

UP FROM SIN

The Fall and Rise of a Prodigal
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by

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CHAPTER ONE

STARTING IN LIFE

“A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father: Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living” (Luke 15:11, 12).

There are many lessons to be learned from a careful study of the parable of the prodigal son: the fatherhood of God – man’s proneness to sin and stray away from God – the nature and consequences of sin – return to God a voluntary act – and God’s willingness to forgive. These points will all consume a portion of our consideration as we proceed.

We will first consider the prodigal at

HIS HOME

There is no questioning the fact that in the majority of instances a boy’s home life marks his future conduct. But when I say “home life” I do not mean the amount of money in his home. Oh, we so often confound the word home with something material! A boy’s home is not made up of money. It is not made up of houses and lands. It is something grander than these. It is something indestructible. It is that which will stand misfortune and reverses. It is a moral and spiritual edifice. Well might the Italian sing-

“My home, my home is love;
There is nothing that can tell it.”

There was a mighty truth spoken by a little waif on the streets of a certain city one morning as he met a handsomely dressed gentleman, and began talking to him about his home. Said he:

“Mister, I’ve got the finest home you ever seen, if I am in rags myself.”

“*Your* home?” said the man.

“Yes, sir, my home.”

“Where is your home?”

Just at that time he saw coming around the corner a poor old woman, with a bundle of clothes upon her head, and, pointing toward her, he said:

“There it is, mister.”

Yes, many of us can appreciate his words. When I go to the city of Raleigh, N. C., I always want to visit my old home; but where do I go? Not to the old house. ‘Tis true, there are many things which could interest me there: the old playground, where I used to sail kites and play marbles and jump the rope. But I don’t go there to find my home – oh, no!

I go over to beautiful green Oakwood, and I ramble around among the cedars and the marble slabs, till I come to a little mound that marks the grandest mansion that was ever erected by hands – the spot where dear mother lies. So a boy’s home does not consist of houses and lands, but a mother’s love and a father’s protecting care.

May we not conclude that much of the failure on the part of young men is due to false training in the home? May it not be that much of the good learned in life, in the school room and church, is lost because the home does not back up such lessons? Let me then appeal to you, fathers and mothers. Study well this matter. To neglect it is an awful mistake to make. Try to help me as I try to help your boys.

It is not always true, however, that a bad or unsuccessful boy has had bad training. Doubtless it was not true in the case of the prodigal. He may have had the very best. And it is no excuse for a young man that he was not trained properly, for boys become men, and men ought to know right from wrong and to act for themselves.

What, in my judgment, causes so much failure on the part of young men is a false conception of life at the start.

A FALSE CONCEPTION OF LIFE

First – This is shown in a crazy disposition on their part to get away from home and home influences.

This was true of the young prodigal. He was restless and unsettled; wanted to get away from home and home influences; could not stand the restraints of his father, the earnest pleadings of his mother. There was too much sameness about his life. He could see other young men having a good time in the world, and why should not he enjoy some of the fun?

How much life him are many of our boys! I know what I am talking about; I’ve been a boy. I am going to talk plain to you, then, boys. Not that I delight in criticizing you, but to help you.

The modern prodigal – how numerous his kind! He wants to get away from the old folks; get away from home.

There is not as much liberty as he wants and (he thinks) he deserves. He looks around, and sees other boys have freedom. They are not tied to “mother’s apron string.” They stay upon the streets day and night. They are not forced to come home and give an account as to where they have been. They don’t have to go to church and hear a long sermon, or to attend Sunday school. But with him it is the reverse. He has to go to church and Sunday-school; cannot be allowed late hours upon the streets; somebody is always watching him; and he concludes that he can’t stand it.

Besides, there is too much restraint upon his bodily indulgences. He opens his big Solomon eyes, and sees to harm in this and that thing. There is, to him, no harm in visiting the opera and looking hours upon half-dressed men and women. Oh, no; that’s not any harm! Mother and father object, but that is “old folks’ fogishness.”

There is, to him, not the slightest harm in dancing the german. Oh, no; it gives grace to one’s carriage. No harm at all in clasping his arms around the waist of a young lady, provided it is in a ballroom. True, mother and father tell him that it is like a breeze which many times fans the animal passions into flame to such an extent that ruin is the inevitable consequence. But that is more “old folks’ fogishness.”

He sees no harm in playing a game of cards for fun in the parlor with a young lady. Certainly not; it passes away the time so pleasantly. The old folks say it is wrong. They say it may lead to ruin. But they don’t know. Boys are presumed to know some things.

And then occasionally he wants to smoke a cigarette. The cigarette is a necessary concomitant of the dude, and he sees no harm in it; other boys do it; it don’t hurt them. On the other hand, it looks nice and sporty for a boy to smoke gracefully a cigarette. ‘Tis true again, mother and father and the family doctor tell him that one great cause for the rapid spread of consumption today is the inhalation of the hot, poisonous fumes of the cigarette.

Ah, young men, hear me upon this point. Many a young man today is a wreck, mentally and physically, because of this awful habit. I shall never forget a death scene I witnessed once. It was caused by cigarettes.

He was a bright young man, and had a promising future. He formed the habit of smoking cigarettes, and, like all others, he inhaled the smoke. He continued this for several years. His lungs were not strong. After awhile, a cough developed. A physician was called. His lung tissue was beginning to give way. His eyes were swollen from the arsenic in which the paper was bleached. The doctor told him to quit, but he could not; it had gone too far. Like a man chained to a post, he was chained fast to this mighty evil. Finally he gave up, and I shall never forget his confession on his deathbed. Said he:

“Doctor, I am a murderer. I have taken my own life, and am afraid that I cannot get pardon.”

Oh, young men, this is a mighty evil! I wish I could impress you with it as it truly is. I beg you, lay down that death-germ you hold in your hand. Free from it, or it will be your ruin. Great God, help them as they try to let the habit go!

Liberty! Liberty! Liberty! What of its fruits? Go into our big cities today. Let me show you those great institutions, with rooms filled with young men; the germs of death eating out their lives. Take care, young men, lest, as you plunge into what you call fun and innocent pleasure, you do not pay its awful penalty. Take care that, as you hunt for liberty, you do not find a prison.

THE CURSE OF THE DAY

Second – This false conception of life is seen in the extravagant manner in which young men spend what they get.

It has been said, extravagance is the curse of the age. I believe it is true. Largely what a young man is by twenty-five, he is for life.

- Edison was famous for his inventions when twenty-three.
- Bacon was a member of Parliament at twenty-three; at twenty-six, one of its leaders.
- Hayne, when twenty-two, had the best paying law practice in South Carolina.
- Poe was a poet at sixteen; at twenty-four he wrote "*The Raven*."
- Bryant wrote poetry at nine; at eighteen, his masterpiece, "*Thanatopsis*," was published.
- Choate entered college at sixteen; began practicing law at twenty-four.
- Longfellow's first poetry was published at thirteen.
- Shakespeare left school at fourteen; Clay at fourteen; John Bright at fifteen.
- Scott entered the fair realm of literature at twenty-five.
- Byron's first poems appeared at nineteen; at twenty-four, he reached the highest pinnacle of his literary fame.
- Wilberforce entered Parliament at twenty-one.
- William of Orange commanded the army on the French frontier at twenty-two.
- Napoleon, at twenty-seven, commanded the army in Italy.
- Hamilton began his public career at seventeen; at twenty-seven, was one of the best-known lawyers of his day.

So I say a young man's habits are usually pretty well established by the time he is twenty-five. If then he should be extravagant till that age, he may expect to be extravagant for life.

I believe this is the solution of the hard-times problems. Bad legislation on the part of state and nation has been accused. It doubtless may be partly responsible. Good legislation may tend to remedy things. But as I see it, extravagance is the fundamental cause for all our trouble along this life; extravagance in the individual and in the nation; more money going out than is coming in.

A young man today thinks that about the highest achievement in life is to so live as to gain for himself, by his money or otherwise, the title of "society man." It makes no special difference what it cost.

Girls are largely responsible for such a sad state of society. At a very prominent watering place I once overheard two young ladies talking about a certain young man who lived in their town. One of the girls remarked:

“Oh, he is awfully nice; no better boy in town; prominent in church; a thorough business boy; saved his money, and, in fact, he’s perfection. But you know we girls can’t associate with him in company because he’s not a ‘society boy.’”

What did she mean? She meant that he didn’t throw his money away buying spike-tail coats and big-leg trousers; that he did not visit the german, the opera, the card table and the saloon. Yes, it meant that he was a man, and, as such, possessed enough sense to know the pitfalls in the way of young men. And it is in order to appease the cry of foolish, flippant girls that they are led into such life; caused to spend their time and money in reckless extravagance, until by the time they are old enough to settle down in life they have neither health nor wealth. There is many a one who is being led on and on to ruin by this false idea of life.

There is a young man in our city who came from another city. At home, he was a good boy; prominent in church and in business; never thought of being a dude. But when he came here he fell in with the wrong crowd; and today he is a physical, financial and moral wreck. God pity any boy who falls in with that crowd.

In another city I had a playmate and a friend. He was thought well of by the town. He was a very prominent young man in church; had a good, godly mother. This boy went to another state, received a good salary, but unfortunately fell in with the wrong crowd. He began the sporting life. Step by step he went downward, until after awhile he came to himself, saw his condition, saw an overdrawn account which he could not meet. He skipped for the West, but he was caught, and tonight he is serving a term of five years in the Virginia State prison.

Oh, think upon these things! They are no “tales”; they are facts. You do not think they will be *your* end, but it is well for you to watch. You are not safe so long as you are in this road. When I was in a Western city once, the people were much alarmed one morning at the news of “no water.” The reservoir was practically dry. What was the matter? Why, a secret leak had sprung in its base, and though supplied by the Ohio river, yet, because of the leak, it was insufficient. So, young man, you may convert your business into a regular flowing Pactolus, ever depositing its golden sands in your coffers, but through numerous wastes of unfrugal habits you may live embarrassed and die in want.

A FALSE CLAIM

Third – This false idea of life is seen in the exhibition of their impudent dependence.

It was so with the prodigal. Hear his demands; see his consummate impudence: “**Father**” – it is a wonder he said “father”; most of our young men would not have had so much respect for him; they would have said “old man” – “**give me my goods, the portion belonging to me.**”

Impudence personified! He had no goods. What had he done to have a claim upon his father’s goods? That father ought to have taken him off, given him a good flogging, and then put him to work. That’s the goods he needed.

There is too much sponging upon the hard earnings of the old fathers.

I know healthy young men who walk around our streets all the week, spin yarns, fight cocks, “root” for baseballers, play cards and read novels, and think nothing of going to their old fathers Saturday nights and demanding “spending change.” Some of them depend upon poor, hard-working mothers for all they get. And yet society does not frown them down. They are given high seats, and the public applaud. Oh, when will these things change? When will society be purged!

THE FAMILY WAGON

One day I was going down the street and saw a wagon stalled. It was loaded with wood. Hitched to it was a poor old flap-eared mule, looking as if he was on his way to the bone-yard more than anywhere else.

On this wagon were two strong, broad-shouldered young men. I watched them for awhile.

“Get up! Get up!” they shouted. “What’s you here for?”

And then bang! Bang! Bang! Came the lash.

“Get up! Get up! Get up! What’s you here fur?”

The temptation was too strong. I said:

“Boys, get down and give him a lift.”

“None of your business,” they said. And I went on.

Now I think I’ve seen some family wagons life that. A poor, old father is hitched. He pulls his best, and can just manage to get along. Two or three great strapping boys, who ought themselves to do the pulling, are always on the wagon. They whip and they slash when things get stalled, but never think of putting their own shoulders to the wheel and helping to carry the load.

THE REAL END OF LIFE

Finally, young men, let me at the start impress you with the real end of life; it is the glory of God and the good of your fellow-men.

All other things fade away. Pleasure is but for a season. Money must perish. But service to God grows brighter and brighter as the years go by.

Oh, that you could learn this lesson; learn it while under the home-roof, while starting in life. This is the period of most importance to you. Much depends upon it.

A vessel was coming across the waters. A young man was aboard. Bucked around him was a belt of precious treasures he had gathered on his journeys. During the last night of the journey, the boiler of the vessel exploded. The ship, consequently, began to sink.

The passengers began to leap, with their life-preservers, into the angry sea. Just as he was preparing to leap, a little girl came up and said:

“Mister, won’t you save me?”

He thought a moment, pulled off his treasures, cast them upon the deck, threw his arms around her, and leaped for their lives. The great waves came and rolled them ashore, when friends and loved ones shouted and leaped for joy.

Young man, such is your case. You are on a sinking vessel. The period of youth is slipping away. Stretched out before you is the sea of life. There are two great powers claiming your attention – the power of pleasure and wealth, and the power and weight of eternity.

Your soul is pleading for salvation from the threatening waves of sin. You must decide this matter. Oh, heed the pleadings of our soul! Unbuckle the belt of pleasure from around you. Buckle on the life-preserver – Jesus Christ, and trusting the strong arm of His resolute protection, leap out in life. Though storms may come, yet in the end you will land safely on the other shore, where loved ones will meet and greet you. Angels will rejoice, and, above all, God will crown you with immortal glory and honor.

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