

Our Pulpit.

The Possibilities of Young Men in our Great Cities.

Taxt.—"Then Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank.—Daniel i. 8.

The story of my text tells us that young men upon coming to our cities may, if they so will it, make the grandest success of their life in the city. They may reach the highest places in every department. Now, the practical question comes: How? I can only indicate two, or at most three, brief answers; and leave them with you for a further development. These answers are suggested by the story of the text.

1. In the first place, success in our city comes to a young man through truthness to his character.

And heretofore we say it is not the city, it is the man himself that is everything. The city is only the occasion calling out the man. If evil be in the man it will come out of him everywhere, country and city. All the evil of the world is not in the city. Let me give you a single item from my experience. I was born in the city, and brought up in the city; but when I reached the age of fifteen I left the city and went to a college in the country. I was a young man from the city. I was sent to the country for protection. But what I wish to relate is the first thing that happened to me upon going to the country. It was this: the first student whose acquaintance I made, a country youth three years older than myself, asked me to spend my first evening at college by going out to a farmer's orchard to steal apples. Did I go? I did not. The farmer had a large dog. But I must be just to my first country acquaintance and tell you the full story of my relations with him. He is now in one of the leading pulpits of the city of New York. He came to New York when I was pastor there, and I went to hear him preach his first sermon. I had never heard him preach. I was a little late, so as I entered the church he was reading the Scripture lesson, and those were the first words which I heard from his lips as a preacher, the words of Paul: "Let him that stole steal no more." His first words as a minister to me counteracted his first words as a fellow-student.

The point which I want to make is this: the city is only the interpreter of a man. I cannot give you an exact diagnosis of a man in the quietness of a rural village. He is hemmed in by the sentiment of his rural home. The eyes of all the community are upon him, and he must walk straight. If he does not his business will leave him. Character and cash depend upon his being, seemingly at least, a true man. There is no crowd there in which he can hide himself. I cannot tell whether he be acting out his true self or not. But let me watch that man as he lives one week in the city and I will diagnose his character for you. What does he wish most of all to see in the city? What are the places which he frequents? Who are the people with whom he strikes an acquaintance? What are the things which he avoids as he moves among people who know him not? At what does he laugh? At what does he weep? For what does he spend his money? Which is popular with him, the church or the theatre, the prayer-meeting or the circus, the refined art gallery or the show-window hung with the low prints of actresses photographed for carnal eyes? These are leading questions, and their answers reveal the man.

How many young men come into our cities and go headlong to ruin! They come from the pure atmosphere of a father's home, but no sooner do they reach here than they sling off all moral restraint. They ally themselves with evil society, feed the gross appetites of their lower nature, give free rein to their desires. The result of all this you well know. Their whole being is soon demonized. They are early stricken with dire consequences. The flush of health leaves their faces, and, devitalized and consumptive, they go back to their homes to die. Ah! this is sad, sad, very sad. But such cases occur every year by the hundreds. From hundreds of rural homes to-day the bitterest of curses are issued against the city because of the fall of noble sons. I do not wish to shield our cities against a single righteous curse; every evil within the city should be cursed; but I wish to be fair. I wish to set fact and truth before rural homes, and before young men from rural homes. Nine-tenths of these ruined young men fell before they set foot in the city. They fell in their inner nature, in their secret longing, before they started from home. They fell spiritually in their father's house. Reading of the sinful pleasures of the city, they gloated over these in private, and lived with them in thought, and made these possible sin actualities by the power of imagination in the secrecy of their own souls. When they came here the city only gave them an opportunity to act themselves out. The city only made visible that which was invisible. I would ring it out through all the land to-day that the danger which besets young men in coming into the city begins in their far away home—begins in the plans which they make for sight seeing before they receive their mother's good bye kiss. Young men, bring a true personality with you into the city, bring with you minds filled with holy resolves.

2. Success comes to a young man in the city only when he is true to himself and develops himself.

The development of self is a great work, and requires many things.

It requires that you shall hold self to a strict account.

Away from home, away from the restraints which were once thrown around you by loving friends, you must be a restraint to yourself. You must convert your liberty into loyalty. You must keep life under the inspection of conscience. Be severe with yourself, be rigid and conscientious even to the border of what the free and easy would call morbidness. Measure yourself by some high moral and spiritual standard, and say to your soul, "Soul,

you must equal that." As a man you have this wonderful power. You can go out of yourself, and picture yourself in the third person. And criticize yourself; you can say, when you do not like yourself: "I ought to be more than that. I ought to be better than that. I am misshapen, ill formed, undeveloped. I hate and detest that old self; I will strive after the other and higher self, which as yet only an ideal." You have the power to put yourself into helpful contrast with others who are better.

Do you remember that wondrous book of Victor Hugo's, where Jean Valjean, the escaped convict, meets with the old bishop, who lovingly talks to him, and breaks him down by his forgiveness? Do you remember how he contrasts himself with that affectionate and noble-hearted bishop, and then projects himself outside of himself and loathes and turns away from the old Jean Valjean, and determines to be something better than that? It was because he did that that he became what he afterwards was—the noble-hearted Jean Valjean, the mayor of the city, a man tender and true in every fibre of his being.

The development of self requires that you shall have large faith in the possibility of the noble and true in human life.

Whenever I see a young man who has lost his ideals, and who is satisfied with a few face-qualities, who ceases to believe with all his might in anything, who has lost his faith in honor and in integrity and in virtue, I see a young man who is already lost. Every young man should have an Excelsior in his soul. There should be within him a sense of the possibility of incarnating the fine and the noble and the true. Young man, when you say that all men are a sham, and that there is nothing but the low and the selfish and the carnal and the untrue and the unchaotic in the world, you tell your soul that which is not true; and you forever fetter all your higher powers. Allow me to say to you that Jesus Christ was a reality, and that Jesus Christ in all His moral beauty and perfection is this very day finding a thousand fac-similes in humanity. The belief in this is the first step toward your higher and better self.

The development of self requires constant and ceaseless effort and sacrifice. So does every grand product. All the triumphs of genius and of moral being are the embodiments of hard, persistent work, and tension and sacrifice. If the harp wishes to fill the air with solemn and soul-stirring music, it must give up all of its strings to be so stretched that they will almost break. But out of this tension and strain come delightful harmonies, and wave upon wave of rapturous sound. The music of a true Christian personality is like the ringing of the chimes of heaven on earth and the striking of the harps of gold; but every faculty in the harp-nature of man must be keyed up to the concert pitch of heaven. Will, conscience, imagination, reason, the faculty of emotion, the memory, all must be brought into accord with the perfect human nature of Jesus Christ.

In the life of man there is first the soul of the mother ruling and leading, and then by and by there is the soul of the wife; and the two together, the mother and the wife, make the man. It is the loving and loved woman that determines the man. The real man is the woman he carries in his heart. If she be an angel of a woman, she will make him an angel of a man; but if she be a demon of a woman, she will make him a demon of a man. The letting of a noble woman's love into your life is like letting the sunbeam into the great clouds that float in the dome above. The sunbeam makes the vapoury mass beautiful with its many delicate tints and burning hues. Never in life's experience is there a further remove from all that is earthly than when one's soul reads all its destiny in another. It is not strange, therefore, that when Paul speaks of the union which consummates such love, he compares its mystery to that which unites the Church and Christ.

Let a man love anything purely and disinterestedly, and he will be a better man for that love—less selfish and more appreciative of the good. In preaching this I am not preaching a novelty, something that I have discovered. This was known away back in the days of Socrates and Plato. Back there, men used to reason in this way about love: Let a man begin by loving one beautiful form, and from the love of the one he will rise to the love of many beautiful forms. From loving beautiful forms he will rise to the love of beautiful practices. From the love of fair practices he will rise to the love of fair ideas. From the love of fair ideas he will rise to the love of the person who thinks the fair ideas. From the love of the noble thinker, the magnificent woman, he will step over into eternal love and eternal friendship with God, the creator of the magnificent woman, whose divine spirit is the holy power within her, making her magnificent. The pathway of a noble woman's love is the pathway that leads to God.

Only a few weeks ago I saw a simple illustration of this point which I am pushing. I was walking across the Boston Common behind a young couple in the full vigor of budding manhood and womanhood. She was an art student, and he was an admirer of just such an art student. Gallantly he was carrying her books and utensils, and the two were earnestly conversing. As I passed them I overheard her say, "But there is a moral in what you mean to do; you certainly wish to put your whole uprightness into it." That is all I heard, and I naturally looked into the face of the speaker. To use Bronson Alcott's phrase, it was "a solar face," and shone with purity and spiritual life. Back of her fine words the young woman put a winning smile; and I could see that that smile, which expressed hope and confidence, and even admiration, sent her words to the very core of the young man's being. The flush that suffused his cheek told this. He was charged and surcharged to the full with moral electricity. Good resolutions fairly crackled in his finger-tips, and lofty purposes sparkled in his eyes. I said to the friend who was walking with me, "That was well said; that good advice was effective. It was a sugar-coated pill, but he took it with evident relish from the fair one. I venture to affirm that if his father or even his mother had given him that lecture it would not have been received with half that grace."