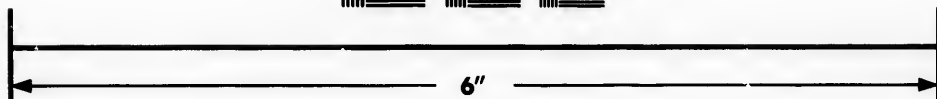
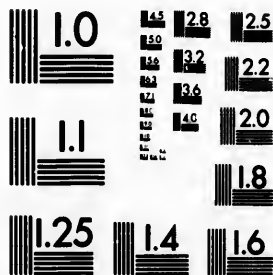


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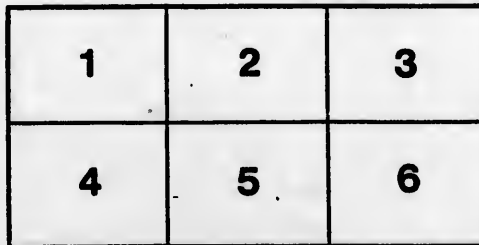
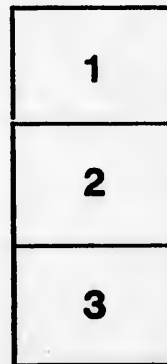
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MEN'S EXCUSES

FOR

NOT BECOMING CHRISTIANS.*

"AND they all with one consent, began to make excuse."—LUKE 14 : 18.

After announcing the above as the text for his discourse, Mr. BEECHER read the parable in which it occurs, as follows :

"And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him : Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said he unto him : A certain man made a great supper, and bade many : and sent his servant at supper time, to say to them that were bidden : Come, for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him : 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it : I pray thee have me excused.' And another said : 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them : I pray thee have me excused.' And another said : 'I have married a wife : and therefore I can not come.' So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry, said to his servant : 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said : 'Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.'"

Christ had been teaching many of the more eminent virtues which belonged to his kingdom and to his calling. There were some, also, who imagined, in hearing him, that there was a millennium close at hand ; that that kingdom, which was to be decorated and adorned with resplendent instances of men who were to exhibit such sterling virtues as he had been descending on—humility, kindness, sympathy, hospitality, magnanimity—was soon to be established. To those who supposed that, in the kingdom which they thought he had come to establish, men would evince just these qualities, he said : "Blessed is he that shall *eat bread* in the kingdom of God."

Christ speaks, then, a parable to this effect : That moral excellencies are exceedingly attractive to men that hear about them, but that they are apt to be repulsive to men who are called to practise them ; and that, in reference to those very things which led to this admiration of his own kingdom, when men were called to take up such virtues, they would find reason not so

* Preached in Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, May 28, 1853.

much for admiring the virtues as for excusing themselves. He therefore spoke this parable.

In the twenty-second chapter of Matthew, the same parable is given; and there it is stated that it was a king who made a feast on the occasion of his son's marriage. This heightens the picture, because there was then not only a reason of respect for going to the feast, but a reason of allegiance; and in staying away, there was not merely disrespect, but disobedience.

There are three excuses given in the parable, although there is but one spirit at the bottom of them. They amount only to this: that each man preferred his self-interest to his duty; he preferred to please himself rather than to please his liege-lord. The excuse alleged in each case did not cover the ground at all. There was not a justifying reason in either. There was nothing in the circumstances mentioned by any one of these men, that made it impracticable for him to attend the summons of his sovereign. His ground would not sink from under his feet while he was paying this duty to his king. His five yoke of oxen would not stray away or be lost by his waiting. He had married a wife, and there was no danger that he would get rid of her so soon. These were mere pretenses. The reason was, in each case, that the men did not wish to go; and these excuses were, therefore, mere pretenses, that covered that unwillingness.

What is meant by an excuse? It is a reason given for disobedience, or delinquency, in some duty. It implies, always, an obligation, an unfulfillment, and some reason which the person supposes will justify or palliate this delinquency or disobedience. There is no virtue, therefore, in an excuse, unless it has power to release a man from a foregoing obligation, or to palliate the non-fulfillment of such an obligation. There are many duties which are relative—that is, they depend very much upon circumstances. The services and kindnesses which we owe to each other, change—the obligation varies with our situation. What do parents owe to their children? They owe love. But the conduct that love requires varies with each of their children, and with the parents' own condition. The relations of men throughout society stand on definite principles; but the application of these principles varies through a long scale. So that a man may disappoint expectations, and even agreements, and yet not be altogether without excuse. For sickness, calamity, the constant incursion of other duties and burdens, the weakness of a man in foreseeing what is to happen, and thereby promising what he can not perform, and hundreds of such things, may be valid excuses for the non-performance of those duties which are relative between man and man.

But there are other obligations that are not movable, from which men can not recede excusably. No man can excuse himself, if he fail in the duty of patriotism as a citizen. In some special developments of this duty, he may do a certain thing or fail to do it; but as to the general temper and spirit of patriotism, there can be no excuse for the want of it. There are no such things as excuses for the want of honor. What honor requires a man to be, or to do, may vary with circumstances; but for a lack of the central and

essential spirit there is no excuse. There is no excusing a man for want of truth, for want of fidelity. There is no excusing a man in any respect in which the obligation includes fundamental qualities essential to his moral being, or his honorable estate. No excuse in moral things can ever avail, when it relates to the *higher* forms of obligation—those which stand in a man's own nature, and in his relations to God and to eternity.

What is the spirit which usually grows up in men who are given to excesses? The habit of finding reasons for not doing right, is a habit that grows very rapidly and very insidiously. It enfeebles the motives to right conduct, and leads men to seek rather how to avoid than how to perform duty. A man who has taught himself early to excuse delinquency in duties, has lost moral feeling just in the proportion in which he has gained a facility of justifying himself. There never was a proverb truer than this, that "A man who is good at excuses is good for nothing else." For, though there are excuses which justify men, yet the spirit of self-excusation is always a mean one.

Excuses for moral delinquency are usually essentially false. They are pretenses. They do not state the truth. They are rather statements made to *conceal* the truth. They are devised merely to make a good show, and either to deceive other eyes or to blind our own. The excuses which we make to ourselves are often eminently deceptive; the excuses which we make to others are still more glaringly so. Nothing is more common than that wrong is committed, on one ground, and that then the mind begins to search some plausible excuse for it, on another, alleging this last as the primal and moving cause of the act. So that men's excuses are acting, all the while, to produce delinquency or wrong, by the very fact of trumping up an excuse to make the show fair.

Excuses for moral delinquency are, therefore, usually processes of self-deception. At first they may not be: but at length, a man who tries to deceive himself comes into that state in which he can do nothing else but deceive himself. A man can put out his eyes, inwardly, so that at last he will not see that a lie is a lie, and a truth is a truth. Deceit may be known to be so, at first; it then becomes less and less noticeable; and finally the mind is falsified, and lives without frankness, openness, truth, or purity. I think that one of the most terrible spectacles in the world is to see a man that has destroyed the power of moral judgment in respect to his own action, his own moral state, his own moral character. The number of such persons is not small; it is growing more and more; and what is more remarkable, they are found more frequently in the Church, and within the sound of preaching, than out of it, and in rounds of wickedness. On that very account, Christ declared that, "The publicans and harlots shall enter the kingdom of God before you." A man who is an open sinner, and carries his scars on the outside, does not pretend to disguise it. It is bad, bad; he knows it is bad; he does not deny that it is bad. Without plausibilities or cunningly-devised excuses, he sets before himself just what he is, and says: "I am a drunkard; I am a liar; I am a dissipated man; I don't pre-

tend to be a Christian." But a man that has been brought up in the Church, as it were; a man who has had his conscience pressed and pressed again and again; who is forever trying to find out some way of excusing himself for not being what he knows he ought to be, comes at last to that state in which he entirely confuses his moral sense. And nothing is more common than that men may be in that state, with a certain kind of exterior morality, making them noticeably good in exterior matters, while they have actually lost the power of moral discrimination in respect to their own real inward habits. They become hardened. It is said of such persons, that their conscience is "seared as with a hot iron." They are calloused.

The spirit of excusing one's self is a spirit much to be dreaded. There is something very noble in openness and frankness, even when exercised by bad men. A bold bad man always attracts interest. When a man does wrong, and says, "Yes, I know it is wrong," there is something commendable in him. We feel ashamed, sometimes, to think that we admire any thing in a bad man; but there is something in frankness, and in truth-speaking, and especially in truth-speaking when the truth which a man tells is to his own harm, that we can not help admiring. On the other hand, there is something essentially mean and detestable in a man who is always passing off a kind of small coin of lies—living wrong, feeling wrong, doing wrong, and yet perpetually imposing upon himself and other persons by excuses. Making excuses is a very mean business. It is like the manufacture of bogus money—the issuing of false bills.

Let us look a little in detail at some of the excuses usually made by men for not accepting the life which Christ proposes to every human being.

There are excuses founded upon a variety of doubts respecting the truth of the Scriptures. Let me say, that I admit, in the beginning, the possibility of doubts in respect to much that belongs to the external form, and to the historical connections of Scripture. The Bible is a library of books that has had an experience most marvellous. The Scripture contains something almost of the history of the entire human race from the beginning of the world. But that which makes the Bible is not its dates; not its exact literary form; not its precise historical accuracy. We have the testimony of Christ as to what it is that makes the Bible, when he was talking of the two great commandments, and said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." In other words, the whole Bible is nothing but just this. This is the marrow of it. This is its essential spirit. It is the revelation of man's obligation to love God, and to love his fellow-men, and to evolve his whole life and character upon the basis of that principle.

Now, I say, in respect to the great mass of men purporting to be doubters of Scripture, they do *not* doubt the Scripture at all; and that this is not the reason why they do not become Christians. I do not say that they may not doubt Genesis; that they do not set aside the Mosiac books; that they do not find a world of amusement in the old, singular stories of prophetic

times ; that they can not find fantastic things in Scripture, and many things which excite a smile, especially if they are a little ignorant. But I say that their difficulties and troubles about the form of Scripture, are *not the reasons* why they do not become Christians. It is the power, the substance of Scripture, that they do not like. It is the insidious refusal of the life and conduct which Scripture inculcates, that makes them turn round and attack the Bible itself, and the authority of the whole system of Christianity. Self-seeking and self-pleasing, in all their forms, constitute their integral life. This is the motive power with them. When they open the word of God, the declaration is, If a man does not lose his life, he shall not save it. They find that if they would save their life, they must yield it up. They find that no man who is not converted into this essential element of love, who is not born again—out of old personality, out of old pride, out of old self-seeking—and born into a new life, of love to God and to his fellow-men, shall ever inherit the Kingdom of God ; and when the pressure of this truth comes upon them, and they are told to come under subjection to this law of love, it is because their pride says, "I will not submit ;" and their vanity says, "I will not submit ;" and one after another faculty of their mind, on being summoned, says, "I will not submit ;" it is because their whole nature rebels against Christ's law of love to God and to man, and they refuse to be clothed and controlled by such a spirit, that they seek to find a miserable excuse by criticising, condemning, and rejecting the Scripture.

It is this that leads men, for the most part, to search for reasons of doubt.

The effect of this may be seen in the different ways in which men read a document ; as, for instance, whether they read it in a spirit of regard and gladness, or in a spirit of criticism and fault-finding. Two men read the same will. What a different instrument it is to them ! One is the son who is possessed of the property, and the other is the son who is dispossessed. The man who is to get the old house, and the ground, and all the property, reads it over and over, every line of it, and his face lights up with a smile, and he says, "That's good, that's right, that's law, that's equity : " because it is money ; because every line of it is money to him ! The other man reads it, and scowls, and says : "It's *not* right, it's *not* good, it's *not* law, it's *not* equity." One says, "I love that will ;" the other says, "I hate that will." Every body says that both the one and the other gives a false judgment. The heart worked there, and not the head ; the head had nothing to do with it. The head judged the document just according to the heart's telling, and not according to calm reason—which is calm humbug ! Talk about reason when a man's head is like a boiling pot over the fire ! It is the *heart* that makes men think—with the mere exception of scientific research. No man thinks, except by the power of feeling ; and it is love, jealousy, pride, vanity, avarice, that sets fire to the thoughts. And when a man's heart is on fire, and he says, "I will be my own master ; I will not have Christ to rule over me," it would be a pity if the intellect could not find flaws in the Scripture to satisfy the man with not being a Christian. But the moment a man *wants* to be a Christian, and is touched in his heart

by the Spirit of God—the moment he *does* wish to submit his disposition to the love of Christ—the moment he is touched by trouble, the moment he is crushed by sorrow, and *desires* to believe—how quickly all his doubts fly away! But as long as a man does *not* want to be a Christian, as long as he refuses to yield himself to be controlled by the Spirit of Love, there is but little use in arguing with him; he can never be answered; his excuses are valid to him. Therefore, I have for a long time, in the main, declined this way of addressing myself to unbelieving men. That is to say, I have declined to take the battle-ground of ideas upon ideas. I recognize that there is a fair field for controversy and conflict—for theologians and philosophical disputants; but ordinarily, in dealing with men, my own experience has been this: that the reason of their unbelief has been their low moral tone; and the way to settle their minds, in respect to disputed things of the Bible, was to arouse their moral feelings; for the moment their moral nature was intensified, they began to take care of their own difficulties. There was no more trouble then. Those arguments which they array around about them, for the minister to answer, or for the Christian to answer, there is no need of answering. The moment their own moral nature is really aroused, they dispossess themselves of their own trouble. Generally speaking, no man can be cured except he cures himself; and the way to begin to cure a man, is to set him to curing himself. For it is the same with a man's mind as with his body. When a man's body is sick, it is not the doctor that cures it; it is the medical power of nature—the recuperative force of the man's own system. So there is in the mind this self-recovering power. When his moral nature is touched, and he wants this higher tone, all his difficulties begin to disappear. A man, who, as it were, yesterday had as many objections as ever a tree had leaves, to-day has not a single one; and the explanation is, that yesterday he wanted them, and to-day he don't want them; yesterday his nature inclined him to make them; to-day, disinclines him. He now wants another kind of life, and his troubles are all gone.

In general, in regard to the obstacles which men oppose by their excuses on account of troubles of belief in Scripture—look them through to the bottom. Although there may be such things as real philosophical difficulties, yet that is not the reason why men are not Christians. The reason is, because selfishness does not like to turn into love; because pride does not like to turn into humility; because self-seeking does not like to turn into seeking the good of others. That is the reason.

Excuses are not few, founded upon the difficulty of understanding doctrines, and founded also upon the confusion which is produced in the world from the quarrels, the disputes, and the doctrinal differences among Christians. How many persons there are, who, when approached and urged to enter upon a Christian life, say: "Oh! there is no telling what to believe; nobody seems to believe alike; churches are all quarrelling, and have been since the beginning of the world. And I am bewildered and mystified; I don't know where I stand, and I won't have any thing to do with it." Although there is misconduct in the disputes of the Church, and has been

from the beginning; great and reprehensible violence in the discussion of their doctrines; yet, in respect to the things that really pertain to the salvation of the soul, there is almost *no difference at all*. There is difference about church government, church ordinances; about the terms of creeds, about the way in which truths shall be stated in a connected form, and as a system of philosophy. But when it is not a question of baptism, or of bishops, or of elders, or of ordinances, but simply a question of "What shall this poor soul do to be saved?" I will take the inquirer, and he shall go round with me to every church and ask. As we are going, we meet a Baptist minister, and I say to him, "Tell me, what shall this poor soul do that asks to be saved?" and he will say, "Do! why, let him break off from sin, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and he shall be saved." And that minister will begin to labor with him; while he is talking to him, there comes over the way a Presbyterian minister, and the Baptist brother says: "Here; this man asks what he shall do to be saved; tell him." "Do! why, let him repent of his sins, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and he shall be saved." Close by, coming round the corner, is a Congregational minister; and as he draws nigh, he says: "Well, brethren, what are you talking about?" "Oh!" the Presbyterian says to him, "here is an inquiring soul; tell him what he must do to be saved." "Do! why, if he has been living in sin, he ought to break off his sin by righteousness, and live by faith, and love Christ." There comes now, in his canonicals, an Episcopalian clergyman. "Now, here is a man from the true Church, and we shall have a different doctrine." They stop him: "My dear sir, we were just talking to this man, inquiring what he must do to be saved; what do you think he ought to do?" And he looks upon him: "Why, my dear friend, I don't know your history; but if you have been living in worldliness and sin, you ought to cease that, and turn from it; and if you have been living without God in your heart, you ought to love Christ, and believe on him; and by repentance, and faith in Christ, you shall be saved." Here are four. Now, I will go and bring in a Lutheran, a Methodist, a Reformed Dutch, an Associate Reformed; and one after another, they will say the same thing. Finally, there comes by Bishop Fenelon, of the Roman Catholic Church. "I say, Bishop, come here and see a man inquiring what he must do to be saved. I don't want to talk about the things that divide us as Protestants and Catholics, but this poor soul wants to know what he ought to do." "Sir," says the Bishop, "the Scripture is plain on that point. Break off your sins, and turn to Christ; and he will have mercy, and will abundantly pardon. Why do you *ask* me such a simple question as that?"

Now, if you went one step further than that, and asked about forms of government, or which is the true Church? the Baptist would say, "It is *my* Church;" the Presbyterian, "It is *my* Church;" the Congregationalist; "It is *my* Church;" the Episcopalian, "It is *my* Church;" the Roman Catholic bishop, "It is *my* Church." But when you go to them with the simple question, "What must a man do to be saved;" you see how they all

join hands, and say one thing: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Now, so far from there being any ground and reason of excuse, "that you don't know what to do, because there are such differences of doctrine," it is just the other thing; it is because you *do* know what to do; it is because you know there *is* consent of Christian men on this one point, namely, renouncing self, accepting justification through Christ, breaking off sin, and beginning to live for God. They all agree about that, though they disagree about other things. And you pitch at those *other* things, and search *them* out, and dwell among *them*. The points on which they agree, you take care to steer clear of. You say, your reason is, that Christians do not agree; but you know while you are saying it, that you are mean, and cowardly, and a liar. My voice is but the echo of your own consciousness!

There are, again, excuses for not being a Christian, which are founded upon the inconsistency and the misconduct of Christians. There are a great many persons who will not be Christians, "because professors of religion act so." Well, I think they *do* "act so." There is no doubt about great inconsistency. There is great weakness. They live far below their light and their privileges; far below their own intention. I am not here to bind up, with justifying excuses, the delinquencies of professors of religion, whether ministers or laymen. I freely admit that they are very sinful, very imperfect. In fact, they never profess to be any thing else but that. They never profess to be saints. Some people think that the Church is like a picture-gallery, and that Christians are all like portraits, all painted and perfect, and hung up on the wall for show. There they are! They are ranged around as quick as they come into the church, and we have a right to come and look at them; and criticise them as completed works! But, coming into the church is more like coming into a school, where there is every degree of scholarship, from the first to the highest form; and a person in coming in, just *begins* to learn, and is not already *perfected* in learning. The church is more like a place where some kind workman is teaching inexperienced apprentices. They are learning, and not learned.

Do you know that that is the meaning of Christ's own word; *mathetes*, a scholar, a disciple? He invites men to follow him, and be *scholars*. And the Church professes only to have those who are *learning*. The one thing that constitutes fitness for membership in a church is this: the consciousness of moral weakness and want. It is never implied that membership in church is equivalent to an exhibitory state. Men are not gathered into the Church that they may be exhibited as specimens of perfect saints. Far from it!

When men find fault with Christians that they are inconsistent and sinful, and say that they are inexcusably so, it is not to be understood that a Christian is a perfect man. Not at all! He does not profess any such thing. But even if the worst were true—and the worst is not true—I mean that, while now and then Christians are judged accurately by men of the world, comprehensively they are not; for I think that a man that is simply in-

different to the things that a Christian is trying to do and to be, does not know how difficult they are. A man who is living without any check on his own selfishness, without any check on his own pride, is not in a state to judge how nearly a man is successful who is doing violence to his original nature by the force of moral principle. If you think it is easy for a man to subdue pride; if you say, "you are a minister, you ought not to carry your head high"—did you ever try to carry yours low? If you never did, then you don't know what difficulty there may be in the operation. Did you, in the midst of your worldly-mindedness, ever undertake to fill your mind with spiritual things? If you did not, then you can not tell the trials of temptation, which other men have met in doing it. If you suppose that it is an easy road, all through, to be a Christian, that there are no difficulties, that there is nothing to prevent a man from being symmetrical and even all round, and to be always what he ought to be, it is because you have no conception at all of what is required. Nothing less than the Spirit of Almighty God, and his grace and power, can be sufficient.

Moreover, to be able to judge about another man, you must have a spirit of love toward him. You are never *fit* to judge a man, unless you love him! If you see a man in the street, although he is a detestable villain and a thief, you are not qualified to judge him rightly, unless you have such a spirit as this. He may be a miserable debauchee, a *roue*; he may be rotten to the bone; but you are not fit to judge him, till you have kindness towards him, till you have a yearning disposition, till you have a loving heart. No man is to judge another till he feels that he can do it in a spirit of kindness; and then, in the spirit of love, you can form the *best* judgment.

Now, in respect to Christians, the world does not love them. On the contrary, it stands and looks upon them coldly and piercingly. It judges them without any consciousness, or any experience of what they are doing, of how they are denying themselves, of how they are wrestling, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities. I need not say how unjust and cruel such judgments are.

But (as I was going to say before) even if the worst were true, that worst would not be any excuse for the men who find fault with it. It would not touch the ground of *their* moral obligation, on which *each* man individually stands. God's claims and man's duties stand on no such foundation as the consistency or the inconsistency of Christians. If every man in New-York cheated, the obligation for *you* to be honest would be unimpaired. If every man in New-York habitually lied, your obligation to be a man of truth would stand on just the same ground. If every man in the army were a coward, the duty and the beauty of courage would be just the same on you. Men's moral and social duties do not stand in the way in which other men perform them. They stand on grounds peculiar to their own individuality.

But this keen perception of Christian delinquency, instead of excusing men, only makes them the more guilty. No person can look at the rule of Christian life, and then at the discrepancy of individual conduct compared with that rule, without convicting himself of what is right. For he must

know what is right, or he could not *condemn* men for not practising it. He sits in judgment upon others, forgetting that he is, at the same time, judging himself!

There are, again, excuses founded upon the pressure of business. The pressure of business may determine how much a man may do, in a certain direction. It may determine the degree of external activity, if he should become a Christian. But there is no occupation, there is nothing consequent upon the transaction of business, than can reach the question that lies within the man, and excuse him for the want of higher moral qualities. Circumstances of business may determine how much we may *do* for our parents, or our children; it will never justify us in withholding our *love* from them. No man feels that any amount of business is an excuse for the want of moral qualities. No man ever said: "I know I have been a slippery man; I know I have been flying kites more than I ought; I know I have resorted to many devices not right in business; I know I have done a hundred things; but then, I haven't time to reform; I haven't time to tell the truth; I haven't time to be honorable; I haven't time to make good paper instead of bad." Why, every body would laugh to scorn any such statement as that. As if it took a man any more time to do right than to do wrong! As if it took a man any more time to tell the truth than a lie! As if it took any more time for a man to swear than not to swear! It takes no more time to be virtuous than not to be—nor half so much. It takes no more time to be just than to be unjust.

Now, if it were true that religion required a man to relinquish business, and to go into a cave or convent, then there might be plausibility in this excuse. But the command is this: "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." And it takes a man no longer time to act from a benevolent, than from a selfish motive; from allegiance than from non-allegiance. The whole excuse that a man "has no time," is utterly without foundation.

Nay, religion is, in one sense, an economy of time. A mind centered in love—a mind trusting in God, and hopeful of heaven—a heart that truly loves men, is better fitted for the transaction of business than any other. It can do more in the same time; can do it better, with less weariness. I do not mean to say that, when a man becomes a Christian, he will make a great deal better merchant than a man who is not a Christian; for the original gifts for commercial life may be very different in the two men. But I say, take the same man, before and after he has become a Christian, and his adaptation for business afterwards will be better than it was before. Take a man who is hard, grasping, clenching, greedy, wanting more and more, without bound or measure, and he is wasteful of the economies of his life. He can not do so much as a business man, as if his soul were transfused with the love of God, and his desires were tempered with the love of his fellow-men. A man whose mind is serene, who says, "God rules; my trust is in him; I look up to heaven; if I lose my property here, it is nothing, comparatively—if I lose my place and position, it is nothing, com-

paratively. So that my crown is not taken away, I lose but little—"such a man is better fitted for business than any other, who can not say this. And no man has so little ground of excuse for not becoming a Christian, as the man who pleads that he is burdened and plied with business engagements. He, more than any body else, needs religion.

A word about excuses founded upon hope, such as promises and procrastinations, for there are many of them. They seem very amiable sins, for they consist, not in men's *refusing* to perform duty, but simply in adjourning its performance. Many persons excuse themselves for not being Christians now, by the promise that they will be by and by. At the bottom, however, their promises are all deceptive. They are artifices simply to rid one's self of importunity. They are like many debtors' promises, who promise to pay what they owe, the next month—not because they expect to pay it then, but because they wish to get rid of your importunity till that time. It is a device, not by which you are to get your money, but by which they are not to pay it. So men say, they can not attend to religion now, but they will at such and such a time. These excuses are at bottom untrue and deceptive, and are *meant* to be so. Oh! how many of them there are! The mere statement does not begin to cover the facts. I call upon those that are present to-night to remember how many of those prayers, which they have made, have been forgotten after they were made. If you had made as many notes—written them, signed them, and, in the presence of witnesses, given them out—as you have made solemn promises to God, covering the whole sphere of your being, and if all these notes were to be brought to your notice now—you would be bankrupt. Think of all that you made when you were sick! Beginning at childhood, and coming down through five, ten, fifteen, twenty, forty, fifty years—most solemn promises that if God would, in your trouble, remove that trouble; that if, in the sickness of your child, God would spare that child, and let it be restored to life; all the promises that you made to God, that if he would fulfill certain conditions, or forget certain threatenings, you would fulfill certain duties; all that you made for the future, which you made only to forget; all that you made upon the sea, and in the storm; all that you made in distant lands, and in great exigencies and emergencies; all that you made under vehement pressure of business! Oh! what promises have you made to God! How many times have you adjourned present performance with the avowed solemn promise that you would perform your duty at some other day? A young man, some five years before he comes to his estate, is waiting anxiously for it. He can not take possession, and he wants to use it before he can get it. Whenever he wants money he goes to a usurer, and gets it by giving a note of hand for the amount. He borrows it to pay it out of the estate when it shall fall to him. He is drawing it all from this usurer, who knows that the estate is ample. He don't want to disturb the young man's fear. So one note after another is put down, and one after another again—the young man forgetting every one, the usurer remembering every one—till there are enough to make a package, and it is inclosed

in an envelope, and laid away in the safe. Then another note comes in, and then another, and another—the usurer keeping account, the young man keeping no account—till another package is made, and put away alongside of the first. So the expecting heir gives his notes—during one year, two years, three years, four years, five years; and then he comes into possession. Five years he has spent in enjoying himself, and now he is going to enjoy himself all the more. One day, after he is in full possession, he “receives a visit” from his friend! His friend has come to “settle those little matters!” “Oh! yes, I recollect. There were some slight transactions between you and me.” “Yes, some *slight* transactions”—and the man pulls out the bundles, one after another, and opens them. “That is for the year 1840; that for the year 1841.” The young man begins to look strangely. “I don’t recollect so much as that, sir.” “Well, never mind; I recollect it. But that is not all!” The usurer begins to pull out more notes. “That package is for 1842; that, for ’43; that for ’44:” and he begins to open them one by one. “Is that your signature?” He looks at it and says: “Yes.” He shows him another. “Is that your signature?” He examines it and says: “Yes.” He opens another package. The young man asks: “What’s that?” “Oh! that’s the same thing. Is that your signature?” “Yes,” he says, and he begins to grow pale. Ten thousand dollars—twenty thousand! He counts it up, and says: “Oh! I never had so much!” “Stop,” says the money-lender, “that’s not all—that’s not half.” Thirty thousand—forty thousand! “Why, sir, the estate is worth only fifty thousand!” *And here is forty thousand consumed.* “Ah! yes—fifty thousand; that’s just it; here it is—count it!” Fifty thousand! The whole estate! There he has gone on, giving his notes—month after month, year after year—till they just cover the property! And the usurer’s interest was that the man should not understand any thing about it till the time came for possession of the estate, when he could make a clean sweep, and take it all himself from the spendthrift and bankrupt heir! The old home, where the man expected to spend his life, is gone; the money is all gone; the property is all gone—and he is turned out in poverty upon the world!

Now, God is not a usurer, but this may illustrate the other side of the story—when a man will give promise after promise, and pledge after pledge—he forgetting them all, but God never; till by and by, he shall come to stand up in judgment, when these promises—made from sick-beds, made in times of difficulty and danger, made in moments when the heart was stricken with trouble—will all rise up before him, and confront him to his everlasting confusion and shame! He will then find that his promises were no justifying reasons for neglecting his duty!

There are, also, excuses founded on peculiarities of situation, difficulties of temper and disposition; but I can not, to-night, begin to discuss the chapter of excuses any further. For, as for excuses, they are more numerous than there are new leaves coming out, to-night, on all the trees of the city; and some men are as full of them as any tree is of leaves.

None of these excuses amount to any thing which is not solvable by the

will of man—which men can not overcome *at once*—which they do not overcome ten thousand times in business, in pleasure, in ambition. Whenever a man wants any thing, the difficulties in getting it may be tenfold more than in trying to become a Christian. Usually, when men want any thing, they are determined to get it; but a man says: "It is so *hard* to become a Christian!" It is hard, because you don't *want* to be a Christian. A man *does* want to be rich, and, though the money is under the equator, he breaks away from his father's house, from home, from pleasure, from the conveniences of life, and goes in search for it, and, braving danger and disease, toils by day and by night—an exile, severed from home—that he may have the privilege of going back again with a *little money*. There is nothing hard! Men will go to the North Pole, if money draws them, or the love of science, or of enterprise and daring! There is nothing hard to the enthusiasm of ambition! Whatever is to be gained by enterprise, by perseverance, by toil, by patient endeavor, none of these things are esteemed hard. If the thing is a worldly thing—if it touches their passions, their pride, their self-interest, it is never hard; but, oh! if it be virtue, if it be purity, if it be hope of immortality, if it be Christ and heaven, then the difficulties are *so* great! It is because men do not *care* for these things, that they find them hard; and every man then has an excuse. It is because he *will not*, not because he *can not*.

There can not be, in the nature of things, any excuse that should justify a man in the neglect of Christian duty. No excuse can be framed why a man should neglect his own character, why he should live forgetful of his immortality, of his honor, of his power and capacity of enjoyment forever and ever. No possible excuse can justify it! There is no excuse why a man should build up his whole character upon the basis of his lower nature, instead of his higher. There can be no excuse why a man should persistently, all his life long, live without God. There can be no excuse why a man should ever treat himself so cruelly as wicked men treat themselves—starving their conscience, starving their moral nature, starving out their very life! Oh! the heart of every man—I do not care how wicked he is—sometimes hungers and thirsts! There is something in the soul of every man that, first or last, cries out for God! In the ear of man's highest prosperity, something will always come to whisper, saying: "All these successes do not satisfy you!" I think that in the history of bad men—I think? *I know*—there are intervals when there comes to them a sense of the unutterable meanness of business, of the utter deceit in it, of the unsatisfying nature of it! The drunkard between his cups calls out for temperance, and for help against his temptations. The lecherous man, in the intervals of his furious voluptuous passions, knows that his manhood is not there, and that he is being bestialized. The dishonest man, in the intervals of his bargains, knows that he is under the dominion of avarice, and that he is simply a commercial and useless man, living for no higher end than money. Men who live merely for social enjoyment, and who leave God out of their life, know the miserable hollowness of the world. Men's souls moan and sob within them, as often, in the

household, children cry out from the cradle, when parents are gone out, and wet their pillows with tears unheeded. There is something in the soul that cries out for God; and no man can frame a justifying reason why he should deny his better nature, giving himself up to live as if he were a beast. If you were a mere animal, if you were only an ox, browsing and horned, then your life would not be so very bad. If you were a bird, feathered and flying, it would not be so inexcusable. You would do very well for an ox; very well for a bird. You would do very well if you were a dog, or if you were a horse; and many men would ascend a great way to become so. You would make very good animals; but God has made you in the likeness of his own self. God made you to form such a character as should make Heaven possible to you. God made you for the upper part of your nature, and not for the lower part of it.

And now, to live for the pampering of the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life; to live for the enjoyment of that which perishes in the using; to live so that truth and love and all things that endure shall be marred, and flawed, and neglected, and starved—there is no excuse for that! There is no excuse for that! And when you come at last, in the Judgment Day, to look upon the face of God, you will not then think of urging these excuses! It is declared—and I can imagine the reason why—that when we stand at last convicted before God, we shall stand *speechless*! There will be nothing to be said! You may be garrulous and excusatory before minister or priest; but when you come to render your account before that Great Tribunal, where your excuses are to stand or fall for evermore, you will be perfectly *dumb—speechless*! For when the wicked rise to shame and everlasting contempt, they will be so overwhelmed, that no man will choose to speak, but will be bowed down, and sink forever and ever! May God redeem you from all these vain excuses, and bring you in sincerity and with the heartiest earnestness to seek the Lord Jesus Christ—to love Christ; to live by faith in Christ; to die in the consolation of Christ; to rise in the image of Christ; and to dwell with Him forever and forever! Amen!

DISCOURAGEMENTS

IN THE

CHRISTIAN LIFE.*

"FOR consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."—HEB. 12 : 3.

I BELIEVE there is not one of the Epistles of the New Testament—whether special, to particular churches, or catholic, to all Christians—that does not, over and over again, multiply exhortations and comforting assurances to those who have begun a Christian life, on the supposition that they are liable to discouragement and faint-heartedness and that they need, again and again, to be inspired with hope and courage. There is nothing in human life that is not liable to turns of depression. It would be very strange, indeed, if Christian men, endeavoring to live a high moral and spiritual life, were not subject to the discouragements which belong to all human endeavors.

If there were no other than common natural weakness attaching to us in our religious life, it would be fit, occasionally, that we should be exhorted, comforted, and inspired. But there are causes which lie deeper than the mere capacity of being wearied, and deeper than this exhaustion, which overtakes us with discouragement—that work in the heart of man, to put unnecessary difficulties in his way. There are difficulties which, if explained, would cease to be any longer difficult.

It is for the purpose of setting before you, in some few particulars, some of the causes of weakness, and so oftentimes of discouragement, that I shall speak to-night.

Some there are who begin well, in the Christian life, but of whom we never hear afterwards. They disappear like dew in the morning, which the sun drinks dry; only they are not drunk up by the Sun of Righteousness. Some hold on in respect to many things, but give over, early in their Christian career, the idea of a complete victory. They retreat to what may be called a sort of section-life, in which they take some section of Christian development, for the purpose of persevering only in that, while they reject the whole as too comprehensive for them. Some give up the devotional element. They think they are not specially called to the interior life of a Christian, but to outward moralities, or to what they call a more practical

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Christianity. If, for instance, they are so placed that in their business there are no special problems or difficulties which trouble them, they take the easiest side, and say: "We will become good, practical Christians, living as well as we know how, and leave others to indulge in the mere fancies of devotion." Others resort to the devotional element, because they happen to be so placed in life that they suffer conflict between their religious principles and their daily business; a conflict which requires of them constant self-denying processes. Their business has great difficulties for them, and so they abandon what they call practical morality, and take the higher ground of spiritual devotion. In other words, they make up in hymns what they lack in honesty; in prayers, what they lack in truthfulness; and in inward luxury of religion, what they lack in outward fidelity and daily service of God!

There is a kind of adjustment to which men must come—a correction of crude notions by stern experience. Perhaps one man out of twenty begins a Christian life, and holds out to the end as he began, only better and better; but I think that the nineteen in the twenty, beginning as they may, will go through a period in which there will certainly be discouragement, shrinking, hesitation, reasoning with themselves, and readjustment. They come, by and by, into their Christian life in good earnest, but not until they have gone through this preliminary fermentation.

There are so many who have been newly gathered into this church, and who have lately begun a Christian life, who are, in these respects, like-passioned with others, that it seems eminently fit that they should receive, in the beginning, a word of caution in regard to a great many of these points, in order that these readjusting processes, which, undoubtedly, they too must experience, may be consummated happily.

I shall point out some of the causes which will be liable to work discouragement among you.

1. Many persons are discouraged at the great difference which they experience in their feelings, when they receive instruction from the ministrations of *other* people's minds, and when they are obliged to furnish *themselves* with the truth which is required for their daily Christian life.

In a time of unusual religious interest—when all men think and speak of religion—when unwonted power is put forth in the disclosure of religious truth—when men are brought into meetings morning and evening, and on multiplied occasions through the week—there is continually prepared for them and brought to bear on them a great and unusual amount of religious truth, which, spoken by men who are themselves awakened, and who are more fervent, more imaginative, and more emotive than they ordinarily are, is pressed home with power and effect, which they can hardly measure, and of which you are hardly aware. Many persons began their religious life amid such circumstances, who, as the general interest gradually ceases, and they are left to navigate alone, do not know the transition between receiving truth already prepared for them, and searching for truth and preparing it for themselves. They then fall into great straits. They do not know

what the matter is. They can only say that they do not feel as they did before. They sometimes think that the Spirit has departed from them. At other times, they suppose they have lost their first love, and try to comfort themselves by thinking that every body must expect to experience less joy by and by, than at the beginning.

What would they think of a person who should rise in the morning, and be so intently occupied with the affairs of the house, that he should forget entirely to take any breakfast, and should go on singing without it, till ten or eleven o'clock? By this time, he would think he was going to be unwell! He does not know what the matter is; only he says: "I feel worse than when I arose." By and by, he comes to twelve and one o'clock, feeling still worse. He has forgotten his dinner too! He begins to feel still more mysterious sensations, and becomes very weak and faint. At last, he bethinks himself to send for a physician—whom he asks: "What can be the matter with me?"

The physician inquires of him: "What did you eat for breakfast?"

The man hesitates a moment, and replies: "Oh! I forgot my breakfast."

"Well, what did you eat for dinner?"

"Ah! yes; I didn't eat any thing for dinner."

"Why, your trouble is want of food. You are faint because you have eaten nothing. Go and get your dinner, and you will feel better."

He goes immediately to the table, and eats a hearty meal; and on eating, he says: "Why, yes, that was just what was the matter with me!"

Many persons after partaking bountifully of the spiritual repast which is provided for them in church, on going away for a time, and being thrown into circumstances where, if they are to have food, they must themselves prepare it—where, if they are to have Scripture, they must themselves read it—where, if they are to have devout feelings, they must themselves pray; but who, when food is no longer offered to them, and forgetting to go and get it themselves, go without Scripture, without instruction, without prayer—lose their feelings, and wonder what is coming over them. Whereas, all the time, it is nothing but faintness from lack of food! If you would minister to yourself those things that were before ministered unto you, you would feel just the same now as at the beginning. That vision of Christ which made your heart respond and echo with joy, would awaken your joy again. But instead of waiting for others to hold up these thoughts and visions to you, you must call them up yourself. In other words, you must now earn your daily bread in spiritual things, just as children who come to years of majority, are obliged to earn their daily bread in secular things.

Wherever God, in his providence, may carry you, remember that some one must give you bread, or else you must get it yourself. You can not expect that your Christian feelings will continue in your heart, just because you have become a Christian. Many persons think that when the heart is changed, the causes of joy are implanted in it in such a manner, as that they shall go on with joy all the rest of the way through life. Christians, on the contrary, are day-clocks; you must wind them up every day, or

they will neither tick, nor strike, nor tell the time. It is a mistake to suppose that Christians are like springs, that gush out of crystal fountains, which are so high and full and pure that neither summer nor winter can bring drought to their streams. The mountain top must forever condense the clouds, or mountain streams will cease to flow—and the Christian heart will cease to flow unless the life is carried so high up toward heaven, as forever to bring down supplies.

The eagerness with which persons begin the Christian life can not, of course, forever remain, although the earnestness may. I do not mean, that the prevalent popular notion, that Christians are happier at the beginning, than they ever will be afterward, is true. I think, on the other hand, that every true Christian is less happy at the beginning, than he will be later in his course. But there are some kinds of enjoyment which belong to novelty and to first experiences. These must, naturally, die out; for, as grape-blossoms, fragrant as they are, must drop away, in order to give place to grapes, which are better, so there are some forms of early religious experience which must give way, in order to produce, in their places, certain others, which are better than they. Change is not destruction.

2. Many are liable to become wearied and faint, from positive reaction; from a depression arising from exhaustion. These include two classes of persons: those who are conscientious and nervous, and those who are not in good health. The element of health enters very largely into the question of emotive religious experience. It is not difficult for a person of a slender constitution, with but little nervous stamina, to be so exercised in a short time, that, according to the necessities of nature, he will suffer a prodigious reaction. Excitement in religion can be carried to excess, just as easily as in any thing else.

Many persons, in the early stage of their religious feelings, are without any moderation. They think, so that it be religion, that they can not have too much of it! But religious feeling excites men, just as really as any other feeling, and many persons have a good deal too much of it for their own good. There are persons who attend this church twice a day, who ought never to come but once, for the excitement of twice coming is more than they can bear. No man that lies awake all Sabbath night, and who requires half a week to get over the mere nervous excitement of an over-taxed brain, is serving God intelligently! They have no right to pervert the laws of nature in this way. There is to be a rational view in these things, as in all others.

It often happens, that in a contagious excitement, men who can not bear long-continued pressure, are so pressed, that at last, when they are brought out into such a state of religious enjoyment and luxury, they think of nothing so little as of economy, care, and watchfulness, in respect to their physical, psychological, and mental symptoms. By and by, when the external pressure is removed, they begin to decline, and go further and further down, not knowing where they will land. It seems to them as it seems in the night, when they sleep and dream that they are falling. Oh! that awful

sense of falling in one's sleep! It is reproduced in the experience of persons who enter their Christian life, as they enter upon a strange joy in a dream, and who, when the stimulating causes of their excited feelings are removed, give way, and seem to themselves to be helplessly falling into the abyss of despair.

If persons in such circumstances are unwisely treated, it may be their utter destruction. I have known persons to be driven crazy from such a cause. I have known others, who fell into a state of fixed and settled melancholy, which was not eradicated in all the rest of their lives. Very great care should be taken, in the first place, to prevent such intense excitement; but where there has already been over-taxation, corresponding information and instruction should be given. Direction should be given, not that they should have a cumulation of conscience; not that they should sing more, and pray more, and go to meeting more, and in this way win back their lost joy; but that they should have what they most need—*rest*. I would say to them, if from stimulating religious exercises you have already over-taxed your energies, you have gone beyond what nature can bear; these are the signals and tokens that you have transcended the limits of propriety. You now need rest, quietness, fresh air, wholesome food, recreation, and the removal of such acute and intense excitements, moral though they be; and to persons in such circumstances, such excitements are more moral than religious.

If persons, without sufficient strength or stamina to bear great excitements, find themselves swinging from their high joys, and visions, and ecstasy, into lower and less happy moods; if, further, they settle down through these, into states of feeling still lower, in which it seems as if darkness and night were gathering round them; if their old experiences are gone, and their yearnings for them do not bring them back; if, though they are willing to take up any cross, and to bear any burden, could only the old joy be restored, and the old emotions fill their hearts once more, these do not, nevertheless, return, and their hearts that cry out to be filled, are yet empty—if this is the condition in which men find themselves, against their will and wish, and in spite of their forced religious exercises and devotions, it is very plain that they are suffering from too great excitement, and that the remedy which they need is repose. They have overtaxed themselves, and they should be instructed to undo this mischief; and when it is undone, there will usually be no further trouble—till the next time, when they overtax themselves again, and bring the old difficulty back once more.

3. Persons of a timid nature, whose religious life has either by education, or from something in themselves, turned upon conscience, or in whom their religious life is of the type of conscience rather than of love, or trust, or hope—are peculiarly liable to discouragement and weariness. For conscience, when it is the controlling element, is exacting and exhaustive, even though it be applied merely to external moralities. But, still more, when it is applied to the inner realm of the mind—to thought, to feeling, to motive, to the ideal of inward Christian life—conscience becomes excessively

despotic, and beats down hope. No man is so often wearied and discouraged, as one whose life is set to the key-note of conscience—and not to love, or trust, or hope.

4. Great discouragement befalls men who have a religion without any social element to corroborate it. So far am I from thinking that meditation and solitary exercises are indispensable to religion, that it is almost a miracle that men in such circumstances are good. I can conceive, now and then a nature with force and resource enough to be good in a cloister or a cave; but usually speaking, I think a man's piety is mouldy, poor, and mean, who is shut up from the social element of religion. When, therefore, men are converted, and are brought into the Church, it is to the last degree important, that they should be surrounded with friends, and should experience the genial stimulus of social life. When they have no friends around them, or when they are obliged to abandon their old associates, and find no new ones in their places; when, in some measure, they are attempting to live a kind of secret and undisclosed religion—it is almost morally certain, that such persons will be liable to great despondency and discouragement. Therefore, I think that, among the earliest things which a person ought to find, who is beginning a Christian life, should be some confidential friends, of like mind with himself, to whom he may speak of his conflicts, his troubles, his temptations; and with whom he can hold pleasurable and intimate fellowship, such as he does not with his ordinary acquaintances in the world. There is in every man this necessity of social life; and the more there is of it in him, the more indispensable it will always be that this element should exist in his religion. There are men who were generous, large, cheerful, and happy before they came into the Church, but who, after they were in, grew lean, pinched, poor, and unhappy. They were genial and attractive before, but afterwards no body else seemed to want their society, and they seemed to want no body else's. Whatever they may have been before their church connection, they contrived afterwards to drop the social element out of their life; and their character, taken as a whole, has less symmetry now than before. It does violence to the design of God, and to the symmetrical development of the character of man, to take away any part of human nature.

When a man begins a Christian life, his passions are not to run riot, or be allowed to do what they please; yet the man who puts out the fires of passion, because he has become a Christian, only weakens and not profits himself. God gave them to man for good uses. They are to be regulated, controlled, but not destroyed. I would as soon think of putting out the fires of a steamer on the Ocean, for the sake of making a good voyage to Liverpool, as to put out the passions of my own nature for the sake of making a good voyage to heaven. The passions were meant to give men force, and to add juice and power to the soul. No man can afford to put out his mere passional nature, still less can he afford to put out the social and the imaginative element.

To become a Christian, does not mean that you are to creep into a convent

box, or to be screwed up like a man in a living coffin. That is not piety. To become a Christian, is to bring the whole nature out more powerfully than ever before, to take all the faculties that God gave you originally, and which have been going to waste or perversion, and so to bring them under the dominion of God, that there shall not be a loss of any part of your nature, but that all your powers shall work together in accordance with the divine plan, being all controlled and guided by the superior element of spiritual love.

The mischief of doing away with the social element is very great, and we are very liable to it in cities. Young men who find themselves, on coming here from the country, in undesirable companionships, coming, as they frequently do, with a religious education, only to forget their Bible, and remaining here for years, making only such friends as they would not acknowledge at home—when at length they are touched by the Spirit of God and begin to live a Christian life, and when, in doing it, they leave off their wicked associates, ought immediately to see to it that they find new and good friends to take the place of the old and bad. It is right to break off from wicked associates. If they are plague-struck, and you would not take it, you must keep clear of them. If they offer you temptations to drinking, to gambling, or to any thing vicious and wicked, it is, of course, best that you should break company with them, and no longer remain their associates. But if a man has no friend to take the place of these—if there are no brothers, no sisters, no family (blessed be the family! for I never feel so sure about young converts, as when I find out that they are living in the Christian families of their parents, or of their relatives or friends)—he should set about, as soon as possible, finding proper Christian associates and confidants.

Sometimes I ask a man who has newly become a Christian :

“Have you any associates in the Church?”

“None.”

“Do you know any body in the city.”

“Nobody; except that I am in the store of a Christian merchant.”

Ah! yes! In the same store with a Christian merchant! That sounds very well; but after all, a Christian merchant is apt to be only a merchant. The clerk is to have so much a month, or so much a year, and the Christian merchant pays this, and that is all. He does not hire him with a perquisite of visiting his family! He does not undertake to be a father to him. No! That don't belong to a Christian merchant! He does not undertake to look after his clerks in any such way! He may have eighteen, twenty, twenty-five young men in his employ, every one of whom had praying fathers and mothers, and whom he knows to be touched in the direction of a religious life; yet it is not his business to talk to them on such subjects, nor to give them his own society—else it would have been in the bargain!

The young man is in the store of a Christian merchant; but that does him no good. He is obliged to say: “I have no companionship.” He is thus compelled to begin his Christian life without staff or stay. It is very

important, I repeat, that when men become Christians, they should find company. This is a necessity of human nature. Among Christians there should be fellowship. I suppose that this was the reason why churches were ordained. When you turn from the world, to go toward heaven, you should walk together; you should hold each other up: you should know each other; you should love each other; the social element should surround you, and should work itself into a religious element.

5. Many persons are brought into great discouragement and uncertainty as to what they shall do, because they have mistaken the full purport of religion. Instead of "breaking off sins by righteousness," they have simply "broken off their sins." They were very wicked men, who supposed that by ceasing to be wicked, they thereby became good. No, not at all! This can not be!

Suppose a man has a gnarly old apple tree in his orchard—very wide-spread and rank in its growth—with every apple so sour as scarcely to need fermentation to make it vinegar! He says: "Now I am going to have better fruit than this." And he takes his saw, in the spring, and cuts off one branch here, and another there, until there is nothing left but the trunk.

"There," he says, "I have now got a good fruit tree."

He is now rid of his sour fruit; but he has not yet got the sweet. He must now graft the tree with some choice variety that he may select. If he makes no adequate provision for this, there will be side-shoots, or water-sprouts; and there will be the same fruit-buds, and the same sour apples over again. Some men think they have become Christians because they do not grow any more sour fruit; because they have simply broken off their old wicked courses—because they do not ride out of town any more on Sundays—because they do not drink any more—because they do not gamble any more—because they have left off swearing, and bad company—because they do not lie and cheat—any more than is necessary in this wicked world! But men, to be Christians, must be more than this! Simply omitting their wrong courses is not enough. "Cease to do evil—*learn to do well.*" This is the command. It is not single, but double. It is not simply to break off sin, but to break off sin by righteousness. It is not only to cease to do wrong, but to begin to do right.

If a man has been wicked, the way for him most effectually to break off his wickedness, is to enter now upon a life of positive goodness. If a man has been very active in wickedness, he ought, for his own safety, after his conversion, to be proportionately active in goodness. It will not do for him to say:

"I was headlong and precipitate in evil; I will be slow and cautious in good."

On the contrary, a wicked man of great force of character ought, after he is converted, to exert all that force of character for good. He should be just as ambitious and active now as he was before, only, of course, in another direction. A man who ran express along the way of wickedness, ought not to creep along the way of goodness. If I see a man who has simply broken

off his evil habits, I say to myself, it is very doubtful if that man will hold out. But if he has not only broken off the bad, but taken on the good in their place, he is then in the fair way of success. If he has gone with all sail set for Satan, and then, veering around, goes with all sail set for Christ, it is right to expect that such a man will succeed. But a fat sinner should not make a lean Christian!

The same is true of persons who have not been very bad, in the sense of outbreacking wickedness, but who have great fullness of nature, and activity of feeling. I meet, in social life, persons of whom I think—though I may not say it in words to them—somewhat in this manner: With the largeness with which you love—with the much that there is in your mind and your imagination—with the eagerness of your will-power—with the fertility of your pride—with your prevailing sense of self—with all these, you can never be a happy Christian unless you are an *eminent* one. I always know that such persons will fall into embarrassments, doubts, disappointments, and, ultimately, into discouragements. I know not a few, recently introduced into this church, who are now in this pass. They are going through a fermentation. What the matter is, they do not know. Persons of a full, large nature, when they attempt to be Christians by serving Christ as little as possible, will necessarily go through pain and signal discipline of experience, before they will come to peace; and they never will come to it, till their whole soul is yielded up to the Lord Jesus Christ, and they are just as active for good, as they have hitherto been for selfishness.

6. The neglect to consolidate religious feelings into habits is frequently an occasion of discouragement, because it leaves men subject to all the fluctuations of feeling. Feeling, by its very nature, rises and falls, comes and goes. Emotions are like the leaves of a tree. Every flourishing tree must have both its solid parts, and its movable and tender parts. The leaf is not made merely for its beauty, nor for the shade which it casts gratefully down, at mid-day, in summer. Graceful and delicate as it seems, every leaf is a laboratory. On its surface, the crude sap, exposed to light and warmth, is changed to organizable matter; and that liquid current which ascended the interior of the trunk, when leaf-touched, descends upon its exterior surface, depositing solid matter, all the way down to the root again. Thus those tender leaves, which any child may crush in his hand, which the rude winds may easily blow away, are silently and constantly building stronger in every branch, and stouter in every fibre of the trunk, that solid frame of the tree, which time can scarcely wear out, and winds and storms beat upon in vain! They are taking away from the movable and fragile part of the tree, to add to the firm and immovable part. Now, feeling is like a leaf. It should organize habits. It should consolidate transient tendencies into abiding and enduring experiences. It should take what at first are fluctuating emotions, and turn them into settled habits. That is only a miserable type of Christian life, which comes and goes with moods and feelings. But in this way, many Christians fight the same battles over and over again, year after year, and, thus at the end of forty years, find that they are

struggling with the same tendencies and temptations which they encountered at the beginning! They go, year after year, the same round of wearisome and discouraging temptations, either weakly yielding to them, or else contending against them with doubtful battle. On the other hand, a Christian whose fluctuating feelings are brought to crystallize into settled habits, will gain new victories as he gains new strength, day by day!

7. Many men are convicted of sin less deeply at the beginning of their Christian life, than long after their conversion; and this not only alarms but seriously discourages them. They do not feel as they once did, nor as they expected they always would. As their conception of duty is being raised, they find that their self-complacency is being disturbed. Such persons, sometimes, instead of becoming happier, as they should, become less happy.

In certain natures (which I shall not now stop to analyze) the introduction of a new and higher standard into the mind, throws all the feelings out of balance, and makes an unexpectedly great resistance. In many persons, while they are living by the average standard of morality that exists in the community, their nature seems to be tranquil, and they get along very well, and with very little trouble. But, when they introduce a higher standard, and undertake to live by that, they immediately arouse within themselves elements of rebellion, surprising to them and to all who know them. Some Christians rise from the lower grounds of experience, by an easy and natural progress, happy in the beginning, and happy at each spiral which they make in their upward flight. Like the sky-lark, some notes they murmur on the ground, but their song really begins only when, with out-stretched wing, in circles growing wider and higher, they reach up far above the hearing of men! But there are others who, like timid forest birds, driven out by the hunter, seem never so much lost as when they are far up above all covert or thicket, in the open and unobstructed space. Their fears chase them as hawks, nor have they one note till they can hide darkling again in the green thicket.

In regard to all these instances—and there are others which might be mentioned, if time would permit—let me say, first, that, simply because you have experienced difficulties which you did not expect, or because you are faint and discouraged, you must not allow yourselves to go back. It is not a question of mere accomplishment, to be determined by your own volition. If a man proposes to make a tour of the continent of Europe, and on reaching London or Paris, prefers, for some reason, to turn back instead of going further, he may do it, without either losing character or incurring reproach. His own pleasure determines what he shall do—whether to go one way or the other—whether to come home from Florence or go on to Rome—whether to come home from Rome or go on to the East. But when a man begins his journey toward heaven, it is not optional with him, at any point of the way, to turn back. It is his duty to go on! It is a question not only of honor, but of safety, to continue. Being a Christian is not the same as making money, of which a man can make more or less, as he chooses, and then stop

—although he does not usually wish to stop. To be a Christian is to begin and not stop ; it is to put the hand to the plough, and not look back. If a man is called, in the providence of God, to begin a Christian life, in which he succeeds very well for a time, but afterwards finds clouds and darkness gathering about him, he must think only of going on, and never for a moment of going back. To return would be perilous, as well as disgraceful. If he droops and is weary in the pursuit of the right, and turns aside from the search, he is giving way to what will inevitably lead him, by and by, into still greater doubt, difficulty, and discouragement. If you give up trying now, trusting in your Christian hope to lift you, by and by, out of the marsh, upon solid ground, you will never be lifted out. The condition of your final triumph is that you are willing to struggle all the time that may be required to win it. If you find it hard now to bring your heart into obedience to Christ, what will be your later experience, when your difficulties will be greater and greater, and your strength to overcome them less and less? It never will be so easy again, as now, to persevere in the Christian life. To conform to the Christian requisition will be harder and harder, the longer you put it off. The earliest months of campaigning, of studying, of learning a trade, are the most difficult months. From this point onward the way grows smoother and easier. And in like manner, in beginning a Christian life, the chief difficulties are at the threshold.

There is a remarkable contrast in this respect, between right and wrongdoing—between virtue and vice : to do right is harder at first, than it ever will be afterwards ; it grows easier and easier to the end. To do wrong, involves few difficulties at first, but more and more every day, until its end is destruction. Pleasure invites us to flowery paths only for the first part of the journey ; all the rest of the way it grows less and less beautiful, and more and more dangerous. Virtue calls us, for the first few steps, over a stony road, which grows less and less rugged, and more and more easy to the end. Men enter wrong courses through the gate of sweet blandishments, but as they go on, they find that all the promises, at the beginning, were false and deceitful. The “narrow way” is entered through the “strait gate,” but the path is the path of the just, and is as a shining light that shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day! The beginning of the one is fair, but its end is death. The beginning of the other is less comely, but its end is eternal life.

The early steps of a Christian life are the most rugged. The tasks of a Christian are never so severe and forbidding as at the first. The farther end of the Christian life is the easier. We begin a worldly life by going down a slope, whose first descent is easy ; but as soon as we are in the valley, behold! mountains rise up on either side. We begin the Christian life by going up hill, and with hard climbing ; but by and by we come to the level plains and table lands at the top, where the way is easy, where the air is pure, and where we are lifted up high above the dust, and noise, and conflict of the lower life.

Take courage, then, in the thought that your work is harder now than it

ever will be again ; that the more vigorously you begin, the more successfully you will finish ; that the more severe your discipline is at first, the easier will your trials be at last ; that the heavier your burdens are now, the stronger you will be to bear them by and by, and the lighter they will be to bear. He who is willing to take the hardest way at first, will, in that very choice, find for himself the easiest way in the end !

If it be any encouragement to know that those who have been tasked as you, tempted as you, tried as you, discouraged as you, wearied as you, faint as you, have nevertheless persevered unto victory—take that encouragement, and go on in your way rejoicing ! If any of you have been tempted to swerve, cease your faint-heartedness, and remember that nothing strange has befallen you ! You are suffering only such temptations as have befallen all God's children, and you may be sure that he will not suffer you to be tempted more than you are able to bear ! I suppose that there is not one saint who now stands elate and jubilant in heaven, who could not narrate experience equivalent to yours. It would be different in form, but the same in substance. It would show the same necessity of toils and burdens, of discipline and trial, of struggle and conflict ! It may not be a great comfort to know that they who went before you were embarrassed and perplexed ; but it is a comfort to know that your difficulties and embarrassments are not because you are not a Christian, and that they are incident to all Christian life !

When men come to swollen streams, which they must needs ford, they look with troubled face upon the wide and rapid water ; and it is a great comfort to see fresh hoof-marks along the bank, which show that other travellers have recently crossed that way. They drive down to the water's edge, but still dreading to venture in, look at the foam and the anger of the torrent, fearful that sudden freshets, loosed from the mountain side, may have over-swollen it since its passage by those who are ahead. They hear the sound of voices on the other side, of men whom they can not see, in that dense forest, yet who have just gone over the river, and are not yet out of hailing distance. The tremulous men at the brink call out : " Ho ! strangers, is the river passable ?" And as the sound dies away among the forest trees, the salute is answered, as with an echo : " We have just crossed ! All safe !—Come on !" At this summons, they step in, but in a moment the water grows deeper, and the roar of the flood is more fearful ! Every man among them is bewildered. The stoutest heart quails. The water is already pattering around the flanks of the horses, and is getting deeper and deeper every moment. The foremost rider looks around almost as if he would go back ! Ah ! my friend, you can not go back now ! It is perilous to turn round in a ford. It is as easy to go all the way over to the other side, as to go back from where you started ! They begin to be more alarmed ; but the men already over, who have come back again to the bank to see how those who are following them may fare, smile to see the fear that is written upon their troubled faces. The water is above the saddles, and is careering over the horses' backs. Every man now says to himself : " It is swim or drown ;

I must go through or go under." But the foremost man has passed the centre of the channel, where the water begins to lick the backs of the horses less and less, and to subside along the ribs down toward the stirrups! He shouts out to the rest: "Ho! I am past the channel! Come on!" The worst will soon be over. In all the rest of his passage, he is rising, at every step, higher and higher out of the flood, and is coming nearer and nearer the opposite bank. The rest that are behind, take new hope, and plunge into the channel as though they had at first feared no danger, and all reach in safety the other shore!

O Christian! standing in fear by the side of the flood, fearing to enter in, and cross to the other shore, others who have gone before are standing on those distant shores, and calling out to you to "take courage and plunge into the wave!" The voices of friends are calling on the other side: "Come over, come over!" The voices of companions, the voices of children who have passed safely through; the voices of parents long gone over; the voice of the loved and lost—lost on this side but saved on the other—are calling out across the stream: "Come over! come over!" Angels and shining ones stand with them on the bank, and mingle their voices with these, saying and beckoning! "Come over! come over!"

The testimony of all who have tried the stream is but one unanimous voice: "We came over safe! We came over safe!"

O Christian! faint not, but follow after! A little more fording, and you shall find that the waters, instead of growing deeper, will grow less deep; and you will rise out of the flood and stand safe upon the other shore! Do not be discouraged, therefore, because you are not yet landed. Do not faint because you are yet in the struggle. You shall by and by be across the channel and over the stream, and stand victorious on the other side! May God grant to every one of you the victory through Christ, our hope and our Redeemer! Amen!

