

THE ULTRA MORAL-REFORMER: A SKETCH¹ FROM ACTUAL LIFE

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'My dear,' said Mr. Mallory to his wife one morning at the breakfast-table, 'my dear, you know I have fully adopted the principles of Teetotalism², Abolitionism, and Non-resistance. Upon reflection, I have come to the conclusion that principles are of no use whatever, unless put in practice; and I have determined to carry mine out to their full extent, and be governed by them in every act of my life, however apparently trivial.'

'Your theory sounds very well, Mr. Mallory,' said his wife, 'but what change do you intend to make in your practice? I am sure you have always been temperate; you have always raised your voice against slavery at all proper times; and certainly, you are not a fighting-man: I never knew you to get into a quarrel in your life, although your temper may have been occasionally ruffled. How you can alter your practice, except by keeping a more strict watch over your thoughts, actions, and words, so as to offer as perfect an example as possible of a Christian life, I confess I cannot see.'

¹ A story or poem that is a description of a person drawn from real life. Could also be from "character sketch," meaning the analysis of a particular type of individual ("Character, n." 2014). No solid evidence supporting a particular person as the inspiration for this piece was found. Research ruled out any single individual associated with teetotalism, abolitionism, non-resistance, and general religion-centric moral reform, although many articles were published at this time related to these topics. It can thus be assumed that this is a satirical composite of the many types of reformers during this period. [Reverend Dr. George S. Mallory, editor of the ecclesiastical magazine *The Churchman*, at first appears to be a viable candidate: he had a wife, one son, and two daughters ("Rev. Geo. S. Mallory, D.D." 1897); a biographical sketch was written about him somewhere unknown ("Dr. Mallory" 1897); his religious zeal about getting a Christian-appropriate theatre in New York was supposedly just a front for money (Zecher 110). However, careful consideration of the dates reveals that Dr. Mallory's date of birth in 1838 prevents him from being the Mr. Mallory of this 1842 piece ("Dr. Mallory" 1897).]

² "The principle or practice of total abstinence from alcoholic liquors" ("Teetotalism" 2014).

'We must go further than that, my dear. It has been the fault of most moral reformers that they have endeavored to eschew evil themselves, to wash their own hands clear of sin, and at the same time have practically upheld others in their iniquity. As for myself, I am determined to make thorough work, be the consequences what they may. We must discontinue the use of sugar and molasses. They are products of slavery; and I will not uphold that institution, how indirectly soever. I will have no more cotton used in my family, for the same reason. You must purchase linen instead.'

'But, Mr. Mallory, how expensive that will be!'

'I can't help it, wife; I will not sell my soul for money. And there is another thing; you must not buy any thing more of Mr. Winkle the grocer. I hear he sells wine by the gallon, and I cannot conscientiously patronize such a man. And yon know I told William the next time he played truant I would punish him, and lock him into his room two days. Now, yesterday morning he did not go to school as he was told to do, and in the afternoon he carried a forged excuse for his absence. Superficially considered, perhaps if he ever deserved punishment he does now: but mature reflection convinces me that the principles of non-resistance forbid the use of coercion even to a boy. We must rule by love. Is it not written: 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay it, saith the Lord?'³ And are we not commanded: 'Resist not evil?'⁴ No exception is made in the case of children. It would he doing evil in my family for the sake of keeping evil out of it. No; I'll not punish William; for it is no better for a full grown man to fight a little boy, than for two men to fight. It is a relic of barbarism, this using the rod, and shutting up children in dark rooms. It is an awful crime for a parent to strike his child. No; I will use love and moral suasion, and leave the rest to God.'

'But, Mr. Mallory, haven't you always punished William in love? I should be sorry to think you had punished him in anger. You know he is always a good hoy for two or three months after punishment; while on the other hand, talking and persuading seems to have no effect whatever upon him, at certain times. I fear yon will ruin him for ever by this sudden change in your system of government.'

'I think not, Mrs. Mallory; but even the fear of that should not deter me from doing my duty, which I conceive to be plainly this: Whenever I discover that I have been acting on wicked principles, I must discard them at once, and adopt Christian principles in their stead; and no considerations of expediency should induce me for a moment to continue in my old course. I cannot serve God and Mammon.'⁵

³ "Revenge not yourselves, my dearly beloved; but give place unto wrath, for it is written: Revenge is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Here, God is saying that He shall be the one to take vengeance upon those who have wronged His people, and that they should leave it all to Him. This aligns with Mr. Mallory's idea to leave everything to Providence (God).

⁴ "But I say to you not to resist evil: but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other" (Matthew 5:39). This passage helps justify Mr. Mallory's approach, as it asks for passivism instead of active resistance.

⁵ Mammon is a desire for wealth and riches, and is sometimes used as a proper noun for the demonic personification of this desire ("Mammon, n.," 2000). In modern popular culture, it is the personification of greed, one of the seven deadly sins. Two particular passages use mammon specifically in Douay-Rheims bible; many of the other English translations used "riches" instead, but they are interchangeable. "No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one, and love the other: or he will sustain the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon"

'I have a case in point, which I think you will allow to be an exception to your rule. A man was injured by a fall last week, who had been accustomed to drinking a pint and a half of spirits daily. He was taken to the hospital; and the doctor, who was a thoroughgoing teetotalist, refused to allow him any stimulant whatsoever, because he considered the use of spirituous liquors as a great sin; and no considerations of expediency, he said, should induce him for a moment to consent to such a thing. 'He must do *his* duty and leave the rest in the hands of God;' and the consequence was that the poor sot had the *delirium tremens*⁶ and died; when half his usual quantity of spirits, slightly decreased daily, would probably have saved his life. Now I am afraid the sudden change in your system of government will prove equally fatal to William. Can't you make the change more gradually?'

'Gradually! Would you ask a pirate to leave off robbing and murdering gradually? The principle is the same in my case; the difference is only in degree.'

After uttering this sage opinion, Mr. Mallory put on his hat and walked down to his counting-room to attend to his mercantile business, mentally reiterating on the way the new rule of action which he had laid down for himself: Never to depart for an instant from his non-resistant, abolition, and teetotal principles, whatever might be the consequence to himself or others. He determined to test every act of his life by his new code of morals. Poor man! He did not reflect that there was a higher principle—the only primary, true, and immutable rule of action: 'Cease to do evil; learn to do well;' and that all others were but secondary to this great principle; and when found conflicting with it, cease to be correct rules of life.

Now it chanced that one of Mr. Mallory's ships had arrived on the previous night, and one was to sail on that day, after clearing at the Custom House. But as he had repudiated human government, absolved himself from all allegiance to it, and renounced its protection, what could he do with those vessels? Pay duties on his cargo in one case, or pay for clearance in the other, he could not; for would not these sum contribute toward upholding a system of violence and war? His vessel could not go to sea without papers; so he discharged captain and crew and laid her up at the wharf. He could not for the same reason pay the duties on the cargo just arrived; so he discharged the crew and laid up the other vessel also!

Not many days elapsed before Mr. Mallory discovered that the person to whom he paid wharfage led a very dissolute life. He came to the conclusion that the money which he paid him went to support him in his extravagance and dissipation. He could not encourage any man in such courses; and as he owned no wharf himself, and could find no wharf-owners whose characters were immaculate, he was sorely puzzled what to do with his vessels. Providentially, he succeeded in finding a sufficient number of abolitionists and temperance men whom his conscience would allow him to employ, and thereupon he caused his vessels to be taken to the middle of the stream and safely moored. He was then easy on that score. He had many offers for his vessels, but they all came from men to whom his

(Matthew 6:24). An almost identical passage is included in Luke: "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13).

⁶ "A species of delirium induced by excessive indulgence in alcoholic liquors, and characterized by tremblings and various delusions of the senses." A symptom of withdrawal from severe alcoholism. ("Delirium tremens, n.," 1895).

conscience forbade him to sell. As a matter of course, none who agreed with him in opinion wished to engage in such unholy traffic; and he could not sell to others, for that would he encouraging them in sins which he dare not commit himself.

A FEW days after this, Mrs. Mallory asked her husband for a little money, which she needed for some household purpose.

'I have no money, my dear,' said Mr. Mallory.

'You have no money, Mr. Mallory! Why, you have become very poor all at once! There were large dividends declared on your bank-stock last week; why don't you draw them?'

'I can't, Mrs. Mallory; my conscience will not allow me to do so.'

'Heaven help us!—is the man crazy?' exclaimed his wife.

'I trust not, my dear; but listen and judge whether I am right or not. I have discovered that large profits are made in these banks in loans of money to distillers and traffickers in spirits and wines; to traders in the products of slave-labor; and to the government, where it is employed in building war-ships and in carrying on wars of extermination against the poor Indians. This capital which I have placed in those banks is used in a thousand ways to uphold vice and crime. It grieves me to the heart to think that money of mine is employed for such base purposes. It has become the sinews of war, the oppressor of slaves, and the demon of the distillery. That money of mine is scattering moral pestilence and death wherever it goes. And it is potent for evil; for no sooner has it finished one work of darkness and returned to the bank-vaults than it is again sent forth on another errand of iniquity, and so on for ever. I will touch no more of the spoils!'

'Then sell your stock,' said Mrs. Mallory; 'sell it, and we can live on the principal.'

'Sell it, woman!' said the short-sighted moralist, with virtuous indignation; 'do you suppose I would encourage others to commit crimes of which I shrink to be guilty *myself*? Never! I leave the matter to Providence. I will neither touch, taste, nor handle the accursed thing.'

'If you are not mad yourself, you will drive *me* mad, Mr. Mallory. It is lucky that you owe no debts. But there are many things wanted in the family, and unless you can contrive some way to get them, we shall all be obliged to go to the poor-house soon.'

'Oh, I can raise a little money, my dear, for immediate use. Brother Bumble wants to buy some furniture for his parlor; and as I know he is a good man, and will not make a bad use of it, I intend to sell him all our drawing-room furniture.'

Mrs. Mallory controlled herself with difficulty; and when she saw the furniture carried away, she retired to her chamber and wept bitterly at the miserable prospect before her.

WILLIAM soon got wind of his father's new system of family government. He concluded not to go to school any more; spent his time in bad company; rode about a great deal; and ran up a large bill at every tavern and stable in town. He was but thirteen years old, yet he soon reached half a century in sin. Mrs. Mallory was heart-broken. Mr. Mallory *would* have been wretched, but his principles upheld him in this hour of trial. He could not

interfere, for it would violate his conscience; and so it came to pass that William went to the devil as fast as he could travel.

Time rolled on. With bills against his son continually coming in, and never-ceasing demands for household expenses, Mr. Mallory was sorely puzzled for money. One by one every piece of spare furniture was disposed of; expenses were curtailed, domestics dismissed, and yet there remained many calls unanswered and many debts unpaid. Mrs. Mallory at this time discovered that her husband was a large proprietor in the Lowell rail-road⁷; a circumstance of which she was not before aware, for all husbands do not inform their wives of all the property which they possess. This corporation had lately made a semi-annual dividend of four per cent. Mr. Mallory owned fifteen thousand dollars' worth of stock: six hundred dollars would make them quite easy again. She resolved to mention the subject to her husband; and accordingly at supper that evening she began by inquiring of Mr. Mallory why he did not draw his dividend on his Lowell rail-road stock.

'Lowell rail-road stock!' said he; 'how did you know that I owned any?'

'No matter how I discovered the fact,' said she; 'you do own it: now why don't you make use of it, and relieve your family from disgrace and want? I have been obliged to take Emily and Ann from school because I have no means of paying their tuition; and unless you will avail yourself of the means you possess I shall be compelled to send them to the district school; no great hardship certainly, were it not that we are able to do better by them. Almost every decent article of our furniture has been sold; yet our butcher's and grocer's bills are unpaid, and our children are greatly in need of dresses and shoes. Do, my dear husband, draw this rail-road dividend; we shall then be at ease at least for some months to come, by which time I hope you may be brought to entertain more rational views on these matters.'

'Rational views!' said Mr. Mallory; 'that is ever the way with you advocates of expediency! When one has grasped the truth and determined to hold fast to it, be the consequences what they may, he is 'irrational;' he is 'a *fanatic*;' he 'carries his principles too far,' etc.; as if truth were a thing to be taken up when convenient and dropped when burdensome! In my days of sin and darkness I purchased a large amount of stock in the Lowell railroad; but now that my eyes are opened, my conscience will not allow me to draw any support from that polluted source. The profits of that road are made by conveying passengers of all kinds, many of whom are engaged in morally unlawful business, and are enabled by it to prosecute their sinful undertakings with vigor and success: for instance, distillers, and wholesale and retail dealers in wine and ardent spirits. The money of pick-pockets, gamblers, drunkards, keepers and inmates of bad houses, and of almost every kind of vile creature in the shape of humanity; all goes to make up and swell the profits of this corporation. And yet you ask me to *partake* of this unholy spoil! But there are worse objections still. A large proportion of the revenue of the road is derived from the transportation of cotton, a slave-product, from Boston to Lowell, and from the freight of

⁷The Boston and Lowell Railroad Corporation was a real business, chartered in Massachusetts in June 1830. Part of the charter included giving the company sole rights to have a railroad in the area for the next thirty years. At the time of its completion in 1835, it was one of the most sturdily built railroads in the country and the best in the state. As this story later says, the railroad indeed was used for both freighting and for passengers. On average, the interest paid to stockholders was six percent per annum. ("Boston and Lowell Railroad" 1854).

manufactured cotton goods from Lowell to Boston. This is the great business to which the road is devoted; this, and the conveyance of persons engaged in manufacturing cotton. The Lowell rail-road is one great prop of the tottering edifice of slavery. I will touch none of the unhallowed spoil!

And thereupon Mr. Mallory put on his hat and walked out of the house with his head very erect and his face glowing with the expression of the self-satisfied and self-righteous feelings which filled his heart, and which he mistook for philanthropy and virtuous resolution.

As he passed along the street, and recognized many whom he knew to be engaged in what he considered 'morally unlawful business,' he indulged in thoughts and feelings which would have startled him could he have seen them put into words. Thus they ran; and though he knew it not, the Devil was busy with his heart: 'I thank thee, God! that I am not like those whom I see around me.' He forgot the publican who was justified before the pharisee.⁸ 'I thank thee that I am not a wine-bibber.' He forgot that his Saviour drank wine, and when there was none to be had, even turned water into wine, for the use of the wedding-guests. 'I thank thee that I do not, like these sinners around me, contribute to support human government and all its attendant iniquities.' He forgot that the Saviour paid tribute unto Caesar, which went to support the government of Rome and all its vile concomitants.

Thus wrapped in the mantle of self-righteousness, and possessed by the demon of scorn, he passed through the streets; in his heart despising all whom he met, and arrogating to himself a purity beyond that of his divine Master. And yet poor Mr. Mallory imagined that his heart was filled with true philanthropy and the pure religion of the meek and lowly JESUS. Alas for him! alas for us all! For are we not all liable, in a greater or less degree, to the same condemnation?

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TIME passed on; and Mr. Mallory, being determined to 'act up to his principles' in all things, extended the operation of his impracticable theories day by day into the minutest ramification of the business of life. He was soon looked upon by many as an insane man, and his friends had a guardian appointed to administer his affairs and look after the welfare of his family. This had become a necessary step, and Mrs. Mallory readily consented that it should be taken.

But from that day and hour her husband refused to live in the house, or partake with the family in their meals. He said this 'would be but sharing in unholy spoil.' He went about preaching his favorite doctrines, living upon alms, and altogether leading a vagrant and a precarious life. For instead of 'eating such meats as were set before him,' on the principle

⁸ A commonly told biblical parable telling of how a publican (a Roman public contractor or tax account interchangeably) is a better Christian because he is more humble to God than the Pharisee, a conservative Jewish spiritual leader. "Two men went up into the temple to pray: the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee standing, prayed thus with himself: O God, I give thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, as also is this publican. I fast twice in a week: I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes towards heaven; but struck his breast, saying: O God, be merciful to me a sinner. I say to you, this man went down into his house justified rather than the other: because every one that exalteth himself, shall be humbled: and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted" (Luke 18:10-14).

that 'the workman is worthy of his hire,' into whatsoever house *he* entered, he first asked: 'Are you abolitionists, teetotallers, and non-resistants here?' If answered in the negative, he proceeded no further; but retracing his steps to the street, faced round and poured out such a volley of terrible denunciations against them and their's, dooming them to infamy in this life and eternal perdition in the next, that the inmates soon closed their doors and windows in self-defence [*sic*], and left him to deliver the rest of his lecture to the crowd of laughing and hooting boys who always gathered about him on such occasions.

If, on the contrary, the answer were in the affirmative, he would enter that house with pleasure and sit himself down for a talk on his favorite and only topics. He seldom found any of his friends however who held doctrines so ultra as his own; and when he discovered that they were not inclined to carry their principles to such a ridiculous extent as he had carried his, he charged them with 'making a compromise with the Devil;' with attempting to serve both God and Mammon; and invariably departed from that house immediately, refusing to partake of any refreshment, and breathing out denunciations even more bitter than he bestowed upon those who differed from him wholly, both in principles and practice. 'For,' said he, as he shook his skirts clear of such friends, '*you* sin with your eyes open; *you* sin against the Holy Spirit that is within you, whose teachings you comprehend but refuse to obey; and never, either in this world or the next, shall the dew of forgiveness descend on your parched and thirsty souls!'

Mr. Mallory would have been starved outright were it not that some charitable persons kept their opinions to themselves, tacitly allowing him to believe that they agreed with him in all things, and by this laudable hypocrisy inducing him to accept of their hospitality. Not always however could these considerate friends avoid giving cause of offence to his scrupulous conscience. He would inquire the history of every article of food that was set before him, and if he could detect any slavery, alcoholic, or warlike taint therein, he would refuse to partake of those viands, and would often quit the house altogether, lest he should be contaminated by those who, as he said, 'professed one thing with their mouths and practiced the very opposite in their daily lives.' He once spent a few days with a benevolent physician for whom he did some writing, as an offset for his board; but he left his house in holy horror on being requested to copy a prescription for the cholera in which the word 'brandy' appeared!

Thus, sane on all other points, (and some may think on *all*,) Mr. Mallory led a vagabond life, preaching through cities and villages his favorite doctrines of moral reform, speaking really a great deal of truth, laying down generally correct premises, but reasoning thereon in such a manner as almost invariably to lead to error. His motto was: 'Never stand still; follow unhesitatingly where principles lead; always improve.' An excellent motto certainly, and worthy to be adopted by all. But unfortunately, Mr. Mallory, though possessed by a strong desire to be a great reasoned [*sic*], had only a semi-logical mind. The consequences were lamentable. His principles, as he called them, proved but *ignes fatui*,⁹

⁹ Means "foolish fire" in Latin. "A phosphorescent light seen hovering or flitting over marshy ground, and supposed to be due to the spontaneous combustion of an inflammable gas (phosphuretted hydrogen) derived from decaying organic matter; popularly called Will-o'-the-wisp, Jack-a-lantern, etc.," ("Ignis fatuus, n.," 1899).

which led him away from the great highway of truth into the wilderness of error; convenient disguises assumed by Satan to lure him to destruction.

It can be no wonder therefore that every day found him engaged in some new vagary. The last was the wildest of all. He laid it down as a fact not to be controverted, that our ancestors obtained possession of this country by fraud and murder. He thought the receiver as bad as the thief, and one who would profit by murder as bad as the murderer. He came therefore to the conclusion that all who occupied lands which were originally obtained by fraud and murder were *themselves* guilty of fraud and murder! He *had* shared in the unholy spoil, but he would partake of it no longer, either directly or indirectly. He had renounced houses and lands himself; he would now refuse to receive any sustenance or support whatever from the occupants of the polluted soil of his country. He resolved to leave it for ever.

He sought but sought in vain for any conveyance by which he could escape, without violating the principles which he had adopted as his rule of action. Either the ships in which he thought to embark were owned by wicked men, or they were bound on some sinful voyage; or in the act of leaving the country he would be obliged to do something by which he would recognize the validity and propriety of a civil government which relied upon war for its defence. Finding himself thus hedged in by his 'eternal principles of truth,' so that he could turn neither to the right nor left without committing sin, he wandered away to the sea-coast, that being the very verge of the polluted land from which he wished to escape; and there, seating himself on the brow of an overhanging cliff, he darkly mused of himself and of the unhappy world in which he was placed. The land-breeze bore to him the scent of flowers and of new-mown hay; but to him it seemed the rank effluvia of corruption. The stars were shining in the clear sky, and the moon was just rising from her ocean-bed; but their mild glances bore no heavenly message to his heart. To him they appeared to glare in fiery wrath on the iniquitous world below. He could not bear to look at them; they seemed to consume his very soul within him.

His gaze fell upon the ocean. Unrippled by the light fanning of the land-wind, it was calm and smooth as glass as far as the eye could reach. Its bosom rose and fell regularly, like the young breast of a lovely maiden in a deep and placid sleep. The radiant fires of heaven and the distant blaze of the light-house flashed brokenly from its surface in long lines of undulating light. It presented to his weary spirit a picture of rest and peace. And tossed and worn indeed must his mind have been, when the never-resting ocean seemed peaceful in comparison. Only when it touched the accursed land on which he stood did it arouse from its slumbers and thunder forth its indignation and wrath.

Up to this period, amid all his vagaries, Mr. Mallory had been in some measure a sane man; but the balance of his mind was now irretrievably lost. Behind him lay the depraved and vicious earth; above him from the countless eyes of heaven glared Almighty wrath; before him was peace and rest. His brain whirled; he leaped from the cliff, and plunged into the waves below. He perished!—a victim to a false system of morals and philosophy.



Editor's Note

America in the 1840s was going through a series of major changes that shifted the political landscape. The tensions that led to the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848 did not just start when Congress signed the declaration of war on May 13. Abolitionists were worried that any westward expansion would increase the power of the slave-holding Southern states, in turn thwarting their efforts to abolish slavery in the United States completely; (“Mexican-American War” 2015). Others just thought that the government itself was being greedy, using John L. O’Sullivan’s idea of manifest destiny as an excuse to spill blood and gain money (“Manifest Destiny” 2015). A religious revival in the early years of the century had also sparked the temperance movement; by 1833, more than 6,000 organizations and societies geared towards moderation of or abstinence from alcohol had been founded. Massachusetts, the most likely setting of “The Ultra Moral-Reformer” based on the inclusion of the Lowell Railroad stock, was one of the quickest states to join the movement in 1813 (“Temperance Movement” 2015).

Although “The Ultra Moral-Reformer” hides behind the guise of a funny tale about a crazy man, this story is actually a commentary on religious and political extremism, based off the real issues of the time as seen above. Mr. Mallory’s fundamental views are sound, “speaking really a great deal of truth, laying down generally correct premises, but reasoning thereon in such a manner as almost invariably to lead to error.” Most extremists do retain elements of the common viewpoints on the issue, yet what makes them truly radical is that they twist them until they are unrecognizably unreasonable, hurting everyone around them, including themselves. The sufferings of the Mallory family are great, functioning as the collateral damage that any group on the far edges of a spectrum can do. Extremists even ostracize themselves from others who would usually be on their side; they go so far with the “us vs. them” mentality that they become outsiders as well. The author, like Mrs. Mallory, is a voice of reason pleading for moderation and dissolution of polarization, which is a sound moral even today, considering how many hot-button debates take place in our society. A closer look at the religious backgrounds of the abolitionist, temperance (teetotalist), and non-resistance movements of the nineteenth century could also lead to interesting parallels within these issues, especially considering that slavery and the subject of war is put on the same moral level as individuals imbibing alcohol.

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