

HONESTY

THE
BEST POLICY.



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A GENTLEMAN who was one day a passenger on the River Thames, observed on the stern of the boat these words, "Honesty the best Policy." Taking notice of it he determined to enter into conversation with the waterman; and, inquiring into his situation in life, found that he had a wife and five children, and supported also an old father and mother-in-law by his own labour. The gentleman upon this was still more desirous to know why he had given such a title to his boat, and asked him the reason of it. I can easily explain this to your satisfaction, answered the young man, if you will give me leave; and being desired to proceed, he spoke as follows:

My father and mother died a few years ago, and left a large family. My father was a waterman, and I was his assistant in the management of a ferry-boat, by which he supported his family: on his death, it was necessary (in order to pay his just debts) to sell our boat; and I parted from it even with tears. But the distress which I felt spurred me on to industry; for I said, I will use every kind of diligence to purchase my boat back again. I accordingly went to the person who had bought it, and told him my design: he had given five guineas for it, but told me, as I was the owner, and had acted so honourably in regard to my father's debts, that the boat should be mine again whenever I could raise five pounds. Shall the boat be mine again? said I; my heart bounded at the thought, and I resolved to do my utmost in an honest and fair way to obtain my object.

I was at this time married to a good young woman, and we lived in a small cottage. She was healthy, industrious, and careful. We loved one another dearly, and, united in our affections and our efforts, what might we not undertake? My father used to say to me, "Always do what is right; labour diligently; manage frugally; trust in God; and rest assured that he will bless your store." We treasured up these rules, and determined to try the truth of them. My wife had long been the support of two aged parents: I loved them, and took care of them as my own, knowing, that "he who provideth not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." (1 Tim. v. 8.) The desire of contributing to their support, as well as to that of my own family, was an additional spur to my endeavours to repurchase the boat. I entered myself as a day-labourer in the garden of our squire; and my wife was called occasionally to perform some services at the house, and employed herself in needle-work, spinning, or knitting at home; not a moment of the day was suffered to pass unemployed. We lived sparingly, not a shilling was spent in the alehouse, nor on any improper object; and by these means we were enabled to contribute a little both to the support of religion, and to real objects of charity, and also to drop every week a little overplus into a fairing-box, to buy the boat. If any accident or charity brought us an additional shilling, we did not enlarge our expense, or spend it on trifles, but we kept it also for the boat. The more careful we were, the more comfortable we felt; for we were more independent, and daily approached nearer to the object of our wishes; and as we were enabled to give ready money for all our family provisions, we bought these both better and at a lower rate than our neighbours; and this saving, without making us poorer, supplied us with a fund for pious purposes.

Our family indeed increased, but with it our

friends increased also ; for the cleanliness and frugality which furnished our cottage, and the content and cheerfulness which appeared in it, drew the notice of our rich neighbours, and of my master and mistress particularly, whose rule was to assist the industrious, but not to encourage the idle.

They did not approve of giving money to the poor ; but, in severe winters, or dear times, allowed us to buy things at a cheaper rate ; this was *money to us* ; for when we counted our little cash for the week's marketing, all that was saved to us by our tickets to purchase things at reduced prices, went into our little box.

If our children got a penny at school for a reward, or a present from a neighbour for any little service done, instead of buying gingerbread with it, they brought it home, and gave it to their mother, saying, it would help daddy to buy the boat ; and it was faithfully applied to increase our little store. I felt it my duty to teach them from their infancy to be obliging, industrious, and careful : recollecting that early habits are most lasting ; and when we train up a child in the way he should go, we have the assurance of God's promise, that "when he is old he will not depart from it." (Prov. xxii. 6.)

Thus our little store insensibly increased from time to time, till one pound only was wanting of the sum so much desired ; and often my dear wife and I used to remark, that the blessing of Heaven was very observable in the success of our honest endeavours.

But the following accident seemed to disappoint all our hopes : coming home one evening from my work at a late hour, I saw in the road a small pocket-book ; and on opening it I found a bank note of 10*l.* which plainly enough belonged to my master, for his name was on the book, and I had also seen him passing that way in the evening. It being too late, however, to return to the house, I went on my way. When I told my family of the circumstance, the little ones were thrown into a transport of joy.

My dears, said I, what is the matter? O, daddy, the *boat!* the *boat!* we may now have two or three boats! I checked them by my looks, and asked them if they knew whose money that was? They said, Yours, daddy, as you found it. I reminded them, that I was not the real owner; and bade them think how they would all feel, supposing it had been our box of money, which I had accidentally lost, and which a stranger had found and carried away; telling them, at the same time, that the Holy Scriptures direct us to do to others always, as we would wish them to do to us in similar circumstances; and asking them whether, in this case, they would not have wished the stranger who had found our box, to give it to us again.

This reasoning had the effect on their young minds which I desired: they were silent and pale with the representation of such a disaster; and I begged it might be a lesson to them never to forget the golden rule—"of doing as they would wish others to do to them," and never to turn aside from what God had made their duty.

I also took this opportunity to show them, that the possession of the boat by dishonest means would never answer, since we could not expect the blessing of God upon bad deeds. Nothing, I think, Sir, is of greater consequence than to embrace such opportunities for warning children against what is wrong; and for earnestly pressing upon their tender minds those principles of religion and morality, which are the means appointed by Heaven for guiding their youthful steps to what is right. Early religious instruction has been an unspeakable blessing to me.

But to go on with my story: the next morning I put the pocket-book into my bosom, and went to work, intending, as soon as the family arose, to give it to my master; but what were my feelings, when, on searching in my bosom, it was no where to be found. I hasted back along the road I came, looking diligently all the way, but in vain; there was no

appearance of any such thing. I would not return into my cottage, because I wished to save my family the pain I felt; and in the hopes of still recovering the book, I went to my work, following another path, which I recollected I had also gone by. On my return to the garden gate, I was accosted by the gardener, who, in a threatening tone, told me I was suspected; that our master had lost a pocket-book, describing what I had found, and that I being the only man absent from the garden at the hour of work, the rest of the men also denying that they had seen any such thing, there was every reason to conclude that I must have got it. Before I could answer, my distressed countenance confirmed the suspicion; and another servant coming up, said, I was detected; for that a person had been sent to my house, and that my wife and family had owned it all, and had described the pocket-book.

I told them the real fact, but it seemed to every one unlikely to be true; every circumstance was against me, and (my heart trembles to look back upon it) I was taken into custody, and hurried away to prison. I protested my innocence, but I did not wonder that I gained no credit. Grief now oppressed my heart; my poor wife, my dear children, and my grey-headed parents, were all at once plunged into misery, instead of the ease which we were expecting. all our hopes were blasted at the very time when we were just arriving at the height of our earthly wishes; and, what was worse, my character was tarnished, and all my ungodly fellow-servants, whose practices I had often condemned, were triumphing, and reviling religion on my account.

My misery seemed almost complete; and under these accumulated sufferings I should certainly have sunk, if the consolations of religion had not borne me up. I knew I was innocent, and these words afforded me direction, and were a source of unfailing comfort; (Psalm xxxvii. 5, 6.) "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring

it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day." These words I made the men of my counsel. I committed my way unto the Lord in frequent and fervent prayer, and I endeavoured to satisfy myself, that, according to his word, all things would come right at last. Often I thought on the history of Joseph, who, more than once, suffered wrongfully; and on the history of other Bible saints, whose sufferings were similar to my own; and in a little time my mind was quite composed. I cast my burden on the Lord, and he sustained me; and I never recall to my mind the consolations which I then enjoyed in converse with God, but the tears of joy rush into my eyes. I take it for granted, Sir, you are no enemy to religion. It is the most powerful thing to make men honest and upright in their dealings, and it has made me happier in a prison than many a prince is upon a throne.

But to return: I resolved to trust in the Lord, and act honestly, and having been the cause (though without any design) of the second loss of the property, I resolved to offer the whole of our little store to make it good, as far as in my power, and accordingly sent for my dear wife, to give her this sad commission; but, alas! when she came, I found this sacrifice would be of no avail; for, said she, "My master has been at the cottage, and I told him freely how you had found the note, but unfortunately had lost it again; and I added, that I was sure both my husband and I would make the best return in our power; after which I produced our little fairing-box, and begged him to accept the contents, which had been so long raising, as all we had to offer;" but, Sir, said the waterman, conceive my agony, when she added, that my master angrily refused, saying, "that our being in possession of all that money, was of itself the clearest proof of my guilt; for it was impossible with my large family, and no greater opportunities than my neighbours, that I

could come honestly by such a sum ; therefore he was determined to keep me in prison till I should pay the whole.

My distress for the moment was certainly very great. Every thing seemed to go against me. All my prospects were darkened, and God, who has engaged to make "darkness light, and crooked things straight," was my only confidence. In his promise and providence my heart reposed ; and my mind immediately felt its former composure. I said to my dear wife, who, while she was endeavouring to comfort me, was herself overcome with a flood of tears, Be not discouraged, all shall yet be well ; I am innocent of the crime laid to my charge, and the God whom we have endeavoured to serve will never suffer this reproach to lie upon us. None ever trusted in him in vain, and I am satisfied that some way or other he will clear up this matter, and also make it work for our good. And so it happened. One of my fellow-labourers proved to be the person who had picked up the pocket-book after I had dropt it. Having come a few minutes after me along the same road to his work, and hearing that the suspicion had fallen upon me, he was tempted to turn the accident to his own advantage, and conceal the property : having kept it in his own box for a few weeks, till he thought no suspicion would rest upon him, he went and offered the note for change, and being then suspected, my master had him taken up, and I was released.

The second change from so much misery to happiness, was almost too much for us. It was the Lord's doing, and it was wonderful in our eyes ; for my master sent for me, and with many expressions of concern for what had passed, made me give him an account of the means by which I had collected the little fund, that fixed his suspicion upon me. I accordingly related the history of it, as I have now done ; and when I came to that part where I checked my children for their inconsiderate joy, on my find-

ing the note, he rose with much kindness in his looks, and putting the bank-note into my hand, he said, "Take it, the note shall be theirs ; it is the best and only return I can make you, as well as a just reward of your honesty ; and it will be a substantial proof to your children of the goodness of your instructions ; for they will thus early see and feel the benefit of honesty and virtue." This kind and worthy gentleman interested himself much in the purchase of my boat, which in less than a week I had in my possession. The remainder of my master's bounty, and the additional advantage of the ferry, have placed me in comfortable circumstances ; which I humbly trust God will continue to us, and enable us to continue to act in obedience to his holy word, and to be obliging, honest, and industrious ; and I can say, from my own experience, that the fruit of honest industry is always sweetest. I have also the pleasure now of being able to help others ; for when a rich passenger takes my ferry, (and many do it, as my story is well known in the neighbourhood,) he often gives me more than my fare, which enables me to let the next poor person go over for half-price ; and this, with my known character for honesty, has given me more than double the work of any ferryman in the neighbourhood. And, besides, it is a more regular employment ; for all that go with me once, and get a little acquainted with me, endeavour to go with me again, if their circumstances will at all permit ; and they recommend me to their acquaintance who are coming my way ; so that I find honesty, in every point of view, to be the best policy.

My employment in this way has become also a pleasure. I see the blessing of God on my honest and lawful industry ; and I never had a quarrel with a passenger : for if any one prove unreasonable, I rather suffer a little wrong than disturb my own peace and that of others, and I never lose by such conduct in the end. A man who professes to be

religious, should be a peaceable, as well as an honest man, or his religion is vain.

And when I go home to my family at night with my little earnings, I find it a paradise of domestic enjoyment. My wife, according as our slender circumstances will permit, is always contriving how she can make me happier at home than any where else. My children are waiting to share a father's smiles, and tell me all their little tales, of what has passed during the day. And my little cottage, though poor, is always neat and clean, and orderly, and the habitation of peace.

I never frequent the alehouse, as I have said, nor spend any money on what is trifling or unnecessary, knowing that I am only a steward of those good things which Providence is pleased to bestow; and in this way, I generally save every day from sixpence to a shilling more than those in the same employment, who are in the habit of going to get a pot of porter as often as they have an opportunity; and this, put into one of these savings' banks lately instituted for the benefit of the poor, has amounted last year to no less than 12*l.*, so that I am getting rich by laying by, what others in my situation would have spent, and am unspeakably more comfortable too. Vice and extravagance, Sir, are the fruitful parents of misery; but godliness, as the Scripture says, "is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

The gentleman was extremely pleased with the waterman's story, and the piety of his remarks; and from this time, becoming acquainted with his family, did him every service in his power; giving books and schooling to the little ones, and such things as would make the old folks comfortable as long as they lived.

He was very desirous of knowing what became of the unfortunate fellow-labourer, who had so dreadfully gone aside from the principles of honesty;

and learned that he was, after a short imprisonment, set at liberty by his master, at the earnest request of the honest waterman; as he said it was partly through his carelessness in losing the note, that the temptation had fallen into his fellow-labourer's way. He had moreover a very large family; and his master was so good as to consider that as he was a man who had not been blessed with a good education in his youth; so that having little fear of God before his eyes, he had been the more easily led to commit this wicked action, by which he expected to enrich himself at the expense of an innocent man. I have great pleasure in adding, that the thought of what he had done, together with the generosity and religious character of the honest waterman, had so strong an effect on this poor fellow, that he afterwards had this written on his cottage door, *Do as you would be done unto*. And, in dependance on divine aid, he has resolved to follow this rule himself in future, and to impress it with care upon his children. Indeed, it became a rule well known over the whole parish; for every little child, having heard the story, was told that he ought to consider, before he did any action, whether he would like his brother, or sister, or school-fellow, to do the same by him; and if not, that the action was wrong, and not to be done, let the profit be ever so great. Surely, then, those who have lived long, and seen much of life, and enjoyed the advantages of religious instruction, should never depart from this simple and certain rule. It is the same to all ranks; is the sum of the second table of the law; and the man who does not act under its influence, shows too plainly that he has never been changed by the renewing of his mind. For the Holy Scriptures teach us very clearly, that all mankind are by nature both guilty and depraved; all the world are become guilty before God, (Rom. iii. 19.) and we are all by nature dead in trespasses and sins, and children of wrath; (Eph. ii. 3.) and they teach

us also that when a man becomes truly religious, he becomes a new man, and is created in Christ Jesus unto good works. The dispositions and affections of his mind are quite altered: his practice is reformed; and his devout, and regular, and honest conduct, are the most certain evidences which we can have that he is a true Christian. If any man be in Christ Jesus, says the apostle Paul, he is a new creature; and being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. These truths are most clearly stated in the eleventh and twelfth articles of the Church of England; where it is said, "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, by *faith*, and *not* for our *good works* and deservings; wherefore, that we are justified by *faith only*, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort; and albeit that good works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet are they pleasing to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and living faith; insomuch that by them a living faith may be as evidently known, as a tree is discerned by the fruit."

Christianity is not that empty and notional thing which many take it to be. It is not a mere name; a sabbath ceremony; a compliance with the customs of a country: it changes a man's character and conduct; makes him contented, industrious, and useful, like this honest waterman. And if it does not this, it wants the substance of religion, and the signature of heaven; and the man who professes it, while he has not a conversation becoming the gospel, is only deceiving his own soul.

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