

Homely Virtues.

BY IAN MACLAREN.
STRAIGHTNESS.

It seems a far cry from the fifteenth Psalm to a modern exchange, and the circumstances of the East long before Christ, and of the West in our day, are very different. Yet it is a suggestive fact that the moral judgment of the Jewish psalmist and a Western merchant agree to the letter upon the description of a man of honor. No doubt the psalmist, with his genius for religion, states the case for decision after a more impressive fashion—"Lord, who shall abide in Thy Tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy Holy Hill?" and the merchant would rather ask, in our secular form of speech, "Is he the right kind?" It is natural for the Jew to inquire who is fit for fellowship with God, and natural for the Anglo-Saxon to ask who is fit for fellowship with men. But it comes to the same thing in the end, for if a man's morality gives him entrance to God's Tabernacle, he will be welcome in any respectable human society; but if a man be cast out on moral grounds from such society, he may not hope to dwell in God's Holy Hill. The Old Testament writer would call his ideal man righteous, which is one of the lordly words of human speech, and we, in our anxiety to keep clear of cant, would prefer to sum him up as straight, but let us understand that this familiar term, handed about among old and young, religious and non-religious, is simply the homely equivalent of righteous. An idea, like a soldier, has its parade uniform and its working dress, and straight is the undress of righteous. Righteousness in the Old Testament is not a theological, but an ethical word, and has to do, not with a person's creed, but with a person's character. The righteous man of the Psalms is the righteous man the world over, in every exchange, every club, every society, every workshop. And in calling righteousness by the name of straightness, we have acclimatised this noble quality in the speech of modern life.

There are two types of men, and by their comparison we can remind ourselves what is meant by straight. There is the man who may be clever and interesting, and good-natured, and even, in a sense, pious, but on whom you may not depend. If you ask him an inconvenient question, he will prevaricate in his answer, and you will find that his words have a double meaning, so that while you wait for him at the front end, as you suppose, only door of the house, he has sneaked out at the back door. If you make a bargain with him, it will be your wisdom to have his proposal in black and white without delay, since the chances are, if the market goes against him, he will assure you, with many a profession of regret, that you misunderstood his figure. When goods are delivered by this man, it is absolutely necessary to verify every quality by the sample, since through some carelessness on the part of his people, an inferior value is apt to be sent. If he asks for assistance in some emergency, you may take it for granted that his affairs are much worse than he has told you; and if he succeeds in borrowing money, he will have a hundred excuses for not repaying it. Should his firm be compelled to stop payment, very strong remarks indeed will be made upon the condition of his books; and if he becomes bankrupt, the chances are he will be refused a discharge. When he plunges into a controversy, he will misquote his opponent's words, or wrench them out of their context; and when he played games at school he came as near cheating as he could. He is tricky, shifty, smooth-tongued, double-faced, not straight.

Over against him there is the man who may be plain in manner and blunt of speech, and slow in understanding, and who perhaps, may make no profession of religion, but who can be depended upon at all times, in every word he speaks and in everything he does. His smile may not be so taking, nor his style so plausible, but he looks you in the face, and his words have the accent of sincerity. He means what he says and he says what he means, and if you quote him you will never be left in the lurch. He may be long in coming to a decision, and he may be hard in a bargain. When the bargain is made, whether by word or mouth or a nod of the head, just as much as by a letter which has been copied, he will stand by it, though he lose his last penny. He will not whine about his losses, for they are the fortune of war, nor will he brag about his honesty, for he expects that to be taken for granted. If you have to meet him in debate he may press you hard, and be very keen in his views, but he will always deal fairly with you, looking for the sense of what you said, and not taking any advantage of the words. If he has a quarrel with you he will have it out with you face to face, and would scorn to slander you behind your back. He also may be unable some day to pay his debts, and that will be the bitterest trial of his life; well, he will work night and day to regain his prosperity, and then he will pay his creditors, every one, with interest. Never was he known to make a capital out of any doubtful point in a game, for, though he was eager to win, he was still more determined to win like a sportsman. And this is what we mean by a straight man.

There are many things for which one may fairly

criticise the world, and by that I mean the people who do not profess to be religious; but let us freely acknowledge that they have at least one good quality, and that is an honest appreciation of straightness. The man who cheats at a game, who goes back upon a bargain, who shirks the post of danger, who filches away another doctor's patient, who exposes a woman's frailty, who brings up the catastrophe in a man's private life, is despised and cast out by the world. The pariah of the world is a sneak, and for him there is no more mercy than for a rat. Upon the other hand, while one firmly believes that the Church of Christ sets upon the whole an example of unparalleled virtue, yet one is haunted with the feeling that the church has not always laid enough stress upon righteousness, in the Old Testament sense of the word, and that she has given the idea the cold shoulder. She has enforced the commandments which touch on piety and on purity, she has not given so clear a sound upon the commandments of truthfulness. If any man denied the creed or if any man was a gross evil-liver, the church, except in her worst times, would deal strictly with him; but if he were simply dishonest and disingenuous, mean and tricky, she has been apt to leave him alone, so that he came to feel that she did not care, and his own conscience was lowered. Perhaps one might go further, and say that crookedness has been a religious sin and has almost had the sanction of the church, although it has ever received the manifest judgments of God. Abraham was the father of the faithful and a noble type of religion, but Abramam lied to Pharaoh, just with that kind of lie which finds its shelter beneath the shadow of religion. He played upon words, saying that Sarah was his sister, which, in a sense, she was, but allowing Pharaoh to understand that she was not his wife, which of course she was. It was not a downright falsehood, but a guarded and calculated departure from the truth, a policy in which the religious conscience has shown itself an adept. There is a kind of man who will not drink, nor swear, who believes in the deity of Christ and the eterna punishment of the wicked, but who has no more idea of personal honor than a fox, and will do things at which a high-class man of the world would be aghast. We are inclined sometimes to think that if a man be religious, he must be straightforward, and if he be straightforward he must be religious. But we have leaped too hastily to a conclusion, for there are people with a genuine sense of religion who are as crooked as a corkscrew, and there are people who would never dream of calling themselves religious, but yet they are as straight as a die. As, for instance, Jacob in the one class, and in the other such a man as the Duke of Wellington among Englishmen, and Abraham Lincoln among Americans.

Nothing has brought such scandal on religion in public life as the dishonesty of a certain kind of religious people who will call themselves by the name of Christ, and take part in religious meetings, and set themselves up as censors of morals, but who betray the trust of poor investors, and bring banks to ruin, and start bogus companies, and make discreditable bankruptcies, and obtain the possession of the means of relatives and trustful people, and who turn out bad work, so that every decent man condemns them, and, when they are not cunning enough, the law fortunately lands them in prison. With their mixture of Phariseism and duplicity, with their cant and their lying, such people are a reproach and a byword, and are ever being fung in our faces. While they are praying and preaching, young men are declaring everywhere that it is because of them they are not Christians. If the Old Testament gospel of morality had been more stringently preached, the church would not have been cursed with the presence of men who have dared to speak for her, but whom neither God in His Holy Hill, nor the world in her market-places, can tolerate, because they do not walk uprightly nor work righteously.

Nor has the church as an historic body established so high a claim as one would like for straightforwardness. Why is it that priests have earned so bad a name, and been so keenly hated by the people? Why has one order been expelled from nearly every country in Europe, and has often brought cruel persecutions upon its fellow Christians? It were a slander to say that all priests are bad, since many have been men of singular devotion and of vast sacrifices; but it is a fact that, as a class, priests have been less than straight. They have used words in a double sense; they have practised the doctrine of reserve; they have invented astounding excuses for falsehood; they have brought casuistry to the height of a science. One of their chief characteristics has been that rat-like cunning which Browning illustrates in the priest of the "Ring and the Book." Whether called priests or not, all ecclesiastics are tempted to be crafty and diplomatic. They make up catching motions; they devise subtle schemes of policy; they are afraid of exciting prejudices; they are fond of ambiguous words. Certainly no one has ever said that they were simple and guileless. There are fair grounds for saying that while the church has taken the intellectual falling of heresy and made it into a sin, she has condoned the moral falling of trickery and almost raised it to a virtue.

Has it ever happened to us to have a dispute, say, about a statement we have made, or about a matter of business, or about family affairs, or even about a game with a man of the world, and he told us plainly that we had acted dishonorably? Not illegally—which is a different matter, and has to be tried by a different standard—but dishonorably, as between man and man, when tried by the working code of straightness. If he was wrong, it was a bitter moment that he should have thought so badly of us; but if he was right, was it not ghastly? What did we do in that moment when the light was suddenly turned on in the cellar of our souls, and we saw the loathsome creatures of darkness making for their holes? Did we acknowledge our sin to man and God, or did we try to justify ourselves, and afterwards—which is the cheapest thing that we could do—pretend that we were martyrs for religion's sake? When Pharaoh told Abraham to his face that he was a liar, it was one of the lamentable paradoxes in the history of religion, for in that hour Pharaoh stood higher than Abraham before the conscience of men and in the sight of God.

If anyone be conscious that he has a taint of crookedness in his blood, and that he is inclined to play tricks; if he has already been exposed and put to shame because he did not speak the truth, and his hands were not clean, let him face the situation and bestir himself. There is nothing but contempt and humiliation in store for the dishonorable man at the hands of the world, nothing but self-reproach and self-loathing within his own soul. His own wife, try as she may, will not be able to respect him, and his children, as one thing after another becomes plain to them, will be ashamed of him. And whatever he believes, and however he prays, there can be no welcome for him with God, who is the fountain of truth and righteousness. The thoughts of men are often foolish, and their judgments vain; but, after all, they honor straightness. The ways of God are often dark and past finding out, but of one thing we may be sure, the blessing of God rests upon righteousness, both in this world and in that which is to come.—The British Weekly.

The Signals of the Spirit.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER, D. D.

It is well for our churches to realize their entire dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Without his presence and his power, all efforts for the salvation of souls will be fruitless; all the best constructed church-machinery will accomplish nothing, unless it have "the living spirit within the wheels." To watch for the Holy Spirit and to work with the Holy Spirit is the supreme duty of the hour. An incident in New Testament history illustrates this vital point.

When the Philistines were about to attack the armies of Israel, God commanded David to "fetch a compass behind the Philistines and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going (or a rustling) in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself, for the Lord shall then go out before thee." That peculiar sound was the signal for advance. It was the token of the divine presence. David heard and obeyed the signal. When God moved, he moved, and the result was a glorious victory. This unique incident is full of practical suggestion. Faith must always watch Providential leadings, and when God moves is our best time to "bestir ourselves;" if we move with him, success is quite sure to come; if we move without him, then the failure is our own fault. How clearly was the divine signal manifested to that little company in the upper room at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost! The Holy Spirit came upon them and the Apostles fell into line with the Spirit's leadings; they co-operated with the Spirit, and thousands were converted in a single day.

If the history of the most powerful revivals is studied this same truth appears—the signals of the Divine Spirit were recognized, and they were obeyed. God opened the way, and his servants bestirred themselves to special effort and redoubled prayers. Not more plainly does God indicate seed-time and harvest-time to the farmer than he often indicates to pastors and churches that the time has come for them to thrust in the sickle and reap. The biographies of such master-workmen as Dr. Lyman Beecher, Dr. Spencer of Brooklyn, Dr. Edward N. Kirk, Mr. Finney and Mr. Moody contain repeated illustrations. Dr. Lyman Beecher watched for tokens of the Holy Spirit as a sea-captain watches for a favorable wind, and when he feels the first rustling of the breeze through the rigging he hastens to spread his canvas. I have no doubt that God has often given gracious indications of his presence, when human indolence or unbelief has failed to observe them. Our loving God was ready; his servants were not obedient to duty, and the cloud passed away without rain.

Seasons of spiritual awakening often come suddenly in a congregation, or in a community; sometimes they come as a blessed surprise, but the measure of success is always the measure of the readiness of Christians to co-operate with the Holy Spirit. When the Master works, we must work; every hour then is golden. My own

experience a without any ple talked, lo outpouring of special awak versions to confidently p followed and ever I disco of the Hol have felt su should be m The "sound Spirit's signi ministry in a woman at my was under d prayer-servi hurried sum with a most pouring of the reminded me G. Finney in During my the course of earnest inqu called my ch ings for every inquirers. T memorabl Brooklyn, in house. We for three mo number ran praying and assistance. Now there has been the ever a min presence of with the Spi victory is c mortification set in motio penable fact the results o Faith must p signals of th God have hi must be all t

There are in living, th Kinglake to life less toil citizens. O from those of the mountai hate to retur hills"; "O summer, we "Had it not would have enjoyed the beautiful fol eons and clu say others earlier than seemed so sl able, and we It is evid later and lat nature and doors," as that the co requirement were heretic years ago, some far-aw They grew t time which such a favo of his friend ber of atten himself on words: "C parts of ten wish yourse growing us my natural grow worse know what dress myself in my plaita Browning winter in L being lionis kept him fr