

A KINDLY WARNING.

Dr. Talmage Speaks Concerning Evil Associations.

Aptly Illustrates His Text That "A Companion of Fools Shall Be Destroyed"—Advice for Young and Old.

[Copyright, 1900, by Louis Klopsch.] Washington, March 4.

In this discourse Dr. Talmage speaks on a theme which all men, young and old, will be glad to see discussed, and the kindly warning will no doubt in many cases be taken; text, Proverbs 13:20: "A companion of fools shall be destroyed."

"May it please the court," said a convicted criminal when asked by the judge what he had to say why sentence of death should not be pronounced upon him, "may it please the court, bad company has been my destruction. I received the blessing of good parents and in return therefor promised to avoid all evil associates. Had I kept my promise I should have avoided this shame and the burden of guilt which, like a vulture, threatens to drag me to justice for my many crimes. Although I once moved in high circles and was entertained by distinguished men, I am lost. Bad company did the work for me. Only one out of a thousand illustrations was that of the fact that "a companion of fools shall be destroyed." It is an invariable rule.

Here is a hospital with a hundred men down with the ship fever. Here is a healthy man who goes into it. He does not so certainly catch the disease as a good man will catch moral distemper if he consents to be shut up with the vicious and the abandoned. In the prisons of the olden time it was the custom to put the prisoners in a cell together, and I am sorry to say it is the custom still in some of our prisons; so that when the day of liberation comes, the men, instead of being reformed, are turned out brutes, not men, each one having learned the vices of all the rest.

We may in our worldly occupation be obliged to talk to and commingle with bad people, but he who voluntarily chooses that kind of association is carrying on a courtship with a Delilah which will shear the locks of his strength, and he will be tripped into perdition. Look over all the millions of the race, and you cannot show me a single instance where a man voluntarily associated with the bad for one year and maintained his integrity. Sin is catching; it is infectious; it is epidemic.

A young man wakes up in one of our great cities knowing only the gentlemen of the firm into whose service he has entered. In the morning he enters the store, and all the clerks mark him, measure him, discuss him. The bad clerks of that establishment, stand in some relation to him. The good clerks will wish him well, but they will wait for a formal introduction, and even after they have had the introduction they are very cautious as to whether they shall call him into their association before they know him very well.

But the bad young men in that establishment all gather around him. They patronize him, they offer to show him everything that there is in the city on one condition—that he will pay the expenses, for it always happens so when a good young man and a bad young man go together to a place of evil entertainment—the good young man always has to pay the charges. Just at the time the ticket is to be paid for or the champagne bill is to be settled the bad young man will affect embarrassment and feel around in his pockets and say: "Well, well, really I have forgotten my pocketbook."

In 48 hours after this innocent young man has entered the store the bad young men will gather around him, slap him on the shoulder with familiarity, and, if he is stupid in not being able to take certain allusions, will say: "Ah, my young friend, you will have to be broken in." And forthwith they go to work to "break him in."

Oh, young man, let no fallen young man slap you on the shoulder familiarly! Turn around and give a withering glance that will make the wretch cower in your presence. There is no monstrosity of wickedness that can stand before the glance of purity and honor. God keeps the lightnings of heaven in his own scabbard, and no human may reach them, but God gives to every young man a lightning which he may use, and that is the lightning of an honest eye. Anybody that understands the temptations of our great cities knows the use of one sermon like this, in which I try to enforce the thought that "a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

And, first, I charge you, avoid the skeptic—that is, the young man who puts his thumb in his vest and swaggers about, scoffing at your old-fashioned religion, and taking out of the Bible and turning over to some mysterious passage and saying: "Explain that, my friend, explain that. I used to think just as you do. My father and mother used to think just as you do. But you can't see me about the future. I used to believe in those things, but I've got over it." Yes, he has got over it, and you will get over it if you stay in his companionship much longer. For while he may not bring one argument against our holy Christianity, he will by scoffs and jeers and caricatures destroy your faith in that religion which was the comfort of your father in his declining years and the pillow on which your old mother lay a-dying.

That brilliant young skeptic will after awhile have to die, and his diamond

will flash no splendor into the eye of death. His hair will lie uncombed on the pillow. Death will come up, and this skeptic will say to him: "I cannot die. I cannot die." Death will say: "You must die. You have but ten seconds more to live. Your soul—give it to me right away. Your soul!" "Oh, no!" says the skeptic. "Do not breathe that cold air into my face. You crowd me too hard. It is getting dark in the room. Here—take my rings and take all the pictures in the room, but let me off." "No," says Death. "Your soul! Your soul!" Then the dying skeptic begins to say, "O God! Death says: 'You declared there was no God.' Then the dying skeptic says: 'Pray for me,' and Death says: 'It is too late to pray; you have only three seconds more to live, and I will count them off—one, two, three. Gone!' Where? Where? Carry him out and lay him down beside his old father and mother, who died under the delusions of the Christian religion singing the songs of victory.

Again, avoid the idlers—that is, those people who gather around the store or the shop or the factory and try to seduce you away from your regular calling and in your business hours try to seduce you away. There is nothing that would please them so well as to have you give up your employment and consort with them.

Idleness is the next door to villainy. When the police go to find criminals, where do they go to find them? They find them among the idle—those who have nothing to do, or, having something to do, refuse to engage in their daily work. Some one came to good old Ashbel Green and asked him why he worked at 80 years of age when it was time for him to rest. "Oh," he replied, "I work to keep out of mischief." And no man can afford to be idle. I care not how strong his moral character, he cannot afford to be idle.

But you say: "A great many people are suffering from enforced idleness. During the hard times there were a great many people out of employment." I know it, but the times of dullness in business are the times when men ought to be thoroughly engaged in improving their minds and enlarging their hearts. The fortunes to be made 20 years from now will be made by the young men who in the times when business was dull cultivated their minds and improved their hearts. They will get the fortunes after awhile, while those men who hang around their stores, never engaging in any useful occupation, will be as poor then as they are now. It is absurd for a Christian man to say he has nothing to do.

People go to Florence and to Venice and to Rome to see one of the works of the great masters. I think I can show you the picture of one of the great masters. "I went by the field of the slothful and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding, and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw and considered it well. I looked upon it and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that traveleth and thy want as an armed man." There is no more explosive passage in all the Bible than that. It first begins to hiss like the fuse of a cannon and then bursts like a 54-pounder. The old proverb was true: "The devil tempts most men, but idlers tempt the devil!" Therefore seek something to do. If no worldly business offers, then, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, go out on Christian toil, and the Lord will bless you, and the Lord will help you.

Again I counsel you, avoid the pleasure seeker, the man whose entire business it is to seek for recreation and amusement. I believe in the amusements of the world so far as they are innocent. I could not live without them. Any man of sanguine temperament must have recreation or die. And yet the amusements and recreations of life must administer to hard work. They are only preparative for the occupation to which God has called us.

God would not have given us the capacity to laugh if he did not sometimes intend us to indulge it. God hath hung in sky and set in wave and printed on grass many a roundelay. But all the music and the brightness of the natural world were merely intended to fit us for the earnest work of life. The thunderclod has edges exquisitely purpled, but it jars the mountain as it says: "I come down to water the fields." The flowers standing under the fence look gay and beautiful, but they say: "We stand here to refresh the husbandmen at the nooning." The brook frolics and sparkles and foams, but it says: "I go to baptize the moss; I go to slake the thirst of the bird; I turn the wheel of the mill; in my crystal cradle I rock muckshaw and water lily; I play, but I work."

Look out for the man who plays and never works. Look out for that man whose entire business is to play ball or sail a yacht or engage in any kind of amusement. These things are all beautiful and grand in their places, but when they become the chief work of life they become a man's destruction. George Brummel was admired of all England. He danced with peeresses and went a round of mirth and folly, until after awhile, exhausted of purse, ruined of reputation, blasted of soul, he begged a crust from a grocer, declaring as his deliberate opinion that he thought a dog's life was better than a man's.

These mere pleasureists will come around you while you are engaged in your work, and they will try to take you away. They have lost their places. Why not you lose your place? Then you will be one of them. Oh, my friends, before you go with these pleasure seekers, these men whose entire life is fun and amusement and recreation, remember while after a man has lived a life of

integrity and Christian consecration, kind to the poor and elevating to the world's condition, when he comes to die, he has a glorious reminiscence lying on his death pillow, the mere pleasureist has nothing by way of review but a torn playbill, a ticket for the race, an empty tankard or the cast out rinds of a carousal. And as in delirium of his awful death he clutches the goblet and presses it to his lips, the dregs falling on his tongue will begin to uncoil and hiss with the adders of an eternal poison.

Again, beware of the Sabbath breakers. Tell me how a young man spends his Sabbath, and I will tell you what are his prospects in business, and I will tell you what are his prospects for the eternal world. God has thrust into our busy life a sacred duty when we are to look after our souls. It is exorbitant after giving six days to the feeding and the clothing of these perishable bodies that God should demand one day for the feeding and the clothing of the immortal soul? Our bodies are seven-day clocks, and they need to be wound up, and if they are not wound up they run down into the grave. No man can continuously break the Sabbath and keep his physical and mental health. Ask those aged men, and they will tell you they never knew men who continuously broke the Sabbath who did not fall either in mind, body or moral principle. A manufacturer gave this as his experience. He said: "I owned a factory on the Lehigh. Everything prospered. I kept the Sabbath, and everything went on well. But one Sabbath morning I bethought myself of a new shuttle, and I thought I would invent that new shuttle before sunset, and I refused all food and drink until I had completed that shuttle. By sundown I had completed it. The next day, Monday, I showed to my workmen and friends this new shuttle. They all congratulated me on my great success. I put that shuttle into my. I enlarged my business; but, sir, that Sunday's work cost me \$30,000. From that day everything went wrong. I failed in business, and I lost my mill. Oh, my friends, keep the Lord's day. You may think it old fogy advice, but I give it to you now: 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work.' A man said that he would prove that all this was a fallacy, and so he did. "I shall raise a Sunday crop." And he plowed the field on the Sabbath, and then he put in the seed on the Sabbath and cultivated the ground on the Sabbath. When the harvest was ripe, he reaped it on the Sabbath, and he carried it into the mow on the Sabbath, and then he stood out defiant to his Christian neighbors and said: "There, that is my Sunday crop, and it's all garnered." After awhile a storm came up and a great darkness, and the lightnings of Heaven struck the barn, and away went his Sunday crop.

Again, I charge you, beware of association with the dissipated. Go with them and you will in time adopt their habits. Why is that man fallen against the curbstone, covered with bruises and beatings? He was a bright-faced lad as ever looked up from the nursery. His mother rocked him, prayed for him, fondled him, and would not let the night air touch his cheek and held him and looked down into his loving eyes and wondered for what high position he was being fitted. He entered life with bright hopes. The world beckoned him, friends cheered him, but the archers shot at him; vile men set traps for him, bad habits hooked fast to him with their iron grapples; his feet slipped on the way, and there he lies. Who would think that that uncombed hair was once toyed with by a father's fingers? Who would think that those bloated cheeks were ever kissed by a mother's lips? Would you guess that that thick tongue once made a household glad with its innocent prattle? Utter no harsh words in his ear. Help him up. Put the hat over that once many a brow. Brush the dust from that coat that once covered a generous heart. Show him the way to the home that once rejoiced at the sound of his footsteps, and with gentle words tell his children to stand back as you help him through the ball.

That was a kind husband once and an indulgent father. He will kneel with no more as once he did at family prayers—the little ones with clasped hands looking up into the heavens with thanksgiving for their happy home. Shake off the Sabbath breaker. Oh, turn your back upon these men. Shake off the skeptic. Shake off the idler. Shake off the pleasureist. You may do this work of ejection in politeness, but you may do it firmly. You are not under any circumstances to lose all the remembrance of the fact that you are a gentleman and must always act the gentleman. A young man said to a Christian Quaker: "Old chap, how did you get your money?" "Well," said the Quaker, "I got it by dealing in an article in which thou mayest deal if thou wilt—civility."

Be courteous, be polite, but be firm. Say "No" as if you meant it. If you say "No" in a feeble way, they will keep on with their importation and their temptation, and after awhile you will stand in silence, and then you will say, after they have gone on a little longer, "Yes," and then you are lost.

Oh, turn your back upon the banquet of sin! I call you to a better feast to-day. The promises of God are the fruits. The harps of Heaven are the music. The clusters of Eschol are pressed into the tankards. The sons of the daughters of the Lord Almighty are the guests, while standing at the quiet to pour the wine and divide the clusters and command the music. I welcome the guests is a daughter of God, on her brow the blossoms of paradise and in her cheek the flush of a festive summer. And her name is Religion. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

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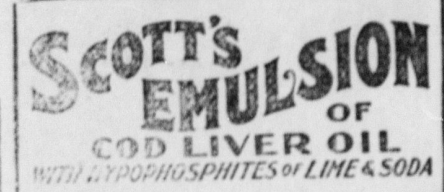
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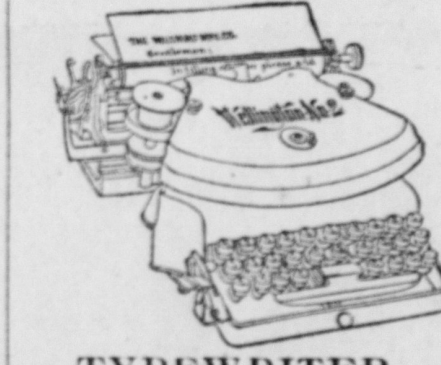
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