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CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD.

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INTRODUCTION.

p. 1

THERE are few subjects of greater practical importance than that considered in these pages, viz., Conformity to the World. It is one that penetrates into the daily life of families, and leads to questions of the most delicate character between those who are bound together by the most intimate relationships of life. It is moreover a subject pre-eminently suited to our times, for I venture to say there are few amongst us who have not reason to deplore a sad tendency to worldly conformity amongst those in whom we take a deep interest. Many of the young people of our day seem prepared to sweep away all barriers, and to lose sight of all distinctions; while others, who, we really hope, are Christian people, who take an interest in Christian objects, and assist us generally in our parochial work, seem to have forgotten the landmarks drawn out by our fathers, and, I fear, have become in consequence weakened in their faith, and paralysed in their Christian peace. They have become very much like Ephraim as described in Hos. vii. 8, 9: 'Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.' Thus in such characters there is a warm side, and we acknowledge it with thankfulness; but there is a cold side likewise, and we deeply deplore it. The cake has not been turned, and the result is a thorough inconsistency of character. There is sufficient religious interest to blind the eye to the discovery of decay; but, though they know it not, the decay is begun, and there are grey hairs stealing upon them, the outward signs of inward weakness; for they have mixed with the people, and strangers are devouring their strength.

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But we need not suppose that this is a new difficulty, or that the temptation is now for the first time appearing in the Church. It was the same in Cowper's day, as we may gather from his poem:—

'Renounce the world, the preacher cries.
We do—a multitude replies.
While one as innocent regards
A snug and friendly game at cards;
And one, whatever you may say,
Can see no evil in a play.
Some love a concert, or a race;
And others shooting, or the chase.
Reviled and loved, renounced and followed!
Thus, bit by bit, the world is swallowed.
Each thinks his neighbour makes too free,
Yet likes a slice as well as he.'

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But the difficulty reaches much further back than Cowper's time. It is in fact as old as the human heart, for it is part and parcel of it, so that 1800 years ago the Church of Christ required the same warning that it does now, and the Apostle Paul gave the inspired caution: 'Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.' The word 'transformed' is alone sufficient to show the deep-seated character of the evil, for it proves that nothing less than a transformation is required to enable us to overcome it. Let human nature go on unchanged, and the result will be conformity to the world. The world and the love of it are in the natural heart, and, unless there is a change, there is sure to be worldly-mindedness in the life.

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THE WORLD.

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BEFORE we can understand what is meant by conformity to the world, we must first see clearly what is meant by the world itself.

There seem to be three senses in which the word is employed in Scriptures.

(1.) It is used to express *all mankind*. I cannot doubt that this is the meaning of our blessed Saviour in those memorable words of His: 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' I have heard a limitation put on that passage, and seen 'the world' explained as meaning only the elect. But such an interpretation I believe to be contrary to Scripture. The expression 'the world' is constantly used for those who are not amongst the elect, but never, I believe, for those that are; besides which, the eighteenth verse of the chapter seems to me to prove conclusively that both classes, viz., those who believe, and those who do not, are here included in the one comprehensive term, 'the world.' The words are, 'He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God:' showing, as I cannot but think, beyond a possibility of contradiction, that those who perish and those who are saved are included in the world, which God loved in His

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deep compassion, and for which He gave His only begotten Son.

(2.) The world stands for *this earth and all that belongs to this present life, or dispensation.*

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Thus of the incarnation St. Paul says that our Lord 'came *into the world* to save sinners.' (1 Tim. i. 15.) So our Lord speaks of His lifetime here as a time spent in the world: 'While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name.' (John, xvii. 12.) So, 'When Jesus knew that the hour was come that he should depart out of the world, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.' (John, xiii. 1.) And this I have no doubt is the meaning of His prayer (John, xvii. 15), 'I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil.' He did not desire that they should die, or be removed from the scene of life's labour, but that they should be preserved in it as a holy and consecrated people.

In the same sense St. John says, 'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever' (1 John, ii. 17); and again, 'Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?'

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(3.) But there is a third sense of the term 'the world,' and one of more frequent occurrence in Scripture than either of the other two. It is used for *the body of unconverted persons as contrasted with the children of God.* In this contrast there are many points clearly marked in Scripture.

(1.) The two classes are separated by the gift of God, as we learn from the words of our Lord in John, xvii. 9: 'I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.'

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(2.) Believers enjoy a fellowship with God to which the world are strangers. 'How is it,' said Judas (John, xiv. 22), 'that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.'

(3.) The world has no real knowledge of the Father, of Christ, or of His people. They may think they know Him, and may really know a great deal about Him; but as for that knowledge which our Lord declares to be life eternal, they are perfect strangers to it, for His language is, 'Oh righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.' (John, xvii. 25.) In like manner said St. John, when speaking of the Father's boundless love in 1 John, iii. 1, 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God! therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.'

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(4.) The world has its origin in this world, and belongs to it; but believers have their life from God.

So the world are sometimes called 'the children of this world,' as *e.g.*, Luke, xvi. 8: 'The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light;' and our Lord puts the contrast very plainly when He says (John, viii. 23), 'Ye are from beneath, I am from above: ye are of this world' (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου); 'I am not of this world.'

On the other hand, of believers He says, that their life is from above. Just contrast the passage already quoted with His language in John, xvii. 16. Of the world He says, 'Ye are of this world.' But of His little flock, 'They are not of this world, even as I am not of this world.' They have a life given them from above (ἄνωθεν, John, iii. 3), and therefore St. John plainly declares respecting them (1 John, v. 19), 'We are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.'

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(5.) The world has its portion in this world; believers have their portion in heaven.

The world are like the rich man described by our Lord, to whom Abraham said, 'Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things.' The good things that he sought for were all connected with this present life, and he received them. Thus there are few better definitions of men of the world than that given by David in Psalm xvii. 14, when he describes them as 'men of the world, which have their portion in this life.' Every person has his portion somewhere; *i.e.*, we all have some treasure at which we are aiming, something that we are pursuing if we do not all attain it. Now the portion of the men of the world is altogether in this present life. I do not mean that they have no vague hope of going to heaven when they die; but that they are practically living for the things of time. It is for the things of this life that they are spending their strength, and here it is that they really have their portion.

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How different it is with those whom God has called out of the world! They are in the world, but their treasure is in heaven, and they can say as David did (Psalm xvi. 5), 'The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and my cup: thou maintainest my lot.' To them the world is a crucified thing, as St. Paul said, 'By whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.' They have a new hope and a new inheritance; for, being children, they are heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. Their conversation is in heaven, because their Saviour is there; and, while they are diligent in life's occupations, they seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness. They are looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

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(6.) But there is another point in which our blessed Saviour has marked the contrast between the two classes still more clearly, *viz.*, this, The world does not love Christ or His people. I know that the first impression produced on many minds by such a statement would be that there is not this

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antipathy in our own times. There is so much kindness of heart amongst worldly people, and in many cases they show so much friendliness, that it is difficult to realise this hostility. But our Lord distinctly declares it, and all His words are true. In John, xv. 18, 19, He says, 'If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.' So again (John, xvii. 14), 'I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.' So St. John echoes His Master's words, and says (1 John, iii. 13, 14), 'Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you: we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.' In all these passages there is the contrast clearly marked between the world and those whom God has called out of it to be a separate people unto Himself; a contrast so marked that it produces enmity on the part of the world towards the separated people. But still, as I have already said, there are multitudes of professing Christians who are ready to deny the existence of any such enmity, and most of ourselves have frequently met with generosity and kindness from those who we cannot but fear are still people of the world. How then are we to explain this apparent difference between Scripture and experience? How is it that we do not find a greater hostility on the part of the world towards the people of God? Of course the testimony of God's Word must be true, and the explanation must be sought for in ourselves. I would suggest to those brethren who think they see a difficulty, three inquiries which may perhaps remove it.

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(1.) Do we not sometimes mistake conformity to the externals of the Gospel for love to Christ? In a Christian country like this, the most thoroughly worldly persons are induced, by their sense of respectability, to conform to the visible practices of Christianity; but it does not follow on that account, that the real enmity of the human heart towards a blessed Saviour is removed, or that the offence of the cross has ceased.

(2.) Do we not sometimes mistake personal regard to ourselves, for a love to the people of God? Men of the world have strong natural affections, and those natural affections may happen to be fixed on the children of God; but it does not follow on that account, that they love either Christ or His people.

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(3.) Are the people of God thoroughly faithful in their intercourse with the world? Is not an exhibition of the Lord Jesus Christ so greatly modified in many cases, that the world is never brought into collision with the high standard held up by Him? If our Gospel is softened down to meet the world's mind, of course it will excite no hostility; and I cannot but fear, that the friendship we so often meet with in the world, may arise from our taking low ground ourselves, and not really shining forth as lights in the world, or exhibiting with sufficient clearness the holy character to which Christ has called His people.

But without stopping to dwell on these causes for the absence of the apparent enmity, we must, I think, all admit the clear contrast drawn in Scripture between the world and the people of God; and must conclude, that in the various passages referred to 'the world' includes all those who are not in Him, as contrasted with those that are. There are two classes, with a clear line between them—the world and the people of God; the world consisting of those who are not in Christ; and the people of God, of those who are given to Him, called by Him, justified in Him, born again through His Spirit, and preserved in Him as vessels for His glory. Thus the world is not limited to profligate or notorious offenders, but includes all those who are strangers to the covenant of God in Christ Jesus. The world might almost be reckoned as a middle class between the profligate and the people of God; a class having great charms, and many excellencies; a class having a wisdom of its own, exceeding, so far as this life is concerned, that of the children of light; a class including amiable men, moral men, influential men, and intellectual men; including the refined, as well as the unrefined—the gentleman, the statesman, the philosopher, and, I must add, even the clergyman, provided only that one thing is wanting, that one thing being a living union with Christ Jesus the Lord.

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CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD.

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FROM this account of the world, we may proceed to examine what is meant by conformity to it; and in this examination we must begin with general principles.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES.

(1.) Conformity to the world is quite distinct from immorality.

It is a very common thing for persons to say that there is no harm in such or such an amusement; by which they mean that there is no profligacy. But conformity to the world is a totally different thing to profligacy; and though there is no profligacy, there may be the most thoroughgoing worldliness. The world, in many cases, condemns open vice as much as the people of God do. It is most unjust in its sentence; as, for example, when it brands the poor woman with infamy, and admits her abominable betrayer into the unrestrained enjoyment of society. But in many cases it is extremely severe, and it would not be just, or true, to identify it with debauchery or low-lived habits. It is altogether far more refined in its character; and though it may be perfectly true of a young man that he is quite steady, and free from low vice, it may be equally true that there is no

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love of the Lord Jesus in his heart, and that he belongs entirely to those described by the Psalmist, 'the men of the world, who have their portion in this life.' It may be quite impossible to lay your hand upon any one thing that he does, and pronounce it immoral; but equally impossible to discover in him anything that savours of the things which be of God, or that proves him one of those whose conversation is in heaven.

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I regard this distinction between immorality and worldliness as one of the utmost importance in the consideration of the subject; for I have known many cases in which Christian parents bring questions to the test of immorality, rather than to that of worldliness. If there be no immorality in any course of action they are satisfied, without stopping to consider whether it is most in harmony with the mind of the world or with the mind of God. But, if immorality and worldliness are entirely distinct in their character, it is clear that this latter test is the only one on which we can rely. If the mind of the world were the same as the mind of God, then, of course, we ought to be satisfied if there is nothing in a young person's conduct which the world condemns; but if it be a fact that the mind of the world is opposed to the mind of God, then in His sight we may be altogether wrong, though the world can discover no harm whatever in our conduct. A young person may be quite steady, and yet altogether worldly; quite free from habits of dissipation, but conformed at the same time to the world; perfectly moral, but of the world, and in it.

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(2.) Again, conformity to the world does not consist in diligent attention to the business of life. The rule for the servant of God is; 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might;' and we may be perfectly sure, that God's name will never be honoured by negligence in a Christian calling. On the other hand, the effect of the Gospel on the heart will be to render the Christian man pre-eminently effective in that state of life in which it shall please God to place him. There is nothing in spirituality of mind to make a person a bad man of business, or to give any apology for ineffectiveness in common life. If a Christian man is inaccurate in his accounts, unpunctual in his appointments, and muddling in his arrangements, it is the effect not of his religion, but, generally speaking, of his indolence; for if his religion were properly applied, it would lead him to act on the scriptural maxim, 'Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.'

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(3.) Once more, separation from the world does not consist in eccentricity. Christian persons are not called upon to look out for opportunities for making themselves different to other people. Our Lord came, it is true, to redeem us to Himself 'a peculiar people.' But that peculiarity is perfectly distinct from singularity, or eccentricity. It refers simply to the sacred position of the Lord's people, as redeemed by His blood, and so made His own, an especial people unto Himself. It is the result of the great truth taught in the text: 'The Lord's portion is his people: Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.' If the blessed fact that we are His, be consistently followed out in daily life, the distinction will be quite sure to make itself felt; and it is the duty of the child of God not to shrink from its being so felt. If we be amongst the Lord's people we must not be ashamed of it, but must be prepared for anything that may arise out of the peculiarity of our high calling. But the Christian is not called to go out of his way to make the distinction conspicuous, or to attract attention by anything of his own choosing. If the Lord makes him a marked man, it is well; but if he makes himself one, though he may really desire to adorn the Gospel, he may by his own folly make it appear ridiculous.

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What, then, is conformity to the world, and what is the practical development of it in common life? Its general principles we have already ascertained. It is living according to the mind of the world, instead of the mind of God; and, as far as general principle is concerned, there will probably be but little difference amongst Christian persons. The real difficulty lies in the application of this principle to daily life, and in ascertaining where to draw the line between that which is desirable and that which is undesirable, for those whose desire it is to be conformed to the will of God. In many happy cases there is no difficulty at all, for it disappears before the power of a new affection. The new affection which God has planted in the heart is so strong, and so warm, that it settles all questions without discussion. The new taste finds no relish in the old habits, and the result is that they drop off of themselves, like the leaves in autumn. But there is not always this strength in the new affection; and there are those who are thoroughly sincere in their desire to follow Christ; and who, we hope, have really begun to follow Him; who still want help in making up their mind as to the line they ought to take. They have to decide on their course of conduct, and sometimes without any counsel from their friends. They wish to be faithful to their blessed Saviour, but they are anxious not to give needless offence. They are afraid of paining those whom they respect and love, and there is a delicate feeling of modesty, which makes it extremely painful for them to make a higher profession than those around them. For such cases, a few practical suggestions may be an assistance.

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RECOGNITION OF THE DISTINCTION.

There is conformity to the world *when we ignore the distinction between the people of God and the world*; and this, I believe, lies at the very root of the subject. There is nothing more unpopular to the world than this distinction. The prevailing theory of worldly persons is, that all are very much alike, provided only that they are virtuous and amiable; and there is nothing which they dislike more than the idea of a peculiar people, separated unto God in Christ Jesus. They would wish to be considered right in their opinion, as their more religious friends are right in theirs; and if the servants of God will only concede this one principle, the men of the world will bear almost anything at their hand.

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I am well aware of the practical difficulty of maintaining the distinction. In many things the

world conforms to the Church, as the Church does to the world; and the line is so shaded off on both sides, that it is almost beyond man's power to trace it. The state of things is very much like two dissolving views at the time when they are passing from one to the other. There is a faint sketch of both, but no clear outline to either. Then, again, the last thing that we desire is to see our young people assuming to themselves a spiritual superiority, and saying to others, 'Stand aside, for I am holier than thou.' But still the distinction is drawn by God in His Word, and we are guilty of thorough conformity to the world if we set it aside. Happily, we are not called to decide where each individual stands; and I know few things more painful than to hear persons discussing whether individuals are converted or not. But still the existence of the distinction in its broad outlines must lie at the basis of a great deal of our practical conduct, and must not be allowed to disappear from our guiding principles. If we are in Christ, adopted as His own holy family, we must not be afraid of acknowledging Him, or ashamed of being identified with His people. p. 31

DRESS.

We are conformed to the world *when we adopt the dress and appearance of the world*. I do not mean to say that Christians are called to make themselves eccentric in their appearance, or altogether to ignore the changing fashions of the country. I do not believe that worldliness is avoided by having a stereotyped dress like nuns or Quakers. The principle by which, I think, we ought to be guided, is never to be either in the advance of the fashion, or the extreme of it; but, when it has become the costume of the country, to adopt it in moderation. There is no risk of eccentricity if a person abstains from a new fashion until it has become so common as to be a part of the national costume, and if it is then adopted in great moderation there will be nothing at any time to attract attention. p. 32

I know that some take a different line, on the plea, as they say, that it is necessary to dress according to their station, and that the style of the dress should be regulated by the income of the wearer. Thus, I have known some cases of palpable inconsistency in mistresses, and even Sunday-school teachers, who have gravely exhorted their servants or scholars against a style of dress which they themselves were wearing at the time. But, if the quality varies with the income, which I quite admit, does it follow that the style should? What is not modest apparel for the maid, is no better surely for the mistress: and if it is wrong for the scholar to be showy, it is wrong likewise for the teacher. Others I have known who have professedly dressed in the height of the fashion in order to increase their influence with worldly persons; but surely this is a low and human policy, and it would be far better for all parties simply to adhere to Scripture. Human nature has always been the same, and women loved smart dressing 1800 years ago just as much as they do now. The costume, of course, was different, so that the actual directions of those days will not apply to our own; but the taste was the same, and the Scripture teaches us plainly that Christian women ought, for the Lord's sake, to keep that taste in subjection and restraint. The language of St. Paul is, 'In like manner also that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but, which becometh women professing godliness, with good works.' He considered modest apparel to be the true adornment of a Christian woman, and surely any deviation from it is a direct act of conformity to the world. The words of St. Peter are to the same effect, 'Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price.' (1 Pet. iii. 3, 4.) Surely such passages show that there is a sin in stylish dressing, and that the Christian lady will be distinguished from the fashionable world by the quiet modesty and becoming simplicity of her appearance. p. 33

SOCIETY.

We may be conformed to the world *in our intercourse with society*. As long as we are in this life we are thrown into the midst of other men; and, as members of society, we are bound by the duties of social life. There are kind neighbours all around us, many of whom, we may fear, are still men of the world, but who are associated with us through business and the ties of neighbourhood. How, then, should we act in society when we really desire not to be conformed to the world? I do not think that the Christian is to show himself an exclusive man. 'He that hath friends must show himself friendly;' and there are many things which he may, and even ought to do, to all around him. p. 36

He should be in all cases a friendly, obliging, and unselfish neighbour.

He should be open at any time to kind and friendly intercourse.

He should be ever ready to help his neighbours in all that concerns either them or their families.

He should be diligently seeking to promote the happiness of all who are brought into contact with him.

And all this without ever stopping to consider whether they are the children of God or not. p. 37

I believe, also, that he may safely join with them in social life. Our Lord did it, and therefore they who desire to follow Him may do it likewise. But let us all remember, what we are sometimes apt to forget when we look to His example, that we must be prepared to follow Him *throughout*, and

go, as He went, wherever we go, as faithful witnesses for God. Our Lord accepted the invitation of Simon the Pharisee; but He never forgot His character or mission; and before He left the dinner-table He both reproved Simon, and saved the poor sinner that came trembling to His feet. My belief is that this is the true solution of all the questions that arise respecting social intercourse with men of the world. I see great difficulty in artificial rules; but I believe that, when Christian men seek for God's grace to adorn the Gospel wherever they are, they will soon find that society sorts itself. If Simon the Pharisee, or Zaccheus the Publican, ask them to dinner, let them go, and let them recognise the hospitality of their friend. But let them be sure they first seek God's grace that they go as Christian witnesses, and they will find practically that, unless their Master is welcomed as well as themselves, they will not be perplexed by many more invitations. If they go on the principle of leaving all their Christianity at home, the case is of course different. They will then be sought for by the world, for the simple reason that they are conformed to it; for nothing do worldly men prize more than the implied sanction of those who bear a high name as religious characters. 'We cannot be wrong,' say they, 'for Mr. So-and-So was here; and we all know what an excellent man he is.' Conformity to the world does not consist in going to the dinner, but in changing our character as well as our dress, and going there as men of the world, without letting it be felt that we have sought the Master's presence, and are anxious for the Master's glory.

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FRIENDS.

There is conformity to the world in our *choice of friends*.

I say 'our choice of friends,' because there are many given us by God without any choice of our own. There are often dearly-beloved relations respecting whom we may feel a deep anxiety; but that anxiety must not deaden the affections, or take away the natural love which God Himself has planted towards them. But these are not our chosen friends, not those whom we have sought out or made for ourselves. But there is probably scarcely anything that marks a character more than its friendships. Nothing can be stronger than the Scripture is upon this subject, 'Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity against God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.' (James, iv. 4.) Thus there is a direct act of conformity to the world in the cultivation of worldly friendships. If the people of God are thought dull, and are therefore disregarded, while we seek our friendships from those who belong to the world, it shows that there is no affinity with the people of God, and I fear we must go one step further, and say, no real love for God Himself; for the words of Scripture are perfectly plain, 'Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.' (1 John, v. 1.)

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AMUSEMENTS.

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But now I come to that which, I am inclined to think, is the most difficult portion of our whole subject, viz.—*amusements*. We are conformed to the world when we go into *many of the amusements of the world*. I say 'into many,' because I cannot say all, as many do not belong exclusively to the world, but are a legitimate source of recreation to the children of God; and this it is that makes the subject so pre-eminently difficult.

There are, however, a few general principles which may help to guide us.

(1.) The Christian man has no place in those amusements *which have become practically connected with immorality and open wickedness*.

This principle will clear off a great many at once; such, for example, as theatres, operas, and races. There is no harm in racing a horse, acting a play, or the performance of beautiful music, regarded in the abstract; but in practical life they are mixed up with gambling, fraud, profligacy, and the degradation of female character. The mischief has become part and parcel of the system, so that the Christian man has nothing to do but to withdraw. He is not called to reform the racecourse, the ballet, or the stage, so that his only course is to have nothing whatever to do with them.

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(2.) But, further still. There is conformity to the world when we go into those amusements which are *decidedly worldly in their character*. As I have already shown, there may be thorough worldliness where there is no profligacy; and in such a case it is for the people of God to keep clear. On this principle, I believe we should abstain from balls. There is no denying that the fashionable ball is altogether of the world. The dress, the flirtation, the excitement, the late hours, are all of the world; and the moral sense is sufficient to decide that any thing savouring of the Gospel, or of the Lord Jesus Christ, is utterly out of place in such a scene. If balls are not worldly, I cannot imagine what is. I went to some in early life—sober, quiet, well-conducted family balls, and I do not hesitate to express my conviction that I never met with anything in which I have seen so complete a combination as in the ball-room of the three things mentioned by St. John, 'The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,' which are 'not of the Father, but of the world.' Some dances, such as polkas and waltzes, I believe to be objectionable on moral grounds; and I have known instances in which perfectly steady young men have been exposed to great temptation through them. I can quite believe, however, that this is not the case with all, and therefore it is not the point on which I rest my chief objection. It is the thorough, avowed, open worldliness of all balls that I think should lead the Christian to abstain. The whole thing is of the world. The conversation is of the world; the gratifications are all of the world; the excitement is altogether of the world; the society assembled there is, for the most part, of the

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world; and, therefore, I cannot believe that they are the fitting enjoyments for those who wish to carry out the Apostolic precept, 'Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.'

(3.) Surely the Christian is out of place *where he cannot reasonably hope to enjoy the presence and companionship of God.*

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If the whole scene is of such a character that it would be clearly out of place to speak of the things of His kingdom, and if the effect of the whole is likely to be such as to forbid secret communion at the time, or to unfit us for stated prayer afterwards, it is surely a clear case that such is not the amusement for those whose earnest desire it is to walk with God, and to do His will.

(4.) So further, I think we may conclude that, as a general rule, it is safer and wiser *to be guided by the experience and common practice of the people of God.* I do not mean to say that Christian people are infallible, or that they may not in some cases draw the line too tight. They are but men, and they are liable to human failures. But still they are much more likely to be right in such matters than those are who have never sought counsel from God upon the subject. If therefore we see that the most decided Christians have as a body been led to abstain from a certain class of amusements, it is surely wise to believe that they have seen some good reason for doing so, and the prudent course for the young Christian is to endeavour to avail himself of their experience, instead of relying on his own wisdom, and so striking out a new course for himself. This lesson is well taught us in the Song of Solomon (chap. i. 7, 8). The Bride there says, 'Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?' Her desire was to be near to the Lord, and not to turn aside to strangers. Now mark well the answer: 'If thou know not, O thou fairest among women,' if thou know not, that is, where to find the beloved, 'go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents.' In order to find the chief shepherd she was to trace the footsteps of the flock that followed him, and tracing those footsteps, she would be guided to her Lord Himself. So if we want to live near to the Lord, I am persuaded we must not be ashamed of tracing the footsteps of His people. We must be prepared to identify ourselves with them; we must not set aside their experience as a thing of nought; and must so far yield our own will as to be guided by their concurrent judgment. When, therefore, a young person finds that all the most decidedly serious persons of his acquaintance have thought it best to abstain from any particular amusement, I am persuaded that he is more likely to enjoy the presence of his Lord if he decides on abstaining with them, even though he may not see their reasons, than if he sets aside their experience, and follows in the steps of those whose boast it is that they make no profession.

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(5.) There is another practical suggestion with reference to amusements, though I cannot urge it as one of principle; viz., this: *There is great risk in adopting, or introducing, an amusement, if it is likely to lead on to something further, and you cannot draw any clear line at which you mean to stop.* There are some things perfectly unobjectionable in themselves, but which become most objectionable when carried to the extent to which the world carries them. But yet the shades of difference are so delicate that it is almost impossible to draw any line that shall form a stopping point between the innocent beginning and the objectionable end. Take dancing as an illustration. In itself, it is a natural, cheerful, innocent amusement, and a great deal better, in my opinion, than many others which are substituted for it. But those others have this advantage, that, when they reach a certain point, they cease of themselves; whereas, dancing leads straight on to the ball-room, and you cannot tell your sons or daughters where to stop. It is offensive to your friends to say that your young people may dance in your own home, but not in theirs. Then, again, it is impossible to persuade a young person that the question of conformity to the world depends on whether the carpet is taken up or not. You cannot turn the carpet into a test, as I have known some attempt to do, and say that it is all right if the carpet is down, but wrong if it is taken up. Nor can you make the time of leaving off a test, and say that it is right till eleven, and wrong if it goes on till twelve; or right till twelve, and wrong if it goes on till one. The result is that those who begin with what they call family dances find in most cases that their young people end in being habitual ball-goers; and very frequently the parents themselves are so drawn along down the sliding scale that they give up most of their early principles, and become with their young people, in such matters, thoroughly conformed to the world. Thus, many a young person has been like those unfortunate travellers who perished when crossing the Col de Géant. They found the narrow ridge of rough rock was difficult and fatiguing, so they turned aside a few paces in order to find an easier path on the smooth surface of the sloping snow. Of course they had no idea of doing anything but keep safely along the upper part of the slope, close to the rocky ridge. But it was not in their power to choose their own path when once on the slope. In a fatal moment one slipped, and drew the others with him. There was no stopping point then, and they were dashed to atoms over the tremendous precipice below. I am not surprised, therefore, that most Christian parents have considered it wiser and safer for their children to keep strictly to the rocky ridge.

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But in saying this I think we must bear in mind that it is rather a point of Christian prudence than of Christian principle, and be therefore extremely careful in condemning the conduct of those who differ from us. It is possible that a truly Christian person may think that he has discovered a safe stopping place in the sliding scale; and, if so, we must be careful how we blame him for conformity to the world, if he goes up to what he considers the safe limit. We may entirely differ

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from him, and believe that he is walking on very dangerous ground. But he may still be sound in principle, and sincerely anxious not to be conformed to the world.

(6.) But the next suggestion is one of principle, and of the utmost importance to the practical consideration of the subject; viz., this: *That no amusement should be entered into by young persons without the full and hearty concurrence of their parents.* By 'full and hearty concurrence' I do not mean reluctant permission, almost extorted from them by the fear of paining their children; but I mean that real approval which makes the young persons' pleasure theirs. I am persuaded that in such matters the young Christian cannot well make too much of his parents' wishes. I am prepared to adhere to this even in those cases in which I believe the young person to be right, and the parent mistaken. Of course if a clear command from God were involved, the authority of God must overrule that of a parent; but if the question turn on some point which the Word of God has left undecided, then surely the young person is called to yield. To take an example. A daughter is convinced of the great Scriptural principle, 'Be not conformed to this world,' and on the strength of it wishes to give up balls. But her mother wishes her to accept an invitation to one, and there is a collision between the judgment of the child and the will of the mother. How, then, should that young person act? It is an open question so far as the Scripture is concerned, whether going to balls is conformity to the world. The young person thinks it is, as I do. But after all, this is human opinion; whereas it is a Divine command to honour the father and the mother. But in all cases the human opinion must give way to the Divine authority, and therefore the right course appears to be for the young Christian, under such circumstances, to say to her mother with the utmost affection and most dutiful respect, that she wishes from a sense of duty to abstain from such amusements; but that, if her mother requires it as an act of filial obedience, she is ready as a child to obey. I have given this advice to many young persons, and I never knew an instance in which I had occasion to regret it. But surely the same advice must be given when it acts in the contrary direction, and, as long as young people are under their parents' roof, even though they may differ from them, the parents' wish must be held supreme.

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We must not, however, forget that the same principle which calls for obedience in the young calls likewise for fidelity in the parent. The parents have a responsibility laid upon them so long as the young people are inmates of their home, a responsibility which the young person is bound to acknowledge, and of which the parents cannot divest themselves. Parents therefore are bound to be faithful, as well as the children to be submissive. If they consider a particular course of conduct to be conformity to the world, it is their duty as Christian parents plainly to say so. They should let their minds be known, and let it be an understood thing that the course adopted is opposed to their judgments and their wish. There are very few Christian families in which the knowledge of the parents' wish is not sufficient; and when young persons are ready to submit to the judgment of their parents, it is clearly due to them that the parent should not shrink from the responsibility of decision. It is an easy thing to get rid of a difficulty by saying that at their age young persons must do as they like; but it is not fair to do so when the young persons are dutifully disposed, and perfectly ready to yield to their parents' judgment. In such a case the son or daughter has a right to look to the parent for a decided expression of his opinion and wish. When things are as they ought to be in a Christian home, the parents' wish is followed at once. If that wish is clearly expressed, and then disregarded, the blame lies on the young people; but if, from any motive, the parents withhold the expression of their wish, then they must be held responsible, and they have no right to express regret at the worldly conformity of their children.

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But, besides the duty towards the children, it is important not to forget the responsible position which the parent occupies in society; for, as a general rule, parents are held to a great extent responsible for the amusements adopted by the young people under their roof. If we could get behind the scenes we should often hear it argued that Mr. A. allows his daughters to adopt a certain line of conduct, or that Mr. B. makes no objection; whereas it is not impossible that they have both objected strongly, but have not had the moral courage to take the responsibility of withholding their consent. The result is, that they are thought by their friends to sanction that which they disapprove, and they practically throw the weight of their influence into the support of that which they think undesirable.

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But let it not be supposed, that in saying this, I do not enter into the anxieties of parents, for I have seen too much of life not to know how great they are, and how strong are the considerations which sometimes make many waver when deciding for their children, who would never hesitate as to their own conduct.

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Some are afraid of exciting a prejudice against their principles; and their earnest desire to see their dear children living in Christ makes them glad to soften down as much as possible the distinction between His people and the world. I can enter most heartily into such a feeling, and I am persuaded that no wise Christian would ever wish to put a needless cross in the way of his family. Still we must make up our minds to the conviction, that neither they nor we can follow Christ without the cross. There is a cross to be borne, and we shall utterly mislead those who are guided by us if we suppose that it is melted away by modern improvements in society.

We have therefore plainly to face the fact that our Christian principles involve a cross, and we shall never really commend them to others by presenting them in such a modified form as to keep out of sight their true character. If we succeed in persuading young persons to accept such a modification, there is danger of our becoming the unintentional means of deceiving them as to their true position before God.

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Others, who feel strongly themselves, are afraid of drawing the line too tight for others, and so causing a reaction when the tension ceases. I can thoroughly enter into these fears, and most fully acknowledge the danger. But I do not believe it is avoided by the parent's departure from his own principles; but rather by the prayerful and painstaking endeavour, in accordance with those principles, to make his home thoroughly cheerful. It is the greatest possible mistake, to suppose that exciting amusements and large parties are essential to the happiness of the young. On the contrary, I believe that, when the collapse after the excitement is taken into account, they will be found on the whole to diminish it. The real happiness of a young man's vacation depends on the resources of his home; and the best safeguard against the irritating effect of real consistency is to make the home so thoroughly cheerful that there is no desire for extraneous excitement. This is not always easy, and in all cases requires prayerful self-denial and painstaking. If a family is left to itself, to amuse itself as best it may, who can wonder that the evenings often hang very heavily? But when the dearly beloved mother throws her whole heart into the interests of all around her; when she is always planning for that which may make the day pass pleasantly; always on the look-out for good books and good friends; always ready to deny herself so as to cheer away a dull half-hour, and to throw herself with real interest into all the amusements of her family; and when the father takes his share in all that is going on, his share of interest, if he cannot afford his share of time, and so gives all the support in his power to her on whom the home life must mainly depend for its attractions, it will seldom be found that the young persons crave after excitement, for the simple reason that they are satisfied at home. I need scarcely remark what a rich reward such parents reap for their painstaking, and how deeply thankful they should be, if the Lord so bless their efforts as to make what some call the tightness of the line never felt by those who are gently guided by it.

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CONCLUSION.

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BUT while these practical suggestions may be helpful to some who are doubtful as to their practical conduct, it is important for us to remember well that the root of conformity to the world is not found in those practices which lie on the surface, but in the deep affections of the natural heart; so that whatever rules we adopt we are conformed to the world when we are living for the things of the world. We found at the outset that the men of the world are described as those who have their portion in this life. So we are conformed to the world when the portion in this life is the great end and object of our pursuit. Turning to the epistle of St. Paul to Titus we find that the grace of God which bringeth salvation is to have a twofold effect on the character. It is to wean, and to attract. The weaning process is described, when he says, 'Teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;' and the attractive power in the words, 'Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.' Now we must not suppose that by the word 'lust' is meant only sensuality. It is the old English word for desire. Thus, worldly desires, or desires after the world, are placed side by side with ungodliness, and both are to be denied by those who know the grace of God which bringeth salvation. Here lies the root of the matter. If the affections are still fixed on the world, and the desires bent on it, it is in vain to tell a man that in practice he shall not be conformed to it. Where his treasure is there will his heart be also, and where the heart leads the way, the steps are almost sure to follow. If, therefore, the affections be fixed on the friendships of the world, and the desires are bent on the good things of the world—its wealth, its honours, its popularity, its applause, its high positions, we must expect that questions which arise in practice will be referred, not to the balance of the sanctuary, but to the balance of the world; and it is hopeless to look for any decided line of action. But this must not be the case with the children of God. If we be in Christ we know the grace of God which bringeth salvation; we have been redeemed unto God by the precious blood of Jesus; we are sealed unto Him by the Holy Spirit of Promise, we are kept as His purchased possession until the day of His return: we are looking, waiting, hoping for that happy time when He shall take the kingdom, and all these earthly things pass away for ever; and are we to be looking backwards instead of forwards? Are we to be fostering the earthly affection, and losing sight of the heavenly? No. Let the world seek its own, and enjoy it while it lasts. But it won't last long. Still, while it does last men of the world are consistent in living for it. No one can accuse them of inconsistency. What we ask for is a similar consistency in those whose conversation is in heaven, and whose desire it is to walk with God. If we know Him let us keep our eye steadily fixed on Him; let us not be afraid of going forth without the camp, if only we can trace His footsteps in the path; and let us never lose sight of the Divine precept, 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things of the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.'

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