

KINDNESS

BY

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TO THE
DIVINE HEART OF JESUS,
THE ONE INFINITELY EXHAUSTLESS SOURCE
WHENCE ALL HUMAN KINDNESS EMANATES,
THESE PAGES ARE DEDICATED WITH
PROFONDEST WORSHIP
BY
THE EDITOR

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Chapter 1

ON KINDNESS IN GENERAL

The weakness of man, and the way in which he is at the mercy of external accidents in the world, has always been a favourite topic with the moralists. They have expatiated on it with so much amplitude of rhetorical exaggeration, that it has at last produced in our minds a sense of unreality, against which we rebel. Man is no doubt very weak. He can only be passive in a thunderstorm, or run in an earthquake. The odds are against him when he is managing his ship in a hurricane, or when pestilence is raging in the house where he lives. Heat and cold, drought and rain, are his masters. He is weaker than an elephant, and subordinate to the east wind. This is all very true.

Nevertheless, man has considerable powers, considerable enough to leave him, as proprietor of this planet, in possession of at least as much comfortable jurisdiction as most landed proprietors have in a free country. He has one power in particular, which is not sufficiently dwelt on, and with which we will at present occupy ourselves. It is the power of making the world happy, or, at least, of so greatly diminishing the amount of unhappiness in it as to make it quite a different world from what it is at present. This power is called kindness. The worst kinds of unhappiness, as well as the greatest amount of it, come from our conduct to each other. If our conduct, therefore, were under the control of kindness, it would be nearly the opposite of what it is, and so the state of the world would be almost reversed.

We are for the most part unhappy because the world is an unkind world; but the world is only unkind for the lack of kindness in us

units who compose it. Now, if all this is but so much as half true, it is plainly worth our while to take some trouble to gain clear and definite notions of kindness. We practise more easily what we already know clearly.

We must first ask ourselves what kindness is. Words which we are using constantly soon cease to have much distinct meaning in our minds. They become symbols and figures rather than words, and we become content with the general impression they make upon us.

Now, let us be a little particular about kindness, and describe it as accurately as we can. Kindness is the overflowing of self upon others. We put others in the place of self. We treat them as we would wish to be treated ourselves. We change places with them. For the time self is another, and others are self. Our self-love takes the shape of complacency in unselfishness. We cannot speak of the virtues without thinking of God. What would the overflow of self upon others be in Him, the Ever-blessed and Eternal? It was the act of creation. Creation was Divine kindness. From it, as from a fountain, flow the possibilities, the powers, the blessings, of all created kindness. This is an honourable genealogy for kindness.

Then, again, kindness is the coming to the rescue of others when they need it, and it is in our power to supply what they need, and this is the work of the attributes of God towards His creatures. His omnipotence is for ever making up our deficiency of power. His justice is continually correcting our erroneous judgments. His mercy is always consoling our fellow-creatures under our hard-heartedness. His truth is perpetually hindering the consequences of our falsehood. His omniscience makes our ignorance succeed as if it were knowledge. His perfections are incessantly coming to the rescue of our imperfections. This is

the definition of Providence, and kindness is our imitation of this Divine action.

Moreover, kindness is also like Divine grace, for it gives men something which neither self nor Nature can give them. What it gives them is something of which they are in want, or something which only another person can give, such as consolation; and besides this, the manner in which this is given is a true gift in itself, better far than the thing given. And what is all this but an allegory of grace? Kindness adds sweetness to everything. It is kindness which makes life's capabilities blossom, and paints them with their cheering hues, and endows them with their invigorating fragrance. Whether it waits on its superiors, or ministers to its inferiors, or disports itself with its equals, its work is marked by a prodigality which the strictest discretion cannot blame. It does unnecessary work, which when done looks the most necessary work that could be. If it goes to soothe a sorrow, it does more than soothe it. If it relieves a want, it cannot do so without doing more than relieve it. Its manner is something extra, and it is the choice thing in the bargain. Even when it is economical in what it gives, it is not economical of the gracefulness with which it gives it. But what is all this like, except the exuberance of the Divine government? See how, turn which way we will, kindness is entangled with the thought of God!

Last of all, the secret impulse out of which kindness acts is an instinct which is the noblest part of ourselves, the most undoubted remnant of the image of God which was given us at the first. We must, therefore, never think of kindness as being a common growth of our nature, common in the sense of its being of little value. It is the nobility of man. In all its modifications it reflects a heavenly type. It runs up into eternal mysteries. It is a Divine thing rather than a human one, and it is human because it

springs from the soul of man just at the point where the Divine image was graven deepest.

Such is kindness. Now let us consider its office in the world, in order that we may get a clearer view of itself. It makes life more endurable. The burden of life presses heavily upon multitudes of the children of men. It is a yoke, often of such a peculiar nature that familiarity, instead of practically lightening it, makes it harder to bear. Perseverance is the hand of time pressing the yoke down on our galled shoulders with all its might. There are many men to whom life is always approaching the unbearable. It stops only just short of it. We expect it to transgress every moment. But without having recourse to these extreme cases, sin alone is sufficient to make life intolerable to a virtuous man. Actual sin is not essential to this. The possibility of sinning, the danger of sinning, the facility of sinning, the temptation to sin, the example of so much sin around us, and, above all, the sinful unworthiness of men much better than ourselves — these are sufficient to make life drain us to the last dregs of our endurance. In all these cases it is the office of kindness to make life more bearable, and if its success in its office is often only partial, some amount of success is at least invariable.

It is true that we make ourselves more unhappy than other people make us. No slight portion of this unhappiness arises from our sense of justice being so continually wounded by the events of life, while the incessant friction of the world never allows the wound to heal. There are some men whose practical talents are completely swamped by the keenness of their sense of injustice. They go through life as failures because the pressure of injustice upon themselves, or the sight of its pressing upon others, has unmanned them. If they begin a line of action, they cannot go through with it. They are perpetually shying, like a mettlesome horse, at the objects by the roadside. They had much in them,

but they have died without anything coming of them. Kindness steps forward to remedy this evil also. Each solitary kind action that is done the whole world over is working briskly in its own sphere to restore the balance between right and wrong. The more kindness there is on the earth at any given moment, the greater is the tendency of the balance between right and wrong to correct itself, and remain in equilibrium. Nay, this is short of the truth. Kindness allies itself with right to invade the wrong and beat it off the earth. Justice is necessarily an aggressive virtue, and kindness is the amiability of justice.

Mindful of its Divine origin, and of its hereditary descent from the primal act of creation, this dear virtue is for ever entering into God's original dispositions as Creator. He meant the world to be a happy world, and kindness means it also. He gave it the power to be happy, and kindness was a great part of that very power. By His benediction He commanded creation to be happy; kindness, with its usual genial spirit of accommodation, now tries to persuade a world which has dared to disobey a Divine command. God looks over the fallen world, and repents that He made man. Kindness sees less clearly the ruin of God's original idea than it sees still that first beneficent idea, and it sets to work to cleanse what is defiled and to restore what is defaced. It sorrows over sin, but, like buoyant-hearted men, it finds in its sorrow the best impulse of its activity. It is labouring always in ten thousand places, and the work at which it labours is always the same—to make God's world more like His original conception of it.

But, while it thus ministers to Him as Creator, it is no less energetic and successful in preparing and enlarging His ways as Saviour. It is constantly winning strayed souls back to Him, opening hearts that seemed obstinately closed, enlightening minds that had been wilfully darkened, skilfully throwing the

succours of hope into the strongholds that were on the point of capitulating to despair, lifting endeavour from low to high, from high to higher, from higher to highest. Everywhere kindness is the best pioneer of the Precious Blood.

We often begin our own repentance by acts of kindness, or through them. Probably the majority of repentances have begun in the reception of acts of kindness, which, if not unexpected, touched men by the sense of their being so undeserved. Doubtless the terrors of the Lord are often the beginning of that wisdom which we name conversion; but men must be frightened in a kind way, or the fright will only make them unbelievers.

Kindness has converted more sinners than either zeal, eloquence, or learning; and these three last have never converted anyone unless they were kind also. In short, kindness makes us as Gods to each other. Yet while it lifts us so high, it sweetly keeps us low. For the continual sense which a kind heart has of its own need of kindness keeps it humble. There are no hearts to which kindness is so indispensable as those that are exuberantly kind themselves.

But let us look at the matter from another point. What does kindness do for those to whom we show it? We have looked at its office on a grand scale in the whole world; let us narrow our field of observation, and see what it does for those who are its immediate objects. What we note first as of great consequence, is the immense power of kindness in bringing out the good points of the characters of others.

Almost all men have more goodness in them than the ordinary intercourse of the world enables us to discover. Indeed, most men, from the glimpses we now and then obtain, carry with them to the grave much undeveloped nobility. Life is seldom so varied or so adventurous as to enable a man to unfold all that is

in him. A creature who has got capabilities in him to live for ever can hardly have room in threescore years to do more than give specimens of what he might be and will be.

But, beside this, who has not seen how disagreeable and faulty characters will expand under kindness? Generosity springs up fresh and vigorous from under a superincumbent load of meanness. Modesty suddenly discloses itself from some safe cavern where it has survived years of sin. Virtues come to life, and in their infantine robustness strangle habits which a score of years has been spent in forming. It is wonderful what capabilities grace can find in the most unpromising character. It is a thing to be much pondered. Duly reflected on, it might alter our view of the world altogether.

But kindness does not reveal these things to us external spectators only. It reveals a man to himself. It rouses the long-dormant self-respect with which grace will speedily ally itself, and purify it by the alliance. Neither does it content itself with making a revelation. It develops as well as reveals; it gives these newly disclosed capabilities of virtue, vigour and animation. It presents them with occasions; it even trains and tutors them. It causes the first actions of the recovering soul to be actions on high principles, and from generous motives. It shields and defends moral convalescence from the dangers which beset it. A kind act has picked up many a fallen man who has afterwards slain his tens of thousands for his Lord, and has entered the Heavenly City at last as a conqueror amidst the acclamations of the Saints, and with the welcome of its Sovereign.

It is probable that no man ever had a kind action done to him who did not in consequence commit a sin less than he otherwise would have done. I can look out over the earth at any hour, and I see in spirit innumerable Angels threading the crowds of men and hindering sin by all manner of artifices which shall

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