

well. Perhaps a man who behaves thus would not *tell* a lie, but he acts one, which is quite as bad, and sometimes worse.

Then there is the official lie. Of course, no one is bound to volunteer a telling of all that he knows, and reticence is often right; but when, say, an institution is charged with some questionable practices, the purely official mind often sets itself at once to throw dust in the eyes of the accuser, and to conceal defects rather than to cure them. Now, truth is "the account of things as they are," and this is the last thing some officials desire.

A man hears a thing, about a neighbour perhaps, which he cannot resist repeating, especially if it has a spice of naughtiness. So-and-so has said this or that (which probably he soon wishes had been unsaid), or done some foolish thing, as you and I have, many a time. Perhaps it could hardly be called wrong or sinful, though nothing is insignificant, and small mistakes often bring mischief, just as a slate off a house may let the rain in, and give some one a cold which leads to a dangerous illness. But the hearer of a tale, especially if he or she be a gossip or busybody, about a neighbour's stupid blunder, tells it to a friend, who in turn tells it to another, adding his or her touch to the story, until, at last, the original statement is so swollen and distorted as to convey a false impression, quite unjustified by the facts of the case. No one who has helped to hand the thing on has any intention to deceive, and yet the result is a sort of cumulative lie, made by successive talkers contributing a little flavour of exaggeration to the story as it came to their ears.

The worst of it is that this comes to pass by the exercise of a power which is sometimes useful. I mean that creative ability which gives life to a description. A man hears a thing, and then touches it, often unwittingly, with the colour of his own thoughts.

But, as I have said, this may eventually produce disastrous results, and falsely bring mischievous discredit upon the original maker of the small stupid remark, or doer of the foolish little act.

And who is to blame? The thing has grown into a lie, and every one who has thus passed the story on has helped to tell it. We are not, indeed, always bound to keep silence about the faults or foolishness of a neighbour. Social comment is often wholesome and corrective, but if we must needs repeat a tale, it should leave us as it comes, without any twist or increase of our own. That is doing as we should be done by, "for we are every one members one of another."

Sometimes it is so unpleasant to speak the truth that a man lets his good-nature get the better of his good sense. This is occasionally the case when he is asked to give a "character," or the candidate for a post begs a friend to furnish him with a written testimonial, which perhaps he prints. His friends are glad to say what they can in his favour. One contributes this, another that. The result is sometimes a testimony which announces perfection. Meanwhile, possibly, some who have contributed to it feel secret qualms about the fitness of their friend for the post he seeks. And thus many men are slow to appreciate any written testimonial; and when those who are asked to give one cannot freely speak well of a man, it is best to evade the giving of one at all. We owe a duty to those before whom it goes, "for we are every one members one of another."

As we speak truth, and act it in our lives, so we best discharge our duty to man, and are freed from the deadly harm which follows departure from the law of God.

And to be true, to understand the manifold forms of deceit, and master the many temptations to deceive ourselves or others, there is no spirit to be used but His, Who said of Himself, "I am the Truth."

