

STURDINESS OF CHARACTER

One characteristic of this age is the evident flimsiness of character. Men seem not to be gripped by any controlling conviction. The future goal which reaches back to the present and influences men may have personal uprightness and general helpfulness as its chief traits, but the average man does not seem to be set on such achievement. Long ago a man of special wisdom wrote, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." No character can be firm, and true, and steadfast which does not rise in aspiration above things which are perishable. When one's highest goal is subject to decay, he himself has no standing place after the period of decay. He whose heart is set on riches in themselves will be disappointed in one of two ways. Either he will not obtain the riches or they will be unsatisfactory after being secured. The spiritual nature which outlives things of time is not supposed to find satisfaction in temporal things. Character is that which endures. That character which is formed by association with things destructible never can become sturdy, for the very object of its pursuit fails.

Men make two mistakes. Sometimes they have a goal in life which is altogether unworthy. Sometimes they have no goal whatever.

In the first instance, anything which is vitally related to perishable things is unworthy. If our highest ambition is to possess, or to occupy a large place in the public eye, or to wield an influence over men, or to be independent of other people for selfish advantage, we are spending force for naught. We may achieve all of these, but the game is not worth the candle. When this success is obtained, if in any sense it can be called success, we are no better off than before. There is nothing in all of this which persists along with the continuing soul. Evidently, anything that is to be of permanent value must itself have permanency.

In the second place, many men make a greater mistake than the suppositional case in the preceding paragraph. They have no goal at all. Their plans may not reach beyond the next meal, or the night's sleep. These are the dangerous citizens. All the propelling force they have is natural inclination. One thing is as good to them as another, and this lack of distinction in values makes it easy to live without any exertion. Why should they become active in any thing when nothing is to be gained by it? So they seem to reason. A tree is coaxed upward by the sunshine; but nothing coaxes these men. A tree is strengthened when it sets itself against the storm; but these are not strengthened because they drift with the storm. A tree fulfills its purpose in life, the part assigned it by its Creator. But some men, supposed to be immeasurably higher than trees even deny that any purpose exists for them which they should fulfill. They are nothing for character, although developing character of certain type day by day. They lack the power of any great conviction. Martin Luther said he had one great passion, only one, and that was Jesus Christ. The world under-

stands how the great reformer was gripped by the conviction of that passion, and how it made a man of him who was dependable to the last hour. Huss, the Zwingli, and Manlanchon and the other reformers had convictions which were dearer to them than life itself. Any man so gripped, so mastered, so driven, is an outstanding man. Other people are more or less clay on the wheel of daily circumstances, rather than becoming masters of conditions, and changing conditions to guarantee achievement. A character of the right sort requires vision and energy, and self-mastery, and self-direction. A man so possessed will do certain things though forbidden by every potentate. A man thus possessed will refuse to do certain things, though urged by every inducement of the flesh, and by every appeal of human kind.

Character is not formed in the drift. It is not stablished by going with the wind. It requires, first, a conviction of the right, and an inflexible purpose to stand for the right. It spurns the channel of least resistance. It laughs at obstacles. It despises compromise. It takes a position not to be peculiar (but because a sensitive conscience and a clear judgment so dictates. And these two no man dare despise or injure.

The man who does not feel under obligation to live in any particular way, or to govern his conversation, or to control his thoughts, may be above the animal plane in form, and in common reputation, but not in actual fact. The horse or the cow is as good as he unless he is higher than mere animal inclinations.

"Unless above himself man can erect himself.

How poor a thing is man!"

In intellect, almost divine!

In aspiration, a fit companion for the Lord!

In worship, above the angelic host!

In privilege, next to the Lord himself!

In character, dependent upon how he uses his privileges, and how he responds to the call from the world above himself.

The character of man or woman which can be calculated by measuring the sordid influences of mere human existence is not worthy of the forming. The character which defies human explanation, which rises above all calculation, which transcends thought and is formed in large part by association with God himself, such a character is the one that has promise of good and assurance of hope for the world.—Selected.

"Would to God that we were all more contented with our mercies, and more discontented with ourselves! It is the trying to live in external conditions that makes a Christian restless and wretched. A soul at peace with God and itself, a soul that delights in making other people happy can sleep sweetly, like the old-time patriarch, with a stone for a pillow.

We are not responsible for being here, but God holds us responsible for our actions while we are here. He has given us a will-power and made us free moral agents; we can go to heaven in spite of the devil, or we can go to hell in spite of all Jesus has done or would do to get to heaven.

DOES HOLINESS "WORK" ?

That is a fair question.

If holiness does not do all that is claimed for it then either its proponents are mistaken or will have to modify their positions. A theory that does not "work" is not worth bothering about.

Holiness has not done all that some folk claim it would—that is evident. But may not the failure be in two places, neither of which leaves any reflection on the truth of holiness? That is, its proponents may have claimed too much for it, or they may have failed to live up to the demands and possibilities of the gracious truth.

But there is still another way of looking at this. Holiness is not a bit of magic that converts mediocrity into genius, ignorance into knowledge, weak personality into brilliancy of person; and holiness is not a mythical something that once deposited in the breast of a man will control him and automatically make him always do and say the right thing. No! Holiness as a fact of experience will have to be directed, defended and developed by prudence, prayer and faith. The fact that a man received a clean heart yesterday does not guarantee that today he will do the wise thing or the right thing. He will have to be prayerful and thoughtful and trustful today, or what God did for him yesterday may be destroyed and made of none effect.

To claim that one who has the experience of heart purity will automatically be patient, or that he will find his praying always easy, or that he will have no difficulty in resisting temptation, is to make it carry a meaning that the Scriptures will not "work" if we expect too much from it.

But the fact is that holiness "works" when it has a chance. It is up to us to decide whether holiness will be displayed in holy tempers and loving attitudes and honest and honorable and useful living.

Yes, holiness "works".—Christian Witness.

THY WILL BE DONE

This is thy will, I know,
That I should holy be;
Should let my sins this moment go,
This moment turn to thee,
O might I now embrace
Thine all-sufficient power,
And never more to sin give place,
And never grieve Thee more.
—Charles Wesley.

Can none be kept a single day without sin? Yes, through the indwelling Christ, for "He shall save His people from their sins." The purpose of His coming was "that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life."—(See Luke 1:74-75).

There are various ways by which with readiness we may measure our progress: