

Decision of Character.

Baccalaureate Sermon, delivered by Prof. J. Durham, in College City, Cal., April 24, 1881.

"A doubleminded man is unstable in all his ways." James 1: 8.

My dear young friends I am thankful that I am permitted to appear before you on this beautiful Lord's day, amid the charming fragrance of floral wreaths, and in the joys of spring time; while the earth is enshrouded in her gorgeous hues, songsters are warbling their notes of praise, and all hearts are filled with joy and gladness. I am thrice thankful that it is appointed unto me to give you the "God send" of your college life, and to present to you on this day of the Lord, from a heavenly stand-point, a Gospel precept that shall serve as a beacon light, to lure you on to noble and God like action. May this Scripture be a radiant star of such magnitude as shall ever glitter in the divine constellation of heavenly precepts, with an eternal light, that shall not be like the scintillations of a blazing comet or flashing meteor, that dazzle for a time, then pass off into the trackless void to be lost in an unknown orbit. But no, we desire to impress upon you this heavenly precept, that was borne amid the stars, pinioned to earth by the spirit of God, placed in our childhood tongue, with such a divine glow, in each letter that he who runs may read.

In my short experience in life, and observing the success and failures of so many of my fellowmen, this Scripture has made a lasting impression on my mind, and for years has its echo sounded through the halls of duty.

This Scripture stands before us as a lighthouse, which the apostle James has erected on the rock-bound shores of life. Sentinel fires and lighthouses, my friends, you will never find in deep seas nor in pleasant harbors, but they are only placed where the rugged rocks tear the sea to foam, and danger is hid in every heaving billow.

The term translated *doublemindedness*, as used in this Scripture, occurs in only one other place in the divine word, and that by the same writer. The word meaning properly is, *two-souled*. That is, a man who is constantly wavering in his designs, or inconsistent in his conclusions. Such a man is one who has no settled principles, but is controlled by passion and popular feelings; to-day he has one view or opinion and to-morrow he panders, and yields to the whims and caprices of the prating multitude.

"The strongest pillar a man or woman can have to support a life work is *stability of character*, such a person is willing to open his bosom to the inspection of the world," while his thoughts will receive the smiles and "God speed" of the good and great of the world, and the benignant blessings of heaven shall descend upon him like celestial dews on Mt. Hermon. But he who is uncertain and undecided in his life course feels like seeking shades of darkness, lest his deeds come to light that they may be reproved. The apostle had just spoken, in the same connection, of the uncertain man, and compared him to a "wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed." The propriety and beauty of the expression is seen at the first glance. There is no stability in a wave of the sea. Many times have I stood on the beach and gazed with inexpressible delight at the incoming and receding waves. Toss an object into that quivering foam, up, up, comes the swelling wave, and you think your object will soon ride on the silver crest of the glistening spray, but no, this wave yields to the force of the receding one, or to the one pressing hard behind, and shortly the object is thrown at your feet on the glittering sand; so with the unstable, you may see the waves of success ready to translate them to usefulness, but a little ebb or flow of disappointment or trial will overcome them, and they are finally

tossed between the waves of hope and fear and are landed on the shores of eternity, having missed the mark, and life is a failure.

A determined course of life is the sure road to success; assume a correct and honorable course, and let come what may, you will be secure. Storms of trial may gather, darkness may hover all around, slander may assail; all their fiery darts must fall short of the aim; you will be sure of the approval of every noble man and the smiles of heaven.

The man who has no decision of purpose before him will find many crooked, rocky, thorny paths, with here and there a pit-fall to catch his unwary feet. His bosom heaves with uncertain aspirations, and he has not the determination of purpose to act with that magnanimity, kindness, generosity, that defies the world, the flesh, and the devil. He trembles and fears lest some one will call in question the integrity of his purposes. Be firm in the cause of right, and honest with all men. I would avoid dogmatism, but show a decision that will strengthen with the years. The undecided have been well compared to the uncertain course of a little stream. Were you to go with me to the summit of yonder mountain I would show you the beginning of a beautiful river, yet how undecided in its course. Every little pebble or rock changes its course. Here and there it moves along in its serpentine course, and for want of force and decision its whole course is laid out, so that when its place is taken by the mighty river, you see by its crooked bends where the little streamlet ran.

Yet, do not bound off to opposite extremes and be like the roaring, impetuous torrent that rushes down the mountain side and scatters destruction in its pathway. It pushes on like a man with no consideration before him, the only object is to reach a certain end, and that too, at all hazards; so that Cascade, in the Yosemite valley, by whose side we stood in awe and amazement, if it thinks at all, thinks of nothing but returning as quick as possible, to its ocean home, where it may enjoy the repose of its mother's breast and be "rocked in the cradle of the deep."

No, there is a golden mean to be sought; 'tis easily found too, a few moments thought reveals it to any enlightened mind. It will be like the grand old ocean whose bosom heaves with steadiness of determined purpose; on such a sea the mariner is safe. He will even risk all with a weakened vessel if the ocean but maintains her equilibrium of action. He only fears when her fountains are broken up and her identity is lost in the raging storm. On the crested wave of such singleness you can amid a joyful spray glide into eternity on the upward swell, having, like the ocean, purified your own life by your constant deep-seated action.

That richest boon—a good name—every person may have, and with it all the beautiful tints that sparkle in the halo of its radiance. It takes decision of character to secure a good name. It will not spring up spontaneously as do those domestic flowers, which follow the footsteps of man. Even the plant had its seed, and the encouraging soil, sun, showers, and the hands of children to guard its feeble growth.

That good name must be sought with earnestness, for it comes not unsought. Our richest metals and most costly gems are obtained only by the most unrelenting labor and most costly appliances. So the old Greeks, placed among their standard sayings, "The gods sell all good things for labor."

One of the boldest examples of the decision of a young man is said to have occurred during the age of persecution. A young Roman officer had believed in Christ. He was told by the authorities that he would be given

but three hours to give up Christ and christianity, or his head must be taken off. A christian bishop took the young man to the church and laid a sword by the side of the Bible, saying, "What is your decision?" "If you decide for the Bible you give up life, here. If you decide for the sword you have honor for a little while. Rome will delight to honor you." The young man said, "That Bible is my decision." In three hours he was beheaded. Thus, example follows example in all ages of the world, of those who have by determination and decision attained the highest honor among men, and vied with the angels in the glory of the highest heaven. There are more offers to-day of honorable and trusty positions in the land than there are those who are willing to put forth a suitable effort or will aim high enough that they may reach them.

It has oftentimes been repeated to the youths of America, "Have an aim in view." The man who sets out in life without an object before him will be the man who is born a cipher and will die zero. The reason why so many of our fellow countrymen have made any successful attainments is, that they had something definite before them. Their energies have been decisive, and their vigorous efforts have let them to the goal of success; while on the other hand the indefinite man has floated along, consumed his daily rations, had no purpose, attained nothing, passed into ignoble obscurity to await his doom "unwept, unhonored, and unsung." Then if you wish a prize, or the "heavenly prize," you must press for it.

There is a true old saying, that the man who aims at the sun will not reach it, but his arrow will reach a much higher mark than that if his aim is on a level with himself. So set your standard high, and though you may not reach the exact mark to which you aim, it is very certain you will reach a much higher point than if you aimed at a low object. Young men really do not know their worth, for if they did, they would do more to enoble and dignify their lives, and less to deteriorate and degrade their prospects of success and their hopes of future usefulness.

For many years I have tried to impress upon young men the importance of honesty, purity, righteousness, and decision. And in the language of another, "You may be whatever you resolve to be. Resolution is omnipotent. Determine you will be something in the world and you will be something, if you will try. Aim at excellence and excellence will be attained. This is the great secret of effort and eminence. I cannot do it never accomplished anything. I will try has done wonders." A young man once had a large patrimony left him, but through profligacy and recklessness, he lost all, he then resolved to gain it all back, suiting the action to the determination, he began by shoveling coal in a cellar, and he died a miser of great wealth. This simply shows what determination did, and the young person who sets out with a fixedness of character and decision seldom fails. Flowers of hope cover his pathway and their fragrance will enchant like a fairy land while the star dusted sky beckons on to a higher life. Pages of American history are filled with the efforts of young men of decision. This took Franklin from humble printers' boy to the arbiter of nations, companionship of kings and a philosopher whom the world will delight to honor. This principle placed Clay, the "mill boy of the slashes," among the first orators and statesmen of America. Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen, determined to place the power and resources of Rome at her disposal, and to do this she must capture Caesar by her beauty. This she did by being wrapped in a roll of heavy carpet, tied with cords, and thus carried to Caesar's presence. When un-

rolled, the fair queen stood before that great Roman emperor, a perfect picture of beauty and grace. The end was gained, and the legions of Rome were at the order of the Queen of Egypt. After Caesar's assassination, Mark Antony, the Triumvirate, became his successor. The fair queen, determined to hold her power with the Romans by capturing him, which she did. And the final act of her decision was seen when she saw her queenly power snatched from her, and rather than see herself a prisoner, she placed the poison asp to her bosom that it might fill her life bloom with its venom.

There are thousands of young ladies all over this land whose beauty will rival that of the Egyptian Queen, but they have not that true decision that is necessary to refuse the countenance the young man of indecision, who takes his dram, seeks improper associates, or earns his living by dishonest means, so they immerse themselves to the life of a drudge and a slave, rather than hold the sceptre of a fairy queen.

This same principle led Caesar and Alexander through their brilliant career. It led Napoleon to have no fear of the combined powers of the world, and even to set from his own heart the companion of his early love, wicked as it was, and he had to spend his last days on the "cold and inhospitable rocks of St. Helena," because the world feared his bold and decisive character. His life would not have had such an inglorious end had he feared the Lord and obeyed his commands.

This principle in the heart of the immortal Washington, with heaven's smiles, sustained him in his determination to rescue our land from British oppression. To all appearances the odds were against him; the British regulars, well clad and fed, and in numbers three to one. With him stood a few of the American Yeomanry, of the Puritanic stamp, poorly provided for, and Congress passing resolutions of censure. But a brave heart, pure motives, decided character, and the approval of heaven, placed his name among the household gods of all ages.

The name of Amos Laurence, a noble son of New England, is before the world. A lad clad in the robes of poverty, became a clerk in a little store, but he would not join with his associates in the use of strong drink or tobacco, and in writing to a young friend years afterward said, "In the first place take this for your motto at the commencement of your journey, that the difference of going *just right* or a *little wrong* will be the difference of finding yourself in good quarters, or in a miserable bog or slough at the end of it. Now I say to this simple fact of starting *just right* am I indebted with God's blessings on my labors, for my present position."

Through this omnipotent "I will," a poor penniless cabin boy died an aged millionaire. And while the nation lives, men are educated, orphans are fed, will the name of Girard College, the orphan's home, and other public benefits bless the name of Stephen Girard—the cabin boy.

A few years ago a poor lad was janitor in a little out-of-the-way seminary in Ohio. He was struggling for an education, as a christian youth, and a few weeks ago that person was inaugurated President of the United States in the most imposing manner ever before known in American history.

A few years ago a woman of decision became mistress of the table at the White House, and when wine and other such drinks were to be brought in as was the custom, she says, "I will not permit it and will leave the result with the Lord." That act was a tidal wave that swept round the earth. The fragrant breath of a perpetual spring shall ever cover her pathway, hundreds of thousands will call her blessed, and the gallery of this

great nation is to-day beautified by the finest production of art, that the world may gaze on the picture of that brave woman who dared to lay hands on the demon and drive it from its national retreat.

Some years ago, at a great gathering in Cincinnati, Ohio, the Prince of Wales extended his first offer to a beautiful christian girl, asking her company to join in the giddy dance. The lady's reply was, "Thank you, sir, I am a christian." That noble man honored her much for her decision, and the lady felt she had simply obeyed the promptings of her conscience and her duty to God.

So we might fill volumes with such historical examples.

"Thy lives of great men all remind us,
That we may make our lives sublime,
And departing leave behind us
Foot prints on the sands of time."

(To Continue.)

—The most notorious infidel lecturer of the day spoke recently in Philadelphia. The *Inquirer*, a daily morning paper, discussed the speaker next day as follows: "Robert G. Ingersoll, better known among a class of politicians of the baser sort as Bob Ingersoll, may contend with the better part of himself—and we have no doubt that he has a better part than that of which he makes public exhibition—that he must live, and that to live after the fashion he has chosen he must have money, and a good deal of it. He tried to live by the law, but he lacked clients and failed as a lawyer, he tried to live by politics, but he lacked even the smallest stock of principles which our modern politicians must have to secure success, and, consequently, he failed. He recognized, however, that he had great and attractive abilities as an orator, a certain dramatic faculty as a storyteller and a fund of sarcastic humor which delighted his boon companions of the Congressional lobbies. For after Mr. Ingersoll's failure as a politician he tried to live as a lobbyist; but here he partly failed again, because the Credit Mobilier exposures had made honorable members afraid to have commerce with 'the gift-bearing Greek.' Having failed in everything he had attempted, Mr. Ingersoll determined to utilize the talents, gifts and abilities, which God had given

him, as a lecturer, and being shrewd enough to know that he could succeed only by choosing a subject of vivid or even startling interest, chose that of the defamation of God and of his religion. It was his need—or his fancied need—that impelled him to what he did, and he has prospered exceedingly in doing it, so far as reaping large pecuniary harvests from sowing the tares of unbelief and infidelity can be considered prospering. He wanted money, and he gets money. It is possible, however, that, if he does not now think, the time will come when he will think that there is something in the world better than money, and that a wholesome, abiding faith in God and His mercy is worth more than all the money that ever was coined. Mr. Ingersoll, is simply a trafficker in blasphemy and infidelity, and partly because it pays him to traffic in them, and possibly partly because he is as ignorant of the harm he is doing as he is of the subject of which he publicly speaks.

"It should be thoroughly understood that Mr. Ingersoll is simply a peripatetic showman performing for his own benefit. He represents no eminent body of citizens or of men; he represents only himself, and has no higher purpose to serve in denouncing religion and belief than that of filling his pockets. It is possible, even probable, that if there were any lower depth to which he could sink his talents and his manhood, and which promised larger pecuniary rewards, that he would seek it. He appeared at the Academy of Music last night in his favorite character of infidel and blasphemer, in opposition to Barum's Circus and the theaters, and drew as large a house as any of them all, though even the clown in the ring or the singer of unclean songs in the variety show must have felt humiliated to be compelled to contend for public favor against a performer who put his thoughts and speech to such base uses, and, for a price, plays the pander to the ignorant and vile."—*Statesman*.