

On Being Straight

F.B. Meyer:

To be straight is to be true. There is no more important exhortation on the page of Scripture, than where the Apostle says, "Whatsoever things are true . . . think on these things." A friend of mine, educated in one of our great English schools, says that the most formative words of his life were addressed to him by his head master, as he said good-by: "Be true," he said, "always be true." My friend records that those words have often come back to him at critical moments of his life, indicating his path as with a finger of light.

Every man, in his heart of hearts, has some knowledge of what is eternally right and good. You see it in the little child who blushes and conceals itself when it has told a lie, or taken forbidden fruit, and who shares its sugar-candy with its little brother. It may be but a dim flicker, but it is there. The radiance that streams through the open door of heaven may have become very faint by the time it reaches the spot on the dark common where you stand, but unless you wilfully turn your back on it, it falls around your feet and on your heart.

Truth, so far as it concerns us, is that attitude of soul which thinks and acts in consistence with its highest ideals. And the marvel is, that as we act consistently with our ideals, they tend to become always nobler and purer, and to approximate more nearly to those highest standards which exist in the nature of God. If a man be true to his better self, he will become the pupil of the Spirit of Truth, and catch a glimpse of farther horizons, so that ultimately he will come out into the great light of eternity, as it shines from the face of Christ.

Be true in "your speech. Do not say one thing to a man's face, and another behind his back. Do not flatter where you inwardly despise and condemn. Do not exaggerate as you repeat your pet stories, for the sake of effect, and to win a smile. Let your speech mirror your convictions, so far as may be right and possible. Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay. Do not puff the article you want to sell beyond its real value, or say a single word more of it than you can verify. In the old fable the palace walls were panelled with mirrors, on which a mist arose when insincere and untruthful words were uttered within their precincts; realize that such mirrors are ever around you, and see that you never cause a stain or blur.

Be true in your actions. If you are an artist, portray Nature as you find her, never using your colors for mere effect or display. If you are a mechanic, do not make articles merely for show or sale, but because they realize the purpose they profess, boots to keep the feet dry, clothes to wear, furniture to last. The world is full of shoddy and sham, of scamped workmanship in our houses, of mottled paper that looks like marble, of tinsel that resembles gold, of paste-jewels, and veneer. Do not choose a trade for your boy which is a success in proportion as it is a mimicry and sham. Do not deal in counterfeits, lest you contract the habit of unveracity and falsehood. See that your hands and eyes and heart are in rhythm with your highest conceptions of what is honest, lovely, and of good report. Bear witness, as Jesus did, to the Reality of Things. Did Paul ever make a tent which deceived the purchaser?

Be true in your opinions. We are all liable to be warped in our opinions by considerations of what is popular, expedient, and likely to commend us to our fellows. The statesman is sorely tempted to listen to the wire-pullers of his party, the catch-cries of his constituency, the lead of some popular organ, and to allow these to divert him from the path of conviction and conscience. How often have men like Pilate been led to act against their clear judgment by the insistence and fear of the mob. Like waves of the sea, they are driven by the winds and tossed. Like the weather-vane, they move around with the least puff of breeze. This is specially the temptation of religious leaders, who are assailed by many voices, such as: Will it pay? Will it attract people, or alienate them? Will it be popular, or the reverse? Life is pitiable, indeed, when such considerations have to be balanced.

"Better be a dog, and bay the moon!"

Of course we must speak the truth in love. Some seem to think that truthfulness, of necessity, involves rudeness and ruggedness of speech, a rasp on the tongue, an abruptness in the act. But this need not be. The King of Truth was also the good shepherd, whose words were music, whose ways were mercy as well as truth, and whose glory comprised, in equal proportions, truth and grace.

Whatever happens, be true. As you stand behind the counter, a question may be asked by a customer about some article you are desirous of selling. An evasive answer, or a slight deviation from the strict truth on your part, will complete the transaction. The manager or shop-walker is listening. Shall you say it? If you do, no one will be much the worse. If you don't, you will lose your situation. What shall you do? Believe me, there is no alternative. You must follow your King, the King of Truth. And if you are cast out, he will receive you, and count you his companion, and give you a deeper glimpse than ever into his heart.

Or you are beginning to question certain conceptions of truth in which you have been reared. The more you think of them, the more unable you feel to accept them. To renounce them will give pain to those you love, will lead them to look at you shyly, will condemn you to ostracism and misunderstanding. On the other hand, it would be easy to shut your eyes, and sign your name to what all your neighbors hold. But, I pray you, do not do it, or you will put out your eyes as surely as Hubert's hot irons put out Arthur's.

This is why there is so much infidelity in the world. There are evidences enough, not only in books, but in the heart and soul, in life, in the world around. The moonbeam's silver path comes across the mere to the feet of every young warrior, and the hand clothed in samite offers to each the Excalibur sword. For each dreamer, of all the young pilgrims across the wold of time, there waits the angel-ladder. Beside each one of us the bush in the desert burns with fire. The difference between those who see and do not see these things lies in their devotion or disobedience to truth, so far as they know it.

If a man refuses to obey the truth, so far as it is revealed to him, the glimmering light dies out from his soul, and his eyes become dimmed, so that he cannot see.

If, on the other hand, a man obeys the truth, he is like one that had been lost in the catacombs; suddenly stooping down, he touches a cord, which he catches up and follows hour after hour, until it conducts him to the mouth of the long corridor, whence he steps forth into the perfect day.

It may be that some shall scan this page who have no faith in Christ or Christianity. I ask them to follow this simple recipe: Put away all from your life, in speech, thought, or act, which is inconsistent with your highest conceptions of the supremely Right and Good. Then be true to those conceptions, and, as you are, you will find them heighten and widen; you will discover yourself one in a great company, who are all travelling in the same direction towards the rising sun, after a while you will encounter One who speaks of things of which you have become profoundly and experimentally convinced; being of the truth, you will listen intently to him as he tells of things that lie beyond your view; but as he spake truly of things in which you could follow him, so you will believe that he speaks truly of these others; as when he says that God is a Father, that hereafter there is a home for those who trust and love, that he is the only begotten Son, to know whom is to know God, and to follow whom is to have everlasting life. Be straight: be strong: be true.