

The Plumbline.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "WHISPERING LEAVES"

Written for the Review.

"Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A Plumbline."—Amos vii: 8.

We all know a plumbline. It consists of a cord with a piece of lead or other heavy substance attached to one end so that when it is suspended by the other end it is always perpendicular. (Thanks to Gravitation.) On account of its simplicity and accuracy it has been used by carpenters and masons as a standard. By it they test their work.

We all have standards, correct or otherwise, by which we judge of all things. We *must* have them because all human knowledge is relative. God alone knows things *absolutely*. The solar system illustrates. When little children we think the sun goes round the earth. Then we learn that the earth goes round the sun. We may then imagine that we know the exact course of the earth in space. We know its orbit about the sun, its course from the standpoint of the sun; but the sun and the planets are all the while sweeping through space with a velocity inconceivable. So of all things we judge from a human standpoint. We use standards. We have the unit of value, the unit of capacity, the unit of weight, the unit of distance. In judging of actions we must use some standard. Do we use honest ones? Do we not often measure ourselves in our neighbor's half-bushel? Or them in ours? Paul knew such people, who, "measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves with themselves, are without understanding."

To illustrate. We have heard, or at least read, of those who buy new dresses and hats not because they need them at all, but because their neighbors have new ones. Young men have seen respectable men smoking a cigar and they think they too must sport this toy of Satan. Speak to that man in business about some crooked dealings. Perhaps he will tell you, "I don't profess much but there is a Christian merchant across the street, and I am as 'square-going' as he." Whose half-bushel are all these using? God's? or man's fixed over by the devil?

Every one of us is a builder. Even the boys and girls are building. Every act and every word are bricks or stones cemented by our thoughts into the wall of character. Are we then building for life? no, no, for *eternity*. Think of it. *For eternity*. As the fire "fixes" the china of the potter, so death "fixes" our character. (See Rev. xii: 11). My dear friend, what are you building? May God with the sun glass of His Holy Spirit burn this thought into our hearts—*building for eternity*.

"Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not its goal,
Dust thou art, to dust returnest
Was not spoken of the soul."

How soon our destiny may be "fixed"! In building let us use God's plumbline—the blessed Book we call the Bible.

By this plumbline we will be judged. Amos saw the Lord standing on the wall with a plumbline in His hand. Thank God, we will not be judged by our neighbors; for who could stand? And yet—O, think of that all seeing eye (Ps. cxxxix, Heb. iv. 13) He knows even our *secret* sins. If we cannot stand the test, eternally reprobate (Ps. xxviii: 16, 17). O God, have mercy. Who can escape? God can be just and yet justify the sinner that puts his confidence in Jesus.

We all have God's plumbline. Is it in our homes for ornament or use? We do not know the Bible as we ought but we *know* it better than we *live* it. How we love to hold it up along side some one else! Satan often turns aside the arrow of truth by this thought, "that is for so and so." We ought to ask, is that not for *me*? Cannot I learn and profit by it? Some souls are lost by their generosity. They give away the kernel of God's truth to others, and they keep the hull. They give away the gem of application and keep the casket of abstract truth.

We should apply the plumbline to every part of the wall of life. Some use it only where they are "plumb." Does not this please us all? It leads to "ease in Zion." May God help us to see our shortcomings and our transgressions. Our prayer and effort should continually be to use the plumbline honestly and at every part. We need to take it always with us in our hearts and minds. There is more need for it in the kitchen than in the parlor, in our work than in our worship. We have read of "company manners." When visitors are in everything is lovely and the little children are "angels" lacking only the wings. But when the visitors close the door on the outside, what a change! The calm gives way suddenly to a storm. Kind words flee before harsh ones and perhaps things more substantial. Some people have Sabbath morals. They are angels in church and perhaps all

Sabbath, but on Monday how human! Their grace is laid away with their Sunday suit.

What would we think of a mason that left his plumbline home? Yet do we not often do so spiritually? We glance at a chapter in the morning—to see what the plumb is—and then forget all about its teachings until our duties for the day are done. We need it coiled up in the pocket of our heart, ever ready for use. May it keep us from doing *mean* things, from slighting our work, from the disorderliness of passion. The one that yields to anger is as intemperate as the drunkard in the gutter.

The material of the wall is of the utmost importance. God can see through white-wash. (Matt. xxiii. 27). The fire will burn up the stubble of earthly pleasures. Let us use only the gold and precious stones of kind acts and loving words. (1 Cor. iii. 12-15). Let us not murmur if the Great Master Workman transforms some diamond found "in the rough" in our character into the "brilliant" by turning upon us the painful wheel of trials.

More important still is the *foundation*. Imagine a man building a beautiful house upon a bog! Many build their souls upon the bog of self or of the world. Nothing on earth can support the weight of a human soul. It outweighs the universe. Unsupported by God it sinks into hell. (Matt. vii. 24). In this we see the difference in the eternal prospects of a Christian and of a person equally moral but *not* a Christian. There is one foundation. (1 Cor. iii. 11.)

The longer we build the more we see our need of help. Even the plumbline is swayed by a breeze. So even the plummet of God's truth is perverted by the winds of policy and of passion. Rev. John Milne aptly said "A young Christian thinks he knows everything. He advances a little way, and finds that he knows not the half of what he thought he knew. At last he says, 'I know nothing as I ought to know.' He begins to fight with the idea that nothing can overcome him. He ends with the conviction that anything will throw him down without Christ's grace."

The coral islands are composed of minute skeletons. At first the coral is porous, defective; but the ocean gradually transforms it into a crystalline mass. If our life is hid with Christ in God, if our character is buried in the ocean of God's love it will be transformed from its defective nature into crystalline perfectness. Then by the grace of God we will be even worthy of a place in His glorious temple of redeemed souls.—A. W. LEWIS.

The Furnishing of the Mind.

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Every one who thinks shall speedily reach the position of Bildad the Shuhite, who said, "We are but of yesterday, and know nothing." Our minds, armed as they are, with faculties, need something to act upon, something to use. The mind is the potter, but it needs clay to work with. It is the painter, but it requires colors and brushes to display its inborn feeling and fancy. It is the weaver, but it must have a loom and material to employ its skill with, and declare its thought. It is the musician, but it can do nothing without the reed or the harp or the organ, whereby it may express its thronging imaginations.

Dr. McCoah tells us that "Our faculties are in the first instance mere capacities with a tendency to act. They are infants in the form of a seed, a germ or worm, and need to be cherished in order to grow and be useful. They are all capable of being trained and should be trained, and education, private and public should undertake the work." These faculties are trained by actual engagement upon something for which they are peculiarly fitted. A practical education is the best of all: one in which experiment leaves its residuum of fact as a furnishing for the mind. Among the various methods in vogue for plenishing the mind with material it may use in the putting forth of its activity I would suggest the wise storing of choice selection.

We all know that thought grows by slow and gradual accretions: portions picked up here and there; bits got now and again. Very seldom does a whole field of light lie open to our view; more frequently is it a pencil of light that pierces the darkness, and touches us like an arrow. Let a man read a book, and he does not take it all in. He may follow the reasoning and take in the argument, but it may not all abide with him; only this point and the other, remain with him, because he was specially prepared for them—his mind had an affinity for them. Let a man listen to a public oration constructed so as to enlighten and impress and carry conviction, and what does he carry away? The whole of it? No. Only a few selections. Even in minds that are trained and cultured this is the case.

The bread of thought is broken up and divided among the crowd. Hence, the mode of choosing memorable and beautiful passages, such as is pursued in our "School Readers," and in Recitation books is a wise one; and every way a profitable one,