

SIX FOOLS

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TO MARY MY WIFE

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FOREWORD

GRUFF, gloomy, pessimistic, dyspeptic Thomas Carlyle once described the population of England as consisting of so many millions, who were mostly fools. Carlyle must have been suffering from one of his numerous attacks of indigestion when he gave vent to that savage utterance, or possibly one of his sleepless nights had somewhat disturbed his mental equilibrium. From whatever cause the explosion came, his percentage is confessedly much too high for the number of fools in England's population or in that of any other civilized country. If we receive, however, the generally accepted definition for a fool, that he is a person deficient in judgment, who acts stupidly or absurdly, or pursues a course contrary to the dictates of wisdom, then we must admit that fools form a considerable number in the population of every civilized land. Something over a hundred times the word

“fool” is used in the Bible, and it is an exceedingly interesting study when we come to inquire into the root-meanings of the word. In the different contexts, where the various terms for the *English* word “fool” are found, it means, in the original, an evil person, a boaster, a self-confident one, an empty fellow, a contemptible individual, a villain, one who is thickheaded, thoughtless, unwise, heedless, or rebellious. So true are the Scriptures to universal human experience that whenever we read the references to fools in the Bible or come to study their several individual histories, their portrayal is so vivid and so true to human nature that we somehow feel the various writers must be describing flesh-and-blood existences in this twentieth century rather than men and women who lived thousands of years ago. We find that the modern kinds of fools are like the Bible types: boasters, bragging of their great exploits; wise in their own conceit, but superficial and vacuous; indifferent to life’s greatest and best opportunities; imprudent and rash, careless and improv-

ident; wicked and base; and rebellious against the laws of God and man. In the chapters of this book the author has nothing to do with the professional fool, the jester or buffoon of the sixteenth century of English history. Such was a person of quick wit and ready repartee and a capital story-teller, appearing quite conspicuously in Shakespeare's plays and dressed in fantastic garb of most gaudy colors. He wore upon his head a pointed cap trimmed with small bells, that tinkled as he walked. This fool was kept by persons of rank for the purpose of making sport and furnishing entertainment to while away the often tedious hours of court routine. He finds his modern counterpart in the circus clown of to-day. The writer does not treat of weak-minded or of idiotic people, nor of insane persons, all of whom are sometimes called fools. The Scriptures and the larger book of human life show that multitudes of people most finely endowed have turned to the ways of folly and have gone down to destruction. Some of the most clever people intellectually

have, like Saul, "erred exceedingly and played the fool." The sad tragedy about it all is that those who, through their own willfulness and stubbornness, have refused to look at things in their true and right relations, have turned deaf ears to all counsels of wisdom, and have made evil choices, have at last come to themselves only after the hardest and the most bitter lessons learned in the rough school of experience. Some see, after the years with all their golden opportunities have gone, how they might have succeeded only after success has been finally forfeited, and after their last chance to win has been forever swept away. The common apologetic and often smiling comment on recklessness in youthful character is that it is only a case of sowing wild oats. People frequently refer to the sowing of wild oats as lightly as they speak of measles as one of the unavoidable diseases of childhood. But the young person, who indulges in that sort of seed-sowing is bound to reap sooner or later the harvest of the same kind of worthless tares and noxious weeds of

wickedness. In many personal instances after a complete moral reform, it has been found that there still continue in the doomed physical body the undermining effects of even the few years that have been spent in sin. Many a constitution that has broken prematurely and many a death date on the tombstone that has antedated God's own good time belong in the harvest of wild oats. As to the kinds of fools that receive attention in this book, we discuss those who, refusing to grapple with the hard tasks that make manhood, compel classification with the invertebrates. Another class considered are the obstinate, opinionated, and self-centered, who decline to accept the good counsels of those older and wiser than themselves, and who are rewarded according to their folly. Another group treated are those who trust to the attractions of external adornment rather than to the sterling worth of moral qualities, and who as a result come to inevitable degeneracy of character. Investigation is given to those who starve the soul to fatten the purse, who grow rich in the abundance

of the things which they possess, but become atrophied, inactive, and inert in the exercise of all the powers of the higher and better nature. A study is presented of those who pride themselves upon their great intellectual ability and force of will, who claim that for this reason they can give free rein to appetite and passion, who maintain that they will always continue to be their own masters in self-control, yet who make an utter wreck of life and character. Last of all a view is taken of those most shallow and empty of all who question or deny the existence of an Intelligent First Cause. It will be seen that the teaching in these pages comes not only from the direct study of the type of fool that is under consideration, but also from reference to contrasting characters of goodness, virtue, and excellence. It is sought to make the folly of the fool all the more evident by considering also the wisdom of the wise.

I

THE YOUNG FOOL

A fool always finds a greater fool to admire him.—*Boileau.*

The fool is happy that he knows no more.—*Pope.*

Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend!
More hideous than the sea-monster art thou,
When thou showest thyself in a child!
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!

—*Shakespeare.*

I

THE YOUNG FOOL

THE ten great laws, which furnish the foundation of all modern jurisprudence, were written originally on two tables of stone. Jewish tradition holds that upon the first table were engraven the first four commandments, that embody man's duties to his God, and that upon the second table were recorded the last six, that include the duties of man to man. It is uncertain whether the Decalogue was thus divided as to the two tables of stone, but it is evident that the Ten Commandments fall naturally into these two logical divisions: duties to God and duties to man.

Why should the commandment "Honor thy father and thy mother" have been given the first place among the duties of man to man, and thus seemingly emphasized as the most important in the second division of the Decalogue? All human

government began in the family. He who created us as moral beings made us to dwell together in mutual dependence. "God setteth the solitary in families." The germ of all authority lies in the relation of parent and child; in the care that the child calls forth, in the weakness of infancy, and in the natural parental and filial reverence that springs perennially from the human heart.

Turning back toward the beginnings of history, we behold the patriarch Abraham dwelling in his tent with his children. We see this household expanding into tribes, yet still linked in a bond of brotherhood, and still honoring and reverencing the father of them all, who is their sheik, priest, and head. We discern in this household the foundation of the Hebrew commonwealth. History repeats that same early chapter in the beginnings of the Roman empire, and in the tribes of the Arabs of the desert to-day.

One of the wisest of English jurists, in his work on ancient law, has said, "Society in primitive times was not a collection of