

HONESTY
THE
BEST POLICY.

— PUBLISHED BY THE
AMERICAN TRACT
SOCIETY.

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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 labor. 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. In reply the young man 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. I parted from it even with tears, and resolved if possible to purchase it back again. I accordingly went to the person who had bought it, and telling him my design, he engaged that the boat should be mine again whenever I could raise five pounds. My heart bounded at the thought, and I re-

solved 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. My father used to say, ‘Always do what is right; labor 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. I obtained work as a day-laborer, and my wife 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 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 lay aside every week a little towards buying the boat.

“If our children got a penny at school for a reward, or a present from a neighbor for any little service done, they brought it home and gave it to their mother, saying it would help father to buy the boat. 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.’

“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 endeavors.

“But the following accident seem-

ed 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 ten pounds, 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, father, 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, father, 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.

“ This reasoning had the effect on their young minds which I desired, 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.

“ 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 nowhere to be found ! I hastened back along the road I came, looking diligently all the way, but in vain—there was no trace of it to be seen. On my return to the garden-gate, I was accosted by the gardener, who

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, there was every reason to conclude that I must have got it. Before I could answer, 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 I was arrested 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 gray-headed parents were all at once plunged into misery ; 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 consolation of religion had not borne me up. I knew I was innocent, and these words were a source of unfailing comfort, ‘Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass.’ I resolved, having been the cause (though without any design) of the second loss of the property, to offer the whole of our little store to make it good, as far as in my power, and accordingly sent for my 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 my husband and I would make the best return in our power : after which I produced our little box and begged him to accept the contents as all we had to offer ; but,’ 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 neighbors, 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, but, conscious of my innocence, I soon recovered my composure, and grew confident

that we should not trust in God in vain. And so it happened. One of my fellow-laborers proved to be the person who had picked up the pocket-book after I had dropped 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 ; which, having kept for a few weeks, till he thought no suspicion would rest upon him, he offered the note for change, and being then suspected, was taken up, and I was released.

“The sudden 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. 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 finding 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 for 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. I have now the pleasure of being able

to help others; for when a rich passenger takes my ferry, as my story is well known in the neighborhood, he often gives me more than my fare, which enables me to let the next poor person go over for half price.

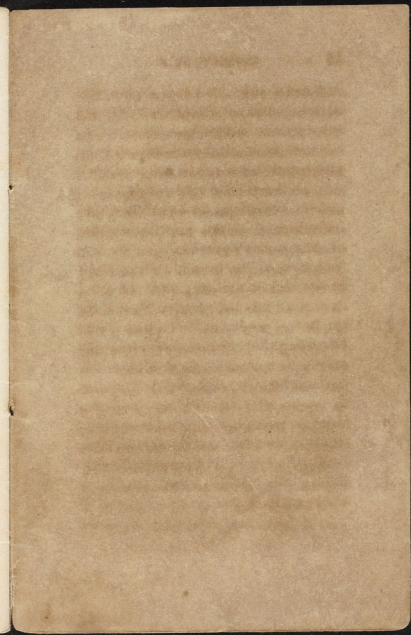
“ My employment in this way has become also a pleasure. I see the blessing of God on my honest and lawful industry; and when I go home to my family at night with my little earnings, I find it a paradise of domestic enjoyment. My wife, according as our slender circumstances will permit, is always contriving how she can make me happier at home than any where else. My children are waiting to share a father's smile, 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 the habitation of peace. 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 was very desirous of knowing what became of the unfortunate fellow-laborer who had so dreadfully gone aside from the principles of honesty. He learned that he was, after a short imprisonment, set at liberty at the earnest request of the honest waterman; that the thought of what he had done, together with the generosity and religious conduct of the waterman, had so strong an effect on him, that he afterward had this written on his cottage door, *Do as you would be done unto*. And in dependence on Divine aid, he has resolved to follow this rule himself in future, and to impress it with care upon his children.

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 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 man is, by nature, "dead in trespasses and sins," Ephes. 2:2; but when he becomes a new man, and is "created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works," the dispositions and affections of his mind are quite altered; his practice is reformed; and his devout, regular, and honest conduct are the most certain evidences which we can have that he is a true christian.

THE END.



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