

Other Men's Sins

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... Be not partaker of other men's sins.—1 Tim. v., 22.

I am not concerned to-day with the "Irish Question," but I would use the case of the late Mr. Parnell as an illustration to begin a sermon with. He was a singularly gifted man, and as a political leader had a hold upon his followers such as few men have ever had. But while he continued to be this, a time came when his followers found themselves confronted with the question to which the text refers. Could they follow him in politics after he had confessed and been judged by the world to be morally unclean? This brings up a question which is not simply an interesting problem in casuistry, but one which confronts the Christian again and again in daily life. How far may good men co-operate with bad men without becoming partakers of their sins? Please to remember that this is not at all a question of the scope of Christian charity, which "beareth all things, hopeth all things." I speak of those persons and things upon which sweet Charity has exhausted herself. She has borne and striven and hoped, and all in vain. They are openly, avowedly bad, and are not ashamed. How shall we bear ourselves toward them?

For example, shall a Christian woman maintain social relations with a notoriously profligate man? Shall she ask him to dinner? Shall she send him a card to her reception? There is no doubt about his manner of life. It is open, gross, palpable, like Falstaff's lies. He ought to be made to feel the whip of public scorn. He ought never to have the chance to look a pure girl in the face or enter a good woman's door.

Or, again, ought I to receive dividends from a business which is conducted in a manner that will not bear the light? I am, let us say, a shareholder, a small one, in a great corporation which notoriously deals hardly with its employees, or which systematically debauches the courts or the legislature, or which breaks faith with its rivals, or which crushes out its weak competitors by sheer brute strength of wealth. I have no influence in the management; my holding is so small that my proxy is not even asked. But the earnings, when they come into the company's treasury, have dirt, or sweat, or blood upon them. Shall I take my dividend? What shall I do with my stock?

Or, again, shall I go to the play to see an actor or actress whose personal life is flagrantly immoral? I am assuming now that theater-going is intrinsically as innocent as going to market. For sake of the graver issue involved, let us for the occasion take that for granted. In this case the actor is a master of his art, or she is a genius with the divine gift. But he is a debauchee, she is an adulteress. They are naked and not ashamed in their personal morals. Does that fact preclude me from going to enjoy their presentation of fictitious characters in a fictitious drama?

Or, again, and for the last time, what shall the Christian man do in his political life? The party which in its general policy best expresses his beliefs acts by methods which all good men must condemn. It breaks faith; it makes promises which it has no intention of keeping; it bribes and corrupts. Its managers use the party principles as a stalking-horse from behind which to bring down their private plunder. If I give it my vote, do I become partaker of its sins?

Now, the difficulty in all these cases arises from the complexity of modern life. In a primitive community, where life is simple, and each individual or each family self-dependent, it is easier both to see and to do the right. But we are so entangled with one another's lives! My lady does not want to ask an unclean fellow to her table, but then the fellow has a mother and sisters. She doesn't want to break with them, nor to cause them pain for their brother's faults. With "the human blindness kindly given," they do not or will not believe those things of him which all the rest of the world knows to be true. In business, unless one shuts his eyes to many things which he knows to be bad, he must simply close up. If I do not

take my bit of dividend, which I know to be tainted, my family must want. I can't afford to tear up my stock; if I sell it, is not that simply to escape a sin by saddling it upon some other man? And so on.

Now, I am speaking only to those, and I believe they are not a few, who want to live as the Master would have them do, but who are distressed by this present evil world. Is there any clue to so crooked a maze?

Roughly speaking, Christians actually do follow one or other of two courses, both of which are, to say the least, unsatisfactory. The first is the Roman Catholic method of "spiritual direction." In any case of doubt, lay the matter before your spiritual director. He is an expert. He will tell you what to do. I do not propose to discuss the evils of this method. They are so great, both for priest and people, that they must always make this method repugnant to the great mass of Christians.

The second course is to distinguish sharply between the personal and the professional character of the things and the people with whom we come in touch. This is, in fact, the way that men generally act. They are quick to judge the religious quality of any act which each one can do as an individual, and strangely indifferent to the moral side of corporate actions in which they are concerned. Men, for instance, will condone a course of conduct by the political party to which they belong, which they would not do themselves for any price. So long as the immediate, personal contact with wrong is avoided, one is not much disturbed. The hostess says, "I never ask Mr. So-and-so except to my large receptions; I detest him; but then there is his sister, Mrs. Blank, you know." Or one says, "Why shouldn't I go to see Marius play Romeo or Madame Veuve-degras play Camille? I don't ask about their morals. All I care about is that they are great actors. If I want a surgeon to cut off my arm or a teacher to teach my son mathematics, I don't ask whether or not they keep the ten commandments, but whether they know their business." Will this plea serve? There is something in it, a great deal in it. As a matter of fact, we do have all sorts of relations with people into which the personal element does not enter. It really does not concern me whether the street-car conductor who collects my fare is a virtuous man or not. But if my business partner, who is integrity itself as a partner, be the lowest kind of a man out of office-hours, does that concern me? Clearly it does. But why? You say that the personal element does not enter into the matter at all. To this I reply, you are in error concerning the way in which human personalities affect each other. You fancy that they can touch, as two contiguous circles touch, at a single point only, and from that point recede all round. This is not true. Whenever two personalities touch, they touch throughout their whole extent. The process is a vital, not a mechanical, one. The touch of a polluted soul discolours as a drop of colored liquid will discolor a vase of crystal water. The two lives flow together. They mingle so quickly and they combine with such a chemical obstinacy that only a divine reagent can precipitate them. One cannot even touch pitch without being defiled.

But the final reason why the Christian may not act upon this policy is because doing so destroys his power as a "witness." It puts out his light. The Master conceived clearly the task to be done by him and his followers in the world. There is a great heap of wrongs to be reduced, of evils to be rectified, of bad things to be made good. The first step for Christ's co-laborer is that he must get himself clear from the evil which he proposes to attack. He cannot live permanently in both camps. He cannot come and go without let or hindrance from one camp to another. He must so bear himself that he can always rebuke sin. He cannot rebuke it if he hold shares of stock in it. He cannot approach a wrong-doer as a missionary so long as he can be accused with any sort of color of sharing in the wrong or profiting by it.

Of course I know the difficulty and cost of disentangling one's self from relation with evil persons and evil things. But then the Master forestalled this objection. It may cost a right hand or a right eye, he said. I certainly could not

state it more strongly. But in this sermon I assume that it is possible. That is all. And, being possible, there is no other line permissible for the Christian. He is bound every day to face the question, "Can I share in this business, in this party, in this pleasure, in this society, and at the same time be listened to if I point to the evils in any of them?"



Women Speakers

By Elizabeth Elliot

"I wonder," said an observant man recently, "why it is that women, who are the conversation-makers of society, who keep the ball rolling so briskly in the drawing-room and around the dinner-table, when they get up to say anything in public, as a general thing, say it as tersely and baldly as possible, say just *it*, with no embellishments or superfluities, and, as quickly as they can, sit down?"

He did not mean what may be classed as professional women orators, such as some teachers, lecturers, and the large and growing class of women who make the advocacy of some cause their life-work, but that much larger class of useful women who, with all their energy, intelligence, and efficiency in church work, are yet horribly afraid of the sound of their own voices, and, when it falls to their lot to have to present a report or even to read a statement, do it under the most strenuous self-compulsion, with their knees knocking together under them, and too often in a voice that begins bravely, goes on feebly, and ends inaudibly.

There are those who maintain that all this is inexcusable in a Christian woman, that she should always have the courage to "testify," that she should not fear the face of man or the criticism of woman.

The Christian Endeavor Society—I say it with bated breath, well aware how many thousands bristle with indignation at the slightest criticism of that organization—is training up a generation of young women who are carefully instructed that they must say something whether they have anything to say or not. Many of them have something excellent to say, and say it well, but there are others! In all the women's societies there is less and less patience with the mere listeners, the women who conscientiously come to the meetings, who are interested to hear and to give, but who will not "take part." They are exhorted and adjured and labored with faithfully—though it must be owned that the exhortations commonly have little effect. The woman who won't speak listens politely, sometimes she even assumes to agree with the exhorter, but she doesn't speak! She just goes on in her quiet, gentle, unyielding way, about as responsive to persuasive influence as the Rock of Gibraltar to a child's popgun.

There are some, however, who yield to the arguments, who are convinced that, like Mrs. Dombey, it is their duty to make an effort, but who are so nervous themselves that they send shivers of nervousness through the tortured listeners. Their voices tremble, become fainter and fainter, they grow more and more hysterical, and not infrequently sit down dissolved in tears. Never shall I forget a painfully ludicrous example of this kind of speaker. It was at a woman's prayer-meeting, where earnest words had been spoken and prayers offered that were most stimulating and helpful. A good woman, of plain appearance, weak voice, and most retiring demeanor, had nerved herself to participate. Fearing to trust herself, she had brought her remarks written down. She had not read two lines before she began to weep. She wiped her eyes, and proceeded a little further, what she read being almost entirely inaudible. Then she paused, blew her nose loudly, gulped down her sobs, and took a fresh start. For a few lines she went on, sobbing and sniffing, when the leader, feeling the situation becoming painfully strained, offered to read the paper for her. She consented, and collapsed into her handkerchief, weeping copiously. But, alas for the well-meant intervention! The leader found herself confronted with a very illegible manuscript, in a totally unfamiliar handwriting. Struggling with a profane desire to laugh, she stumbled, she put in the wrong words, she even skipped whole sen-

tences. The meek woman hushed her wails, and became visibly irritated at the mutilation of her rounded periods. Trembling perceptibly with resentment, she rose, reclaimed her production, and finished the reading herself, crying out loud all the time. The most devotionally inclined had hard work not to laugh, and the good effect of the meeting was effectually dissipated. Like Gilbert's heroic "Captain Reece of the Mantelpiece," she felt that "it was her duty and she did," but the experience recalled the remark of a still more eminent theological authority, Dr. Patton, of Princeton. Commenting on those inevitable brethren who speak at every prayer-meeting, he observed that they felt it their duty to take up their cross and speak, but he had sometimes thought it was the hearers who carried the cross.

It must be owned that speaking in public is a good deal like riding a bicycle; unless you can keep your balance it is not safe to ride, but the only way by which you can learn to keep your balance is to ride boldly off and do it. Women who cannot keep themselves pretty well in hand should certainly not attempt to address others; but there are a great number of women who can learn to control themselves and their audiences, especially if those audiences be women. An intelligent and sympathetic woman knows her own sex pretty thoroughly. She knows that to hold their interest she must never offend their taste, that gentle old Keble struck the right note when he said

He could not trust his melting soul
Save in his Maker's sight.

We generally do not want to see each other's melting souls. It gives us a sense of embarrassment such as we feel for a too *décolletée* woman. We blush for her far more uncomfortably than she does for herself. But to be a good speaker a woman needs to be more than intelligent and sympathetic. As George Eliot in one of her suggestive observations upon the wonderful career of Savonarola remarks, "The secret of oratory lies not in saying new things, but in saying things with a certain power that moves the hearer." I think many women have this power, many, too, who speak with the utmost simplicity and unself-consciousness. We are impressed, as we hear them, with the conviction that they do but speak because they must. They are simple, direct, filled with their message, convinced of its supreme importance, and therefore convincing.

I know it is not fashionable now to quote St. Paul. Even those who politely acknowledge his earnestness find him altogether too theological and abstruse for modern religious methods. But we must all agree with him when he says "we have gifts differing." Some women can speak in meeting, and some can not. If we could glorify God and help our fellow-men only by speaking in public, it would be very sad for the women who can not. But while we can pray in private, and give with one hand without mentioning it to the other, and listen without criticism, and sew for the poor people, and help to teach the little children, we can comfort ourselves by remembering that the King who said, "I was naked and ye clothed me, I was sick and ye visited me, I was in prison and ye came unto me," did not say a single word about speaking in meeting.



All great ages have been ages of belief. I mean, when there was any extraordinary power of performance, when great national movements began, when arts appeared, when heroes existed, when poems were made, the human soul was in earnest.—*Emerson*.

The only way to regenerate the world is to do the duty which lies nearest us, and not to hunt after grand, far-fetched ones for ourselves. If each drop of rain chose where it should fall, God's showers would not fall as they do now.—*Charles Kingsley*.

We are carried through many a hard thing by the very press and stimulus to our whole nature, summoned in its integrity to act or to endure. It is like the fifteen pounds to the square inch which we *rest* in, because we bear it on *all* the square inches.—*Mrs. A. D. T. Whitney*.