

## A COMMONPLACE LIFE.

A commonplace life, we say, and we sigh;  
But why should we sigh as we say?  
The commonplace sun in the commonplace sky  
Makes up the commonplace day.

The moon and the stars are commonplace things.  
The flower that blooms and the bird that sings,  
But sad were the world, and dark our lot,  
If flowers failed, and the sun shone not,  
And God, who sees each separate soul,  
Out of commonplace lives makes his beautiful whole.

—Susan Coolidge.

## THE OCCASION OF BACKSLIDING.

The cause of backsliding is not far to see. Compassed about as we are with many infirmities of the flesh, even with the flesh itself, which lusteth against the Spirit, and is contrary to it, not to speak of the ever-present and persistent activity of the great enemy who, with many wiles, is evermore seeking to ensnare unwary Christian souls, we may readily point out the cause of backsliding. However, it is not so much the cause as the occasion which concerns us. For, if we give no occasion to the flesh and the Devil, they are powerless against us even in our weakness. For, if we walk in the Spirit, we need not fulfil the lusts of the flesh; and, if we resist the Devil, steadfast in the faith, even he will flee from us.

Backsliding begins in the life of any Christian as soon as he ceases to grow in grace or in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our life is in the course of this world; and, the instant we give over the upward and forward movement, that moment the current begins to carry us downward. At first it may not be perceptible; the dead point must be overcome; but thence afterward the backward movement is sure to be rapid and strong. Let that Christian fear for his spiritual welfare the moment he gives over regular communication with God by means of the Word of God and prayer. The temptation to relax in both these exercises is very great, except in the case of those who have gotten into the love of the Word and into the delight of prayer. Few Christians are aware of the peril they expose themselves to spiritually, when they find that prayer has ceased to be an habitual exercise with them, and that the Word of God has ceased to have a daily place in their thoughts and meditations. It is very easy to give over Bible reading; more easy than to cease to pray; but one will not long continue in prayer after he has ceased to read his Bible. God speaks to us through his Word, and we speak to God by prayer. It follows that communion between the soul and God is mutual. It is difficult to keep up conversation with an earthly friend who never speaks a word in return to us. It is equally difficult to continue spiritual conversation with God if we refuse to allow him to speak back to us. Indeed, we must give God the lead in communion, else we will fail in matter of communion, and our desires and delights will cease in the Godward direction.

This danger is all the more subtle for the reason that a form of prayer may be maintained without there being any communion in connection with it. It is possible to continue drawing near with our lips while our hearts are far from him; and when this habit becomes established, the life becomes paralyzed; and unless the paralysis is speedily removed from the soul, it is only a question of time when the worshipper becomes a "whited sepulchre." The chief occasion then, of backsliding, in our judgment, is to be found in the relaxing or giving over of Bible study and prayer. So long as these defenses are maintained the soul is safe to dwell in security; for neither the flesh nor the Devil can make head against a soul that is in constant and living communion with God. Though the enemy should assault us as he did our Lord on the mount or in the wilderness, or on the temple top, we will be ready with the unfailing "It is written."

Time and space would fail us if we should even attempt to enumerate the many ways besides, by which a soul is drawn from its rest with God. Nevertheless we mention two of the more common occasions of backsliding.

Chief among them we would say that old habits are a source of continuous danger to the soul. Every man at the time of his conversion has some peculiar development of sin; or, if we may accommodate our thought to the point under consideration, sin holds every man strongly at some special point. One man may have been a drunkard, another may have been a victim of covetousness, another of some grosser lust of the flesh, another may have been bound by mere love of pleasure—all are bound to the old life by "the love of some unlawful thing, or by the unlawful love of some lawful thing." We all know how at the time of our own conversion we made some stand or another against the Spirit because of some habit or worldly love or lust. When this was yielded we were set free and rejoiced in the deliverance,

and many of us thought with a glad sigh of relief that on that point we would never more have trouble. But, alas! It was at that very point, most likely, the Devil got his first advantage over us. Bunyan, in his "Holy War," tells us how old Mr. Covetousness, who was a principal person in the town of Mansoul, after it was taken by Immanuel began his business career under the new name of Mr. Prudent. Thrifty. But this was only the old man masquerading under a new name.

We are no stronger than at our weakest point. The drunkard has most need to guard that point in his life at which the enemy of souls had him fast bound, and to build over against that point where he had suffered the widest and worst breach. It were wise if every man who was ever more or less given to drink should become a total abstainer after his conversion, and settle it forever that he will never more give the enemy an occasion by even a moderate indulgence of the wine cup. The covetous man would do well to begin the cultivation of regular and large benevolence.

Again, old companionships are a snare to many a soul. It is one of the hardest things for a young convert to break away from those companionships in which his sinful life had the most pleasure. Many a man and woman has been lured back onto the Devil's ground by those of his old companions who have never ceased to be the servants of sin. We are aware that it is difficult sometimes to adjust our companionships; and it seems cruel and even wrong to make a clean break with all whom we love on natural lines because we have become Christians; and, indeed, in some cases it must not be done. A wife may not leave her husband, a brother may not forsake his sister, nor is it easy to abandon a friend of former days. But there is danger even in these close and naturally lawful relations. The danger must be met by a settled determination to win our companions over to the Lord's side. We may mingle ever so freely with all men, if we do as our Lord did, with the single purpose of gaining them back to God. The danger is in preserving our friendships at the expense of our Christian testimony. But, if we are purposed to be true to God and our own souls, God will show us how we may do this thing and walk with him and them, until they are either won, or else themselves break the fellowship. —Independent.

## RELIGIOUS TRIFLING.

Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart-ropes. —Isaiah v. 18.

Let us give you a picture. Here is a man, who, as a young man, heard the Gospel, and grew up under the influence of it. He is an intelligent man, a Bible reader, and somewhat of a theologian. He attended a Bible class, was an apt pupil, and could explain much of Scripture, but he took to lightness and frothiness. He made an amusement of religion and a sport of serious things. Sermons he frequented that he might talk of them, and say that he had heard the preacher. After the sermon, when others were impressed, he was merry. He had discovered some mistake in the preacher, in his pronunciation, in the grammatical construction of a sentence, or in a misquotation from a poet, and this he mentioned with gusto, passing by all the good that was spoken. That was only his way. He did not mean any hurt by it; at least he would have said so, had any one seriously reproved him.

He came under the bond of this religious trifling, but it was a cord of vanity small as a packthread. Years ago he began to be bound to his sin by this kind of trifling, and at the present moment I am not sure that he ever cares to go and hear the gospel or to read the Word of God, for he has grown to despise that which he sported with. The wanton wiling had degenerated into a malicious scoffing; his cord has become a cart-ropes. His life is all trifling now. You could not make him serious. Every holy thing is now the subject of comedy. Like Belshazzar, he drinks his wine out of the sacred vessels of the temple. Earnestness hath a pleasantness of its own, and a bold spirit yokes mirth and laughter to its ear, and subdues all the faculties of the mind to God, not even excepting humor; but this man owns no Lord within his heart, but laughs at the most solemn truths, and does not seem capable of anything higher or better. His life is a sneer. He would pull a feather out of an angel's wing and wear it in his cap. On the solemn day of Pentecost he would have drawn a picture of the cloven tongues upon his thumb nail, that he might show it as a curiosity. There is nothing sacred to him now. The habit of being contemptuous has grown: to be a cart-ropes with him, and it holds him most securely. I say, young men, break those wretched cords of vanity before they strengthen in you.

## A NOTABLE AFFAIR.

Col. Ingersoll was thrown incidentally into the society of Henry Ward Beecher. There were four or five gentlemen present, all of whom were prominent in the world of brains. A variety of topics was discussed with decided brilliancy, but no allusion to religion. The distinguished infidel was of course, too polite to introduce the subject himself, but one of the party finally desiring to see a tilt between Bob and Beecher, made a playful remark about Col. Ingersoll's idiosyncrasy, as he termed it. The Colonel at once defended his views in his usual apt rhetoric; in fact he waxed eloquent. He was replied to by several gentlemen in very effective

cart-ropes. While yet there is at a slender thread snap it, here thread gathers to thread, and at last to another, and that to another, until it has come to be a cable, which even a giant could not pull asunder. There are many lamentable instances of triflers ripening into scoffers, and it were a great pity that you should furnish further illustrations. Avoid trifling with religion as you would avoid common swearing or profanity, for in its essence it is irreverent and mischievous.

I have seen the same thing in another shape, and then it appeared as capacious questioning. We are afraid to be examined upon anything in the Word of God; but we dread a caviling spirit. I, for one, believe that the more the Word of God has been sifted the more faithful it has been confirmed. The rest has been the better understanding of its teaching. The pure gold has shone the more brightly for being placed in the crucible. But there is a habit which begins thus: "I do not see this; and I do not understand that; and I do not approve this; and I question that." The rest makes life into a tangle of thorns and briars where ten thousand sharp points of doubt are forever tearing the mind. This doubting state reminds one of the old serpent's. "Yes, hath God said?" If the statement made had been the opposite, the gentleman would have questioned it; for he is bound to doubt everything. He is one who could take either side and refute; but neither side and defend. There are minds constructed in such a way that they can act in every way except that of plain up and down. Their machinery is eccentric; it would puzzle the ablest tongue to describe it. I like the old-fashioned consciences that go up and down, yes and no, right and wrong, true and false—the kind which are simple and need no great intellect to understand their methods. We are growing so cultured now that many have become like the old serpent, "more subtle than any beast of the field." The new-fashioned consciences act upon the principle of compromise and policy, which is no principle at all. To each inquiry they answer "Yes and no. What is the time of day?" for it is yes or no according to the clock, or according to the climate, or more generally according to the breeches' pocket, for so much depends upon that. Practically many are saying, "Upon which side of the bread is the butter? Tell us this, and then we will tell you what we believe."

People of that sort begin at first with an inquiring spirit, then go on to an objecting spirit, then to a perpetual quibbling spirit. There is nothing earnest; for when a man is a sincere questioner, and is willing to receive an answer, he is on the high road to truth; but when he merely questions and questions and questions, and never stops for an answer, and is nothing but a heap of cavils, he is not worth clearing away. The last thing he wants is an answer, and the thing he dreads beyond everything is that he should be compelled to believe anything at all. Such a man at last gets bound as with a cart-ropes; he becomes an atheist or worse; for all capacity for faith departs from him. He is as frivolous as Voltaire, whose forte seemed to lie in ridiculing everything. You can not save him. How can faith come to him? How can he believe who must have everything explained? How can he believe in Christ himself when he requires him, first of all, to be put through a catechism and be made to answer cavils? Oh, take heed of tying up your soul with cart-ropes of skepticism; take heed of a truth-denying spirit. God help you to break the bonds! Inquire; but believe. Ask; but do accept the truth; and be in earnest in your resolve that if you prove all things you will also hold fast that which is good. To be always using this sieve, and never to be using the mill, is a starving work; to be always searching after adulterations, but never to drink of the genuine milk, is a foolish habit. Caviling is a curse, and carping is a crime. Escape from it while yet it is but a cord of vanity, lest it come to be a cart-ropes, which shall bind you fast. —Spurgeon.

repatee. Contrary to the expectations of all, Mr. Beecher remained an abstracted listener, and said not a word. The gentleman who introduced the topic with the hope that Mr. Beecher would answer Col. Ingersoll at last remarked:

"Mr. Beecher, have you nothing to say on this question?"

The old man slowly lifted himself from his attitude and replied:

"Nothing—in fact, if you will excuse me for changing the conversation, I will say that while you gentlemen were talking, my mind was bent on a most deplorable spectacle which I witnessed to-day."

"What was it?" at once inquired Col. Ingersoll, who, notwithstanding his peculiar views of the hereafter is noted for his kindness of heart.

"Why," said Mr. Beecher, "as I was walking down town to-day I saw a poor lame man with crutches slowly and carefully picking his way through a cesspool of mud, in the endeavor to cross the street. He had just reached the middle of the filth, when a big, burly ruffian, himself all bespattered, rushed up to him, jerked the crutches from under the unfortunate man, and left him sprawling and helpless in the pool of liquid dirt which almost engulfed him."

"What a brute he was," said Col. Ingersoll.

"What a brute he was," they all echoed.

"Yes," said the old man, rising from his chair and brushing back his long white hair, while his eyes glittered with their old time fire, as he bent them on Ingersoll, yes, Col. Ingersoll, and you are the man. The human soul is lame, but Christianity gives it the crutches to enable it to pass the highway of life. It is your teachings that knock these crutches from under it and leave it a helpless and rudderless wreck in the slough of despond. If robbing the human soul of its only support on this earth—religion—be your profession, why, ply it to your heart's content. It requires an architect to erect a building; an incendiary may reduce it to ashes."

The old man sat down, and silence brooded over the scene. Col. Ingersoll found that he had a master in his own power of illustration, and said nothing. The company took their hats and parted.

## SPEAK EVIL OF NO MAN.

The Christian Weekly says: "What is meant by 'Speak evil of no man?' Certainly it is not meant that we are never to speak of any fault or sin of any person to another, even with the added qualification, 'in his absence.' May not the father and mother talk of their children's faults one with another? May I not go before the grand jury and testify to the crime I have witnessed? May I not speak to my pastor of the faults of one of my fellows in the church for his correction, or for the better preservation of the church itself from scandal or corruption? May I not tell and enquire the true character of a discharged servant or clerk? Christ spoke evil of Herod in his absence when He said to the Pharisees, 'Go tell that fox.' Paul spoke evil of Demas and Hymeneus and Philetus, in their absence, when he wrote to Timothy: 'We must use

are life," was the deep utterance of the Master. The same must be true with every preacher. It is not the placid pool but the upspringing fountain that we want—the living water. For this there must be fresh and lively perceptions of old truths ever new, and vital realization of their truth in the speaker's own heart. The Spirit of Life must quicken the soul and kindle the tongue, and so make the word "quick and powerful." Thus Christ will be made to live in the message that leaps from the lips from sense of its intense vividness and reality.

A living gospel is the only tonic for a languishing church. Let discouraged pastors note this and instead of being nervous about their usefulness, warning, simply seek a richer, lovelier experience in their own hearts of the living Christ, and they will find themselves uttering an awakened gospel and ministering to an awakened church. —Bapt. Weekly.

## CURE FOR A BAD TEMPER.

"When I was a child," said a minister to me some years since, a minister now gone to his final rest in the bosom of God, "I had a dreadful temper, but when ten years of age I was converted. I carried that temper to Christ, and in the simplicity of a child's faith asked him to take it wholly away, and I had such a revelation to my mind of his meekness and gentleness that for sixty years I have never been troubled in the least with that temper. I have lived forty-two years with my wife. Ask her."

Therefore I put the question to her, "How many times during these forty-two years have you seen your husband out of temper?" "I have never," was the reply, "seen his temper ruffled in the least degree. I was a high tempered woman, and sometimes used to think that if he would get angry and give me a good scolding, it would do me good. But he never did it. And now," she added, "I have taken my temper to Christ, and have obtained the same deliverance that he did."

If you will do the same thing, dear reader, Christ will grant the same grace to you, and that in respect to all evil tendencies and temperaments. He will "gird you with everlasting strength," and no evil temper or tendency shall have dominion over you. —D. A. Mahan.

## IMMEDIATE DECISION.

A London city missionary went away from home to hold service in a mission room. He took his text from Haggai 2: 5, "Consider your ways," and he urged the importance of every one doing this, and doing it now. Among those present was G—C—who went home and said to his wife, "Mary, I mean to turn over a new leaf," and finding his Bible, and wiping the dust from it, he read a portion of Scripture, and then offered prayer for himself and his wife. He professed to have found peace for his soul, and the family worship thus commenced was continued day by day. Ten days after he commenced it, he left his home in the morning with a van and horses to go some distance. On his return at night, while sitting on the shaft of the van, he fell off, the van went over him, and he was taken home dead. What a glad revelation it was for his friends that he had considered his ways, and had turned from them to receive salvation from the Lord Jesus Christ, and to walk in his ways. Does not an event say to each one, "Be ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not?" —Star.

## LOST HER INFLUENCE.

A lady who bore a high reputation for saintliness and benevolence as speaking of the religious life day to some friend she had made a watering place, when her attendant attempted to rearrange her rap which had in some way become displaced. In a sharp, petulant tone she said to the really gentle and sensitive maiden, "No, not that way!" and then resumed her pious conversation. The petulance of those few sharp words of unmerited abuse, more than the words themselves, by revealing her unsanctified power, despoiled that lady in a moment of the influence she had previously won over her new friends. One of them, at least, it nipped the bud of a desire for a highly spiritual life which had risen in her heart. Thus the fly of a petulant npper robbed her saintliness of its ore, and made it a savor, not of life, but of death to another. How important it is that they who wear saintly robes should be also saintly temper. —Zion's Herald.

We cannot skip the seasons of our education. We cannot hasten the ripeness and the sweetness by a single day, nor dispense with one night's nipping frost, nor one week's blighting east wind. —Robertson.

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