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## Chapter IX

### 'FRUITS MEET FOR REPENTANCE'

Comrades and Friends, — I sent you a Message a short time ago on the subject of Repentance. Many of you, I have no doubt, regarded the topic as very important; and important the topic is, seeing that by sincere repentance a man is enabled to obtain the forgiveness of his sins and to make a Friend of his Maker.

Every one, in his senses, who realizes the possibility of his sinning against God or wrongdoing his fellows, must know that regret for his transgression is a right and necessary feeling.

When John the Baptist showed the Jewish people the evil character and the destructive consequences of their sins, and preached the doctrine of repentance and the blessings following it, they replied to the prophet that they had already repented. John answered: 'Perhaps you have, but at present I only have your word for it. Prove to me the genuineness of your assertion by conduct corresponding with it.' In other words, 'Bring forth fruits meet for repentance.'

Doubtless, many of those who listened to my previous Message considered that they had repented. Indeed, I am afraid that a great many people in our day think that they never do any wrong without being genuinely sorry for it.

Now I am speaking, I have no doubt, to a number of people who profess to have repented, who openly say that they have, and I am not prepared to call that profession in question; but one thing I do say, with John — 'If you have repented, bring forth fruits meet for repentance.'

When any one plants in his garden a tree that ought to bear a particular kind of fruit, he expects, when the season comes round, to find fruit, he expects, when the season comes round, to find fruit on it answering to the name it bears. So he who professes repentance should prove by his character and conduct the genuineness of the same. Let me name some of the signs of all true repentance, and then you will be able to judge whether the work done in your heart is genuine or not.



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- I. –The first and the most unmistakable sign of genuine repentance is ceasing from the evildoing of which you profess to repent.

If it be falsehood, or dishonesty, or uncleanness, or adultery, or deception, or any other sin, no matter how pleasant or necessary it may appear to be, it must go, and go at once. Neither men, nor angels, nor those guilty of such transgressions can believe in the genuineness of any repentance unless it is evidenced by this putting away. Listen to the Saviour's words: 'If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into Hell.' Do you understand?

- II. –The next sign of genuine repentance is restitution.

This means reparation, so far as possible, of the injurious effects brought about by the wrong that may have been done. Alas! Much of the misery sin bring about can never be remedies; all the regret you can possibly feel or manifest can never undo the wrong committed or repair its consequences. But when we can make any sort of amends to those on whom our conduct has inflicted loss or sorrow, if our repentance is genuine those amends will be made. Do you understand?

- III. –Another proof of genuine repentance is the forgiveness of those who may have injured you.

Especially when a confession of the evil has been made, and regret expressed for its commission.

How can either God or man believe that you honestly regret the injuries you have inflicted on others, if you will not forgive those who may have injured you? 'But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.' Do you understand?

- IV. –Another fruit of genuine repentance is the use of such means as are likely to prevent a repetition of the sin repented of.

'The burnt child dreads the fire,' is an old saying. That is, having once suffered the pain caused by the burning, the child is likely to keep at a respectful distance from the fire.



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Now, those whose sins have been in the direction of strong drink, novel reading, worldly fashion, grudge-bearing, or other similar evils, will, if their repentance is genuine, not only renounce such evils with all their heart, but carefully guard against anything calculated to lead them again into the power of the enemy.

One step on the sinful ground, one look at the sinful thing, one glass of the ruinous liquor, one trifling touch of the accursed object may be sufficient to carry the soul over the borderline to the demon from whose clutches they have just been rescued. Do you understand?

- V.       –Another proof of repentance is separation from the company and conditions that have in the past led the wrongdoer astray.

While the penitent who is wisely guided will go to his, or her, old companions at the first opportunity, tell them of the change that has come about, and invite them to join with him on the way to Heaven, at the same time he will make it quite plain that he cannot and will not travel any farther with them on the road to destruction. Do you understand?

- VI.       –Another sign of sincere repentance will be the immediate alliance of the penitent with the people whose society and influence are most likely to keep his feet in the way of righteousness.

I often say when I am speaking to penitents, 'Unite yourselves with the people from whom you will be likely to get the most good, and through whom you will be likely to do the most good, and who will be most likely to keep you from falling into those sinful habits from which you have been delivered. Is not that sound advice, my Comrades? Do you understand?

- VII.      –The continuation of the spirit of repentance is another proof of its genuineness.

Regrets and confessions, and tears and pledged, which only last for an hour, are void and useless, however impressive they may appear, and can be of no service unless they result in the determined and permanent consecration of every power to the holy and abiding service of the Living God. Do you understand?



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- VIII. –The putting forth of earnest efforts to bring other wrongdoers to abandon their evil ways, and to turn to God, is another proof of genuine repentance.

To care for the Salvation of father and mother, husband or wife, children and friends, follows naturally in the heart and life of the man or the woman who has experienced the grace of true repentance. Nothing will so convincingly prove the genuineness of repentance in the eyes of Comrades and neighbors, or be so likely to increase its power and ensure its continuance as open and straightforward efforts to promote the grace of repentance in the hearts of others. Do you understand?

- IX. –A bold acknowledgment of the wrong of past evil conduct and the resolution to renounce it for ever constitutes a fruit meet for repentance.

This is a course expected by every one who has any acquaintance with the evil-doer.

When I was labouring in Cornwall, fifty years ago, it was a common thing for the Converts to shout their farewell to the drinking saloons as they passed from the Meetings to their homes, whether by night or by day; and no one who heard them felt there was anything incongruous in their conduct.

When the forgiven penitent allows himself to be hindered from confessing the forgiveness of God by shame or pride, the people around him will not be likely to believe in the reality of his professed regret. Do you understand?

My friends, have you ever repented after the fashion I have been attempting to describe? Was there ever a time when you saw the evil of your sin – sorrowed over it – accepted forgiveness, confessed your change of mind and heart and life to those around you, and gave yourselves over to seek the Salvation of your fellows and the service of your Heavenly Father? And, further, are you living in that same spirit today? If so, you may rest in the satisfaction that you have not only repented, but that you are bringing forth fruits meet for repentance.

Your affectionate General,  
William Booth.