

—although he does not usually wish to stop. To be a Christian is to begin and not stop; it is to put the hand to the plough, and not look back. If a man is called, in the providence of God, to begin a Christian life, in which he succeeds very well for a time, but afterwards finds clouds and darkness gathering about him, he must think only of going on, and never for a moment of going back. To return would be perilous, as well as disgraceful. If he droops and is weary in the pursuit of the right, and turns aside from the search, he is giving way to what will inevitably lead him, by and by, into still greater doubt, difficulty, and discouragement. If you give up trying now, trusting in your Christian hope to lift you, by and by, out of the marsh, upon solid ground, you will never be lifted out. The condition of your final triumph is that you are willing to struggle all the time that may be required to win it. If you find it hard now to bring your heart into obedience to Christ, what will be your later experience, when your difficulties will be greater and greater, and your strength to overcome them less and less? It never will be so easy again, as now, to persevere in the Christian life. To conform to the Christian requisition will be harder and harder, the longer you put it off. The earliest months of campaigning, of studying, of learning a trade, are the most difficult months. From this point onward the way grows smoother and easier. And in like manner, in beginning a Christian life, the chief difficulties are at the threshold.

There is a remarkable contrast in this respect, between right and wrongdoing—between virtue and vice: to do right is harder at first, than it ever will be afterwards; it grows easier and easier to the end. To do wrong, involves few difficulties at first, but more and more every day, until its end is destruction. Pleasure invites us to flowery paths only for the first part of the journey; all the rest of the way it grows less and less beautiful, and more and more dangerous. Virtue calls us, for the first few steps, over a stony road, which grows less and less rugged, and more and more easy to the end. Men enter wrong courses through the gate of sweet blandishments, but as they go on, they find that all the promises, at the beginning, were false and deceitful. The "narrow way" is entered through the "strait gate," but the path is the path of the just, and is as a shining light that shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day! The beginning of the one is fair, but its end is death. The beginning of the other is less comely, but its end is eternal life.

The early steps of a Christian life are the most rugged. The tasks of a Christian are never so severe and forbidding as at the first. The farther end of the Christian life is the easier. We begin a worldly life by going down a slope, whose first descent is easy; but as soon as we are in the valley, behold! mountains rise up on either side. We begin the Christian life by going up hill, and with hard climbing; but by and by we come to the level plains and table lands at the top, where the way is easy, where the air is pure, and where we are lifted up high above the dust, and noise, and conflict of the lower life.

Take courage, then, in the thought that your work is harder now than it