

"The First Stroke is Half the Battle."

The following paper was read before the "League of the Cross," of St. Paul's:

From the natural course of events man has deduced several maxims or proverbs. The established principles embodied in these are repeatedly brought to our notice for the improvement and advancement of our minds in knowledge and wisdom. Experience of former days, and our own personal observations, conclusively prove to us that but few of these maxims express a better known truth, or are more universally manifest than that "The first stroke is half the Battle."

A skilful architect, upon being entrusted with the construction of any large edifice, fully recognizes that the most important part of his task is to see that the foundation is substantially laid, and that, unless this is done, he will be unable to construct any great work of architecture, and that all his subsequent endeavours to do so will be but vain and useless. This fact applies to the architecture of every enterprise. The two momentous factors of any undertaking are its introduction and its conclusion. If the former is well inaugurated and the latter suitably arranged it is no difficult task to amplify the intervening space. A prudent lecturer, for instance, well understands that his popularity with his audience depends largely upon the impression he makes in his prefatory remarks. If he gains their good will and attention in the introduction of his discourse, he can with little difficulty, retain their confidence and their attention throughout the balance of his lecture. But if, on the contrary, he does not impress them favourably at the outset, he will experience great difficulty in regaining their confidence and commanding their attention, hence many of his subsequent jewelled remarks will fall, unproductive, upon the barren soil of their intellect. If the first stroke has been applied with accuracy and effect, he has won half the battle of success, but if this has not been the case, he has lost half of it, and it requires almost superhuman efforts on his part to regain it.

But accord^d as the beginning of any work is the most important part of it, so also is it proportionately the most difficult. When classical students first venture upon the ocean of Latin and Grecian Literature, they are inclined to believe that they will soon be stranded upon the shoals and quick sands of the many rules and declensions of these languages, but once their little intellectual bark has braved these in safety, they sail out into the open sea, and, by expanding and unfurling their mental sails, soon find themselves ploughing through the waves of knowledge contained therein at a rapid pace. But they are also fully cognizant of the fact that their success in the study of these languages depends almost entirely upon laying their elementary rudiments low with their first stroke. If they thoroughly master these in the beginning, their subsequent course will be all downhill, but if they endeavour to wade through the classical authors without this sound basis, they soon find their task more difficult than stumbling through the jungles of Africa. Many students neglect their work at the commencement of the term, confident that they will be able to counterbalance their dilatoriness by a little extra exertion towards the close of the scholastic year. However, when the result of their examinations is made known, they find that the diligent students, who buckled on their armour of work at the commencement of the year, and whom they have frequently scoffed at for their application, have far surpassed them. Then especially is the truth of my proverb most un-

pleasantly borne in upon them, and they make a firm resolution to renew acquaintanceship with their books at the inauguration of the next scholastic year.

Again, when a physician repairs to the bedside of his patient, he thoroughly diagnoses his condition before assaying to prescribe, and upon this diagnosis largely depends the success of his treatment. If grim disease gains the first stroke of the contest for the life of the sick man, and foils the physician in this, all the latter's medicine will have no effect and the patient will likely succumb to his disease. But if, on the other hand, the physician gets at the root of the disease in his first diagnosis, he will probably be enabled, with the assistance of his medical science, to curb its ravages. The first stroke, therefore, is the all-important one and upon it rests almost the life or death of the patient.

In the same manner an author, an actor, or a painter, ensures or mars his success by the impression he makes at the outset. If he captivates the populace with his first production, or upon his first appearance, they will accept anything in reason from him afterwards, and will overlook many of his deficiencies. If an inferior poem or play should be unearthed with the autograph of Shakespeare appended to it, it would be considered as surpassing a production of greater merit from a poet of a more obscure fame. If the great and immortal Raphael had carelessly executed but a fair work of art, it would be considered of greater value than a superior production of a less widely known painter. The plainest acting of Henry Irving or Miss Terry would be considered as superior to the better acting of some less renowned actor or actress. These eminent personages have made reputations for themselves which will last for many centuries, that of the two former ones being immortalized. Their success consisted in the popularity with which their first productions were received. But the author, the painter, or the actor who fails upon his debut before the world, requires to make almost superhuman efforts to obliterate the prejudicial feelings formed against him in the beginning of his career.

Thus we see that a vigorous onset upon the induction of any enterprise augurs well for its success. Human experience, that beacon light which illumines our earthly career, has repeatedly verified this. The younger generation, who are just commencing the battle of life, cannot have this fact too emphatically impressed upon them. Upon their first stroke depends to a great extent their subsequent life and their eternity, just as the tree of youth is inclined at its early growth. It inclines to its maturity, and so also do the habits formed in the beginning of one's career accompany him to the grave. The enemy of man knows this full well and consequently makes use of his best endeavours to ensnare us when but in the bloom of youth. When first he attacks his innocent victim he finds it a difficult task to capture the fort of his baptismal innocence. He at once enjoins his wicked followers to advance the battering-ram of base seduction. It requires their utmost endeavours to plough into the soil of his untainted purity and unimpaired integrity, in order to sow their deadly seed therein, but once their leader has succeeded in forcing in the point of his plough-share, pregnant with the small root of evil, he will soon force in the whole plough, with which he will uproot and upturn the soil of his innocence. If he gains the first stroke, and implants but the thin edge of his wickedness, the contagion is inclined to spread, and it requires the greatest diligence to prevent it from doing so. It never does to trifle with evil, because they who

do are sure to succumb to it in the end.

"Vice is a monster of such hideous mien,
That to be hated, needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

Conscience is always on the alert to wage war with vice, but if the latter is trifled with continually, it loses its repugnant appearance, and, casting conscience back for a time, gains the mastery unmolested.

We frequently meet with young men, who, upon being requested to join our Society scorn to do so upon the plea that they partake of liquor but very seldom, and that it does not require a pledge to keep them within the bounds of temperance. But alas! these young men are but trifling with the danger and "He who loves danger shall perish in the danger." They are already midway upon their journey to intemperance, now being familiar with the face of this vice, and if they persist in so trifling with it, they will soon endure, then pity, and then embrace it. Many before them have talked in the same strain and have later on succumbed to that demon, whom we are all pledged to destroy. It therefore devolves upon us, as members of the holy Sodality of the League of the Cross, to bring the young men of our fair Queen City in from the storm of temptation raging around them, and into the harbour of our protective society. It is the duty of every man to join some temperance society, a duty he owes to himself, to his family, and to his God. Many may think they are strong and proof against the bullets of intoxication flying through the air, but they forget that braver men than they have fallen, and that they must take great heed lest they fall themselves. If a young man is secure from the blasts within the harbour of a temperance sodality, he is marshalled upon the side of the victors, and is in no approximate danger of losing the contest, but if the serpent of evil has succeeded in enticing him to indulge in liquor occasionally, and even within moderate bounds, he has won the first stroke, and will gain a complete victory before giving up his advantage.

Thus we see that life is a continual contest with our arch enemy for the spoils of eternal bliss or damnation. When we Catholics come to the use of reason we have already won the first stroke of the battle by drowning and vanquishing him in the waters of Baptism, and, consequently, have half the victory of Eternal Salvation won. It only remains for us to preserve in its completion under the banner of our white Baptismal robe, and, when the contest is over, we will emerge from it in a halo of glory and then attain the triumph and bliss awaiting, at the hands of the King, his successful soldiers.

A. O'LEARY.

How strange our ideas of growing old change as we get on in life. To the girl in her teens, the riper maiden of twenty-five seems quite aged. Twenty-two thinks thirty-five an "old thing." Thirty-five dreads forty, but congratulates herself that there may still remain some ground to be possessed in the fifteen years before the half century shall be attained. But fifty does not by any means give up the battle of life. It feels middle-aged and vigorous, and thinks old age is a long way in the future. Sixty remembers those who have done great things at threescore; and one doubts if Parr, when he was married at one hundred, had at all begun to feel himself an old man. It is the desire of life in us which makes us feel young so long.

Benziger's Catholic Home Annual, 1894.

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