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CHAPTER

1

The Set of the Sail

THAT RELIGION LIES in the will is an axiom of theology. Not how we feel but what we will determines our spiritual direction. An old poem states it for us:

*One ship drives east and another drives west
With the selfsame winds that blow;
Tis the set of the sails
And not the gales
Which tells us the way to go.*

—Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Though we do not hear much of it in this age of spineless religion, there is nevertheless much in the Bible about the place of moral determination in the service of the Lord. "Jacob vowed a vow," and it was the beginning of a very wonderful life with God. The following years brought a great many vicissitudes, and Jacob did not always acquit himself like a true man of God, but his early determination kept him on course, and he came through victorious at last.

Daniel "purposed in his heart," and God honored his purpose. Jesus set His face like a flint and walked straight toward the cross. Paul "determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus

Christ, and him crucified," and in that determined spirit ignored the learned philosophers, preached a gospel that was accounted foolishness and earned himself a reputation for ignorance, though he was easily the greatest brain of his generation.

These are only a few of the many men and women of the Bible who have left us a record of spiritual greatness born out of a will firmly set to do the will of God. They did not try to float to heaven on a perfumed cloud, but cheerfully accepted the fact that "with purpose of heart they must cleave unto the Lord."

In the kingdom of God what we *will* is accepted as what we *are*. "If any man will," said our Lord, "let him." God does not desire to destroy our wills, but to sanctify them. In that terrible, wonderful moment of surrender it may be that we feel that our will has been forever broken, but such is not the case. In His conquest of the soul God does not destroy any of its normal powers. He purges the will and brings it into union with His own, but He never breaks it.

In the diaries of some of God's greatest saints will be found vows and solemn pledges made in moments of great grace when the presence of God was so real and so wonderful that the reverent worshiper felt he dared to say anything, to make any promise, with the full assurance that God would enable him to carry out his holy intention. The self-confident and irresponsible boast of a Peter is one thing and is not to be confused with the hushed and trustful vow of a David or a Daniel. Neither should Peter's embarrassing debacle dissuade us from making vows of our own. The heart gives character

to our pledges, and God knows the difference between an impulsive promise and a reverent declaration of intention.

Let us, then, set our sails in the will of God. If we do this we will certainly find ourselves moving in the right direction, no matter which way the wind blows.