

LIFE'S DECISIONS.

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SOMETIMES in our lives we all have to make important decisions. Life has followed a direct path for some years, and then the way divides and there is no sign-post to direct our steps. We have to stop, to think things out, to weigh the "fors" and "againsts," and then very often start afresh with some uncertainty and misgiving, wondering whether after all we are acting for the best.

Here are some of the difficulties with which we have to deal. There are excellent reasons for following both courses of action before us, and how are we to gauge their comparative value? Then, though there seem to be so many reasons ready to hand, yet we know in our heart of hearts that we have not, and indeed cannot have, the whole evidence at our disposal; we cannot estimate accurately the unknown resources of capacity and feeling which we possess ourselves, still less can we estimate those which others possess, so it seems we must make more or less wild guesses at the most important facts of the case. Again, our feeling and our reason may conflict, every instinct of good and wholesome desire may call us in one direction, and the cold, cautious voice of reason in the other, and who is to say which is the best guide? In our distress we cry out, "Oh, for some wise person who can look on it all from the outside and settle it for me!" And yet in our heart of hearts we know that no outsider could quite grasp the situation, could quite appreciate all the delicacies of our own thought and feeling, and the point of view of another must inevitably be different from our own. And so once more we fall back, as a rule, on our own judgment.

Now the first thing to remember at such a crisis is this—*all thought tends to work itself out in action*. We all of us are familiar with this fact when we nurse angry feelings in our hearts; we may have strength to restrain angry words, but if the thought of anger is once admitted it will work itself out involuntarily in our expressions and attitudes. It is the same

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in making a decision; once let your thought rest continually on one set of reasons, let these reasons come up warm round your heart, let yourself brood over them, and your decision is really made then, though you may easily deceive your friends and yourself into thinking that you are still uncertain. Indeed it is possible to go through prolonged mental struggles which are very wearing and very useless long after your decision is made, until at last your mind recognises that the course you really chose long ago has now become inevitable. It does not follow that a decision such as this is necessarily ill-judged, but it is carried out in a weak manner and tends to enfeeble rather than strengthen character.

So we must endeavour to get quite right at the beginning of things, as far as possible hold our minds still and let all the evidence on both sides pass before it, remembering clearly that any strong taste, or affection, or capacity of our own are all most important facts which must have ample consideration. The good advice of sensible friends should also be taken into account, though it should always be regarded only as advice, some additional evidence for or against to be treated with all the respect and affection due to it; but we should never allow ourselves to imagine that a friend can decide for us, that we can shift the responsibility on to someone else's shoulders. Even if a friend were able to throw some new light on the matter, it is still we ourselves who recognize that it is light, who accept it, and act accordingly.

But the question still remains, how are we to gain that quietness of spirit which will enable us to collect and to use all the evidence with restraint and effectiveness? How are our souls to be stilled so that we can realize all the delicacies of thought, feeling, and reason which are so easily silenced by some uprush of self-will or desire? How can we lift ourselves above ourselves as it were and from some spiritual height coolly survey our own circumstances, powers, tastes, instincts, claims, and responsibilities, and then commit ourselves without misgiving to one definite course of action? Such quietness of spirit is not easily attained. It is the result of long discipline and patient self-surrender. But in our own small way we can begin to practice it now by diligently seeking to put the Will of God in the place of our own will. We cannot

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now discuss this daily exercise of self-control; we have only time to speak of the great crises in our lives. But in order to attain to quietness at any particular time, we should kneel down alone and let the stillness of the Unseen sink into our souls. That is a very different manner of prayer from letting our minds rush through all the facts of the case over and over again. Such prayer is little better than worrying upon our knees. If we need words at all there is nothing so helpful as the Lord's Prayer, or the hymn, "Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire," only we must surrender ourselves to the bigness of the great words we use and cut ourselves clean away from the petty details which bind us to the earth. These words lift us up from earthly to heavenly things and thereby give us power over ourselves and over our lives.

After this, and when we have patiently let ourselves consider the evidence from these heights, it is as well if possible to defer making the final decision for a reasonable space of time, and during the interval to think of the matter as little as possible, filling our time as busily as possible with our own normal occupations. And the reason for such a method is this: people's minds have a wonderful power of working unconsciously when they are started on certain lines, and once having thoroughly done the necessary work with your conscious thoughts you may well leave your unconscious thoughts to finish the matter. Indeed the more absolutely you can exclude the question from your conscious thoughts the more satisfactory will be the work of your unconscious thoughts; so sleep, and eat, and work just as usual, and suddenly you will become aware that the decision has made itself. Arrived at in this way you will find that it comes with a curious sense of satisfaction which brings no regret in its train. It seems to fit in restfully with your life as a whole, and, coming with conviction, you can commit yourself strongly to it without worry and without reserve.