

Character and Reputation

BY J. M. FARRAR, D.D.

A MISTAKE has been made by underrating the value of reputation in its relation to character.

Character and reputation are running mates. Reputation is the pacemaker, but it is character that wins or loses the race. There is one time in every man's life when he has a pronounced reputation, but little, if any, personal character. This time we call birth. The child inherits some ethical traits, certain mental tendencies, but they must be mixed with conduct before they become character. Environment adds material for the makeup of its character. The circumstances in which a man is placed by birth have a great influence upon his character. To some it gives the character shape, "like pebbles on the shore, by the rough seas in which they have been rolled." But the real character builder is Will. By the authority and power of Will the evil tendencies of heredity and environment can be checked and placed under the restraint of law. Dr. McCosh wrote: "But these restraints will produce only a negative character, hard as the case of a shellfish. The Will may also cherish all that is good within, and getting good from without, especially from above, may seek out fields for the employment of the faculties and affections, and devote them to benevolent ends. I hold that in this way a man may form his own character, morally, with intents and ends and practical working."

While character is thus being formed reputation is of the utmost value. It is the borrowed capital with which many men make their first start in success. The reputation that is real and endures is based upon good character, but we are writing about the reputation that precedes character. This ante-character reputation is an estimate or a value that two or more persons place upon another. It is the estimate attached to an individual by the community. The mother and a few intimate friends usually start the child in life with a

Someone is reported as saying: "If I could purchase a good reputation for ten thousand dollars I would do so quickly. I would count it a good investment. I would immediately make twenty thousand out of it." This would be a wise investment for it would secure him a good position, enlarge his opportunities, and encourage him to bring up his character to the standard of his reputation.

A good reputation will secure for us a position, enlarge our opportunities, and enhance our fortunes, but if character is not brought up rapidly and kept in step with reputation there will soon be a great shrinkage in the investment. Almost every day we hear of a cashier, treasurer or some other trusted man whose lame character has failed to keep in sight of his reputation.—The World Evangel.

Let your temper be under the rule of the love of Jesus. He cannot only curb it—he can make us gentle and patient. Let the gentleness which refuses to take offence, which is always ready to excuse, to think and hope the best, mark our intercourse with all. Let our life be one of self-sacrifice, always studying the welfare of others, finding our highest joy in blessing others. And let us, in studying the divine art of doing good, yield ourselves as obedient learners to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. By His grace, the most commonplace life can be transfigured with the brightness of a heavenly beauty as the infinite love of a Divine nature shines out through our frail humanity.—Rev. Andrew Murray.

The Missing Bolt

BY REV. J. MARVIN NICHOLLS.

IT happened on one of those commercial highways that have played their part in the opening of the great Northwest.

The horrible catastrophe took place where fear of splendid engineering were in constant evidence. The belts of steel stretched themselves across a fertile valley of unsurpassed beauty. The ascent was made around awful precipices and far up the distant granite hills, through unapproachable grandeur, high up into the eternal mountains, the railway found its course. At a given point one of these royal gorges must be crossed.

For ages through this terrific rent in the earth, the restless, dashing, turbulent waters had made their way. The bed of the mountain stream had gone down until immeasurable depths had been reached. To stand on the overhanging wall and look down into the awful abyss makes one dizzy. To stand on the water's edge for an upward look reveals nothing but the stars in a far-off firmament. Amidst the sublime solitude of these everlasting hills one waits for Jehovah to break the solemn silence.

Across this mighty chasm the structure was thrown upon which were laid the threads of steel. It was a piece of wondrous skill. The day of its completion was past. The contractor delivered his work under the guarantee that the bridge would sustain any load that might be moved upon it. For years it endured the constant and excessive strain. To all appearances it was able to hold up any weight. But, by constant use and some degree of neglect, an apparently insignificant bolt lost its place in that bridge.

A great load was moved upon it. A quivering, a swaying above those awful depths, a careening, now a crash, a shriek of unspeakable horror, a pitch toward death, the dying echo far down the canyon, a passing tremor as the earth received the shock upon her bosom—and unbroken silence sets in again.

How strong was that bridge? Of what avail was all its apparent strength? How much stronger the structure than at its weakest point? Was not the measure of its strength at its point of weakness?

Ah! We must stand still until we have learned the lesson. Here's the principle that underlies the whole realm of human action. Here's the final definition of character. Here's the last statement of all that is majestic in manhood. Would that we might know the secret—the measure of strength is forever at the point of weakness. In other words, character is no stronger than at its weakest point. We know our strength of character as we discover our weaknesses.

The great apostle Paul discovered this fundamental principle: "For when I am weak, then am I strong." Not that weakness is strength, but that the very consciousness of its existence enables us to set up a defence at the very point where the entire character is in constant jeopardy. What matters all our apparent greatness? The secret sin—the real point of weakness—is the identical measure beyond which no limit of strength ever reaches.

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IN THE HAY FIELD

good reputation. Reputation rather than character has therefore first place in the child's life.

Give a child a good reputation and his outlook for a fine character is greatly enhanced. The child enlarges and ennobles his formative character by a constant effort to overtake and to keep step with his reputation. Cowper in his Table Talk says:

"Thus reputation is a spur to wit.
And some wits flag through fear of losing it."