

some people that they are the heart and soul of every enterprise. Transferred from the bodily frame to man's moral and personal life—the life of reflection, of conscience, of free choice, of spiritual emotion, of formed character—we never doubt but that strange inner life also has its central point—its heart. My moral and religious being is quite as complex as my bodily frame; but it forms quite as strict a unity. I am one person, whole and indivisible. There must be a point (whether metaphysicians can put their finger on it or not, where all the moral currents of my nature centre—all the varied influences which tell on character—all impulses or emotions, prompting to act—all the principles which guide or restrain action—all the wayward and conflicting forces which successively sway me in this direction or in that. Deep down at the root and focus of human character lies that mysterious, responsible self—that “I myself”—which constitutes me a person, not a thing; and out from that true radical seat of the personal life spring forth and flow all the streams of conduct which fill up my daily existence.

In asking for our heart, therefore, God asks leave to control our character and personal life from within, from its moral centre. And the words I have just quoted from our Lord remind us that, from the very nature of sin, no regeneration of us was possible which did not restore the rule of God and the love of goodness at the centre or heart of our character. Whatever is bad in conduct is no more than a symptom; the seat of our moral malady lies deep, in what we are, not in what we do. This is the point at which every shallow plan of reform stumbles over the facts. Men cannot do well till they are made well: make the tree good, and the fruit will grow better of itself. Our Father, therefore, goes straight to the key of the whole position, when He asks, as One Who asks a concession which concedes everything—asks One Who cannot reform us until He gets this concession—that His fallen child should lay once more in the parental hand the very spring of his being; to let that hand which made, remake. It is regeneration which we all need, not reformation: it is new life working from the heart outwards.

Besides, if God be our Father, it is reasonable that the tie between us should be of this personal sort—a heart-tie. Between parent and child, any colder or more exterior relationship cannot be suitable or satisfactory. It cannot suffice this Father, any more than it would an earthly one, that the son yield a formal observance in certain outward acts of respect or courtesies of address. It cannot be enough to consult Him in a few great emergencies as you might a stranger, hear with decent show of attention what He has to say, do now and then some small thing to please Him, but at bottom shut yourself up from any closer or more confiding or more affectionate intercourse, and allow Him no real voice in your private affairs. Nay, it is just this banishing of God out of our heart to the circumference and outside of life which is the “head and front of our offending.” This is what has opened the heart to the sway of bad passions, and turned it into a very fountain of Marah, embittering and desolating all our life. The first condition of our becoming again holy and happy men is that the dishonoured Father gets His rightful position in the throne of the affections and the will; that He become once more Lord of the heart, our confident, and the controller of all the secret springs, both of character and of conduct. “My son”—is His inevitable request—“Give Me thine heart.”

A good deal, if not all, of what I have now said, could have been said by a devout Hebrew before Christ; for earnest men of God always knew (as you learn from the Psalter, for example) that the very inmost being of a good man needs to be wholly formed and possessed by God's grace. “Create in me a clean heart, O God,” is their prayer. “Thy word have I hid in my heart,” is their profession. “The law of his God is in his heart,” is their description of a righteous man. Still, we ought to understand better than they what is really meant by giving one's heart to God as to a Father in heaven, for we see Jesus Christ. Of such heart-surrender as God insists on, and of its happy consequences, Jesus is the unapproachable instance. That instance we are free to study. That instance we are free to imitate. If you and I will approach God through the blood of Christ, as sons redeemed in Christ, our relationship to Him will be moulded, not so much on that of devout men of old, but on that of the Incarnate Only Begotten Son Himself. For ours is the adoption and the spirit of sonship in Christ Jesus. God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts. Consider, therefore, how the Lord Jesus, in His pious walk with God

as with a Father, yielded up that to heavenly Friend His entire heart. Consider the inwardness of His fellowship with God. Remember how the band betwixt them was one of pure devout love, and led to an indwelling of the invisible God with Jesus so close and perfect that, as a man on earth, He could say of God in heaven—“I and My Father are one.” Remember that, into the heart thus given to His hand in love, God poured the Holy Spirit without measure. Recall the spontaneity of service which this produced in the Saviour's life; how from the Spirit-filled well of that holy heart, held in the hand of God, no trace of impurity or ungraciousness ever issued to stain the waters of His life; no impatient idle speech—no blundering, hurtful deed. And from your adoring contemplation of that loveliest sight to be seen on earth—most worthy object of our endless study—the life of the perfect Jesus, learn what is asked of you by the same tender voice which reaches you to day: “My son, give Me your heart.”

For this voice does reach you all to-day. Once more the mighty love of the Almighty Parent presses itself tightly against your stony, stubborn heart, and seeks all round a crevice to enter by—like some great sea wave that blindly feels its way along the rock-bound shore. Once more it wooes you to be God's genuine child, and let your Father's Spirit in. “See how I have loved, and given My heart to thee in Christ—for thee, to be pierced and broken. My child, My long-lost, long-sought-for child of many sorrows, give Me—give Me now at last thine heart!”

It were your wisdom, dear brothers and sisters, to yield to that heavenly voice. For we see, in the case of Jesus, how true, noble manhood, the ideal of human virtue, is only possible when we children of men give ourselves up to be willing children of God. There is nothing worth your flinging your heart away on, of meaner preciousness than the Eternal God above you. And as for your own sake, so also for His, give Him your heart. It is due to Him, as He is your Maker and your Parent, true Author of that rich, deep nature of yours, with all its budding sensibilities and capacity for goodness, constant Guardian of your days, patient Educator of your manhood and womanhood. Due to Him above all, as He is become your Redeemer, reaching out after you the pierced hands of Christ, drawing you by the tender eyes of His sorrowful Son, yea, incessantly pleading through the dumb lips of Jesus' wounds: “My son, My daughter, to Me thy Father, give now thine heart.”

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AM I SUCCESSFUL?

A WORD TO SUNDAY-SCHOOL TEACHERS.

OUR Master has taken us as co-workers to life. He permits his faithful Sabbath-school teachers, aye, all who work for Him, to see a little of the results of their labours now—some more, some less—but the sum total, the final reckoning of life's work, in saving souls, and in all the sweet, saving influence of a holy life—a life of prayer and consecration—the sum of sacrifice, earnest toil and endurance in his service, he does not exhibit here; that is waiting for its showing in eternity. And so I am prepared to say to every discouraged superintendent and teacher, every worker in the vineyard of the Lord, you are successful, and that too in everything, however small, done or suffered for Jesus. Every cup of cold water, every visit to the prisoner, the sick, the poor, every mite dropped into the treasury of the Lord, in the name of a disciple, is noted by the recording angel. Every moment of earnest, prayerful study of the Sabbath-school lesson, and all the patient service in teaching—the bearing and forbearance with the wild and wayward boys, or careless and indifferent girls, and even the stupid ones (were not the disciples slow of hearing?) though you are so “weary in well-doing,” as almost to give up in despair, is success. And it is so, even if there is no apparent good. For it is the spirit and the intention at which the Master looks. But there is real good done, though you may not see it. As every rain-drop and snowflake moistens and enriches the earth, so every honest, faithful effort to instruct, enlighten, and save a soul does make an impression. And may, sooner or later, by the blessing of God, bring that soul to Christ. The “Bread cast upon the water shall return after many days,” “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy,” “He that hath sown and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again, with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” I. T. W.