

are thinking of men and women who are taking the guiding and fashioning of their life into their own hands; and we are reminding them of the solemn responsibility involved in their friendships and intimate acquaintances. We are continually helping to make others even as we are perpetually being made by others. We may not be always able entirely to escape from the influences which we know to be hurtful; but we may at least avoid them when we can, and we may watch against their power. A slight amount of care may prevent the poison entering into our system, when it would require a great strength of constitution to cast it out.

The fashioning of the life and character is a process that goes on as long as life endures. Indeed we may, perhaps, suggest that something similar will be continued through man's endless existence. It is true indeed that the more important part of this work is done in our youth, or when we are comparatively young. Here, of course, as we have said, a considerable portion of the work is done for us by others. But it is a mistake to suppose that the formation of character terminates with our childhood. It is indeed a matter of great difficulty to eradicate qualities which have become confirmed in us by long practice ending in confirmed habits, but it is quite certain that character is greatly modified in men after the period of youth, nay that it is fundamentally changed, that great crises occur in which the character receives a new bent, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse.

There are cases, alas! not few, of deterioration. Sometimes a character becomes debased by evil influences even after a man has long passed the meridian of life. But here we would practically insist on the other side of this truth. A man may be changed after he has left his boyhood and his youth behind him; and many such

have been changed from evil to good, from the world to God. Thus, men have conquered a besetting sin; and that conquest has altered the whole complexion of their lives. Men have adopted a new principal of life, have yielded themselves to God, and so have begun to live the life of grace and faith and devotion, instead of the life of nature, of worldliness, and selfishness. It has been done, and it may be done again. It generally involves a very hard struggle, but it is not impossible, and it receives great and special help and blessings from God.

May we not add that our sense of the greatness of this work will be intensified when we remember that it is done not merely for time but for eternity. We do not undervalue the life of man on earth, still less would we speak as though the divine life were only for the future. We are now the sons of God, if ever we are to be so. The Divine life is as truly lived on earth as in Heaven. Yet surely we who believe in immortality may rightly and reasonably consider the scope of our existence as reaching onwards into the unseen and the eternal. And there is no chasm between the present and the future, there is no break in the continuity of a man's life and character. What is meant by this? "God will judge every man according to his works." Does it mean that every act of a man's life will be enumerated, scrutinized, pronounced upon? It is not likely. But, whether this be so or not, one thing is certain, that our works make our character, and our character will determine our position for ever. Every man will go to his own place. It is the law of man, of nature, of the universe—"Whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." It may be well that everyone of us should consider whether we are such as we should desire to be when the fire of the Divine judgment shall try every man.