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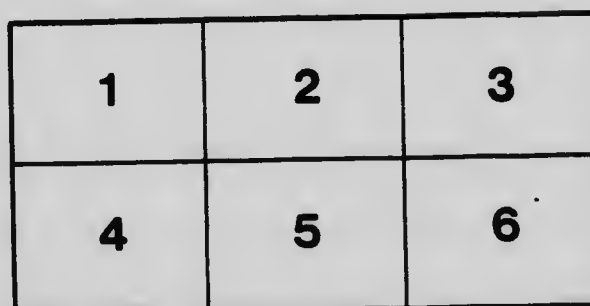
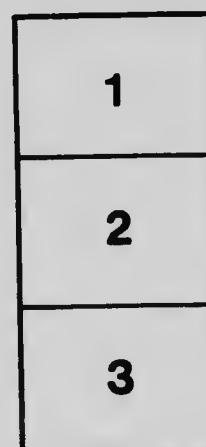
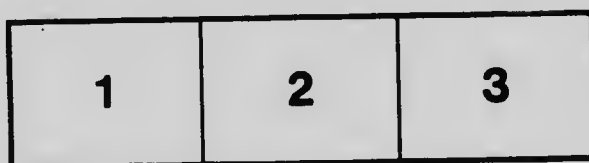
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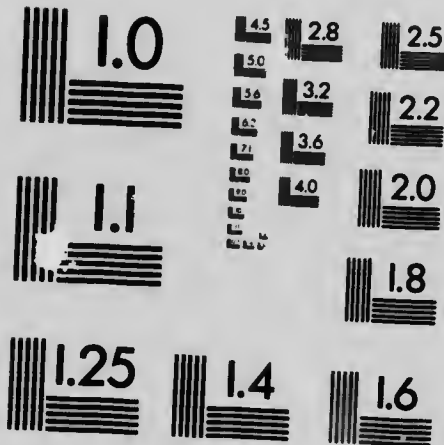
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**ON LIFE'S THRESHOLD**

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*The Simple Life, The Better Way*  
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# ON LIFE'S THRESHOLD

TALKS TO YOUNG PEOPLE ON  
CHARACTER AND CONDUCT

BY

CHARLES WAGNER

TRANSLATED BY EDNA ST. JOHN



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## INTRODUCTION

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*To the  
School-Children of America and  
Their Teachers*

**W**HEN one loves a country, one naturally desires for it prosperity and power.

But wherein does the source of these lie?

In breadth of territory, in material wealth, in numerous ships or soldiers?

No, the source of all fruitful and vigorous national life lies in the quality of the citizens.

The true public treasure is the popular conscience, is the public spirit, the result of manly traditions and of the education of character.

I love America with all my heart. What must I wish above all things for this great Republic?

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Is it not a younger generation simple of heart and strong of character, at once independent and reverent, fed upon all that can furnish the State with steadfast wills and enlightened minds?

I should be the happiest of men if I could contribute in the least to the realisation of that ideal.

For many years, I, too, have been at intervals a school-master.

I have had the rare privilege of addressing at the same time children of all social classes, belonging to all religious denominations. I brought them together upon the same school-forms, that they might together take the Holy Sacrament, in a common warmth of sentiment toward the ancient family, the noblest of all, militant Humanity.

As I became more familiar with those dear heads, blond or brown, those wide eyes eager to understand, a more powerful and more mysterious attraction took possession of my whole

## INTRODUCTION

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being. I understood that youth is the garden of God, and I knew the joy of the sower, who forgets the passing hour and the sadness oftentimes of the present, while he devotes himself to labour for the future.

Dear and happy children of free America, I have seen you gathered in your fine school-buildings around your teachers. Daily you heard the words of the gentle Master who died upon a cross to show us in what degree we must love one another. Daily you behold in your public squares the figures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

It is a disciple of Jesus and a fervent admirer of your heroes who sends you this little book, in which he has endeavoured to speak as simply as possible of the greatest thing there is—I mean, *Life*.

This little volume is very incomplete. Indeed, it is an essay, a beginning, to which a sequel shall presently be given.

But I venture to hope that those whose mis-



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sion it is to teach youth may find here a few new ideas.

And I wish that these pages may compel my young readers to think, may awaken them to moral reflection, at that period of early adolescence when the question begins to be formulated in the mind: What has one come to do in this world?

The essential thing is that our children should be made to have an interest in their own character and conduct, and that they should catch a glimpse, were it once only, in connection with whatsoever event or lesson it may be, of the immense interest of *Real Life*.

CHARLES WAGNER.

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**WHERE DO WE COME FROM?**



# I

## LIFE AND ITS SOURCE

**W**E enter into life without having asked to come, without having made any effort to get here.

We begin life without knowing that we are alive, as do the trees, the flowers and the beasts, which all possess life, but not the realisation of it.

An infant does not know that he exists. He is, as it were, unconscious. It never occurs to him to ask whence he came.

But the time arrives when a man perceives that he is here and that he is somebody. An irresistible instinct impels him to reflect on himself and on the world about him. This is the question which is forever rising anew

in his mind: "Where do all these things come from?"

And this simple question takes us a long way. It is like the song of the cuckoo which you hear in the woods in spring-time. You do not know where it comes from; it attracts you, it perplexes you. You follow it, but it eludes you, until, maybe, in order to set eyes on the mysterious singer who is always fleeing you and escaping you, you have gone into the very depth of the forest, discovering unknown paths, curiously formed rocks, wild strawberries, strange plants. These voyages of discovery are never to be regretted. We should always be searching, exploring this world in which we have been placed, as travellers cast on an unknown land go carefully over it and hunt out its secrets. There is nothing finer, more beautiful, or worthier our attention, than the sight of nature surrounding us. No book will ever be so full of stories so entrancing.

THE LESSON OF THE APPLE

**N**OTICE, to prove what I have just said, an apple fallen from a tree.

It was an apple, you know, that told the astronomer Newton the story of universal gravitation. Who would believe that a mere apple, from which we make cider or into which we crunch our teeth, could instruct an astronomer? It is true, none the less. Moreover, if you examine it closely, it will teach you more besides.

If you actually knew the entire contents of a piece of fruit like this one, you would be wiser in natural science than the best known professors. Men would come from the ends of the world to see you and to hear your explanations.

To-day let us be satisfied with asking the apple the one question: "Where do you come from?" It will reply: "From that apple-tree."

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And whence came the apple-tree? From an apple that was grandmother to this one. And whence came that grandmother apple? From an apple-tree, great-grandfather of the family.

And so we go on, never able to come to an end. The apple comes from an apple-tree, the apple-tree from an apple, and so on over and over through the centuries, into the night of prehistoric times. But there must be some end. That immeasurable line of apples and apple-trees must terminate in some kind of beginning. There have not always been apple-trees. What was there, then? Before apple-trees, there was the earth. That, I think is obvious. But the earth, however old it may be, with its millions of years, has not always existed. Whence came the earth? Why does it produce apple-trees?

## WHERE DO WE COME FROM? 7

**I**F a mere apple sets us thinking so hard, imagining times so distant and problems so vast, how much deeper must we be set thinking by our own existence!

*Where do we come from?* We come from our father and our mother, who have themselves had a father and a mother. These are our grandparents. Some of us have been able to see our grandparents. After them our great-grandparents, whom very few of us have seen. And then there are kept in the family the names of a few ancestors. But it is only necessary to go a little way into the past to lose trace of our genealogy. How many of us can trace our ancestors several centuries back?

By sure and simple reasoning, to be sure, we conclude that each of us traces back not only to the Crusades, of which some families are so proud, but to the very origin of humanity.

Now whence came these first human beings? Whose children were they?



They must have had a beginning, since, somehow or other, they came to exist. And here we are again at the same point we reached with the apple—whence are we come? Whence comes life? Every stream has its source. What is the source of this mighty stream called life? We do not assume too much in declaring life to be the result of a power capable of producing it. This is not what you think, or I think. It is what we cannot but admit.

Now this power capable of producing life, this power which was before life, before the earth, before everything; this power to which all goes back, in which everything reposes, by which everything is accomplished; this power must have a name. Humanity has named it God. The source of life is God.

## II

### GOD

**L**ET us stop here and calmly reflect as to that belief in God to which we have been led, and to which we should give a sure place in the depth of our souls. Let us once more take account of the good right we have to arrive at this conclusion: There is a God; *I believe in God*. In saying that, do we give ourselves up to a certain superstitious tendency? Are we under the influence of some old groundless doctrine, or the dupes of an imposture?

To persuade ourselves that belief in God is neither absurd nor factitious, we need merely ask ourselves how we came to it. Was it by refraining from the use of our reason or by following it? It was by following it. Our rea-

son is so organized that it is obliged, in spite of itself, to investigate the cause of things. All human thought is related to the principle that nothing is without cause. Eliminating that, there is no more possibility of science, study, or explanation. Our minds cannot admit of the idea that anything is created of itself. The smallest object has its reason for being. If we look at one of those artificial flowers with which women ornament their hats,—a rose, a daisy, a violet,—we think immediately of the skilful fingers that fashioned them. We notice the taste, the art, the grace, reflecting the thought which created the flower. Should some one tell us that one of those petals found its place, and modelled and painted itself, we should, of course, have reason to smile and disbelieve.

And yet that flower is only a copy, vaguely similar to the original in form. In reality, it is made of dead matter. It is not alive, nor will it produce a seed wherein lie dormant whole generations of future flowers. How could we grant

## WHERE DO WE COME FROM? 11

that all the flora of the universe, from cowslips and daisies to the rarest flowers and giant trees, are created of themselves? Or deny that there is at work in all of them, thought and foreseeing wisdom? To think anything else would be to do violence to our intelligence. We must think of the world quite simply, as an immense, mysterious piece of workmanship that presupposes a workman. Anything else one may say is infinitely less evident, less reasonable, and less natural.

Following its normal incline, every thread of water that runs through the mountain comes finally to the ocean. Let us follow the inclination of our intelligence without opposing or corrupting it, and we shall surely find God.

Neither let us be led astray by the narrow superficial opinion that attributes the origin of faith to imposture. According to those who profess this opinion, religion was invented and fostered by rogues, for the sake of power and profit. It is as though one said restaurant-

keepers and cooks had invented hunger and thirst for the sake of deriving profit from them. Faith in God is not the result of imposture. It is the result of thought in its normal course, the mature fruit of our reflection; it responds to a profound need of our being.

Like hunger, thirst, hope, grief, or confidence, it has often been shamefully abused. But the source of it is pure.

### III

#### OUR MEANS OF KNOWING GOD

**I**T is not enough to admit the existence of God in a general way, and merely to agree that there is some one beyond us.

Humanity would be very unfortunate if it were obliged to hold to this summary affirmation without being able to add anything. But how can we do that? Can we say anything certain of the mysterious being who is hidden in the core of the universe? Does not even conjecture seem impossible?

Surely a human being can no more comprehend God than a glass can hold the sea or a child's hand catch the stars. God is too great; we are too small. We must never forget that.

But there are ways for us to approach him nearer.

**T**O begin with, we have this visible creation which is His handiwork. We all know very well that, without having seen a man, we may get to know him through his acts and his works. A painting reveals to us the qualities of the painter; a piece of music, those of the musician. Give me any bundle of books: without knowing whose it is, I shall know pretty soon what sort of pupil owns it, whether he is painstaking, studious, and intelligent. His books and his papers will show him to me.

So does the work of God speak to us all of its author. The creation reveals to us the creator, His power, His infinite knowledge, His equal attention to what is great and what is small. For the ant that you crush in the grass, without even noticing, is fashioned with as much pains as the eagle whose flight appals us. And though we may see in the world disturbing phenomena and accidents that puzzle our intelli-

## WHERE DO WE COME FROM? 15

gence in seeming out of harmony, we must recognise that these phenomena are exceptions.

The earth, as a whole, denotes order, method, and foresight. Wherefore we may believe that even in what seems to be disorder, there is an order beyond our comprehension. So we say to ourselves that God knows what man does not know, and in Him we put our trust.

**Y**ET the visible creation is not the only means or the best for knowing God.

It is the first, the one by which we begin; but there are more. We learn to know God by ourselves, by our souls. To understand better let us take an illustration.

Every one knows a rainbow. The light of the sun passing through water or through a prism divides into seven colours. Do you know that by these colours they have come to discover what substances are burning in the sun? Not only that, but, by a very simple process, a rainbow



## 16 ON LIFE'S THRESHOLD

has been produced with many of the stars (it is called their spectrum), and in that way we have learned of what substances the stars are composed.

Now even as, afar off, a ray of sunlight or starlight tells us of its source, so our souls, which are rays emanating from the divine source, speak to us of God. By those rays fallen into the depths of our being, we are brought into a sure, direct, intimate relation with the God who seems so far away from us. We are of the race of God, even as the rainbow is of the essence of the sun. Therefore we can say: "He is near each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being."

By our spirits we are able then to attain to a conception of God, who is a Spirit, and by our moral nature we are brought into touch with the Source of good, truth, justice, and love. What is faintly reflected in us, or but the beginning of a virtue, is, in Him, at a state of absolute perfection. But whatever be our un-

## WHERE DO WE COME FROM? 17

worthiness and His glory, we are closely bound to Him, our life is of His life.

**E**ACH one of us, nevertheless, if left to himself would run a great risk of having but a mean rudimentary knowledge of God. We need the help of those who have lived before us. This is another powerful means by which we are brought into relation with God, the religious traditions of humanity. Each generation cannot begin all over again the work of history: progress would be impossible. We inherit the experiences of our forebears: for Christian peoples, these experiences are, first of all, preserved in the sacred books called the Bible. In these books, we are brought into vital personal touch with men whose deeds and examples are of still more import than words and doctrines. The luminous epitome of the best that we possess in the way of revelation of God to humanity is found in the prophets of the Old Testament, in the Gospels, and in the

## 18 ON LIFE'S THRESHOLD

person of Jesus Himself. Never did God speak to man in a clearer, simpler, more fatherly language than when He sent us the Christ, filled Him with His Spirit and put His words in His lips. One may truly say of Jesus that in Him the divine Life "has dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth."

Christ has gathered knowledge of God into a few words for us: "God is the Father; God is Love." This is the highest, most consoling affirmation, crystallising what the human soul has need to know.

What do these words mean?

They mean that we can always count on God's infinite care and tenderness.

God wishes good for us, and neither our faults, provided we are sorry for them, nor our severest troubles, nor even death itself, can separate us from Him.

Man needs to rest in this strengthening certainty.

Troubled by the glooms of life, led sometimes

## WHERE DO WE COME FROM? 19

astray by his limited judgment, he is too often tempted to believe that the world is given over to blind chance, full of irreparable injustice and inconsolable suffering. He needs to repeat to himself often, in order not to forget, that One who has made all things and understands all things, is mindful of him, has knowledge of his distress, and must know how to deliver him from his pain. Man needs, also, in order to walk firmly in the right, to fear the look of God which is Justice itself; and, to recover himself where he has fallen into sin, he cannot do without belief in the Father's forgiveness.

The certainty of being loved by God encourages man to respond with love, to remain faithful and to keep himself in touch and in harmony with the eternal and inexhaustible source of his life.

It is one of the great sadnesses of our frail lives that we hunger to attach ourselves permanently somewhere, and that our love encounters round about us only the perishable objects and

persons who, sooner or later, will fail us. We must take refuge in the love of God, not in order to become indifferent to human affections, but to find a solid foundation for them. By the love we reach entire confidence, a condition essential to steadfast living.

That traveller and pilgrim called man, who has to march and fight and face the storms of life, must feel himself safeguarded and enclosed by the all-powerful and merciful will that rules the worlds. Let him, then, be sure that we are in the hands of God for life, for death, and for eternity.

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WHO ARE WE?



#### IV

### CHARACTERS AND CONDITIONS OF HUMAN LIFE

**H**AVING spoken of the source of life and considered whence we come, let us examine the characters of life and the particular conditions in which we are placed.

Let us ask ourselves: What are we?

What sort of being is man?

In mere outward aspect, he is only a compound of material substances.

You remember the old classification that divides the world into three kingdoms: animal, vegetable, and mineral.

Man, by his physical nature, belongs to all these kingdoms. He is subject to the laws of weight, like a common pebble. If you should lose your balance on the edge of a precipice,



you would fall just like a lifeless stone. Your cries or your suffering would make no difference. The fatality of weight would drag you down.

Our bodies belong to the mineral kingdom for still another reason. They are derived from the earth. Decomposed by chemical analysis, they are reduced to a few simple substances that are found everywhere.

On the other hand, through the plants from which we derive nourishment, we belong to the vegetable kingdom. Without plants, we could not exist. The earth contains the elements of which we are composed, but of which we cannot make direct use. If I should suggest your eating clay, you would refuse, and not only because of the taste. The human stomach can digest only materials previously transformed by plants. "But," you say to me, "we eat meat." Granted; but the animals that furnish you with meat, have eaten vegetables. Plants, in a word, are our primary nourishment.

Finally, man belongs to the animal kingdom. The organization of his body does not differ essentially from that of warm-blooded animals. We have senses like those of animals, except that many of them have sharper sight, keener hearing, surer scent, decidedly better means of self-defence, and, in general, more speed and agility. Like the animals, we feel hunger, thirst, and pain; we grow old, we die.

**I**T can safely be said, then, that man is an animal. But can it be maintained that he is the same kind of animal as the others? Some people lay exaggerated stress upon the points of resemblance. Some, on the other hand, indignant at such a comparison, declare man to be absolutely different from the beasts. We might comprehend this indignation, had animals been created by some malevolent genius. But is it not God who has created them as well as us?

Let us begin by not reviling the beasts in order to exalt mankind. Let us by no means deny the intelligence of animals. They have intelligence, sometimes, to a surprising degree, but it is our place here to emphasise a great elementary difference constituting one of the distinctive characteristics of human life.

Man seems endowed with less powerful senses and with less redoubtable armour; in a word, he makes his start in life with inferior chances. He knows by instinct neither how to build himself a habitation, nor how to produce food, and yet he has learned how to send his sight farther than the eagle and to hear sounds that even the cat cannot detect. He builds dwellings that are solider and more comfortable than birds' nests, and invents arms compared with which the claws and teeth of lions are but playthings.

How does that come about?

It comes from the fact that the human intelligence advances from one thing to another, proceeds from the known to the unknown. The

advance is so slow that it often takes centuries to reach comprehension of something that seems very simple; but it does advance, it does progress. It is never content with what it has, and feels always impelled to go farther.

Animal intelligence, on the contrary, lively, striking as it is, often astonishing, seems shut within an insurmountable limit. The animal attains quickly enough the degree of perfection of which its species is capable, but it stops there. Studying animals through the ages, we may conclude that they have no history. If they have one, it is for us to study them; for their part, they do not know or observe themselves. They undergo our training, but do not transmit to their kind what they have learned from us. Have you ever seen a wise dog turn teacher?

In likening the intelligence of beasts to that of men, let me use an illustration which will, I think, stick in your memory.

You have often watched horses or bicyclists

on a circular track. They may go faster or slower. Some advance easily, others take so rapid a pace that they seem dizzy. But the time or the zeal they put into their work matters little; they never leave the circle, they never get ahead. This sort of exercise shows admirably how the instinctive intelligence of the animal, astonishing in its precision and swiftness, is nevertheless limited to a circle from which it never escapes.

Human intelligence goes another way. Slow, painful, laborious, its progress is like that of a man who would climb a mountain by a road of many levels. He does not go rapidly; perhaps, at times, he seems to be receding, retracing his steps; but he covers ground, and, if he is given time, he will make the summit.

**A** SECOND mark distinctive of mankind is his invincible tendency to differentiate the quality of his actions. He is not mistaken between good and evil; he

cannot help finding out that some things are good and some bad. This sense that judges actions and divides them into good and bad, is called the moral conscience. An animal seems to us given up to his instincts and to his sensations, a fact with which we find no fault; and be he ugly or good-natured, amenable or ferocious, we feel that he cannot be anything else. The man who shows himself to be governed by his instincts and his appetites incurs our contempt; we may well call him a slave, because he has, of his own accord, renounced liberty and effort. He appears to us a monster, and a criminal; and we regard him as at least partly responsible for his sad condition. The fact that man is essentially a moral being is proved by the remorse which follows our evil acts. The beast has no sense of remorse: "The lion tears his prey and sleeps; man commits a murder and lies awake."

Still another distinguishing mark of man is religious sentiment. The need he feels of

searching, beyond the visible world, for the invisible cause that has produced it and governs it; the tendency to venerate and adore the being hidden behind the mystery of the Creation: these are the distinctive signs of our nature, and are not to be found among the beasts.

**T**HOUGH we are related to the stones, the plants, and the animals, we belong to still other degrees of being. We are souls, and, as we have said, we are of the race of God.

In this incongruous origin lie both the difficulties and the interest of life. We come of an inferior substance, yet something within us prevents us from remaining inferior, and, in spite of ourselves, we take the road toward a higher form of life. There are instincts in our nature, low, inordinate, selfish, and wicked, and, at the same time, we are penetrated with inspirations that are high, noble, just, and true.

From the two tendencies dividing our nature,

comes the struggle, the great struggle between good and evil.

There are days when this struggle weighs us down. We should rather it did not exist. We envy the peace of beings who have no sense of it. We dream of being a flower, a bird; and this feeling is easy to understand. To give in to it would be to abdicate our rank. The beauty of life is in this torment.

We owe to the philosopher Plato a striking figure. He likens man to a chariot. The driver is our reasonable will; the two horses are our good and bad impulses. One of the horses is white, and gentle but very strong; he tractably obeys the voice of the driver. The other is black and vicious; he has bloodshot eyes, rears, plunges, throws himself to right, to left, into the legs of his mate, and threatens to drag the cart into ditches and quagmires. The driver needs all his vigilance to keep in the right road, with the help of the white horse.

Each one of us can see himself in this apo-



logue. There are times when we are workers, sober, reasonable, and well-disposed; the white horse prevails. Then comes a time when all our evil passions seem loosed; we feel ourselves wicked cowards, dissolute ingrates; the black horse is doing his work. The best of us has to struggle to keep his balance.

Truly this is a formidable state of affairs. But after all what better is there to excite our interest? Think a minute, and tell me what it is that most vividly attracts your attention. Is it not the sight or thought of a battle? Animals fighting, men in combat, or forces matched?

Have you ever watched in a stormy night at sea a ship's light wavering and disappearing, lifting again? How fascinated you were by that struggle of the trembling light against the elemental fury! And why? Because, without you knowing it, perhaps, that light was to you a symbol of human life. Our existence, however frail and tossed it now appears, has neverthe-

less the impassioned beauty of a combat in which are at stake the greatest interests, the most precious treasures, and in which there is nothing that is of no account, because there is nothing that does not either increase or lessen the chances of success, hasten victory, or compromise it.

## V

### OUR FOES AND OUR ALLIES

**W**E have seen that life is a combat. Is there any kind of combat where all sorts of unexpected antagonists or auxiliaries do not intervene? The first make the task harder, harassing and trammelling us. At the very moment when we need all our strength to sustain the fight they come and attack us from behind.

The others, on the contrary, help and keep us up. In the great combat of life also, man has foes and allies. We must stop a moment and consider this: for it is an important point.

**L**ET us speak first of the foes. Those that prevent man from leading an upright life are both internal and external. They are internal when they are with-

in us, in our will or our inclinations. The evil round about us would be easier to overcome, had it not, to assist it, the evil within us. A besieged city defends itself more easily when it needs only to resist outside assailants. It is indeed exposed the moment its enemies have confederates inside its walls. So it is with man. The evil he must fight has secret confederates in his own heart. In that fact lies the chief difficulty.

Whence comes this evil in us, which can be traced from our infancy, and which is not our own doing? It comes to us partly by inheritance.

Every man is an heir. He brings into the world, at birth, wrong tendencies. You hear often of family sicknesses. A new-born child may have in him the germs of a disease. There are also family vices like drunkenness, impurity, envy, or avarice. But we do not belong only to our especial family. We belong to humanity, which is a large family, whose principal mal-

ady, transmitted the world over to all its members, is a sort of innate savageness toward our fellow-beings. It causes us to forget our duty toward them, makes us hard, evil-minded, and selfish, and puts us into perpetual insurrection against God's command to love one another. From this chief vice come all the minor vices.

Besides internal foes installed within us, we have those that come from our surroundings: bad examples and bad habits.

The emperor Marcus Aurelius, whose beautiful life has our admiration, tells, in one place, from whom he learned to direct his actions. He mentions parents, public men, and even servants.

"In my grandfather, Verus," he says, "I have had an example of gentle manners and of unalterable patience. My father left me the memory of modesty and strength of character.

"I wish to strive to imitate my mother's devotion and benevolence; to abstain, like her, not only from doing evil, but from even conceiving the thought of it; to lead her frugal life,

so different from the accustomed luxury of the rich.

"To my tutor, I owe my knowledge of how to bear fatigue, how to keep down my wants, how to work with my own hands, how to avoid meddling in the affairs of others, and how to make my doors difficult for idle tattling.

"It was Diogenete who inspired me with dislike for useless occupations; and, thanks to him, too, I know how to bear frankness in speech.

"Rusticus made me understand that I needed to correct and cultivate my character. He also diverted me from the false paths or the ways whither the Sophists lead. . . ."

What Marcus Aurelius says here of a salutary example could be repeated many times, the other way round, to show the influence of a pernicious example.

If man had a sufficiently good memory and enough clear-sightedness to observe and retain the facts relative to his conduct, he would be

able to tell where and from whom he learned the evil that he knows and practises. We adopt habits, the idea of which has not necessarily germinated in our brain. They come to us from a comrade who has inspired us, excited us, led us on, who has become our teacher in the art of doing evil. Environment exerts upon us a very powerful influence. We are endowed with a marked faculty for imitation which is indispensable to life. All that we learn depends on this faculty. Alas! it is often the occasion of error and corruption. We reproduce what we see done. Any one brought up in the midst of bad examples runs the risk of imitating them before even perceiving his danger. In bad example, under all its forms, we see our principal external enemy.

If we had neither evil inclinations within us nor perverse examples round us, the struggle between good and evil would be much simplified. We should be free to fight unhampered. But that is not the case. Man is a fettered fighter.

Think of a soldier, laden with baggage, dragging a ball chained to his ankle, and under those conditions obliged to fight.

Suppose I give one more illustration, since it does no harm to lighten a grave subject.

You have all seen men running races. They take off everything that would hinder them, in order to run better. So prepared, they start out over the course. But often to complicate the race different methods are devised. One of the most successful, and most amusing, consists of putting the runner into a sack tied round his hips. His arms are free, his legs imprisoned, or else his arms, too, are tied, leaving only his head free. This is called a sack-race. It is rather difficult, but, if the runner perseveres, somehow or other, he reaches the goal, and there is certainly credit in winning under such conditions, and such are the conditions imposed on men whose task is especially hard.

Let us not forget this; and if some of us run faster than others, let us conceive that perhaps



they are reduced to running in a sack,—we must not let ourselves despise them.

**H**APPILY there come powerful allies and set themselves opposite to all the enemies gathered against us. We must keep them in mind. To count our adversaries is prudent, but to review our friends is more agreeable. It goes without saying, that this must not prevent us from relying on ourselves and our own efforts. The assurance of allies is given us, not to lead us into inertia, but to inspire our courage and keep up our hope.

Our first allies are within ourselves. If our souls bear traces of unhappy inheritance, they also bear marks of good omen. There are good instincts in us, which are as much our heritage as the bad ones. Without our knowing they come to us from those who have lived before us. These hereditary virtues are no more to our credit than hereditary vices are our personal fault. We benefit in this respect by the law

that formerly was against us, but "noblesse oblige." We are not permitted to let be lost or lie dormant the gifts that accompanied birth. Let us be thankful and make the best possible use of them. The good that is in us must serve to war against the evil that is beside it.

With inherited virtues, we may place national qualities and those of the religious and social centre where we live. These we cannot appreciate enough. The heir of generous blood, energetic character, mental balance, and a soul that loves truth, has a patrimony more precious than riches, a sound legacy to be devoutly guarded. Such provision of good health in one's being, equips for battle.

We have another ally: good example with its power of radiation. Bad example inclines the will toward evil, invites us, tempts us. But the example of a beautiful life charges us for good. The one excites the beast in us, appealing to the evil instincts and leaguings with them; the other, like a trumpet call, ringing through our souls,

summons every healthy energy. It gathers them, orders them, ranges them for battle, and leads them into action. Example is not only an indication, a counsel. It does not merely point out the right way, and then leave us to ourselves as a fine model of handwriting indicates the true form of the letters. Example is not that—but an active force, that injects us with the principle of energy. One might almost say that it acts contagiously upon us.

Example does not die with those who have given it. It survives them. And we have, thus, not only the good examples round about us, but those of the entire past. To sustain, strengthen, and help us, we have the actions and the thoughts of those who, before us, have sought truth, loved justice, and done good. Heroes, saints, wise men, prophets, Christ and the apostles, all, in fact, humble or famed, who have been champions of the right,—are our allies. What a noble train! What honour to enter into this immortal phalanx if only under the title of an

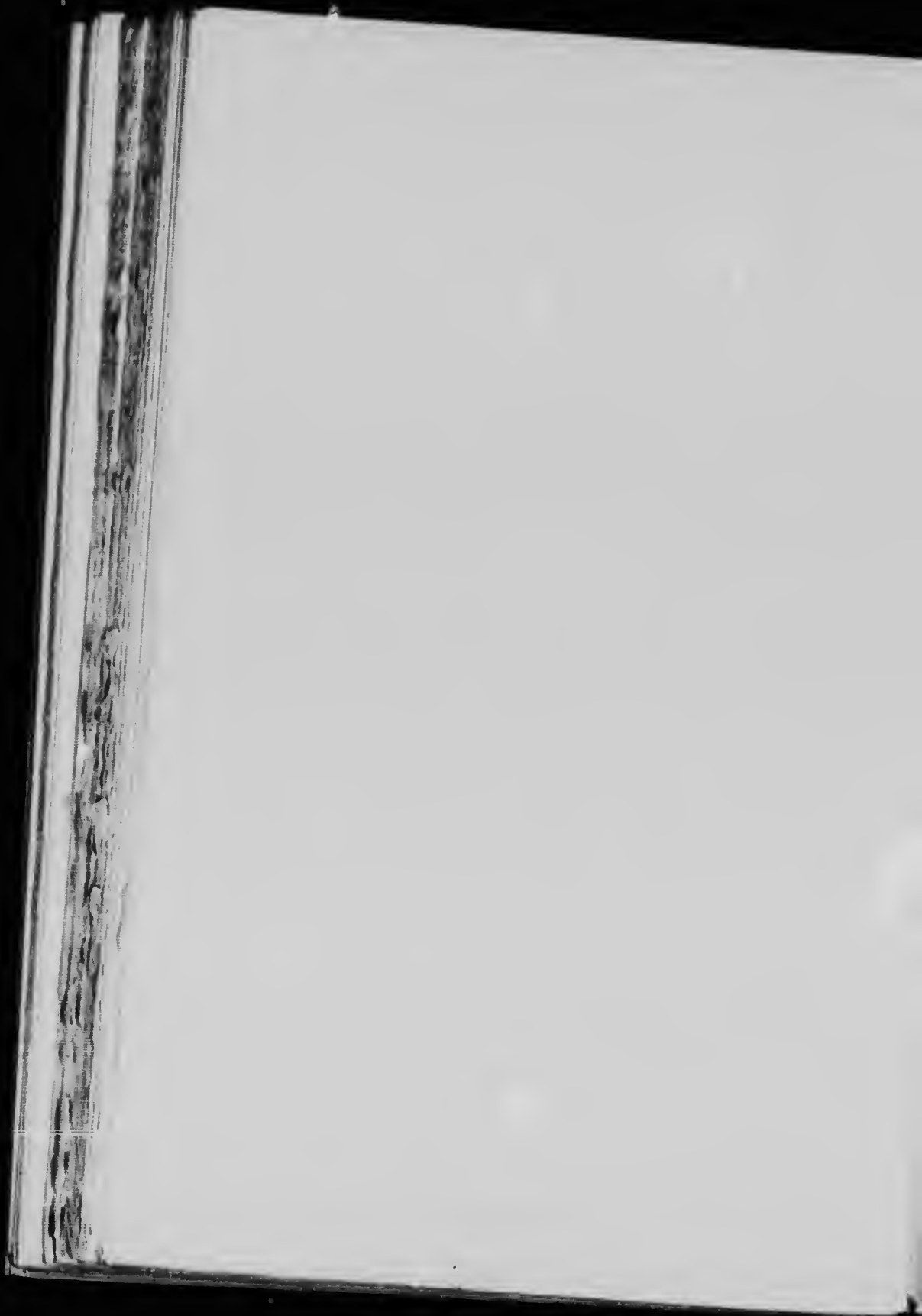
obscure little soldier! All the helping powers of humanity surround us. Christ, one day, spoke these words, "*Lo, I am with you, even unto the end of the world.*" Holy humanity of all ages gives us this assurance through his mouth.

And above human life and the struggles it causes us, we have the eternal Will of God, desiring that God exist, that Justice triumph, and that Evil be vanquished.

Not alone then, or betrayed in advance to our enemies, do we enter into the combat, but under a good captain, with countless allies, and with the assured hope that at the end of our strife, we shall bring back victory.



**WHAT ARE WE TO DO?**



## VI

### THE LAWS OF LIFE

**C**OMBAT has its rules, to which, under pain of defeat, soldier and officer alike must conform. It is not enough to be a resolute soldier; with spirit should go discipline. And the officer, for his part, no matter how ingenious and confident he be, needs knowledge of the art of war and the principles of strategy.

Let us, accordingly, the better to prepare ourselves for the field of honour, study carefully the laws of life, and the main occasions when we are called upon to assert ourselves.



**T**O do this, let us consider, first, what constitutes a law. There are many false notions on this point, though it is one of the most necessary to state precisely and to understand. We shall look at it as simply as possible.

Most men believe that a law is an order that it has pleased some one to give, but that might just as well have been formulated differently. To modify a law, it would be enough to get rid of a few ideas or a few customs. Applying this principle to the regulation of life, amounts to declaring that everything is but artificial convention or arbitrary ordinance. Doubtless there are arbitrary laws which men have made, guided by their passions or misled by their ignorance. But the laws of life are not arbitrary; they are as necessary and eternal as those of nature. They exist; we may ignore them, but we could not change them. Our greatest interest consists in seeking them, in carefully

meditating them, and in following them. Every one knows these commandments from the decalogue, "Thou shalt not kill; Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour; Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Where did these commandments get their value? Was it because Moses promulgated them? or because the Church adopted them? Did they not exist before being written? Might not God, to whose inspiration we have traditional reasons to attribute them, have decreed others and said, for instance: "Thou shalt kill; Thou shalt lie; Thou shalt steal; Thou shalt commit adultery"? In that event the good men would have been the murderers, the thieves, the cheats, and the corrupt beings who take pleasure in shame and filth. Do you not see the absurdity of such a supposition? Could life go on, if men applied themselves to killing, lying, stealing, and degrading themselves? I do not suppose humanity would last a year

should it conduct itself scrupulously and universally on such principles.

The truth is that the laws of life are not arbitrary. They are neither the result of the fantasy of man nor of a sort of capricious desire on the part of a God ruling according to his good pleasure. They are established in life itself. There are laws for living as there are for building. Try to construct a bridge or a house with no attention to the laws of weight and equilibrium. These laws, to be sure, were discovered by men. The square and the plumb-line are of human origin. But masons and architects, in slowly acquiring the essential principles of their trade, have only followed nature and her fixed law. The time will never come when we may follow other laws, building without regard to the resistance of materials and to the perpendicular line.

The laws of life, too, have been slowly evolved and brought to light. Even errors have taught men. He who falls and hurts himself asks

himself why he fell, and grows more prudent. He who eats a poisonous fruit falls sick and thereafter lets that harmful food alone. Men have learned, through long and sorrowful experience, that living a certain way was going the wrong road, and, the better to point the road, they have expressed in laws and regulations, the results of wisdom that has cost them dear. Likewise sailors, after long years of uncertain navigation, of accidents, and of shipwrecks, have created the system of signals and beacons you see along the coast. These signals and beacons, with their different colours, are a language the seaman comprehends. He knows that such a fire means: "Look out, there are rocks and shoals"; that another fire means: "Look out for currents"; and that finally that friendly light beyond is telling him: "Here is the right way."

**S**UMMING up, in connection with the laws of human life, what we have just said, let us draw a general conclusion from it.

The law of a being depends upon what that being is, the faculties it contains, its organisation, its structure, and its general character. To raise an animal, you must know about it. A bird does not live like a fish. A young lion requires a different diet from that of a young rabbit. To know how a man should live, you must remember what he is and what he is worth. Man, having a nature that is corporeal, intellectual, and moral, is obliged to care for himself under these three aspects, to neglect none of them, and to treat them according to their reciprocal value. There is a saying that it is first necessary for man to be a good animal; and that is true. His body, neglected or weakened, becomes for him such a burden and such an encumbrance, that he can no longer pay

attention to anything else. The best means for making the body a capable instrument for the service of the spirit, is to watch over it, to exercise it, to train it, to assure it, in a word, what we call health.

The health of the mind depends, likewise, upon a careful and well-understood culture. Just as lack of cleanliness and of bodily care results in sickness, lack of intellectual culture gives rise to disorders. Ignorance, superstition, and all kinds of intellectual malady result from lack of culture. "A sound mind in a healthy body" is the way the ancients defined the condition of a normal man. But for a man to be well and to be wise is not enough. If his conscience is not enlightened, if his will is indirected, if he has not formed his character, he runs the risk of putting to evil use his bodily vigour and mental capabilities. A wicked man is the much more dangerous the more he is robust and well-informed. We should, therefore, above everything else, nourish, fortify, and purify

our conscience and our will, in order that whatever power we have acquired may be put to good use. And it is to do precisely this that we are put here.

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## VII

### INDIVIDUAL MAN AND HIS LAW

**L**ET us take up first the individual apart from his surroundings. Let us consider the way every one should act toward himself. In this connection two rules dominate all conduct: Self-respect and self-control.

**F**IRST, self-respect. In this matter we must distinguish between the degraded personal sentiment called pride, which we rightly condemn, and the requisite and normal personal sentiment by which we feel that we are worth being somebody, worth asserting our separate special existence and its due. Pride affects a man absurdly, making him attach importance to the lowest phases of his be-



ing, value himself according to his looks, his strength, his wealth, or his knowledge, have of himself an exaggerated opinion and take to himself a place in the world ridiculously out of proportion. But we need not, therefore, conclude that a man should hold the meanest opinion of himself, should efface himself, and not have, so to speak, courage to be. Be some one;\* God wishes it. Otherwise there would not be so many different natures and temperaments. We are created and put into the world to fulfil a function, and to accomplish an end. Every one has his own work to do, with the special capacities for doing it, just as a bird has his own song, which he is supposed to sing rather than that of some other bird, a man has his own row to hoe; and to do it, he must live his life, must steadily, firmly, and confidently be what he ought to be, without letting anything or anybody disconcert him.

\* "*Dare to be*" was the motto of that great and good man, Felix Pécant.

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A couplet from Victor Hugo expresses admirably the simple quiet courage of being one's self in spite of risk or ridicule:

*"In June, no smile embarrasses the rose  
From filling nature's duty to unclothe."*

There is, then, a kind of pride we should respect, approve, and cultivate. Without it, we should be lacking in essential strength. The trouble with most of us is that we do not realise what we owe ourselves. To appear well, to exert ourselves, to do well in business, we must necessarily think pretty well of ourselves. Our life is so big and mysterious that we could not keep over it a watch too minute nor guard too close. When girls of a holiday morning go out in their white dresses, how they avoid touching anything dirty, any dust, or whatever might soil their attire or mar its freshness! Let us be as careful of our young lives, of our bodies and of our souls as our sisters are of their clean dresses; let us dread soiling ourselves, disgrac-

ing ourselves or letting any habit get the better of us.

Some men have so keen a sense of family honour, that the mere name they bear keeps them from misconduct. Where is the family older or more venerable than the great human family in which we are children? Or what name is there worthier than man's, the child of God?

We must bear it with sacred respect. For it denotes the most priceless thing in the world. The Gospel says: "What does it avail a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" That means that the poorest, the most unfortunate, the most friendless of us is worth more than all the gold, all the riches, all the kings' crowns, and all the stars of the heavens. Man will never search these words deeply enough. If he understood them, no humble situation could abase him, no tyranny could subdue him, no misfortune could break his courage, no base temptation of interest or vulgar pleasure could corrode him.

**M**AN ought not only respect himself, but govern himself. The second law that extends to all our thoughts and all our actions is the law of moderation.

Moderation consists in applying a sense of proportion to our needs, our desires, our words, and all the manifestations of our existence.

Man has been given the faculty of directing his actions himself. But he learns to exercise it only gradually. At first he is pretty unruly, inordinate, and unrestrained. Innate passion carries him toward his desire or his whim; and his state of being a free creature often makes him inferior to the beasts that are guided and checked by instinct. It is here that definite limits must be set up, of reserve and prudence, of that equilibrium, in short, which consists in not overstepping bounds. There is nothing more difficult, at certain moments of enthusiasm, than to stop. Effort to succeed in this point

signifies wisdom and nobility. Unfortunately, the majority of human beings have never learned to govern themselves. They are the sport of their appetites, and time after time let themselves be carried away in all sorts of directions, far from what one would consider the right course for a reasonable being. We must learn in good season to order our life and our desires; and however difficult it be to regulate our natural appetites, we must accomplish it, or no longer merit the title of man. A man is no reed, pliant to any wind, or letting himself be borne along like a dead leaf on the violence of his impressions. A man worthy to be so called is a disciplined will, accustomed to conform himself to law, and to be moderate, temperate, and sober in all things.

Yet the care of his body and of his mind, all the trouble he takes to watch over his health, to exercise his physical strength, to forge ahead, to cultivate his intelligence and his conscience, to assert himself, and to form his character, are

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only the beginning of his work. The end of man is not to strengthen and perfect himself for his own glory, or advantage; the end of man is to develop his body and brain as much as possible, in order finally to be of service to his fellow-men.

## VIII

### SOCIETY AND ITS LAW

**W**HEN we start to reflect on the life of man, we soon see that each of us is nothing by himself. He but exists and continues by means of ties that bind him to other men.

These ties are very many: some are visible and potent, others lie hidden. We speak of them under the general name of *solidarity*.

**F**IRST of all there is the *family tie*. What is man when he enters into life?

A pitiable being, without beauty, without speech, ignorant of everything, even of his existence, without power to move an object or take hold of it. Though you might put clothing and food near him he would perish of cold

and hunger, not knowing how to make use of them.

We owe our existence to our parents in a double sense. Our mothers not only bring us into the world, but their kind, deft hands provide us with the indispensable facilities we cannot yet exercise.

These incessant attentions, thanks to which our bodies live, are not all we receive. We are bred in tenderness, our minds and our hearts awaken under our mother's kiss. As we drink the milk, we absorb the life round about. Any one who had forgotten would need but to notice a baby in its development. Through his sense of imitation, the little child is literally suckled by his surroundings. He adopts the language, the accent, the ways of thinking, the gestures, the local customs: a man comes forth from his family as fruit from a tree. How blind he would be after that, were he willing to forget it all, in thinking only of himself!



**A**FTER *family solidarity* comes *national solidarity*. The little family in which we grow up has prepared us for the large one which is our fatherland. The family leads to our country as the brook leads to the river. The first impressions attaching us to our country are those of childhood, the memories of home and the native soil. Our country is the "Fatherland," and we belong to it through our particular fathers and ancestors.

Patriotism, as it first appears, is local. It is made up of all the tender memories that attach a man to the corner of the earth whence he came, and to the faces that surrounded his childhood. However spiritual our feelings may be, they always fasten themselves to some visible object. Thus the sentiment of patriotism binds itself in our minds to certain clear images which conjure up our native land. It may be the sight of a village or of meadows, a forest, mountains, or

the sea-shore. Whether the land be rich or poor, insignificant or majestic, memories of youth lend it a charm nowhere else to be found. The lands best loved by their children are very often rough and barren.

As a boy grows up, his horizon recedes, the boundaries of his narrow country, formerly ended by a hill or a river, stretch out. It is then we learn that the beloved spot so familiar to us, where we have left our footprints, and carved our name on the bark of trees, is part of a number of like territories, and constitutes with them a vast whole: the country. That country has a history which is told us; we learn what struggles, what far-away events, have made way for things as they are. The names of its heroes ring in our memories, are sung on our lips. We come to know the thought and the work of fellow-citizens who have lived before us. Their glories and their defeats, their sufferings and their successes touch us, and thus we conceive

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affection for the whole idea of a great national life. When it is genuine, patriotism becomes a source of inspiration and activity. Love of country sustains us in our daily work, whatever that be. Choose any honourable task you wish, however humble it be, the prosperity, the honour, and the reputation of your country are directly concerned in your performing it to the best of your ability. A country's future is intrusted not only to its skilful diplomats, to its artists of great talent, to its captains of industry, and to its heroic soldiers. It means more to a country to have good workmen, good seamen, industrious farmers, honest shopkeepers, faithful servants, and studious children than to have great generals and ministers, scholars, and teachers of note. Every one in his place must do his duty, and be mindful of his country if national life is to be sound and vigorous.

Patriotism impels us to respect public order, national laws and institutions. At the same time, it fills us with goodwill toward our fellow-

citizens, regardless of political, social, or religious distinction.

Let us take good care not to confuse true patriotism with that narrow, sectarian sentiment that decorates itself with the name of patriotism and consists chiefly in a prejudice against foreigners with no increase in brotherliness or toleration among our own people. Just as true patriotism is like wholesome natural wine, passionate, blustering patriotism is like artificial wine that has never seen a vineyard.

**T**RUE patriotism is a large and generous sentiment, that ennobles us, tempers us, betters us in every way, and prepares us for a solidarity still higher than the national. The country is not the last degree of *human solidarity*. Much as a man is connected with the social body, each country is connected to humanity. One country could not isolate itself and take no interest in the others. Nations

are contiguous at their frontiers, and be they rivals or enemies, have common interests.

Each country is concerned in living at peace with its neighbours, and especially, whether they are friendly or unfriendly, in knowing about them in order to keep in touch with their thought and their activity. Let us never be led, by a misconception of patriotism, to despise a foreigner, to be ignorant of his manner of living, of working, and of preparing for the future. It is through patriotism that many excellent citizens give themselves up to learning foreign languages, to leaving their country in order to inform themselves of outside customs, and bring back to their home land the fruit of their labour and experiences.

Beyond all these considerations, moreover, good as they are in themselves, there is one that should induce us to take our part in what is happening beyond national frontiers: I mean that higher brotherly interest, that greatest concern of all, which every man, because he is a

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man, should feel in the destinies of his fellows. It is simply and beautifully expressed by one of the ancients: "I am a man, and nothing human is foreign to me."

IX  
RESULTS OF SOLIDARITY  
OBEDIENCE

**W**E have just traced the broad framework of life in society. Let us now go over several of the principles that should guide us in it.

The first of these, which appears especially to concern childhood, but really pertains, in a different way, to the whole of life, is obedience. It consists in conforming ourselves to the laws of the community in which we belong.

Let us first speak of obedience as it presents itself to all of us at the beginning of our career.

It is a rather unsympathetic subject, I know. It does not excite curiosity or provoke enthusiasm. When we are young we would rather

hear surprising stories, listen to the description of distant countries, of peculiar animals, of exotic plants, or of strange adventures, than have our attention invited to obedience.

Could we not dispense with obedience? Is it not much more agreeable to do what we please? Why, when we are little, do grown people put us under such a yoke? These are the practical questions with which we have to deal.

I shall begin by telling you that grown people did not invent obedience through spite or through a spirit of domination. It is the result of necessity.

When you wish to go into an unknown country, for example, without the risk of being lost any minute, you must follow a guide who knows the way. Life, for a child, is an unknown country, in which he has need of a guide. Obedience is letting others show us the way. Our natural guides are our parents, or the teachers to whom our parents delegate their authority. We who have come recently and without expe-



rience into a family, cannot be allowed to disorder the household, to compromise our health and our future, and attack the general interest of the family, by going on such adventures as we please. I suppose nothing in the world is simpler in theory.

In practice it is another thing.

Why should it be so difficult to obey, when obedience, in short, is natural?

Let us try to account for that. Let us think a minute.

If we had no will, we would go, at a signal, to the right, to the left, forward, and backward, like a machine; our motions would follow a certain given order, like those of a jumping-jack following a thread. But we have a personal will. It is one of the most precious things we possess. This will, though, begins by being blind. It follows, haphazard and with great force, the first impulse that comes. The less enlightened the reason, the more opinionated is the will. This is what happens with a child

He wants a thing absolutely; he becomes infatuated with it. Refuse him; order him to take something else, and his will enters into a struggle with yours. There is a collision; and the collision is sometimes very unpleasant.

Education consists in enlightening, directing, and disciplining our will, not in breaking it. We might compare ourselves, for instance, to young colts, whose petulance is a good deal like the vivacity of our young spirits. The education of a spirited horse does not consist in breaking his legs, putting out his eyes, and then saying: "Now, you are conquered and perfectly quiet." It does consist in making him, with the proper means, and little by little, tamer and more tractable, so that his strength may not be foolishly and harmfully wasted in kicking, but spent in steady and useful efforts.

Obedience is either easy or difficult, as we understand or do not understand why we obey. The reason ought willingly to be explained to us; but that is not always possible. Sometimes

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there is not time, and often, too, we are too young to understand. In that case we must obey without understanding. Listen to this story which will explain what I mean.

A man employed by a railroad as switchman was at his post to turn the switch so that a fast train might pass on the instant into the station.

Suddenly he saw running toward him twenty paces away, his five-year-old son who was crossing the track without noticing the train. If the man left his post, he would cause a collision that would kill many people; but if he stayed, his child would be killed.

In that fearful extremity, he cried to the child with all his might: "*Lie down on the ground!*" Instantly the child obeyed, and the express passed over him without harming a hair. He was saved; had he asked *why*, he would have been lost.

Let us look at obedience as an indispensable barrier. Is it to vex and oppose us that parapets are put on bridges, balustrades on balco-

nies, hand-rails around precipices? We know these are for our good. Let us put a little goodwill into our comprehension of the necessity of obedience; that will turn our foolish heads to docility and thought.

The entire rule of life is contained for children in the fifth commandment: "Honour thy father and thy mother." Those who will not obey are like the bough that will not remain attached to the trunk, and receive its sap: they are destined to wither and dry up.

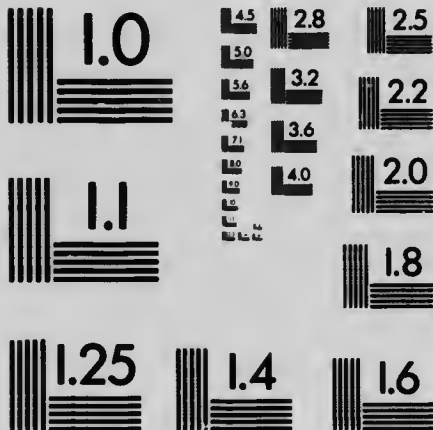
**O**BEDIENCE is often made difficult to a child by the sight of the lives of grown people who, according to him, "*do what they please.*" Just as a poor man most resents his misery when he sees the luxury and pleasures of the rich.

But it is an error, and a great one, to think that grown people do as they please. No one does as he pleases. Some obey their passions and their appetites: these are the worst grade of



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slaves. Others obey reason, duty, and conscience: they are the truly free. It is to a place among the latter that we should aspire. To reach it, we must learn to yield ourselves, as children, to the respectable and intelligent will of our parents. While we are young and ignorant of the laws of life, they are our law. They stand in the place of conscience to us, so long as our own is unassured. In respecting them, we are preparing to respect later the advice of our conscience, when law, at first an outside influence, shall have become an inside influence. Respect is a keen sense of the value of men and things. It is always a part of a good man's every thought. Rascals, criminals, lunatics, and evil-workers, have no knowledge of respect. For them, nothing is venerable or sacred. They are like a brutish wild boar that ravages a beautiful garden, tears up the seeds with his snout, tramples the frail sprouts, and rolls among the dainty blossoms.

Respect takes nothing from our stature.

Do you think that in bowing modestly to an old man as you pass him, or to a distinguished citizen, you have sacrificed a part of your dignity? On the contrary, in bowing to him you have added to your stature. In knowing what is honourable, you do yourself honour: failing in respect where it is due, you do yourself dishonour. The lowest of human beings is he who has no respect for anything or anybody: he has descended so abjectly far that he has no longer even a sense of what is beautiful, noble, and exalted, or of what deserves admiration, enthusiasm, and reverence.

We recognise now the pure, strong feeling that makes a man bend his head to a worthy law. Let us go along farther and look at others of the laws which point like guide-posts toward good and upright living.



## X

### BE TRUE

**F**IRST comes the law of truth. To live together, men must be able confidently to count upon one another.

When confidence begins to fail, all relations are disturbed; that is so true that even brigands and thieves, when they form a band, are expected to practise a sort of honesty among themselves. If a brigand mistrusts his accomplice, what becomes of the band? It is soon divided, betrayed, discovered, and surrendered to the police.

Men in society are like stones in the arch of a bridge. If the stones are displaced, failing in their promise of solidity, the bridge collapses, and, falling with it, everything is lost that depends on its soundness—men, horses, and the passing train.

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Truth is the ground under our feet. You have heard people tell of the terror that strikes into everything alive at the times of earthquake. The earth is a firm foundation. We have learned to look on it as secure. When men walk or build on it, they have the feeling that it will not move, and when it begins to tremble, there is nothing that abides. The oldest walls crack and tremble; the roof falls on the heads it should protect; abysses open at our feet to engulf us. Then all is up, and even the courageous lose heart. On what can we count if the earth crumbles and is gone? In the moral world, the earth on which we build is truth.

To be true to others, we must begin by being true to ourselves. The human heart is the centre of action. From a deceitful heart can come only trickery and falsehood.

For the human soul, truth is frankness, sincerity. It is a disposition to be upright, and kindly loyal toward others.

As a general rule, man begins by being frank.

At the same time he is trusting. In early life, we do not understand simulation, and distrust is unknown to us. When we lose frankness, confidence goes too. He who is frank believes others to be frank, and he who hides his feelings and tries to deceive people easily believes that they are trying to deceive him. The liar suspects everybody; that is one of his punishments.

How does the child who does not know how to hide how he feels, happen to become shy and deceitful?

If we look back for the cause of our first falsehoods, we shall see that they were often invented to cover up misdeeds and avoid their disagreeable results. Often, too, falsehood takes that seductive and agreeable form called flattery. Its end, then, is to gain the goodwill of those to whom it is addressed: remember the fable of the fox and the crow.

Alas, it is not always to avoid punishment, or to obtain advantages, or to piece out boast-

ful tales, that we descend to falsehood. Too often it serves as a weapon to wound and morally to kill one's neighbour: it is then called slander and is calumny.

**S**LANDER is a certain skill in discovering and exploiting the foibles of others. It sees the ridiculous and defective sides of a man, and brings them into relief. Of his good qualities, it never speaks. To picture only our faults is to wrong us. Every one of us has faults. If, in speaking of us, you show only those, you are lying. I may have a black spot on my face, but that spot is not my whole face. Caricatures are not portraits.

The world is full of people who take a vicious delight in laying stress on anybody's worst features. Such people are often very witty and amusing. One laughs involuntarily in listening to their talk. But it is an unhealthy and inadvisable diversion. Slander not only causes its victim suffering; it serves ill those who lend an

ear to it. They get used to this sad distortion of human nature, and finally believe that that is the only way it exists. Let us be just; let us be true. Let us prefer to look for the good and to mark it well. Let it please us to find at least one virtue, where there seem only faults. That will be worth more to us than adroitly remarking imperfections, and keeping carefully silent about good qualities.

**S**LANDER is imposture; but there is something worse than that: I have called it calumny.

Calumny invents, out of whole cloth, things about people that are absolutely false. While slander is often bold, and appears in plain daylight, calumny creeps, hides, and conceals its identity. Those who peddle in such formulas as these: "They say the story goes"; "could it be true that?"; etc. But no one knows whence the story comes, or cares about knowing. Often the very people who

have invented it say: "I can scarcely believe it, but this is what they are saying about such and such a one. Don't give me away, keep this to yourself, and, above all, don't tell anybody that you had it from me."

The bearer of calumny is the coward par excellence. He attacks from behind and in the dark. To fight an enemy in front of you, however terrible it may be, gives you, at least, a fighting chance. But to receive blows without knowing whence they come, to be accused without knowing by whom, often not even of what, and without being able to answer and defend yourself,—truly people must be pretty vile and criminal of soul to occasion fellow-creatures such anguish.

**T**HERE is still another name for falsehood, when it permeates one's entire life: hypocrisy.

The hypocrite is the false, masked being whose gestures and actions are all pretences.

He hides vice under a show of virtue, hatred under the mantle of love, impiety under the aspect of religion. Hypocrisy must be a very subtle, formidable kind of evil, that Christ, who was all gentleness and pardon, and understood so well the infirmities of our poor nature, should point it out with so relentless a severity.

We have not finished describing the various kinds of falsehood. It would be easier to count the fishes of the sea or the birds of the forest than to catalogue all the varieties of this hideous vice.

We are appalled at the numerous forms of falsehood and their results; at all the untruth that is spoken, written, printed, or taught. Falsehood seems to us like an immense fortress, guarded by a numberless throng, all armed with every conceivable weapon, and we ask ourselves if truth has a single chance in this world of prevailing.

If it were necessary for truth and justice to shine forth, that the majority of men might

consent to speak the truth, we should have reason to be discouraged, for, unfortunately, the number of those who lie is very great, and thus arise many of the doubts and disasters of life. We deceive one another and change the earth into an uninhabitable place. In some countries, they say: "Ah, what a fine place to live in! What a marvellous climate! It would be a paradise, were it not full of snakes." We should be right in thus speaking of the earth. Men would live in peace, were they not liars, or perjurers, and did not their dishonesty, their deceit, and their evil and perfidious tongues, like so many vipers and scorpions, scatter everywhere death and desolation.

**T**RUTH, however, does not lose its authority. Falsehood is a colossal force; truth is even stronger. I shall try to prove this statement by a very simple example.

Suppose that I am very strong indeed, and



that I have a business transaction with a little child to whom I owe a thousand francs.

I lay on the table before him a five-franc piece and a sou, and I ask him their names. He tells me: "The large white piece is five francs, or one hundred sous; the little red one is a sou, five centimes, one hundred times less."

Now, for my own interest, I wish him to think the contrary of this. I have a thousand francs to pay him, and it serves my purpose to tell the child that the reddish pieces are worth one hundred sous. I repeat to him, as I count out one hundred sou pieces: "Two hundred times five francs are a thousand francs. There, you are paid."

Here is a crying injustice. The child cannot deny it. What does that prove? Merely that I am the stronger, not that I am right, and nothing is really changed. Each of the sous I gave remains a sou. Whoever sees them will say: "Those are only sous." Suppose that I support my claim by joining with other strong,

armed liars. We gather a company, terrorise everybody, attack and make prisoners of all who will not say that one sou is a hundred. After all this violence, a sou will still be a sou. Let us put the question to the people. Let an entire nation, by its votes, declare that one sou is a hundred sours. Nothing more would be accomplished. No power on earth, neither emperor, nor pope, nor crowd of howling people, could change it. By taking the necessary time and trouble, you may lower hills and raise valleys, but you cannot make a sou anything else than a sou. To lie is to attempt the impossible.

Here appears the power of truth against falsehood. To tell the truth is to say what is and what is not. A child who tells the truth is stronger than a man who lies. A poor man who tells the truth is richer than a powerful, celebrated rich man who lies.

A dead man who told the truth is stronger than the hundreds and thousands of living men who tried to kill with him the truth that he defended.

Persecution has followed truthful men who have devoted themselves to patient study and to long research that they might discover certain laws of nature. You all know that Galileo was imprisoned because he insisted that the earth revolves, and there were people whom that idea annoyed. They even succeeded, by promises and threats, in making him deny his conviction. After his retraction, the poor man, with his head in his hands, cried out: "It does move, for all that."

Yes, it moves, and in vain men write or print that it does not. To what does it amount to forbid teaching that it turns, or to say that he who thinks so is an impostor? To nothing, for what is not, is not. Galileo, who says that the earth turns, is right against all the doctors, traditions, and millions of men who maintain the contrary. You know that man can neither create nor destroy a grain of sand. Neither by fire, nor by the pestle, nor by dynamite, can an atom be destroyed, nor can the most skilful

chemist ever make a molecule out of nothing. You cannot destroy a fact by substituting another for it. What has happened, has happened. No one will ever abolish a fact by repeating that it has not happened.

We need know nothing more to serve truth courageously. Her day will come: against the truth, no force can prevail. Let us be truthful men, servants of truth.

Man is a witness. A witness should not consult his preferences, but should tell what he has seen. No one is greater than a man who, before whatever power, or in whatever danger, tells only what he knows, without adding to it or retrenching it, even to glorify a good cause. To desire to serve a good cause by forcing one's testimony, by exaggerating or detracting from the facts to make them more conclusive, is to try to serve truth by falsehood, like feeding a man his own brain to strengthen him. Your speech should be yes, yes; no, no, and, once spoken, it will become like a granite monument

fixed in the earth. Keep your promises; honour your engagements. Let the people say of you, "One man; one word." He is not a man, who has none; but a changing misleading phantom, that vanishes at touch or pressure.

If we knew the strength, the nobility, the beauty, and the benefit of truth, we would cleave to it, as the ivy to the oak.

Truth is the salvation of the world. It is the friend of all, even of whom it strikes. Wounds made by truth heal and cleanse; caresses of falsehood poison and kill. If we love fellow-men, friends, countrymen, or family, let us always tell them the truth. To lie to any one, even to be agreeable, is to treat him as an enemy; it is equivalent to giving him false money for true, poison for food.

Let us honour truth by serving it cheerfully. If it is possible to smile, let us not speak it sharply, or with a scowling face. Many bear truth like those awkward porters, who cannot move along with their burdens without hitting

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foreheads, staving in eyes, or trampling the feet of pedestrians. Do not be like them. Do not serve truth with "a face too imperiously majestic," as Montaigne says. To serve truth rightly, and to make it agreeable to those who hear us, let us choose scrupulously our time and our words. Let us try to unite to truth, tact and propriety, benevolence and charity.

## XI

### RESPECT LIFE

**L**IFE is the wonder of wonders. Man can neither create it nor understand it, though he may have a harmful or a salutary influence over it.

The greatest harm one may do life is to destroy it, but of that it seems that only a coward or a criminal would be capable. That is a mistake. One does not need to have particularly ferocious instincts to destroy life. He needs but to forget to watch over himself.

We notice that man, from youth up, has a perverse tendency called the instinct of destruction, which manifests itself in many cruel and destructive actions. It begins very young in those whose chief joy is to break or destroy. To them, trampling on a flower, tearing out a

shrub by the roots, or plundering a garden, is a treat. You tell me that a crushed flower does not suffer. Possibly; but a flower is a masterpiece of art and grace. Something in it is from the One who made the world. To destroy it for the pleasure of destruction is a sign of boorishness and stupidity, as well as an offence to the Creator. It is always unjust to destroy the fruit of labour.

Moreover, in crushing unregretfully a delicate corolla, you are growing hard-hearted. You will not be satisfied, soon, to strike down, as you pass, the lily of the pool or the rose of the hedge; you will want to torture living beings, who cry out with pain.

When you have torn little birds from their nests, mutilated a toad, tormented a dog, or beaten a donkey, you will pass to your fellow-men, and it will seem more refreshing to you to torture them.

The murderer lies sleeping in us. Beware!

Do not say that so long as you attack only



birds and beasts, it is nothing,—it is the preliminary exercise that carries you away; the first weapon that prepares you for future exploits.

My children, you may think that I exaggerate in speaking of the murderer asleep in you. Would you be taken for a criminal? Is it worth while to say to you: "Thou shalt not kill"?

Yes, it is, for to do murder is not only shedding blood, piercing hearts with a poniard, or beating a man to death with a club. To spoil another's life is often as wicked as to take it from him, and we should be cautioned on this point.

Each one of us, in a certain measure, holds in his hands the happiness or the health of others.

You may exercise an evil influence over the health of your comrades, by setting them a bad example, leading them to evil, making them undergo bad treatment or injustice. Tell me, are there not many school-children whom the mock-

ery and foolish tricks of their comrades have reduced to a laughing-stock?

You may also, by disobeying them, exciting them to anger, causing them cares and annoyances, compromise seriously the health and the life of your parents and teachers. How many children have never thought of that? Yet those who die by the hands of assassins are only a comparatively small number, compared to those who die slowly, worn out and tormented by vexation and trouble.

Some men are made so miserable by the conduct of their fellows that death would be preferable to the life they have to lead.

We may, again, fail in the respect due to life by neglecting our duties of vigilance and professional diligence. Take, for example, the coachman who sleeps at his post the merchant who sells spoiled goods, the editor who spreads false news or excites men to hatred. Laziness and intemperance often prevent a man from attending to his duty, and so incur loss for those who trusted him.

Human existence, in short, is forever menaced, less by professional murderers, than by those whose wickedness, ignorance, or thoughtlessness has become a destructive force. One might almost say with certainty that all the malevolent actions of mankind tend, by their consequences, to the ruin of human life. And if there is so much suffering and misery in the world, it is not an inevitable consequence of our destiny, as God has fixed it, but the result of our own faults. I shall only cite as an example the ravages of alcoholism. In giving himself up to the alcohol habit, a man has fixed upon himself a legion of plagues, infirmities, maladies, and mental and spiritual disorders.

**L**ET us stop here. Having enumerated the misfortunes we may cause in life, let us look at the good we may do there. As a counterpoise to the instinct of destruction, we carry in our souls a kind and help-

ful feeling, which takes pleasure in seeing life develop, and in protecting it against its enemies. Thanks to this happy disposition, life is interesting to us. An unfolding seed; a blade of grass, piercing through the ground, and, for the first time, looking upon the sun; the young bird just hatched, frail and unfledged, are all subjects of observation and wonder to us. This interest in nascent life is met with in the lovely face of a child:

*"Opening wide his young soul to life,  
And his mouth to kisses."*

V. HUGO.

It is clear that this lively and passionate interest must be roused when we see life threatened or endangered. What we feel then is called Pity, which seizes us, not only at the sight of the griefs of our fellows, but may even be awakened by a poor wounded animal, or by a flower crushed by the tempest. Have you never straightened the broken stalk of a flower, or replanted an uprooted shrub? What pleasure

you felt when the flower revived, or the bush regained its strength! These emotions are naturally stronger when the injured one is an active being, who, by his gestures or his cries, makes signs of distress. What more striking picture of anguish could there be than that of a kitten in the water, or a bird falling at your feet with a broken wing! Who would not be touched by the sight? With what eagerness you pick it up, put it in a safe place, bandage it, care for it! No trouble matters to you. Ah, if you could only save it! When you do this, my children, you are living on the highest side of your nature.

The more the suffering creature resembles us, the more we can feel and comprehend its griefs, and the more our pity is moved. But if pity is not to remain fruitless, if it is to result in relieving distress, and in combating evil in the world, a man should set himself to enlighten it and turn it into sensible activity. Every one may feel compassion; every one is not capable of

bringing relief or care to sufferers. All the human faculties need to be educated in order to bear fruit. Let us join to pity the study, the exercise, and the habitual practice of mercy.

Simple prudence teaches us that man, exposed by destiny to all sorts of troubles, ought to accustom himself to caring for and relieving these troubles. To be something of a nurse is not a talent of luxury, but rather an accomplishment of the greatest necessity. From childhood, let us accustom ourselves to being useful to the sick and the infirm. Let us lend our eyes to the blind, our feet to the paralytic; let us carry the burdens of poor old folks who have a hard time to carry even themselves. The child who does this will not grow into the man who goes on his way without noticing the suffering beside him.

You are mistaken in thinking that some knowledge of certain misery will trouble or spoil the serenity of youth; it is not those who are unsensitive, lost in egotism, closing their souls

to the sufferings of others, who know joy in its purest and profoundest forms. The most intense joy that a man can feel is that which comes from having relieved a trouble, and you can do a great deal, in fact, if only by your frank face and your happy smile, to soften the sufferings of others. Do not fail to do it; you shall see how happy it will make you. If you may, conveniently, begin early to care for the sick, to repair the damages done by certain accidents, you should also serve the apprenticeship of kindness, as I call it, by learning to understand and to relieve moral suffering. Hardly any one is exempt from pain. All have their lot of trouble. Some are even wounded to the heart for life, as others are wounded in body. With these, especially, remember a simple counsel that a wise man has given us: "Be good, my child." Conduct yourself so that your behaviour may do good to those who are in affliction, and your presence may comfort them. No provision is as necessary along the way of life as that of ten-

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derness that consoles wounded hearts. Let us cherish that provision, giving of it to every man who suffers. Let us not be clouded souls, enveloped in the cold vapours of egotism, but sunshiny souls, to whom men will come to warm themselves.



## XII

### DEFEND YOURSELF: DO NOT AVENGE YOURSELF

**A** SUBJECT which has the most direct connection with respect for life is that of defence. Should we defend ourselves? Sometimes we say no, appealing to the saying, "If a man strike thee on thy right cheek, offer to him thy left also," or this, "Resist not evil." We need but reflect a moment to understand that these words apply to particular cases, and may not be considered as a general rule.

It is better, in some cases, to defend yourself by resignation and silence, for by using other means, you run the risk of augmenting the evil.

This kind of conduct, however, is not always practicable. The best skeleton key does not

open every door, and the best rule does not apply to all circumstances.

Every one knows that Christ spoke the words quoted above, and He, Himself, has shown that they are not an absolute law. Sometimes, when He was accused, He kept silence; sometimes, He replied. Often, too, He was the first to attack, and then He said words that struck to the very heart.

Before the great Council, a Roman soldier struck Him in the face. If Christ had replied to the blow by presenting the other cheek, He would have provoked the unfortunate soldier to commit two crimes instead of one. If He had retaliated by returning the blow, we should not have recognised Him. What did He do? He spoke the soldier firmly and gently, attributing his act to ignorance. He took the trouble to enlighten one conscience. Here are the words of His reply: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; if I have spoken well, why smitest thou me?" That is defending one's self in the right way.

For an evil blow, Christ returned good in a just and reasonable answer. Yet, He defended Himself.

ONE should defend himself; it is a right, and even a duty. But here difficulties arise. How is it to be done? That is a great question. Most men defend themselves badly. An offence awakens in them bitter feelings and violent passions that they try to satisfy. They then add a new injustice to that done them, by rendering evil for evil. Their method of defence aggravates the damage, instead of repairing it. All of us, in a word, *avenge* ourselves, instead of *defending* ourselves. Now, vengeance no more resembles defence, than the bear of the woods resembles the wonderful constellation of the Great Bear that we see in the sky on clear nights.

To limit the thirst for vengeance, it was said in the Law of Retaliation: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." This seems brutal. But it

is just, and even moderate, compared with the excess to which a man is carried by vengeance. Some are so possessed by the demon of revenge, that for one eye put out, they would crush both of their adversary's, and break the whole jaw of one who had knocked out a tooth. Human revenge is insatiable: the brute stops himself; man keeps on. Let us watch over our hearts, my children. We believe ourselves lambs, but let come a real offence, or an outrageous injury, and the frightful beast in us awakens. How it dashes out and roars!

There are places in some mountainous countries where the echo repeats its sound many times. When a gun is shot off the rocks send it back and forth a hundred times, it rolls and increases across deep gorges, and when you think it has at last died away, a heavy, prolonged rumbling warns you that it is still going on. Many human hearts resemble these echoes. An offence reverberates in them with unheard-of violence, strikes the most hidden folds, and throws them

into an agitation that nothing can calm. Others are less violent, but have a tenacious power of resentment. Their malice is not assuaged: they forget nothing; they bide their time, combine their forces, and throw themselves on their adversaries, as the serpent on its prey.

Here, then, is an important point of conduct, which we should remember well: let us defend, but not avenge ourselves. To do this, let us be masters of ourselves; let passion give way to reason; let us remain men in defending ourselves.

Listen to this little comparison:

When an ugly dog attacks you in the street, what do you do? To give him a reasonable exhortation or to make an appeal to his sense of justice, would be lost pains. But are you going to bark and bite as he does, making yourself exactly his equal? Will you shoot him needlessly? No. You will make skilful use of your good stick, and, with a vigorous blow on his paws, you will send him to his kennel. He attacked you like a bad dog; you defended your-

self like a man, but like a man who knows that he is defending himself from only a bad dog.

To defend yourself, you must use the most practical and convenient means, beginning with the least violent. You have no need of using at once the strongest means at your disposal. That would be firing a cannon to kill a mosquito, and you would not even be sure of succeeding.

Gentleness is often a good weapon of defence. Do you recall the fable of the sun and the wind? These two powers had made a wager as to which of them could the sooner remove the coat of a traveller going along the road. The wind blew furiously upon him, but the harder it raged the closer the man drew his coat. When the wind had declared itself vanquished, the sun set to work gently to warm the traveller, and he soon took off his coat.

This is the same as saying: "Gentleness is worth more than violence," or again: "A kind face can accomplish more than any armed man."

You must defend yourself, however, be it by ordinary or unusual means. To fail to do so would be wrong. Not to oppose injustice is to encourage and become associated with it. Defending yourself is not only striving for good, but serving those against whom you struggle, by preventing them from doing evil.

To let yourself be struck, robbed, insulted, or deceived is to fail in your duty toward yourself and those who strike, rob, or deceive you. Toward them the law of fraternity consists in saying, "Halt."

You must defend others as well as yourself. Shall we let a stronger comrade maltreat a weak one before our eyes? Shall we keep silence if some one be unjustly punished for fear of compromising ourselves? Never!

Now has no one the right to tell us, "Mind your own business"? Is not this wise and prudent advice: "Don't bother with that affair; let those people attend to it themselves"? No, my children. That advice is wise only in ap-

pearance. It is often an evil temptation, a cowardly suggestion.

When the lamb is struggling with the wolf, no one should be allowed to say, "Leave them alone; let them get out of it as best they can." We know too well how this will end, and if we cannot succour the lamb, we are worse, we men, than the shepherd-dog who runs away and leaves his charge to the claws and teeth of the wolf.

The cause of another is, moreover, in a certain measure, ours. An injustice that is committed is committed against us. What a man does to a fellow-being, however lowly, however despised, he does to us. They are dead who no longer feel the lash, the burn, the blow. Shame upon you, if you can remain untouched, when around you the simple are deceived, the absent slandered, the orphan defrauded, the rights of the weak trampled under foot! If you do not feel the blows that strike them, if you are not wounded by the fist that slaps justice in the face, you are dead to justice.



THE same might be said of national, as of personal defence. A people ought to be peaceful and kind to their neighbours, but can we, nowadays, melt our cannon, dismantle our fortresses, or transform our swords into ploughshares? That would be fine, but very dangerous for our security and liberty. If peaceful people were not ready to defend themselves vigorously, the earth would soon belong to warlike nations. We are surely not made to kill each other on the battle-field, and yet it would be even sadder than war to see the whole world under the heel of a few through love of peace. Right must be strong, if we will not have force become right. This ought to encourage every citizen to train himself willingly in the calling of arms, when required.

### XIII

#### BE HONEST

**H**AS man a right to own anything or not? This is a problem often under discussion. We might as well dispute over the question whether or not we have a right to exist. Property is a fact, like life. Man has not produced it. The force of things themselves, and the laws that govern the world, lead to its attainment.

The essential property, of which all others are only the consequence, is our life and our individuality, with their various qualities. The possession of one's self, seemingly the most elementary natural right, has, nevertheless, been slow to be recognised. That a human creature may belong to himself, dispose of himself freely, and not be owned by another creature; that he may be his own property, in short, is a truth that,

even to-day, has only triumphed in part, for slavery, real and disguised, always exists. Man belongs to himself, then, and as soon as he exercises his activity or expends his labour, he acquires rights beyond himself. These rights, once existing, he may make use of them for himself or for others, and so each one may say, in a greater or less degree, that certain things belong to him.

The common respect that men have for each other's goods is one of the bases of society. It is called honesty.

A thief is one who does not respect the goods of others, deems the world an unexplored field, where nothing belongs to anybody in particular, and helps himself to all he can get.

Thievery has many forms. The commonest is laying hands brutally on the money or goods of others, to plunder them. Refined and disguised varieties of thievery are innumerable, but all consist in procuring the goods of others by exploiting their confidence, their credulity,

their passion, their hunger, their good faith, their charity, their religious sentiments, etc. The thief is in every business in the world. He coins money from anything, and, provided his methods succeed, all are equally good. Nothing is sacred to him. Should he think that he can gain more by selling men than coal, rice, or tallow, he becomes a slave-dealer. Should there be profit in showing himself a good patriot or a devotee, he will become patriotic or pious. Let there be more to hope for from the contrary, you will see him deny his religion, or betray his country.

**R**ESPECT for property does not alone consist in taking what is not ours, keeping it when one finds it, or benefiting ourselves by dishonest traffic or dubious undertakings. It consists, infinitely more, in respecting our own wealth. Here most men have trouble. They believe that honesty means not to steal the goods of others, but that with their

own personal goods they may do what they please. This is a grave error. To be truly honest, one must respect his own wealth as he would that of others, and never use it on his passions, his fancies, or his selfishness, but according to his reason and his conscience.

Property is the wealth of which we can dispose according to our responsibility. A man is not permitted to use his money in an evil way, any more than he is permitted to make bad use of a weapon belonging to him. "It is mine; I can do what I wish with it," is a proposition you hear maintained by people who scatter their money to the winds, waste their bread, and leave their fields and houses in destruction for want of care. These people lack the respect every one should have for goods confided to his care.

Economy is the name that is given to the virtue of using one's wealth judiciously. The greater the wealth, the more difficult it is to practise it well. Economy is commonly said to be a virtue of small people. Absurd reasoning! It

is like saying that more vigilance is required to guard a small flock than a large one. The more we own, the more complicated is the possession, and the more our responsibility is taxed. The fact of owning something constitutes a social function that we must fill, not only in our own, but in a general interest, that we may make ourselves as useful as possible to humanity. It is wrong to let any wealth, whatever, fail of usefulness to somebody. You may possess little or much, but you must not lose or neglect it. When a man has had a great deal of trouble in amassing a little money or property, he cares so much the more for it, and nothing is more honourable. The economical workman or the farmer, who has at such pains laid up a little, respects himself, with his past labours, in the wealth he has carefully saved, and he does not wish to spend it lightly. Nothing is sadder than to see a man dissipate foolishly the fruit of painful toil.

What would you say if you knew two men, one

of whom would labour six long days of the week, and the other, on Sunday, would take the money of the first and go and eat and drink it up? A lawful indignation would stir you; you could not pity enough the poor slave whose salary is destroyed by a vile parasite, and if you were able, you would put an end to the shameful abuse. Alas, he who labours all day long, and he who foolishly spends in an hour, are often one and the same man. He has no pity for himself, for the money laboriously acquired; he respects neither himself nor his work, and becomes his own tyrant. This is one of the worst slaveries from which the world suffers.

**A**S health creates duties toward the sick, intelligence toward the ignorant, strength toward the weak, so the wealth that we have, whatever it may be, creates duties toward those who have none.

Some men possess amiability, liberality, magnanimity; others are, on the contrary, in the

possession of surliness, egotism, peevishness, or ferocity. Like the dog who gnaws his bone, and growls and shows his teeth at whoever approaches, are some men who keep their wealth to themselves with exclusiveness and malevolent feelings. They are always afraid that some one will take it from them, and this fear makes them evil-minded and hard. Never will they give anything away. They want only to receive. To get, is good; to give, evil. He who asks them for help is an enemy and an impostor.

Others possess things stupidly. They hold their wealth as a monkey would a missal or a fine piece of Gobelin tapestry, knowing neither the value nor the use of it, and they employ it senselessly.

Let me say here a word about equality of fortune, of which some make a sort of ideal. Equality would perhaps be possible, if it consisted alone in the exterior resemblance of the goods we possessed and in their respective quantity. But that is not the point. You would try in



vain to make fortunes alike, since men put them to such varied uses. Fortune is like a musical instrument; knowing how to play it is everything. Even if everybody had a flute, would all play it alike? The same thing in different hands changes value entirely. So long as men have different natures, so long will their wealth, even of different kinds, be unequal. What is essential is to hold it in a fraternal spirit.

#### XIV

### BEWARE OF THE FIRST STEP

ONE of the principal precautions to take, in leading a just and upright life, is to flee, not only from evil, but from the paths that may lead to it. We are seldom born wicked, or invincibly disposed to evil. We become evil by gradations that are like halting-places in the apprenticeship of sin. Useful observations are here to be made. Since we have just spoken of honesty, let us see how one becomes a thief.

It is not always because he has an instinctive tendency to put his hands upon the property of others, but because he does not watch his own desires and weaknesses leading to thievery. Some try to maintain that hunger and misery lead a man to steal. There are cases, doubtless,

where misery so maddens a man that he takes what is necessary, which he could not procure by ordinary means. But all thieves are not hungry. If such were the case, there would not be so many rich thieves in high places ready to augment their wealth by dishonest means. Can we forget that there are around us many people who are at once miserable and honest?

One of the commonest reasons for stealing is laziness. The lazy are nearly always friends of the table and of pleasure. Their aim is a life of enjoyment, but they do not want to take any trouble to attain it. On this account they have recourse to theft in order to procure the means of making good cheer.

Other men are industrious, but they are too ambitious. Their gain does not satisfy their desire to shine. They must have an elegant residence, genteel raiment, fine food, and every kind of distraction. A time comes when honest gain is not enough for so many exigencies. How shall they satisfy their luxurious tastes? They

then run into debt and never pay, or allow themselves to commit underhand tricks or abuse of confidence. How many faithless employees have become thieves through ambition :

Gambling is the road by which many of our contemporaries arrive at the most shameful expedients. The gambler abandons the regular conditions of life to live by chance. He hopes to grow rich in a short time by a lucky chance. Once let him get a taste of gambling and he becomes drunk with it. Working, waiting, getting his living by modestly fulfilling his duty, become intolerable to him. How absurd to spend the whole day carpentering or making shoes for the sake of earning five or six francs, when, in two hours, you may gain at play twenty, thirty, or fifty francs, without tiring yourself! Once in this gear, a man is lost. If luck is against him, the hope of regaining what he has lost besets him. He returns to the game with borrowed money ; meaning to return it, he takes from the chest confided to his care enough to play a re.

Unfortunately, he loses his stakes, and is guilty of an abuse of confidence. Now comes prison; his career is broken.

Some men become thieves through an exaggerated love of their wives and their children. Unable to refuse them anything, desiring to make their lives pleasant, they go to expenses beyond their means, and try in every way to obtain money.

Many children have ended by taking very important things after having first laid hands on insignificant ones. To-day they take a pen or a book, or get into a garden through love of forbidden fruit. To-morrow they levy their depredations upon the stalls in front of shops, and, in the end, they are unable to distinguish between their own goods and those of others.

For the most part the thief is not a man apart, but one like any other, who has turned to crime as wine turns to vinegar.

A murderer develops, too, by degrees, and not

suddenly. Men who are very gentle, without any homicidal disposition, find that they have committed a murder by having put themselves into a position that has led them to it little by little. A thief, at night, means merely to loot a house; in the morning he finds that he has killed a man.

Jealousy, anger, or whatever causes a man to lose his mastery over himself, easily leads him to acts of violence.

The career of the liar, also, is not run in a day. It is reached little by little. Hypocrisy is an accomplished art, that is only acquired by exercise.

Bad conduct, intemperance, and impurity are learned by degrees, and, after having been the exception, end by becoming habits. You begin as a novice, but you see, at length, that with time you have become a master.

The great fault lies in not watching the beginnings. You reassure yourself by such phrases as, "Once is not a habit. It is such a

small thing. What matters a little irregularity? We shall not go too far. Take our word, we shall stop in time."

Suppose that, giving way to your adventurous spirit, you had climbed to the roof by the cat's road. There you are, sitting on the eaves, your legs over the edge. What would you say if I tried to get you to fall half-way and then stop? You would say: "But once in space, I cannot stop until I reach the ground." You would be right. Beware of the descent toward evil. He is mistaken who lets himself glide softly down it, intending to stop in time.

Each of us has seen, on the railroad and the street railway, what is called a switch. At such a place, the cars need to deviate but an inch from their original position to go in another direction. At first, you hardly notice the difference, but upon it depends all the rest of the journey. Remember this, my children, when the opportunity of leaving the right way pre-

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sents itself. Here are the places to watch. See to your thoughts; be careful to avoid the beginnings of evil. An old proverb says: "It is the first step that counts." Do not forget that.



## XV

### BE INDUSTRIOUS

**P**EOPLE have very erroneous ideas about work. Some regard it as a chastisement from God; others simply as a necessary evil. These two ways of looking at it lead us to represent a happy life as one of perpetual ease. To play, refresh ourselves, and let the days pass without taking any trouble, would be the height of felicity.

For my part, I consider this the dream of a sluggard, the ideal of a lazy good-for-nothing. We must cure ourselves of it as of a dangerous sickness. The idea that work is a punishment may have come to men in the face of certain horrible, brutish tasks, where the worker is seen less than the slave. Alas! such labour does exist. All the efforts of society should try to di-

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minish or destroy it by organising labour in such a way that no one should be reduced to the state of a brute, and that human dignity should be possible to every one.

That labour itself, in general, should be a punishment, an evil, or a shameful bondage is a nameless delusion.

Those who refer to the Bible as teaching such a doctrine forget that even before the fall of Adam, it is said that God placed him in the Garden of Eden to *cultivate* it. Now, nobody has ever taken the cultivation of the soil for a sinecure.

Let us leave tradition and consider the structure of the human body, and even that of the hand alone. The whole world presents no tool comparable to the human hand. All the marvels of mechanics are children's toys beside it. If you believe that the hammer is made to strike, the pincers to seize, the gimlet to pierce holes, why do you think that the hand was made to do nothing? Nonsense!

The hand is so made for work that at the very outset of life man begins to exercise and make use of it, just as he does all his other members. Prevent a child from trying his strength, from moving or from handling objects, and you make him most miserable. The worst misfortune is that of the prisoner reduced to inaction and immobility. To act is to live. Work is a law of life. The more perfect the life, the more active it is. Look at nature: the lower creatures are endowed with a rudimentary activity; oysters stuck to a rock need make no effort for nourishment; they are satisfied to seize it as it passes within their reach. But in more complex animals activity manifests itself. The bird builds her nest, feeds her little ones, hunts, fishes, and searches in all sorts of ingenious ways for subsistence. Bees are wonderful architects. The ant pierces galleries in the earth, and stores up provisions; her proverbial activity made Solomon say: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard."

What a great amount of labour fills all crea-

tion! The universe is perpetually at work. Everything is moving, fermenting, pressing onward, transforming. Christ said, "My Father always works." What a lesson for the lazy, the enemies of work, who despise action! They may seek in this vast world for a place where exists the inertia in which they delight. Even while you sleep, lazy ones, the earth turns and your heart beats; the mighty progress of things continues. Immobility is death.

We owe our life to work. 'To be fed, clothed, lodged, cared for in illness, even to be instructed, to learn morality, to enlighten one's soul and procure higher consolation, humanity needs to work. Labour is the price of each one of our conquests and benefits. Such a word of life and truth has cost as much trouble to find as a new continent.

Now suppose a man has all he needs, that he is not only rich but wise and morally cultivated: even so, work would be a necessity for him. People often say: "He is rich; he does not

have to work for a living." This is a gross error. I am not going to speak here of every one's duty to make himself useful, but of his need to exercise his activity. Every being who is making no effort is degrading himself, growing corrupt and rotten. Should the most cultivated mind cease from acting, searching, or thinking, it would soon become crusted over. The purest and most upright character that should, for a time, entirely neglect itself, would slowly descend to apathy or immorality.

It has been said that man should earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. That is entirely true of everybody. It means that you should live by your own efforts, and you can just as readily state the opposite and yet speak the truth: "You will die of your own inertia." The sword rusts in the scabbard; furniture uncared for becomes covered with dust; poorly attended gardens are invaded by weeds; unbrushed furs are eaten by moths, and the man who does not work becomes the prey of moral

vermin. Vices feed on him as worms do on a corpse.

Living without working is not alone a vain undertaking, but an injustice and a crime. Humanity owes its life and its progress to its children's work. He who does nothing profits by the work of others, offering nothing in exchange. He is a parasite upon the body social, not a man. "He who does not work shall not eat," says the Scripture. Nothing is more just. And who does not understand that this is the condemnation of the sluggard *to death?*

We have, then, all of us, the best reasons for devoting ourselves to useful, profitable labour. Nature sets the example; our noblest instincts bind us strongly to it. Our debt to humanity, our need of keeping ourselves strong, and in moral and physical health, all counsel activity, so that there may be bread to eat. To earn our bread by our own labour is the most honourable thing in the world. Most men work to earn their bread. But do not forget that earning our

bread is not the only reason for working. If it were we should, some day, come to this foolish conclusion: "I have my bread now, so I do not need to work any more."

THE need of work being once established, you may ask in what manner we should employ our activity, and if certain occupations do not lend a *dignity* to those who pursue them.

Faculties are infinitely varied, because needs are numerous and aptitudes are different. The choice of work for a career depends upon our capacity, and also upon the circumstances and means at our disposal. All have not artistic capacity, manual skill, or the vigour of mind and body necessary for every calling. One is more apt at thinking than at wielding the hammer; another has a tendency toward painting that would give him a fair reputation. Each one should examine himself and choose agreeable work within his reach and conformable to his

aptitudes. He is a miserable slave who drags his duty as he would a ball, and dislikes or hates his calling.

So much said, however, it is unjust and puerile to ordain differences in dignity between the different occupations of men. There are differences of form. Some occupations are cleaner, more æsthetic, or more glorified. Some duties seem inferior; others, superior. You hear of a high functionary and a subaltern. Such a distinction has its reason for being, which, however, does not go to the bottom of things. The equal dignity of all truly useful work, and of all necessary duties, manual or intellectual, distinguished or humble, should be established as an absolute principle. Society cannot do without good carpenters any more than without good architects, without good labourers than good physicians and professors. There is a special dignity and a singular nobility for all those who put their hands to work that helps to sustain humanity. From youth, you should accus-



tom yourself to the nobility of the worker, and learn to do him honour wherever you meet him. Should you salute a workman with profound emotion and lively gratitude, I ask you to save gratitude and emotion for the humblest and the most difficult work. Those who work in visible places are honoured; they have their reward. Let us find those who are forgotten, and let our tribute of affection sustain them in their often hard and ignored task. Idleness, alone, is despicable, the hand that refuses to touch useful labour is alone unworthy of being touched, for it has itself cut the bond of fraternal solidarity that binds each of us to humanity.

In some places, peopled with do-nothings, they say of a man or a woman that he or she has to work for a living, and is less esteemed for it. To have to work is the sign of belonging to an inferior class. Here is my opinion on that subject: I honour work so much that I admire it, even among the brute creation, and I cannot endure idleness in my fellow-beings or in myself.

When it is time for me to rest,—a very important and legitimate thing,—and I go by a donkey drawing his cart, I find him much more interesting than I am, and I say to myself: “Industrious little donkey, I ought to take off my hat to you, for you are working and I am pretending to be dignified.” My children, you may believe me that this saying is true, and should be inscribed in your memories: “A donkey that works is a king compared to a man who does nothing.”

You appreciate better what you learn by yourselves. To teach yourselves not to despise any work, it is good to have seen and done other things than those of your own profession or trade. I find manual labourers, exposed to bad weather and to the heat of the sun, quite inclined to despise the brain-worker seated under shelter, while the latter is often tempted to take the former for machines. It is well for the thinker to work at times with his hands. His health and his relations with his fellow-men profit

by it. Nor is it bad for a philosopher or a scholar to find himself grappling with a shovel, saw, or hammer. As he tries to make a table alone, he finds out that the joiner knows many things of which he is ignorant, and that the former, too, works with his head. The opposite is also true. It is enough for those tempted to take mental labour as a sort of disguised idleness, to try it, in order to undeceive themselves. Thought is such a great effort, that some people prefer to saw a cord of wood rather than write a letter. Old folks sometimes think that children, who are studying and preparing themselves for ruling or intellectual careers, had better learn a trade as well. Nothing is wiser. A man initiated into manual labour is not only more skilful than another; he has also more judgment.

Let us guard against the superficial opinion that work is only a commodity. From one point of view, doubtless, this is so, but it is something else as well. A tree, a fruit, an animal, a pic-

ture, may also be regarded as commodities, though they are also something else. So it is with work. Is an apple a projectile because it sometimes serves as such, when everybody knows what it is to eat apple-sauce? Is a dictionary a cushion because it can, in a pinch, make a chair at the table for the little brother? No. Well, then, work is sometimes a commodity, but it is, indeed, something else as well. When a man gives himself truly to his work, he puts into it his will, his strength, his health, his love, and his soul. A man may put into a day's work, for which he receives three francs, so much of the qualities of devotion, intelligence, and goodness, that nobody can pay him. You pay for the visits of your doctor, but you can never repay his risk of taking the disease while he is caring for you. Nothing is more just than that work should be paid for, but you should never say to a man: "You are paid for that," since that is an insult strictly merited only by the do-nothing who would accept his salary without

troubling to earn it. Do not say to those who have served you: "I have paid you; we are quits." Such speeches are all marks of bad relations between people. Just as a polite man says "thank you," even when he receives a doubly merited salary, a sensible, just man thanks the labourer, and is grateful to him as he pays him.

Work is both a commodity and a sacred thing. It assures a man not his bread alone, but his place in the sunshine of human dignity, and constitutes a bond of mutual gratitude among all associated workmen. Each one of us, at his post, fills the place of others. We are there for our own profit and that of all. To understand this point more completely, listen:

"That little chimney-sweep is very ugly, papa. I do not like to look at such black faces; he might be a negro or the devil. He must be wicked, don't you think so, papa?"

"You should not talk so, my child. Without

knowing it, you are being ungrateful, for if the little chimney-sweep is black, it is for you."

"For me! What do you mean, papa? I do not understand."

"I shall explain. In cold weather, there are fires in all the houses. Thousands of hearths are burning to warm us and to cook our food. The chimneys fill with soot and get very dirty. Soon chimney-sweeping becomes indispensable. If there were no chimney-sweeps, who would do the sweeping? Papa, mamma, or you, perhaps. Now any of us would infallibly get blackened at that work. You see here how we should look. I do not think that you would have much taste for it. Then be thankful that the little chimney-sweep does it, for, I repeat, *it is for you that he is black.*"

"I had never thought of that, father dear."

"You will think of it in the future, my child. And, since we are on the subject, listen further. It is for you that the miller is white, the butcher red; for you the labourer is burned by the

sun and tanned by the wind and rain; for you that the shoemaker has a round spine, the mason hardened hands, that the doctor exposes himself to contagion, that the mechanic stands at his engine, and that the soldier fights on the frontier; when these men die at their posts, it is for you. Every man who fulfils a useful function does it for others. Each one is, in his work, the servant and representative of his fellows. And the more difficult, the humbler, the more poorly paid the work, the more the workman should be honoured."

"I promise you, father, that I shall never again say that the chimney-sweep is ugly, or the masons, or the cabmen."

"That is not enough, dear child. The older you grow the more you will perceive how men and women work for you with their hands and with their thoughts. Work is the life of the world. When you understand that, you will be content, no longer, with respecting the workman; you will want to imitate him. In your

turn, you will make yourself useful. You will have loads to bear and efforts to make for others. And when you are tired or worn out with the honest labour that is the duty of each of us, you will think often of the little chimney-sweep. Each human toil leaves traces on hands, face, forehead, and heart. When one has done his duty well, he is generally covered with wrinkles, scars, dust, and sometimes with blood. These are not usually pretty to look at, my child, but nothing in the world is more to be venerated. I wish but one thing for you. As you have just said, in your childish ignorance, 'Oh, how ugly that chimney-sweep is!' you may, some day, enlightened by life, cry out to all the labourers whose work has marked, twisted, or scarred them: 'Ah, how beautiful you are!'"

None are ugly but the wicked and the useless. The more they shine or array themselves, the more repugnant are they.



## XVI

### REST

**R**EST, like work, is a law no one may escape. Nature has her periods of activity and of repose. Trees rest from bearing fruit, fields from yielding harvests. Machines, too, have need of rest, or they will too quickly wear out. Everywhere we notice the alternation of activity and repose. Existence is a succession of efforts and stops. You know that we need frequently to renew our powers by sleep. A being who would violate the law of rest and who, though he did no work, would stay awake all the time, would infallibly destroy himself. Our organism is so constructed that at a given moment it succumbs to sleep. Worn out with play, the child sleeps where he lies; tired of listening, auditors sleep

in meetings; the weary miller sleeps in the noise of the mill, the overwrought engineer sleeps on his engine.

It is noticeable that the more complicated and perfect is a nature, the more complete rest does it need.

Such rest is found not alone in sleep, but in distraction, change of occupation, and in all that has been well named *recreation*. Those animals that have a certain degree of intelligence, such as dogs, cats, etc., indulge in frolics and gambols. More than they, by reason of his absorbing and often painful life, has man need of diversion. Intervals and pauses should be given him to get possession of himself.

Students sleep all night, and it is at your age that one sleeps best. Why do you have vacations? It is understood that we must stop learning sometimes in order to classify and clarify what we have learned. It is well known, too, that children set to work again with more ardour when they have enjoyed a short respite. Do you

not think that all those who work and endure on the earth are like you? The days become monotonous because they are all alike. It is impossible always to perform the same duties with the same enthusiasm.

The most agreeable things, too often repeated, become fatiguing. A song that pleases once or twice tires, enervates, and finally exasperates if we must hear it twenty times. Should not hard work, with greater reason, awaken discouragement and depression? Fatigue keeps its eye on the labourer, and if he pretends to despise it, he is the sooner obliged to acknowledge that he has miscalculated. Muscular powers have their limit, intellectual force has its end; our hearts have but a certain capacity for experiencing emotions. The moment comes when we are in need of oil like the waning lamp. Let it continue to burn without oil, and the light grows lower and lower, and finally smokes. It is the same with man. He risks doing bad work, who works when he is worn out. Then let the labourer rest. If

he is his own master, it is his duty to call a halt. If he serves others, let his master or mistress take measures to procure for him now and then the indispensable leisure. The labourer must not descend to the ranks of the galley-slave; the right of rest is one of the sacred rights of every living creature.

For this reason, from the farthest antiquity, and among the most diverse peoples, a periodic rest has been raised to the height of a social and religious institution. The Day of Rest, be it Jewish Sabbath, Moslem Friday, or Christian Sunday, is a monument of humanity, wisdom, and pity. To value lightly the day of rest is to manifest very short sight and profound ignorance of the needs of mankind.

This is not a lost day. On the contrary, it is made to render us capable of better profiting by the others. Every one should have the liberty of using his rest agreeably to himself, if he uses it well. He who spends his day of rest in dissipation, not only does not rest or prepare him-

self for future labour, but returns to his work more fatigued than when he left it. The use of our leisure is one of the great questions of life. Because they do not amuse themselves in a wise and reasonable manner, many men destroy, during their leisure hours, all the fruits of their hours of work. A multitude of good workers lose their effort because they do not know how to use their free time. After the art of working, the most important is that of relaxing.

It is no less true, however, that each one ought to be able to choose his recreations. A forced diversion is no longer a diversion. On the kind of work necessarily depends the kind of recreation. For a rural postman, for example, the ideal rest is to stay at home, seated in an arm-chair or lying in the shade. The tailor and the dressmaker, always seated, dream of leaving their homes and taking a walk. Thinkers rest by gardening, labouring, going to the mountains or the sea-shore. Manual labourers prefer to rest by reading a book. The principal dis-

traction of the countryman is to go to the city. The city man, on the contrary, takes willing, as they say, the key to the fields. Let us not legislate about the manner of resting.

**N**OW here is a new motive for taking some spare time once in a while. In the midst of the ordinary preoccupations of existence, and in the fever of action, we lose the habit of entering into ourselves and of reflecting on our actions. The torrent carries us away. We work and go about without knowing well what we are doing or where we are going. There is a danger here. If you do not want to lose your way, it is well to stop at times, look back whence you came, and forward whither you are going. To live well, a man must sometimes collect his thoughts, devote an hour to meditating on his conduct, screening himself from passions and temptations, listening to the voice of his conscience, and lifting his thought to less troubled regions. It is very useful as well to

leave your work sometimes, that you may learn from watching the work of others. You do wrong in becoming so absorbed in your task that you no longer see what is going on around you.

All these reasons make rest a sacred thing, and because it is so sacred, each of us ought to hold to it for himself and others. It is impious not to look out for others who labour; to give them no truce; to trouble them without good cause. And here it is necessary to have children consider their parents. We are accustomed to think of them as our Providence, and to rely upon them for everything. We may do this while we are infants. The nursing child cries for his food at night, careless whether or not his mother is fatigued. We should pardon him, for he is ignorant. But it is unpardonable for big boys and girls to be waited on by their parents, and to forget that parents' strength has a limit. Think often of the cares and toils of your parents. Help them as much as you can,

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and if, by putting yourself out a little, you may give them a chance to rest, a good sleep, or a little leisure, do not fail to do so.

Lessen your demands, always and everywhere, if you can, and so lighten the load of those who are especially burdened. Do not add to the burdens of servants or public officers; do not call up doctors and druggists unnecessarily in the middle of the night; do not do on Sunday work that may be put off to other days. The labourer is worthy of his rest. It is always a good deed to help him get it.



## XVII

### THE SUPREME LAW

**W**E have applied ourselves so far to discovering and formulating certain laws of life. We have drawn their consequences under the form of precepts and practical rules. But, however wise and equitable may be these directions, they are powerless, in themselves, to make us just and humane. To know them is not enough; we must have the strength to perform them, which is found in a powerful and profound sentiment called love or charity. Love of one's neighbour is the hidden spring of all life that is good. From this we draw our inspiration for good, and the power to realise it.

All of a man's actions are prepared in his

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heart, so if the heart is evil, full of hatred or ill-will, we may in vain know what is good, for we shall not do it, nor have a desire to do it.

The violations, of which men are guilty, of the laws of truth, honesty, temperance, life, and the welfare of their fellows, are all explained by a lack of kindness. They agree with the facts that our hearts are not inclined to goodwill toward others. We are either badly disposed toward them, or their lot does not interest us enough; they are indifferent or distasteful to us.

The thief lacks kindness more than honesty.

The liar lacks kindness more than frankness.

The drunkard lacks kindness more than sobriety. If he thought of his wife and his children, could he so degrade himself?

The do-nothing lacks kindness more than energy.

Even the faults that we seem to commit through absence of character, or through weakness of will, come especially from lack of kindness. If we possessed kindness, it would make

us strong. Nothing is difficult to true love. Through its enthusiasm, it submits itself to the hardest labours, and exposes itself to dangers and sufferings.

You have all seen sail-boats on sea or river momentarily stopped for want of wind. Sails hang limp and the boat does not stir. This is called "lying to." But let the wind rise and fill the sails, and immediately the boat starts; it has life and motion. We may be compared to boats. When the quickening breath of love fails us, nothing goes, for the essential thing is lacking.

We must force ourselves to acquire and cultivate the essential. We must desire it ardently, and ask it from God as the treasure of treasures. Without it, all our qualities and all our gifts are fruitless or turn to evil. Let a man have health, intelligence, talent, fortune, or strength of will; if he be not kind, to what purpose has he all the rest? I admit that he may have even religion, virtue, and a seriously correct conduct; if

he be not kind, what is his religion worth, and to whom is his virtue useful?

Is it possible to love God truly without caring for men, our fellow-beings, of whom God is the Father?

The supreme law, containing all the others and making us truly men, is the law of Love. "Love one another." In these words is the world's power and salvation. Evil comes from not loving one another enough. Without love, men hate, deceive, corrupt, persecute, dispute, and destroy each other. To obey his parents, a child must love them; to raise and care for his children, a parent must love them. Love is needed to teach pupils to pardon and amend faults. To nurse the sick, as much pardon as science is required. Without love and kindness, life is cold, selfish, and uninteresting, and finally leads to a distaste for everything. With kindness, the difficult becomes easy; the obscure clear; life assumes a charm, and its miseries are softened. If we knew the power of kindness,

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we should transform into a paradise this world that without it is a hell.

To love makes one happy ; to hate, unhappy. A man's worst enemy is his selfishness. It narrows and poisons his existence, and transforms him into a slave of himself. Hateful selfishness is like a narrow unhealthy cage where all our being languishes. Love is the free vast horizon where the soul can spread its wings. Let us then learn early to be interested in something besides ourselves.

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## XVIII

### REPARATION OF EVIL

**I**N spite of our efforts to live well, we realise that we have committed more or less serious faults, and experience soon teaches us that in the world there exists a great amount of iniquity, injustice, and vice, the sad consequences of which we meet at every step. We should ask ourselves, then, what ought to be done by the man who has committed evil, and what would be his bearing toward that not committed by himself. Let us take the latter question first. In the presence of evil committed by others, what shall we do?

**F**IRST, let us not rejoice over it. Joy derived from the suffering of others is criminal. Few men ought to be so bad as to feel it, but, alas! this inhuman feeling

is widespread. Every day we see children and even older persons taking an evil pleasure in the faults of others. It would seem that the misdeeds of our comrades or our brothers and sisters would whiten or excuse ours. Let us strive against this low tendency. To every well-directed heart, evil, whatever it may be, and no matter who is guilty of it, causes grief; he regrets and deplures it. May we stop here?

Most men have made a rule, by which they bind themselves to repair only the evil of which they are the authors. They consider themselves responsible for the results of this evil, and obliged to remedy them as far as possible. This seems logical enough in the main. To repair the harm one himself has caused is right; everybody should approve of that. But it is magnifying our duty to enjoin ourselves to repair that caused by others. No one can approve such a demand. Yet we deceive ourselves in reasoning thus. Let us take an example. A house is on fire. Who should fight the fire and

put it out if possible? After the foregoing reasoning, it should be the one who lighted it. But where is he? Shall we hunt him up before going to the rescue? Perhaps it was a heedless smoker, who is now far away and ignorant of the result of his imprudence. Perhaps it was a criminal, who has fled, happy to see the column of smoke rising behind him. He, surely, will not come back to put out the fire. Run quickly to the rescue. Let the flames get once under way, and it will be time to busy yourself about responsibility. When it is a matter of a fire, it seems very simple. Why not apply the same rule to all the evil that comes to our notice?

Here is another deplorable habit. When we have given counsels and warnings that result in serious accidents to those who have disclaimed them, our first, and often our last remark is, "I told you so." Many are satisfied with that, and believe they have done their duty in warning others of danger. They have not been heeded; what they foresaw has happened; they



pay no further attention to the matter. I do not think that this way of acting is intelligent or worthy of a man. Our duty is to contribute to the reparation of evil, even if our fellows draw it upon themselves by scorning our advice. You warn a child not to go near the water; he disobeys, approaches it, and falls in. Would you be pitying him if you left him there, and cried, "I told you so"? That would be inhuman.

We shall then follow other methods. Every circumstance will lead us to think that duty is doing what is necessary to atone for the evil we may witness. Where may we go without seeing it? Those who make havoc are not usually in a hurry to repair it. Liars spread their lies and calumnies, but it would be as hard to discover who the guilty ones are as to invite them to contradict themselves or to relieve their victims of the tortures they have obliged them to undergo.

Thieves take the property of others, but if

you had to wait until they brought it back, you would wait a long time, and so, everywhere, patience would be lost in counting on criminals to heal the wounds they have made and repair the damages they have caused. If good men did not set to work to re-establish order where others have sown disorder and ruin, evil would grow in peace, and it could not be successfully resisted. Let us set to work energetically. As the life-saver hastens to the succour of a life in danger, let us begin to repair an evil as soon as we have seen it. Let us not first try to reproach those who have committed it. First intervene, comfort, cure; then, if there is an opportunity, place responsibility, and make remonstrances.

If the wrong has been done directly against us, if it is in the form of a loss sustained, of harm inflicted on our person, the work of reparation is complicated. We are irritated and wounded, and while our irritation, like our suffering, is legitimate, it must not become obsti-

nate. Should we perceive the beginning of regret in the offender, let us encourage it by great leniency. Let us be capable of forgiving and forgetting. To forget a kindness is impious. To forget an injury is the mark of a generous soul. Yet it is not to others alone, but to ourselves, also, that we render a service in consenting to pardon a wrong. He who keeps a lively memory of every offence is like a perfect accountant who enters everything on his books. There are, at length, so many offences and wicked deeds to put down, that they cumber his memory, and the presence of so many ugly things darken and taint his mind. He succumbs to the evil impressions. You have heard of men condemned to be walled up alive. Picture the frightful anguish of being enclosed in a niche in a thick wall and seeing the plaster slowly rise that is finally to close in upon you. He who tries to remember every offence against himself is condemning himself to be walled up alive. He is heaping up around him the wrongs

of others, and he will soon be buried underneath the mass.

**I**F conscience tells us to repair evil that others have done, it naturally imposes upon us much more the reparation of that which emanates from ourselves. To hide it, to leave to time and circumstance the care of atoning for it, would be a greater fault than the first.

Alas, man is quick to do evil, slow to make amends! He thinks it is false self-love to recognise the wrong that he has done, to ask pardon, or to take back frankly the wounding words he may have said. The evil that he does not mend is like a wound that is neither cleaned nor dressed. It festers and finally compromises the general health. To acknowledge your faults courageously and simply is as great a thing as to do the most brilliant act.

Let us note in passing an error into which it would be dangerous to fall. Certain tender

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consciences are so impressed with a fault that they are inconsolable about it. Repentance takes such hold of them that they believe themselves forever lost and dishonoured. You should never give up to despair. To regret a wrong is good; to stop to think of it too long, and to plunge into remorse, is to lose the power of reparation.

A man who has sinned may be compared to one who has fallen down. He does not stay on the ground looking at his bruises and groaning over his pain. He makes an effort to get up or he is lost.

It is surely a terrible thing to say that some faults are irreparable, that lost time never returns, that what is past is past, and that we shall never have another opportunity of effacing the stain that distresses us. But is it right to lose to-day and to-morrow by looking backward, because we have lost yesterday? Certainly not. Repentance like this would be fruitless and corrupting. Let it become, on the

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contrary, an active force in our lives; let us remember our sins only to avoid them in the future and to recollect good incessantly. Let us leave to God who forgives, the past that torments us, and let us get all the profit possible from the present moment, so that it may not fall fruitless into the gulf of the past. Those men who have done the most good, wiped away the most tears, healed the most wounds, righted the most wrongs and injustices, are inspired by an active repentance, with a lively feeling of past sins pardoned and transformed into an unwearied source of good.



**WHERE ARE WE GOING?**





## XIX

### DEATH AND ETERNAL LIFE

**S**OME people think it is better never to speak of death, or even consider it. I know that they have tried to hide it from their children, carefully avoiding any encounter that might reveal it to them. This is one of those desperate feats that serve only to make more formidable what we are obliged to look sometime in the face.

Death comes without any care on our part. Its manifestations are part of the daily spectacle of nature and of human society. We need not look at a corpse or a coffin to see it, for to note only a fly or a bird falling lifeless is to have our attention directed to that mysterious Something called death.

Of course we should not spend our whole life watching for its end. That would be the worst

way to prepare for it. The school-boy who spends his school hours thinking of recess is a poor labourer, as well as the workman occupied all day long in counting the minutes that separate him from the evening. Like them, he loses his time who spends it in fruitless contemplation of death. We are here to live. It would be especially unhealthy for the mind of youth to be invaded by mournful preoccupations and to have its soul dulled by a constant representation of the last hour. Youth ought to be the time of joy, of free gaiety, and of long hopes.

It is not a bad idea to become familiar with the fact that we shall not stay forever on the earth, and I do not think it necessary to wait for old age to remember death. Since every one knows that old age is an exception, it is well to consider it while we are young.

He who thinks at times that his days are numbered is disposed to utilise them better. The words of Jesus come to him: "Work while it is yet day, for the night cometh when no

man can work." The thought of death makes him a better man. He watches more scrupulously his conduct toward those who live near him, thinking that perhaps he will not always have them. How many faults would be avoided, how many sharp regrets spared us, if we would consider sometimes that a word or an act may irreparably wound our loved ones, and that death may separate us before we may have had time to console them.

In order to avoid becoming puffed up on fine days, and discouraged by the miseries of life, is it not well to say ourselves that all this will end? When the way is painful and the burden overwhelming, to dream of rest is a comfort. For humanity that is struggling, enduring, and suffering, this is a comfortable saying: "There remaineth still a rest for the people of God."

Nothing will sooner lower our pride and confound our vanity than the thought of the instability of beauty, strength, power, and fortune.



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To think sometimes of our end exercises us in living well, and teaches us to hold ourselves ready for it as becomes men.

Death comes, it is true, nearly always as a surprise. It arrives when one is thinking least of it, and rarely presents itself in the expected form. It is, therefore, so much the more necessary to be ready to receive it.

Now, what should we think about death? We should not forget, first of all, that much of its bitterness is due to man himself. We bring it upon ourselves before our time by all sorts of vices and errors; we augment its horrors by crime, we trouble its peace by hatred. Cleared of what we add to it, as it is included in God's Plan and Will, death loses much of its terror. It is impossible for the world to be at once transitory and changing, and imperishable. Who of us could bear to live forever under the same conditions? When we are young, it is easy to maintain that we should never tire of being here. So we are disposed in the morning, ready

for all enterprises, full of all curiosity. But evening comes and sleep lays hold of us. We ask only one thing—to close our eyes; to sleep. Do you know what would happen if some one were spared by death and kept here forever? He who was the most eager for life would ask mercy at the end of a few centuries, and would say to God: "Let thy servant depart in peace."

Let us accustom ourselves in early life to the idea that we must go away, and let us play our part bravely, without having our good nature spoiled or our enthusiasm for work diminished. Then, if the moment comes to stop, it does not prove that what we have done in this world is in vain, not that we should lightly value these days that will end. What we have begun here will have its successor and its to-morrow. If a man resigns himself to death, he is not permitted to resign himself to nothingness. Death is a stage of progress, it is not the end. God's Will for us is infinite. Nothing that comes from God can vanish into nothingness.



Man is greater than death, since he can enter into it freely and give his transitory life for what is worth more than mortality. He who dies for justice, truth, or the salvation of others, is more living than the selfish man saved by his cowardice, and having for his only pre-occupation the fear of death.

Each act of courage is a demonstration of the superiority of the human soul over exterior obstacles. The greatest is dying for duty. Such a death is a triumph over death. It is a manifestation of the higher life that is hidden and being worked out under our ephemeral existences. And that sublime manifestation of the superiority of man over death has not alone been given by strong heroes of past ages, who were sustained by great purposes. It has been furnished often by children of our age. Nothing is nobler than a child who has accustomed himself not to tremble before the horrors of death.

Let us say this to ourselves, my children: "the face of death, be a man." Do not honour it

so much as to fear it. The kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, belong not to it, but to Him who wishes you to be a man even in death.

To make of death a sombre monarch before whom the human race bows in passive acquiescence, is contrary to reality and to man's dignity. The man in danger of annihilation is he who is given up to his animal instincts, and who does not know what immortality lies hidden under the fibre of this frail life that is torn to pieces by death. He becomes, in his blind terror, the prey of death, as the mouse is of the cat. His life is given him only as a respite more or less brief, and the perpetual menace hung over his head prevents his enjoyment of it. But the true life consists in delivering ourselves entirely from the slavery of fear. "Be a man" does not necessarily mean "know how to live"; it means also "know how to die." And to know how to die means not alone accepting resignedly what you cannot avoid. It means as well to be strong in hope; to wrap yourself in it as the dying soldier

wraps himself in the flag. Give yourselves up, not to annihilation, but to God. He understands, as you do not, the dark passage, which is light for Him. Be confident to the end; through the shadows, take the Father's Hand.

**T**HE great bitterness of death has always been the realisation of the sins with which the conscience is laden.

You cannot die in peace when remorse gnaws at your heart. Let this be a warning to hold us back from evil temptations. Let us remember that we must render an account.

The Master of life and death, however, is not an inexorable judge who lays upon our frail shoulders burdens of responsibility too heavy for fallible creatures. No one has a right to terrorise us in His Name. Make way for Christ and His Merciful Face! He has told us that before the Supreme Judge, Only, Just, and Incorruptible, a sincere regret will take the place of justice. He has done our poor unequalled

humanity the service of lightening the shadows of the tomb. To him who trembles at the judgment, but weeps over his past and condemns himself, He says, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." To him who is troubled by the approach of the twilight where our steps falter, and our eyes grow dim, He says, "Fear not, only believe."

Then when we are thinking of our own death or that of our loved ones, particularly if that death seems premature, incomprehensible, or violent, and in circumstances where our doctrines and our reasonings cannot give us light, we may take refuge in absolute trust in God. He is the Supreme Shelter: there is no other. He is impregnable. We may say to Him: "I am dying, and I do not know what will happen to me. Thou knowest; that is enough for me. My destiny will be shaped to Thy holy Will. What Thou wilt do to me will be well done, and better than I could think." The most beautiful words before death are those of the dying Jesus: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

**W**ITH regard to the honours paid to those who are no more, their principal quality should be simplicity and sincerity. It is contrary to good sense and piety to carry into death the difference between rich and poor, and to profane our mortal remains by surrounding them with the apparel of our pride and vanity.

When we are asked where the dead have gone, the best reply would be, "They have gone to God." They belong to Him as they did while living, and as we do also. The tie between them and us is not broken, for we are bound together through God Himself, in Whom is our life.

It is thus that our journey ends. God surrounds us on every side. We come from Him, we go to Him, and, according to the beautiful saying of Saint Augustine, "For Thyself, O God, hast Thou created us, and our hearts know no repose until they rest in Thee."

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