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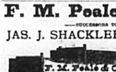

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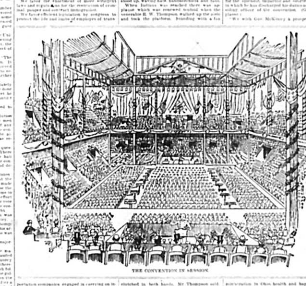

THE CONVENTION IN SESSION.

HON. WHITELAW REID.

THE PLATFORM.

RAW RECRUITS.

The Hosts of Temptation May Be Flanked,

But It Will Be shot for that—God Never Puts You in Battle But He Gives You a Weapon—Dr. Talmage's Sermon.

Dr. Talmage's sermon was from the text, Ephes. vi, 11: "Put on the whole armor of God."

There is in this text a great rattle of shields and helmets and swords. Soldiers are getting ready for battle. We have had recently in this church new enlistments and I shall address myself to those in this and other churches who are putting on the armor of God and who may feel themselves to be as yet only raw recruits.

"Masterly retreat" is a term often used in military circles, but in religion there is no such thing. It is either glorious advance or disgraceful and ignominious falling back. It would be a strange thing if all our anxiety about men ceased the moment they were converted. You would almost doubt the sanity of that farmer who, having planted the corn and seen it just sprout above ground, should say: "My work is all done. I have no more anxiety for the field. No. There is work for the plow and the hoe, and there must be a careful keeping up of the fences, and there must be a frightening away of the birds that would pillage the field. And I say the entrance upon Christian life is only the implantation of grace into the heart. There is earnest, hard work yet to be done, and perhaps many years of anxiety before there shall be heard the glorious shout of "Harvest Home." The beginning to be a Christian is only putting down the foundation, but after that there are years of hammering, polishing, carving, lifting, before the structure is completed. It takes five years to make a Christian character; it takes twenty-five years; it takes forty years, it takes seventy years, if a man shall live so long. In other words, a man dying after half a century of Christian experience feels he has only learned the "A B C's" of a glorious alphabet. The next year will decide a great deal in your history, young Christian man. It will decide whether you are to be a burning and shining light of the church, or a spark of grace covered up in a barrel of ashes. It will decide whether you are to be a strong man in Christ Jesus, with gigantic blows striking the iron nail of darkness, or a bedwarfed, whining, grumbling soldier, that ought to be drummed out of the Lord's camp with the "Rogues' March." You have only just been launched; the voyage is to be made. Earth and Heaven and hell are watching ...

Remember that God never puts you in battle but he gives you weapons with which to fight.

My second word of counsel to those who have recently entered upon Christian life is: Abstain from all pernicious associations, and take only those that are useful and beneficial. Stay out of all associations that would damage your Christian character. Take only those associations that will help you. A learned man said: "If I stay with that man Fenelon any longer I shall get to be a Christian in spite of myself." In other words, there is a mighty power in Christian associations. Now what kind of associations shall we, as young Christians, seek after? I think we ought to get in company better than ourselves, never going into company worse than ourselves. If we get into company a little better than ourselves and there are ten people in that company, ten chances to one we will be bettered. If we get into company a little worse than ourselves, and there be ten people in that company, ten chances to one we will be made worse than we were before.

Now, when a young Christian enters the church, God does not ask him to retire from the world. The anchorite that lives on acorns is no nearer Heaven than the man who lives on partridge and wild duck. Isolation is not demanded by the Bible. A man may use the world with the restriction of not abusing it. But just as soon as you find any surroundings pernicious to your spiritual interest, quit those associations. This remark is more especially appropriate to the young. Now, it is impossible that the young and untroubled should seek their associations with those who are aged and worn out. As God intended the aged to associate with the aged, talking over the past, and walking staff in hand along the same paths they trod, thirty, forty and fifty years ago, so, I suppose, he intended the young chiefly to associate with the young.

The grace of God does not demand that we be unnatural. I do not want you to take this caution I have given you as that of a growling misanthrope, hating hilarity. For you must have a spring bow if you want to make the arrow fly. But while this is so, I want you to be especially on guard in this matter, and let the religion of Jesus Christ control you in all your associations. I know young people who have meant well enough, but they have floated off into evil influences, and they have associated day by day with those who hated God and despised his commandments, and their characters are all depleted. I can see they are changed for the worse, but they are not aware of it. O young man, come out of that bad association. I do not know what it is. I do not know to what place you may have a private key.

... a man this power of prayer, and you give him almost omnipotence.

This afternoon you will see two Sabbath-school teachers. That one does not gain the attention of her class. This one does. What is the difference between them, their intellects being about equal? The first thought only of her own apparel. The other came from great prostration before God in earnest supplication, asking that God's mercy might come upon the school, and that in the afternoon she might gain the attention of those five or six immortals that would be around her. The one teacher had no control over her class. The other sits as with the strength of the Lord God Almighty.

A minister comes into the pulpit. He has a magnificent sermon, all the sentiments rounded according to the laws of rhetoric and fine sermonizing, and the truth makes no impression on the hearts of men. People go away and say: "Very beautiful, wasn't it?" A plain man comes into the pulpit. He has been on his knees before God, asking for an especial message that day, and the hearts of men open to the plain truth, the broken sentences strike into their consciences, and, though the people may disperse at the close of the services seemingly without having received any impression, that night voices will be lifted in some household: "Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?" Oh, this power of prayer! Pray! Pray!

Another word of counsel I have to give—be faithful in Bible research. A great many good books are coming out. We can not read half of them. At every revolution of the printing press they are coming. They cover our parlor tables, and are in our sitting rooms and libraries. Glorious books they are. We thank God every day for the work of the Christian printing-press. But I have thought that perhaps the followers of Christ sometimes allow this religious literature to take their attention from God's Word, and that there may not be as much Bible reading as there ought to be.

How is that with your own experience? Just calculate in your minds how much religious literature you have read during the year, and then how large a portion of the Word of God you have read, and then contrast the two and answer within your own soul whether you are giving more attention to the books that were written by the hand of man or that written by the hand of God. Now, you go to the drug store and you get the mineral waters, but you have noticed that the waters are not so fresh or sparkling or healthful as when you get these very waters at Saratoga or Sharon—getting them right where they bubble from the rock. And I have noticed the same thing in regard to the truth of the Gospel; while there is a good deal of refreshment and health of the Gospel of God as it comes through ...