

## The Christian's Footprints.

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"Make straight paths for your feet lest that which is lame be turned out of the way."—*Hebrews xii: 13.*

This exhortation follows another,—  
"Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down and the feeble knees." It requires strong knees to enable us to take firm steps and make a straight path. If one is weak-kneed, he will be jostled and turned aside by every sturdy and resolute man he meets; and therefore for a Christian to make headway through a world full of wrong-headed and perverse characters it demands the utmost vigor of step. And both these requirements—the strong knees and straight path—are preceded by another,—  
"Wherefore seeing we are compassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses . . . let us run with patience the race that is set before us, *looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.*" On the cross, Christ was the author of our faith: at his coming, he will be the finisher of our faith; and between these two lies the whole Christian race. These two facts, therefore, need to be definitely fixed in our creed and in our conviction. The carpenter takes but two points in drawing his mark, and stretching his cord between these he snaps it, and makes a line as straight as a sunbeam. Starting from the cross, where we get forgiveness of sin, we are to set our face steadfastly towards the crown, where we shall attain perfection, and thus are we to press on, hearing God saying to us, "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil."

There are two principal lessons suggested by this subject:—

### I. *The Christian's correct walk: "Make straight paths for your feet."*

The meaning is, "*Make straight tracks with your feet.*" So many Christians go through the world without making any tracks at all! They step so softly, and glide so quietly along that they leave no real definite impression of any sort. And I don't know but this is the most serious question after all,—not, first, whether our steps are crooked or straight, but whether they are firm and decisive, and leave a deep indenture on society. The heavier a person is, the deeper his tracks I suppose. If you are decided and thorough-going,

*tion of the gospel of peace.*" O ye bare-footed moralists, thinking to stand in the presence of God in the unsaddled feet of impenitence and unbelief, come back to your Father, and accept his reconciliation and his "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and *shoes on his feet,*" before you can expect to leave the deepest footprints of a Christian example.

When God revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush, he said, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." The ground on which we come to him is no less holy, and the requirements of his law are no less stringent to-day; but, through the weakness of the flesh, man has been found unable to come to God, hence God has come out to him, while he was yet a great way off, and shod his feet with "the preparation of the gospel of peace." "Therefore being justified by faith, *we have peace with God.*" With this firm assurance we move on, not hoping for peace at the end, but having it now; not striving to keep the peace with God, but having the peace of God which passeth understanding, to keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. It is this assurance of an accomplished and present peace with God that gives us a firm footing and a steady tread. The Christian life is no trial trip to heaven now; it requires no retreating upon bewildered footsteps; it is as sure of its goal as it is of its starting point. Feet shod with conjecture, tracking an experiment, running in the way of some unexplored perhaps, these can leave no track for sin-blinded and truant souls to walk in. God help us, if we know not whom we believe or whither we are going, to sit down and wait till we do, rather than be blind leaders of the blind! "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness," says Jesus, and we may add assuredly that such an one will not lead others into darkness.

But, how shall we make straight paths for our feet? "Take the Bible for your compass," it will be answered. True advice! And yet, do you know that if a ship's pilot should happen to have considerable metal about his person, or if he should chance to carry a strong magnet in his pocket, it might so affect his compass as to turn the ship out of its course? I believe the Scripture is the guide, and the infallible guide, of the Christian; but I know that if a Christian has some private prejudice or personal prepossession, he may so deflect the compass of Holy Scripture as to make it lead him entirely out of the way. There are Christians who have an appetite for wine, and who are running straight upon the rocks where they will be wrecked in body, soul, and estate, and who are yet steering all the time by these two texts,—that at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, Jesus turned water into wine; and

*that which is lame be turned out of the way.*"

Ah, how tenderly the Lord cares for the lame ones! You are strong, and have no need to be afraid of rough places; but perchance there is a weak and crippled brother coming after you, who will stumble and fall where you tread firmly. Think of him, and act accordingly. A father, climbing up a steep and precipitous cliff at a summer watering place, says that to his astonishment he heard his little boy calling out behind him, "*Take a safe path, father, for I am coming after you.*" What was safe for the strong nerves and sturdy strength of the father might be exceedingly perilous for the weak and unpractised step of the child. Therefore the father must "make straight paths for his feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way." It is a lesson running through all life and conduct. It may be safe for you, who have a strong will and great self-restraint, to drink wine; but there are scores who are watching you, to whom it would be a deadly peril. They are lame through some hereditary appetite or weak through some constitutional flaw, and if they were to follow you, they would certainly be turned out of the way. Therefore it is not a question of your own feet, which may be strong and steady, but of your footprints, which may be way-marks to destruction, luring the weak unto death. Let us remember that we cannot obliterate our own footsteps. We may change our life, but the footprints of our example are behind us,—a far-reaching ladder, on which souls will climb to heaven, or descend to ruin, when we have ceased to be.

Now, observe how the principle of our text runs all through Scripture. Disputations in regard to doctrine there will be. "But," says Paul, "him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but not to doubtful disputations.*"

Drop your arguments, however important; put aside discussion, however vital, if by these things you are likely to bewilder and perplex a weak brother and prevent him from entering the kingdom of heaven. There are scores of poor souls who know just enough to believe in Christ and be saved, but who would stumble and fall if you were to try to lead them over the lofty track of theological arguments which Jonathan Edwards and John Calvin traversed. But Jesus Christ's way is a very easy and simple way: and if any of you are confused about the doctrine of predestination, or the doctrine of the Trinity, he will not require you to go through these mazes of doctrine before admitting you to heaven. Cry, as David did, "*Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path,* because of mine enemies," and the Lord will hear you. I believe in theology for theologians. There is a kind of mental exhilaration in watching a trained mind

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plead for consistent Christian examples on the part of the disciples of Christ. The larger part of mankind follows a few leaders as unthinkingly as the flock follows the wether. Manners are contagious, conduct is the beacon by which most are guided. Therefore be sure that your example is salutary.

And remember that you cannot exert a Christian influence except as you are yourself personally a Christian. Every shadow is the shadow of something, and a Christian example is only possible as the image and reflection of a Christian character. For a merchant to attempt to exert a religious influence over his clerks, while he is neither religious nor prayerful nor believing; for a parent to try to set a pious example before his family, while he himself is undevout and worldly,—this were like attempting to cast a shadow without a substance, to give it body and outline. Influence lives, happily or unhappily, when the person who casts it is gone, like the image retained on the photographer's plate after his subject has left the room. But tell me, who has produced sun-pictures, without a face or form to cast them? and tell me, who has exerted a Christian influence or left behind him a Christian example, without himself being a Christian? O men of the world and men of society, women of culture, and women of position, there are lame feet straying out of the paths of virtue and stumbling on the dark mountains of sin, which may be led back into the paths of righteousness and purity. But it will take a strong and sturdy example to influence them. It will have to be an example magnetic with Christlike sympathy, and firm and uncompromising with divine holiness and self-denial. No atom-character, floating on the currents of worldliness and self-indulgence, will arrest a wreck that may perchance be drifting down. "Be ye therefore steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,"—steadfast and unmovable, even if you cause a foam in the stream that passes by you by your seeming religious stubbornness and eccentricity. For you are called, not only to make straight paths, but to be yourself a rock, on which bruised and footsore and sliding feet may rest and find a solid support. And the Lord give you strength to be what you are required to be!

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