

9/1912

# THE NEW YORK OBSERVER

## Charles Dickens' Rule of Life

“Whatever I have tried to do in life, I have tried with all my heart to do well. What I have devoted myself to, I have devoted myself to completely. Never to put one hand on anything on which I could not throw my whole self, and never to affect depreciation of my work, whatever it was, I find now to have been one of my golden rules.”—David Copperfield.

## DICKENS CENTENARY NUMBER

# THE NEW YORK OBSERVER

Vol. XC, No. 6

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1912.  
Established in 1823.

Whole No. 4631

## Estimating One's Self fairly

BY CLELAND B. McAFEE, D.D.

IN the list of seven homely virtues named by Peter in his first letter (3:8-12), he gives fifth place to humble-mindedness. In this particular form the word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, but other forms of it occur frequently. It always stands over against false pride, against over-estimate of one's self. But it does not suggest any servile self-depreciation instead. Indeed in the Colossian letter Paul distinctly warns against pretending humility when one is not humble. It must be honest, it must be true to the facts, or it is only pretense.

Sometimes it is difficult to steer our course between the evident extremes. Counting ourselves nothing and counting ourselves everything are almost equally bad. Magnifying our powers and minimizing them work out into about the same inefficiency. We have to learn to think of ourselves fairly, as we ought to think.

Against over-estimate of ourselves must always stand the fact that without our circumstances and the aid which others give us we would be helpless. A shrewd man said once that his only criticism of self-made men is that they always seem built with the gable end toward the street! Dickens describes Josiah Bounderby as always boasting of the hard times he had as a boy, being kicked about, sleeping in the gutter, deserted by his mother. It sounded very big and heroic. But when the facts came out, it was found that he had been made by other people as we all have been made. His mother and employer had cared for him. There had been many helpers. If we could only get back into the life of any man, we would find the same thing in varying forms. What we are is the product of others. Why, then, should we boast?

Mr. Jacob A. Riis tells how impressed he was in his youth with the politeness of the people of Copenhagen when he walked about with a strange man whom he had met at the museum door. They took off their hats and bowed profoundly to him. The boy Jacob returned the salutations, delighted with such courtesy. Afterwards he found that the strange man was the King of Denmark and that the salutations were not meant for the lad who had accepted them so easily. Those who know well one of our wealthy men say that he is a most kindly man, with no pride of what he can do with his money, giving as though it were a privilege and a pleasure. But ah! his secretary! He feels his position, they declare, and sees that others feel it. You would suppose the money was his! Get on the good side of him, be suitably respectful and obeisant, and he will let you see his chief, before whom you can be yourself! A lady who had just entertained a great man looked pale and worn when he had gone; one of her friends expressed surprise that he had been difficult to entertain because he seemed so gracious and human. "It was not he!" the hostess exclaimed, "it was not he! It was his valet who awed us into weakness."

Take yourself out of your surroundings, brother, stand by yourself, away from your money, away from your position, away from your accidental power, and see how much people regard you! There will be enough to humble any of us.

Against over-estimate stands also the certainty that it will unfit us for our best service. Many a minister has failed by a note of egotism which sounded jarringly in the ears of his people. Many a layman has failed by acting as though there were no other opinion but his own. Young people have been willing to attempt what all earlier experience had declared impossible and have wrecked their lives. In one sense we owe the American nation to the unwise training of a prospective king who learned folly from it. The mother of the lad who became

George III., used to say to him over and over, "Be a king, George; be a king!" And George came to the throne with silly notions of his own importance. It was costly folly, whatever blessing came from it.

We are not swiftly ready to accept the strengthening which we need when we encourage ourselves to believe we need nothing more. When we are sufficient of ourselves why should we accept the power really needed for large and heavy service?

On the other hand, against underestimate there stands the fact that in it we cast a slight upon all that has made us what we are. Is God to have no honor for His work? Are we to act as though He had done nothing? Leonardo said: "I will undertake any work in sculpture, in marble, in bronze, or in terra cotta—likewise in painting I can do as well as any man, be he who he may!" That sounds like boasting, but there are some who think it was true. Leonardo da Vinci was a genius of the first order, a gift of God to the world. Should he minimize God's work? The language of some men in an attempted humility is really a belittling of the work of God. I remember the comical look on my father's face when a most inadequate student told him effusively that all he was he owed to my father. I know he ached to tell him he need not bother about so small a debt! But what if we say I owe all I am to God, and what I am does not amount to anything? Underestimate casts discredit on God and all who under him have made us what we are.

So it keeps us from attempting our full share of the task of life. How many requests for help have you declined because you felt that you were not fitted for the work? You were often wise, no doubt, but the more you are impressed with your unfitness the less you will be ready to do. After a while it becomes almost a matter of pride to depreciate ourselves and a matter of great convenience as well. If we should say we would not do things, that sounds selfish, but if we say we are not fitted to do them, that sounds modest, lays the blame on God—and lets us out of doing them just the same! Men lose powers because they will not trust them in use. If they had believed in themselves more, if they had been more daring in their attempts, they would have found their powers adequate. Underestimating ourselves helps to make us shirk our full share of the work.

Of course we shall never see ourselves as we are except in the light of Christ. Coming up alongside of him brings out our real dimensions. He keeps us from pride, but he keeps us from depressing humility as well. He makes us humbly proud and proudly humble.

Brooklyn, New York.

## THE STILL SMALL VOICE

By Ralph D. Lusk.

It comes through the roar of the city street,  
Where jostling crowd and hurrying throng  
In maelstrom's tide of barter meet,  
Chaotic, swept along.

It enters the fastness of vaulted hall  
In silent watches of the night,  
Where brooding shadows start and crawl,  
Moving in spectral light.

It pleads alike with king and slave,  
Never ceasing. Life's short span  
Hath shown no greater power to save  
Than this—the God in man!

Staunton, Va.