

Devotional Service

MARCH 17.—"WHAT IS SUCCESS?"

Prov. 3. 1-18.

HOME READINGS.

- Mon., March 11.—"Success is God's favor." Ps. 12. 1-8.
 Tues., March 12.—"Success is character." Ps. 15. 1-5.
 Wed., March 13.—"Measured at the end." Job 42. 10-17.
 Thurs., March 14.—"The fear of God." Prov. 1. 1-9.
 Fri., March 15.—"Common Sense and Religion." Prov. 26. 1-10.
 Sat., March 16.—"Keeping commandments." Eccl. 8. 1-9.

FOREWORD.

The world's standard of success and that of God's are decidedly different. According to the ordinary view, the successful man is the one who makes money and builds up a fortune. Our magazines and newspapers are filled with the life stories of men who began life as poor boys and by industry and perseverance became millionaires. These are held up as examples to the young people of today. "Success" is always keyed to the tune of dollars and cents, until we are in danger of supposing that man's chief end is to make money.

If this topic impresses upon our minds the great truth that the highest kind of success can be achieved without wealth, that a successful life depends upon character rather than possessions, it will have accomplished a useful purpose. There is something to be learned from the poor boy who by his own efforts became rich, but the more inspiring example is the boy who did not amass wealth, but always retained his integrity, his honor, his purity of heart, and became a good and useful citizen.

BIBLE LIGHT.

"Let thine heart keep my commandments" (v. 1). The successful man guides his life not according to the maxims of the world, but according to God's commandments. He does not ask what his neighbors say about his conduct, but above all things he seeks God's approval.

"Length of days—shall they add" (v. 2). The keeping of God's commandments always tends to prolong human life. The self denial, the self restraint, of the virtuous life promotes physical health and vigor. The peace, the faith, the hope of the Christian help to increase the period of earthly existence, while the dissipations and excesses of sin cut short many a promising life.

"Let not mercy and truth forsake thee" (v. 3). Instead of wearing costly jewelry, the good man's ornaments are the great principles of righteousness. He binds mercy and truth about his neck and there is nothing more attractive or beautiful.

"So shall thou find favor, etc." (v. 4). The healthy man no matter whether he is wealthy or poor has a blessing in the respect of the community. Men trust him and honor him. "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches."

"In all thy ways acknowledge Him, etc." (v. 6). The beginning of all wisdom is in the recognition of God, in personal submission to Him, in diligent obedience to all His commands. "In all thy ways" means that we shall consult Him in all the concerns of life; the choice of a profession, the choice of a place of residence, the choice of our field of service, etc.

"Honor the Lord with thy substance"

(v. 9). The truly successful man does not think altogether about getting, but recognizes the obligation of giving. Wisdom requires him to yield the first fruits of all his possessions to the Lord. The money we use upon our pleasures, or to promote our own interests, is soon spent and gone, but the money given with an open hand to good causes is not spent; it all, but laid up in the most secure of banks.

"So shall thy barns be filled, etc." (v. 10). God honors those who love Him. So far from being impoverished by what he gives the liberal man finds that God has given him back tenfold. The more he has given away, the more he has prospered. Thousands have proved this promise to be true.

"Her ways are ways of pleasantness" (v. 17). This is true but we must not seek these ways because they are pleasant. "All her paths are peace," but we do not enter them to gain peace, for the peace often comes under the stress of a great conflict, or in the endurance of a heavy chastening. The Divine wisdom gives us these blessings when we no longer set our hearts upon them.

"The merchandise of it" (v. 14). How attractive to the majority of men is the sound of that word, "merchandise." With many it absorbs almost their entire time and thought. But there is something better than "the merchandise of silver." Heavenly wisdom, the knowledge of God and of His will, coupled with a desire and determination to do His will is far better than to possess the fortune of Rockefeller.

SUGGESTIVE THOUGHTS.

There is no better hand-book, or pocket-book for a young business man than the book of Proverbs.

No one thinks of measuring life only by days and years. The chief blessedness of the godly man consists in the knowledge that each day is distinctly worth living.

The empty admiration of the rich is not so rich in blessing as the heartfelt love of the few.

Those who actually acknowledge God in all their ways, find their lives running over with blessing, and become the means of incalculable good to the world, and to themselves.

The greatest surprises of heaven will be the revelation that many of the "failures" of earth were glorious successes, and not a few of the world's "brilliant successes" were miserable failures.

To be content with worldly success is as if the architect of a great building were content with the scaffolding.

Religion is not a disagreeable condition through which a blessing rests, a dark tunnel through which we reach a shining land beyond. It is a gift of God, radiant and happy, an appeal, not to our lower tastes, but to all that is exalted in us.

A sense of character is success. It is the flowering out of a true moral life, beautiful and rich by which we come into fellowship with God.

ILLUSTRATIVE.

Wm. H. Vanderbilt's daughter said to him, "Father what would you like for a New Year's present?" He replied: "A good night's sleep and an appetite for breakfast." Thank God I had both of them, and I didn't have a hundred dollars' worth. Thank God a man can be rich without a dollar in his pocket.—Sam Jones.

There is a valley in Burmah where the most perfect rubies in the world are found. It is situated four thousand five hundred feet above the sea level, in a

range of mountainous spurs, about eighty miles north of Mandalay, but owing to the difficult nature of the intervening ground, the valley can only be reached by a circuitous journey of some two hundred miles, which winds through malarious jungle, and over arduous mountain passes. Wisdom is more precious than rubies, and infinitely more accessible.

When Nelson signalled from his flagship, "England expects that every man, this day, will do his duty," it did not mean the same to all. To the commanders it meant that they should do their best as commanders, to the gunners that they should do their best at the guns, to the sailors that they should do their best in sailing the ships, to the boys that they should do their best as messengers. Every one succeeded who did what he could.

QUOTATIONS.

(To be repeated at the meeting with some comment of your own.)

"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom." This is not an intellectual, but a moral quality; not mere sagacity, prudence, ingenuity, but the reverence and love of God, in short true religion.—Dr. Starrs.

The accomplishment of one's purpose is not necessarily success. It is sometimes the worst kind of failure, as in the case of Ahab who obtained the real estate of Naboth, but at the expense of his honor.—W. F. Crafts.

It is not success to win wealth by such means that the winner is always fearing the pistol shot of revenge. It is not success for a man to turn his heart into a money vault by driving out all his nobler sentiments. The soul will starve if gold alone ministers to its needs.—Dr. Crafts.

The man who walks with a merry song to his work, the morning with his dinner pail in his hand, and walks back at night when his work is done with happy heart and an approving conscience has attained success more certainly than the man who rides in his carriage to his bank, and comes back again with a discontented heart and a reproving conscience. He who loses his character in winning money has lost more than he has gained, and is therefore not a success.

Bishop Vincent's secret of success is given in a single sentence: "Aa entire surrender of impulse and inclination to the demands of duty, as expressed and made possible in the life of Christ."

THE MAN WHO WON.

He kept his soul unpolluted
 As he went upon his way,
 And he tried to do some service
 For God's people day by day:
 He had time to cheer the doubter
 Who complained that hope was dead:
 He had time to help the cripple
 When the way was rough ahead;
 He had time to guard the orphan, and
 One day, well satisfied
 With the talents God had given him,
 He closed his eyes and died.

He had time to see the beauty
 That the Lord spread all around;
 He had time to hear the music
 In the shells the children found;
 He had time to keep repeating
 As he bravely worked away:
 "It is splendid to be living
 In the splendid world to-day!"
 But the crowds—the crowds that hurry
 After golden prizes—said
 That he never had succeeded,
 When the clouds lay o'er his head—
 He had dreamed—"He was a failure,"
 They compassionately sighed,
 For the man had little money in his
 Pockets when he died.