

MEASUREMENT—TRUE OR FALSE?

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Every man has his measurement which he applies to himself and to the world. Wherein these measurements approach the truth they are more like to each; but as they fall away from truth they are vastly divergent. But what is Truth? Ah! that's the question which, were it not that we have Christ's life to show us, we could never answer.

Men who have helped the progress of the world in science, commerce, politics, or letters, have stretched themselves beyond the common measurement of things, have looked away beyond the ideals of men about them in their day. But those who were content with carrying the world by storm, and so winning at once the loud applause of men, these have soon been forgotten. They have applied the wrong measurement:

"The worthlessness of common praise—
The dry-rot of the mind,
By which its temple secretly
But fast is undermin'd."

Our measure is Christ; the measure of our work Christ's life. We cannot stretch beyond that measure. It is God-given: therefore perfect.

Who is there who has not seen the little boys and girls at school stretching up a tiptoe to seem as tall as their school-mates larger grown? We would do well to practise their example, not in make-believe but in real earnest, that someday we may reach more nearly to the stature of the Christ. We cannot fill our perfect measure. But it is our duty always to aim to fill it and not to be found wanting. Perfect Christlikeness—it is the common multiple of *all* the Christ like virtues.

The comparing of ourselves among ourselves that the great apostle speaks of, may not—need not—be wholly bad, so long as it does not take the degenerate form of measuring ourselves by ourselves. That is self-esteem, which, if it be unfounded, or if it go beyond a certain limit, is a deadly thing. Comparison among ourselves, if we are honest in our purpose, may help us to interpret and apply the true standard, Jesus Christ. But, if the perfect Measure be not kept in view we cannot so rise higher than the lower ideals of men and women around us. The question, then, is not, Am I as good as so-and-so? but, Am I getting Christ into my heart and adorning His doctrine by the life I lead?

Christians! keep yourself in currency. By this I mean, keep your mind fresh, your heart active, your soul-life vigorous. This shall you do by looking alway: to the Lord Jesus Christ, putting His promises to the test of experience, copying His matchless life and practising His virtues. If you had a thousand bushels of corn stored in your granary it would do you no good to measure it up every week or two and return it to the bin. Take it to market. Put it in circulation. It may then do good in several directions. So may you do good by keeping yourself current, making your talents ring upon the counter of God's service. Here again we have questions to answer: What talents have I? What can I do, *now*, for the Lord? What have I done? What do I purpose? But the most important question to be answered is, What is God asking from me? For, rest assured, God's requirements of His children are never quite commensurate with His grace. Stand alone, if need be! You shall find sufficient grace. We look for help from those who make the like profession with ourselves. But if it comes not—stand out alone. It is easier to do one's work keyed up by sympathy. It may not come; but the sympathy of men is not all-necessary. We have the sympathy of Him who, in the crucial hour, longed in vain for His brethren's sympathy that failed Him. If you have had the like experience, "go back to work, but take with you this time unconquerable hope," and aim to fill thy measure.

OUR CHANGING MOODS.

There are not many of us who are always equable, calm, restful. Comparatively few could claim as their own that beautiful portrait which Christina Rossetti paints in one of the most exquisite stanzas of English poetry:

"We never heard her speak in haste
Her tones were sweet,
And modulated just so much
As it was meet,
Her heart sat silent through the noise
And concourse of the street,
There was no hurry in her hands,
No hurry in her feet."

With most among us the weather alters, and the seasons revolve, and we do not continue long in one stay.

Sometimes we have a springtime of promise and hope; sometimes a summer of the brightest and warmest skies, of joy unalloyed and full; occasionally an autumn of harvest and fruitage; too often a winter of cold and dearth, "a drear-nighted December." Gladness alternates in our spiritual experience with sadness, calm with storm, clear-sighted faith with utter despondency, warmth of affection for Christ with coldness and dulness. It has been so, not with us alone, but with the majority of believing souls in all the centuries. Take the Psalms, and see how every cadence is represented in their music. Take the hymns of the Christian Church, and see how gloom and glory meet together in their atmosphere. Manifestly the children of God, in whatever age or country their lot has been cast, have been men of like passions with ourselves; and they are the happy and favoured ones among them who are able to appropriate that chastened and sober confession of Andrew Bonar's *Diary*: "I have not always had bright sunshine, but I have every day had sunlight and not darkness in my soul."

When these tossings to and fro are so common and universal, there must surely be good reasons for them. Our moods vary, our minds are lifted up to-day and cast down to-morrow—why? One answer will be that such strange diversities of temperament and feeling are fitted to make us better acquainted than we could become in any other way with the manifoldness of Christ Jesus—how He meets every separate necessity of the human soul, how He rejoices with our joy and binds up our broken hearts. We can understand, too, that the alternations in the spiritual sphere of day and night, heat and cold, summer and winter, discipline and develop and ripen character; just as the storm is regarded in the natural world no less than the season of calm weather for the maturing of flower and tree, and "the useful trouble of the rain" is as essential as the clear shining which succeeds it. And our sympathy with others would, it is to be feared, be exceedingly circumscribed and defective, if it were not that, as George Fox phrased it in his own quaint style, we are ourselves "baptized into a sense of all conditions"—we are tempted like as they are, and thus we are qualified to succour them to good purpose. A final result of our hurrying and conflicting emotions should be that we learn more effectively the lesson that this is not our rest. Within the veil, in the Father's House, we shall come to the Palace Peaceable where, though feeling will survive, it will never be painful feeling. There the Lord will be with us in majesty, a place of broad rivers and streams.

There are sufficient reasons, then, as we may well believe, for the multitude of our thoughts within us. But we must never forget the peculiar dangers which beset the emotional part of our nature. It is terribly easy to put mere human sentiment, mere romance and yearning, a hasty gladness and a superficial joy, the longing for the restfulness and reward of heaven which all of us feel, the admiration we have for the peerless beauty of the man Christ Jesus, the sympathy even to tears which the sight of the Cross stirs in us—to put these in the room of the redeeming and transforming grace of God, and of the submission of mind and will and conduct to our Saviour and Lord. It is just as easy to cherish emotions which lead to no practical issues, and which are entirely idle and slothful. We all know people who dream of Dark Continents, and who neglect their suffering and sinning neighbours in the street next their own. We all understand what an effect, for a few hours or a few days, the stories told by a foreign missionary, or the impassioned appeal of an evangelist, or the reading of some sweet and melting biography, may produce on ourselves; but the impression passes, and we sit still and do nothing. It is only too easy, on the other hand, for many genuine Christians to permit their emotions to carry them into a region of almost perpetual shadow and gloom. They persist in writing bitter things against themselves. They take ten looks at their own unworthiness for one look they take at Christ's infinitude of merit and grace. This, as Dr. Oswald Dykes pointed out at the Free Church Council, was perhaps the chief defect in the noble and stalwart religion of the Puritans. But there are tender and beautiful souls amongst us in whom the defect lives on still.

Our safety, in the midst of these perils, is to give the control of our emotions, as of every department in our many-coloured life, to our Lord. If we have changes of mood and temper—changes from light to dark—let us believe