

That it is natural for
each of us



That is, selfishness is natural to human nature.

It is natural for each of us to want his own way, to look after his own interests first, to think that he is the most important person in creation. A child is naturally selfish. His constant cry is, want this : I will do that: I won't do what I don't like. Unselfishness, or consideration for the wants and feelings of others, has to be taught. It is a matter of training. Self-denial means denying one's self one own will and wish.

It is saying " No!" to oneself. It is easy to say No to others : but it takes training and effort to learn to say No to oneself. It is hard to write the first personal pronoun with a small " i". Yet self-denial must be learnt, for selfishness is an ugly thing. It is really the root of all evil. All sins are selfishness in some form. The essence of sin is selfishness, and the essence of goodness is the opposite of selfishness, love.

That was why the Founder of Christianity taught that all morality was summed up in two laws " Thought love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," and, " Thought love thy neighbor as thyself". Self-denial means denying oneself for the sake of others: giving up our way, our interests, our pleasure, when they would cause, others unhappiness or harm. When we live in a community we have to learn to give and take. Every one cannot do just as he likes because that would make society impossible. To live together at all, we have to give up many individual rights for the sake of the commonweal.

And the more we learn to consider the interest of others, and sacrifice our wishes to please them, the better men we shall become; yes, and the happier. For selfishness, in the end, brings unhappiness, but unselfishness is

the source of the purest joy. At the same time, self-denial can be carried to excess. Self-denial just for the sake of self-denial is foolish. There is no virtue in denying ourselves pure pleasures and wholesome advantages, if our enjoyment of them does not hurt anyone else.

That was the mistake religious fanatics made, who thought it was virtuous to starve themselves and torture their bodies and forego all happiness. That is a silly kind of self-denial, that does more harm than good. Besides, we have a duty to ourselves as well as to others: and it is as much our duty to make the best of ourselves and develop all our powers, as to help and bless others.

Christ did not say, Love thy neighbor more than thyself, but as thyself.