

The Young Man and His Problem

By James L. Gordon, D.D.

THE INWARD VOICE.

There is an inward voice. Call it what you will—God, Conscience, Spirit, Soul—but there is a voice within. To enthrone that voice puts the silver lining of sincerity into the whole fabric of life. There can be no greater satisfaction, when the hair is sprinkled with white and the flesh pink of youth leaves the face, than the memory and the recollection that the motive of life was true. Listen to the inward voice.

When Theodore Parker took up a stone to throw at a tortoise in a pond, he felt himself restrained by something within him. He went home and asked his mother what that something was? She told him that this something was what was commonly called conscience, but she preferred to call it the voice of God within him. "This," said Parker, "was the turning point in my life"; and this was his mode of accepting the truth of the divinity of the Eternal Spirit that speaks to our own spirits.

LIFE IN THE PULPIT.

Life is attractive. The swaying of the flower, the twinkling of the star, the shimmering of the stream, the rustle of the forest trees, the motion of an insect, the romping of a child, the movements of a bird—life arrests our attention wherever we find it.

Mr. Emerson, in his Cambridge divinity address, thus described one of his own church experiences:

"I once heard a preacher who sore tempted me to say I would go to church no more. Men go where they are wont to go, else, else had no soul entered the temple that afternoon. A snow storm was falling around us. The snow storm was real, the preacher merely spectral, and the eye felt the sad contrast in looking at him and then out of the window behind him into the beautiful meteor of the snow. He had lived in vain. He had no one word intimating that he had laughed or wept, was married or was in love, had been commended or cheated or chagrined. If he had ever lived or acted we were none the wiser for it. The capital secret of his profession, namely, to convert life into truth, he had not learned. Not one fact in all his experience had he ever imported into his doctrine. The man had ploughed and planted and bought and sold; he had read books, he had ate and drunken; his head aches; his heart throbs; he smiles and suffers, yet was there not a surmise, a hint in all the discourse that he has ever lived at all."

PLAIN SPEECH.

Scores of preachers would succeed if they merely knew how to tell the truth: Not in a vulgar manner; not in a personal way; not in a fashion which would be objectionable to respectable people; but in a style which would command the respect of all thinking people. It is a great compliment when the people say concerning the preacher's sermon, "That's true." And a true preacher may even become "personal" occasionally. On one occasion Peter Cartwright, the Backwoods' Methodist preacher, was occupying the pulpit of a time-serving fashionable preacher at Nashville. He was in the middle of his sermon, when Andrew Jackson ("Old Hickory") entered the building and walked up the main aisle. The presence of so great a man, the President of the United States, overpowered the clergyman in charge, and bending over to Peter Cartwright, he said in an audible whisper, "General Jackson has come in; General Jackson has come in." "And who," thundered out Cartwright, "is General Jackson? if he doesn't get his soul converted, God will damn him as quick as He would a Guinea negro!" It may well be supposed that the congregation was startled, and the next day the Nashville pastor went, with abject apologies, to the general regretting the indignity that had been offered him. But the independence the bold Backwoods' apostle, so far from giving offence to "Old Hickory," won his lasting regard, and the Rev. Peter was afterwards his honoured guest at the Hermitage.

FORCE!

Force! Temper! Driving power! Every man must possess force of character in order to succeed. I would rather have a man with a "bad" temper than a man with no temper at all. Give me a horse which I must hold in rather than an animal which needs the spur or the whip. A certain writer remarks concerning Thos. Carlyle: "Carlyle's mother had exacted from him before leaving home a promise never to fight, not to give blows even in self-defence; a promise which probably embittered the whole of his after life, for the boys were not long in discovering that he did not fight, and in consequence they bullied and tormented him outrageously. After months of this treatment, he finally turned one day in a rage upon the biggest bully, and began kicking him with all his strength. After that he was left alone, but he had no desire to associate with his schoolmates. The effect of this experience was to make him solitary and misanthropical even at that early age."

HE'S A BRICK.

The average brick is about the same size, and two bricks look very much alike. But a brick has one particular virtue—it stays where it is "put"; and if you try and remove it, it will break before it will budge. Therefore, we say, concerning a man who has good staying qualities, "He's a brick."

Plutarch tells us in his "Lives," that Agesilaus, a King of Sparta, once received an ambassador from a foreign court, and during the interview the king took pleasure in showing him the capital. Remembering the great fame of the king, and having heard so much about him, he expected, in his tour, to be shown the massive wall round the city; battle towers for the soldiers to defend it. Imagine his great surprise when he saw nothing of the kind. He remarked upon the absence of these things to the king, who replied, "Indeed, you could not have looked carefully. Come with me to-morrow morning, and I will show you the walls of Sparta." According to appointment, the king and his guest went outside on to the city plains, and saw drawn up in full array, an army of soldiers and patriots. The king said, "There thou beholdest the walls of Sparta—10,000 men, and every man a brick."

HARMONY vs. AGONY.

If you want spiritual power, don't cry, don't weep, don't whine, don't bawl—there is no power in "worked up" emotion to move God. Nay, the secret of spiritual power is to keep in touch with God.

We once heard an emaciated, frail-appearing minister testify at an opera-house meeting conducted by the late Dwight L. Moody in one of our large cities. The minister said that he had been up all the night before praying for his people. A few hours later Mr. Moody and this minister met, together with other guests, at the supper table in the home of an eminent college president, whose institution was the pride of the city. The conversation was on the meetings of the day, and the hopes cherished for the one in the evening, as also for the whole series of special evangelistic services just begun. Suddenly Mr. Moody turned to the minister who had given the testimony we have referred to at the afternoon meeting. Said he: "Brother B—, did I understand you to say that you were up all night praying for your people?" "Yes," said the minister, "I felt a great burden for the souls of my people. They all seem so cold, and the revival spirit is so lacking." "You were wrong," said Mr. Moody; "you were wrong. Never in my life have I weakened myself by such unnatural exercises and worry. I am a pretty robust man, but I could never have had strength for my work had I done such unnatural things. You must trust God more, my brother."

AN EXTRA DOLLAR.

We all believe in being generous until we possess the ability to give—and then we suddenly become economical. We are prone to say to each other: "If I possessed a million dollars, I would do thus and so." But the question is: "What are you doing with the dollar which you do possess?" Tell me what a young man does with a dollar and I will tell you what he would do with a million dollars.—If he possessed such a handsome sum. And what do you do with an extra dollar when it comes your way. Does a "windfall" create generosity in your soul? John Wesley was importuned to allow a cast of his face to be taken. He refused, and then the artist offered him a sum of ten guineas if he would consent. Wesley yielded, and after the operation walked out into the street with the money. He saw, almost immediately after leaving the house, an auctioneer who was about to sell the bed on which a poor man was dying. Wesley rushed in at once, and found that the debt was only ten guineas. He at once paid the amount, and remarked, "I see why God sent me these ten guineas." Such instances are delightful, and they are indicative of his character.

TELL THE TRUTH.

Tell the truth. Think only truthful thoughts. Build your life on truthful ideals. By and by truth will be written on your face, seen in the gesture of your hand, indicated by the stride of your step and reflected in the gleam of your eye.

When General Lee was in conversation with one of his officers in regard to a movement of his army, a plain farmer's boy overheard the general's remark that he had decided to march upon Gettysburg instead of Harrisburg. The boy telegraphed this fact to Governor Curtin. A special engine was sent for the boy. "I would give my right hand," said the governor, "to know if this boy tells the truth." A corporal replied, "Governor, I know that boy; it is impossible for him to lie; there is not a drop of false blood in his veins." In fifteen minutes the Union troops were marching to Gettysburg, where they gained a victory. Character is power.

THE HAND.

The hand indicates character. A small, short hand indicates economy; a plump hand, good nature; a long hand, thoroughness and a grasp of details; a hand with tapering fingers, a love for art and music; a hand blending most of these signs, is the practical hand. Study the hand. Here is a description of the hand of John Ruskin:—"His palm, and especially the back of the hand, was tiny. When he rowed his boat he held the oars entirely in his fingers; when he shook hands you felt the pressure of the fingers, not of the palm. In writing, he held the pen as we are taught to hold a drawing-pencil, and the long fingers gave much more play to the point than is usual in formed penmanship. Knowing that, it is not surprising to find that his writing varies, not only from one period to another, but with passing moods. Everybody shows some of this variety, but Ruskin's hand was as flexible and as impressionable as his whole being."

A GREAT DECISION.

Be sure you are right in your great decisions. You may err in choosing a hat. You may make a mistake in buying a coat. You may fail to exercise good judgment in selecting a boarding house. You may be "taken in" in the purchase of a horse. What of these? Every one of these may be remedied. But to marry the wrong woman, choose the wrong profession or select the wrong man as partner—these are among the Great Decisions of life.

The late Rev. Dr. James Pullman, of Lynn, was brother of George M. Pullman, the famous sleeping-car inventor and millionaire. When young in the ministry he was besieged by his brother to forsake it and enter business and become rich in worldly goods. "This does not appeal to me," was the young preacher's reply, as he asserted the supremacy of the spiritual over the material. The time came, years after, when the millionaire visited his brother in Lynn, that the earlier colloquy was recalled. "James, you were right and I was wrong. You have chosen the better part," was the tribute of the magnate to the prophet.

FOREIGN MISSIONS.

I believe in "foreign missions," but do not neglect the missions which are not foreign. If you cannot go to Africa, you may find Africans who need your attention within a block of where you reside. We are for ever charmed by the green fields which are distant. What we cannot see has more influence over us than the things which we can touch. We are not blind, but in our endeavor to do good we are possessed by the "far away look." David M. Cleland says:—"A young lady came to her pastor with the earnest request that he would give her some work to do for Christ. She assured him that she must do something and expressed a willingness to go anywhere and do any work required, as she longed to be of service to her Lord. After asking if she had sufficiently counted the cost of such service and receiving her hearty assurance the pastor said, 'I am glad you feel as you do and I will ask you to call on a good old lady who would be wonderfully cheered by the Christian companionship of such a bright young person as you are,' and wrote a name and an address on a slip of paper. The young lady looked at the paper and exclaimed, 'Why, that is my own home, and the old lady is my grandmother!' and the pastor said, 'That is the lesson I would have you learn.'"

QUALITY IN WORK.

Do your work well. Remember that you invest yourself in every act. Into every deed you insert reputation, character and destiny. Everything you do comes back to you. In "to-day" you will find all your yesterdays enthroned. There is no such guarantee of future happiness as the record of duties well performed. There is no perfume so sweet as the fragrance of an approving memory. To illustrate:—

Senator Chauncey M. Depew says that a farmer came into his law office in Peekskill, New York, the first day he opened it, when he was fresh from his admission to the bar. The farmer asked him a question in regard to the settlement of an estate. Depew looked it up and when the farmer came back the next week he gave him a written opinion, for which he charged him five dollars. The farmer said that he would never succeed if his fees were so exorbitant, and he gave him one dollar and seventy-five cents. That was his beginning. Twenty years afterward a gentleman came to Depew's office in New York and asked him the same question. He answered it immediately and it was exactly the same answer he had given the old farmer. The interview occupied about an hour, and his client gave him five hundred dollars.