Must those and those only engage in christian work whose hearts are lit with celestial fire? Is there no power, as in instruments, in works of christian usefulness—in the sympathy which awakens sacrifice—to win by slow degrees the worker's soul to Christ? We know such works cannot in themselves save a man. But, we would ask, must "christian precepts" be spoken only to those who already love Christ? If so, how did Christianity in her infancy ever win the temples of Paganism and the allegiance of the fierce barbarians? Christian precept is wrapt up in the life of Christ. To teach Christ is to unfold, in the largest sense, the precepts of the Gospel. Moreover, is honest labour, even among nominal christians—labour for the eternal verities, justice, truth, love, against falsehood and hatred, and society's false gods—is such labour no factor in the causes furthering the work of the church militant upon earth?

To bolster up a theory as light as air, Canon Baldwin has set forth views alike incompatible with scripture experience and common sense.

"A WHOLE CONGREGATION DEAD in trespasses and sins"!! Let us draw a veil over this melancholy picture.

Yours very truly,

Laicus.

Montreal, Dec. 3rd, 1879.

## TWO OR THREE QUESTIONS REGARDING PRISON DISCIPLINE, ETC.

To the Editor of the CANADIAN SPECTATOR:

SIR,—It is a common belief now-a-days—or, rather, people take it for granted—that the discipline of our prison government is about as perfect as it may be, or indeed the days when the necessity of a philanthropist like Howard are passed for ever; that the convicts in the penitentiaries and inmates of our prisons have now no need of intercession on their behalf by busy-bodies outside of the pale of the Minister of Justice, and that the internal economy of prison life, and the comfort and reformation of prisoners at large are much of the same sort; that as a matter of fact prisoners in general have such a good time while incarcerated within the walls of the prison during the term of their confinement that they actually desire to go back again, and gladly commit all sorts of misdemeanours for that purpose; and in proof whereof these innocent and easily satisfied people cite, for example, that whereas during the summer months in the Central prison at Toronto there are in the neighborhood of four hundred prisoners, as the winter draws on that number is generally augmented by some fifty, and they knowingly shake their heads, these ignorant wise ones, and say: "We told you so; they want to get a home for the winter, where they may have clothing, warm shelter, and food and lodging." God forbid that such