

"A noble peasant, Isaac Ashford, died,
Noble he was, contemning all things mean,
His truth unquestioned and his soul serene."

When Demosthenes was asked what were the first three requisites of an orator, he three times repeated the word "Delivery." The Duke of Wellington also had the question put to him as often, "What are the three essentials in a soldier's outfit?" to which he replied, "Boots, boots, boots." These were exaggerations, but they were exaggerations for a purpose. Were a similar question asked as to the prime requisite in a Christian minister, an equally pertinent reply would be—not piety, nor zeal, nor learning nor eloquence, nor kissing babies, but—Honesty. This does not simply mean that he shall not be a confirmed hypocrite and shammer all the way through, nor that he shall not preach other men's sermons as his own, nor that he will not need to be watched lest he abstract the silver spoons when enjoying the hospitality of his prominent church-members. No, he may do none of these things, yet still be a dishonest man. He may be dishonest in doctrine when he professes to believe what he does not, and cannot believe. If, for the sake of the good-will of his fellows, of avoiding annoyance, of making a living, or of any other matter of mere expediency, he suppresses the facts of his real belief, he is a fraud. Such men though are surely very rare, we hear some excellent people saying. They are not. They are thick as blackberries in the United States, and thicker in Canada, because our ministry is more intelligent. They declare, and are compelled to declare, that they believe the *whole* doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith to be the truth of God. This may be called a mere form, but, so far as the word "whole" is concerned, it is on the lips of every thinking man, a dishonest form. Ian MacLaren's self-made elder, who spoke on Carmichael's heresy case in Kate Carnegie, would say, "Let those who cannot keep their contract leave the Church at once." Have those who talk thus the least conception of the proportion that would be left behind, the proportion both in numbers, and in Christian character, intellectual ability, and pulpit efficiency? You could count the high-minded, sincere conservatives on your fingers, and the rest would be Falstaff's ragged regiment. The Churches are doing woeful harm to many an honest conscience by not modifying an unnecessarily harsh form of subscription that sets a premium on dishonest speech. Our young ministers are like the humorist qualifying by test to enter an English University, "Do you accept the Thirty-nine Articles?" he was asked, and answered, "Yes, forty of 'em."

He may be dishonest in worship. Cicero, in his work on Divination, quotes the old saying of Cato: "I wonder when one augur meets another how he can help laughing." The fellows knew that they were impostors. So did Theron Ware's male and female revivalists, the Soulsbys, with their well-planned mechanical contrivances for creating excitement, the trick of which they imparted to the young pastor on the principle of honor among thieves. There was a theological college in which students exercised themselves in public prayer. They began slowly and in a low voice, but, as they proceeded, their words quickened and their tones rose until the end was a torrent of language that roared excitement through the brain of the uninitiated. Many a time, it is said, students possessed of a sense of humor have gone off into fits of laughter during such performances, just as Charles Wesley did, to his brother's great disgust, when he and John were shouting hymns with all their might in the green fields to an audience of cattle. The very language of prayer, even in Presbyterian pulpits and prayer meetings, is often exaggerated and insincere, attempts to imitate Rutnerford and McCheyne without their experience. And what may be said of preaching as a mechanical duty or a glorifying of self, a preaching at variance with the man's life and practice, sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal? Our American neighbours tell of the finest prayer offered to a Boston audience, and of an anthem to the praise and glory of the choir, and there may be added a sermon declaring the whole scholarship and eloquence of the preacher to all whom he could lay under contribution. After the decease of a tearful ecclesiastic, a sort of Heraclitus and Jeremiah of the pulpit, his literary executor answered the question: "Whence these tears?" by finding on the margin of his discourses the stage-like rubric "cry here." Must not his inner self have had many a quiet laugh, as the outer obeyed the injunction, or when the rubric varied to "smile sweetly" and "turn up your eyes," just as if the master of ceremonies at a country wedding had said, "set to partners" and "ladies' chain?"

When it comes to the matter of practice, a higher word than honesty should be employed. An old man died several years ago in a Canadian city, leaving a very large fortune. For some time before his death he used to say to his visitors: "People give me a hard name, but I have always been a scrupulously honest man. I have insisted on getting every

cent that was due to me, but I have paid every copper I owed." This was quite true, but he did not tell of hard bargains driven, of extortionate interest demanded, of foreclosures of valuable mortgages in bad years, of families beggared, of widows and orphans driven from home, all to swell his *honest* gains. He was an honest man in the lowest sense of the term, but his practice was dishonourable. Shenstone says: "True honour is to honesty what the court of chancery is to common law." It leaves honesty to tithe mint and anise and cummin, and attends to the weightier matters of the law, even judgment, mercy, and faith. It is a court of equity. Everyone who has read Trench's little books on "Words" knows how in the course of years expressions have often suffered deterioration. Thus the Latin *virtus* rose, indeed, to the higher English *virtue*, but fell to the French *vertu* and the Italian *virtuoso*. So the Code of Honour, which even in this century died hard, if it be really dead, was a set of conventional rules agreed on by fashionable society, the defects, ever the crimes of which were as numerous as its good points. There was a danger of mistaking the true quality of an honorable man for the fiction of the Code; therefore, as the sacred word "love" lost caste among the Puritans because the Cavaliers had trailed it in the mire, so Christian men sought some other name by which to call the distinguishing characteristic of a gentleman. We all know the story of the soldier who had abstracted the poker from the fireside of an inn, and repeatedly denied by many sacred oaths that he knew anything about it, until the landlady put him on his honour, when the missing article was produced with the words:

"Touch my honour, touch my life;
There's your dirty poker!"

He is no honorable man whose honour is something apart from his ordinary words and actions.

People lose their keen sense of honour in many ways for which the institutions of society, not excepting the Church, are to blame. Children lose it by being everlastingly hedged in with rules, questioned, and spied upon, instead of being put on their honour. Older people lose it in competition with the unscrupulous. There is always a temptation to fight moral fire with fire, even when a plentiful douche of the waters of moral contempt might be its quietus. Competition is called the life of trade, and the race after success in life has developed fine characters. No true man grudges the clever but honest competitor his success, even Colonel Ingersoll says he does not, nor envies him who, by dint of a stout heart and hard work, has risen to the top of life's ladder. Yet, while we watch the events of the arena, we are conscious that scattered through the crowds around us there are pickpockets many, from whose thievish hands nothing is safe, not even the victor's crown. Thousands of men don't know that they are dishonourable until the opportunity appears of making something out of nothing. The French say "Opportunity makes the rogue," but happily this is far from universally true, otherwise all men would be scoundrels waiting for an opportunity to succeed as such. All men are not rascals nor liars, as David said in a hurry; but the average man, badly taught, and thus with no moral or spiritual backbone, is a prey to all kinds of mean, contemptible temptations. Competition and the race for success in such men breeds envy and every unscrupulous excuse for getting ahead. That such conduct is dishonourable never troubles them; they do not know what honour is, nor would its magic name extort the stolen poker from the sheltering folds of their cloak of hypocrisy.

Instead of relegating the word Honour to duellists, turfmen and gamblers, it should have been the aim of the Christian to reassert it in its ancient significance, long anterior to fashionable codes, lest with the shadow the substance also be lost. Plato defines it as the frame of soul which hinders a man doing what is disgraceful. Aristotle calls it magnanimity, the justifiable self-respect of the lofty nature that cannot condescend to the small and the mean. These give but a selfish view of honour, which is more than magnanimity or loftiness of mind. True honour regards the rights of others, and, in conscience, speech, and act, safeguards them as truly as it does its own. It is remarkable that St. Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, styles the honourable Bereans who searched the Scriptures "more noble," literally, well born, than the people of Thessalonica, yet the evangelist was no toady to the nobility. His language, however, suggests the transmission of a spirit of honour through one or more generations. Frederic the First of Germany was found among the Troubadours, and in ancient verse praised:

"The Genoese for their honour clear,"

than which he could not have paid the merchant princes of Italy a higher compliment. A later emperor, Rodolph of Hapsburg, so lived that after his death men swore by "the honour of Rodolph." Sir Philip Sidney, the gentle knight, Bayard, without fear and without reproach, and hosts of men and women in many lands and ages have been awarded by those who knew them the crown, not of, but

for honour. Great Britain is an honourable nation and never repudiates her engagements. We honour her for it, even though Lord Tennyson deplored the falling off of the high spirit which once actuated the professional man and the merchant, as well as the peer and the sturdy squire. The obsequious shopman may, in the event of invasion, "strike with his cheating yard-wand home;" but his blow would be far stronger with an honourable heart to urge it. Here in Canada we live in a colony of shame, on the borders of a republic that has seen its century of dishonour, and has but recently, thank God, been rescued from the threat of shame still greater. The flush must have passed from cheek to brow on the countenances of many thousands of Canada, when, in the expiring days of the defeated Government, the news appeared that Ministers of the Crown were squabbling over the unutterable baseness of anonymous letters, and that the larger part of a Cabinet deserted and dishonoured its aged head. Those who know political life all over the Dominion, municipal affairs, the world of business, the cliques of fashion would blush themselves into a permanent eczema, had they not become hardened to the sickening reign of dishonour on every side. Many influences may have been at work to produce this, but no external force can make free men dishonourable against their will.

How is the Church going to lift up a standard against iniquity coming in like a flood? The answer is, "Physician, heal thyself." Why, what is the matter with the Church? is asked, and, of course, the answer is that of students when the question is put concerning their individual college, "She's all right." Therefore, we must suppose some other Church, such as that of Theron Ware, which asks itself the question, What is hindering Christian life? These are hindering it: a man in the pulpit in whom you can put no trust; an outwardly pious sheep-stealer; a slanderous accuser of the brethren; an underhand schemer to supplant a minister in the affections of his people; a wire-puller for a call; a self-advertiser in the newspapers; weak men afraid of public opinion and bending to every breeze; professional ministers; and mechanical galvanizers of excitement. They may not be many, but one sinner destroyeth much good. Doubtless there is a majority of honourable men in all the Churches, and some of their ecclesiastical courts are innocent of the voice of scandal. Those in others who are guilty of scheming, trickery, wire-pulling, and unbrotherly defamation are probably not conscious of the heinousness of their sin, and the dishonour they are thereby bringing upon the body of Christ, to say nothing of the evil effect of their example upon younger ministers and students. There was a time in Canada, as in the Mother Country, when to be a Presbyterian minister was to be recognized, not perhaps as particularly eloquent or unctuously pious, but as an honourable man. It was a proud distinction. The Church has advanced in sacred learning, in organization, in zeal for the progress of Christ's Kingdom at home and abroad, in religious excitements not all destitute of spiritual life, but it has retrograded in the quality of honour. Earnest ministers and members of the Church perceive that, with all the gratifying progress made, there is something lacking. They propose to fill the gap with increased facilities for the religious instruction of the young, with burdensome organizations and enthusiastic conventions, with evangelistic services, and with a call for increased attention to the questions of the Committee on the State of Religion, most of which are very good things. They urge Sabbath Observance, Total Abstinence, and many excellent forms of moral and social reform, but Honour has no place by name in their recommendations. Yet, in the State of Religion Scheme for 1896, the first item is "Consistency of life among members—uprightness, charity," etc., Will these be sufficient to include honour?

It is a painful, yet at the same time a hopeful sign that a recent graduate of one of our colleges proposed the formation of a league of ministerial purity, pledging its members to discourage all underhand and dishonourable practices. What is the use of trying to reform congregations and the world, social and political, while dishonour has its nest in the sanctuary! Let the crooked brethren be made aware that the opinion of the Church is on the side of honour, and they will become externally honourable; they will be anything to be in the fashion. Then, honourable principles may leaven the Sabbath school, and spread thence to the common schools, and work up into High Schools and Colleges. In time, the Church, through these agencies, will leaven the electors and they will make the Parliament a body of honourable men of whom our Canada may be proud. But no abuse of evils, or effusive piety, or any other agency short of self-improvement and teaching by example will reform dishonest politicians. Other Churches may help that reformation on, when led to imitate the honourable Presbyterian Church in Canada.