

Messenger and Visitor

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Honesty.

The Standard Dictionary gives as a primary meaning of honesty—"a disposition to conform to justice and honorable dealing, especially in regard to the rights of property." The word is of course frequent and properly used in a broader sense, but it is of honesty in respect to rights of property that we desire here to speak.

Now honesty is generally regarded as a very admirable virtue, while its corresponding vice bears a most disreputable name. To intimate to a gentleman that he is dishonest, is scarcely less unpardonable than to challenge his veracity. To fix upon a man the reputation of being a thief, is wholly to destroy his respectability. All moralists, ancient or modern, heathen, Jewish or Christian, enjoin a respect for the rights of personal property as a fundamental principle in ethics. It is even a maxim of worldly wisdom that "honesty is the best policy." Since, then, the excellence of this virtue is so universally recognized, while dishonesty is held to be a stupid vice, to be avoided by those even who are governed by no higher principle than that of worldly self-interest, one might conclude that there is therefore no longer any occasion to urge upon Christian readers the importance of honesty. We should be glad to think that this is the case, but we are constrained, on the contrary, to believe that there never was a time which called for a stronger emphasis upon the virtue of honesty. For in this case, as in many others, it will be found that men are much more ready to applaud virtue than to practice it.

The assertion that dishonesty is disreputable may be accepted as a half truth. It is to be feared that it is nothing more than that. Dishonesty is indeed disreputable, in so far as it materializes in petty thievery, in house-breaking, safe-cracking, highway robbery, forgery, defaulting, embezzlement, etc., and, generally speaking, the disgrace involved is apt to be in inverse proportion to the amount of property dishonestly appropriated. Such methods of dishonesty as these are crimes in the eyes of the law, and are likely to involve the offender in imprisonment and disgrace. But if a man by reason of superior sagacity or wealth, or if a number of men by uniting and conspiring together, can manage to evade the law and its penalties, while they appropriate to their own uses the property rights—present or prospective—of others, their action assumes in the eyes of many people a very different character, and they are judged with a very different judgment from that which is accorded to those who stand as criminals before the law. We apprehend, however, that in harmony with the principles on which God judges the world, the man who acts and the man who conspire under the cover of law, to despoil their fellowmen of what is theirs in right, are as really and criminally dishonest as are the sneak thieves, the burglars, the highwaymen, the defaulters, embezzlers, or any of those who carry on their dishonesty in defiance of law. The man who runs recklessly into debt, borrowing money and getting credit on this side and on that, living all the time far beyond his honest means, and by and by making an assignment with the purpose of protecting himself and his friends, while scores of creditors are made to suffer the consequence of his reckless extravagance—such a man is no less essentially dishonest, than the man who forges a check or robs a bank.

The familiar saying that corporations have no

souls, is more true to facts than complimentary to the essential honesty of mankind. Over a good many gateways in our modern business world, it might well be written—"Renounce all moral sense who enter here." Few things in the moral world are more remarkable than the contrast between some men's conduct in their ordinary personal relations with society, and that which they will do or endorse as members of a business corporation. Outside the limits of the corporation, a man may appear to have a fairly healthy moral sense, while within those limits his conscience seems as dead as Julius Caesar. One might have some trouble in finding, even within the walls of a penitentiary, a man with a conscience so tough that he could go around to the huts and wretched tenements of the very poor, and take, by stealth or force, a part of their little stores—the barest necessities of life to them—gathering here a pound of flour, there a pint of oil or a peck of coal, in order that he might add them to his own already abundant provision. But many a man, eminently respectable in social and even religious circles, finds it possible to be part and parcel of a corporation which employs its great wealth and influence to effect a corner in wheat, or to raise above their legitimate level the price of oil or of coal, thus robbing every consumer, rich or poor, and laying under tribute every poor widow's barrel of meal and cruse of oil, in order to swell to still more gigantic proportions the fortunes of millionaires.

It is surely important that public opinion, and especially Christian public opinion, should regard all dishonest appropriation of property in its true light, no matter what the methods may be by which the dishonesty is accomplished. There are far too many Christian people who seem to think it is quite legitimate for a man to get all the money he can secure, by any methods which are not likely to land him within the four walls of a prison. And there is, we fear, far too prevalent a disposition to esteem men for their wealth and to applaud them for their apparently generous gifts to benevolent objects, with very little respect to the question as to whose wealth it properly is that feeds the springs of their generosity. It is to be considered that a gift has no less power to blind the eyes of men today than it had in the days of Solomon. It is surely the duty of ministers of the gospel, and all who occupy the position of moral and religious teachers, to see clearly and to speak clearly in regard to this subject. Emphasis should be laid upon the fact that dishonesty which proceeds by indirect methods, no matter what forces or wealth and respectability it may have at its back, is no less a crime against society and no less offensive to God, than the commonest and meanest kinds of dishonesty.

Divine Admonitions.

Our Lord's precept in reference to censorious judgment, with which the Bible lesson for the current week opens, is probably not less appropriate and applicable to the world's condition today than it was when it was spoken. How apt we are, even we who call ourselves Christians, to impute wrong motives to our fellow men, and harshly to condemn both their conduct and their character, forgetting that it is impossible for us to know all about the motives and the circumstances of others, and that only he who does know all is competent to pronounce judgment. It is a most serious consideration that as men judge others so shall they themselves be judged. No man is accepted before God on the ground of his self-righteousness. It is the humble and the contrite heart that finds acceptance and obtains mercy. The man who is so filled with the sense of his own excellence as to be blind to his sins, naturally thinks himself competent to pronounce judgment on other men whose sins are perhaps of a kind "he has no mind to." But the man unto whom God has regard, the man of a contrite heart who trembles at the divine word—if he shall set himself up to be a judge of other men, it will be only in some moment when he has forgotten what manner or spirit he is of. Let us not forget that it was against the sin of self-righteousness that our Lord uttered his strongest condemnations.

The second paragraph of the lesson teaches another truth. To refrain from judgment in the sense of our Lord's precept, does not mean—not to discriminate at all between the good and the evil, the humble and the haughty, the clean and the unclean. The holy things are not to be given to dogs, and

pearls are not to be cast before swine. Men who are living an outwardly godless life, are not to be treated as though they were holy, men who proclaim by their manner of life and speech that their desires are for the things that are sensual and devilish, must not be expected to appreciate spiritual discourse, or to share the Christian's joy in a heavenly inheritance. The gospel's message to all men—even the vilest—is a message of love and hope. But it is first of all a message of repentance, and to treat the godless and impenitent as if he were an obedient child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, is to profane the holy things of God, and that without benefit to those who wickedly and brutally tramp them beneath their feet.

The third paragraph of the lesson assures the believer of the loving kindness of God, and adds a precept—well called the Golden Rule—for the government of men in their relations to each other. Our Lord encourages his disciples to expect great things, and forbids them to fear that the best gifts God can bestow will be withheld from them. Ask, seek, knock, be earnest, be importunate. To the soul that truly and earnestly seeks for good, the door into the wealth of God's kingdom is sure to be opened. There is no prayer unanswered. No one really seeks in vain. And why? Because God is "Father," and even the poor, weak, human heart of man bears certain testimony to the truth, that a father will not mock his children's hunger by giving them stones for bread, or shame and outrage their filial trust with gifts of serpents and scorpions. To believe that God will not surely bestow good in answer to the prayer of his hungering children, is to interpret God as being less worthy of love and admiration than man himself. And because God is ideally, and would be really, to every man his Father in heaven, therefore let men put themselves in harmony with the divine character and purpose, by being the dutiful children of God and in the fullest sense brethren to each other; "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them."

The last paragraph of the lesson contains an emphatic admonition to earnestness and strong, well-defined purpose in the religious life. We must not think that, because God is infinitely good and able to bless, and the Father in heaven is more willing than any earthly parent to give good gifts to his children, it only remains for us to drift along the path of least resistance into everlasting bliss. Men do not drift into eternal life. To go with the current in this world is to go to destruction. God will give all things to his children, but he will give only to earnest souls, to those who pray. It is those who hunger and thirst after righteousness who shall be filled. Eternal life is found by those alone who are so earnest in their quest that they are willing to seek it along a straitened way, and by a gate so narrow that it will admit no one of greater proportions than the man of humble and contrite heart.

Editorial Notes

—In the course of his speech on the budget in reply to Hon. Mr. Foster, Sir Richard Cartwright is reported as making the proposition to Mr. Foster, that instead of each of them sending out his own speech to his own constituents, they should each send both of the speeches together. To this proposal Mr. Foster is reported to have responded laughingly, "All right." Perhaps neither of the honorable gentlemen was very serious in the matter, but the proposition is certainly one that might be adopted with great propriety by our parliamentary debaters, and especially so if the franking privilege is to be employed to convey to the several constituencies the campaign literature first exploited on the floors of the House of Commons. By all means send both sides of the story, that the electors may be in an intelligent position to judge as to the validity of the claims of rival politicians and rival politics, and the value of the argument by which these claims are supported.

—All accounts go to show that at the battle of Paardeburg and in the attack upon the Boer camp, which resulted in the surrender of Cronje and his force, the men of the Canadian Contingent made a name for themselves as soldiers, of which they and the Dominion have a right to feel proud. It was after a forced night march of 23 miles that they arrived at Paardeburg, and worn out as they were, and with little or nothing to eat, they were ordered into action. In, under such circumstances, men who had never before been under fire had shown something less than the disciplined bravery of veterans, they might well have been excused, but it does not appear that a man of them faltered, and the courage they displayed was of a kind to win praise

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