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Chapter VIII

Impurity. — I. A Warning.

Flee youthful lusts. — 2 Timothy ii. 22.

Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. — 1 Peter ii. 11.

Impurity, more, perhaps, than any other form of sin, has destroyed multitudes of the human race. Every generation has laid its tribute of blasted lives at the feet of this monster. History abounds with the records of mighty nations that have been first degraded and then overthrown by its subtle power. It has, I believe, been the source of more calamities among God's leaders than have sprung from any other evil. It has, I know, been a cause of great sorrow and loss in The Army. In one form or another it is, probably, the most powerful temptation which assails many of our people, overthrowing some, weakening still more, and being often the occasion of deep heart anguish and terrible spiritual darkness to others.

I would to God, my dear comrades, that I could write something on this matter which would at once instruct and strengthen you, not only for yourselves but for the sake of those with whose eternal safety you are charged. I write as unto the wise — that is, to those who desire to avoid this evil, and to escape from its awful consequences. My first words must be words of warning,

1. Impurity is like falsehood in one important respect. The strength of a lie is generally in the degree of truth that is in it; it is the perversion of the truth which makes a lie. So, the strength of impurity is generally in its connection and association with what is naturally pure, and with that which is the most beautiful thing in the world: love. An unclean bodily habit usually obtains its awful power for evil because it is linked on to an appetite which is necessary to the human race, and which, if it is only indulged at the proper time and in the proper measure, and in the married relationship, is natural and pure. An unlawful union between a man and woman sends its roots right down into their nature and holds them in their sin with a strength greater than bonds of steel, because it was their love for each other which first led them into the wrong; and yet we



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know that pure love is the foundation of life, the light of human existence, the likeness of God, and that without it the world would be only a wild beast's den. In the same way, a lustful mind seizing upon suggestions of what is questionable or unclean quickly entrenches itself behind that wonderful power of the mind over the body, which in itself is good, and which makes men more than sheep and dogs, and without which there would be nothing in life for intelligent beings worth the having.

2. Well may the Apostle say that this evil wars against the soul. We see that it does every day of our lives. It saps the life-power of its victims, kills their will-power, enfeebles their brainpower, and, above all, it breaks down all faith in God's power, robbing them of supreme love either for Him or for any man or woman. It disturbs the reason, and makes the mind like muddy waters, brings in unquietness, and unfits for work, breaking up all peace, and gradually driving away true happiness. The slave of impure habits, whether they be habits of body or habits of mind, is like a sow that is washed — no matter how often, or with what tears and groans and stifled agony the poor slave is washed — which returns to its wallowing in the mire. Filthy does as filthy is. Even in the most solemn moments of Divine visitation, when others with exceeding longings are crying for souls, or at the feet of Jesus are weeping over the sins of the world, the impure wander away to the mire, their thoughts or their desires take fire at some trifling thing which they hear or see, and the poor soul is dragged down into the slough and foulness and the slime. The corruption that is through lust is, perhaps, the most degrading of all corruptions.

Like other forms of evil, this horrible disorder gains force as time goes on. The very smallest beginnings are apt to grow rapidly. A few shady thoughts increase and multiply, until the mind becomes like a cage of unclean and crawling things that love the night and the darkness. A little indulgence is soon found to have become like a chain of fiery serpents holding its victim tight in the grasp of habits which I cannot name. Love, which might have been so pure and so chaste, and therefore so beautiful both in the eyes of God and man, when once it is tainted with impurity, sinks down to the level of mere animal passion; and lives which could have been all holy in the liberty and union and sweet happiness of purity, are spoiled, physically as well as spiritually, by the horrid license of fleshly indulgence and excess. Yes, indeed, I say it again, well may the Apostle declare that these lusts of the flesh war against the soul.



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3. The evil is all the more alarming because it is especially the young who are tempted. It is when the body is full of youthful vigour and strength that all the natural appetites are most powerful, and therefore most in need of government and control. It is then, in the spring-time of life — when the heart is fresh and innocent, when the mind is free from the harassing memory of wasted years — that this evil works its most awful ravages. To be old and wicked, to be old and impure, to be old and the slave of your own body — that is bad, pitifully bad and sad. But to be young, and yet be unable to say No to your passions; to be young and bright and strong, and with life before you, and yet to be held in degrading bondage to secret sin, or to secret thoughts that you hate when you remember them in the daylight — that is worse still and sadder still. If it is not more hateful to God, it is certainly more ruinous to the soul, and more destructive to the body. Impurity is the high road to death and hell.

4. But what in view of all this is the Apostle's advice, and how can it be carried out? 'Flee,' he says; 'fly away from youthful lusts.' What does he mean?

(a) First, be afraid of them. Let that be your regular condition and experience. Live in the fear of impurity. Such fear is a great blessing. Just as the fear of small-pox and cholera and other diseases of the body is valuable because it leads people to take all sorts of precautions to avoid them, so the fear of this moral disease will help you. Cultivate it. It is said that merely to look at a person who has small-pox will give some people the horrid infection, and such people are very anxious, therefore, not to look at anything like small-pox. Their fear is, so far, a protection to them. Cultivate, therefore, that holy dread of impurity which will make you shun every suggestive word or look, and make sure you frown on every joke that may mean something not quite pure; cultivate that delicacy and dread which will prompt you to run away from the book which seems to suggest, or the man or the woman who seems to enjoy such topics, or attempts to lead you towards them. Get to feel to it all just as you would to a foul leper who was running after you, maliciously attempting to infect you with loathsome leprosy, beyond which lies death and hell.

(6) Settle it once for all that impurity, in any shape or form, is not only forbidden by God, and highly dangerous to the body as well as to the soul, but that it is not in any way a necessity of



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your nature. Here lies one of the devil's most subtle and successful falsehoods with regard to it. It is only natural, he says to the young man or to the young woman, that you should feel the influence of sexual desire; and therefore, he argues, it must be natural to think on such things, and thus he soil, the mind; and natural, he goes on, that those desires should be indulged in some way, though God may not have set you in the relationship in which they can be lawfully indulged; and thus he enchains the body; and purity is wounded, and presently conscience is seared as with a hot iron.

When men assert that any sort of impure indulgence, either of the mind, through the eye or the ear, or of the body, by appetite or habit, is natural to them, what do they mean? Do they mean to say that our nature is only animal? Is it on a level with the brutes? Is it a beastly nature? Is it not something higher than that? Is it not the nature of one made in the image of God? Is not the spiritual intended to triumph over the animal? Is the body to be the governor, and the soul to be the slave; or is the soul, which was at first created in purity, and is now redeemed and restored through Christ, to be the master? The truth is, that it is impurity which is unnatural, for it is contrary to, and the very opposite of, man's nature as a whole, founded as that nature is on the principles of reason, of conscience, and of self-preservation, of every one of which impurity is the deadly foe. My brother, my sister, that is your true nature which acts out the noble thought of Paul when he said, "I keep under my body ... lest ... I myself"- even Paul the great Apostle - "should become a castaway." Never, therefore, say of an uncleanness in word or thought or deed, that it is excusable because it is inevitable or necessary to your nature. That would be a lie.

(c) Settle it also that one cannot take fire into his bosom and not be burned. In other words, that you cannot tamper with this sin of impurity without committing it. The body is the temple of the soul, and just as the air influences the bird, and the water influences the fish, the body exercises an enormous influence for good or ill upon the soul which occupies it. If anything be permitted which degrades the body, the soul is also degraded; if anything be permitted or cherished which sins against the body, it is also a stain upon the soul. The two are so joined that the one cannot be separated from the influence of the other.



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No, this evil cannot be touched or trifled with, submitted to or allowed, without bringing its own dire consequences of sorrow and guilt. He who permits a 'little' uncleanness of habit, or indulges in occasional impurity of thought, takes fire into his bosom, goes upon hot coals, and verily he will be burned. And against the consequences of that fire there is no insurance; even if, by the mercy of God, it be eventually quenched, that will not avail to spare its victim from deep sorrow, from wasted powers, and from life-long, nay, from everlasting losses.