

PAPER ON THE SEVENTH QUERY,

Read at Benjaminville Monthly Meeting.

"Are Friends careful to live within the bounds of their circumstances, and to avoid involving themselves in business beyond their ability to manage? Are they just in their dealings, and punctual in complying with their engagements? and when any give reasonable grounds for fear in these respects, is due care extended to them?"

In the contemplation of this query, as in some, and perhaps most of the others, there is scope for differing opinions. We view these things from such different standpoints. There are three standards from which this query might, perhaps, profitably be considered—Christian, intellectual and financial. And if it were discussed under either of these headings by several persons, their views, in detail, would be quite diverse. However, as this query belongs to a Society based upon a spiritual religion—exemplified by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ—it is proper that it be considered from a Christian standpoint. I take it that the "circumstances," mentioned in the query, refer mainly to financial condition. We are living in a fast age; everything over which man has control or influence, especially that which tends toward worldly fame and wealth, is being pushed forward with feverish rapidity; and in the strife for ascendancy many fail to count the cost, and financial embarrassment or ruin is the result. We read that there are diversities of gifts; one may be endowed with the gift for accumulating property, and in proportion to his prosperity he lives. The world says that is all right; he has a right to do with his own as he will. But aside from the charity he might worthily bestow by simple and plain living, do we not often see his neighbor, lacking the necessary executive ability or foresight requisite to financial prosperity, unduly influenced to live beyond his circumstances? We say he has no

right to yield to that craving for the honor of mankind. The flesh is weak. No ambitious person, especially the young, likes to see his or her neighbor or friend outstripping them. One cannot see why he has not as good a right to venture an investment or speculation as his friend. Then, here comes the need for prayerful study of ourselves, and an earnest seeking for Divine light in all our undertakings. That light and wisdom comes not in the fiery excitement of wild speculations; or the clamor for applause; but as we yield to the Divine Immanence, we are filled with a quiet peacefulness, enabling us to use our reasoning powers, illuminated by the Prince of Peace, the Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God! I feel to say in regard to incurring indebtedness: that while it seems necessary for many to do business on a partial credit system, a debt should never be contracted, unless, in the light given at the time, the way is clear to discharge the obligation. Sometimes unusual failures in productions, or depreciation in values, destruction by fire, flood, wind, etc., render it impossible to fulfill financial engagements. While these make it impossible for us to manage our business prosperously unaided by our friends or an extension of time, I do not think it a violation of the spirit of the query. Infinite wisdom alone is perfect.

"Are Friends just in their dealings?" In a religious sense Webster defines "just,"—"living in exact conformity to the Divine will." Here, again, according to the Quaker faith, we are left to the light of the Divine presence in the individual heart. Then, why do we see so much diversity of opinion as regards the justice of our dealings with one another, by those professing to conform to the Divine will? And these diverse views are verified by individual action. Note the definition: It is not professing, it is *living in exact conformity*,—perfect obedience, which condition has never been attained by any, save Jesus. Then, in proportion