

*WEIGH YOUR WORDS.*

Here is a very common case—

*A* commits a crime, or does a dishonourable thing. He is disgraced, and every one condemns him. The wrong done is serious. There is no excuse for it.

*B* is one of the multitude that condemn the fault. Either by virtue of his position, or as a private person, he has to speak his mind; at least, he thinks he should do so. He is one of the people aggrieved. Perhaps he has suffered loss by the offender's wrong-doing. At any rate, he is right in expressing his opinion, and everyone says he may do so.

Here comes in the difficulty. In the course of his remarks on the fault committed, *B* uses unguarded language. Perhaps he sees the danger before him, and is careful as to what he says. But in presence of a "friend," so called, and in the course of a private conversation, he lets his excited feeling get the better of him. He, like his neighbors, is justly indignant at a wrong which has hurt innocent people, and has brought misery to more than one quiet home. Speaking to *C*, he feels that he may speak plainly. He says just what he thinks, and unfortunately uses one careless inappropriate word. The mischief is now done, and it cannot be mended, for

*C* repeats the unguarded expression that *B* has used. He does not mean to do harm, or to blame *B* for using the word or words. Perhaps he half believes in the appropriateness of the language employed. And in the course of a private conversation with *D*, he repeats the words. Now comes the catastrophe.

*D* is righteously indignant. For

some reason, good or bad, *D* is disposed to take up the cause of *A*. He did not know it before, but now he feels for *A*, and is anxious to get justice for him. He has heard many people blame him, and he has consented, nay, even joined in the condemnation. But the remark that *B* made has turned him round altogether. From this moment he takes a new line. He forgives and forgets all the misdoings of *A*, and keeps all his resentment for the one unwise work of *B*. Now, mark what follows.

*E*, *F*, and *G*, and a great many more people in the neighborhood, hear what *B* has said. They have got tired of talking about the fault committed by *A*. They want a change, and they have got one. They have begun to feel a little for *A*. They remember that faults of the same kind were committed years ago by other people, and those offenders got off easily. They fancy that *A* has already suffered enough, or more than enough. They have begun to feel for him, and are anxious to make things less uncomfortable for him; or, even if they do not care for *A*, the feelings stirred up against him are cooling down, and they are ready to warm up again about any new offender. That offender is *B*.

The offence that *B* committed is magnified. First, some very scrupulous people profess to doubt his having used so injurious a word. It is impossible. He is a religious man, a man of some respectability and position. He could not so far degrade himself; if he did, they could have no more confidence in him. This "if he did" is the carefully-prepared arrangement for securing