

**FIRST WORDS**  
**TO**  
**YOUNG CHRISTIANS**

by

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**CHAPTER NINE -**

**HELPS AND HINDRANCES IN DAILY LIFE**

My dear reader, in your journey heavenward your best interest requires that you should avail yourself of all the helps you can, having your mind deeply impressed with your personal responsibility to GOD. A young Christian made this entry in his diary:

"Resolved that I will, the Lord being my helper, think, speak, and act as an individual, for as such I must live, as such I must die, stand before GOD, and damned, or saved, for ever and ever. I have been waiting for others; I must act as if I were the only one to act, and wait no longer."

This is just what is wanted: not to be comparing ourselves with others, with the members and office-bearers of the church, and setting them up as our standard, but each aiming at personal piety for ourselves. Each must work for GOD every day as if there was not another worker in the world. One who knew Harlan Page well, says:

"I have well considered the assertion when I say that during nine years in which we were associated in labors, I do not know that I ever passed an interview with him long enough to have any interchange of thought and feeling, in which I did not receive from him an impulse heavenward - an impulse onward in duty to GOD and the souls of men."

He did not wait for the church all to go to work before he would do anything, but did his own work that lay around, as in GOD's sight.

It will be a great help to have special seasons set apart for the study of the Bible, accompanied with much earnest prayer for the sanctifying influences of the HOLY SPIRIT.

The opinion of the world, the standard of piety in the church, the attainments of deacons and ministers in personal religion, are not what we are to look at, but

**THE RULES THAT GOD LAYS DOWN**

in the Scriptures. The Word of GOD fixes a very high standard of spirituality, and tells us that to

**"be spiritually-minded is life and peace."** Nothing should be allowed to interfere with our hours of private devotion. It is the habit of some Christians to take, in the morning, a short portion of Scripture to meditate upon during the day; and amid the pauses of business, or as they have opportunity, their minds recur to it. This is an excellent plan. It brings the soul into direct contact with GOD - with His thoughts and His words.

And we should read such good books as we find have a reviving and spiritual influence upon our minds.

A good book is like a good companion; it helps us on in our heavenly journey. I can never forget the happy influence exerted upon my mind when first I read Baxter's "*Saint's Rest*." A good book is a quiet, silent friend. It lies there unobtrusively, waiting patiently till we are ready to take it up, and then gives us the glowing thoughts of one who may now be rejoicing among the angels in Heaven. Eternity alone can declare the good that has been done by the press when consecrated to GOD. It is impossible to read such books as Jay's "*Exercises*," Taylor's "*Holy Living*," Owen on "*Spiritual-Mindedness*," Cecil's "*Remains*," and Nevins' "*Practical Thoughts*," without feeling that they draw us nearer to GOD and Heaven.

The memoirs of good people, such as Martyn, Payson, Brainerd, McCheyne, Isabella Graham, Dr. Judson, Carey, and Mary Lundie Duncan, are very refreshing to the soul. We catch to some extent their spirit, share with them in their joys and sorrows, and learn to follow them as they followed CHRIST. While there are many very bad books, so bad that they seem if they had been

### **SCOOPED UP OUT OF THE PIT OF PERDITION,**

let us thank GOD that there are books that in tens of thousands of dwellings are speaking for GOD with a voice that never tires!

Do not neglect to pray for the abiding presence of the HOLY SPIRIT.

If you are to have solemn, heavenly, elevating thoughts, the SPIRIT must impart them. If you are to loath sin, pant and thirst after GOD, and long intensely after holiness of heart, the SPIRIT must implant these feelings in your soul. Every glimmer of holy light, every spark of celestial fire that comes into our darkness and coldness, comes from this divine Agent. Let it be your earnest constant prayer that you may have His presence with you always. In the burning words of Dr. Harris, be urged to this:

"O Christians, is there such a doctrine in our creed as the doctrine of divine influence? Is there such an Agent in the church as the Almighty SPIRIT of GOD? Is He among us expressly to testify of CHRIST - to be the great animating spirit of His missionary church? And is it true that His unlimited aid can be obtained by prayer - that we can be baptized with the HOLY SPIRIT, and with fire? O ye that preach, 'believe the promise of the SPIRIT, and be saved!' Ye that love the Lord, keep not silence! Send up a loud, long, united and unsparing entreaty for His promised aid! This is what we want. And this is all we want. Till this be obtained, all the angelic agency of Heaven will avail us nothing; and when it is obtained, all that agency will be unequal to the celebration of our triumphs."

The young convert must endeavor to cultivate great tenderness of conscience.

Paul said: "**And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.**" Young converts generally have a tender conscience. It may not be as well enlightened as it should be, but it sensitive, and quick to speak for GOD. But if it is trifled with, the whole soul will soon feel the shock. If its voice is frequently stifled, and its admonitions neglected, the soul will soon walk in darkness. "**If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.**" It is a dreadful thing to sin so that a man's own conscience becomes

### **HIS BITTEREST ENEMY.**

A pastor being called to see a dying man, received from his lips the following account:

"Twenty years ago I was a member of a church in W. I was tempted, and quickly yielded to the poisonous cup. I became intoxicated, was called to trial, refused to make a proper acknowledgment, and I suppose my name was stricken from the book. But GOD's eye has watched me ever since in all my crooked ways. I see how reluctant He has been to let me go. He has brought me in a way that I knew not, and He has never given me up. Oh, He has been so good, So merciful, so kind. so long-suffering to me!"

But," said the pastor, "how do you feel when you think how you have treated Him?"

"Oh," said he, in tones of deepest anguish, "that's what hurts me; that's what hurts me."

Yes, the stings of a rebuking conscience are hard to bear, but it is still a more dreadful thing to have

### **A CONSCIENCE THAT HAS CEASED TO REBUKE.**

A good conscience is one that speaks loud enough to be heard, that speaks truth when it is heard, that speaks in time to prevent the commission of evil, and that perseveres in speaking till it is obeyed. James Brainerd Taylor says in his journal that it is a bad sign when we find ourselves looking back to past Christian experiences for evidences of piety. And the professor who not keep a clear conscience is nearly always found s doing. How much better to keep a sweet present consciousness of the divine favor, like the man who I asked if he wished to recover or not, said:

Really, my friend, I do not care which. If I die, I shall be with GOD; if I live, GOD will be with me."

We come now to speak of some hindrances that lie in the pathway to glory.

Uniting in marriage with one who is not a professor of religion, is a great hindrance.

There is no earthly relation so tender, so intimate as that of a husband and wife. If there be a radical difference of tastes and inclinations between them, if one has an indifference, or it may be an aversion, to what the other regards of supreme importance, there is a sad drawback upon the happiness of both. Especially when the subject of religion, the greatest and important that can engage the human mind, is the subject of difference, to get along at all there will be a resort to compromises, and these in religion are always dangerous.

We have enough of hindrances to encounter from our own hearts, from the world, from the circumstances in which we are often placed, without deliberately choosing

### **A LIFE-LONG HINDRANCE**

in our bosom companion.

Suppose a devotedly pious young lady is united to a man who is not a Christian. He may not persecute her for following out her religious convictions, though that is often done, but he will have no sympathy with her in those things that are dearest to her heart.

He will look coldly upon her religious feelings and observances. Perhaps he will even sneer at them; at first, it may be, by way of joke, but afterwards in bitter earnest. To get him to go with her to church, she is tempted to promise to go with him to places that her conscience does not approve, and thus a great wrong is done to her moral nature. No family prayer, no spiritual conversation, no co-operation from him she loves in her religious enterprises, and no good Scriptural hope of spending an eternity with him in Heaven - it is easy to see what a sad drawback upon religious progress all this will be.

It is true she may be the means of her husband's conversion, but alas! it is still oftener the case that he becomes

### **THE CAUSE OF HER APOSTASY**

Every pastor is familiar with the gradual steps of declension. Her class at Sunday school is given up. She is found missing at the prayer meeting. She attends but once on the Lord's-day, and often not even that. Her duties as a tract-distributor are given up. In short, her connection with the church becomes a mere matter of form.

When spoken to upon the subject, her ready excuse is:

You know that my husband is not a professor of religion, and I cannot do as I would wish."

And when it is a pious husband that is joined to an unconverted wife, the influence upon him is equally bad. The power of woman's influence is a favorite topic with the orator, and too much can scarcely be said upon it; but it is a power for evil as well as for good, according as it is exerted.

A good woman is a crown of glory to her husband, and will prove a blessing to him, both for time and eternity; but many a promising young man has been utterly ruined by uniting himself to an unconverted companion, who by her thoughtless, giddy and extravagant conduct has blasted his prospects for both worlds.

If children are given them, the influence of the mother upon them is disastrous. In short, the result is often that the husband yields point after point to the opposition of his wife till there is little left of his religion but the name, if even that is not gone.

What better could we expect from the willful violation of GOD's rule: "**Be not unequally joined together with unbelievers,**" and marry "**only in the Lord.**"

The last hindrance I would mention is becoming too much engaged in our lawful worldly business.

How many has the attainment of wealth here made poor for ever! When Garrick was showing Dr. Johnson round his new house and estate, and through his splendid parlors, he said:

"Ah, David, these are the things that make

### **DEATH-BEDS TERRIBLE!"**

Alas, how many professing Christians I have seen make their business their idol, give their days and their nights up to it, till it seemed as if they had not a thought for anything else! The fruit such reap is misery.

We are told that a young person once expressed to Dr. Franklin his surprise that the possession of great riches should so often be accompanied with anxiety and unhappiness, and he referred to the case of a rich merchant, who did not seem nearly so happy as some of his own clerks. The doctor took an apple from a fruit basket, and gave it to a child in the room who could scarcely grasp it in his little hand. He then gave a second, which filled the other hand. Then choosing a third, of great size and beauty, he presented that also. The child tried to hold the three apples, but failed, and dropping the last on the floor, burst into tears.

"See," said Franklin, "there is a little man in the world with more riches than he can enjoy."

Sometime ago two gentlemen stepped into the same compartment of a railway train just as it was starting from Greenwich to London. One of them was a minister of the Gospel, the other a rich merchant of high standing in the metropolis. The merchant held in his hand a circular which he was reading with great uneasiness, and at last he exclaimed:

"Well, that is enough to drive anyone mad!"

The minister looked at him kindly, and said:

"I trust, sir, nothing serious has occurred to disturb you."

"Serious enough, I assure you," was the reply; and he handed him the paper he had been reading. The minister saw that it was a printed list of the prices of stock, for that day, in the London market. Supposing that he had lost by some stock-jobbing speculation, he handed the paper back to the merchant, remarking that those who meddled with such matters must expect to suffer losses sometimes.

"Oh," said he, "you are mistaken. I have suffered no loss. But the truth is, I purchased some time ago at sixteen. I sold a few days ago at forty-three, and I find from that circular that

### **I MIGHT HAVE GOT FORTY-SIX!**

that's the thing that vexes me so much."

The minister spoke to him affectionately and earnestly about his soul, and upon asking him if he attended any place of worship, he frankly replied:

"I go to church as regularly as to the Stock Exchange; but I can't say that I get much good, for the world rushes on me like a flowing tide, and my mind becomes distracted with thoughts about this and thoughts about that, so that the best sermons are, in a measure, thrown away on me. I have been very much prospered, but the mischief is, the more I make, the more miserable somehow I become.

Why, sir, in business - business - business is the only essence of my existence. It seems absolutely necessary to my life, and yet alas! strange to say, it is proving the only bane of it. I am becoming its veriest drudge and its most abject slave, and how I am to rid myself of it is more than I can tell."

Poor man! while he thus poured out his feelings he became very much affected, and wept bitterly.

As my pastoral duties have lain mostly in cities, I have seen a great deal of this kind of thing - men

### **KILLING THEMSELVES BY INCHES,**

body and soul, in the service of mammon. Of course this is done under some pious pretence, such as wanting only to obtain a competence, to provide for their households, and to obtain means to do good. But in almost every case of this extreme devotion to business, it is the love of gain that is the propelling motive.

As some one has aptly said: "Many men want wealth - not a competence alone, but a five-story competence: and religion they would like as a sort of lightning-rod to their houses, to ward off by-and-by the bolts of divine wrath."

This grasping spirit of avarice and speculation is like the morbid appetite of the drunkard, strengthened and increased by indulgence. All the warm, generous impulses of the soul become repressed and die out. The heart becomes contracted by selfishness. The eyes have nothing looking out of them but greedy cunning. A good bargain has far more attractions than a good action. The noble, generous, benevolent souls around us, that are blessing the world with deeds of love, are not those who are very rich. A wide heart and a wide estate seldom go together.

Indeed, the man who does his duty to his GOD and to his fellow-men can never be very rich. A man can only become very rich either by defrauding others, or by defrauding himself. Many a man who, in his business transactions, has been strictly honest to those with whom he traded, has been dishonest to himself; and when he dies, it may be said of him, as Wesley said of one:

"He died wickedly rich."

My reader, seek the true riches - be rich towards GOD! Your fields may be fruitful, but your heart barren. Your shop may be prospering, but your soul bankrupt. You may have a hospitable home in which you entertain your friends in a princely style, while you shut the door of your heart in your Saviour's face.

Lay up treasure in Heaven, where funds never depreciate, and where gold never changes its value. With your weary, worn, troubled heart, restless as the heaving moaning sea, cling to JESUS for sweet repose! Weary of the world, with its wasting cares, and toils, and unsatisfying pleasures - weary of yourself, with your broken vows, and empty resolutions, and purposeless determinations, cling by faith to Him who has promised to give rest to your soul!

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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