

IT NEVER COMES BACK.

AN OPPORTUNITY MISSED NEVER COMES A SECOND TIME.

The Value of Seizing Advantages "In the Nick of Time"—Elements of Commercial, Literary and Political Success—The Greatest of All Opportunities.

New York, Feb. 3.—Rev. Dr. Talmage today took for his subject "Opportunity," the text selected being Galatians vi, 10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good."

At Denver years ago an audience had assembled for divine worship. The pastor of the church for whom I was to preach that night, interested in the seating of the people, stood in the pulpit looking from side to side, and when more people could be crowded within the walls he turned to me and said with startling emphasis, "What an opportunity!"

Immediately that word began to enlarge, and while a hymn was being sung at every stanza the word "opportunity" twitted and mightily unfolded, and while the opening prayer was being said, the word piled up into Alps and Himalayas of meaning and spread out into other latitudes and longitudes of significance until it became hemispheric, and it still grew in altitude and circumference until it encircled other worlds, and swept out into space until it was as big as eternity.

What is an opportunity? The lexicographer would coolly tell you it is a conjunction of favorable circumstances for accomplishing a purpose, but words cannot tell what it is. Take a thousand years to manufacture a definition, and you could not successfully describe it. Opportunity! The measuring rod with which the angel of the Apocalypse measured heaven could not measure this pivotal word of my text. Stand on the edge of the precipice of all time and let down the fathoming line hand under hand and lower down and lower down and for a quintillion of years let it sink, and the least will not reach the bottom. Opportunity! But while I do not attempt to measure or define the word I will, God helping me, take the responsibility of telling you something about opportunity.

First, it is very swift in its motions. Sometimes within one minute it starts from the throne of God, sweeps around the earth and reascends the throne from which it started. Within less than sixty seconds it fulfilled its mission. In the second place opportunity never comes back. Perhaps an opportunity very much like it may arrive, but that one never. Naturalists tell us of insects which are born, fulfill their mission and expire in an hour, but many opportunities die so soon after they are born that their brevity of life is incalculable. What most amazes me is that opportunities do not shadow, far-reaching and tremendous work in such short earthly allowance. You are a business man of large experience. The past eighteen months have been hard on business men. A young merchant at his wits' end came to my office or your house, and you said: "Time is hard now, but better days will come. I have seen things as bad or worse, but we got out, and we will get out of this. The brightest days that this country ever saw are yet to come." The young man to whom you said that was ready for a knock or something worse—namely a fraudulent turn to get out of his despairful position. Your hopefulness inspired him for all time, and thirty years after you are dead he will be reaping the advantage of your optimism. Your opportunity to do one thing for that young man was not half as long as the time I have taken to rehearse it.

It all recognizes that commercial and literary and political successes depend upon taking advantage of opportunity. The great surgeons of England feared to touch the tumor of King George IV. Sir Astley Cooper looked at it and said to the king, "I will cut your majesty as though you were a plowman." That was Sir Astley's opportunity. Lord Clive was his father's dismay climbing church steeples and doing reckless things. His father sent him to Madras, India, as a clerk in the service of an English officer. Clive watched his time and when war broke out came to be the chief of the host that saved India for England. That was Lord Clive's opportunity.

William H. Seward was given by his father a thousand dollars to get a collegiate education. That money soon gone, his father said, "Now you must fight your own way," and he did, until gubernatorial chair and United States senatorial chair were his, with a right to the presidential chair, if the meanness of American politics had not swindled him out of it. The day when his father told him to fight his own way was William H. Seward's opportunity. John Henry Newman, becalmed a whole week in an orange boat in the strait of Bonifacio, wrote his immortal hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light." That was Newman's opportunity. You know Kirk White's immortal hymn, "When Men Shout the Nightly Plain." He wrote it in a boat by a lantern on a stormy night as he was sailing along a rocky coast. That was Kirk White's opportunity.

The importance of making the most of opportunities as they present themselves is acknowledged in other directions. Why not in the matter of usefulness? The difference of usefulness of good men and women is not so much the difference in brain or social position or wealth, but in equipment of Christian common sense, to know just the time to say the right word or do the right thing. There are good people who can always be depended on to say the right thing at the wrong time. A merchant selling goods over the counter to a wily customer who would like to get them at less than cost, a railroad conductor who would like to see the passenger who wants to work off a last year's free pass or get through at half rate a child fully grown, a housekeeper trying to get the table ready in time for guests, although the oven has failed to do its work, and the grocer had neglected to fulfill the order, and the minister who has no opportunities for religious address. Do not rush up to a man in the busiest part of the day, and when a half dozen of people are waiting for him, and ask, "How is your soul?"

But there are plenty of fit occasions. It is interesting to see the apostles, gathered in a room at side and accompanied by the bounds yelling down the road, or on hunting expedition, but the best hunters in the world are those who hunt for opportunities to do good, and the game is something to gladden earth and heaven. When a soul is in bereavement is the best time to talk of gospel consolation and heavenly reunion. When a man has lost his property is the best time to talk to him of heavenly inheritances that can never be lost. When one is sick it is the best time to talk to him about the supernatural latitude in which unhealth is an impossibility. When the Holy Spirit is moving on a community is the best time to tell a man he ought to be saved.

A city missionary in the lower parts of the city found a young man in a wretched den and sin. He said, "Why do you not go home?" He said, "They would not receive me at home." He said, "What is your father's name and where does he live?" Having obtained the address and written to the father, the missionary got a reply, on the outside of the letter the word "immediate" underscored. It was the heartiest possible invitation for the wanderer to come home. That was the city missionary's opportunity. And there are opportunities all about you, and you will be glad to see the God who will bless you and bless those whom you help, in capitals of light, the word "immediate."

A military officer very profane in his habits was going down into a mine at Cornwall, England, with a Christian minister. The officer used profane language while in the cage going down. As they were coming up out of the mine the profane officer said, "If it be so far down to your work, how much farther would it be to the bottomless pit?" The Christian minister responded, "I do not know how far it is to that place, but if this rope should break you would be there in a minute." It was the Christian minister's opportunity. Many years ago a clergyman was on a sloop on our Hudson river, and hearing a minister utter blasphemous words, he said, "You have spoken against my best friend, Jesus Christ." Seven years after this same clergyman was on his way to the general assembly of the Presbyterian church at Philadelphia, when a young minister addressed him and asked him if he was not on a sloop on the Hudson river seven years before. The reply was in the affirmative. "Well," said the young minister, "I was the man whom you corrected for uttering that oath. It led me to think and repent, and I am trying to atone somewhat for my early behavior." The preacher of the gospel and a delegate to the general assembly. Seven years before on that Hudson river sloop was the clergyman's opportunity.

I stand this minute in the presence of many heads of families. Under if they all realize that the opportunity of inheriting the household for Christ and heaven is very brief and will soon be gone! For awhile the house is full of the voices and footsteps of children. You sometimes feel that you can hardly stand the racket. You say, "Do be quiet. It seems as if my head would split with all this noise." And things get broken and ruined, and it is "Where's my hat?" "Who took my books?" "Who has been busy with my playthings?" And it is a rushing this way and that until father and mother and mother are well nigh beside themselves.

But there is one opportunity so much brighter than any other, so much more inviting and so superior to all others that are innumerable fingers pointing to it, and it is halos with a glory all its own. It is yours. It is mine! It is the present hour. It is the now. We shall never have it again. While I speak and you listen the opportunity is restless as if to be gone. You cannot chain it down. You cannot imprison it. You cannot make it stay. All its pulses are throbbing with a haste that cannot be hindered or controlled. It is the opportunity of invitation on my part and acceptance on your part. The door of the palace of God's mercy is wide open. Go in. Sit down

VENGEANCE OF THE CZAR.

THE STORY OF A SOLDIER IN THE RUSSIAN ARMY.

Experience That Would Shatter Nerves of Iron—A Thrilling Narrative of a Historical Episode From the Pen of Alexander Dumas.

I was 28 years old. For two years I had been an Ensign in the Pavlovsky Regiment. My regiment was stationed in the great stone barracks that still exist on the other side of the Champ de Mars, opposite the Summer Garden. Emperor Paul I was in the third year of his reign, and he lived at the Red Palace.

One night when, after some youthful escapade, I had been refused permission to make one of a party of my comrades going into the city for the night's enjoyment, I had retired to my room and fallen into the semi-unconsciousness of my first sleep, I was aroused by the rough voice of a man whose face was close to mine, and who whispered in my ear: "Unliri Alexandrovitch, awake and follow me!"

I opened my eyes. A man stood before me whom I did not know, and who had so suddenly brought me back to the world. "Follow me, and where?" I exclaimed. "I cannot tell you. Sufficient for you to know that it is by the order of the Emperor." My blood froze!

By order of the Emperor! What could he wish from me, a poor Ensign—very young and true, but too far removed from the throne for my name ever to have reached the ear of the Emperor?

Through my mind there ran the awful Russian proverb: Near in the time of Ivan the terrible: Near to the Czar, near to death.

There was no time to hesitate. I sprang from my bed and dressed myself. I looked with keen attention at the man who had so suddenly brought me back to the world. He was tall, thin, and had a great full beard, but he believed he could recognize in him the Turkish slave, the favorite servant of the Emperor.

"I am ready," I said at the end of five minutes, clapping my hand with some confidence on the sword that hung at my side. My fears doubled when my guide, instead of taking the corridor that led from the barracks to the open air descended by a little circular staircase into the lower gallery which he had passed. He lit the way with a smoky lantern.

After many turns we found ourselves before a door that I had not seen before. Thus far in our route we had seen no one—it was as though the building were deserted, except for the man who had so suddenly brought me back to the world. The door which we stood before was closed. My guide struck upon it in a peculiar way. As his signal it swung open and I stepped into a room which was lit by a single candle.

The passage in which we had entered was evidently subterranean and some 7 or 8 feet high. The darkness was such that it penetrated the bricks over which we walked and made them slippery with moisture. At the end of 500 paces our progress was stopped by an iron gate. My guide drew a key from his pocket, opened the gate and closed it behind us.

We continued on our way. There occurred to me the tradition that told of a sunken gallery communicating between the Red Palace and the barracks which I had just passed. It was the gallery in which we were, and that when we had left the barracks we had started for the palace.

Presently we reached another door, similar in every respect to that through which we had just passed. I had my guide rapped in the same manner he had done the other; it was opened as was the other by the motion of a man who waited on the other side. And we passed through.

We found ourselves at the foot of the small staircase which we had just passed. It brought us into one of a number of small apartments where the atmosphere was such that I realized I was in a building intended for human habitation. Then all my doubts were at an end. The darkness was such that I realized I was in a building intended for human habitation.

I recalled the instance of the young Ensign whom the Emperor had noticed in the street, whom he had called to his service, and who had so suddenly brought me back to the world. I had passed in review before him every day. I recalled how at the last inspection his eyes had rested on me for a moment; he had ordered me to step out of the ranks beside my Captain; he had looked at me for a moment, and then in a low tone asked some questions of one of the officers of his suite. All this increased my uneasiness.

"Sire," said my guide, bowing low, "here is the young Ensign with whom you wished to speak. The Emperor approached me, and as he was much shorter than I, he raised himself to his full height, and in so doing, I noticed he recognized in me the one I had noticed at the review, because he made a sign as though he were satisfied, and turning on his heel, he said: 'Go!' My guide, bowing again, withdrew, and left me alone with the Emperor. I assure you I would quite as willingly be left alone with a lion.

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EXPLANATORY AND PRACTICAL NOTES.

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27. He answering said. He presented the very summary of the law which Christ himself gave on another occasion, showing either that he had already heard it from Christ, or that he had penetrated much deeper than most, his character into the spiritual meaning of the word. Love the Lord. Love involves communion, fellowship, and the relation of unity with God. No man who neglects God or fails to obey his law can be truly said to love him. All the duties of the individual, and definite affection. All thy soul. With the emotional nature, having feeling and warmth. All thy strength. With intensity and devotedness, as the one great purpose. All thy mind. An intelligent and a blind passion. Thy neighbor. Not more, not less, but to the same measure with ourselves, in absolute justice of dealing as between man and man, and with true benevolence to all.

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"Do this," said Christ, "and thou shalt live." Still intent on discussion, the scribe added another question, "But who is my neighbor that I may love him?" The great Teacher gave no direct answer, but told the story of a wayfarer, robbed by accident, neglected by passers-by of his own race and religion, but succored by an alien stranger, and then bade the questioner follow his example, and count as his neighbor every fellow-man in need.

EXPLANATORY AND PRACTICAL NOTES.

Verses 25, 26. Lawyer. A professed interpreter of the law, and one of the rabbinical classes upon which Jesus was far more extensive than the law itself. Stood up. To indicate a desire for discussion with Jesus. Tempted him. Rather, "tested him," to ascertain the measure of his knowledge and wisdom. Master. The word means "teacher." What shall I do? It was not the question of a convicted sinner, but of a self-conscious theorist, who sought not for light, but for the opportunity of airing his own learning. To inherit eternal life. The questioner closely pressed upon Christ, as upon every religious teacher. (1) The deepest hunger of the human soul is for immortality. What is written. Instead of giving detailed precepts Christ sends him back to the law of love, the law of the Father, which contains an answer for every question of the soul. How readest thou? (2) How we read is of more importance than what we read. Ten persons may read the same book, yet no two of them may bring out of it the same results.

27. He answering said. He presented the very summary of the law which Christ himself gave on another occasion, showing either that he had already heard it from Christ, or that he had penetrated much deeper than most, his character into the spiritual meaning of the word. Love the Lord. Love involves communion, fellowship, and the relation of unity with God. No man who neglects God or fails to obey his law can be truly said to love him. All the duties of the individual, and definite affection. All thy soul. With the emotional nature, having feeling and warmth. All thy strength. With intensity and devotedness, as the one great purpose. All thy mind. An intelligent and a blind passion. Thy neighbor. Not more, not less, but to the same measure with ourselves, in absolute justice of dealing as between man and man, and with true benevolence to all.

28, 29. Answered right. Christ was ever ready to recognize and commend whatever was worthy, even in an enemy. This do. A personal application of the great principle. (4) Christ's words are always addressed to the individual, and definite in their directions. To justify himself. The burden of the argument had already been thrown from the questioner to the questioner, and the lawyer felt that he must somehow extricate himself from his own dilemma. Who is my neighbor? He would start a new discussion on an abstract question: "To whom is the obligation of neighborliness due?" Whether to kinsmen or tribesmen?

30. Jesus answering. Instead of a defensive lawyer Jesus pointed at himself another application to the shape of a story. A certain man. Who, by the terms of the parable, is supposed to be a Jew. Went down. The journey of eighteen miles from Jericho to Jericho is a continuous descent, through the most fertile and fertile valleys in all ages have been haunted by robbers. To Jericho. In the early days a royal city of the Canaanites, destroyed by Joshua (Josh. 6. 24), but afterward rebuilt (1 Kings 16. 34), at one time the home of the prophet Elisha. The probably robber that day adorned by King Herod. Fell among thieves. More correctly, "highway robbers." Jerome says that in this time the road was called "the bloody way." Stripped of his goods. The "robber" is not the man himself, but the robbery of his goods. He was not a robber, but a victim. The Nairs, or far more particularly the tiger and with a life, and the tiger's claws are often a great and deadly enemy. The Nairs, or far more particularly the tiger and with a life, and the tiger's claws are often a great and deadly enemy.

31. By chance. "By a coincidence." Not by accident, but by divine order. The sufferer was met that day. (7) What men call chance is often a divine plan. (8) Seeking chance reveals real character. A certain priest. Many priests had homes in Jericho, from which they went up to the temple for their fortnight of service each year. He saw him. So that his passing by was not an oversight through ignorance. (9) Every man is responsible for whatever of wrong he sees and can remedy. Passed by. Doubtless he could find abundantly excuses in the danger of the way, the impossibility of saving the wounded man's life, the haste of his journey, the men may shape the excuses, but God marks the neglect. On the other side. In a cheap compassion, he would not look on the suffering which he did not think to cure; just as many hasten out of the way of the needy and stay at home from churches, when contributions are to be taken. A Levite. One from the priestly tribe, though not of the tribe of Aaron; employed in subordinate duties at the temple, and in religious instruction. Gazed and looked. Pausing to glance at the sufferer, perhaps to do a sentimental tear, and then passing on his way unwilling to incur legal pollution by touching the bloody feet. (11) True sympathy spends itself not in feelings, but in actions.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

INTERNATIONAL LESSON FEB. 17.

"The Good Samaritan." Luke 10. 25-37. Golden Text, Lev. 19. 18.

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