

Our Young People

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THE C. E. TOPIC.—Dec. 11.

HOW TO BREAK BAD HABITS AND CULTIVATE GOOD ONES.

Romans 8: 1-15.

BY AMOS R. WELLS.

There is an Eastern story of a fly that lighted on the edge of Abdallah's goblet, took a sip, and flew away. It came again, and as it was not brushed away, it grew bolder and bolder. With each sip the fly became larger, and at last Abdallah perceived that it was a man. He began to eat Abdallah's meat. The youth drove him away, but he came again, wearing beautiful clothes. One day Abdallah was found lying dead, his face black, and on his throat the print of a mighty finger, as large as a man's hand. The fly had become a giant.

That is a picture of the ease and rapidity with which bad habits grow. And after they are fixed upon us, it is the hardest thing in the world to uproot them.

Dr. Peloubet tells of an old tavern that was changed to a dwelling-house, the bar-room being transformed into a parlor. The building was used as a dwelling for twenty years, but even at the end of that time, if the parlor were kept close for a few days, it would smell of the old rum and tobacco.

A father once taught his son this lesson: "Drive a nail into this board, John," he commanded, and the boy obeyed. "Now, John, pull out the hole." Ah, you may think you have conquered a habit, pulled it up by the root; but the hole is there, and it is so easy to fall into the old ways.

Endless patience is needed, if we would break off our bad habits. Remember John Boyle O'Reilly's rhyme:

"How shall I a habit break?"
As you did that habit make.
As you gathered, you must lose;
As you yielded, now refuse.
Thread by thread the strands we twist
Till they bind us, hand and wrist;
Thread by thread the patient hand
Must untwine, ere free we stand.

That is true, and we must be patient and persistent with ourselves and with all that are trying to undue the past. And yet we must not make the mistake of the foolish man who set to work, one winter morning, to scrape the frost from his window panes. He complained to a passing neighbor, "It keeps coming on one pane as fast as I get it off of another." "Why, man," said the neighbor, "leave your windows alone

and kindle a fire, and the frost will come off all at once and without any of your trouble."

You are like that foolish man if you try to break off your bad habits one at a time and by your own efforts. Build in your heart the fire of love, crowd your life full of warmth and good cheer and brightness, and the bad habits will disappear as the frost melts off the window pane. Patience is needed still, and lots of it. The fire may go out. You may need to re-ignite it, again and again. In any event, as O'Reilly says, you must work as hard to get rid of a habit as to get the habit in the first place. But work on the heart and not on the habit. Crowd out the evil by crowding in the gospel.

HE PRAYED.

Some years ago I was a sailor on board the Heroine, bound for Montevideo. We were east of the Bermudas, running under single-reefed topsails. It was the dog-watch, in the evening, and a sailor named George and I were on the watch, on the topgallant fore-castle, in the forward part of the ship. I was talking with him of my early life, and of the lessons of piety which I had learned at home. He ridiculed the whole, and declared that there was no God, and that all this talk was mere moonshine.

"Eight bells" rang, and the watch was changed, and the men were called away to pump ship. George took a bucket to get some water to fetch the pump. As he flung it over the side of the vessel it caught in the water, and as we were going quite fast George was drawn overboard. Instantly the cry was heard, "Man overboard!" We were on the larboard tack; the mate shouted, "Hard starboard the wheel!" and the vessel came round and stood on the starboard tack, and we could hear George crying in the darkness: "Same me! Save me! Save me!"

We immediately launched a boat, but it stove in launching, and began to fill with water. The steward came to our assistance with some blankets, which we stuffed into the hole to stop the water, and we hastened to the rescue. The night was dark, and the sea was rough. We pulled out into the darkness, and followed the sound as well as we could, until we came to the place where poor George was struggling with the waves. Being a good swimmer, he had kept himself from sinking, and we found him about a quarter of a mile from the vessel, drew him on board, and pulled back to the ship with our boat half full of water. In thirty minutes from the time he fell overboard we had him safe in his bunk in the fore-castle, and as comfortable as we could make him.

The next morning I said to him: "Did you think that the ship was going to leave you, and that you were lost?" "Yes, I did," he said.

"Now, George, be honest—what did you do then?"

"I prayed to God."

"But I thought you did not believe there is a God."

George replied: "When a man is overboard in a dark night, and the ship going away from him, and he expects to die, he thinks different and talks different from what he does when he is on the topgallant fore-castle spinning yarns in safety."

We heard no more of infidelity or blasphemy from poor George, but he did not recover from his terrible experience in the water. We left him at

the hospital at Montevideo, where he afterwards died.

This is but one of a thousand instances where infidelity has not stood the test of actual experience in the hour of danger. Men can scoff and mock in times of health and safety, but there is a secret hypocrisy in it all. As the man who had long believed there is no future punishment said when following his plow: "Of course, I believe that doctrine—I believe it, but I would give that yoke of oxen to know that it is so." Here is the great trouble. Men pretend to believe very much as they desire to. "The wish is father to the thought;" but they would give a great deal to know that their faith has a good foundation, and unfortunately they are not able to satisfy themselves.

SAINTS IN WRONG PLACES.

Some get under the tree of discouragement like Elijah. Discouragement is a destroyer of faith, a damper upon love, and a veil upon the face of hope; therefore, it is a sin to be discouraged.

Some get on the slippery path of worldliness, like Abraham when he "went down" to Egypt. There is no tent of separation, no altar of communion, and no revelation of joy in Egypt. These are only found at the Bethel of fellowship with God. Gen. 12: 7-10; 13: 4.

Some get on the housetop of self-ease, like David (2 Sam. 11: 2), who stayed at home when he should have been in the battlefield. His self-ease led him to self-indulgence, which brought upon him the chastening hand of the Lord. Self-ease, like rust, corrodes the spirit with the mildew of unbelief, warps the moral fibre of consecrated work, and blinds the eyes of its devotee to the sight and attractive beauty of Christ.

Some are ensnared in the meshes of disobedience, like the man of God out of Judah, who was entrapped by the wily old prophet of Bethel. I Kings 13: 9. No saint on earth, no angel in heaven, no devil from hell, and no man under the sun, should turn us aside from the plain directions of God's Word.

Some get into the Doubting Castle of unbelief, like John the Baptist, who sent his disciples to Christ to know whether he was the Messiah (Matt. 11: 4), after he had proclaimed him as such. John 1: 34. Doubt is a faith-crippler, joy-killer, zeal-dampener, mind-darkener, love-retarder, hope-annuller, and Christ-hinderer.

Some get into the sieve of self-confidence, like Peter. Luke 22: 32, 33. When self puffs up, and we warm ourselves at the world's fire, we place ourselves where Satan can grab us; and when he gets hold of us he riddles us to the loss of our power and joy.

Some get into the ring of wrangling, like the disciples, who "disputed among themselves" as to who should be the greatest. Mark 9: 34. They did not strive for the lowest place, nor as to who should be nearest to Christ. Strife is the child of pride, the companion of ambition, the killer of unity, the grief of the Spirit, the bane of humanity, the hinderer of the gospel, and the despiser of love.—London Christian.

WHAT IS DYSPEPSIA?

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THE TAKEN GIFT.

A minister of the gospel was trying to explain to a lady the difference between praying and taking; but she was a slow pupil, and could not see the distinction. Presently they went to her home, and tea was on the table.

"Will you take a cup of tea?"

"Thank you."

"Milk and sugar?"

"If you please."

The tea was prepared and handed towards him; but he appeared as though he did not see it, and said plaintively: "Please, madam, give me a cup of tea."

The lady thought that he was absorbed in some far-away subject, and put the tea closer to his hand; but still he did not seem to see it, and said: "May I trouble you, madam, for a cup of tea?"

Again the lady reached it nearer, and said: "Excuse me, but the tea is there, ready for you; will you not take it?"

And immediately he turned to her, and said: "That is what God has been saying to you for the last ten years. You have been pleading with him to give, whilst he has been pressing his richest gifts toward your hand, saying, 'Take, child, take!'"

God's offer of salvation is never withdrawn for an instant. It is there for our acceptance at any moment.

Pains Disappear Before It.—No one need suffer pain when they have available Dr. Thomas' Electric Oil. If not in the house when required, it can be prepared at the nearest store, as all merchants keep it for sale. Rheumatism and all bodily pains disappear when it is applied, and should they at any time return, experience teaches the use of the Oil how to deal with them.

No arena presents more scope for the possibility of true courage than religion. So it has from the first. If you want to see a hero, where will you find a better one than David, approaching Goliath, not in an armor of steel, but in the strength of the God of Jacob; or Elijah, standing alone on Carmel, against Ahab, and against all Israel.