

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.

(Continued.)

And from the Book of books we learn that it was decision that made Daniel pray three times a day with his window open toward the Holy City, and notwithstanding the command in reference to the image that the king had erected in the plains of Dora, he and his brethren would not bow to it.

Why did Paul say of himself of what he had undergone, "In stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft; of the Jews five times I received forty stripes save one, thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own countrymen, in perils by heathen, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watching often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." But you say God sustained him, so he did, and he will sustain every man who is determined and unswerving in the cause of right.

Time forbids me to bring up a host of reformers and sacrificing godly men who have stood in the front with a moral courage that was sublime and heavenly. Their names are legion and only can the Great Arithmetician of eternity count the deeds of love and mercy that they have performed for benighted and suffering humanity and the glory of God.

But I beg leave to call your eyes away from those starry pictures, which you have been gazing upon, to a few minor paintings that young men have painted for me during the last quarter of a century.

A young man, whose face is yet familiar in the class-room, wrote to my family a few years ago, "I aspire to be Dr. —, of San Francisco." I have watched his movements. With decision he uttered these words, his actions have been suited to them. He was studious, prompt in business, strictly moral, and, although a young man, is consulted by thousands of our great metropolis; his ability in his profession is being known in every direction, and he will soon be one of the most prominent in our fair State.

Back in my prairie home, years ago, I employed a Christian young man to plow my garden. I walked beside him. We stood together in the furrow and conversed on the aims and decisions of young men. Says he, "I am decided on the law." I watched him, he had not yet entered college. I worked hard in trying to unitize his first oration. In a few years he could not meet the demands for his oratory. He is one of the first of his profession in a western State; and a few weeks ago was summoned to Washington by the President to assist in a piece of work.

Another, who sat by my side for many months, said, "I am bent on the law." I watched him. He was brilliant, but lacked principle with his decision. He rose with pinions plumed for a lofty flight, but that which he lacked soon sank him into an ignoble grave and forgotten oblivion.

Another, a young man of very moderate ability said, "I am determined to preach the Gospel." I watched him. No obstacle stopped him, it only hindered for a little time. His movements were slow, but he succeeded, and to-day he is doing a good work in the West, in the cause of Christianity.

Many others are in mind but cannot be mentioned.

My dear brethren, you are starting

along the pathway of a noble life. It will not always be filled with the fragrant breath of May. As you pass along, on either hand you will see beautiful archways with gilded entrances. Beware, watch your footsteps. There is one yonder, the exterior is charming; enter not its fascinating halls; pit-falls are before you at every step. The enticements to enter try the integrity of the young man and young woman; around its entrance stand the elite. Many are educated and are, what the world calls refined, many on whom social comfort has shed her genial smiles; many fair lovely maidens with their bewitching smiles greet the passerby. Look within; there are frescoed walls, parlors sparkling in their richest beauty, charming music and lovely song. Gay wedding suppers, where wine doth sparkle; silver slipped dancers and brazen tongued crime. All these are dedicated to the God of Bacchus. Shun these attractions for they will profane the temple of the living God and count the blood of Christ an unholy thing.

There is another attractive archway which is beset with many charms; praiseworthy objects allure you on, ambition's flattering smiles may offer you honor, if you will fall down and worship the beguiler. Let not ambition lead you, unless it is guided by noble aspirations, pure motives and high hopes.

There is another way whose dazzling lights invite you to pleasure, minstrelsy of song, the merry laugh goes round. Over the pendant rocks flowers bloom, and their fragrance will bewitch with the wand of an enchanter. Let not the words of pleasure only lead you unto its scyllian rocks or into its charybdean whirlpools by its enticing words. "There is no harm in this," or "Just this one time." Be true to duty, be stable, be firm, stand to the right though the heavens fall.

Again, as you pursue your onward course you will see a beautiful decorated aisle, leading into gay and spirited company, the windows allure with the most attractive engravings, while within are tables spread with sumptuous feasts prepared and savored as a literary hash by the heated imagination of bewildered novelists. Much in our journals and all the dime novels are but enticing incidents and attractive chapters. Feed your mind with it no more than you would feed your body with tainted meat.

Should you enter the literary field seek not to pander to the degraded palate that seeks diseased and sickly food for mental digestion. You cannot afford to waste your life in a dreamless vision. The mind of the nation has become so superficial that the shop windows will show you just such food as the majority of the readers are consuming; much of which is almanac, squibs and chimney corner slang, that only prepare the mind for something worse. As proof of this, a few months ago, one man who saw the course of affairs, dared to show his decision, and assailed the press with a power akin to madness. He went to the P. O., the peoples' friend, and rested neither day nor night, determined to rid the mails of polluted literature, to such an extent had the matter grown that ladies were not allowed in the post-office department. The result of the action of this decisive philanthropist is, that writers have stopped their composition, pressmen their work, and the mails are so purified that within the last few months ladies have again entered the department.

Young men of California, have you any decision? Will you decide on a noble, pure and holy life? A course of life that will be positive. Do not be shiftless, worthless, godless. If you decide to be a farmer, do not dishonor that noble calling. It was the first occupation that God honored among men. There are many, many ways of dignifying and exalting that primitive calling. If you would be a

mechanic, tradesman, or if you enter the law, medicine, the proclamation of the Gospel, or any honorable calling, for I trust none will enter upon a course of life that is dishonorable, whatever you enter bear it to the skies with a noble life. And if you should fail; if you do not succeed, dare not to cast back your failure on the world, but remember, and I would have it echo back and forth through the gilded halls of your mind, that your life will be much as you make it. If you have no decision, and are tossed about by every wind of doctrine you will fail. It is no little thing to get men to say no and stick to it in case of an offer to do wrong, while that doublemindedness that says, "I guess I will," is nothing. There is no fixedness of purpose in it.

The man or woman who resolves on a true and definite course of life, and says, "I will," has crossed the Rubicon, the territory is his, the victory is gained, and all he need do is to press for the prize. The crown of glory is held ready to be placed on his triumphant brow. Even more than this, the halo of success will come to meet him as he approaches the goal, while waving streamers greet the enraptured vision. Then let me say,

"Press on; nor mind the chilly morn
That usher in the weary day."
The jagged rocks, the wounding thorns,
That strewn so thick thy dubious way.

Press on; nor mind the rising cloud—
The gathering blackness of the storm;
The thunder pealing long and loud,
The lightning flashing thick and warm."

A young man, a slave to tobacco, said, "I can quit if I want to." No decision again. And another who is fast being hurled into the terrible maelstrom of a degraded drunkard's life, said to me, "I think there is no danger." And thus the monster draws his cold and slimy folds around the undecided victim, dethrones the reason, destroys the soul, and from the funeral pyre, a ruin he hath wrought, he raises his hydrahead and with bell glaring eyes and forked tongue he pours forth his hissing venom on the nobler man below.

To encourage all who will strive for the nobles of all callings, the apostle says, "I press for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," and so we repeat press on, press for it; it is the "high calling." And to still urge us on, James says, "Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you, cleanse your hands you sinners and purify your hearts you doubleminded." When we enter this heavenly calling, the fragrant breath of heaven, the joys of eternal spring will greet our senses, for the Father sees those who will have that decision to lay hold on eternal life. In this high calling we may all attain to perfection. There is room for all that will apply. There is "one hope in this calling," and the apostle says, "I beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called," but as all the vocations of earth require decided characters to walk in them, so that heavenly calling which is as far above our earthly callings as heaven is higher than the earth, can only be attained by that principal that exalts humanity, glorifies God, brings heaven to meet us, that attunes our voices with angelic songs that the sweet symphonies of heaven shall repeat in sounding joy.

My friends, I shall be amply paid for the efforts of this day, if I shall have flagged one station that will serve as a guide to your thoughts in after years. You have before you the highest authority in the universe—the word of God—and the achievements of men in daily life.

Experience, examples, observation and precept give us all our lessons, so take the examples and precepts of heaven, look at the successes and failures of your fellows, take the torchlight of experience, go out on the pathway that is laid out to a life of success in this world and a home in the heaven of heavens.

Finally, it would be far better, after this good beginning, and that you should have passed through life without a decided course of moral action and left the world no better, that you had lived an insignificant trilovite of the Paleozoic period, or the Sauvian which left its footprints in the stratified earth from whose remains the amateur geologist may read the wonders of the earth and the wisdom of the Divine mind. May you each be enabled to say:

"I live for those who love me,
For those I know are true,
For the heaven that smiles above me,
And awaits my spirit too;
For all human ties that bind me,
For the task that God's assigned me,
For the bright hopes left behind me,
And the good that I can do."

I can not close this theme nor do justice to myself or you till I have offered tributes of parting to the memory of two who were with us a year ago. One an instructor. How you loved him. For years he had led you along the angles and sines of mathematical obstrusities. His lucid explanations enamored you with the wonders of the relations of numbers and the power of his mind. A man of bold decision of character, a scholar, teacher of high rank, and a man whose mind demanded more than he was able to supply. A pure and noble hearted Christian, who pressed for the prize, for, said he to me, one evening,

"Over the river they beckon to me,
Loved ones who have passed to the further side;
The gleam of their snowy robes I see,
But their voices are lost in the dashing tide."

One year ago to-day he sat in the audience and listened with delight to my feeble effort, but his words of encouragement are green in my memory, and will, I trust, help to bear me over the "dashing tide" in triumph, place me by his side in the paradise of the eternal, where the pangs of death shall not hinder the scope of our minds in grasping the wisdom and goodness of God.

Another is gone, Bro. Foree, the news of whose death we have received only a few days ago. A year ago he was in the graduating class. I had known him for a long time. We all loved him dearly. His kind heart, genial nature and studious life, won friends for him wherever he went. Look at him, too, as a young man of decision. Look at the elements of his life. He decided to have an education, with that he was always prompt and studious, and he esteemed a good

name better than riches. He decided to spend his life, as far as I knew, in the noble profession of a teacher. He did most of his work in that direction in our school, while yet in feeble health, and when he returned home his pupils and others said that if his health would permit he would soon rank among the first teachers in the land. But above all he decided to be a Christian gentleman. In this none were better. To many who are present are his exhortations still echoing through the halls of memory. When Wednesday eve came, if possible, Bro. Foree was present, and his clear, pure words fell like coin from the mint, ringing back sincere devotion to the "high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And how well do I remember on one evening he rose and said, "I feel certain that I have been the means of saving one person." How our hearts were warmed by his words. And he yet a young man scarcely out of his minority. Look at the thousands who have spent a long life and have not even saved themselves. Will you not say this was a successful life? How noble, how eloquent, how heavenly. Peace to his ashes.

Go forth, my friends, as a holy duality on your great mission, and pay your lives be long, happy and useful, and as the sunset of life shall come upon you, may your barks drop gently down the stream of time, and as the "golden gate" opens may

your enraptured vision behold the peaceful sea, of joys immortal and bliss eternal, where our associations shall be renewed forever, and to each one of you we say,

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee,
The Lord make his face to shine upon thee
and be gracious unto thee;
The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace." Amen.

James T. Fields.

Of this gentleman, whose recent death ended a career unique in American literary annals, the Boston Traveller says:

James T. Fields was born at Portsmouth, N. H., Dec. 31, 1817, and was therefore in the sixty-fourth year of his age. He was educated at the High school of that city, and at the early age of fourteen found his way to Boston, and became a clerk in the bookstore of Carter & Hendee, thus at once stepping on to the ladder on whose topmost rung he was presently to stand. The passion for authorship manifested itself while he was yet a youth. At eighteen (in 1838) he was invited to deliver the anniversary poem before the Boston Mercantile Library Association, Edward Everett being the orator of the occasion. In 1848 he read before the same society a poem entitled "The Post of Honor," Daniel Webster being the orator of that day. Shortly after reaching his majority Mr. Fields became a partner in the famous publishing concern of Ticknor, Reed & Fields, which, in 1844, assumed, on the withdrawal of Mr. Reed, the style of Ticknor & Fields. The house acquired the first reputation in the country by the high character of its publications, which embraced, among authors, the work of Everett, Prescott, Bryant, Dana, Emerson, Hawthorne, Halleck, Whipple, Hillard, Holmes, Longfellow, Sumner, Parsons, Sprague, Bayard Taylor, Mrs. Stowe, Lowell, Thoreau and Whittier. This was due very largely, we might say mainly, not only to Mr. Field's fine literary judgment, but to that personally fascinating manner which made him the familiar friend of all these eminent writers.

The story has often been told of the relation which sprang up between Hawthorne and Mr. Fields, and if the reading world owed to the latter no more than the publication of "The Scarlet Letter," which might never have seen the light but for his persuasive influence over the shy romancer of Salem, it would be forever heavily in his debt.

It is also to be said of him that he enjoyed a closer intimacy of association with contemporaneous British authors than any other American man of letters. With Wordsworth, DeQuincey, Thackeray, Dickens, Reade, George Eliot and the Brownings, and many others of equally lustrous fame, he had the most close and pleasant personal relations, during his visits to England, and his reminiscences of these worthies, related in his recent lectures, have been among the rarest of literary feasts. In 1858 Mr. Fields received the compliment from Harvard University of the honorary degree of Master of Arts. Mr. Ticknor dying in 1864, his publishing house took the new style of Fields, Osgood & Co., and six years later, in 1870, Mr. Fields withdrew from it wholly, and devoted himself exclusively to literature and the lyceum.

Of the impression he made in England we may judge from the following from Miss Mitford's "Literary Recollections":

"Mr. Field's visit was necessarily brief; but that short interview has laid the foundation of a friendship which will, I think, last as long as my frail life, and of which the benefit is all on my side. He sends me charming letters, verses which are fast ripening into true poetry, excellent books; and this autumn he brought back himself, and came to pay me a visit; and he must come again, for of all the kindnesses with which he loads me, I like his company the best."—*Rural Home.*