

# **HOW TO MAKE A RATIONAL FIGHT FOR CHARACTER**

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**HENRY CHURCHILL KING**

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HOW TO MAKE A RATIONAL  
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*By*  
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## How to Make a Rational Fight for Character \*

In trying to point the way to a rational fight for character I wish to connect all I have to say from the very first with Paul's statement of the outcome of his experience: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans vii. 24, 25.) For I am not willing that any man should think, even for a moment, that in taking up some of those subsidiary considerations which we need to have in mind in this fight that we have to make in life, I am forgetting the one great way out. That is, let it be clear that there is no attempt here to find some lower substitute for Christ and the great motives of His gospel, but rather posi-

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\* An address given at the Northfield Student Conference, July 4, 1901.

### The Fight

tively to state those conditions of all kinds, involved in our very natures, which we need to heed if Christ and the great Christian truths are to have the power with us they ought to have. Any man who believes that God is the Creator of him, body and mind, must also believe that in some true sense God has expressed Himself in this constitution of his being, bodily and mental. God does not mean to ignore the conditions involved in our constitution, nor may we. He has not contradicted Himself in the double revelation of Himself in our natures and in Christ. And the great revelation in Christ will mean most to us, as we heed most carefully the laws of our natures. Not through deliberate disobedience to those laws, but through careful heeding of them are we to be saved. Let us not forget that the laws of this being of ours are laws of God, and, therefore, sacredly to be observed.

In calling careful attention to the constitutional conditions under which we all have to live out our lives, I strive simply

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to answer a question that was brought me some time ago by an old pupil of mine who said, "What are we to do in those poorer moments when the higher motives have lost their appeal?" That is the question.

I. In the first place, it seems to me, that at that lower moment when it looks as if everything were going, it is well for a man to say to himself with all seriousness, "*Everything is now at stake; it is fight or die.*" That is the situation. A friend of mine, with the marks of a serious disease upon him, went some time ago to a distinguished specialist in that disease and consulted him. The physician, after going carefully over his case, said to him:—

"I think the disease has not gone so far but that if you will rigorously follow this regimen which I prescribe for you, you can still pull through."

My friend heard him out as to the regimen that he proposed, and said, "Why, doctor, I should simply die if I had to live under that regimen."



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The doctor somewhat gruffly turned upon him and said, "Well, die then."

He had just that one chance. Let a man say to himself, in like manner, in one of those lower moments when he is likely to be engulfed by temptation, "It is fight or die."

It is a very significant thing to-day, in all branches of the Christian Church, that the old shallow talk about sin has ceased, and that there is no branch of the Christian Church that dreams to-day of sweeping multitudes of men without reference to their condition into heaven and the presence of God. Men have come to see that to be saved is to share the life of God, and to share the life of God is to share His character, and *so* to share His blessedness; that God means to save us to character, and that there is, therefore, no way out for any man except by coming into character. Christ means to save us into character, into likeness of character with God. There is no other salvation. In his poorer moments, then, let a man say to himself, "I have simply to let my-

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self go on along this line in which I am now tempted, to have it all over with me, to be lost, absolutely lost." For men have come to see to-day, as they never saw before, that the very utmost that any man by any possible way of thinking could promise anybody in the future life is, that at much greater pains, under greater difficulties, traveling a longer way back to God, he might have opportunity to do just that which now he ought to do. There is no escape in the universe of God but by character. We are shut up to that. Everything, then, is at stake in temptation.

II. Moreover, I think a man ought to ask himself in these lower moments, Why the lower moments? And the second suggestion, therefore, that I have to make is: *Keep yourself persistently at your best.* You have no right to have these lower moments continually breaking in upon your life. Just as in health that is the secret, so here in character it is the secret. You are to guard conditions and strive to keep yourself at your very best.

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Not tolerable health, but superb health, what Emerson called "plus health," must be the aim. I know no way in the matter of bodily health except simply this: to say, I will carefully, conscientiously observe the conditions that will keep me at my very best. In the same way, no man can be certain of character who is willing barely to keep the breath of moral and spiritual life in him, and is not aiming persistently at the very best of which he is capable, and therefore conscientiously observing the conditions that will keep him at his best. It is the subtle gradual deterioration which we are to fear as we fear death.

III. In the third place, we are to *consider the conditions bodily, mental, and of association.*

1. And, first, the *bodily conditions.* I suppose there is hardly a clearer lesson in all modern psychology than the unity of man, mind and body. You may like it or you may not like it; it makes no difference. You are not now a disembodied spirit whatever you may be hereafter;