

The January Consecration Meeting

BY THE EDITOR.

TOPIC—Our New Year's Resolutions.

LESSON—Eccles. 5, 4, 5; Psalm 101.

APPROPRIATE HYMNS—"Epworth Praises," 4, 7, 29, 35, 99, 103, 132, 109, 113, 86, 1.

(If you do not know these, try them.)

IN preparing for this meeting it is well to remind ourselves of the importance of resolves, and more particularly those of a religious character or that bear on our spiritual life. It might be profitable to have a brief Bible Reading on the subject. In addition to the Lesson text given above consult and use such passages as Numbers 30: 2; Deut. 12: 11, 23; 21:23; all of which show the importance and binding character of vowing. Then from Gen. 28: 20-22 (Jacob) and Psalm 132: 1-5 (David) illustrations may be drawn that will give us concrete cases of vowing and praying unto God.

The New Year is proverbially a time for stock-taking. This is well. To review the past is profitable. To resolve to do better in the future is commendable. We should seek to know what we are worth in comparison with a year ago. None may be just satisfied with the increase of the year. But none need despair of larger progress during the year ahead. We may all wisely learn lessons of the past and make profitable use of all we possess in the coming days.

"Swift years but teach me how to hear,
To feel and act with strength and skill;
To reason wisely, nobly dare—
And speed your courses as ye will."

But New Year's Resolutions, though numerous, and generally well-intentioned, are often very fragile things, and are soon and easily broken. *Why?* Because too frequently they represent a thoughtless mind, or a faithless soul, or both. Many fail because of (1) Lack of sincere thought. They do not consider the true nature of Christian life, and because they do not count the cost, they fall at the first test of strength of character. They do not ponder well the sacredness of a promise in general and to God in particular, and too lightly take upon themselves obligations that they cannot in their lack of essential loyalty, fulfil. Two words should be emphasized in this regard, *consider* and *determine*. (2) Lack of sustaining purpose to persevere. Moved by impulses, good enough at the moment but lacking fixity, many young people break their New Year's resolutions before the year is many days old. (3) Half heartedness. This is ever a prophecy of failure, and if ever whole-hearted and enthusiastic

devotion to high principles were in demand, it is now. (See Editorial pages). (4) Too light an estimate of sinning. Hence comes prevarication, especially with oneself; compromise, especially in the discharge of high duty; procrastination, especially in relation to public service; and apology for failure to realize one's contemplated aims. It is not a trivial thing to "vow and not pay." Therefore, make such resolutions as you intend to keep, and keep them at all costs, thus preserving your own sense of honor and integrity before God. He asks of us *sincerity* as our starting point, and *continuance* as our characteristic habit as the days go by.

"He hath no pleasure in fools." The "fool" of Scripture is not an idiot, but one who if he reasons at all, reasons wrongly, whose conduct is not regulated by religion and reason.

But we would not discourage you from making vows. Abstinence from vowing to be a Christian may be a negative vow to enjoy the freedom from religious restraints thus gained, and becomes practically a resolve to go on sinning indefinitely. And therein is danger. It were better to resolve on high things if we be but *sincere*, and fail to reach them, than not to resolve at all. "Our greatest glory is not in never failing, but in rising every time we fall."

Shall we vow?

Yes, but consider:

1. The appropriateness of the vows made. Ask, "does God require them of me?" If so, they must be in harmony with my highest good, and also within the realm of possible performance.

2. The motive in making the vows. Am I sincerely in earnest? Have I studied the terms involved? Am I ready to meet them? Thoughtfulness is essential to thoroughness, and lacking either of these, I shall fail.

3. The purpose in fulfilment. No matter what the cost I must persevere. I may forget and God may have to remind me as He did Jacob of old; but if so, I must hear and obey. In short, I must *will* to do what I have promised and retain my will intact.

This may seem hard!

But it is not really so. If our young people look upon promises as "like pie-crust, made to be broken," they had better not vow, for their resolutions are in such a case insincere and vacillating.

"Pay what thou hast vowed."

Do it now! Do it to-morrow! Do it next week! Thus it will become habit and by repetition be made easy. One day at a time is all we have to live, and in living one day at a time as we should, we accomplish what God has in view for us.

A Talk at a Membership Contest

NOT long ago an already large Epworth League chapter conducted a membership contest. There was the usual division of the forces into reds and blues, each side under a captain, and the usual set of rules governing the competition was drawn up. New members counted most, attendance at devotional meeting counted for something, and visitors were credited to the side which induced them to attend.

For weeks the contest went on. As it progressed, interest in it increased, until by the time the last half month arrived the young people and a good many of their elders scarcely talked of anything else but the contest and its outcome. One side induced nearly all the members of a neighboring chapter to attend as visitors one evening, and the other side met this with prompt resourcefulness, and brought in another group of strangers which the first side had overlooked.

On the last and deciding night of the contest, the chapter asked one of its members who had not been able to take sides, to lead the devotional meeting. When he stood up to open the service he faced nearly five hundred eager and enthusiastic Epworthians and their friends. Nobody knew yet which side was victor, and although everybody was keen to get the first information, there was a real spirit of devotion in the meeting. And here is part of the address the leader tried to make, as nearly as it can now be recalled:

"What a superb sight is this! Here, where usually fewer than two hundred are gathered, more than double that number are now before me, and, instead of being listless and uninterested, you are all keyed up to the highest pitch of enthusiasm.

"You have been working for weeks with your eye on this night and its results. You have performed prodigies of sacrifice and inventiveness, the victory might come to the side on which you are enlisted.

"And for what? Nobody suspects that the reds or the blues are particularly eager for the dinner which the winning side is to receive at the hands of the losers, for dinners are not an unheard of luxury in your lives. But you have wanted to win.

"This contest has been a sort of game and if you will take care of the results which the game has brought to you, the game may be a blessing indeed to this chapter.

"But that is not the thing I am most anxious to say. You have set aside other pleasures, you have gone out of your way to invite strangers and casual acquaintances, you have exerted yourselves to attend every night instead of every once in a while, you have brought every resource of your invention and your strength to bear on winning this contest. You have done all this: shall we not all just stop and think what you could do in this community and in this Church, not for the sake of winning a game, but for the sake of bringing joy to the heart of Jesus Christ, your Lord?

"The contest is a small matter, but, because your hearts have been in it, you have made it great. You are confessed partakers in another contest, whose issues take hold of eternity. But all the friends of the kingdom of Christ in all this country would thrill with joy if the zeal and service of this contest could be transformed into zeal and service for Jesus Christ and for his Church, and transmitted to every other chapter in the League.

"For you are not the only young people who can do so great a thing as this. It can be done in every Epworth League chapter in Methodism. Wherever a membership contest can enlist capable leadership and devoted following, there is a chance for such obedience to Jesus Christ, such loyalty and achievement as the Church longs for and must have if it is ever to conquer the world.

"To do these things for the sake of the contest is good, unless the contest is counted as the end of all things; then it is bad beyond all telling. But to do these things for the sake of the one business which justifies the existence of the Epworth League and the Church, that is the greatest thing to which you can put your hands and your hearts."

Membership contests will be held in many chapters this fall. Perhaps this little preachment may be worth reading when the contest committee is planning the details, and it would do no harm to read it again on the night the contest is ended.—*Epworth Herald*.