

*Alumni Essay read by George A. MacDonald, at the  
Commencement Exercises, May 27, 1926.*

### HONESTY

"Honesty—a name scarce echo to a sound—honesty!  
Attend the stately chambers of the great—  
It dwells not there, nor in the trading world;  
Speaks it in councils? No, the sophist knows  
To laugh it hence."

Honesty considered in all its aspects is probably today one of the rarest virtues in this busy world of ours. Not only is it a rare virtue in this business world, but even in our private and spiritual life as well.

Man in the course of his life must necessarily have three relations, that with his God, that with himself and that with his neighbor. From the earliest records of the human race, dishonesty has played a prominent part, for, were not our first parents dishonest, and for what reason? Did they not have every wish gratified? Did they not have the promise of everlasting life? And yet, in spite of all this, were they not led away by the deceiver? These created beings made to the image of the Creator and endowed with God's most precious gifts, did not remain true to their dearest friend and master.

We, through our first parents, have become subject to all the ills and misfortunes, all the passions and weaknesses, all the trials and tribulations which they merited. Little wonder it is then that with our tendency to evil we find it far easier to slight our obligation to God, and to live for this world alone. Little wonder it is that we find it so easy to forget Him to whom we are indebted for the very air we breathe. Yet God in His sovereign goodness lets us live on, some to fall deeper in the thralldom of dishonesty, others to rise as pure lights shining mid the gloom of strife, brilliant beacons ever guiding those who might otherwise stumble and falter by the wayside, and who might find the temptations and allurements overwhelming. But where do we find these disciples of truth? Is there any particular station in life to which this virtue is confined? Must man live a secluded life so as to escape the enticements of the world? By no means. True honesty is not confined to any walk of life, nor to

any class. It is found in the hovels of the poor or in the mansions of the rich, in the crowded streets or in the quiet fields, it becomes the great as well as the lowly, the ruler as well as the ruled.

“Who is the honest man?

He that doth still and strongly good pursue  
To God, his neighbor and himself most true  
Whom neither force nor fawning can  
Unpin, or wrench from giving all their due.”

Man has many enemies in this world, but the deadliest and most artful of all is himself. He may be able to overcome his enemies and even outwit his friends, but if he is unable to conquer himself, his pride and his passions, his other attainments go for naught. His selfwill some day will conquer his prudence and the result will be the loss of self respect. And what greater disaster could happen to a man in high position, in fact in any position, than the loss of his self respect. By this he loses the goodwill and esteem of those under him, and receives the ridicule and disdain of those above him. Not only this but he falls in his own estimation, and, with this burden weighing him down, can no longer look the world in the face. He might be a born leader and commander of men yet to himself in all honesty he is a coward.

There is a reward for all true efforts either in this world or in the world to come. In this life itself the fruits of honesty are manifold. Do not men rise to positions of trust and respect through their integrity? True our business world is not a model of this virtue, yet even the most unscrupulous admire in others the trait of honesty, for they know in whom to place their trust, with whom their interests will be safe. So he who practises honesty in all his actions, be they great or small, will find that he is the one to whom responsible positions come.

Honesty is one of the virtues that does not admit of modification; a man is either honest or dishonest, for “Trust forgives no insult and endures no stain.” We should not diverge the slightest from the narrow paths of honesty, even to better our worldly condition, for it is only a transient gain in this world that may be won by this means, for no alloy is permitted to contaminate the virtues in the world to come.

Man is ever, unconsciously perhaps, revealing by his



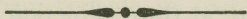
everyday works the traits of his character, not only by works, indeed, but by his appearance, by his conduct, and by his bearing towards others, especially those weaker than himself. These traits of character are discernible even to the least observant. Little children have an unerring instinct in understanding character, an instinct that makes them cling affectionately to some rough and honest workman, and shrink fearfully from the polished but heartless deceiver. Yet in spite of all this, success seems to crown the efforts of him who is not over-scrupulous in his dealings with his fellow man. Perhaps there is a cause for this. Man's ambition has in many instances been allowed full rein, and in his overwhelming desire for success, fame and honour, he does not hesitate to covertly employ shadowy means to attain his goal.

As with man singly, so with man collectively. In the basis of all society, the family, there should be paramount the sterling virtue of truth. It is there the child receives his first lessons which frame his character; it is there his plastic mind is moulded along lines which in later years he will follow. So it is fitting that in the home every virtue should be practised, every moral precept followed and every honest tendency encouraged. Then were this the case, what a change would be in man's relation to man. The virtues of the home would be mirrored in the community, and still more so in the nation, and even in the relation of nation to nation. What an ideal world would then exist, free of strife and discord, with harmony and peace reigning supreme. No more would nation lift up sword against nation, nor would war exact its terrible toll, no more would the land be devastated by the terrible gods of war, to gratify the dishonest ambitions of nations; no more would tribunals be necessary for the proper conduct of fighting, nor league exist for the preservation of peace.

Contemplating this, one cannot help but wonder that honesty is so rare; that this virtue is not practised more in our daily lives. We, of course, despise the calumniator and the hypocrite because of the harm they may do us, but not because they are untrue, yet it is not calumny or treachery that does the most harm, it is the veiled untruth the low insinuations which are even worse than the outspoken falsities, because they are harder to combat. It is these that cause ill-feeling, that lead to open hate, these hidden thrusts in the dark that cannot be perceived.

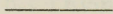
Then let us say with Ruskin—"Do not lie at all. Do not think of one falsity as harmless and another as slight, and another as unintentional. Cast them all aside." Many are there indeed, who would be more willing to hold to truth at a great sacrifice, than to practice it at the cost of a little daily trouble. Many there are who would, under great provocation remain firm, yet under no particular temptation, and seemingly for no reason, freely practise dishonesty in the most trivial affairs. In this lack of honesty in small things they truly display their real character, for an upright man never attains an end, be it ever so humble, by dishonest means; an upright man ever shows forth his true nobility by his honesty, and fittingly justifies Pope in his famous couplet:—

"A wit's a feather and a chief' a rod  
An honest man's the noblest work of God."



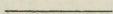
Even from the body's purity, the mind  
Receives a secret, sympathetic aid.

—*Thompson.*



'Tis education forms the common mind  
Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined.

—*Pope*



In the lexicon of youth, which fate reverses  
For a bright manhood, there is no such word as "fail."

—*Bulwer.*



Think that day lost whose low descending sun,  
Views from thy hand no worthy action done.

—*Jacob Bobart.*



Who shall decide when doctors disagree  
And sound causists doubt like you and me.

—*Pope.*