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I Promise

Frederick Brotherton Meyer

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I PROMISE



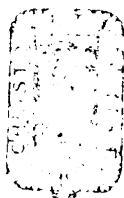
REV. F. B. MEYER.

I Promise

By

Rev. F. B. Meyer, B. A.

Author of "Saved and Sent," "Light
on Little Children," "The Sheep-
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United Society of Christian Endeavor
Boston and Chicago



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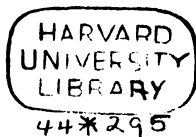
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United Society of Christian Endeavor
Boston and Chicago

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. SALVATION AND TRUST . . .	9
II. WINNING GOD'S ATTENTION . .	18
III. GOD SPEAKING	25
IV. "WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?" .	34
V. OUR DUTY	42
VI. CONSCIENCE	51

INTRODUCTION.

I AM exceedingly glad that Rev. F. B. Meyer has given this little volume to the public. I feel that so far as Christian Endeavorers are concerned his pen could not possibly have found employment upon a more important theme, and I am equally confident that there is no one whose wise and winning words will be listened to more eagerly, or heeded more willingly. The man and the theme have been united in a most happy way, and the result is a little volume of exceeding value. The prayer-meeting Covenant Pledge is the mainstay of Christian Endeavor. It is to Christian Endeavorers what Magna Charta was to British liberty, what the Constitution of the United States is to the American patriot, what the *May-flower* compact was to the Puritans, what the National Covenant was to the Covenanters. The societies that adopt and live up to the covenant pledge with reasonable fidelity

have always prospered. No society that has ignored or weakened the pledge has long continued to do a conspicuously good work. Whatever theories or prejudices may exist concerning it, the facts of the history of the eighteen years of Christian Endeavor are all on the side of the Christian Endeavor pledge. To have this fundamental feature of Christian Endeavor expounded, explained, and illuminated by such an author, is indeed a boon to the Christian Endeavor world. I trust that this little volume will be read by hundreds of thousands of Christian Endeavorers, that those who are faithful and true will be strengthened in their fidelity, that any who are weak and wavering may be braced by these chapters to new and more strenuous endeavor, and that all, as they see the reasonableness, scripturalness, and absolute necessity of our covenant pledge to our best endeavor, will with renewed zeal, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, go forward in his strength to do whatever he would like to have them do. FRANCIS E. CLARK.

Boston, April, 1899.

I PROMISE.

I.

SALVATION AND TRUST.

“Relying on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.”

How grateful these words must be to our Master, Christ, as they are said week by week by hundreds of thousands of young lips! It seems as if there were a murmur of such words always rising from the world like sweet incense, which must do something to counterbalance the hoarse sounds of blasphemy and rejection. At times,

of course, the murmur becomes a great shout, when there gathers a convention of Christian Endeavorers in their tens of thousands. But probably there is not a single minute in any part of the twenty-four hours in which some voice or voices are not professing reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. He is crowned with many crowns; to him multitudes of knees are bowing, and tongues confessing that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Personally, I greatly rejoice in the distinction which is made between reliance on Christ for salvation, and the trust for daily strength to live a godly and a righteous life. It reminds one of the distinction of the Psalmist, who said, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of

whom shall I be afraid?" Salvation deals with our deliverance from the power of sin, which would check and hinder our fellowship with God, whilst trust for daily strength looks toward the positive side of Christian living, in virtue of which we are able to do great exploits for God in the world. We are saved that we may serve, but salvation is one thing and service another.

For Salvation. — "Salvation" is a great word. It is conjugated in three tenses. There is the *past* tense, "we are saved"; at the moment when we first trusted Christ. Saved from the wrath of God; saved from the curse of a broken law; saved from the consequences of being born from a sinful race, and having committed many grievous sins against God. This salvation is a distinct and definite matter, which is ours at the moment we exercise simple faith

in Jesus. "Being, therefore, justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him."

There is the *present* tense of salvation. To us who "are being saved," Christ is the power of God. The Lord added to the church daily "those that were being saved." Such is the accurate rendering of 1 Cor. 1:18, and Acts 2:47. We are being saved perpetually from the love and power of sin. The disinfectant of Christ's presence is ever warding off the germs of deadly temptation. The mighty arm of the divine Keeper is always holding the door against the attempts of the adversary. The water is always flowing over the eye to remove the least grit or mote that may alight. "We are being saved by his life."

There is the *future* tense. He will appear a second time without sin unto

salvation. We are being kept by the power of God unto a salvation which waits to be revealed in all its majesty and fulness in the last time. Much as Jesus can do for his saints in this life, there is a point beyond which even his love and power cannot go, since they must bear about with them the body of their humiliation, which will finally, unless he come first, return to its dust. Salvation in all its completeness can, therefore, only be secured when at his coming, though we were dead, yet shall we live, and those that live and believe in him shall never die.

Is not "salvation" a great word? It includes the forgiveness that remembers sin no more; deliverance from the curse and penalty of our evil ways; emancipation from the thrall of evil habit; the elimination and destruction of self-love; the gradual refinement and elevation of

the tastes of the soul ; its growing conformity to the image of Christ ; and the final resurrection of the body in spiritual beauty and energy, to be forever the companion and vehicle of the redeemed spirit.

Relying. — This is a personal word. It implies that there has been some kind of contact between spirit and spirit, person and person, the client and the patron, the friend and the friend, the sinner and the Saviour. There is a great distinction between believing *about* Christ and believing *in* him. The devils have the former, and tremble ; redeemed sinners the latter, and are at rest.

In reliance there are three steps. First, we must know something about the person in question. Secondly, we must put our case definitely into his hand, and believe that he undertakes.

Thirdly, we must go on our way, refusing to entertain any suggestion to doubt, because we can so absolutely leave this matter with Him into whose hands we have committed it. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able."

How simple it would be for any doubting and distressed soul to take these three steps forthwith! It need not take longer than five minutes to perform the definite act of submission and faith, and so enter into a relationship with Christ, which, when once established, will defy the gnawing tooth of time, the most virulent hatred of the pit.

But, in order to enjoy the fulness of Christ's saving grace, it is necessary to take him in each of the three aspects denoted by the terms applied to him in this opening clause of our pledge.

There must be the human aspect,—
Jesus.—The name the angel gave him, by which Mary and the Nazareth home-circle knew him. The name that represents his boyhood, manhood, sufferings, sympathies, love, and tears. We must know him as such, for it is through the human that we must come to the divine. The ladder that touches heaven must rest on earth.

There must be the divine aspect,—
Lord.—If he be no more than human, we are of all men most miserable. Only God's sorrow can atone for sin; only God's succor can avail to save; only if he be God can he be excused from the charge of arrogant blasphemy when he made himself God's equal.

There must be the royal aspect,—
Christ.—The Messiah, the King of glory, the Anointed of the Father, the absolute Lord and Monarch of our

lives. He must be this, for only if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, shalt thou be saved. (Rom. 10: 9.)

II.

WINNING GOD'S ATTENTION.

"To pray to him . . ."

I THINK, young people, that I understand a little better than formerly what it is to pray. Of course we are all little children, feeling our way gradually into the heart of the great mysteries of earth and heaven. The best of us know but little as we ought and shall.

There is an experience which many of us are passing through, or have passed through, in which we think that we shall be heard for our much asking, our intensity, the passionate vehemence with which we press our prayers on God. There is some justification for such a conception of prayer

when we read the words of our Lord about the violent taking the kingdom of heaven by force, and of the apostle who tells us that God does exceedingly abundantly according to the power that worketh in us.

But there is another aspect of prayer which seems to precede that, and without which the one just described is mistaken and harmful.

Permit me to speak of it in the first person. When I kneel before God and say, "Father," it seems as if the entire nature of God were instantly on the alert, and quick to catch the next words. It is good to say, "Father"; better to say, "*my* Father"; best to say, "*our* Father." In the latter we embrace all our brethren and sisters throughout the world; and, above all, enter his holy presence in company with the Son of his love, our Brother and Saviour

and Lord. But is it not wonderful that, just as the least whisper of her name will bring the mother to her child's side, so the tiniest whisper of the word "Father" awakens the instant interest and audience of Him who was before time, and shall be after it, who fills the whole of space as his temple and home?

What a wonderful thing it is to attract the attention and enchain the interest of God, so much so, with such absorbing interest, that for the time it is as if he had nothing else to do than just listen to the sorrowful complaints or the eager entreaties of his child!

But, if this is so, how great must be the disappointment we cause him when we begin to say over to him words which we have learned by rote through constant repetition, which were once the mould of burning thoughts, but from

which all glow has long since vanished ! From such prayers, so formal, so heartless, so destitute of any right appreciation of the greatness of our opportunity, the divine nature must often turn aside (if a very anthropomorphic phrase may be permitted) sick at heart.

Equally disappointing it must be when the suppliant uses the precious moments of prayer as an opportunity for pouring into the ear of God a string of petitions for personal comfort and emolument, never staying to utter one word of reverent and loving devotion. In human intercourse it is not customary to use every moment in trying to elicit as much help as possible from our friend. The most selfish will say some kind words of greeting, or make some personal inquiries, before launching out on the errand which has brought about the interview. But how often do we

rush into God's presence and pour a string of entreaties into his ear without one word of filial greeting and loving appreciation!

Whilst we are praying we are often thinking about our business or pleasure, and wishing to be gone; nothing but a sense of propriety keeps us. Often it would be almost better not to pray at all than pray as we do, as a sop to conscience, a piece of perfunctory duty.

As one reviews one's prayer life, one is perfectly horrified and ashamed of the way one has made God suffer, or, to use the Bible phrase, grieved his Holy Spirit by the sins of one's prayers. How greatly must angels wonder to see the way in which we abuse the greatest privilege within our reach, for in the whole range of our life there cannot be a higher act than to enter

into the presence of God our Father, and to speak to him simply and naturally about anything we need.

Too often we condone our failures, or attempt to, by mentioning at the end of the prayer, like a cabalistic formulary, "For Jesus Christ's sake," as if *that* fulfilled the condition of prayer in the nature of Christ, which is tantamount to Christ's nature praying through us.

How often, therefore, missing the point of the injunction to pray in Christ's name, we pour a pile of prayers into the divine nature, much as an applicant for charity will pour a sackful of circulars into the letter-box, hoping that some may bring a response, but not counting on more than, say, one in ten.

All this is mistaken, and will be corrected if you remember that your first

cry, "Father," attracts instantly the notice and attention of God. You will recollect yourself before you rush into his presence, considering what you are going for and what you shall ask. You will order your petitions aright. You will let the nature of Christ assert itself in and through the Holy Spirit. You will preface your prayers by a few words of thanksgiving and appreciation, which will probably become more extended as the years pass and you know more of God. You will talk to him in the simplest and most artless style, not with clamor and strife. He may lead you on to the pouring out of soul and the vehemence of an unrestrainable desire; but, if not, you will realize that the merest appeal to the divine nature will bring a marvellous response, as scratching a tropical soil secures a prolific harvest.

III.

GOD SPEAKING.

“ And read the Bible every day.”

THAT is indispensable. Indeed, I have often said, and always felt, that, if the time is so limited that we are obliged to shorten one or the other, it is every way wiser and better to curtail our prayer, in which we speak to God, than our Bible reading, in which God speaks to us.

It does not matter so much what method you adopt in your Bible reading; but it is all-important that you should enter into your closet and shut your door, and read the Bible thought-

fully, reverently, devotionally; that through the words you may feed on the Word, and extract for yourself that living virtue which has passed into their texture from the Spirit of God.

Forgive me, but I greatly question whether all the helps which are given nowadays so profusely to assist us in the study of Scripture really help us as much as we suppose. Of course, it is perfectly right to get all the information possible about the geography, manuscripts, botany, and contemporaneous history of the Bible; but a man may have all this, and yet miss the vital principle on which alone the spirit's life can be nurtured. Not for a moment would I dissuade you from obtaining such information, but I would warn you against supposing that it naturally carries with it, and implies, a

right use of the word of God ; and also against spending in such studies the precious minutes, which are as much as you can spare in the early morning.

It is often stated that many Christians rarely open the Bible in the morning watch ; they drop on their knees for a few moments before hurrying off for the duties of the day, but carry no word of light and strength for the day's needs. It is said that a large number of others are content to catch up a textbook, and rapidly scan over a few verses, which are forgotten almost as soon as read. It seems difficult to believe such statements, and it is to be hoped that they are greatly exaggerated. But some color of truth is given to them by the ease with which many amongst us are overcome by the insidious errors of the present day. Nothing would do more

to rebut the infidelity and reliance on mere outward rites, which are blighting our English Protestantism, so much as a revival of Bible love, Bible reading, and Bible memorizing.

The rules for Bible reading are as follows :

1. *Read consecutively* ; the Old Testament at one time of the day, the New at another ; this will enable you to read the New twice and more to one reading of the Old.

2. *Use the references.* For this purpose I like to use two Bibles, one to lie open with the margin well filled with references, to which I turn in the smaller pocket Bible which I hold in my hand. All I know of the Bible is based on the use of marginal references.

3. *Be more careful to read a few verses deeply* than to skim two or three chapters. There are times, of course, when

we pass rapidly over whole tracts of Scripture to discover the lay of the landscape, and the direction of the main thoroughfares. But for devotional reading, a little, thoroughly masticated and digested, is to be preferred to a large amount bolted. The artist who confines himself to one tiny bit of scenery probably enjoys himself best, and extracts most thorough instruction and inspiration from what he sees.

4. *Be thankful if the morning and evening study crystallizes about some theme.* Often it will be so. As you quietly muse on some verse or paragraph beneath the teaching of the Holy Spirit, you will find kindred passages suggested to your mind where the same thought occurs under slightly different forms; and these will lead to more; and as you close the Book you will find your mind rewarded by one mastering theme.

Be very thankful for this, although it may have led you far away from the original chapter, and interfered with your reading as much as usual.

5. *Have your pen at hand*, that you may note such references as occur to you in the margin, and that you may be able to indicate any passage which has shone out like a star to your soul. I think I could tell the history of my life in a series of verses, selected from every part of the sacred Book, which have been my beacon-lights all along its course.

As we approach the study of the Bible, there should be a reverent bowing down of the soul on the threshold of the temple of Scripture ; a putting off of the shoes from our feet ; a cleansing ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh and spirit ; a deep and hallowed consciousness of the presence of God ;

a simple, childlike, humble, and obedient spirit, which listens with hushed awe, like the child Samuel in the sanctuary of old, for the accents of the voice of God.

Souls that love most deeply most truly understand love. Pure eyes carry with them the flames of fire by which they see. Spirit recognizes and reads spirit. Those who are most devout, most like the saintly souls through whom the voice of God spake, will be best able to understand and interpret the yearnings of desire, the pæans of triumph, the wailings of disappointed hope, which fill the pages of Scripture with their various and abundant expression.

Above all, we must obey. We must not be satisfied with looking into the perfect law ; we must continue therein. It is not the hearer that forgetteth, but

the doer that worketh, who is blessed in his doing. God's Spirit tests us by revealing truth. If we obey, he reveals more. If we refuse, he takes from us what we know. The accumulation of neglected commands gathers over our eyes as scales. From the morasses and swamps of our disobedience the mists arise that obscure the blue sky above and the everlasting hills.

We should never open our Bibles without first lifting up our hearts to the gracious Spirit by whose inspiration and movement holy men were led to write. Heartfelt ejaculatory prayer to him will unlock treasures which all the dictionaries and helps in creation could never reach. Beneath his touch rocks will yield water, blank pages become covered with lettering, fountains arise where before the whole tract seemed sere and barren. The deep things of

God are revealed to those only who have received the Spirit which is of God.

Two good rules each morning, to finish with : Never speak to man till you have spoken to God ; never read a line of man's books till you have read God's Book.

IV.

“WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?”

“*To lead a Christian life.*”

It is no small matter that we promise when we repeat these words. The word “Christian” is Greek in an English dress, and to understand it we must go back to old Antioch, on the Orontes, whose witty, volatile people, arrested by the increasing number of disciples, and anxious to label them, called them after the name that was most often on their lips. They were always talking about Jesus Christ, who had been crucified under Pilate, but who, these people asserted, was living still as their Prince

and Saviour. His name was heard so often from those who were becoming a real power in the gay city, that it suggested their appellation, "Christian."

Of course, "Christ" means "anointed," and "Christians" should mean "anointed ones," those on whom the chrism of the Holy Spirit has been poured — the holy anointing oil, which was bestowed on Jesus at his baptism constituting him the Christ, and enabling him to preach the gospel to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound. O that we might be anointed as he was, and by his hand, that we might go forth to continue his work in the world until he come!

But, after all, to live a Christian life implies that we should walk as he walked, and be in all things a sweet

savor of Christ, so that as our lives are scrutinized they might have the effect of recalling Christ, as a sweet scent will recall the person or place with which we first associated it.

I suppose there is no question that should be more often on our hearts than the inquiry, "What would Jesus do?" And there is none which, if properly answered, would sooner secure the Christian life, for which, in our best hours, we so eagerly yearn. Would you live a true Christian life, then let this be the line and plummet by which you test every bit of masonry that you build into the structure of your character: "What would Jesus do?" Not, "What is 'good form'?" not, "What will secure recognition and advancement?" not, "What will curry favor with the wealthy and influential?" but always and everywhere, "Would Jesus

do this if he were here? What would Jesus do?"

A story-book with this question as its theme is having a large circulation on each side of the Atlantic. I am told that a well-known minister has disposed of four hundred copies in his church, and that a revival has been the result of an extensive reading of its pages by his leading people. Here are some incidents:—

The newspaper proprietor cuts out all puffing advertisements, and several items, such as the police-court and divorce proceedings, the gambling and betting news, the obscene and unhealthy elements which had helped to give his paper a wide circulation among certain classes, because they would not stand the test of the question, "What would Jesus do?"

The girl who was training her voice

for the opera feels that henceforth it must be used for Jesus, and goes down to a low part of the town to sing the gospel, till the melody of her voice charms a pandemonium into a congregation, and transforms in time a moral desert into paradise; and all because she resolved that she would be governed by the one inquiry, "What would Jesus do?"

A manufacturer begins to care for his employees, whom he formerly regarded as so many machines for the production of his wealth, giving them a share in the profits, and manifesting a living interest in their well-being; and all because of the magic potency of the inquiry, "What would Jesus do?"

Necessarily the entire town becomes transformed. It is, of course, a fancy picture. No community of people is to be found that literally obeys Christ's

precepts, though for these many centuries the church has taught us to expect that if we reflect as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we shall be changed into his image from glory to glory.

To lead a Christian life, then, demands that we shall act in a way that is becoming to the gospel we profess ; so that it shall not be brought into disrepute, or people feel that we are not worthy of Him whose name we bear. We must maintain the honor of the household. We must walk worthily of Him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Of course this demands incessant watchfulness, both in what we avoid and in what we do. To take a simple illustration from my own life. I am obliged to use cabs pretty freely to save valuable time, and at the end of the ride

there is, of course, the question of payment ; and one of two courses may be followed. Either you may give the exact fare, or you may add a little extra, say sixpence, in recognition of the many demands which must be met by your driver before he can take his earnings home. The first is just, the second generous. The latter is my general rule, because my clerical garb suggests that I am a servant of Jesus Christ, and I am bound to keep up the honor of the family. Forgive this egotism ; my one desire is to show how at every moment when two courses offer themselves we are bound to take that which we think Jesus would have taken, and to do those things which will make people think most highly of his kingdom.

Of course, this is not the popular side. It will often involve us in a

touch of the dislike and persecution and cross-bearing which ultimately led to his death ; but through all this we may glorify him. "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but glorify God on this behalf." If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household?

Do you shrink from living this life because of its cost? Then remember that no soldier goes to the warfare at his own charges. Our Father will enable us to maintain a life which will honor and glorify him; just as the government will find all that is necessary to enable its representatives to live as they ought in some foreign court. "God is able to make all grace abound, that ye, having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

V.

OUR DUTY.

“I promise to be true to all my duties.”

IT is well to inquire what those duties may be before making this solemn pledge; for it is impossible to bind ourselves thus, and violate our promise, without suffering moral injury. Better never to make this promise than make to break it. And in assuming new duties it would be well to consider them in the light of these words, for if we cannot be true to them it is undesirable to undertake them; first, because we may shut out of office some one who

could do them ; and second, because infidelity to trust is apt to grow with insidious but rapid strides from less to more.

The methodical and faithful fulfilment of the simple duties which are demanded of most Endeavorers is more important than the most of us suppose, as will appear in the light of the following considerations.

Employers of labor are always on the outlook for likely young men and women who give promise of suitability for advancement to positions of trust. Great businesses are carried on, not by the millionaire who finances, or the organizer who assigns the various posts, but by the great mass of the rank and file and the more promising spirits who are appointed to positions of trust. It is not the general who wins the battle, but the soldiers ; and success is largely depend-

ent on the subaltern officers and the faithfulness with which they have drilled their men when in barracks.

But no shrewd capitalist or manufacturer will take one from the ranks, and put him over others, unless he has approved himself of faithfulness to some minor duties that may have devolved upon him. Supposing a man is constantly absent from his place, or comes to it after the bell has ceased ringing, or injures his tools, or spoils the materials given out to him — is it likely that he will be placed over his fellow workmen? Supposing a lad is always idling and loitering, and doing his work in a perfunctory and superficial manner, careless so long as he just escapes censure, keen on his own interests, indifferent to his master's — is it probable that he will be promoted to a position of greater responsibility? He that is

unfaithful in what is least will be unfaithful in much.

It would be folly to give the opportunity of repeating on a large scale the incompetence and wastefulness which are only too patent on the small. How little do men and lads realize that their every act is being scrutinized with reference to their future! They do not know what is in the mind of their employer, or how some ill-considered trifle may mar their entire career.

It is he who is true to his duties in the least who is presently promoted to the opportunity of being true in the greatest. He that is faithful in the least is faithful also in much. The lad who cared for the sheep, and delivered them from lion and bear, was made ruler and shepherd of Israel. And Paul, who flinched not from witness-bearing among his own people, was summoned to stand

in Cæsar's pillared hall where all the Gentiles might hear.

How little we realize the attention with which God regards us! Not as a Judge, but as a Father; and yet with full cognizance of the great possibilities of our lives. He allows us to begin in some small sphere in which the duties seem commonplace and trying, such as standing at the door to open and close it, or giving out hymn-books, or sitting on some committee. It is not what we do, but the way in which we do it, that reveals our true character. If we say that it is too trifling to be worthy of our notice, if we slur the work over or neglect it, if we allow ourselves to be eaten up with jealousy of others, and ambition to attract attention, if we are unfaithful and untrue, we show ourselves unfit to assume the great burdens which God lays on elect spirits;

and we induce in ourselves habits and conceptions of life and duty which are entirely foreign to the reposing of heavier confidences. Do you think that God could have said of Abraham, "I know him that he will command his children after him," unless there had been some indubitable signs, on Abraham's part, of absolute loyalty and trustworthiness?

I think that Sunday-school teachers, and Christian Endeavorers, and all whose destiny is as yet unfixed, would be much more accurate and careful, more painstaking and punctual, more persistent and persevering, if they realized that the great crises of their lives were being settled amid the obscurity and simplicity of their first and earliest duties. The young life takes on its color and direction in its first start.

There is this further thought. We

are all apt to do our best on great occasions when the world is staring at us, and to be careless enough when there is no special stimulus of excitement and expectation. Most of us ministers, for instance, will preach great sermons on great occasions, but think that anything will do for the few poor people who gather to a cottage meeting. But surely the cottage meeting, rather than the great occasion, reveals what we really are. It is not what a girl is when the house is full of friends, but when, in the gray morning, she is late at the breakfast-table, and irritable to the younger children, that shows her true self. It is not what we do on the occasion of the anniversary of our society, but what we are on wintry and rainy nights when the attendance is scant, that really tests us. It is the way in which we fulfil the least duties which

manifests us best. Any one can be a martyr when the blood is stirred by the expectation of myriads, but the true martyr spirit burns brightest where the young soul suffers day by day the insults of an obscure office humbly and uncomplainingly.

If we would be really true to all our duties we must abide in Him who is the truth. He will deliver us from eye-service and insincerity ; from time-serving and place-seeking ; from superficiality and obsequiousness. Putting away lying and hypocrisy, he will enable us to speak and act truly.

We must, moreover, perform all our duties for him, seeking his approval and blessing, and remembering that he gladly accepts the most trivial service if it is done with an eye to his "Well done." Thus all life may become great, because actuated by great mo-

tives. There is nothing common or unclean in itself unless the motives that prompt our behavior are so. If we are always inspired by high and lofty aims, we lift the lowest and meanest duties to the level of those aims. To receive a prophet in the name of a prophet is to win a prophet's reward; to give a cup of cold water in the name of Christ is to secure the smile that makes heaven's day.

VI.

CONSCIENCE.

“Some reason which I can conscientiously give.”

CONSCIENCE holds the mirror to the inner life, and shows us just what we are in the light of God's infinite purity and righteousness. The word itself is derived from the Latin, *con*, with ; *scio*, to know. Conscience is what a man knows with or against himself.

Sometimes we meet ourselves with a smile ; this is what we know as a *good* conscience. At other times we do not like to meet ourselves, but avert our faces, and hide our eyes ; this is the case of a *bad* conscience. And the

worst, or *the best*, is, that we cannot deceive ourselves, or hoodwink conscience. We know, and we know that we know, that this is right and that wrong, this good and that evil. Concerning the expediency or in expediency, the wisdom or unwisdom, of a course, conscience is silent: this is not her province; these causes must be settled in the other courts of the soul. But whenever the question is raised of the rightness or wrongness of any course of action, or train of thought, conscience arises, and speaks authoritatively and decisively, pronouncing, as with the voice of God, an irrevocable judgment.

It is very necessary to keep on good terms with your conscience. Conscience is an ill bedfellow, the old proverb says; and when troubled with evil dreams, turning, tossing, and starting, rest is impossible. We do not wonder, there-

fore, that the apostle made it his aim to preserve a conscience void of offence toward God and man.

There is an element in Christian living which does not enter into the ethical code of others. All men have a conscience; else God could not judge them. There would be no standard by which to try or convict. But in most cases conscience is uninstructed. It judges rightly, so far as it knows; but its knowledge is scant, and its power of making accurate distinctions is limited. The Christian conscience is illumined and instructed by the light that falls on it from the face of Christ. Apart from Christ, it is like a diamond or crystal in the twilight; with Christ it is a jewel bathed and saturated in an ocean of sunlight. See to it that your conscience is constantly corrected by Christ's words and life, so that its stand-

ard may be raised, and its power of judging between things that differ may become more acute and accurate.

When, therefore, we Christian Endeavorers say, in the latter part of our pledge, that we will take some part, aside from singing, in every meeting; and that we will be present at every meeting, unless hindered by a reason *which we can conscientiously give to our Lord and Master*, we are binding ourselves to abide by the decision of the most august tribunal possible. We pledge ourselves to judge ourselves. But that "we" is our true self, our best self, our God-taught self: nay, more and better, it is the voice of God within us; it is the echo of the judgment which the Son of God is passing upon us, and will utter audibly one day from his judgment-seat, when we give in our account.

There will be times in our experience when conscience will refuse to receive the excuse that we give for omitting our attendance. It will winnow away the chaff of vain excuse; it will cast a searching shaft of light on our evasions and subterfuges; it will dismiss our apologies with scorn. It will be useless to argue that absence from a meeting cannot constitute a sin, because it will instantly insist that there was no necessity to assume this pledge; but, as it has been deliberately adopted, it must be accurately observed, until there has been a disavowal of it as public as was the original profession.

If the weather is wet and stormy, if the fireside party be attractive, if some favorite author solicits, we dare not yield, lest we be unable to meet the calm, clear gaze of conscience searching us. Or if we yield and sink back into the

arms of ease, we shall spend a miserable hour of bitter reproach and controversy, our Eden will have vanished and become a wild desert, and we shall experience the gnawings of the worm. From the confusion and self-reproach of such a time we shall never wish to be absolved till we have obtained forgiveness from our Master, and have made an up-and-down confession to at least the leader of our society.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of frank confession of failure when it concerns others as well as ourselves. We are bidden to confess our faults, not to a priest, but to one another. And whilst confession is withheld, it is clear that not all the black poison is purged from our system.

Never tamper with conscience, nor gag her protestations, nor drown her voice. Never say it does not matter

for *once* in a way. Never slur over her reproof, never dare to let her voice wear itself out. To behave thus is to tamper with the most delicate moral machinery in the universe. Obeyed, it may conduct to the highest realms of bliss ; disowned and dishonored, it will land you in the bottomless pit.

THE END.



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