

The King's Highway

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The Positive and the Negative

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"We must be positive," has become a sort of cliché for those who are thinking and speaking on the alcohol problem and kindred themes these days. We are often reminded that the negative note is obsolete, ineffective and unrealistic.

I would like to challenge this assumption and plead for a more rational and balanced attitude.

Under the circumstances in which we live one of the primary lessons that must be learned is that of avoiding the hazards that surround us. In our younger days these lessons have to be learned often in resounding negatives repetitiously enjoined upon us by our guardians.

"Don't touch," "Don't eat that," "Don't go near the water," "Don't play on the road."

It is not enough to give generalities about playing safe in interesting ways. The dangers are there. Warnings must be definitely and sternly given. This process must be continued from the cradle to the grave.

Our safety campaigns emphasize the fact that no mere "gospel of good living" is adequate for the perils with which we are continuously faced and threatened.

The same principle holds true for bodily health. It is not enough to inculcate wholesome healthy habits. We live in a world of germs, viruses and microbes that are enemies to man's life. Healthy people are not immune.

Carrying this principle upward into the social structure, we find that there are certain definite patterns of human behaviour that are a menace to mental health and social well being. To face these we have our fundamental moral laws, the Ten Commandments, "which, far from being obsolete, are still basic to a stable and progressive society: "Thou shalt not steal," "Thou shalt not bear false witness" (all negatives, mark you), are not frilly adornments for pious folk but the basic structure of our modern jurisprudence, a neglect of which always leads to a rapid deterioration in society.

The Old Testament is often referred to in a derogatory way as if it were old-fashioned and negative, while the New Testament is presented as being positive and relevant. Such statements can scarcely stand the test of careful examination. There is "positive" enough emphasis in the former and "negative" enough statements in the latter to give the lie to any such broad generalisation.

Please note that in no instance does Jesus soften the negative or exchange it for a positive, but rather carries the negative into the inner motive of the outer act.

Reading on in Chapter 6 in Matthew's record of the sermon you come to a veritable barrage of negative injunctions: "When thou doest alms do not sound a trumpet before you"; "When thou prayest thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are," "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth;" "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink," etc.

The "love" of God and the "wrath" of God are not unrelated but rather complementary elements of His nature. God is a Good God who cares so much for His children that He cannot be mildly tolerant of those things that destroy and weaken.

The measure of our love of the good must be shown also by our hatred of the evil. Those of us who would be "strongly for something" need also to be "strongly against" the opposite.

We would even dare to suggest today that the issue in the alcohol problem needs to be drawn more clearly. We have need in our day of some "angry men" who do not hesitate to use "fighting words."

One of the world's greatest leaders once stood in the slave market and saw the souls and bodies of men being bartered as merchandise into slavery. His soul was stirred within him, and out of that moral indignation came the words "If I ever get a chance to hit that thing I will hit it hard."

His chance came, and the liberation movement sprang from that "wrath" against this great evil. There is a slavery today that binds the souls and bodies of men in bondage to alcohol; and there is a traffic that fattens on this degradation. The world awaits the power of the righteous wrath and indignation that will stir the Christian Church into action.

Too often, in our fear lest we be misunderstood, and lest we might hurt someone's feeling we withhold a strong prophetic word that needs desperately to be spoken. And we shrink from any sort of controversy and disagreement that might mar the harmony of good fellowship.

In our horror lest we be regarded as "fanatics" or "cranks" we so qualify statements and water down our principles that they become vague generalities powerless to stir or challenge.

In our desire to be fair to both sides of the problem, we just sometimes fail to get wholly off the fence to make ourselves felt powerfully on the side of the angels.

In our desire to have young folk "think things through for themselves," free from any "adult pressures or prejudices," we leave them too often just floundering, subject to the promptings of a hard instinct or social cult. There are grave dangers abroad and there should be a very positive commendation that leaves them in no doubt as to which is the more excellent way.

It is easy to become genial, effective little nobodies, respected by brewers, politicians and the general public alike for our fairmindedness, cautious in our utterances, kindly in our judgements, when the situations calls for Christian Crusaders. This is a relevancy to these words of a jingle, which caricatures this tolerance of evil — and complacency in the presence of wrong "Now that sin is old-

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