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The Perfect Freedom.

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PART I.



HE knowledge of the truth gives us freedom, not only in thought, but in action; not merely in discerning, but also in doing God's will. An act is free when it is the expression of your own thought and will, when your own nature and your whole nature goes with it. If in what you do you are merely doing

blindly another's bidding, following mechanically the directions laid down for you, you may be a useful tool, a convenient instrument of a master's purposes, but your work is not your own, but his; you are not free. To make you free, the work itself must constitute or contain the motive of your activity. The satisfaction or delight of doing it, and not any ulterior end or object, must be all in all to you. In the measure in which any other motive—hope or fear, desire of honor or reward, dread of punishment or disgrace, nay, even a sense of duty or obligation—interferes or intermingles with your activity, in that measure you are not free.

This does not mean, indeed, that the agent must necessarily have himself originated the design or plan of the work he executes, that his work is not free if there is higher and more comprehensive mind under which he is content to work. But it means that if it be so, if you do follow or endeavor to realize the conceptions of another, your own soul must have caught, in something of the spirit of originality and freedom.

There is ever a nameless charm, a subtle grace and excellence in work that witnesses to the spontaneity of the hand that did it. In the erecting of a noble building, for instance, all who are employed must follow the architect's design; but a great art critic has told us that ever in the noblest edifice of mediæval and of modern times, it can be observed that free play has been given to the artistic skill and originality of the workman. In the free handling, for instance of the floral ornamentation of capitals, in the elasticity, grace, and variety of the forms of leafage, in the delicacy of feeling and freshness of spirit that can be infused into the moulding of arch and column and traiered window, it is possible to discern the labor of hands that wrought, not by mere prescribed plan and rule, but under the inspiration of a mind in sympathy with the spirit and genius of the work. An accomplished musician, again, is not necessarily the composer of what he sings or plays; but in the rendering of the works of the great masters of this art, a competent ear can at once detect the difference between the soulless, wooden exactitude which by long drill and practice any school-girl may compass, and the life and power and pathos, the freedom of touch and flow of expression which characterize the performance of one who has caught something of the spirit that inspired the work, and reproduces it with a kindred intensity of feeling.

And so, too, must it be with that highest of all arts, the art of goodness, of working out God's design for our existence, of making music for our lives, of building up the being that we are. Here, too, the original idea is not our own. A higher thought and will has conceived for each human spirit the ideal perfection, the noble harmony of virtues which rounds into the perfect whole of a pure and beautiful and Christian life. But here, too, in order to realize it, the conception is one which must not only reveal itself to our intelligence, our reason, our conscience, but must also enkindle our affections and flow into our will. We must not merely recognize the law of duty as an obligation laid upon us by a Divine Lawgiver. We must become inspired

with that passion for perfection, that spontaneous love of goodness and of God which turns service into freedom. The demand that Christ makes upon us, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," can never be fulfilled till we rise above even the position of law and morality, of conscientious obedience to duty, and a life ordered in conformity to the will of God. It is no doubt a great thing to be a conscientious man. We cannot help respecting and honoring the man who methodically and deliberately orders his life, not by regard to public opinion, not from the desire of safety and happiness present or future, but simply from a sense of right and in obedience to the supreme conviction of duty enthroned within his breast. There is ever a certain dignity and nobleness in self-command, in a life of repressed inclinations and restrained passions and actions uniformly regulated by the dictates of reason and conscience; and our sense of the stern dignity of such a life is, from one point of view, enhanced by the amount of struggle and self-discipline which it costs to maintain it. When, for instance, a man of intense sensuous susceptibilities puts a bridle on his passions, checks with iron resolve the waywardness of thought, turns away from tempting scenes and objects, or in the midst of their allurements deviates not one hair's-breadth from the self-determined path of purity and temperance; or, again, when a man of a naturally cold, self-absorbed, unsympathetic temperament lays down for himself rules of practical beneficence, and submits to great sacrifices of time and money and labor for philanthropic objects—in all such cases of rational self-discipline, the persistent subjugation of impulse by reason and conscience creates a character of no ignoble order, and one which calls forth just respect.

(To be Continued.)

A Touch.

A living coal! and with its glow
It touched another coal, when lo,
The dark form into radiance grew,
And light and cheer beamed forth anew.

A loving heart! And with its love
It touched another heart, which strove
With adverse waves on troubled sea,
When ours were lying heavily;
And lo, through rifted clouds Hope smiled,
And Love the weariness beguiled.

That living coal be mine to glow,
That loving heart be mine to show,
While earth has sorrowing hearts that wait
The opening of Redemption's gate.

—The Advance.

Has Fun a Place in a Religious Meeting.

At a recent meeting when a clergyman entertained his audience with jokes, and some of them bordering on the impure, the people laughed long and loudly, but after the meeting many expressed the shame they felt at the bad taste displayed by the speaker and the prostitution of such an occasion to so low a purpose. There were hundreds there who will ever remember that speaker as the man who told unsavory jokes.

Brethren, our Guide Book, the Bible, is not a book of jokes. If the minister of the Gospel should increase his power by the use of fun, surely there would have been some fun placed in the Gospel, but there is none of it. Our model, the Lord Jesus, did not use jokes. We look in vain for such things in the words of any of the men who by inspiration gave the message of salvation. Why should we do it?

The fact is, the joking clergyman is an offense to earnest Christian people. His fun turns souls from the consideration of soul-saving themes to the beggarly elements of an irreligious popular assembly. To play upon an audience so that one moment they will laugh uproariously and

next moment be shedding tears may show ability of a certain kind, such as may be seen at any time in a minstrel show, or in a theater, but it does not win souls to Christ. It does not open the way to the kingdom of God. Imagine John the Baptist cracking jokes on the banks of the Jordan! No, you cannot. Then in doing the same kind of work he was sent to do, why should you?

Will there not be a revival of the sense of need for religion on the part of the people when there is a revival of the solemnity of the work and message on the part of the ministers of the Gospel? Brethren, let us eliminate the element of fun from religious meetings.

Philadelphia.

—S. M.

Helping Others.

A recent writer tells of the way in which one young man of his acquaintance occupied his leisure without evil effects upon his health.

Seeing that he was very healthy and cheerful-looking, we asked him what open-air recreation he indulged in. Did he ride a bicycle, row, or what did he do to make him look so strong and manly?

"Ah," he said, "I have no time for any of those things, and, if I look happy, it is because I try to help others in my spare moments. As a rule, I am at work ten or twelve hours in the shop; but on Saturday evenings and Sundays, and whenever I have an hour or two, I go down to the East End, and hunt up my drift children. We get them into a room and try to teach them something. When any one gives us money, we have a tea for them. Then there is a Bible class and a glee-class for young men. It is work like this that keeps me well. Give me the drift children and I am happy and healthy."

Eare Feet are Shod.

Among the many interesting incidents connected with the closing of the saloons in Knittanning, Pa., a leading merchant tells the following: A woman came into his store very timidly. She was evidently unaccustomed to trading.

"What can I do for you?" inquired the merchant.

"I want a pair of shoes for a little girl."

"What number?"

"She is twelve years old."

"But what number does she wear?"

"I do not know."

"But what number did you buy when you bought the last pair for her?"

"She never had a pair in her life. You see, sir, her father used to drink when we had saloons, but now they are closed he doesn't drink any more, and this morning he said to me, 'Mother, I want you to go up town to-day and get Sissy a pair of shoes, for she never had a pair in her life.' I thought sir, if I told you how old she was you would know just what size to give me."

Church Boarders.

A friend of mine told me once that when he went to a boarding house he could always tell who the boarders were, for they never alluded to family matters, but sat down at the table and talked of outside affairs; but when the son came he would go into the sitting room to see if there were letters, and inquire after the family, and show in many ways his interest in the household. It doesn't take five minutes to tell that he is not a boarder and that the others are. And so it is with the church of God. You see these boarders in church every Sunday morning, but they don't take any interest; they come to criticize. And that is about all that constitutes a Christian nowadays. They are boarders in the house of God; and we have got too many boarders.—D. L. Moody.