

**THE STRENGTH OF BEING
CLEAN: A STUDY
OF THE QUEST FOR
UNEARNED HAPPINESS**

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The Strength of Being Clean: A Study of the Quest for Unearned Happiness by David Starr
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DAVID STARR JORDAN

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The **STRENGTH** *of*
BEING CLEAN

A STUDY OF THE QUEST
FOR UNEARNED HAPPINESS

A WHITE CROSS ADDRESS

DAVID
STARR
JORDAN



UNIV. OF
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THE
STRENGTH OF BEING CLEAN.

A STUDY OF THE QUEST FOR UNEARNED HAPPINESS.

I wish in this address to make a plea for sound and sober life. I base this plea on two facts: to be clean is to be strong; no one can secure happiness without earning it.

Among the inalienable rights of man—as our fathers have taught us—are these three: “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” So long as man is alive and free, he will, in one way or another, seek that which gives him pleasure, hence life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are in essence the same. But the pursuit of happiness is an art in itself. To seek it is not necessarily to find it, and failure may destroy both liberty and life. Of some phases of this pursuit I wish to speak to-day. My message is an old one. If by good chance some part of it is true, this truth is as old as life itself. And if it be true, it is a message that needs to be repeated many times to each generation of men.

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6. *THE STRENGTH OF BEING CLEAN.*

It is one of the laws of life that each acquisition has its cost. No organism can exercise power without yielding up part of its substance. The physiological law of transfer of energy is the basis of human success and happiness. There is no action without expenditure of energy, and if energy be not expended, the power to generate it is lost.

This law shows itself in a thousand ways in the life of man. The arm which is not used becomes palsied. The wealth which comes by chance weakens and destroys. The good which is unused turns to evil. The charity which asks no effort "cannot relieve the misery she creates." The religion which another man would give us we cannot take as a gift. There is no Christliness without endeavour. The truth which another man has won from nature or from life is not our truth until we have lived it. Only that becomes real or helpful to any man which has cost the sweat of his brow, the effort of his brain, or the anguish of his soul. He who would be wise must daily earn his wisdom. The parable of the talents is the expression of this law, for he who adds not effort to power soon loses the power he had. The responsibility for effort rests with the individual. This need is the meaning of individuality, and by it each must work out his own salvation, with fear and trembling it may be sometimes, and all times with perseverance and patience.

The greatest source of failure in life comes from this. It is easier to be almost right than to be right; to wish, than to gain. In default of gold, there is always something almost as good, and which glitters equally. In default of possession, illusion can be had, and more cheaply. It is possession only which costs. Illusion can be had on easy terms, though the final end of deception is failure and misery. Happiness must be earned, like other good things, else it cannot be held. It can be deserved only where its price has been somehow paid. Nothing worth having is given away in this world,—nor in any other that we know of. No one rides dead-head on the road to happiness. He who tries to do so, never reaches his destination. He is left in the dumps.

It is probably too much to say that all of human misery can be traced to the dead-head habit. Misery has as many phases as humanity. But if we make this statement negatively, it will not be far from the truth. No one is ever miserable who would truly pay the price of happiness. No one is really miserable who has not tried to cheapen life.

The price which every good and perfect gift demands, we would somehow or other get out of paying. But we can never cheat the gods. Their choicest gifts lie not on the bargain counters. Our reward comes with our effort. It is part of the same

process. In this matter, man gets what he deserves, meted out with the justice of eternity.

In the sense in which I shall use these terms, sorrow and misery are not the same thing. They are not on speaking terms with each other. True sorrow, the pain of loss, is a hallowed suffering. "For ever the other left," is a necessity in a world which each one must leave as he entered it,—alone. And we would not have it otherwise, for there is in the nature of things no other possibility. So long as we live we must take chances. Sorrow is sacred. Misery is accursed. Sorrow springs from our relations to others. Misery we have all to ourselves. As real happiness is the glow which accompanies normal action, the reflex of the abundance of life, so is misery the shadow of dullness, the reflex of failing or morbid life. Misery is nature's protest against degeneration.

Human misery may be a symptom, a cause, or an effect. It is an expression of degeneration, and therefore a symptom of mental and spiritual decay. It is a cause of weakness and discouragement, and therefore of further degeneration and deeper misery. It is an effect of degeneration, and behind personal degeneration lies a multitude of causes. None of its causes are simple. Some are subjective, the visible signs of weak mind or mean spirit. Some are objective, the product of evil social conditions, to which

the weak mind or mean spirit responds to its further injury. None of these can be removed by any single social panacea. "The poor we have always with us," and there will always be those who shall show that "the way of the transgressor is hard." "The soul that sinneth it shall die," will not become a forgotten axiom so long as instability of will is a part of human nature.

When I was a boy I once had a primer which gave the names of many things which were good and many which were bad. Good things were faith, hope, charity, piety, and integrity, while anger, selfishness and trickery were rightly put down as bad. But among the good things, the primer placed "adversity." This I could not understand, and to this day I remember how I was puzzled by it. The name "adversity" had a pretty sound, but I found that its meaning was the same as "bad luck." How can bad luck be a good thing?

Now that I have grown older and have watched men's lives and actions for many years, I can see how bad luck is really good. Good or bad is not in the thing itself, but in how we take it. If we yield and break down under it, it is not good; but neither are we good. It is not in the luck, but in ourselves, that the badness is. But if we take hold of bad luck bravely, manfully, we may change it into good luck, and when we do so we make ourselves