

*EFFECT OF PLEDGES ON CHARACTER.*

Character is a product of slow but certain growth. Words, actions and look constitute what we call character. But as the same elements, differently arranged make up the sparkling diamond and the dull coal in the grate, so the same elements may form characters wholly different. Character is the waxen tablet upon which every word, action and thought leaves its impression.

All these have an influence for good or evil upon character. What then is the effect of a pledge? Does it tend to ennoble and strengthen or to debase and weaken character?

The will is the great factor in character. If then the will is subordinate to circumstances, we cannot affirm that any character is good or evil, that any action is right or wrong. Both alike are the result of necessity which knows no right, no wrong. But however logical may be the doctrine of necessity we are all conscious of the ability to do or not to do. Then there is within us, as a throned monarch, that which we call will. As the soldier is strengthened by every victory and weakened by defeat, so the will by every triumph grows stronger and loses its firmness by defeat. So a pledge, when kept, tends to strengthen character, while if broken it weakens it.

But the possibility of defeat ought not to restrain us from the contest. If none entered the lists but those whose success is sure the race would soon be abandoned. There is a time to consider, a time to determine and a time to act. Communities and states in their calmer moods lay down certain general principles, certain pledges which are to control them in times of excitement and commotion. So in the individual there are times when he sees more clearly the path of duty, and feels more keenly the impulses for the good, the noble, and then is the time

to lay down the controlling principles, the *magna charta* of character.

It may be said that pledges are inconvenient and troublesome; that when we pass the boundaries of our native land we find customs different from ours, and then pledges would be a restraint. But a pledge should never be taken except in matters where some principle is involved. And when one has fully determined that any custom or habit is wrong, he ought to shun it alike at home and abroad. If we should go to China we need not become addicted to opium. If we should visit France we need not become lecherous. And so if business or pleasure should call us to Germany we need not indulge their national vice—beer drinking. And that character which indulges a vice merely for the sake of fashion is scarcely worth the saving. But does not a pledge destroy freedom? Yes. So does filial affection destroy the freedom to do violence to an aged parent. Why should we prize so highly that freedom which renders our own destruction probable?

I cannot conceive of a true character without pledges either expressed or implied. The whole social system is nothing but a series of pledges. Pledges are the foundation of all government, national, local and individual.

So not only are pledges beneficial to character, but true character cannot exist without them. As the mariner has certain fixed points and lines on his chart, so each individual should lay down cardinal points and fixed principles of life. All men of true character are pledged to support the true, the noble, the good, and to shun and oppose the false and the base.

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STRAY THOUGHTS.

The work of a well regulated literary society is scarcely second to the regular studies of the college curriculum. If in the class-room mathematics furnishes the granite foundation, Latin the marble columns, and Greek the rich entablature, it