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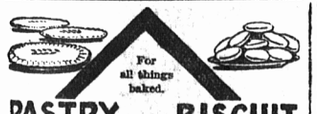

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Nor Let Them be Side-Tracked on Account of Secondary Ones.

LET THE DEAD BURY THE DEAD.

Exposition of a Much-Misunderstood Passage of Scripture, with a beautiful Illuminative Incident In the Life of Christ, Showing His Filial Love When He Was Almost Extremis— Henry Ward Beecher Quoted.

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1904, by William Baily, of Toronto, at the Dep't of Agriculture, Ottawa.

Los Angeles, Cal., July 31.—That men and women should ever be alert to heed the call of the highest duty and not to put it aside with frivolous excuses is the theme of the preacher to-day. The text is Matthew viii, 22, "Let the dead bury the dead."

Never make the mistake of treating half truths as if they were whole truths. With his spade the farmer may cut a worm in two, and then each of those two parts will form a whole worm to wriggle off in opposite directions. But truth is not a worm, headless or tailless. In the study of truth we must not consider an individual atom as a complete whole. "Half a fact may be a whole falsehood," once wrote Colton. "Falsehood is never so successful as when she baits her hook with truth. No opinions so fatally mislead us as those that are not wholly wrong, as no watches so effectually deceive the wearer as those that are sometimes right."

What is true in laboratory investigations is also true in reference to Bible study. We must not study the words of my text with a microscope. We must not isolate this sentence from all its connections. We must compare this passage with other passages, this chapter with other chapters, this book with other books, "I cannot understand why Christ should have trampled upon the filial affections of his disciple who wanted to go back and bury his dead father," said a gentleman to me some years ago. "This young man evidently intended to be a devout disciple of Jesus. But surely he had a duty to his home as well as directly to Jesus. There, in the old homestead, lay the corpse of his earthly parent. It was natural for a dutiful son to want to be present at the funeral. Yet when the young man said, 'Let me, I pray thee, first go and bury my father, and I will follow thee,' Christ showed no sympathy with his natural feeling, but practically said: 'Let the neighbors and the strangers come in and, close the eyelids and wash the cold flesh. Let the neighbors sing the death chant and dig the grave. Let strange hands wrap the motionless corpse in its white shroud and carry it to its last resting place. You must come with me at once. Shut your eyes to the past. Let the dead bury the dead.'"

That way of regarding the incident utterly misrepresent it. Never suppose for a moment that Christ demands that any man should show his reverence for him by slighting or neglecting or deserting an earthly parent. Why, the last human being for whom Christ provided when he was dying upon the cross was his mother. He turned and looked toward the gentle John, the beloved disciple, sobbing at his feet, and said to him: "John, look after my old mother. Now that she is friendless and alone she will need your love and sustenance." Then he looked at the agonized face of his mother as he said, "Mother, let John take my place and be a loving son to you." These are Christ's exact words: "Woman, behold thy son!" "Son, behold thy mother!" Those were not the words of one who disregarded filial duty. His body was racked at that moment by excruciating agony, yet his thoughts were not of himself but of her who, by his death, would be left dependent. It was she for whom he was concerned even in the hour of his dissolution. His own conduct in that crisis proves that when he spoke to the young volunteer the words of my text he was not insensible to the claims of natural affection.

In the words of Henry Ward Beecher, Christ was enunciating the great truth that the primal duties of life should not be sidetracked or pushed to the rear on account of the secondary or the more unimportant duties. "It is not that you desire to avoid right things, but you say, 'Suffer me first to do the inferior, then I shall be ready for the superior. Suffer me first to take care of myself. Suffer me first to take care of my household. Suffer me first to look after this enterprise, and then'— No! This constant habit of humbling the higher and making it subordinate to the lower, this constant preference of the inferior to the superior works demoralization. A man does not need to throw away his Bible nor defy his God nor sell his soul voluntarily. He only needs to say, 'Suffer me first to do the lesser thing!' The moment that is done there will be another 'Suffer me first' in its place. And so we shall put the inferior duties in the place of the higher duties and go through life and fail at last." This comprehensive view of my text is, I am convinced, its true interpretation. These words of Christ need to be remembered in other situations than beside the bier of a dead parent. They have a warning lesson for any man who is postponing his duties to his Lord until he has fulfilled his obligations to the world or to society—to any one who fails in his higher duties through selfishness or sloth.

Sidetracked obligations to God! We see them everywhere. We see them first in the excuses which the young man makes when he is fitting himself by education to enter the battle of life. I enter the theological seminary, where thirty or forty young men are gathered into a class room. They are bright, intelligent young men, eager for knowledge, intent on getting thorough equipment for the work they have undertaken. I put to each student this question: "Young man, where do you go to church? In what Sunday school are you teaching? What mission work are you doing for Christ?" Some there will be two, in order to pay their way through college, are performing some duties by which they earn a little money. But the others, in nine cases out of ten, will answer: "Oh, I am not attending any particular church here. I am not teaching in any Sunday school. I am now studying to be a minister, and therefore each Sunday I go to hear a different minister in the town." The result is that nine-tenths of our young theological students, and I think I am not overrating the proportion, do practically nothing for Christ while they are living within seminary walls unless they are paid for their services. What is the result? With a critical, censorious spirit they go from church to church. They pick flaws in this minster, they find fault with that minister, and all the times they belong to the great army of religious tramps, whom I call the "go-rounders." During these years of study their own life is ebbing away. By the time the young man who pursues this course graduates from a theological seminary he is on the verge of spiritual bankruptcy. Why? Mainly because in the three long years of mental preparation for the ministry he has neglected to do personal work for Jesus Christ.

A large number of students in medical schools are the sons of ministers. And, furthermore, I do not believe I am going beyond my right when I say eight-tenths of all medical students came from Christian homes. Yet medical students as a class are noted for their neglect of spiritual work. Thousands of Christian physicians are found all over the land. But while in college most medical students do nothing for the service of their Master. They say, "Wait, Lord, until I pass my examinations." The result of this waiting is that many young men entirely lose their hold upon Christ. Oh, young man, young woman, Christ ought not to have to wait for you to get a mental education before you are ready to serve him. The development of the spiritual life in the heart should go on simultaneously with the mental development.

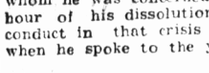
But these words of my text not only apply to the young people who are sidetracking their gospel duties to make way for their preparations for a profession. They also apply to the busy men and women who, in the prime of physical strength and mental power, are like tired peasants staggering along the highways under greater burdens than it seems possible for them to bear. When I speak thus I mean that this text is applicable to nearly all men and women in midlife. Why? Because I believe that most people are overworked. They are physically tired. Most people are overworked in the struggle of life. Yet this text, O man, O woman, in the prime of your physical and mental strength, applies to you. No right have you to sidetrack your duties to God. No right have you to say to Christ, "Lord, suffer me to do this or that, and then I will follow thee." Christ should be first, not last. Christ's command, no matter how or when it comes, should be heeded or obeyed; then all other duties will fall into line in their right places.

Christ's command, "Follow me," comes to the tired merchant, the worn out merchant. It comes to you even in the whirl and the bustle of business life. "Oh, no," you say, "I have no time for Christ. My business absorbs every atom of my energy. I am so tired from my week day tasks that I am too weary to go to Church on Sunday. Why, when I go, I fall asleep during the sermon. It makes but little difference to me then who preaches the sermon. Come down to my store any time and you will see how I am overdriven. There is a steady stream of men in my outer office all the time. I must see them. It is work, work, work until I am nearly dead." Yes, my brother, in one sense what you say is true. You are an overworked man, but how much of that labor that so fatigues you is voluntarily undertaken? Have you, as a Christian man, the right to give to your own concerns, to your business and the world the whole of your time and energy? Have you forgotten the claims that God has upon you? Better leave undone some of the work you are now doing that you may have strength to serve him. Why should you not be willing to drop some of that business drudgery? Do you not know that much of that grinding, useless, selfish toil is making a failure out of your life? The temporal necessities of life are very small, yet thousands of people plod on, and on, and on, in a treadmill of mercantile drudgery, as though their very happiness depended upon raising their store from a four-storey to a ten-storey dry goods emporium.

What I have said to the busy, tired merchant I would also say to the busy, tired mother, with a large brood of little ones. I would speak the same words of advice to the anxious, wearied, half-sick professional man—the lawyer, the doctor, the teacher, aye, to the minister himself. I would also speak the same words of warning to the mechanic, the clerk, the commercial traveler and the servant in the kitchen. You say, "I have no time to serve Christ." You know that the reason you have no time is that you devote to worldly concerns that portion of your time which properly belongs to Christ. Busy? Aye, you are busy. But if you want any work to do you must always go to a busy man or woman to get them to do it. The lazy, loaferish individual never has any time. The reason you are not willing to serve Christ is because you are placing to the forefront tasks which you need not do unless you wanted to do them. "Follow me," says Christ to the busy man and woman of the world. "Follow me, and follow me now."

But this text has still another application. It is a word of reproof to people who waste their time and strength in useless remorse over their undutiful conduct to parents who are now dead. Many men and women have sidetracked their direct duties to God by switching them off to a family plot.. Useless regrets for the dead may have a great part in the sidetracking of our duties to God. Who was this young disciple to whom Christ spoke? I do not know. The Bible does not mention his name. But perhaps he belonged to that great multitude who spend one half of their lives in abusing and neglecting the living and the other half in mourning and sobbing over the dead. Their love and grief are purely Carlylean. They say that Thomas Carlyle, the disgruntled, fault-finding, iconoclastic philosopher, was the founder of a big school of copyists. However that may be, I know there are many people who emulate the writer of "Sartor Resartus" in one fact. After the death of his wife [illegible] uttered was, "Alas, alas, [illegible] how I loved [illegible] he had for

Continued on Page 6.



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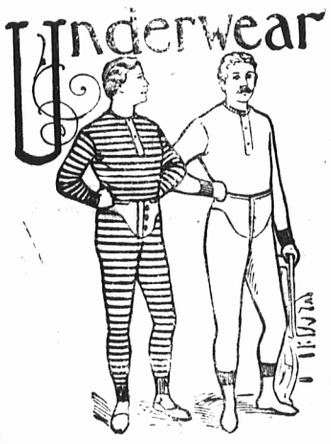

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