



- *Selected chapters from* -

JOHN  
PLOUGHMAN'S  
*Talk*

CHARLES H. SPURGEON (1834-1892)

# JOHN PLOUGHMAN'S TALK

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## Preface

In *John Ploughman's Talk*, I have written for ploughmen<sup>1</sup> and common people. Hence, refined taste and dainty words have been discarded for strong proverbial expressions and homely phrases. I have aimed my blows at the vices of the many, and tried to instill those moral virtues without which men are degraded. Much that needs to be said to the toiling masses would not well suit the pulpit and the Sabbath. These lowly pages may teach thrift and industry all the days of the week in the cottage and the workshop. If some learn these lessons, I shall not repent the adoption of a rustic style.

"Ploughman" is a name I may justly claim. Every minister has put his hand to the plough, and it is his business to break up the fallow ground (Hos 10:12). That I have written in a semi-humorous vein needs no apology, since thereby sound moral teaching has gained a hearing from at least 300,000 persons. There is no particular virtue in being seriously unreadable...

—C. H. Spurgeon

Very little of this paper is to be set down to the account of John Ploughman; for our minister,<sup>2</sup> as I may say, found the horses and held the plough handles; and the ploughman only put in a smack of the whip every now and then, just to keep folks awake. "Two heads are better than one," said the woman when she took her dog with her to market. Begging his pardon, our minister is the woman, and the only sensible head in the whole affair. He is a man who is used to giving his people many things of a very different sort from anything that a ploughman is likely to turn out of his wallet; but I have, at his request, dropped in a few homely proverbs into his thoughts—as he says, "by way of salt," which is his very kind way of putting it. I only hope I have not spoiled his writing with my rough expressions. If he thinks well of it, I should like a few more of his pieces to tack my sayings to; and the public shall always be honestly told whether the remarks are to be considered as altogether John Ploughman's talk, or as the writings of two characters rolled into one.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **ploughmen** – men who plow fields for a living; farm workers; common laborers.

<sup>2</sup> **our minister** – Spurgeon is writing under the assumed character of John Ploughman, an uneducated laborer with lots of common sense. As John Ploughman, he occasionally refers to "our minister," meaning the minister of John Ploughman's church—a veiled reference to Spurgeon himself.

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph originally appeared in chapter 5, "Thoughts about Thought."

# JOHN PLOUGHMAN'S TALK

*Or, Plain Advice for Plain People*

## 1. On Good Nature and Firmness

*Oh, be not all sugar, or the world will suck you down;  
but do not be all vinegar, or the world will spit you out.*

### ***All Sorts***

There is a medium in all things; only blockheads go to extremes. We need not be all rock or all sand, all iron or all wax. We should neither seek favor from everybody like silly lapdogs, nor fly at all persons like surly mastiffs.<sup>4</sup> Blacks and whites go together to make up a world, and hence on the point of temper we have all sorts of people to deal with. Some are as easy as an old shoe, but they are hardly ever worth more than the other one of the pair. Others take fire as fast as tinder at the smallest offence and are as dangerous as gunpowder...

### ***Friends***

There are old foxes whose mouths are always watering for young geese; and if they can deceive them to do just what they wish, they soon make their market out of them. What a jolly good fellow you will be called if you will make yourself a hack<sup>5</sup> for your friends, and what a Benjamin's mess<sup>6</sup> will they soon bring you into! Out of that mess you will have to get all alone; for your old friends will be sure to say to you, "Good-bye, basket; I've carried all my apples"; or they will give you their good wishes and nothing more—and you will find out that fair words won't feed a cat, nor butter your bread, nor fill your pocket. Those who make so very much of you either mean to cheat you or else are in need of you. When they have sucked the orange, they will throw the peel away.

Be wise, then, and look before you leap, lest a friend's advice should do you more mischief than an enemy's slander. "The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going" (Pro 14:15). Go with your neighbor as far as good conscience will go with you, but part company where the shoe of conscience begins to pinch your foot. Begin with your friend as you mean to go on, and let him know very early that you are not a man made of putty, but one who has a judgment of his own and means to use it. Pull up the moment you find you are out of the road, and take the nearest way

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<sup>4</sup> **surly mastiffs** – very large guard dogs that are difficult to deal with.

<sup>5</sup> **hack** – horse kept for common hire.

<sup>6</sup> **Benjamin's mess** – Benjamin was given a portion five times the size of his brothers (Gen 43:34). Spurgeon is using a play on words. Some "friends" will promise much but instead will leave us in a mess of trouble.

back at once. The way to avoid great faults is to beware of small ones; therefore pull up in time if you would not be dragged into the ditch by your friend. Better offend your acquaintance than lose your character and hazard your soul.

Don't be ashamed to walk down "Turn-again Lane." Never mind being called a turn-coat when you turn from bad courses. Better to turn in time than to burn in eternity. Do not be persuaded to ruin yourself; it is buying gold too dear to throw oneself away to please our company. Put your foot down where you mean to stand, and let no man move you from the right. Learn to say, "No," and it will be of more use to you than to be able to read Latin.

A friend to everybody is often a friend to nobody; or else in his simplicity, he robs his family to help strangers, and becomes brother to a beggar. There is wisdom in generosity, as in everything else, and some had need go to school to learn it. A kindhearted soul may be very cruel to his own children while he takes the bread out of their mouths to give to those who call him a generous fellow but laugh at his folly. Very often, "he that his money lends loses both his gold and his friends," and he who is surety<sup>7</sup> is never sure. Take John Ploughman's advice, and never be security for more than you are quite willing to lose. Remember, the Word of God says, "He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretiship is sure" (Pro 11:15).

When we are injured, we are bound as Christians to bear it without malice; but we are not to pretend that we do not feel it, for this will but encourage our enemies to kick us again. He who is cheated twice by the same man is half as bad as the rogue, and it is very much so in other injuries. Unless we claim our rights, we are ourselves to blame if we do not get them. Paul was willing to bear stripes for his Master's sake, but he did not forget to tell the magistrates that he was a Roman. And when those gentlemen wished to put him out of prison privately, he said, "Nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out" (Act 16:37). A Christian is the gentlest of men; but, then, he is a *man*.

### ***Obstinance***

A good many people don't need to be told this, for they are up in a moment if they think anybody is likely to ill-treat them. Long before they know whether it is a thief in the farmyard or the old mare got loose, they up with the window and fire off the old shotgun. Dangerous neighbors these; a man might as well make a seat out of a bull's forehead, as expect to find comfort in their neighborhood. "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go" (Pro 22:24). "He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly" (Pro 14:29). "Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him" (Pro 29:20).

In my day I have seen a few downright obstinate men, whom neither sense nor reason could alter...Getting spots out of leopards is nothing at all compared with trying to lead a downright obstinate man. Right or wrong, you might as easily make a hill walk to London as turn him when his mind is made up. When a man is right, this sticking to his

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<sup>7</sup> **surety** – one who undertakes responsibility to pay the debt of another.

text is a grand thing. Our minister says, “It is the stuff that martyrs are made of”; but when an ignorant, wrongheaded fellow gets this hard grit into him, he makes martyrs of those who have to put up with him.

Old Master Pighead swore he would drive a nail into an oak board with his fist, and so lamed his hand for life. He could not sell his corn at his own price, and so he let the rats eat up the stacks. You cannot ride by his fields without noticing his obstinacy; for he vows he “won’t have none of these ’ere new-fangled notions,” and so he grows the worst crops in the parish. Worst of all, his daughter went among the Methodists and, in a towering rage, he turned her out of doors; and though I believe he is very sorry for it, he will not yield an inch, but stands to it. He will never speak to her so long as he lives, and meanwhile the dear girl is dying through his unkindness...He who never changes never mends; he who never yields never conquers.

### ***Children***

With children you must mix gentleness with firmness. They must not always have their own way, but they must not always be thwarted. Give to a pig when it grunts and to a child when it cries, and you will have a fine pig and a spoiled child. A man who is learning to play on a trumpet, and a petted child, are two very disagreeable companions—even as next door neighbors. Unless we look well to it, our children will be a nuisance to others and a torment to ourselves.<sup>8</sup> “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Pro 29:15). If we never have headaches through rebuking our little children, we shall have plenty of heartaches when they grow up.

Strict truthfulness must rule all our dealings with the young; our yea must be yea, and our nay, nay (Mat 5:37), and that to the letter. Never promise a child and then fail to perform, whether you promise him a blessing or a beating. Be obeyed at all costs. Disobedient children are unhappy children; for their own sakes, make them mind you. If you yield up your authority once, you will hardly ever get it again; for he who says “A” must say “B,” and so on. We must not provoke our children to anger lest they be discouraged; but we must rule our household in the fear of the Lord, and in so doing may expect a blessing...

## **2. On Patience**

*Blow the wind ever so fast, it will lower at last.*

### ***Patience***

Patience is better than wisdom; an ounce of patience is worth a pound of brains. All men praise patience, but few enough can practice it. It is a medicine that is good for all diseases; and therefore every old woman recommends it, but it is not every garden that

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<sup>8</sup> See *The Duties of Parents* by J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) and Free Grace Broadcaster 204, *Biblical Parenthood*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

grows the herbs to make it with. When one's flesh and bones are full of aches and pains, it is as natural for us to murmur as for a horse to shake his head when the flies tease him, or a wheel to rattle when a spoke is loose—but nature should not be the rule with Christians, or what is their religion worth? If a soldier fights no better than a ploughboy, off with his red coat. We expect more fruit from an apple-tree than from a thorn, and we have a right to do so. The disciples of a patient Savior<sup>9</sup> should be patient themselves. “Grin and bear it” is the old-fashioned advice, but “sing and bear it” is a great deal better. After all, we get very few cuts of the whip, considering what bad cattle we are; and when we do smart a little, it is soon over. Pain past is pleasure, and experience comes by it. We ought not to be afraid of going down into Egypt when we know we shall come out of it with jewels of silver and gold (Exo 12:35-36).

Impatient people water their miseries and destroy their comforts. Sorrows are visitors that come without invitation, but complaining minds send a wagon to bring their troubles home in. Many people are born crying, live complaining, and die disappointed. They chew the bitter pill, which they would not even know to be bitter if they had the sense to swallow it whole in a cup of patience and water. They think every other man's burden to be light, and their own feathers to be heavy as lead. They are hardly done by in their own opinion; no one's toes are so often trodden on by the black ox as theirs. The snow falls thickest round their door, and the hail rattles hardest on their windows.

### ***Contentment***

Yet, if the truth were known, it is their imagination rather than their fate that makes things go so hard with them. Many would be well off if they could but think so. A little sprig of the herb called “contentment,”<sup>10</sup> put into the poorest soup, will make it taste as rich as the Lord Mayor's turtle. John Ploughman grows the plant in his garden, but the late hard winter nipped it terribly, so that he cannot afford to give his neighbors a slip of it. They had better follow Matthew 25:9 and go to those who sell, and buy for themselves. Grace is a good soil to grow it in, but it needs watering from the fountain of mercy.

To be poor is not always pleasant, but worse things than that happen at sea. Small shoes are apt to pinch, but not if you have a small foot. If we have little means, it will be well to have little desires. Poverty is no shame, but being discontented with it is. In some things the poor are better off than the rich; for if a poor man has to seek meat for his stomach, he is more likely to get what he is after than the rich man who seeks a stomach for his meat. A poor man's table is soon spread, and his labor spares his buying sauce.<sup>11</sup> The best doctors are Dr. Diet, Dr. Quiet, and Dr. Merryman; and many a godly ploughman has all these gentlemen to wait upon him. Plenty makes dainty, but hunger finds no fault with the cook. Hard work brings health, and an ounce of health is worth a sack of

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<sup>9</sup> **Savior** – the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior from sin (Joh 4:14).

<sup>10</sup> See *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* by Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646), abridged version available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>11</sup> A poor man does not have much food, and its preparation goes quickly. When it is eaten soon after preparing, it is fresh and tender. But when there is delay, it becomes dry and hard, and needs a sauce to make it edible.



diamonds. It is not how much we have, but how much we enjoy that makes happiness. There is more sweet in a spoonful of sugar than in a cask of vinegar. It is not the quantity of our goods, but the blessing of God on what we have that makes us truly rich...A dinner of herbs, with peace, is better than a stalled ox and contention therewith. “Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith” (Pro 15:16-17). A little wood will heat my little oven. Why, then, should I murmur because all the woods are not mine?

### **Providence**

When troubles come, it is of no use to fly in the face of God by hard thoughts of providence.<sup>12</sup> That is kicking against the pricks and hurting your feet. The trees bow in the wind, and so must we. Every time the sheep bleats, it loses a mouthful, and every time we complain we miss a blessing. Grumbling is a bad trade and yields no profit, but patience has a golden hand. Our evils will soon be over. After rain comes clear shining; black crows have wings. Every winter turns to spring; every night breaks into morning.

*Blow the wind ever so fast, It will lower at last.*

If one door should be shut, God will open another; if the peas do not yield well, the beans may. If one hen leaves her eggs, another will bring out all her brood. There’s a bright side to all things and a good God everywhere. Somewhere or other in the worst flood of trouble, there always is a dry spot for contentment to get its foot on—and if there were not, it would learn to swim.

Friends, let us take to a basic diet of patience, bread, and water—rather than catch the miserables,<sup>13</sup> and give others the disease by wickedly finding fault with God. The best remedy for affliction is submitting to providence. What can’t be cured must be endured. If we cannot get bacon, let us bless God that there are still some cabbages in the garden. “Must”<sup>14</sup> is a hard nut to crack, but it has a sweet kernel. “All things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom 8:28). Whatever falls from the skies is, sooner or later, good for the land. Whatever comes to us from God is worth having, even though it be a rod.<sup>15</sup> We cannot by nature like trouble, any more than a mouse can fall in love with a cat; and yet Paul by grace came to glory in tribulations also.<sup>16</sup> Losses and crosses are heavy to bear; but when our hearts are right with God, it is wonderful how easy the yoke

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<sup>12</sup> **providence** – “What are God’s works of providence? A: God’s works of providence are His most holy (Psa 145:17), wise (Isa 28:29), and powerful (Heb 1:3) preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions (Psa 103:19; Mat 10:29).” (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 11; see also *Providence* by Charles Spurgeon; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY)

<sup>13</sup> **miserables** – state in which a person feels down in spirit, resulting in complaining and pessimism such that he cannot be satisfied, making everyone around him miserable also.

<sup>14</sup> **“Must”** – being required to endure a particular situation.

<sup>15</sup> See *The Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod* by Thomas Brooks (1608-1680), available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>16</sup> The apostle Paul suffered much affliction, but understood that it was used of God to grow him in faith (Rom 5:3-5).

becomes. We must needs go to glory by the way of Weeping Cross;<sup>17</sup> and as we were never promised that we should ride to heaven in a feather bed, we must not be disappointed when we see the road to be rough, as our fathers found it before us. All's well that ends well; and, therefore, let us plough the heaviest soil with our eye on the sheaves of harvest, and learn to sing at our labor while others murmur.

### 3. On Gossips

*Don't be the devil's bellows to blow up the fire of strife.*

What a pity that there is not a tax upon words! What an income the queen would get from it! But, alas, talking pays no toll! And if lies paid double, the government might pay off the national debt—but who could collect the money? Common fame is a common liar. Hearsay is half lies; a tale never loses in the telling. As a snowball grows by rolling, so does a story. They who talk much lie much. If men only said what was true, what a peaceable world we should see! Silence seldom makes mischief, but talking is a plague to the parish. Silence is wisdom; and by this rule, wise men and wise women are scarce. Still waters are the deepest, but the shallowest brooks brawl the most—this shows how plentiful fools must be. An open mouth shows an empty head. If the chest had gold or silver in it, it would not always stand wide open. Talking comes by nature, but it needs a good deal of training to learn to be quiet—yet, regard for truth should put a bit into every honest man's mouth, and a bridle upon every good woman's tongue.

If we must talk, at least let us be free from slander and let us not blister our tongues with backbiting. Slander may be sport to talebearers, but it is death to those whom they abuse. We can commit murder with the tongue<sup>18</sup> as well as with the hand. The worst evil you can do a man is to injure his character—as the Quaker said to his dog, “I'll not beat thee, nor abuse thee, but I'll give thee an ill name.” All are not thieves that dogs bark at, but they are generally treated as if they were; for the world, for the most part, believes that “where there is smoke there is fire,” and what everybody says must be true. Let us then be careful that we do not hurt our neighbor in so tender a point as his character; for it is hard to get dirt off if it is once thrown on; and, when a man is once in people's bad books, he is hardly ever quite out of them. If we would be sure not to speak amiss, it might be as well to speak as little as possible; for if all men's sins were divided into two bundles, half of them would be sins of the tongue. “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body” (Jam 3:2).

Gossips of both genders: give up the shameful trade of tale bearing! Don't be the devil's bellows any longer to blow up the fire of strife. Leave off setting people by the ears. If you do not cut a bit off your tongues, at least season them with the salt of grace (Col

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<sup>17</sup> **Weeping Cross** – village in Berkswich parish, Staffordshire, England; used here to indicate that our path to heaven is through daily bearing the cross of suffering (Luk 9:23).

<sup>18</sup> See Free Grace Broadcaster 152, *The Evil Tongue*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

4:6). Praise God more and blame neighbors less. Any goose can cackle; any fly can find out a sore place. Any empty barrel can give forth sound; any brier can tear a man's flesh. No flies will go down your throat if you keep your mouth shut—and no evil speaking will come up. Think much, but say little. Be quick at work and slow at talk; and above all, ask the great Lord to set a watch over your lips (Psa 141:3).

## 4. On Keeping One's Eyes Open

*There are many baits for fishes.*

To get through this world a man must look about him, and even sleep with one eye open; for there are many baits for fishes, many nets for birds, and many traps for men. While foxes are so common, we must not be geese. There is a very great difference in this matter among people of my acquaintance. Many see more with one eye than others with two, but many have fine eyes and cannot see a speck. All heads are not sense-boxes. Some are so cunning that they suspect everybody, and so live all their lives in miserable fear of their neighbors. Others are so simple that every knave takes them in and makes his penny of them. One man tries to see through a brick wall and hurts his eyes, while another finds a hole in it and sees as far as he pleases. Some work at the mouth of a furnace and are never scorched, and others burn their hands at the fire when they only mean to warm them. Now, it is true that no one can give experience to another and we must all pick up wit for ourselves; yet I shall venture to give some of the homely cautions that have served my turn, and perhaps they may be of use to others as they have been to me.

Nobody is more like an honest man than a thorough rogue. When you see a man with a great deal of religion displayed in his shop window, you may depend upon it: he keeps a very small stock of it within. Do not choose your friend by his looks: handsome shoes often pinch the feet...Don't believe in the man who talks most, for mewing cats are very seldom good mousers. By no means put yourself in another person's power. If you put your thumb between two grinders, they are very apt to bite. Drink nothing without seeing it; sign nothing without reading it, and make sure that it means no more than it says. Don't go to law unless you have nothing to lose: lawyer's houses are built on fools' heads. In any business, never wade into water where you cannot see the bottom. Put no dependence upon the label of a bag...See the sack opened before you buy what is in it, for he who trades in the dark asks to be cheated. Keep clear of the man who does not value his own character. Beware of everyone who swears: he who would blaspheme his Maker would make no bones of lying or stealing. Beware of no man more than of yourself. We carry our worst enemies within us.

When a new opinion or doctrine comes before you, do not bite till you know whether it is bread or a stone; and do not be sure that the gingerbread is good because of the gilt on it...Don't cry "fried fish" till they are caught in the net—there's always time enough

to boast; wait a little longer. Don't throw away dirty water till you have got clean. Keep on at scraping the roads till you can get better work; for the poorest pay is better than none, and the humblest office is better than being out of employment. Always give up the road to bulls and madmen; and never fight with a coalheaver or contend with a base character, for they will be sure to blacken you.

*Neither trust nor contend, Nor lay wagers, nor lend.  
And you may depend: You'll have peace to your end.*

I cannot say quite so much as that old rhyme does; for there's more than that needed to give peace, but certainly it will help to it. Never ride a broken-kneed horse: the trader who has once been a fraudulent bankrupt is not the man for you to deal with. A rickety chair is a dangerous seat. Be shy of people who are over polite, and don't be too fast with those who are forward and rough. When you suspect a design in anything, be on your guard—set the trap as soon as you smell a rat; but, mind you, don't catch your own fingers in it. Have very little to do with a boaster, for his beer is all froth—and though he brags that all his goods, and even his copper kettles, are gold and silver, you will soon find out that a boaster and a liar are first cousins. Commit all your secrets to no man: trust in God with all your heart, but let your confidence in friends be weighed in the balances of prudence—seeing that men are but men, and all men are frail. Trust not great weights to slender threads.

Yet be not evermore suspicious, for suspicion is a cowardly virtue at best. Men are not angels, remember that; but they are not devils, and it is too bad to think them so. One thing be sure of: never believe in any priest of any religion; for before a man could be bad enough to pretend to be a priest, he must have hardened his heart and blinded his conscience to the most horrible degree. Our governors imprison gypsies for telling fortunes, and yet they give fat livings to those vagabonds who deceive the people in much weightier things. "Bad company," said the thief, as he went to the gallows between the hangman and a priest; a very honest speech and a very true word, though spoken in jest. It is the ignorance of fools that keeps the pot boiling for priests—may God clean this land from the plague of their presence, and make men wise enough to see through their crafty devices.

Lastly, my advice to all is, remember: good wisdom is that which will turn out to be wise in the end. Seek it, friends, and seek it at the hands of the wisest of all teachers, the Lord Jesus. Trust Him, and He will never fail you. Be guided by His Word, and it will never mislead you. Pray in His name, and your requests shall be granted. Remember, he that leans on man will find him a broken reed, but he who builds on Christ has a firm foundation. You may follow Jesus with your eyes shut if you please, but when others would guide you, keep all your eyes open—even if you have a dozen, and all of them as powerful as telescopes.

## 5. Thoughts about Thought

*Two heads are better than one.*

There are not so many hours in a year as there may be thoughts<sup>19</sup> in an hour. Thoughts fly in flocks like starlings and swarm like bees. Like the dry leaves in autumn, there is no counting them; and like links in a chain, one draws on another. What a restless being man is! His thoughts dance up and down like gnats in a summer's evening. Like a clock full of wheels, with the pendulum in full swing, his mind moves as fast as time flies. This makes thinking such an important business. Many littles make a lot, and so many light thoughts make a great weight of sin. A grain of sand is light enough, but Solomon tells us that a heap of sand is heavy (Pro 27:3). Where there are so many children, the mother had need look well after them. We ought to mind our thoughts, for if they turn to be our enemies, they will be too many for us and will drag us down to ruin. Thoughts from heaven, like birds in spring, will fill our souls with music; but thoughts of evil will sting us like vipers.

There is a notion abroad that thought is free; but I remember reading that, although thoughts are toll-free, they are not hell-free—and that saying quite agrees with the good old Book. We cannot be summoned before an earthly court for thinking; but, depend upon it, we shall have to be tried for it at the great Day of Judgment. Evil thoughts are the marrow of sin, the malt that sin is brewed from, the tinder that catches the sparks of the devil's temptations, the churn in which the milk of imagination is churned into purpose and plan, the nest in which all evil birds lay their eggs. Be certain, then, that as sure as fire burns brushwood as well as logs, God will punish thoughts of sin as well as deeds of sin.

Let no one suppose that thoughts are not known to the Lord; for He has a window into the closest closet of the soul, a window to which there are no shutters. As we watch bees in a glass hive, so does the eye of the Lord see us. The Bible says, "Hell and destruction are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?" (Pro 15:11). Man is all outside to God. With heaven there are no secrets. That which is done in the private chamber of the heart is as public as the streets before the all-seeing eye.

But some will say that they cannot help having bad thoughts. That may be, but the question is: do they hate them or not? We cannot keep thieves from looking in at our windows, but if we open our doors to them and receive them joyfully, we are as bad as they. We cannot help the birds flying over our heads, but we may keep them from building their nests in our hair. Vain thoughts will knock at the door, but we must not open to them. Though sinful thoughts rise, they must not reign. He who turns a morsel over and over in his mouth does so because he likes the flavor; and he who meditates upon evil loves it and is ripe to commit it.

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<sup>19</sup> See *The Vanity of Thoughts* by Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680); available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Think of the devil, and he will appear. Turn your thoughts towards sin, and your hands will soon follow. Snails leave their slime behind them, and so do vain thoughts. An arrow may fly through the air and leave no trace, but an ill thought always leaves a trail like a serpent. Where there is much traffic of bad thinking, there will be much mire and dirt. Every wave of wicked thought adds something to the corruption that rots upon the shore of life. It is dreadful to think that a vile imagination, once indulged, gets the key of our minds and can get in again very easily, whether we will or no, and can so return as to bring seven other spirits with it more wicked than itself (Mat 12:45)—and what may follow, no one knows. Nurse sin on the knees of thought and it will grow into a giant. Dip a tow<sup>20</sup> in naphtha,<sup>21</sup> and how it will blaze when fire gets to it! Lay a man asoak in depraved thought, and he is ready to flame up into open sin as soon as ever opportunity occurs.

This shows us the wisdom of watching, every day, the thoughts and imaginations of our hearts. Good thoughts are blessed guests, and should be heartily welcomed, well fed, and much sought after. Like rose leaves, they give out a sweet smell if laid up in the jar of memory. They cannot be too much cultivated; they are a crop that enriches the soil. As the hen broods her chickens under her wings, so should we cherish all holy thoughts. As the poor man's ewe lamb ate of his own bread and lay in his bosom (2Sa 12:3), even so should godly meditation be very dear to us. Holy thoughts breed holy words and holy actions, and are hopeful evidences of a renewed heart. Who would not have them? To keep chaff out of a bushel, one sure plan is to fill it full of wheat; and to keep out vain thoughts, it is wise and prudent to have the mind stored with choice subjects for meditation. These are easy to find; we should never be without them. May we all be able to say with David, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul" (Psa 94:19).

## 6. Things Not Worth Trying

*There's no making apples of plums.*

### ***Foolish***

That is a wise old saying, "Spend not all you have, believe not all you hear, tell not all you know, and do not all you can." There is so much work to be done which needs our hands, that it is a pity to waste a grain of our strength. When the game is not worth the candle, drop it at once. It is wasting time to look for milk in a gate-post, or blood in a turnip, or sense in a fool. Never ask a covetous man for money till you have boiled a flint soft. Don't sue a debtor who has not a penny to bless himself with—you will only be throwing good money after bad, which is like losing your ferret without getting a rabbit. Never offer a looking-glass to a blind man. If a man is so proud that he will not see his

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<sup>20</sup> **tow** – the coarse and broken part of flax or hemp prepared for spinning.

<sup>21</sup> **naphtha** – a flammable liquid made from distilling petroleum.



faults, he will only quarrel with you for pointing them out to him. It is of no use to hold a lantern to a mole, or to talk of heaven to a man who cares for nothing but his dirty money. There's a time for everything, and it is a silly thing to preach to drunken men: it is casting pearls before swine (Mat 7:6)—get them sober, and then talk to them soberly. If you lecture them while they are drunk, you act as if you were drunk yourself.

Do not put a cat on a coach box, or men in places for which they are not fitted. There's no making apples of plums. Little minds will still be little, even if you make them deacons or churchwardens. It's a pity to turn a monkey into a minister, or a maid-servant into a mistress. Many preachers are good tailors spoiled, and excellent shoemakers turned out of their proper calling. When God means a creature to fly, He gives it wings; and when He intends men to preach, He gives them abilities. It is a pity to push a man into the war if he cannot fight. Better discourage a man's climbing than help him to break his neck. Silk purses are not to be made out of sows' ears; and pigs will never play well on the flute, teach them as long as you like.

### ***Greedy***

It is not wise to aim at impossibilities; it is a waste of powder to fire at the man in the moon. Making building planks out of sawdust is a very sensible scheme compared with what some of my London friends have been aiming at; for they have been trying to get money by buying shares in companies: they might quite as soon catch the wind in a net, or carry water in a sieve. Bubbles are fine fun for boys, but bubble companies are sharp-edged tools that none should play with. If my friend has money that he can afford to lose, there is still no reason why he should hand it over to a set of knaves. If I wanted to get rid of my leg, I should not get a shark to snap it off for me. Give your money to fools sooner than let rogues con you out of it.

### ***Unnecessary***

It is never worthwhile to do unnecessary things. Never grease a fat sow, or praise a proud man. Don't make clothes for fishes, or coverings for altars. Don't paint lilies or garnish the gospel. Never bind up a man's head before it is broken, or comfort a conscience that makes no confession. Never hold up a candle to show the sun, or try to prove a thing that nobody doubts. I would advise no one to attempt a thing that will cost more than it is worth. You may sweeten a dunghill with lavender water, and a bad living man may keep up a good character by an outward show of religion—but it will turn out a losing business in the long run. If our nation were sensible, it would sweep out a good many expensive but useless people, who eat the malt that lies in the house that Jack built; they live on the national estate, but do it little service. To pay a man a pound for earning a penny is a good deal wiser than keeping bishops who meet together by the score and consult about the best way of doing nothing. If my master's old dog was as sleepy as the bishops are, he would get shot or drowned, for he wouldn't be worth the amount of the dog-tax. However, their time of reckoning is on the way as sure as Christmas is coming.

Long ago my experience taught me not to dispute with anybody about tastes and whims; one might as well argue about what you can see in the fire. It is of no use ploughing the air or trying to convince a man against his will in matters of no consequence. It is useless to try to end a quarrel by getting angry over it; it is much the same as pouring oil on a fire to quench it, and blowing coals with the bellows to put them out. Some people like arguments; I don't envy their choice. I'd rather walk ten miles to get out of a dispute than half-a-mile to get into one. I have often been told to be bold and take the bull by the horns; but, as I rather think that the amusement is more pleasant than profitable, I shall leave it to those who are so cracked already that an ugly poke with a horn would not damage their skulls. Solomon says, "Leave off contention, before it be meddled with" (Pro 17:14), which is much the same as if he had said, "Leave off before you begin." When you see a mad dog, don't argue with him unless you are sure of your logic. Better get out of his way, and if anybody calls you a coward, you need not call him a fool—everybody knows that. Meddling in quarrels never answers; let hornets' nests alone, and don't pull down old houses over your own head. Meddlers are sure to hurt their own characters. If you scrub other people's pigs, you will soon need scrubbing yourself. It is the height of folly to interfere between a man and his wife, for they will be sure to leave off fighting each other and turn their whole strength upon you—and serve you right too. If you will put your spoon into other people's broth, and it scalds you, who is to blame but yourself?...

## 7. Debt

*Without debt, without care; out of debt, out of danger.*

### ***My Experience***

When I was a very small boy in pinafores<sup>22</sup> and went to a woman's school, it so happened that I wanted a stick of slate pencil and had no money to buy it with. I was afraid of being scolded for losing my pencils so often, for I was a real careless little fellow, and so did not dare to ask at home; what then was John to do? There was a little shop in the place, where nuts, tops, cakes, and balls were sold by old Mrs. Dearson, and sometimes I had seen boys and girls get trusted by the old lady. I argued with myself that Christmas was coming, and that somebody or other would be sure to give me a penny then, and perhaps even a whole silver sixpence. I would, therefore, go into debt for a stick of slate pencil, and be sure to pay at Christmas. I did not feel easy about it, but still I screwed my courage up and went into the shop. One farthing<sup>23</sup> was the amount, and as I had never owed anything before, and my credit was good, the pencil was handed over by the kind dame—and I was in debt.

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<sup>22</sup> **pinafores** – sleeveless aprons worn by children, so called because they were originally pinned to a dress front.

<sup>23</sup> **farthing** – former coin used in Great Britain worth one-fourth of a penny.

It did not please me much, and I felt as if I had done wrong, but I little knew how soon I should smart for it. How my father came to hear of this little stroke of business I never knew, but some little bird or other whistled it to him, and he was very soon down upon me in right earnest. God bless him for it; he was a sensible man, and did not spoil children as others. He did not intend to bring up his children to speculate and play at what big rogues call “financing,” and therefore he knocked my getting into debt on the head at once, and no mistake. He gave me a very powerful lecture about getting into debt, and how like it was to stealing, and upon the way in which people were ruined by it; and how a boy who would owe a farthing might one day owe a hundred pounds, get into prison, and bring his family into disgrace. It was a lecture indeed; I think I can hear it now and can feel my ears tingling at the recollection of it. Then I was marched off to the shop like a deserter marched into barracks, crying bitterly all down the street and feeling dreadfully ashamed because I thought everybody knew I was in debt. The farthing was paid amid many solemn warnings, and the poor debtor was set free, like a bird let out of a cage.

How sweet it felt to be out of debt! How did my little heart vow and declare that nothing should ever tempt me into debt again! It was a fine lesson, and I have never forgotten it. If all boys were taught with the same doctrine when they were young, it would be as good as a fortune to them, and save them wagonloads of trouble in after life. God bless my father, say I, and send a breed of such fathers into old England to save her from being eaten up with villainy, for what with companies and schemes and paper money,<sup>24</sup> the nation is getting to be as rotten as touchwood.<sup>25</sup>

Ever since that early sickening, I have hated debt as Luther<sup>26</sup> hated the pope; and if I say some fierce things about it, you must not wonder. To keep debt, dirt, and the devil out of my cottage has been my greatest wish ever since I set up housekeeping; and although the last of the three has sometimes got in by the door or the window—for the old serpent will wriggle through the smallest crack—yet, thanks to a good wife, hard work, honesty, and scrubbing brushes, the two others have not crossed the threshold. Debt is so degrading that, if I owed a man a penny, I would walk twenty miles in the depth of winter to pay him, sooner than feel that I was under an obligation. I should be as comfortable with peas in my shoes, or a hedgehog in my bed, or a snake up my back, as with bills hanging over my head at the grocer’s, the baker’s, and the tailor’s. Poverty is hard, but debt is horrible. A man might as well have a smoky house and a scolding wife, which are said to be the two worst evils of our life.

We may be poor, and yet respectable, which John Ploughman and wife hope they are and will be; but a man in debt cannot even respect himself, and he is sure to be talked about by the neighbors—and that talk will not be much to his credit. Some persons ap-

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<sup>24</sup> **paper money** – as opposed to gold coins: the paper itself has no real value.

<sup>25</sup> **touchwood** – wood converted by certain fungi into an easily ignitable substance; used as tinder.

<sup>26</sup> **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) – German Roman Catholic monk, theologian, university professor, and church reformer, whose writings and preaching inspired the Protestant Reformation and changed the course of Western civilization.

pear to like to be owing money; but I would as soon be a cat up a chimney with the fire alight, or a fox with the hounds at my heels, or a hedgehog on a pitchfork, or a mouse under an owl's claw. An honest man thinks a purse full of other people's money to be worse than an empty one. He cannot bear to eat other people's cheese, wear other people's shirts, and walk about in other people's shoes; neither will he be easy while his wife is decked out in the milliner's bonnets and wears the draper's flannels...Borrowers will surely come to poverty, a poverty of the bitterest sort because there is shame in it.

### ***Extravagance***

Living beyond their incomes is the ruin of many of my neighbors. They can hardly afford to keep a rabbit, but they [think they] must drive a pony and chaise. I am afraid extravagance is the common disease of the times, and many professing Christians have caught it to their shame and sorrow. Good cotton or woven gowns are not good enough nowadays; girls must have silks and satins, and then there's a bill at the dressmaker's as long as a winter's night—and quite as dismal. Show, style, and smartness run away with a man's means, keep the family poor, and the father's nose down on the grindstone. Frogs try to look as big as bulls and burst themselves. A pound a week [pretends to be as] five hundred a year, and comes to the county court. Men burn the candle at both ends, and then say they are very unfortunate—why don't they put the saddle on the right horse and say they are extravagant?

Economy is half the battle in life; it is not so hard to earn money as to spend it well. Hundreds would never have known scarcity if they had not first known waste. If all poor men's wives knew how to cook, how far a little might go!...Dear me! Some people are much too fine nowadays to eat what their fathers were thankful to see on the table, and so they please their palates with costly feeding, come to the workhouse, and expect everybody to pity them. They turned up their noses at bread and butter and came to eat raw turnips stolen out of the fields. They who live like fighting cocks at other men's costs will get their combs cut, or perhaps get roasted for it one of these days. If you have a great store of peas, you may put the more in the soup; but everybody should fare according to his earnings. He is both a fool and a knave who has a shilling<sup>27</sup> coming in, and on the strength of it spends a pound that does not belong to him. "Cut your coat according to your cloth" is sound advice; but cutting other people's cloth by running into debt is as like thieving as fourpence is like a groat.<sup>28</sup> If I meant to be a rogue, I would be a pettifogging<sup>29</sup> lawyer, or a priest, or open a loan office, or go out picking pockets, but I would scorn the dirty art of getting into debt without a prospect of being able to pay.

### ***Lying***

Debtors can hardly help being liars; for they promise to pay when they know they cannot, and when they have made up a lot of false excuses, they promise again, and so they lie as fast as a horse can trot.

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<sup>27</sup> **shilling** – silver coin of Great Britain, equal in value to 1/20 pound, or \$0.07 USD today.

<sup>28</sup> **groat** – former English silver coin equal to four pence; therefore, certainly the same.

<sup>29</sup> **pettifogging** – practicing legal deceit or trickery.

*You have debts, and make debts still.  
If you've not lied, lie you will.*

Now, if owing leads to lying, who shall say that it is not a most evil thing? Of course, there are exceptions, and I do not want to bear hard upon an honest man who is brought down by sickness or heavy losses; but take the rule as a rule, and you will find debt to be a great dismal swamp, a huge mud hole, a dirty ditch. Happy is the man who gets out of it after once tumbling in, but happiest of all is he who has been by God's goodness kept out of the mire altogether. If you once ask the devil to dinner, it will be hard to get him out of the house again—better to have nothing to do with him. Where a hen has laid one egg, she is very likely to lay another; when a man is once in debt, he is likely to get into it again—better keep clear of it from the first. He who gets in for a penny will soon be in for a pound...Never owe a farthing, and you will never owe a guinea.<sup>30</sup>

If you want to sleep soundly, buy the bed of a man who is in debt. Surely it must be a very soft one, or he never could have rested so easy on it. I suppose people get hardened to it, as Smith's donkey did when its master broke so many sticks across its back. It seems to me that a real honest man would sooner get as lean as a greyhound than feast on borrowed money...What pins and needles tradesmen's bills must stick in a fellow's soul! A pig on credit always grunts. Without debt, without care. Out of debt, out of danger; but owing and borrowing are bramble bushes full of thorns. If ever I borrow a spade of my next door neighbor, I never feel safe with it for fear I should break it; I never can dig in peace as I do with my own—but if I had a spade at the shop and knew I could not pay for it, I think I should set to and dig my own grave out of shame. Scripture says, "Owe no man any thing" (Rom 13:8), which does not mean pay your debts, but never have any to pay; and my opinion is that those who willfully break this law ought to be turned out of the Christian church—neck and crop, as we say.

### ***Integrity***

Our laws are shamefully full of encouragement to credit. Nobody need be a thief now; he has only to open a shop and make a fail of it, and it will pay him much better. As the [common] proverb is, "He who never fails will never grow rich." Why, I know tradesmen who have failed five or six times, and yet think they are on the road to heaven. The scoundrels! What would they do if they got there? They are a great deal more likely to go where they shall never come out till they have paid the uttermost farthing (Mat 5:26). But people say, "How liberal they are!" Yes, with other people's money. I hate to see a man steal a goose and then give religion the giblets. Piety by all means, but pay your way as part of it. Honesty first, then generosity. But how often religion is a cloak for deceiving! There's Mrs. Scamp as fine as a peacock, all the girls out at boarding-school learning French and the piano, the boys swelling about in kid gloves, and G. B. Scamp, Esq., driving a fast-trotting mare and taking the chair at public meetings—while his poor creditors cannot get more than enough to live from hand to mouth. It is shameful and

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<sup>30</sup> **guinea** – former gold coin of Great Britain, equal in value to 21 shillings; officially replaced by the pound in 1816.

beyond endurance to see how genteel swindling is winked at by many in this country. I'd off with their white waistcoats, kid gloves, and patent leather boots if I had my way—and give them...the prison livery for six months, gentlemen or not. I'd let them see that big rogues could dance on the treadmill to the same tune as little ones. I'd make the land too hot to hold such scamping gentry, if I were a member of Parliament or a prime minister. As I've no such power, I can at least write against the fellows and let off the steam of my wrath in that way.

My motto is: pay as you go, and keep from small scores. Short reckonings are soon cleared. Pay what you owe, and what you're worth you'll know. Let the clock tick, but no "tick"<sup>31</sup> for me. Better go to bed without your supper than get up in debt. Sins and debts are always more than we think them to be. Little by little a man gets over head and ears. It is the petty expenses that empty the purse. Money is round and rolls away easily.

Tom Thriftless buys what he does not want because it is a great bargain, and so is soon brought to sell what he does want, and find it a very little bargain. He cannot say no to his friend who wants him to be security. He gives grand dinners, makes many holidays, keeps a fat table, lets his wife dress fine, never looks after his servants, and by-and-by he is quite surprised to find...creditors bark so loud. He has sowed his money in the fields of thoughtlessness, and now he wonders that he has to reap the harvest of poverty. Still he hopes for something to turn up to help him out of difficulty; and so muddles himself into more troubles, forgetting that hope and expectation are a fool's income. Being hard up, he goes to market with empty pockets, and buys at whatever prices tradesmen like to charge him, and so he pays more than double and gets deeper and deeper into the mire. This leads him to scheming, and trying little tricks and mean dodges, for it is hard for an empty sack to stand upright. This is sure not to answer, for schemes are like spiders' webs, which never catch anything better than flies and are soon swept away. As well attempt to mend your shoes with brown paper, or stop a broken window with a sheet of ice, as try to patch up a falling business with maneuvering and scheming. When the schemer is found out, he is like a dog in church, whom everybody kicks at; and like a barrel of powder, which nobody wants for a neighbor.

They say poverty is a sixth sense; and it had need be, for many debtors seem to have lost the other five—or were born without common sense, for they appear to imagine that you not only make debts, but pay them by borrowing. A man pays Peter with what he has borrowed of Paul, and thinks he is getting out of his difficulties, when he is only putting one foot into the mud to pull his other foot out. It is hard to shave an egg, or pull hairs out of a bald head; but they are both easier than paying debts out of an empty pocket. Samson was a strong man; but he could not pay debts without money, and he is a fool who thinks he can do it by scheming. As to borrowing money of loan societies, it's like a drowning man catching at razors. Both Jews and Gentiles, when they lend money, generally pluck the geese as long as they have any feathers. A man must cut down his outgoings and save his incomings if he wants to clear himself; you can't spend your penny and pay debts with it too. Stint the kitchen if the purse is bare.

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<sup>31</sup> **tick** – *British*: credit; to buy on "tick" (from *ticket*).



Don't believe in any way of wiping out debts except by paying hard cash. Promises make debts, and debts make promises, but promises never pay debts; promising is one thing, and performing is quite another. A good man's word should be as binding as an oath, and he should never promise to pay unless he has a clear prospect of doing so in due time. Those who stave off payment by false promises deserve no mercy. It is all very well to say, "I'm very sorry," but "a hundred years of regret pay not a farthing of debt."

Now I'm afraid all this sound advice might as well have been given to my master's cocks and hens as to those who have got into the way of spending what is not their own, for advice to such people goes in at one ear and out at the other. Well, those who won't listen will have to feel—and those who refuse cheap advice will have to buy—dear repentance; but to young people beginning life, a word may be worth a world, and this shall be John Ploughman's short sermon with three heads to it: always live a little below your means, never get into debt, and remember:

*He who goes a borrowing, Goes a sorrowing.*

## 8. Home

*Merry times in Ploughman's Cottage*

### ***The Best Place***

That word *home* always sounds like poetry to me. It rings like a peal of bells at a wedding, only more soft and sweet; and it chimes deeper into the ears of my heart. It does not matter whether it means thatched cottage or manor house: home is home, be it ever so homely; and there's no place on earth like it<sup>32</sup> ...Sweetly the sparrows chirrup and the swallows twitter around the chosen spot that is my joy and rest. Every bird loves its own nest; the owl thinks the old ruins the fairest spot under the moon; and the fox is of opinion that his hole in the hill is remarkably cozy. When my master's nag knows that his head is towards home, he needs no whip, but thinks it best to put on all steam; and I am always of the same mind, for to me the way home is the best bit of road in the country. I like to see the smoke out of my own chimney better than the fire on another man's hearth; there's something so beautiful in the way in which it curls up among the trees. Cold potatoes on my own table taste better than roast meat at my neighbor's, and the honeysuckle at my own door is the sweetest I ever smell. When you are out, friends do their best, but still it is not home. "Make yourself at home," they say, because everybody knows that to feel at home is to feel at ease.

*East and west, Home is best.*

Why, at home you are *at home*, and what more do you want? Nobody grudges you, whatever your appetite may be; and you don't get put into a damp bed. Safe is his own castle; like a king in his palace, a man feels himself somebody, and is not afraid of being

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<sup>32</sup> See Free Grace Broadcaster 170, *The Godly Home*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

thought proud for thinking so. Every cock may crow on his own dunghill, and a dog is a lion when he is at home. A chimney-sweep is master inside his own door. No need to guard every word because some enemy is on the watch. No keeping the heart under lock and key; but as soon as the door is shut, it is liberty hall, and none to peep and pry. There is a glorious view from the top of Leith Hill in our dear old Surrey; and Hindhead, Martha's Chapel, and Boxhill are not to be sneezed at, but I could show you something which to my mind beats them all to nothing for real beauty. I mean John Ploughman's cottage, with the kettle boiling, singing like an unfallen black angel, while the cat is lying asleep in front of the fire, and the wife in her chair mending stockings, and the children cutting about the room, as full of fun as young lambs.

It is a singular fact—and perhaps some of you will doubt it, but that is your unbelieving nature—our little ones are real beauties, always a pound or two plumper than others of their age, and yet it doesn't tire you half so much to nurse them as it does other people's babies. Why, bless you, my wife would knock off<sup>33</sup> in half the time if her neighbor had asked her to see to<sup>34</sup> a strange youngster, but her own children don't seem to tire her at all—now, my belief is that it all comes of their having been born at home. Just so is it with everything else. Our lane is the most beautiful for twenty miles round because our home is in it; and my garden is a perfect paradise for no other particular reason than this very good one: that it belongs to the old house at home.

### ***Husbands***

I cannot make out why so many working men spend their evenings at the public house, when their own fireside would be so much better, and cheaper too. There they sit, hour after hour, boozing and talking nonsense, and forgetting the dear good souls at home who are half starved and weary with waiting for them. Their money goes into the publican's till when it ought to make their wives and children comfortable; as for the beer they get, it is just so much fools' milk to drown their wits in. Such fellows ought to be horse-whipped, and those who encourage them and live on their spendings deserve to feel the butt end of the whip. Those beershops are the curse of this country—no good ever can come of them, and the evil they do no tongue can tell...

Husbands should try to make home happy and holy. It is an ill bird that fouls its own nest, a bad man who makes his home wretched. Our house ought to be a little church, with "Holiness to the Lord" over the door, but it ought never to be a prison where there is plenty of rule and order, but little love and no pleasure. Married life is not all sugar, but grace in the heart will keep away most of the sour. Godliness and love can make a man, like a bird in a hedge, sing among thorns and briers, and set others a singing, too. It should be the husband's pleasure to please his wife, and the wife's care to care for her husband (1Co 7:33, 34). He is kind to himself who is kind to his wife.

I am afraid some men live by the rule of self; and when that is the case, home happiness is a mere sham. When husbands and wives are well yoked, how light their load be-

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<sup>33</sup> **knock off** – stop.

<sup>34</sup> **see to** – care for; attend to.

comes! It is not every couple that is a pair, and the less they are is a pity. In a true home, strife only serves to make the family happier. A home should be a Bethel,<sup>35</sup> not a Babel.<sup>36</sup> The husband should be the houseband, binding all together like a corner stone, but not crushing everything like a mill-stone. Unkind and domineering husbands ought not to pretend to be Christians, for they act clean contrary to Christ's commands. Yet a home must be well ordered, or it will become a Bedlam<sup>37</sup> and be a scandal to the parish. If the father drops the reins, the family-coach will soon be in the ditch.

A wise mixture of love and firmness will do it; but neither harshness nor softness alone will keep home in happy order. Home is no home where the children are not in obedience; it is rather a pain than a pleasure to be in it. Happy is he who is happy in his children, and happy are the children who are happy in their father. All fathers are not wise. Some are like Eli and spoil their children (1Sa 2:12ff). Not to cross our children is the way to make a cross of them. Those who never give their children the rod must not wonder if their children become a rod to them. Solomon says, "Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight to thy soul" (Pro 29:17). I am not clear that anybody wiser than Solomon lives in our time, though some think they are. Young colts must be broken in, or they will make wild horses.

Some fathers are all fire and fury, filled with passion at the smallest fault; this is worse than the other, and makes home a little hell instead of a heaven. Lack of wind makes the miller idle, but too much upsets the mill altogether. Men who strike in their anger generally miss their mark. When God helps us to hold the reins firmly, but not to hurt the horses' mouths, all goes well. When home is ruled according to God's Word, angels might be asked to stay a night with us, and they would not find themselves out of their element.

### ***Wives***

Wives should feel that home is their place and their kingdom, the happiness of which depends mostly upon them. She is a wicked wife who drives her husband away by her long tongue. A man said to his wife the other day, "Double up<sup>38</sup> your whip." He meant, "Keep your tongue quiet"—it is wretched living with such a whip always lashing you. When God gave to men ten measures of speech, they say the women ran away with nine, and in some cases I am afraid the saying is true. A dirty, slatternly,<sup>39</sup> gossiping wife is enough to drive her husband mad; and if he goes to the tavern of an evening, she is the cause of it. It is doleful living where the wife, instead of reverencing her husband, is al-

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<sup>35</sup> **Bethel** – *Hebrew*: "house of God"; name given by Jacob to the place where God first appeared to him in a dream and blessed him (Gen 28:16-19).

<sup>36</sup> **Babel** – *Hebrew*: "confusion"; the city where men attempted to build a tower very high "unto heaven," so that they could make a name for themselves and be great as God (Gen 11:9). It declared the prideful imagination of man's heart.

<sup>37</sup> **Bedlam** – Bedlam was the Hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem in London, England, used as an asylum for mentally deranged persons.

<sup>38</sup> **double up** – fold up.

<sup>39</sup> **slatternly** – untidy; slovenly.

ways wrangling and railing at him. It must be a good thing when such women are hoarse, and it is a pity that they have not as many blisters on their tongues as they have teeth in their jaws. God save us all from wives who are angels in the streets, saints in the church, and devils at home. I have never tasted of such bitter herbs, but I pity from my very heart those who have this diet every day of their lives.

### ***Family***

Show me a loving husband, a worthy wife, and good children, and no pair of horses that ever flew along the road could take me in a year where I could see a more pleasing sight. Home is the grandest of all institutions. Talk about Parliament, but give me a quiet little parlor. Boast about voting and the Reform Bill if you like, but I go in for weeding the little garden and teaching the children their hymns.

Franchise may be a very fine thing, but I should a good deal sooner get the freehold of my cottage if I could find the money to buy it. Magna Carta<sup>40</sup> I don't know much about; but if it means a quiet home for everybody, three cheers for it...

If I had no home, the world would be a big prison to me. England for me for a country, Surrey for a county, and for a village give me—no, I shan't tell you, or you will be hunting John Ploughman up. Many of my friends have emigrated, and are breaking up fresh soil in Australia and America. Though their stone has rolled, I hope they may gather moss; for when they were at home they were like the setting hen, which gets no barley. Really, these hard times make a man think of his wings; but I am tied by the leg to my own home; and, please God, I hope to live and die among my own people. They may do things better in France and Germany, but old England for me after all.

## **9. Men Who Are Down**

*“For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.”—Matthew 24:28*

### ***No Pity***

No man's lot is fully known till he is dead; change of fortune is the lot of life. He who rides in the carriage may yet have to clean it...In less than a thousand years, we shall all be bald, and poor too; and who knows what we may come to before that? The thought that we may ourselves be one day under the window should make us careful when we are throwing out our dirty water. With what measure we mete it shall be measured to us again (Mat 7:2), and therefore let us look well to our dealings with the unfortunate.

Nothing makes me more sick of human nature than to see the way in which men treat others when they fall down the ladder of fortune. “Down with him,” they cry, “he always was good for nothing”...Dog won't eat dog; but men will eat each other up like

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<sup>40</sup> **Magna Carta** – charter of English political and civil liberties that King John granted at Runnymede, June 1215.

cannibals, and boast of it too. There are thousands in this world who fly like vultures to feed on a tradesman, or a merchant, as soon as ever he gets into trouble. Where “the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together” (Mat 24:28). Instead of a little help, they give the sinking man a great deal of cruelty, and cry, “Serves him right.” All the world will beat the man whom fortune buffets. If providence smites him, all men’s whips begin to crack. The dog is drowning; and therefore all his friends empty their buckets over him. The tree has fallen, and everybody runs for his hatchet. The house is on fire, and all the neighbors warm themselves. The man has ill providence; therefore his friends give him ill usage. He has tumbled into the road, and they drive their carts over him. He is down; and selfishness cries, “Let him be kept down; then there will be the more room for those who are up.”

How aggravating it is when those who knocked you down kick you for not standing up! It is not very pleasant to hear that you have been a great fool and there were fifty ways at least of keeping out of your difficulty, only you had not the sense to see them. You ought not to have lost the game; even Tom Fool can see where you made a bad move. “He ought to have locked the stable door”—everybody can see that, but nobody offers to buy the loser a new nag. “What a pity he went so far on the ice!” That’s very true, but that won’t save the poor fellow from drowning. When a man’s coat is thread-bare, it is an easy thing to pick a hole in it. Good advice is poor food for a hungry family.

*A man of words and not of deeds, Is like a garden full of weeds...*

Most men who go downhill meet with Judas before they get to the bottom. Those whom they helped in their better days generally forget the debt, or repay it with unkindness. The young sucker runs away with the sap from the old tree. The foal drains his mother and then kicks her. The old saying is, “I taught you to swim, and now you would drown me”—and many a time it comes true. The dog wags his tail till he gets the bone, and then he snaps and bites at the man who fed him. Eaten bread is forgotten, and the hand that gave it is despised. The candle lights others and is burnt away itself. For the most part, nothing is more easily blotted out than a good turn. “Everyone for himself” is the world’s golden rule, and we all know who takes the hindmost. The fox looks after his own skin, and has no idea of losing his brush out of gratitude to a friend.

### ***Fair-weather Friends***

A noble spirit always takes the side of the weak; but noble spirits do not often ride along our roads: they are as scarce as eagles. You can get magpies, hawks, and kites by the score, but the nobler breed you don’t see once in a lifetime. Did you ever hear the crows read the burial service over a dead sheep before they eat it? Well, that’s wonderfully like the neighbors crying, “What a pity! How did it happen? Oh, dear! Oh, dear!”—and then falling to work to get each of them a share of the plunder. Most people will help those who do not need it. Every traveler throws a stone where there is a heap already. All the cooks baste the fat pig, and the lean one gets burned.

*In times of prosperity friends will be plenty;  
In times of adversity not one in twenty.*

When the wind serves, all aid. While the pot boils, friendship blooms. But flatterers haunt not cottages, and the faded rose no suitor knows. All the neighbors are cousins to the rich man, but the poor man's brother does not know him. When we have a ewe and a lamb, everyone cries, "Welcome, Peter!" The squire can be heard for half-a-mile if he only whispers, but Widow Needy is not heard across the park railings, let her call as she may. Men willingly pour water into a full tub and give feasts to those who are not hungry, because they look to have as good or better in return. Have a goose and get a goose. Have a horse of your own, and then you can borrow one. It is safe to lend barley where the barn is full of wheat, but who lends or gives where there's none? Who, indeed, unless it be some antiquated old soul who believes in his Bible and loves his Lord, and therefore gives, "hoping for nothing again" (Luk 6:35)?

I have noticed certain gentry who pretend to be great friends to a falling man because there are some few pickings yet to be got off his bones. The lawyer and the money-lender will cover the poor fellow with their wings, and then peck at him with their bills till there's nothing left. When these folks are very polite and considerate, poor men had need beware. It was not a good sign when the fox walked into the hen-roost and said, "Good morning to you all, my very dear friends."

### ***But God***

Down men, however, must not despair, for God is yet alive, and He is the friend of the friendless. If there be no one else found to hold out a hand to him who has fallen, the Lord's hand shall not fail to bring deliverance to those who trust Him. A good man may be put in the fire, but he cannot be burned. His hope may be drenched but not drowned. He plucks up courage and sets a stout heart to a stiff hill, and gets over rough ground where others lie down and die. While there's life there's hope. Therefore, my friend, if you've tumbled off the back of prosperity, John Ploughman bids you not lie in the ditch, but up with you and try again. Jonah went to the bottom of the sea, but he got to shore again all the better for his watery journey.

*Though the bird's in the net, It may get away yet;  
Though I'm down in the dust, In my God I will trust,  
I will hope in Him still, And leave all to His will;  
For He'll surely appear, And will banish my fear.*

Let it never be forgotten that when a man is down, he has a grand opportunity for trusting in God. A false faith can only float in smooth water; but true faith, like a life-boat, is at home in storms. If our religion does not bear us up in time of trial, what is the use of it? If we cannot believe God when our circumstances appear to be against us, we do not believe Him at all. We trust a thief as far as we can see him; shall we dare to treat our God in that fashion? No, no! The Lord is good; and He will yet appear for His servants, and we shall praise His name.

*'Down among the dead men!' No, sir, not I.  
'Down among the dead men!' I will not lie.  
Up among the hopeful, I will ascend,  
Up among the joyful, sing, without end.*



## 10. Hope

*A hope without grounds is a tub without a bottom.*

Eggs are eggs, but some are rotten; and so hopes are hopes, but many of them are delusions. Hopes are like women. There is a touch of angel about them all, but there are two sorts. My boy Tom has been blowing a lot of bird eggs and threading them on a string. I have been doing the same thing with hopes, and here's a few of them—good, bad, and indifferent.

The sanguine<sup>41</sup> man's hope pops up in a moment like jack-in-the-box; it works with a spring, and not by reason. Whenever this man looks out of the window, he sees better times coming, and although it is nearly all in his own eye and nowhere else, yet to see plum puddings in the moon is a far more cheerful habit than croaking at everything like a two-legged frog. This is the kind of brother to be on the road with on a pitch-dark night when it pours with rain, for he carries candles in his eyes and a fireside in his heart. Beware of being misled by him, and then you may safely keep his company. His fault is that he counts his chickens before they are hatched, and sells his herrings before they are in the net. All his sparrow's-eggs are bound to turn into thrushes at the least, if not partridges and pheasants. Summer has fully come, for he has seen one swallow. He is sure to make his fortune at his new shop, for he had not opened the door five minutes before two of the neighbors crowded in. One of them wanted a loaf of bread on credit, and the other asked change for a shilling. He is certain that the squire means to give him his business, for he saw him reading the name over the shop door as he rode past...Well, good soul, though he is a little soft at times, there is much in him to praise; and I like to think of one of his odd sayings, "Never say die till you are dead; and then it's no use, so let it alone." There are other odd people in the world, you see, besides John Ploughman.

My neighbor Shiftless is waiting for his aunt to die, but the old lady has as many lives as nine cats. And my notion is that when she does die she will leave her little money to the Hospital for Diseased Cats or Stray Dogs, sooner than her nephew Jack shall have it. Poor creature, he is dreadfully down at the heel, and lays it all on the dear old lady's provoking constitution. However, he hopes on, and gets worse and worse; for while the grass grows, the horse starves. He pulls at a long rope who waits for another's death; he who hunts after legacies had need have iron shoes. He that waits for dead men's shoes may long go barefoot; he who waits for his uncle's cow need not be in a hurry to spread the butter. He who lives on hope has a slim diet. If Jack Shiftless had never had an aunt, he might have tucked up his shirt sleeves and worked for himself, but they told him that he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, and that made a spoon of him, so that he is no more use at work than a cow at catching hares.

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<sup>41</sup> **sanguine** – naturally cheerful and hopeful; confident.

If anybody likes to leave John Ploughman a legacy, he will be very much obliged to them; but they had better not tell him of it for fear he should not plough so straight a furrow—they had better make it twice as much and take him by surprise. On the whole, it would be better to leave it to the Pastors' College or the Stockwell Orphanage,<sup>42</sup> for it will be well used in either case... I wish people would think less about windfalls<sup>43</sup> and plant more apple trees. Hopes that grow out of graves are grave mistakes; and when they cripple a man's own energies, they are a sort of hangman's rope, dangling round a man's neck.

Some people were born on the first of April,<sup>44</sup> and are always hoping without sense or reason. Their ship is to come home; they are to dig up a pot of gold, or to hear of something to their advantage. Poor sillies, they have wind on the brain and dream while they are awake. They may hold their mouths open a long while before fried ham and eggs will come flying into them, and yet they really seem to believe that some stroke of luck, some windfall of golden apples, will one day set them up and make gentlemen of them. They hope to ride in their coaches and by-and-by find themselves shut up in a place where the coaches won't run over them. You may whistle a long while before goldfinches will hop onto your thumb.

Once in a while, one man in a million may stumble against a fortune, but thousands ruin themselves by idle expectations. Expect to get half of what you earn, a quarter of what is your due, and none of what you have lent, and you will be near the mark; but to look for a fortune to fall from the moon is to play the fool with a vengeance. A man ought to hope within the bounds of reason and the promises of the good old Book. Hope leans on an anchor, but an anchor must have something to hold by and to hold to. A hope without grounds is a tub without a bottom, a horse without a head, a goose without a body, a shoe without a sole, a knife without a blade. Who but Simple Simon<sup>45</sup> would begin to build a house at the top?—there must be a foundation.

Hope is no hope, but sheer folly, when a man hopes for impossibilities, or looks for crops without sowing seed, and for happiness without doing good. Such hopes lead to great boast and small roast; they act like a jack-o'-lantern and lead men into the ditch. There's poor Will at the workhouse, who always declares that he owns a great estate, only the right owner keeps him out of it. His name is Jenyns or Jennings; and somebody of that name, he says, has left enough money to buy the Bank of England; and one day he is to have a share of it—but meanwhile poor Will finds the parish broth poor stuff for such a great gentleman's stomach. He has promised me an odd thousand or two when he gets his fortune, and I am going to build a castle in the air with it and ride to it on a broomstick. Poor soul, like a good many others, he has windmills in his head, and may make his will on his thumbnail for anything that he has to give. Depend upon it: ploughing

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<sup>42</sup> **Pastors' College...Stockwell Orphanage** – worthy ministries begun by Spurgeon.

<sup>43</sup> **windfalls** – fruit blown down from a tree; unexpected good fortune, typically involving receiving a large amount of money.

<sup>44</sup> **first of April** – widely known as “April Fools Day.”

<sup>45</sup> **Simple Simon** – English nursery rhyme about ignorance, first recorded in 1685.

the air is not half so profitable as it is easy. He who hopes in this world for more than he can get by his own earnings hopes to find apricots on a crab-tree.

He who marries an untidy girl and hopes to make her a good wife, might as well buy a goose and expect it to turn out a milk cow. He who takes his boys to the beershop and trusts that they will grow up sober, puts his coffee-pot on the fire and expects to see it look bright as new tin. Men cannot be in their senses when they...set a wicked example and reckon upon raising a respectable family. You may hope and hope till your heart grows sick; but when you send your boy up the chimney, he'll come down black, for all your hoping. Teach a child to lie, and then hope that he will grow up honest; better put a wasp in a tar barrel and wait till he makes you honey. When will people act sensibly with their boys and girls?—not till they are sensible themselves!

As to the next world, it is a great pity that men do not take a little more care when they talk of it. If a man dies drunk, somebody or other is sure to say, "I hope he is gone to heaven." It is all very well to wish it, but to hope it is another thing. Men turn their faces to hell and hope to get to heaven; why don't they walk into the horse pond and hope to be dry? Hopes of heaven<sup>46</sup> are solemn things and should be tried by the Word of God. A man might as well hope, as our Lord says, to gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles, as look for a happy hereafter at the end of a bad life (Mat 7:16-21). There is only one rock to build good hopes on; and that is not Peter, as the pope says; neither is it sacraments, as the old Roman beast's cubs tell us, but the merits of the Lord Jesus. All the hope of man is in "the man Christ Jesus" (1Ti 2:5). If we believe in Him, we are saved; for it is written, "he that believeth on [Him] hath everlasting life" (Joh 6:47). Notice: he has it now, and it is everlasting, so that there is no fear of his losing it. There John Ploughman rests; and he is not afraid of being confounded; for this is a firm footing, and gives him a hope sure and steadfast, which neither life nor death can shake. But John must not turn preacher, or he may take the bread out of the parson's mouth. So please remember that presumption is a ladder that will break the mounter's neck; and don't try it, as you love your soul.

## 11. Spending

*What their fathers got with the rake they throw away with the shovel.*

### **Wasters**

To earn money is easy compared with spending it well; anybody may dig up potatoes, but it is not one woman in ten that can cook them. Men do not become rich by what they get, but by what they save. Many men who have money are as short of wit as a hog is of wool; they are under the years of discretion though they have turned forty, and make ducks and drakes of hundreds as boys do of stones—what their fathers got with the

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<sup>46</sup> See Free Grace Broadcaster 186, *Hope*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

rake, they throw away with the shovel. After the miser comes the prodigal. Often men say of the spendthrift, "His old father was no man's friend but his own," and now the son is no man's enemy but his own. The fact is, the old gentleman went to hell by the lean road, and his son has made up his mind to go there by the fat. As soon as the spendthrift gets his estate, it goes—like a lump of butter in a greyhound's mouth. All his days are the first of April; he would buy an elephant at a bargain or thatch his house with pancakes—nothing is too foolish to tickle his fancy. His money burns holes in his pocket, and he must squander it, always boasting that his motto is, "Spend, and God will send." He will not stop till he has his sheep before he shears them. He forestalls his income, draws upon his capital, and so kills the goose that lays the golden eggs, and cries out, "Who would have thought it?" He never spares at the brim; but he means, he says, to save at the bottom. He borrows at high interest of Rob'em, Cheat'em, and Sell'em-up—and when he gets cleaned out, he lays it all either upon the lawyers or else on the bad times.

Times never were good for lazy prodigals; and if they were good to them, they would be bad for all the world besides. Why men should be in such a hurry to make themselves beggars is a mystery.

*Spending your money with many a guest,  
Empties the larder, the cellar, and chest.*

If a little gambling is thrown in with the fast living, money melts like a snowball in an oven. A young gambler is sure to be an old beggar if he lives long enough.

*The devil leads him by the nose,  
Who the dice so often throws.*

There are more donkeys than those with four legs; I am sorry to say they are found among working men as well as fine gentlemen. Fellows who have no estate but their labor, and no family arms except those they work with, will yet spend their little hard earnings at the beershop or in waste. No sooner are their wages paid than away they go to the "Spotted Dog" or the "Marquis of Granby," to contribute their share of fools' pence towards keeping up the landlord's red face and round body. Drinking water neither makes a man sick nor in debt, nor his wife a widow; and yet some men hardly know the flavor of it; but beer guzzled down, as it is by many a working man, is nothing better than brown ruin. Dull droning blockheads sit on the ale bench and wash out what little sense they ever had.

### ***Good Stewards***

However, I believe that farming people are a good deal better managers with their money than Londoners are; for though their money is very little, their families look nice and tidy on Sundays. True, the rent isn't so bad in a village as in the town, and there's a bit of garden. Still, those Londoners earn a great deal of money; and they have many chances of buying in a cheap market, which the poor countryman has not. On the whole, I

think 'tis very good management that keeps a family going on ten shillings<sup>47</sup> a week in the country, and bad management that can't pay its way on five-and-twenty in London. Why, some families are as merry as mice in malt on very small wages, and others are as wretched as rats in a trap on double the amount. Those who wear the shoe know best where it pinches, but economy is a fine thing...

### ***Beware when Buying***

Some make soup out of a flint, but others can't get nourishment out of beef gravy. Some go to shop with as much wit as Samson had in both his shoulders, but no more. They do not buy well; they have not sense to lay out their money to advantage. Buyers ought to have a hundred eyes, but these have not even half a one, and they do not open that. Well was it said that if fools did not go to market, bad wares would never be sold. They never get a pennyworth for their penny, and this often because they are on the hunt for cheap things and forget that generally the cheapest is the most grievous, and one cannot buy a good shilling's worth of a bad article. When there's five eggs a penny, four of them are rotten.

Poor men often buy in very small quantities, and so pay through the nose; for a man who buys by the pennyworth keeps his own house and another man's. Why not get two or three weeks' supply at once and so get it cheaper? Store is no sore. People are often saving at the wrong place, and spoil the ship to save a bit of tar. Others look after small savings and forget greater things; they are penny wise and pound foolish...Some buy things they don't need because they are great bargains; let me tell them that what they do not need is grievous at a farthing.<sup>48</sup>

Fine dressing makes a great hole in poor people's means. Whatever does John Ploughman—and such as work hard for their daily bread—want with silks and satins? It's like a blacksmith's wearing a white silk apron. I hate to see a servant girl or a laborer's daughter tricked out as if she thought people would take her for a lady. Why, everybody knows a tadpole from a fish; nobody mistakes a poppy for a rose. Give me a woman in a nice neat dress, clean and suitable, and for beauty she will beat the flashy young hussies all to pieces. If a girl has got a few shillings to spare, let her buy a good bit of flannel for the winter, before she is tempted with bright looking but useless finery. Buy what suits yourself to wear; and if it does not suit other people to look at, let them shut their eyes. All women are good—either for something or for nothing, and their dress will generally tell you which.

### ***Balance***

I suppose we all find the money goes quite fast enough; but after all, it was made to circulate; and there's no use in hoarding it. It is bad to see our money become a runaway servant and leave us, but it would be worse to have it stop with us and become our mas-

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<sup>47</sup> **shillings** – silver coins of Great Britain, equal in value to 1/20 pound, or \$0.07 USD in today's money. Ten shillings a week was a basic income when this was written.

<sup>48</sup> **farthing** – coin formerly used in Great Britain worth one-fourth of a penny.

ter. We should try, as our minister says, “to find the golden mean,”<sup>49</sup> and neither be lavish nor stingy.

He has his money best spent who has the best wife. The husband may earn money, but only the wife can save it. “Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands” (Pro 14:1). The wife it seems, according to Solomon, is the builder or the real puller-down. A man cannot prosper till he gets his wife’s cooperation. A thrifty housewife is better than a great income. A good wife and health are a man’s best wealth. Bless their hearts, what should men do without them?...

## 12. Men with Two Faces

*Drink or drone will he, as the case may be.*

### ***Always Changing***

Even bad men praise consistency. Thieves like honest men, for they are the best to rob. When you know where to find a man, he has one good point at any rate; but a fellow who howls with the wolves and bleats with the sheep gets nobody’s good word unless it be the devil’s. To carry two faces under one hat is, however, very common...Many look as if butter would not melt in their mouths and yet can spit fire when it suits their purpose. I read the other day an advertisement about reversible coats; the tailor who sells them must be making a fortune! Holding with the hare and running with the hounds is still in fashion. Consistency is about as scarce in the world as perfume in a dog-kennel.

You may trust some men as far as you can see them, but no further, for new company makes them new men—like water, they boil or freeze according to the temperature. Some do this because they have no principles. They are of the weathercock persuasion and turn with the wind. You might as well measure the moon for a suit of clothes as know what they are. They believe in that which pays best; they always put up at the Golden Fleece. Their mill grinds any grain that you bring to it if the ready money is forthcoming...Like frogs, they can live on land or water, and are not at all particular which it is. Like a cat, they always fall on their feet and will stop anywhere if you butter their toes.

They love their friends dearly, but their love lies in the cupboard; and if that be bare, like a mouse, their love runs off to some other pantry. They say, “Leave you, dear girl? Never—while you have a shilling.” How they scuttle off if you come to the bad! Like rats, they leave a sinking ship. “When good cheer is lacking, such friends will be packing.” Their heart follows the pudding. While the pot boils, they sit by the fire; when the meal tub is empty, they play at turnabout.

They believe in the winning horse; they will wear anybody’s coat who may choose to give them one. They are to be bought by the dozen, like mackerel—but he who gives a

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<sup>49</sup> **mean** – mid-point; average.



penny for them wastes his money. Profit is their god; and whether they make it out of you or your enemy, the money is just as sweet to them. Heads or tails are alike to them so long as they win. High road or back lane, all's the same to them so that they can get home with the loaf in the basket. They are friends to the goose, but they will eat his giblets. So long as the water turns their wheel, it is none the worse for being muddy; they would burn their mother's coffin if they were short of firewood, and sell their own father if they could turn a penny by the old gentleman's bones. They never lose a chance of minding the main chance.

### ***Always Scheming***

Others are shiftY because they are so desperately fond of good fellowship. "Hail fellow, well met," is their cry, be it traveler or robber. They are so good-natured that they must needs agree with everybody. They are cousins of Mr. Anything. Their brains are in other people's heads. If they were at Rome, they would kiss the pope's toe; but when they are at home, they make themselves hoarse with shouting, "No popery"...

They are mere time-servers, in hopes that the times may serve them... Pull the rope, and like the bells they will ring as you choose to make them: funeral knell or wedding peal, come to church or go to the devil. They have no backbones: you may bend them like willow wands, backwards or forwards, whichever way you please. Like oysters, anybody may pepper them who can open them. Sweet to you and sweet to your enemy, they blow hot and cold. They try to be Jack-o'-both sides, and deserve to be kicked like a football by both parties...

They were born of the breed of Judas. The double shuffle is their favorite game and honesty their greatest hatred. Honey is on their tongue, but gall in their hearts. They are mongrel bred, like the gypsy's dog. Like a cat's feet, they show soft pads, but carry sharp claws. If their teeth are not rotten, their tongues are; and their hearts are like dead men's graves. If speaking the truth and lying were equally profitable, they would naturally prefer to lie; for, like dirt to a pig, it would be congenial. They fawn, flatter, cringe, and scrape, for like snails they make their way by their slime; but all the while they hate you in their hearts, and only wait for a chance to stab you. Beware of those who come from the town of Deceit. Mr. Facing-both-ways, Mr. Fair-speech, and Mr. Two-tongues are neighbors who are best at a distance.<sup>50</sup> Though they look one way, they are rowing the other as boatmen do; they are false as the devil's promises, and as cruel as death and the grave.

### ***Religious Deceivers***

Religious deceivers are the worst of vermin, and I fear they are as plentiful as rats in an old wheat stack. They are like a silver pin: fair without but foul within. They cover up

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<sup>50</sup> **Deceit...Two-tongues** – figures from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the classic allegory by John Bunyan (1628-1688), in which the main character, Christian, seeks relief from the guilt-burden of the Law, finds forgiveness at the cross of Christ, and proceeds to face many trials in this world on his way to eternal life in the Celestial City. Part One, complete with George Offor's notes from 1849, is available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

their black flesh with white feathers. Saturday and Sunday make a wonderful difference in them. They have the fear of the minister a good deal more before their eyes than the fear of God. Their religion lies in imitating the religious; they have none of the root of the matter in them. They carry Dr. Watts'<sup>51</sup> hymn-book in their pocket and sing a tavern song at the same time. Their Sunday coats are the best part about them; the nearer you get to their hearts the more filth you will find. They patter like parrots, but their talk and their walk do not agree. Some of them are fishing for customers, and a little pious talk is a cheap advertisement. And if the seat at the church or the meeting costs a trifle, they make it up out of short weights.<sup>52</sup> They don't worship God while they trade, but they trade on their worship. Others of the poorer sort go to church for soup, bread, and coal tickets. They love the communion because of the alms' money...they know which side their bread is buttered on.

Others make a decent show in religion to quiet their consciences; they use it as a salve for their wounds—and if they could satisfy heaven as easily as they quiet themselves, it would be a fine thing for them. It has been my lot to meet with some who went a long way in profession, as far as I could see, for nothing but the love of being thought well of. They got a little knot of friends to believe in their fine talk, and take all in for gospel that they liked to say. Their opinion was the true measure of a preacher's soundness; they could settle up everything by their own knowledge...but dear, dear, if they had but condescended to show a little Christian practice as well, how much better their lives would have weighed up! These people are like owls, which look to be big birds, but they are not, for they are all feathers. And they look wonderfully knowing in the twilight, but when the light comes, they are regular numskulls.

Hypocrites<sup>53</sup> of all sorts are abominable, and he who deals with them will regret it. He who tries to cheat the Lord will be quite ready to cheat his fellow men. Great cry generally means little wool. Many a big chimney, in which you expect to see bacon and hams, has nothing to show you when you look up it but its empty hooks and black soot. Some men's windmills are only nut-crackers—their elephants are nothing but sucking-pigs. It is not all who go to church or meeting that truly pray, nor those who sing loudest that praise God most, nor those who pull the longest faces that are the most in earnest.

### ***Honesty***

What mean animals hypocrites must be! Polecats and weasels are nothing compared to them. Better be a dead dog than a live hypocrite. Surely when the devil sees hypocrites at their little game, it must be as good as a play to him. He tempts genuine Christians, but he lets these alone because he is sure of them. He need not shoot at lame ducks; his dog can pick them up any day. Depend upon it, friends: if a straight line will not pay, a crooked one won't. What is got by shuffling is very dangerous gain. It may give

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<sup>51</sup> **Isaac Watts** (1674-1748) – beloved and respected English hymnwriter and theologian.

<sup>52</sup> **short weights** – dishonest use of a balance scale with weights lighter than their rating.

<sup>53</sup> See Free Grace Broadcaster 194, *Hypocrisy*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

a moment's peace to wear a mask, but deception will come home to you and bring sorrow with it.

Honesty is the best policy. If the lion's skin does not do, never try the fox's. Be as true as steel. Let your face and hands, like the church clock, always tell how your inner works are going. Better be laughed at as Tom Telltruth than be praised as Crafty Charlie. Plain dealing may bring us trouble, but it is better than shuffling. At the last, the upright will have their reward, but for the double-minded to get to heaven is as impossible as for a man to swim across the Atlantic with a mill-stone under each arm.

## 13. Hints as to Thriving

*If the cat sits long enough at the hole,  
she will catch the mouse.*

### **Work Hard**

Hard work is the grand secret of success. Nothing but rags and poverty can come of idleness. Elbow grease is the only stuff to make gold with. No sweat, no sweet. He who would have the crow's eggs must climb the tree. Every man must build up his own fortune nowadays. Shirt sleeves rolled up lead on to best cloth; and he who is not ashamed of the apron will soon be able to do without it. "Diligence is the mother of good luck," as Poor Richard<sup>54</sup> says; but "Idleness is the devil's bolster," as John Ploughman says. Believe in traveling on step by step; don't expect to be rich in a jump.

*Great greediness to reap Helps not the money heap.*

Slow and sure is better than fast and flimsy. Perseverance, by its daily gains, enriches a man far more than fits and starts of speculation for fortune. Little fishes are sweet. Every little helps, as the sow said when she snapped at a gnat. Every day a thread makes a spool in a year. Brick by brick houses are built. We should creep before we walk, walk before we run, and run before we ride. In getting rich, the more haste makes the worse speed. Haste trips up its own heels. Hasty climbers have sudden falls.

### **Start Small**

It is bad beginning business without capital. It is hard marketing with empty pockets. We want a nest egg, for hens will lay where there are eggs already. It is true you must bake with the flour you have; but if the sack is empty, it might be quite as well not to set up for a baker. Making bricks without straw is easy enough compared with making money when you have none to start with. You, young gentleman, stay as a journeyman a little longer, till you have saved a few pounds; fly when your wings have got feathers—but if you try it too soon you will be like the young crow that broke its neck through try-

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<sup>54</sup> **Poor Richard** – *Poor Richard's Almanac* was a popular collection of common sense wisdom published annually in the American colonies by Benjamin Franklin, who adopted the pseudonym of "Poor Richard." The publication appeared continually from 1732 to 1758.

ing to fly before it was fledged. Every minnow wants to be a whale, but it is prudent to be a little fish while you have but little water. When your pond becomes the sea, then swell as much as you like. Trading without capital is like building a house without bricks, making a fire without sticks, burning candles without wicks; it leads men into tricks, and lands them in a fix. Don't give up a small business till you see that a large one will pay you better. Even crumbs are bread.

*Better a poor horse than an empty stall;  
Better half a loaf than none at all.*

Better a little furniture than an empty house. In these hard times, he who can sit on a stone and feed himself had better not move. From bad to worse is poor improvement. A crust is hard fare, but none at all is harder. Don't jump out of the frying pan into the fire. Remember, many men have done well in very small shops. A little trade with profit is better than a great concern at a loss; a small fire that warms you is better than a large fire that burns you. A great deal of water can be got from a small pipe if the bucket is always there to catch it. Large hares may be caught in small woods. A sheep may get fat in a small meadow, and starve in a great desert. He who undertakes too much succeeds but little. Two shops are like two stools; a man falls to the ground between them. You may burst a bag by trying to fill it too full, and ruin yourself by grasping at too much.

*In a great river great fish are found,  
But take good heed lest you be drowned.*

Make as few changes as you can; trees often transplanted bear little fruit. If you have difficulties in one place, you will have them in another. If you move because it is damp in the valley, you may find it cold on the hill. Where will the donkey go that he will not have to work? Where can a cow live and not get milked? Where will you find land without stones, or meat without bones? Everywhere on earth men must eat bread in the sweat of their faces. To fly from trouble, men must have eagles' wings. Alteration is not always improvement, as the pigeon said when she got out of the net and into the pie. There is a proper time for changing; and then, mind you, bestir yourself—for a sitting hen gets no barley. But do not be forever on the shift, for a rolling stone gathers no moss. Stick-to-it is the conqueror; he who can wait long enough will win. This, that, and the other—anything and everything, all put together—make nothing in the end; but on one horse a man rides home in due season. In one place the seed grows; in one nest the bird hatches its eggs. In one oven the bread bakes; in one river the fish lives.

Do not be above your business. He who turns up his nose at his work quarrels with his bread and butter. He is a poor smith who is afraid of his own sparks; there's some discomfort in all trades except chimney-sweeping. If sailors gave up going to sea because of the wet, if bakers left off baking because it is hot work, if ploughmen would not plough because of the cold, and tailors would not make our clothes for fear of pricking their fingers, what a pass we should come to!

### ***Soil Your Hands***

Nonsense, my fine fellow, there's no shame about any honest calling. Don't be afraid of soiling your hands; there's plenty of soap to be had. All trades are good to good traders. A clever man can make money out of dirt. Lucifer matches<sup>55</sup> pay well if you sell enough of them.

*Never mind the stink, Sweet smells the chink.*

You cannot get honey if you are frightened at bees, nor sow corn if you are afraid of getting mud on your boots. Lackadaisical<sup>56</sup> gentlemen had better emigrate to Fool's-land, where men get their living by wearing shiny boots and lavender gloves. When bars of iron melt under the south wind, when you can dig the fields with tooth-picks, blow ships along with fans, manure the crops with lavender water, and grow plumcake in flowerpots, then will be a fine time for dandies; but until the Millennium comes we shall all have a great deal to put up with, and had better bear our present burdens than run helter-skelter where we shall find matters a good deal worse.

### ***Watch Steadily***

Plod is the word. Everyone must row with such oars as he has; and as he can't choose the wind, he must sail by such as God sends him. Patience and attention will get on in the long run. If the cat sits long enough at the hole, she will catch the mouse. Always-at-it grows good cabbage and lettuce, where others grow thistles. I know as a ploughman that it is up and down, up and down the field that ploughs the acres; there's no getting over the ground by a mile at a time...

Keep your weather eye open. Sleeping poultry are carried off by the fox. Who watches not catches not. Fools ask what's o'clock, but wise men know their time. Grind while the wind blows; or if not, do not blame providence. God sends every bird its food, but He does not throw it into the nest. He gives us our daily bread, but it is through our own labor. Take time by the forelock; be up early and catch the worm. The morning hour carries gold in its mouth. He who drives last in the row gets all the dust in his eyes. Rise early, and you will have a clear start for the day.

### ***Be Truthful***

Never try dirty dodges to make money. It will never pay you to lick honey off of thorns. An honest man will not make a dog of himself for the sake of getting a bone. It is hard to walk on the devil's ice; it is fine skating, but it ends in a heavy fall—and worse. He needs have a long spoon who would eat out of the same dish with Satan. Never ruin your soul for the sake of ill-gotten gain: it is like drowning yourself in a well to get a drink of water. Take nothing in hand that may require repentance. Better walk barefoot than ride in a carriage to hell; better that the bird starve than be fattened for the spit. The mouse wins little by nibbling the cheese if it gets caught in the trap. Clean money or none—mark that; for gain badly got will be an everlasting loss.

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<sup>55</sup> **Lucifer matches** – an early type of match, which had an unsteady flame and unpleasant odor.

<sup>56</sup> **Lackadaisical** – lacking enthusiasm and determination; carelessly lazy.

A good article, a full weight, and a fair price bring customers to the shop, but people do not recommend the shop where they are cheated. Cheats never thrive; or if they do it must be in London, where they catch chance customers enough to live by. The long-bow man may hit the mark sometimes, but a fair shot is the best. A rogue's purse is full of holes. He will have blisters on his feet who wears stolen shoes. He whose fingers are like lime-twigs will find other things stick to them besides silver. Steal eels, and they will turn to snakes. The more a fox robs, the sooner he will be hunted. If a rogue wants to make a good trade, he had better turn honest. If all you aim at is profit, still deal up-rightly, for it is the most paying game.

### ***Spend Wisely***

Look most to your spending. No matter what comes in, if more goes out you will always be poor. The art is not in making money, but in keeping it. Little expenses, like mice in a barn, when they are many, make great waste. Hair by hair, heads get bald. Straw by straw, the thatch goes off the cottage; and drop by drop, the rain comes into the chamber. A barrel is soon empty if the tap leaks but a drop a minute. Chickens will be plucked feather by feather if the maid keeps at it. Small mites eat the cheese; little birds destroy a great deal of wheat. When you mean to save, begin with your mouth; there are many thieves down the red lane. The ale jug is a great waster.

In all other things, keep within compass. In clothes choose suitable and lasting stuff, and not tawdry fineries. To be warm is the main thing, never mind the looks. Never stretch your legs further than your blankets will reach, or you will soon be cold. A fool may make money, but it needs a wise man to spend it. Remember, it is easier to build two chimneys than to keep one going. If you give all to back and board, there is nothing left for the savings bank. Fare hard and work hard while you are young, and you have a chance of rest when you are old.

Never indulge in extravagance unless you want to make a short cut to the work-house. Money has wings of its own; and if you find it another pair of wings, wonder not if it flies fast.

*He that hath it and will not keep it;  
He that lacks it and will not seek it;  
He that drinks and is not dry,  
Shall lack money as well as I.*

If our poor people could only see the amount of money that they melt away in drink, their hair would stand on end with fright. Why, they swallow rivers of beer, seas of porter, and great big lakes of spirits and other fire-waters. We should all be clothed like gentlemen and live like fighting-cocks if what is wasted on fuddle could be sensibly used. We should need to get up earlier in the morning to spend all our money, for we should find ourselves suddenly made quite rich, and all that through stopping the drip of the tap. At any rate, you young people who want to get on in the world must make a point of dropping your half-pints, and settle in your spirits that no spirits shall ever settle you. Have your luxuries, if you must have them, after you have made your fortunes; but just now look after your bread and cheese.

Pray excuse me for spinning this long yarn, for as I pulled it came. My talk seems like the Irishman's rope that he could not get into the ship because somebody had cut the end off. I only want to say: do not be greedy, for covetousness is always poor. Still, strive to get on; for poverty is no virtue, and to rise in the world is to a man's credit as well as his comfort. Earn all you can, save all you can, and then give all you can. Never try to save out of God's cause; such money will taint the rest. Giving to God is no loss; it is putting your substance into the best bank. Giving is true having, as the old grave-stone said of the dead man, "What I spent I had, what I saved I lost, what I gave I have." The pockets of the poor are safe lockers, and it is always a good investment to lend to the Lord. John Ploughman wishes all young beginners long life and prosperity.

*Sufficient of wealth, And abundant health,  
Long years of content, And when life is spent:  
A mansion with God in glory.*

## 14. Tall Talk

*Everybody sees the bottom of their dish,  
and yet they go on calling it an ocean.*

### ***The Problem***

The art of stretching is uncommonly general nowadays. Gooseberries are to be heard of weighing twice as much as possible, and unseen showers of frogs fall regularly when newspapers are slack. If a cart goes by and rattles the lid of an old woman's teapot, it is put down as an earthquake. Fine imaginations are not at all scarce. Certain people are always on the lookout for wonders, and if they don't see them they invent them. They see comets every night and hear some rare tale every day. All their molehills are mountains; all their ducks are swans. They have learned the multiplication table and use it freely. If they saw six dogs together, they would swear they saw a hundred hounds—yes, and get as red in the face as turkey-cocks if anybody looked a little doubtful—and before long they would persuade themselves that they saw ten thousand lions, for everything grows with them as fast as mushrooms, and as big as Box Hill.<sup>57</sup>

All things around them are wonderful; but as for themselves, nobody is fit to clean their boots. They are the cream of creation. They are as strong as Samson and could pull against John Ploughman's team of horses, only they won't try it for fear of hurting the horses. Their wealth is enormous; they could pay off the national debt, only they have good reasons for not doing so just yet. If they keep shop, they turn over several millions in the year and only stop in business at all for the sake of their neighbors. They sell the best goods at the lowest prices, in fact, under cost price; and none in the county are fit to

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<sup>57</sup> **Box Hill** – the summit of the North Downs in Surrey, 19 miles southwest of London. Its high point is 735 feet above sea level.

hold a candle to them. Their business is cock of the walk and king of the castle. If they take a farm, it is only for amusement, and to show the poor ignorant natives how to do it...

The greatest wonder is that men of this kind don't see that everybody is laughing at them; they must have bragged themselves blind...

I've known men who open their mouths like barn doors in boasting what they would do if they were in somebody else's shoes. If they were in Parliament, they would abolish all taxes, turn workhouses into palaces, make the pumps run with beer, and set the Thames on fire—but all this depends on an "if," and that "if" is a sort of five-barred gate which they have never got over. If the sky falls, we shall catch larks. If Jack Brag does but get the reins, he'll make the horses fly up to the moon. "If" is a fine word: when a man jumps on its back, it will carry him into worlds that were never created and make him see miracles that were never wrought. With an "if" you may put all London into a quart pot.

*If all the seas were one sea, What a great sea that would be!  
And if all the trees were one tree, What a great tree that would be!  
And if all the axes were one axe, What a great axe that would be!  
And if all the men were one man, What a great man he would be!  
And if the great man took the great axe,  
And cut down the great tree,  
And let it fall into the great sea,  
What a splish-splash that would be!*

"What nonsense!" says someone. So John Ploughman thinks, and therefore he puts it in as a specimen of the stupidity that tall talkers are so fond of. This is not half so silly as nine out of ten of their mighty nothings.

What some of these fellows have done! Now, would you believe it? (I say, "No, I would not!") They made their own fortunes in no time, and made other people's too. Their advice has been the means of filling many a bag with gold. What they said at a meeting fastened the people to their seats like cobbler's wax. They were in a quarrel, and when all their party were nearly beaten, they settled off the opposition side at once with first-rate wit and wisdom. King Solomon was a fool to them. As to religion, they were the first to set it up in the parish, and by their wonderful exertions everything was set a going. They laid the golden egg. People are not grateful, or they would almost worship them. It's shameful to see how they have been neglected of late, and even turned off, by the very people whom they have been the making of. While they had a finger in the pie, all went well at the meeting; but now they have left, they say there's a screw loose—and they who live longest will see most. When they are in a modest humor, they borrow words from David, and say, "The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved: I bear up the pillars of it" (Psa 75:3). It is thought that their death would fill the world with bones. If they remove their purchases, people are expected to shut up their shops directly, and it is only their impudence that makes them hope to get a living after such customers are gone. When they feel a little natural pride at their great doings, then it's fine to hear them go



ahead. Talk of blowing your own trumpet: they have a whole band of music, big drum and all, and keep all the instruments going first-rate to their own praise and glory.<sup>58</sup>

### ***The Response***

I'd rather plough all day, and be on the road with the wagon all night when it freezes your eyelashes off, than listen to these great talkers; they make me as sick as a cat. I'd sooner go without eating till I was as lean as a wash-leather<sup>59</sup> than eat the best turkey that ever came on the table and be dinned all the while with their awful jaw. They talk on such a mighty big scale and magnify everything so thunderingly that you cannot believe them when they accidentally slip in a word or two of truth; and so you are apt to think that even their cheese is chalk. They are great liars, but they are hardly conscious of it. They have talked themselves into believing their own bombast. The frog thought herself equal to the cow and then began to blow herself out to make it true; they swell like her—and they will burst like her if they don't be careful. Everybody who knows these big talkers should take warning from them:

*Said I to myself, here's a lesson for me,  
This man is a picture of what I might be.*

We must try to state the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. If we begin calling eleven inches a foot, we shall go on till we call one inch four-and-twenty. If we call a heifer a cow, we may one day call a mouse a bullock. Once go in for exaggeration, and you may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. You have left the road of truth, and there is no telling where the crooked lane may lead you to. He who tells little lies will soon think nothing of great ones, for the principle is the same. Where there is a mouse-hole, there will soon be a rat-hole; and if the kitten comes, the cat will follow. It seldom rains but it pours; a little untruth leads on to a perfect shower of lying.

Self-praise is no recommendation. A man's praise smells sweet when it comes out of other men's mouths, but in his own it stinks. Grow your own cherries, but don't sing your own praises.

Boasters are never worth a button with the shank off. Long tongue, short hand. Great talkers, little doers. Dogs that bark much run away when it is time to bite. The leanest pig squeaks most. It is not the hen which cackles most that lays most eggs. Saying and doing are two different things. It is the barren cow that bellows.

There may be great noise of threshing where there is no wheat. Great boast, little roast. Much froth, little beer. Drums sound loud because there is nothing in them. Good men know themselves too well to chant their own praises. Barges without cargoes float high on the canal; but the fuller they are, the lower they sink. Good cheese sells itself without puffery. Good wine needs no bush; and when men are really excellent, people find it out without telling. Bounce is the sign of folly. Loud braying reveals a donkey. If a man is ignorant and holds his tongue, no one will despise him; but if he rattles on with

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<sup>58</sup> See Free Grace Broadcaster 168, *Pride and Humility*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>59</sup> **wash-leather** – chamois; thin, soft leather known for its absorption, from the skin of a mountain goat species.

an empty head, and a tongue that brags like forty, he will write out his own name in capital letters, and they will be these: F, O, O, L.

*'By the ears the donkey's known'—  
A truth as sure as parsons preach,  
The man, as proverbs long have shown,  
Is seen most plainly through his speech.*

## 15. Try

*By little strokes, men fell great oaks.*

### **Effort**

Of all the pretty little songs I have ever heard my youngsters sing, that is one of the best which winds up, "If at first you don't succeed, Try, try, try again." I recommend it to grown-up people who are down in the mouth and fancy that the best thing they can do is to give up. Nobody knows what he can do till he tries. "We shall get through it now," said Jack to Harry as they finished up the pudding. Everything new is hard work, but a little "Try" ointment rubbed on the hand and worked into the heart makes all things easy.

Can't-do-it sticks in the mud, but Try soon drags the wagon out of the rut. The fox said, "Try," and he got away from the hounds when they almost snapped at him. The bees said, "Try," and turned flowers into honey. The squirrel said, "Try," and up he went to the top of the beech tree. The snowdrop said, "Try," and bloomed in the cold snows of winter. The sun said "Try," and the spring soon threw Jack Frost out of the saddle. The young lark said "Try," and he found that his new wings took him over hedges and ditches and up where his father was singing. The ox said "Try," and ploughed the field from end to end. No hill too steep for Try to climb, no clay too stiff for Try to plough, no field too wet for Try to drain, no hole too big for Try to mend...

What man has done, man can do; and what has never been may be. Ploughmen have become gentlemen, cobblers have turned their lapstones into gold, and tailors have sprouted into Members of Parliament. Tuck up your shirt-sleeves, young Hopeful, and go at it. "Where there's a will, there's a way." The sun shines for all the world. Believe in God and stick to hard work, and see if the mountains are not removed. Faint-heart never won Fair-lady. Cheer, boys, cheer; God helps those who help themselves.<sup>60</sup> Never mind luck; that's what the fool had when he killed himself with eating suet<sup>61</sup> pudding. The best luck in all the world is made up of joint oil and sticking plaster.

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<sup>60</sup> The author is not endorsing an independent spirit, or implying that man should be led by his own will. Rather, the author is communicating in a few short words the doctrine of sanctification: when we are submissive to God's will and diligently laboring to serve Him with all our hearts, then God blesses our obedience.

<sup>61</sup> **suet** – fatty tissue about the loins or kidneys of a sheep or ox, used to make a meat dish.

## ***Excuses***

Don't wait for helpers. Try those two old friends: your strong arms. Self is the man. If the fox wants poultry for his cubs, he must carry the chickens home himself. None of her friends can help the hare; she must run for herself, or the greyhounds will have her. Every man must carry his own sack to the mill. You must put your own shoulder to the wheel and keep it there, for there's plenty of ruts in the road. If you wait till all the ways are paved, you will have light shining between your ribs. If you sit still till great men take you on their backs, you will grow to your seat. Your own legs are better than stilts; don't look to others, but trust in God and keep your powder dry.<sup>62</sup>

Don't be whining about not having a fair start. Throw a sensible man out of a window, and he will fall on his legs and ask the nearest way to his work. The more you have to begin with, the less you will have at the end. Money you earn yourself is much brighter and sweeter than any you get out of dead men's bags.<sup>63</sup> A scant breakfast in the morning of life whets the appetite for a feast later in the day. He who has tasted a sour apple will have the more relish for a sweet one; your present lack will make future prosperity all the sweeter. Eighteen pence has set up many a peddler in business, and he has earned his trade with it till he has kept his carriage.

As for the place you are cast in, don't find fault with that. You need not be a horse because you were born in a stable. If a bull tossed a man of mettle sky high, he would drop down into a good place. A hard-working young man, with his wits about him, will make money where others do nothing but lose it.

*Who loves his work and knows to spare,  
May live and flourish anywhere.*

As to a little trouble, who expects to find cherries without stones or roses without thorns? Who would win must learn to bear. Idleness lies in bed, sick of the doldrums,<sup>64</sup> where industry finds health and wealth. The dog in the kennel barks at the fleas; the hunting dog does not even know they are there. Laziness waits till the river is dry and never gets to market; "Try" swims it and makes all the trade. Can't-do-it couldn't eat the bread and butter that was cut for him, but Try made meat out of mushrooms.

Everybody who does not get on lays it all on competition. When the wine was stolen, they said it was the rats—it's very convenient to have a horse to put the saddle on.<sup>65</sup> A mouse may find a hole, be the room ever so full of cats. Good workmen are always wanted. There's a penny to be turned at the worst booth in the fair. No barber ever shaves so close but another barber will find something left. Nothing is so good but what it might be better, and he who sells the best wins the trade. We were all going to the workhouse because of the new machines, so the prophets down at the taproom were always telling us; but, instead of it, all these threshing, reaping, and hay-making machines have helped to make those men better off who had sense enough to work them. If a man has not a

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<sup>62</sup> **keep...dry** – military expression: be ready to take action and shoot.

<sup>63</sup> **dead men's bags** – an inheritance.

<sup>64</sup> **doldrums** – dullness; low spirits.

<sup>65</sup> **horse to put the saddle on** – scapegoat; someone or something to blame for my problem.

soul above clodhopping, he may expect to keep poor; but if he opens his sense-box, and picks up here a little and there a little, even Johnny Raw may yet improve. “Times are bad,” they say; yes, and if you go gaping about and send your wits to wool gathering,<sup>66</sup> times always will be bad.

### ***Don’t Wait***

Many don’t get on because they have not the pluck to begin in right earnest. The first pound laid by is the difficulty. The first blow is half the battle. Over with that beer jug, up with the “Try” flag, then out to your work and away to the savings bank with the savings, and you will be a man yet. Poor men will always be poor if they think they must be. But there’s a way up out of the lowest poverty if a man looks after it early, before he has a wife and half-a-dozen children. After that he carries too much weight for racing, and most commonly he must be content if he finds bread for the hungry mouths and clothes for the little backs. Yet, I don’t know, some hens scratch all the better for having a great swarm of chicks. To young men the road up the hill may be hard, but at any rate it is open, and they who set stout heart against a stiff hill shall climb it yet. What was hard to bear will be sweet to remember. If young men would deny themselves, work hard, and save in their early days, they need not keep their noses to the grindstone all their lives—as many do. Let them be teetotalers for economy’s sake; water is the strongest drink—it drives mills. It’s the drink of lions and horses, and Samson never drank anything else. The beer money would soon build a house.

If you want to do good in the world, the little word “Try” comes in again. There are plenty of ways of serving God, and some that will fit you exactly as a key fits a lock. Don’t hold back because you cannot preach in St. Paul’s;<sup>67</sup> be content to talk to one or two in a cottage—very good wheat grows in little fields. You may cook in small pots as well as in big ones. Little pigeons can carry great messages. Even a little dog can bark at a thief, wake up the master, and save the house. A spark is fire. A sentence of truth has heaven in it. Do what you do right thoroughly, pray over it heartily, and leave the result to God.

Alas! Advice is thrown away on many, like good seed on a bare rock (Mat 13:19-20). Teach a cow for seven years, but she will never learn to sing the Old Hundredth.<sup>68</sup> Of some it seems true that when they were born, Solomon went by the door but would not look in. Their coat of arms is a fool’s cap on a donkey’s head. They sleep when it is time to plough, and weep when harvest comes. They eat all the parsnips for supper, and wonder they have none left for breakfast. Our working people are shamefully unthrifty, and so old England swarms with poor. If what goes into the mash-tub went into the knead-

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<sup>66</sup> **wool gathering** – looking for wool lying in the field, instead of shearing the sheep; by extension, indulgence in aimless thought or dreamy imagining; absentmindedness.

<sup>67</sup> **St. Paul’s** – London’s large Anglican cathedral. It sits on Ludgate Hill at the highest point of the City of London, its dome standing 365 feet above ground level, designed by Sir Christopher Wren in the late 17th century in the English Baroque style.

<sup>68</sup> **Old Hundredth** – melody put to the 100<sup>th</sup> Psalm as well as the Doxology.

ing-trough,<sup>69</sup> families would be better fed and better taught. If what is spent in waste were only saved against a rainy day, work houses would never be built.

*Once let every man say Try, Very few on straw would lie;  
Fewer still of want would die. Pans would all have fish to fry;  
Pigs would fill the poor man's sty; Want would cease and need would fly;  
Wives and children cease to cry; Poor rates would not swell so high;  
Things wouldn't go so much awry—You'd be glad, and so would I.*

## 16. Very Ignorant People

*Those who know the world best, trust it least.*

### **Practical Learning**

Wisdom in a poor man is like a diamond set in lead, for none but good judges can discover its value. Wisdom walks often in patched clothes, and then folks do not admire her; but I say, never mind the coat, give me the man. Shells are nothing; the kernel is everything. You need not go to Pirbright to find ignoramuses; there are heaps of them near St. Paul's.<sup>70</sup> I would have everybody able to read and write; indeed, I don't think a man can know too much. But mark you, the knowing of these things is not education; and there are millions of your reading and writing people who are as ignorant as neighbor Norton's calf, which did not know its own mother. This is as plain as the nose on your face if you only think a little. To know how to read and write is like having tools to work, but if you don't use these tools, and your eyes and ears too, you will be none the better off.

Everybody should know what most concerns him and makes him most useful. If cats can catch mice and hens can lay eggs, they know the things that most suit what they were made for. It is little use for a horse to know how to fly; it will do well enough if it can trot. A man on a farm ought to learn all that belongs to farming; a blacksmith should study a horse's foot; a dairymaid should be well up in skimming the milk and making the butter; and a laborer's wife should be a good scholar in the sciences of boiling and baking, washing and mending. And John Ploughman ventures to say that those men and women who have not learned the duties of their callings are very ignorant people, even if they can tell the Greek name for a crocodile or write a poem on a black beetle. It is too often very true—

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<sup>69</sup> **mash tub...kneading trough** – The mash tub is used in making beer; the kneading trough in making bread.

<sup>70</sup> **Pirbright...St. Paul's** – Pirbright is a poorer area southwest of London; St. Paul's Cathedral is located in a preferred section of central London.

*Jack has been to school  
To learn to be a fool.*

When a man falls into the water, to know how to swim will be of more use to him than all his mathematics, and yet how very few boys learn swimming! Girls are taught dancing and French, when stitching and English would be a hundred percent more use to them. When men have to earn their livings in these hard times, a good trade and industrious habits will serve their turn a world better than all the classics in Cambridge and Oxford; but who nowadays advocates practical training at our schools? Schoolmasters would go into fits if they were asked to teach poor people's boys to hoe potatoes and plant cauliflowers, and yet school boards would be doing a power of good if they did something of the sort. If you want a dog to be a pointer or a setter, you train him accordingly. Why ever don't they do the same with men? It ought to be "every man for his business, and every man master of his business." Let Jack and Tom learn geography by all means, but don't forget to teach them how to black their own boots and put a button onto their own trousers. And as for Jane and Sally, let them sing and play the music if they like, but not till they can darn a stocking and make a shirt. When they mend up that Education Act, I hope they will put in a clause to teach children practical common-sense home duties, as well as the three R's.<sup>71</sup>

But there, what's the use of talking this way; for if children are to learn common sense, where are we to get the teachers? Very few people have any of it to spare, and those who have are never likely to take to school keeping. Lots of girls learn nothing except the folderols,<sup>72</sup> which I think they call "accomplishments." There's poor Gent with six girls and about fifty pounds a-year to keep his family on, and yet not one of them can do a hand's turn, because their mother would go into fits lest Miss Sophia Elfrida should have chapped hands through washing the family linen, or lest Alexandra Theodora should spoil her complexion in picking a few gooseberries for a pudding. It's enough to make a cat laugh to hear the poor things talk about fashion and etiquette, when they are not half as well off as the peddler's daughters down the lane, who earn their own living and are laying money by against the time when some young farmer will pick them up. Trust me, he who marries these flighty young ladies will have as bad a bargain as if he married a wax doll. How the fat would be in the fire if Mrs. Gent heard me say it, but I do say it for all that—she and her girls are ignorant, very ignorant, because they do not know what would be of most service to them. Every donkey thinks itself fit to be one of the queen's horses; every candle reckons itself the sun. But when a man with his best coat on, and a paper collar, a glass in his eye, a brass chain on his waistcoat, a cane in his hand, and emptiness in his head, fancies that people cannot see through his swaggers and brags, he must be ignorant, very ignorant, for he does not know himself...Dancing

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<sup>71</sup> **three R's** – reading, writing, and arithmetic.

<sup>72</sup> **folderols** – meaningless syllables making up the lyrics to various old songs; mere nonsense; foolish talk or ideas.

masters and tailors may rig up a dandy, but they cannot make a nothing into a man. You may color a millstone as much as you like, but you cannot improve it into a cheese...<sup>73</sup>

### **Warning**

When tradesmen...lend money at outrageous interest and think to make their fortunes by it, they must be ignorant, very ignorant. As well hang a wooden kettle over the fire to boil the water for tea, or sow beans in a river and look for a fine crop.

When men believe in lawyers and moneylenders (whether Jews or Gentiles), and borrow money, and speculate, and think themselves lucky fellows, they are shamefully ignorant. The very gander on the common would not make such a stupe of himself, for he knows when anyone tries to pluck him—and won't lose his feathers, and pride himself in the operation.

The man who spends his money with the bar tender, and thinks that the landlord's bows and "How do ye do, my good fellow?" mean true respect, is a perfect natural; for with them it is,

*If you have money, take a seat;  
If you have none, take to your feet.*

The fox admires the cheese in the raven's mouth; if it were not for that, he would not care a rap for the raven. The bait is not put into the trap to feed the mouse, but to catch him. We don't light a fire for the herring's comfort, but to roast him for our own eating. Men do not keep beerhouses for the laborer's good; if they do, they certainly miss their aim. Why, then, should people drink "for the good of the house"? If I spend money for the good of any house, let it be my own and not the landlord's. It's a bad well into which you must put water; and the beerhouse is a bad friend, because it takes your all and leaves you nothing but headaches. He who calls those his friends who let him sit and drink by the hour together, is ignorant, very ignorant. Why, Red Lions, and Tigers, and Eagles, and Vultures,<sup>74</sup> are all creatures of prey, and none but fools put themselves within the power of their jaws and talons...

He who believes in promises made at elections has long ears, and may try to eat thistles. Mr. Plausible has been around asking all the workingmen for their votes, and he will do all sorts of good things for them. Will he? Yes, the day after tomorrow—a little later than never. Poor men who expect the "friends of the workingman" to do anything for them, must be ignorant, very ignorant. When they get their seats, of course they cannot stand up for their principles except when it is to their own interest to do so.

To lend umbrellas and look to have them sent home, to do a man a good turn and expect another from him when you need it, to dream of stopping some women's tongues, to try to please everybody, to hope to hear gossips speak well of you, or to reckon upon getting the truth of a story from common report—are all evidences of great ignorance. Those who know the world best, trust it least; those who trust it at all are not wise—as well trust a horse's heel or a dog's tooth! Trusting to others ruins many.

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<sup>73</sup> **millstone...cheese** – many whole cheeses are in the shape of a short cylinder like millstones.

<sup>74</sup> **Red Lions...Vultures** – names of pubs and taverns.

He who leaves his business to court officers and servants, and believes it will be well done, must be ignorant, very ignorant. The mouse knows when the cat is out of the house, and servants know when the master is away. No sooner is the eye of the master gone than the hand of the workman slackens; at least, it is so nine times out of ten. “I’ll go myself” and “I’ll see to it” are two good servants on a farm.

### ***Industry***

Those who lie in bed and bolster themselves up with the notion that their trade will carry on itself, are ignorant, very ignorant. Such as drink and live riotously, and wonder why their faces are so blotchy and their pockets so bare, would leave off wondering if they had two grains of wisdom. Those who go to the pub for happiness climb a tree to find fish. We might put all their wit in an eggshell, or they would never be such dupes as to hunt after comfort where it is no more to be found than a cow in a crow’s nest; but, alas, good-for-nothings are common as mice in a haystack! I only wish we could pack them off to Lubberland,<sup>75</sup> where they have half a crown a day for sleeping. If someone could let loose fellows see the sure result of ill-living, perhaps they might reform; and yet I don’t know, for they do see it, and yet go on all the same—like a moth that burns its wings in the flame and yet dashes into the candle again. Certainly for loitering luses to expect to thrive by keeping their hands in their pockets, or their noses in pewter pots, proves them to be ignorant, very ignorant.

When I see a young lady with a flower garden on her roof and a draper’s shop on her body, tossing her head about as if she thought everybody was charmed with her, I am sure she must be ignorant, very ignorant. Sensible men don’t marry a wardrobe or a bonnet-box; they want a woman of sense—and women of that kind always dress sensibly, and not gaudily.

To my mind, those who sneer at religion, and set themselves up to be too knowing to believe in the Bible, are shallow fellows. They generally use big words and bluster a great deal, but if they fancy they can overturn the faith of thinking people, who have tried and proved the power of the grace of God, they must be ignorant, very ignorant. He who looks at the sunrise and the sunset, and does not see the footprints of God, must be inwardly blinder than a mole and only fit to live underground. God seems to talk to me in every primrose and daisy, to smile upon me from every star, to whisper to me in every breath of morning air, and to call aloud to me in every storm. It is strange that so many educated gentlemen see God nowhere, while John the ploughman feels Him everywhere. John has no wish to change places, for the sense of God’s presence is his comfort and joy. They say that man is the god of the dog: those men must be worse than dogs who will not listen to the voice of God, for [even] a dog obeys its master’s whistle. They call themselves “philosophers,” don’t they? Their proper name is fools, for “the fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psa 53:1). The sheep know when rain is coming, the swallows foresee the winter, and even the pigs, they say, can see the wind. How much worse

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<sup>75</sup> **Lubberland** – the imaginary fool’s paradise popularized in an English ballad, “An Invitation to Lubberland,” first printed in 1685.



than a brute must he be who lives where God is everywhere present, and yet sees Him not! Thus it is very clear that a man may be a great hand at learning and yet be ignorant, very ignorant.

