

## INFLUENCE

"None of us liveth to himself" Rom. 14:7

This text is a law passed in the legislative halls of God. We ought therefore to think about it; descend to its depths; and climb to its heights. If we meditate long upon it we will see ourselves as having been influenced by past generations, and as being molders of future destinies. This will help us to comprehend the bigness of life and unseal the fountains of love within us.

There is nothing in the universe that stands alone--nothing solitary. No atom of might, no drop of water, no particle of air, and no ray of light exists in a state of isolation. Everything belongs to some system or source of which it is a component and necessary part. Just so it is in the moral world. No man stands alone. No one liveth to himself. Man is naturally a social being. We are all formed for society, and dependent upon each other for our prosperity, mental development and improvement, comfort and happiness.

What is influence? It is very difficult to define influence. It is something that baffles definition. It is too elastic and elusive to be mapped out in words. We might speak of it as a silent, subtle, sovereign something that goes out from every life like heat from a fire, or fragrance from a flower, and gives shape and color to other lives.

### I. The Reality of Influence

From the time when God said it is not good for man to live alone, to the present hour, there has been a system of reciprocal pleasures and benefits, sorrows, and evils working in the affairs of men, and every mortal, with scarcely an exception, is placed upon the earth by his Creator for some good purpose, and has been enabled by the actions of his life to impress those around him in society either for good or evil. It is true that there is a vast difference with reference to the degree of influence that men have, but there is not a man who fails to exert some influence upon those around him. We all have an influence--an invisible something which radiates from our personalities, from our inmost beings. Whether we are conscious of it or not, the life of each of us, whether we are rich or poor, learned or unlearned, young or old, is exercising some influence upon others. The most obscure individual exerts an influence which must be felt in the great brotherhood of mankind. No human being can come into this world without increasing or diminishing the sum total of human happiness, not only of the present but of every subsequent age. Everywhere he will have companions who will be better or worse for his influence.

Influence is of two kinds:--

#### 1. Involuntary

This is the type influence which flows out from us and of which we are unaware. Thus it is that one man, without thought or intention, or even a consciousness of the fact, is ever leading some other after him. Little did the Apostle Peter think, as he came up where his doubting brother was looking into the sepulchre, and went straight into the sepulchre, that he was causing his brother apostle to do likewise. But the influences we exert involuntarily will almost never disagree with our real characters. If good ourselves, they are good; if bad, they are bad.

The door of involuntary influence is always open. In this way we are communicating ourselves to others at every moment of our presence with them. Let us notice some miscellaneous proofs of involuntary influence

(1) The instinct of imitation in children

We begin our experiences, not with acts grounded in judgment or reason, or with ideas received through language, but by simple imitation, and, under the guidance of this, we lay our foundation. The child looks and listens, and whatever tone of feeling or manner of conduct is displayed around him, sinks into his plastic, passive soul, and becomes the mold of his being ever after. His soul is a purely receptive nature, and that, for a considerable period, without choice or selection. A little further on, he begins voluntarily to copy every thing he sees. Voice, manner, gait, everything which the eye sees, the mimic instinct delights to ac-  
over. The little girl sees her mother nurse the baby, and she must have a doll. The boy sees his father drive the car, and he must have a toy automobile. And thus we have a whole generation of future men and women, receiving from us their beginnings, and the deepest impulses of their lives. They watch us, and when we are meaning them no good or evil, when we are unconscious of exerting any influence upon them, they are drawing from us impressions and molds of habit, which, if wrong, no heavenly discipline can wholly remove; or, if right, no bad associations utterly dissipate.

(2) The respect of others

We naturally desire the approbation or good opinion of others. You see the strength of this feeling in the article of fashion. How few persons have the nerve to resist a fashion! How many will violate the best rules of society, because it is the practice of their circle! How many reject Christ because of friends or acquaintances, who have no suspicion of the influence they exert, and will not have, until the last day shows them what they have done!

(3) The contagion of feelings

That which a man is, that sum total made up of his beliefs, purposes, affections, tastes, and habits, manifested in all he does and does not, is contagious in its tendency, and is ever photographing itself on other spirits. He himself may be as unconscious of this emanation of good or evil from his character, as he is of the contagion of disease from his body.

How quickly enthusiasm of any sort will kindle, and how rapidly it will catch from one to another, till a nation blazes in a flame! In the case of the crusades you have an example where the personal enthusiasm of one man put all the states of Europe in motion. Fanaticism is almost equally contagious. Note the spirit of a mob. You see the same thing in the propagation of party spirit.

You cannot reasonably doubt that others are continually receiving impressions from your character.

2. Voluntary

Voluntary influence is that influence which we exert purposely or in the endeavor to sway another, as by speaking, teaching, argument, persuasion, threatenings, offers, and promises. In other words, that which we say and do for a special purpose. Speech, or voluntary influence, is a door to the soul that we may open or shut at will.

It is very evident then that we cannot live without exerting an influence. Simply to be in this world is to exert an influence.

II. The Responsibility for Influence.

We have but to listen to the voice of experience, or turn to the page

of holy writ to find that we are beings of influence. We ought then to remember that we are responsible to God for our influence. We must render an account for all our thoughts, feelings, words, and acts. These thoughts, feelings, words, and acts are the manufacturers of influence--and if responsible for the one, we are responsible for the other. We are not only responsible to God for an evil influence, but we are responsible to Him if we do not exert an influence for good.

Every person is a missionary now and for ever, for good or for evil, ~~whether~~ whether he or she intends or designs it or not. One may be a blot, radiating a dark influence to the very circumference of society; or one may be a blessing, spreading a benediction over the world; but a blank one cannot be. There are no moral blanks; and there are no neutral characters. Your influence will either bless or blight.

Knowing that we are absolutely responsible for our individual influence, think we ought to remember that our influence:--

1. Is permanent in its character

When influence is once exerted, it cannot be destroyed or undone. Every act performed is written on the character of the world around us, for good or evil, in the grand progress of our existence.

The great poet of Scotland, Robert Burns, on his dying bed expressed the wish that he could have recalled some of the foolish things that he had written. But it was too late. Better far to leave the wrong undone than afterwards to regret the doing of it. "None of us liveth to himself," should be constantly before our minds as a restraining memory to keep us from evil, and an inspiring memory to cheer us on to make the world better than we found it.

Every day we are exerting an influence which must live long after we are gone, and whether for good or evil, it survives the stroke of death, outlives the pulverizing process of the grave, and will be found working when time hushes and eternity dawns. Oh! what a sublime and awful thing to live! Knowing that influence never dies, let us be careful how we live.

A young nobleman found himself in a little village off in Cornwall. It was a hot day, and he was thirsty. He rode up and down the street seeking a place where something stronger than water could be had. At last he stopped, and made impatient inquiry of an old peasant who was on his way home after a day of toil; "How is it that I can't get a glass of liquor anywhere in this wretched village of yours?" he demanded harshly. The old man, recognizing his questioner as a man of rank, pulled off his cap and bowed humbly, but nevertheless there was a proud flash in his faded eyes as he answered quietly: "My lord, something over a hundred years ago a man named John Wesley came to these parts." And with that the old peasant walked away.

It was a striking remark of a dying man, whose life had been poorly spent, "My influence, oh that my influence could be gathered up and buried with me." It could not be done. It was too late; he had put in motion an agency which he was altogether powerless to arrest. Let us be careful what influence we leave behind us.

2. Involves others

You cannot touch another life without leaving your mark upon it,

though it may never occur to you that you are doing anything of the kind. You cannot live a pure and righteous life without somebody being helped and the world being made better by it.

### III. The Results of Influence.

#### 1. Evil results

The wise man said, "One sinner destroyeth much good." Everyday experience will supply many illustrations of this truth. One bad man or woman will be a center of corruption to the whole circle in which they move. One bad boy often corrupts a whole school. How terrible is the guilt of those who have become the corrupters of others! How terrible is the power of evil to propagate itself!

A little clock in a jeweler's window in a certain Western town, stopped one day for half an hour at fifteen minutes of nine. School children, noticing the time, stopped to play; people hurrying to the train, looking at the clock, began to walk leisurely; professional men, rushing to meet appointments, saw the time and walked slower; business men, after a look at the clock stopped to chat a minute with one another; working men and women noted the time and lingered a little longer in the sunshine; and all were late because one small clock had stopped. Never had these people known how much they had depended upon that clock, till it had led them astray. Many are thus unconsciously depending upon the influence of Christians; you may think you have no influence, but you cannot go wrong in one little act without leading others astray.

There is an old story of a vessel sailing from Joppa, which carried a passenger who cut a hole in the side of the ship beneath his berth. When the men of the ship expostulated with him: "What doest thou, oh, miserable man?" the offender calmly replied: "What matters it to you? The hole I have made lies under my own berth."

But our race is so interwoven that no man can do evil and his fellows not suffer. No man's actions stop with himself.

A man was once walking with a farmer through a beautiful field, when the farmer happened to see a tall thistle on the other side of the fence. In a second, over the fence he jumped, and cut it off close to the ground. "Is that your field?" asked his companion. "Oh, no!" said the farmer, "bad weeds do not care much for fences, and if I should leave that thistle to bloom in my neighbor's field, I should soon have plenty in my own."

Bad men are like thistles. They pay no attention to fences. They are a menace to the peace and prosperity of all classes. And the only way for the virtuous and good in a community to secure their own peace and happiness is to win the sinners to Christ or to shut them up in prisons.

There is a tree which grows on the hill slopes of Chile which the natives look upon as being possessed of an evil spirit. On various occasions innocent travellers have crept under the shade of one of these trees during the heat of the day, and paid for its shade with their lives. After resting under one of these trees for a short time the hands and face of a traveller become swollen, as in a case of snake-bite, and the surface of the skin is covered with boils. Many visitors in the vicinity of Valparaiso have succumbed to the influence

of this poisonous tree.

There are some men and women like that tree. Whoever rests in their shadow is poisoned by the baneful influence of their evil characters.

## 2. Good results

What an influence for good Christian parents may exercise upon their children, with far-reaching results to the world! The faithful Sunday school teacher may leaven with gospel truths young minds that may yet control the destinies of a nation.

There was a woman who lived just outside of Boston, practically unknown, who took into her home a Chinese boy sent here to be educated. She taught him the Bible and treated him as her own child. When that boy was ready for preparatory school, he knew something of the principles of Christianity, and by the time he entered the university he was a firm Christian. He went back to China to assume a position of influence. He returned to this country a little later, bringing forty boys with him to place in Christian institutions. The woman who cared and prayed for him reached across the sea to forty Chinese boys, who some day may shake that empire.

One of the most beautiful epitaphs ever written is chiseled in white marble on the grave of a little girl. It reads, "A child of whom her playmates said, 'It was easier to be good when she was with us.'"

Many years ago a young fellow by the name of Wray, a student at Princeton College, applied for appointment as a foreign missionary. He was a thoroughly good man but not very quick in respect to learning, and when he reached the field of his prospective labors he found it difficult to master the language. But though the simple natives could not understand his talk, they could understand his walk. One day when they were seated in a circle on the ground, listening to the instruction of one of their teachers, the question was asked, "What is it to be a Christian?" And none could answer. Finally one pointed to the place where this young man sat and said, "It is to live as Mr. Wray lives." Not one of them could read the gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, but all could read the gospel according to Wray.

There is one argument which no unbeliever has ever answered--a godly life. There is nothing so powerful for good as a godly life. The influence of a godly life is mighty for good and is as lasting as eternity. The thing we should do is to live near to God, cultivate a Christ-like character, and then our lives are sure to be a great blessing to others and of great use to the Lord. Bear in mind that you are living not for yourselves, but for those around you and for God.

If our lives in the past have not been as we would have them, let us not give up to remorse. Life's day is too brief. Let us live for the present, and each, by the grace of God, be better in the future. God help us so to live that our influence may ever work for good among our fellow men, and result at last in honor and glory to His name.