

Ambition's El Dorada

(By Rev. J. B. Silcox, D.D.)

NOTE: This address—specially for younger folk, yet suitable for people of all ages—was delivered by Dr. Silcox on 10th June to a united service in First Congregational Church, Vancouver. Apart from the pros and cons of Church Union, we believe the spirit of this discourse should commend itself to all readers alike. To give space to it in full it has been necessary to withhold our usual short story. (Ed. B. C. M.)

(Proverbs 23: 17-18.)

The book of Proverbs teaches men their duty in practical life. Its maxims and axioms are as helpful to-day as when written three thousand years ago. It contains the condensed wisdom of many minds illumined by the Spirit of God. It is full of brains. Read it and you will find it an intellectual as well as a moral tonic. This book makes clear the truth that religion is as much for this world as it is for the next. The shop and the store are as sacred as the sanctuary. Honest work is as acceptable to God as reverent worship.

As I understand it, my text is addressed to the young and the ambitious. Here is a young man on the threshold of life, pushing to the front. Far away in the distance is his El Dorado, his golden land of hope and promise. The young man has great expectations. He is not content with mediocrity. He will not burrow in the earth like a mole, but like the eagle with his eye on the sun, he will rise to the heights, and write his name among the illustrious in the calendar of fame.

The inspired writer does not denounce ambition. He encourages it. It is right to seek the highest blessings Heaven can bestow. "Covet earnestly the best gifts." Life was intended to be a success. God never created a human soul to fall and fail. We are under obligation to make the most of ourselves. If you have one talent, double it and make it two. If you have five talents, double them and make them ten. No man ever formed a conception of life and service too high or too beautiful for God to make real.

We begin life with great expectations. We are sanguine of success, confident of victory. It is well it is so. The more hope there is in a man's life, the better fitted he is for life's tough battle. Despair cuts the nerve of endeavor. A discouraged man is a defeated man.

There are men and women all round us whose hearts are strangers to hope. Disappointment and disaster have crowded thick and fast around them, and all the golden dreams of youth's glad day have come to nought. Hope deferred has made the heart sick. Life has more cloud than sunshine for them. The years behind are filled with bitter memories. The mistakes of the past block the way to future success. They say, if I had done differently years ago, I might have succeeded, but now it is too late.

"God pity them, and pity us all

Who vainly the dreams of youth recall;

For of all sad words of tongue or pen,

The saddest are these, it might have been."

When hope dies out of the heart, when despair like a starless night settles down over the human soul, man loses ambition, makes no effort to better his condition, drifts with the debris downward, becomes a victim to his worst passions, and is destroyed by his own vices.

It was a great truth Paul uttered when he said, "We are saved by hope." No book ever written is so radiant with hope, so surcharged with good cheer as the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation the Bible is optimistic. It is never pessimistic. The gospel of Jesus is a gospel of hope; hope for the hopeless, hope for the lowest, hope for the weakest. The gospel despairs of no one. To the most discouraged soul on the face of

the earth its message is up and at it again. Though you fall you shall not be utterly cast down. From lowest depths there is a path to highest heights. From the bottomless pit of perdition there is a way out and up to the shining heights of regenerated manhood and womanhood. God is willing to give you another chance.

"Then courage, soul, nor hold thy strength is vain,
In Hope o'ercome the steeps God set for thee;
For past the Alpine summits of great pain
Lieth thine Italy."

Hope should grow with our years. Expectation should brighten with increase of days. If old people grow gloomy and morose, it is not because of age. It is our follies and sins, not our years, that make us sad. The path of the just shines more and more unto the perfect day of divine coronation. As the lights of earth grow dim, the lamps hung out in heaven shine all the brighter. "Thine age shall be clearer than the morning because there is hope."

The young man of my text is hopeful and ambitious. A lofty and indestructible faith in the destiny of man fills and fires his youthful soul. The curtain of the future rises and discloses a scene beautiful as a dream. Cloud cities rise before him in many colored splendor. All possibilities are within his reach. Dangers do not daunt him. Difficulties do not deter him, for far up the height he hears the voice, "Excelsior."

He has great expectations. Let us be thankful that he has. A man destitute of ambition, without the desire and determination to excel, will never take his place among the heroic souls of earth. A man without ambition is dough without yeast. He will never rise.

Kate Douglas Wiggin, in one of her books, has an old man to say concerning the heroine of the story: "There's good dough in Rose, but it ain't more than half riz." That is the fault with a great number of young people. They have good qualities of manhood and womanhood, there is good dough in them, but they lack yeast, which is ambition.

Ambition has been much maligned. Preachers and moralists have warned men against it. One will tell you, "Fling away ambition, by that sin fell the angels." Willis says, "Ambition is a glorious cheat, angels of light walk not so dazzlingly the sapphire walls of heaven." Some one kindly warns us that soaring too near the sun with golden wings melts them. Very well, let them melt. Better have your wings scorched by soaring too near the sun, than have them smirched by trailing in the mud. Better be wrecked out on the high seas of heroic effort than rot piecemeal at the wharf of commonplace mediocrity. Browning makes one of his characters say, "Better fail in the high aim as I, than vulgarly in the low succeed." And again he says, "A man's reach should exceed his grasp or what's heaven for." The gospel lures us upward.

"Build on, and make thy towers high and fair,
Rising and reaching to the skies,
Listen to voices in the upper air."

It is my faith that the desire to better one's condition and excel, is a God-implanted desire. God never made man to rest in absolute contentment. We are