"HIDDEN TALENTS"

A Brilliant Sunday Sermon By Rev. Dr. Henry C. Swentzel.

Draws a New Lesson From the Parable—A Person Without a Grievance.

BROOKLYN, N. Y.—Dr. Henry C. Swentzel, rector of St. Luke's Church, preached Sunday morning on "Hidden Talents." He took his text from St. Matthew xxv:18: "He that had received one talent went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money." Dr. Swentzel said:

God holds the cornucopia of infinite and omnipotent love. With open-handed generosity He dispenses the gifts of His boundless wealth throughout the length and breadth of the whole creation. From myriad pulpits nature preaches eloquently of the divine philanthropy. The universe is not only a vast workshop, but a magnificent pleasure house for enjoyment. Every field is designed for a harvest, all the forests resound with symphonies and oratories; everywhere are mines of riches awaiting the toiler. God's plan includes all the best things for the multitude, and he who serves his mission may well say, "I have all and abound."

And yet how many are almost persuaded to protest against the doctrine of the liberality of the heavenly Father's provisions. They have more than a suspicion that our interpretation of His bounty does not square with the facts and experiences of human life. They are disposed to intimate that His ways are not equal; that He has fettered Himself by a hard and fast doctrine of foreordination, predestination and election; that His counsels are marred by what amounts practically to unjust discrimination and favoritism. Without pausing to emphasize the impiety of criticising Almighty God or to expose the futility and vanity of passing judgment upon His program for humanity, we ought to be persuaded even by our surroundings that the Lord is prompted ever by a masterful desire to promote the health and wealth, the power and happiness, of His children. If we were qualified to appreciate His plans for mankind, we would accept the world with its beauties and harmonies, its lights and shadows, its resplendent heavens and fragrant flowers, its overflowing granaries, its countless picture galleries, its monumental glories, as parables of divine sovereignty.

But the man with one talent is likely to present himself as an objector to this attractive and inspiring view of the Father's rulership. He is dissatisfied. He has a grievance. He is persuaded that he ought to have a better chance, larger privileges, greater opportunities, a more encouraging outlook. It is perfectly true that there are inequalities. All are not endowed with the same gifts. Some seem to have more while others have less; but there is undoubtedly a law of compensation which opens the way for a high general average of satisfaction in living, a satisfaction which is not affected by what are called success and failure, riches and penury. God never gives everything to any one person, but He does offer a generous gift to every soul, and all will find life to be worth a thousand times more than it costs if they will but do their duty. If the many would honestly do their best with what they have, a large share of present inequalities would disapear, and it would be clearer to all that the Almighty is truly a universal Father. Alas, who has done his best? If the complainer had but half filled the measure of his possibilities, if he had been willing to do what he easily could have done, if he had not hidden his talent, the situation to him would be changed, and he would be more perfectly in harmony with the life-creed proclaimed by revelation and by all the worlds.

Inasmuch as our Lord is the author of the parable of the talents, the religious story with its moral should be received with the utmost thoughtfulness. According to His teaching, everybody receives something, and the very smallest gift is one talent. A talent is a goodly sum of money—equal to a little less than $2000. That amount would be a promising starting capital to a young man of fair business ability. Many, it will be alleged, must begin life on a much smaller basis, for which there may be human reasons which are both regrettable and inexorable, and which we cannot stay to discuss. Ordinarily, however, each soul has a goodly start and sets out with a fair endowment. Generally speaking, everybody has a chance—he can be something, he can do something—he can serve his mission. It is wholesome to be reminded betimes that many of the men who have made history have sprung form a comparatively low origin. In every nation saints, heroes and leaders are, for the most part, born in humble cottages, the poor boys of not many yesterdays ago. To every soul God gives an adequate equipment. Work is the only royal road to excellence. There are people who expect to be carried on angels' wings to the goal of their ambition, but angels and their wings were made for no such purpose.

The trouble with the complaining man of one talent is that he has hidden his power in the earth. God made him to live a splendid life; the man has failed more or less utterly. He may be misunderstood, but far oftener he misunderstands himself. In taking stock of his assets he neglects to rate them even at their face value. He wonders why he is where he is; he alleges insuperable obstacles and insists that he has been sorely handicapped; he regards himself as a victim. It may be apparent that he is not so richly gifted as certain others are, but that is no reason why he should set up an inferior standard for himself and expect nothing as the outcome of his existence. Success is not a matter of talents. It is not true that they whose achievements have given them a place in the world's legion of honor were men whose shining talents, without industry and without development, won for them immortal distinction. All who have real strength are hard workers, whose towering object was not to get through the world with the least possible outlay of energy, who are willing to spend and be spent in living their lives. Brilliant abilities count for little. The high places in the world are seldom filled by people of genius, but by men and women who have simply made the most of their capacity. It is an ever recurring surprise that most unlikely souls come to the front in all the spheres of activity. Many a genius goes at the last to the potter's field, while memorials in marble or bronze are reared to commemorate the virtues and triumphs of characters that were not so rich in natural gifts as they were abundant in labors. Everybody is well enough endowed. The least we have is one talent, which, if it be rightly used, will suffice for our energies and fill the measure of a laudable ambition.

Everybody is good for something; nobody is necessarily good for nothing. The man with one talent has some power. We do not refer to his attributes, though these may be admirable; he may have faculties which are more or less notable; he may have memory, imagination, various gifts which perhaps he does not suspect. But he has a finer talent to be a man—the talent of faithfulness to the right, of courage for maintaining principle, of honesty and sturdiness for work; he has a talent that will give him a standing among his fellows, and that will make him valuable amid the various relationships of his life. By the grace of God he may hope to be something and do something, and he is in honor bound to make large exactions of himself. He may never take his place among the billionaires, or secure fame, or be known far outside of the small circle of his home and his shop, but everybody who tries to do his duty in his own station, whose example upholds righteousness, whose influence, be it much or little, is on God's side in the combat between good and evil, is a public benefactor, and his name, though almost unknown here, is written in heaven's book of worthies.

It is impossible to acquit the man with one talent who hid the divine gift. His wrong was not the misuse or the abuse, but the non-use, of his personal force. He does not belong to the category of the victims, he is not chargeable with iniquities which suggest that there may be some truth after all in the old, discarded notion of the total depravity of human nature, and yet the Lord says to him, "thou wicked and slothful servant." He was wicked, not because he had squandered or lost the gift, but only because he had hidden it.

That is just what thousands and thousands are doing to-day. They put their talent in the earth. In spite of all their worth they are stunted and impoverished because they are "of the earth, earthy." The worldly spirit is not restricted by any means to those who pile up colossal fortunes or who are the habitues of Vanity Fair. A beggar may be, and probably is, quite as much of a mammon worshiper as is the most vulgar money lover. They who fail may be even more worldly than they who succeed. However that may be, our present concern is with the admonition that warns us not to bury our talent by living solely for temporal goods. Every day we are exposed to the contagion of earthly domination. How easy it is to let ourselves down to a low degree of thought, desire and gratification. We are kin to the elements about us. We belong to two worlds—to earth as well as to heaven. With pardonable fondness we refer to our present abode as "mother earth." We came ourselves from its bosom. We get all that we have out of the ground—our food and raiment, our houses, our books, our sciences and arts, all the material blessings with which we are enriched. Here reposes all that was mortal of our beloved dead, and at their funeral rites the church said "earth to earth." Here the great have lived, the brave have fought for right and rights, and royal souls have done their work for the cause of progress. Here Jesus spent three and thirty years. His feet trod upon its hills and vales. His precious blood flowed down from His sacred body to its soil, and His mangled corpse lay in its tomb. How much the earth has in it to fascinate. Is it a marvel that so many fall before its seductions and hide the great and holy talent in the clay? How natural, but how wicked. To every one who buries the talent—his personal force—in worldliness comes the sharp condemnation, "thou wicked and slothful servant."

It is nothing less than a high crime to centre one's being in the earth. When he has the power to be a son of God, when he has an equipment that should get results, when he can be efficient and effective throughout his sphere, when he can make a contribution to the fund of goodness and happiness, what a sorry pity it is that he should put such possibilities into a hole. And yet that is precisely what so many are doing. Some of them are rich, while others are poor; some have knowledge and culture, while others are ignorant and hard, but they are all alike in that they have buried the precious gift. It matters not whether they are lofty or lowly, whether they live in a palace or a garret, they have erred grievously if they have buried the power which alone can make life worth living. What an unspeakable degradation it is to leave the plain where God would have us think and work and to descend to the slavery of a vulgar ambition for worldly concerns. To pass one's years without raising to the dignity and excellences of noble manhood and noble womanhood—to go on from year to year without recognizing the Deity—and without noting the privileges which Christ has assured—to reduce ourselves to the level of machinery, to set up a song and dance as though that were the greatest thing in the world—is to take ourselves into a region which is not fit for immortals. Let us do our work and enjoy our recreations, but let us also appreciate the doctrine that to be true men and true women is the highest possible estate. Away with the base delusion that the average person is called to a condition of inevitable inferiority, and that it is not for him to look for large personal development and excellence. All could be strong if they would use their talents.

We have personality. There is such a thing as the "personal equation." Everybody has a fair chance. The man who has buried his talent is apt to deny all this, and may possibly settle down to be a fatalist, a pessimist, a misanthrope, a chronic grumbler. How true the parable is to nature and to life. The complainant is out of harmony with everybody and everything. His gravamen is most unlovely. He may urge heredity by alleging that his antecedents were unfavorable and his birthright counts for nothing. He may point to circumstances as prohibitory and invincible when he would assert his right to be a man. He may charge that divine providence constantly thwarts him and reduces his every hope to ashes. In the last analysis he takes the position of the condemned man of the parable and says to the Lord: "I knew that Thou art an hard man," an allegation which is disproved by the fact that the Lord had given him a whole talent. Although the human heart recognizes some measure of responsibility, it attempts to argue the matter and sets up a defense, and it ends by laying the blame at the feet of God. The Father has done His part abundantly; it only remains for His children to do theirs; the talent has value only in its use.

St. Paul views this question from a most exalted standpoint. He says: "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are differences of administration, but the same Lord, and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God that worketh all in all, but the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal."

We speak of self-made men as though they were miracles. In referring to them as such as mean that, in spite of difficulties, they have attained remarkable excellence. But every worthy individual is self made by the grace of God. Even under the most favorable circumstances, a man, if he is to amount to anything, must make himself. It, therefore, behooves us to go to work upon ourselves. We ought to take ourselves more seriously in the highest possible sense. We have capacities. God has made us for some good. He has given us each one talent at least. The sons of God, we do not belong to the rubbish pile of the universe. If we will take ourselves in hand—if we will be ourselves and not try to be somebody else—if we will serve our own mission—if we will faithfully and honestly accept and meet the situation as we find it, we will surprise ourselves sooner or later when the results will begin to appear.

"While we live, let us live," or as the old Romans put it—"dum vivimus vivimus." But let us insist upon life in the best possible sense. There is capital enough to begin with. We can develop a sturdier fiber. We need not be ordinary, commonplace, vulgar, inane and insipid. Mediocrity is inexcusable. We can be high-toned, we can be splendid specimens of manhood and womanhood, we can be our best and do our best, we can be our true selves by growing more and more into the likeness of the strong Son of Man.

Influence of a Holy Life.

The subtle germ of Christ's truth will be borne on the secret atmosphere of a holy life into hearts which no preacher's voice could penetrate, where the tongue of men and of angels would fail; there is an eloquence in living goodness which will often prove persuasive. It is the eloquence of the summer heat when it basks upon the thick-ribbed ice—blows would but break it, but beneath the softest, gentlest, yet most potent influence, the hard, impenetrable masses melt away.—John Caird.

RAM'S HORN BLASTS.

THE big I is a mighty small thing in the world's eye.

Words do not make wisdom.

Service is the life-blood of love.

Heavenly laws lie at the basis of human morality.

When we take up another's burden God takes up ours.

Stolen fruits may taste sweet, but they soon sour on the stomach.

The love of Christ is the life of Christianity.

There are no weeping willows by the river of life.

There may be sinful gains, but there are no gainful sins.

A stony face is no proof of a heart strong in grace.

A gift that gives no grace must be a dangerous thing to have.

Delay is the fool's plan for cheating himself.

God's strategy is better than man's strength.

Many doubts vanish as soon as we try to define them.

THE SABBATH SCHOOL

International Lesson Comments For January 17.

Subject: The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus, Matt. iii., 13 to iv., 11—Golden Text, Matt. iii., 17—Memory Verses, iv., 3, 4—Commentary on the Day's Lesson.

I. The baptism (vs. 13-17). 13. "Cometh Jesus." So far as we know this was His first public act since He was twelve years old. "To Jordan." Probably at Aenon near to Salim (John 3: 2, 3), a day's journey from Nazareth. "Unto John." Although John was His cousin we are told (John 1: 33) that he "knew Him not;" which may mean that John did not know Jesus to be the Messiah. "To be baptized." Any confession of sin was of course out of the question. There was only a profession on the part of Jesus that as an Israelite He became subject to the law, and that He was connected with humanity by the ties of blood, of suffering and of love. This act was an endorsement of John and a solemn inauguration of his ministry.

14. "Forbad." Earnestly and pressingly opposed Him. "I have need," etc. Although John was filled with the Holy Ghost from his birth (Luke 1: 15), yet he needed the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire. He needed to receive a larger measure of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. 15. "Suffer it to be so now." These were the first words of Christ's public ministry. In this Jesus humbled Himself at the very outset. "Fulfil all righteousness." To leave nothing undone which would be honoring to the requirements of God. "He suffered Him." The same modesty which led him at first to decline the honor Christ offered him now caused him to perform the service Christ insisted upon him.

16. "The Heavens were opened." Luke says that Jesus prayed as soon as He was baptized (Luke 3: 21). Here is the first recorded prayer of Christ and its answer. It was when He was praying that the Spirit was sent down upon Him, and in all probability it was this that He was praying for. A threefold sign was given: 1. The Heavens opened. 2. The dove descended. 3. The Father spake. "He saw." Christ saw it (Mark 1: 10), and John saw it (John 1: 33, 34), and it is probable that all who were present saw it, for this was intended to be His public inauguration. "Like a dove." There has been a difference of opinion as to whether this was a real, literal dove. Luke says it was in a "bodily" shape like a dove (Luke 3: 22). 17. "My beloved Son." Jesus Christ is the Son of God from eternity. He never began to be His Son. He was also His Son because of His supernatural birth, and He was His Son "by special designation to the work of the world's Redeemer."

II. The first temptation (vs. 1-4). 1. "Then." Immediately after His baptism. Such are the violent alternations of human experience; baptized and tempted; approved of God and handed over to the devil. "Of the spirit." Luke says He was "full of the Spirit;" Mark says the Spirit driveth Him. A divine influence led Him on. "Into the wilderness." Tradition has fixed upon a high ridge called Quarantania, near Jericho. Mark says He was with the wild beasts. "To be tempted." Christ begins His work with a personal encounter with Satan. To tempt is, literally, to stretch out, to try the strength of. Temptation is the testing of a person. 2. "Forty days." Moses, Elijah and our Lord could fast forty days because they were in communion with God and living a heavenly life. Luke says He was tempted during the whole forty days. The struggle was powerful, personal and intensely real. Christ for our sakes met and conquered the tempter's utmost strength. "Afterward an hungered." After the forty days were ended. 3. "Tempter came." How Satan appeared to Christ we do not know, but if he came in bodily form it must have been as an angel of light. "If Thou be." Beware of temptation that comes with an if in its mouth. "The Son of God." The consciousness of His divine Sonship may now in a measure have been withheld. Alone in the wilderness and weak and worn from fasting, Satan saw his chance. "Stones . . . bread." You are hungry; now if You are the Son of God use the power You have to supply Your necessities, and thus prove Your divinity. In this first temptation Satan tempts our Lord, as he did Eve, by the bodily appetite. He appeals to the animal nature first. By this avenue he approaches and conquers the great majority of mankind. Beneath this temptation of bodily appetites all gluttons, drunkards and debauchees have fallen and become the devil's prey. 4. "It is written." Deut. 8: 3. Jesus answered the devil by using the sword of the Spirit. "Not live by bread alone." Human support depends not on bread, but upon "God's unfailing word of promise and pledge of all needful providential care."

III. The second temptation (vs. 5-7). 5. "Pinnacle of the temple." The scene changes from the wilderness to Jerusalem. Some well known pinnacle must have been intended, probably the royal porch on the southern side of the temple. 6. "Cast thyself down." In His first reply to the devil Jesus had shown His unbounded confidence in God. Now Satan takes Him at that very point. If Thou be the Son of God cast Thyself from this pinnacle. All the world will wonder at so grand an exploit. This was a temptation to presumption, or as Mr. Farrar says, to spiritual pride. "For it is written." The devil has a Bible, but he misquotes and misapplies. "Give his angels charge." A mutilated quotation of Psa. 91: 11. 7. "Tempt." Deut. 6: 16. To tempt God is to put Him to the proof—to demand evidence of His power and of His will to fulfil His promises, instead of waiting patiently and trusting. This temptation appealed to the love of show. Thos. carried away from God by worldly pleasures or the vanities of fashion fall here.

IV. The third temptation (vs. 8-11). 8. "Exceeding high mountain." Some high mountain in Judea, where a general view could be had of the country. "Sheweth . . . kingdoms of the world." The root of the third temptation lay in the supposition that the kingdoms of the world were the devil's kingdoms and that he could dispose of them. 9. "Worship me." Here the devil appears in his true character. Christ was probably asked to worship "not by an external act of homage, but by using force and establishing a temporal kingdom."

10. "Get thee hence." Jesus parleys with him no longer, but with authority commands him to go to his own place. The third temptation appealed to the ambition. By this temptation the great men of the world have fallen in myriads. 11. "Devil leaveth Him." Satan had made the strongest effort of which he was capable and had been baffled at every point. "Angels . . . ministered." Brought that food that was necessary to support nature.

How Jamaican Negroes Shave.

The Jamaica negroes, some of whom are great dandies in their way, make a soap out of cocoanut oil and home-made lye, and a fine soap it is, smooth and fragrant. This cocoanut oil soap is used for shaving. When a man wishes to have in the morning, he starts out with his cocoanut shell cup and his donkey-tail brush and a bottle. It is never any trouble to find an empty bottle in Jamaica, even in the mountains. At least twenty generations of thirsty people have lived there and thrown away the empty bottles. The man carries no mirror because he has none to carry. Not one negro cabin in a dozen has even a cheap looking-glass. But nature provides the mirror as well as the soap. The man goes to a convenient pool in the mountain stream, where the water is still, and there is his mirror. He breaks his bottle on a stone, and picks out a good, sharp piece. Then he lathers his face profusely and begins to scrape away with his piece of glass, which works almost as well as a sharp razor.

CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR TOPICS.

January 17—"How May I Overcome Temptations? I Cor. 10:12, 13; Heb. 4:14-16.

Scripture Verses—Rom. 6:16-23; 8: 35-39; 1 Cor. 15:56-58; Eph. 6:10-13; Phil. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:1; Heb. 2:18; 1 Peter 1:5-9; 2 Peter 2:9; 1 John 5:4, 5; Jude 24, 25; Rev. 3:10-12, 20, 21.

Lesson Thoughts.

Every temptation met and overcome makes us stronger to resist the next; but increasing strength must not breed over-confidence. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed."

We may have boldness to meet temptations and confidence that we can resist them; but it must be in the way of escape that God provides, and not by our own power or wisdom.

"Men that are seeking to escape yellow fever do not go to the tropics. Prove that you honestly wish to avoid temptation by avoiding her haunts."

Selections.

After we have got the better of the tempter, we must do as the mariners in a calm, mend our tackling, as not knowing how soon another storm may come.

I cannot shape my way
Where nameless perils ever may betide,
O'er slippery steeps whereon my feet may slide;
Some mighty hand I crave,
To hold, and help, and save,
And guide me ever when my steps would stray.

There was a Greek fighter that made this his prayer. "Give me light on the field!" Certainly half the battle, as Bishop Huntington says, is to see the adversary. To recognize clearly just what our temptations are is one long step toward overcoming them.

Some athletes are "overtrained." They are set to tasks that are beyond their strength, and the exercise that should add to their physical powers really diminishes them. But human souls that submit themselves to God are in the hands of a Trainer that makes no mistake. He will not suffer us to be tempted beyond what we can bear.

Prayer—O thou who art perfect in holiness, wisdom and might, we come to thee in our weakness and ignorance and sinfulness, praying that thou wilt supply our needs. Temptations meet us, and we fall because we trust in our own strength, which is only weakness. O help us rather to put on the whole armor of God, that we may withstand evil and live in purity and holiness for Christ's sake.

EPWORTH LEAGUE MEETING TOPICS.

January 17—My Place in the War Against Intemperance—Isa. 24. 9, 11; Hab. 2. 15; I Thess. 5. 6-8.

The particular woe of the lesson is against him who giveth his neighbor drink, who puts the bottle, or, as the Revised version indicates, places the venom, to his lips. Whatever the primary applipcation, does not any man, anywhere at any time, merit woe who puts the venomous, maddening bowl to his brother's lips, luring him to the shame of drunkenness? It applies not only to those who directly do it, but as well as those who do it through another.

Is not Intemperance the huge, champion villainy of the time? Look at him: A stupendous, hideous colossus of evil. Upon his head the golden helmet of avarice, upon his breast a coat of mail composed of glittering scales of license fees, upon his legs brazen greaves forged in political armories, between his shoulders a target of brass manufactured by a venal press. His armor-bearer, Moderate Drinking, goes before him. Scornfully he defies the armies of the living God—nay, inflicts bloody slaughter upon their beloved. He is the foremost foe of Christ's cause in the world to-day.

The war against him is on, thank God. It is and must be war to the death. The Church of Christ will not die, therefore intemperance must. Imperatively does Jesus summon his soldiery to follow him in this holy crusade. Neutrality is treason, lazy indifference a crime, selfish apathy a satanic sin against both man and God. A fireman who should be neutral when men are perishing in the flames, a member of the life-saving crew who should be a disinterested, idle spectator when the ship is being pounded to pieces on the rocks, would be criminals. What else should a Christian do but join in the fight against this evil, fight it in every legitimate way.

Be filled with the Spirit. Spirit-filled Christians make the steadiest, surest, most valorous, most courageous soldiers in any war against sin. An intensely spiritual Church is the thing before which intemperance cannot ultimately stand. Let Epworth Leaguers eagerly fulfill the first part of their pledge and this foe would have reason to quake. A spiritual Church sees things as through the eyes of its Lord, feels toward them as with his heart, and acts toward them as moved by his will.

Then pray. Pray earnestly, pray with courage, hope, triumphant faith, with heart agony. Pray for the drunkard, for the drunkard's family, for Christians that they may see, feel, act as Jesus would with reference to this evil; that they may quit whining. "It can't be done;" for all efforts and organizations that war against this monster, that leaders in the campaign may have wisdom; that statesmen may have vision and courage, that the nation may get its eyes opened, its heart fired, its will moved. Then, heart and soul enter practically into the temperance army.

An Egytian Wedding.

An Egyptian "fellah" of the Nile Delta makes as much fuss of his wedding as he can, for it costs him a lot of money. Every thing, indeed, is conducted on a hard cash basis, commencing with the purchase of the bride herself. In order to make a goodly show, therefore, the bridegroom musters all the horses, camels and donkeys he can lay hands on among his friends, besides hiring conveyances for the bride and her family. The wife, however, can scarcely be said to grace the brilliant pageant with her presence, as she is invisible, being seated in the closely covered litter seen on the foremost camel. The essence of ladylike behavior among the Moslems is retirement, and the more valued a bride the more is she guarded from the public gaze. So she is immured in her stuffy litter, while the miscellaneous cavalcade winds its way along, preceded by a weird and alarming native band, to the house of the proud and happy bridegroom.

THE GREAT DESTROYER

SOME STARTLING FACTS ABOUT THE VICE OF INTEMPERANCE.

Poem: How to Sign the Pledge—A Thrilling Scene Which Occurred at One of the Public Meetings During the Pledge-Signing Crusade.

Sign it in truth; with high purpose and pure,
Firmly resolved to the end to endure.

Sign it in hope; nor fear once 'tis too late,
For is closed not on any the temperance gate.

Sign it in faith; with thy heart and thy hand
Eager to work t'ward the victory planned.

Sign it with prayer; for thy own strength may fail,
But who rests upon God will be sure to prevail.

Sign it with joy; for it pleasure can bring,
Far more than strong drink, which at length leaves a sting.

Sign it at once; without parley or pause,
For you ne'er will regret having helped such a cause.

A Thrilling Scene.

Among the many hopeful signs indicating temperance progress, none more encouraging than the interest everywhere taken in the Twentieth Century pledge-signing crusade inaugurated by the National Temperance Society. Since that time nearly 3,000,000 pledges have been sent out free by the society in response to applications, and these applications have come from churches and Sabbath schools of all denominations and from all temperance organizations. Now the Epworth League plans a similar pledge-signing crusade.

Many of the reports that are being received by the society are deeply interesting. Some of them describe thrilling scenes as witnessed at public meetings. Take the following instance:

It was a mixed audience that gathered in the hall; among them was one poor woman who had stolen away from her poverty-stricken, ruined home, where she had left her babies who, weak with hunger, had went themselves to sleep. With borrowed cloak to hide her destitution this sorrowing woman had found a place among the crowd who had gathered to hear from a stranger how the victims of rum could be saved and their darkened homes made light.

With intense interest she listened to the speaker, who, in the tale he recited, was describing her own case. He tells of hope; but no—that never can be hers. If he, her husband was here, perhaps—and then a deep, deep sigh bursts from her lips; but she listens still, and more intently to the speaker's moving words, until her heart is full, and looking around to see what effect the words of the speaker have upon her neighbors.

What ails the woman? Whom has she seen among the crowd? Her cheeks are flushed with burning crimson and her eyes are bright with living fire. It is—it must be him! She cannot be mistaken in him. Yes, 'tis her husband. Far back amongst the crowd he stands with folded arms, his gaze intent upon the speaker's face; deep earnestness is stamped on every feature as he gazes on.

See, he dashes a tear-drop from his eye. What has moved? The simple story of a woman's faith—a wounding patience. The wife watches him. She sees him dash away the tear-drop. A gathering mist is in her own eyes, but she forgets it all; forgets all but her other self. Now the speaker closes, and there is a stirring among the crowd. Stepping down from the platform the speaker takes his place by a table on which is an open book, and in kindly, persuasive tones invites the audience to sign the pledge.

Make way! The figure of a man advances down the aisle. Steadily he presses his way to the table. Behind that figure is a female form—a shadow, a pale, faded thing she feels that she cannot stand, but leans upon his shoulder with one hand clasping his arm.

"There, I have signed!" exclaims the man, "and now, my wife, come home and let us pray to-night." Stop but one moment. What a hand is hers? So thin, so trembling; yet she grasps as if it were a rod of iron to inscribe deep words of mercy on the rock forever.

They pass out together—that penniless and friendless pair, strong in each other's truth, rich in each other's love.

Weeks glide away—months—and to-day they are now so happy; blest with a beautiful home and rosy children.

Such are the scenes which cheer on every hand the laborers in this pledge-signing crusade.—The National Advocate.

A Word to the Boys.

What do you think, young friends, of the hundreds of thousands who are trying to cheat themselves and others into the belief that alcoholic drinks are good for them? Are they to be pitied and not blamed? Do you want to be one of those wretched men? If we are to have drunkards in the future, some of them are to come from the boys to whom I am writing; and I ask you again if you want to be one of them? No, of course you don't! Well, I have a plan for you that is just as sure to save you from such a fate as the sun is to rise to-morrow morning. It never failed; it never will fail; and I think it worth knowing. Never touch liquor in any form. That is the plan, and it is not only worth knowing, but it is worth putting in practice.

I know you don't drink now, and it seems to you as if you never would. But your temptation will come, and will probably come in this way: You will find yourself some time with a number of companions, and they will have a bottle of wine on the table. They will drink and offer it to you. They will regard it as a manly practice, and very likely they will look upon you as a milksop if you don't indulge with them. Then what will you do? Eh, what will you do? Will you say, "No, no! none of that stuff for me! I know a trick worth half a dozen of that!" or will you take a glass with your own common sense protesting, and your conscience making the whole draught bitter, and a feeling that you have damaged yourself, and then go off with a hot head and a skulking soul that at once begins to make apologies for itself, and will keep doing so all this life? Boys, do not become drunkards.—J. G. Holland.

A Growing Idea.

North Carolina Baptist, Fayetteville, says: "The average magazine of to-day is cursing the people with flashy liquor advertisements. To advertise the stuff is to wish success to the advertiser. And his success means failure, shame and ruin to many people. We want to see a crusade against this kind of advertising. Public opinion, rightly directed, can stop these advertisements."

The Crusade in Brief.

The United States drinks enough liquor each year to float all her battleships.

If ever hater of the drink evil and friends of temperance would give regularly even a trifle to the reform, the movement would make rapid progress.

Through the great Washingtonian movement in Ohio 60,000 took the pledge. In Pennsylvania 29,000; in Kentucky, 30,000, and multitudes in all parts of the land.

If Christian business men would cease to be so everlastingly timorous in their opposition to the saloon power the bright day when the rumsellers would be cowed would dawn more speedily.

In the great battle against intemperance and vice many Christians prefer a toy pistol to a Krupp gun.

We license men to sell drink. The drink sold makes men drunk. The drunkard commits murder. The murderer is hanged. Who is responsible?

To legalize the saloon is moral robbery, intellectual ruin and spiritual suicide. Does your vote help to legalize it? The vote of the American citizen is one of the greatest moral levers, or one of the greatest crime forces in our civilization.

Alderman White, of Birmingham, speaking at Cardiff, said: "I could give you 100 cases, and 100 after that, and 100 after that, of men who have come under my notice who have become trophies of Divine grace through the simple act of signing the pledge and keeping it."

The Sunday Breakfast Table

The Lens.

I who have barbored doubt, am now
A freeman, ridden of my fears;
Clear writ across the morning's brow
I read the promise of the years.

It dazzles on the face of noon,
Limned there in letters planet-bright;
And though there shine nor star nor moon,
I mark it in the front of night.

'Tis through the lens of Faith I heed
The huddled flight of all my fears;
'Tis through the lens of faith I read
The radiant promise of the years.
—Clinton Scollard.

The Prodigal Son.

This story has grown so familiar through sermon, song and story that it makes but little impression to-day, and the prodigal sons, jocosely called "probable sons," are grown both more prodigal and more probable.

The modern prodigal son says to his Father: "Heavenly Father, give me the portion of the good things of this life which are my birthright—health, wealth, fame, friends, beauty; all that you mean shall be mine." Then straightway, scarcely stopping to value the great fortune that is placed in his careless hands, he takes his way into a far country, a place as far from his Heavenly Father as it is possible for him to get, where he cannot even visit Him on Sundays, because the land into which he has journeyed with his birthright is one in which they have no Sabbath.

It would seem that he does not know the limit of his substance, for he wastes it with a lavish hand, never stopping to think that there may be an end to it. His health! How he spends it, burning up his very life tissues in wanton pleasuring, and expecting them to gush forth fresh the next morning. His fame, his influence, his friends—he draws upon them all as if they were inexhaustible.

Now, had he been at home, in close touch with the Father who had first given him these gifts, they might have been renewed, for the Heavenly Father's wealth is countless and He loves to do for His own. But suddenly the supply of all his fortune runs dry. And now, just as in the days of the first Prodigal Son, when this happens, the next step for him generally is to "hire himself to a citizen of that country," that far land away from God.

He does not like to feed pigs. He would not have chosen to engage in a questionable business when he first came out there to live. It all seemed pleasant then. But now it seems that he is obliged to accept this disagreeable, loathsome task. He does not think that he may, instead, return to his Father. How many prodigals, in need of money and offered a chance to do some dirty work, remember that instead they may even then return to God, confess their sins and be forgiven?

No, every prodigal thinks he has got to feed the pigs. He must accept that position in a brewery, or work on Sunday, or carry on some dishonest dealing, for the "citizen" in that far country has him in his power, and not until he has reached the depths of humiliation, the utter emptying out of self and the entire acknowledgment of the greatness of his Father, is he willing to return home. Notice that the Prodigal Son was not doubtful of his Father's reception at any time, but only asked to be made a servant instead of a son because he felt his entire unworthiness.

And was ever Father like our Father in heaven? The robe of righteousness He puts upon the wanderer, signifying a cleansing from all sin. The ring He puts upon the finger to signify that he is not only forgiven, but is to carry about with him a sense of his Father's great love. His feet are shod with precious promises that he may go forward in the way of peace, and then the fatted calf is killed that not only may he be forgiven and rejoice and feel once more his Father's love, but he may also be happy in it and think no more of his sins, for they are utter'y forgiven.

There is a point not to be forgotten in the Father's talk with the elder brother. "My child," He says, "you are always with Me. Everything I have is yours." Is there the least bit of gentle reproach that the elder brother had not exercised all his privileges? Is it not possible that the elder brother, if he had lived closer to his Father's heart, might have been better understood and partaken of His deep love for the wandering, sinning brother?—Grace Livingston Hill, in the New York Mail and Express.

The Open Heart, the Attentive Ear.

Never a day passes, hardly an hour in which the cry for help of somebody worthy of help—and all who need it are worthy of it in some way—is not near us, if we would but open our eyes to see, our ears to hear and our hearts to think. Therefore every day and hour brings us a new responsibility. None of us may know how much of the blood of our brothers and sisters may be crying out against us from the ground, how many appeals for help arrogantly or pitiantly unheeded by us, have preceded death and ruin which we might have averted or postponed. As we hope to be listened to when we cry aloud or make our mute, pathetic appeals, as we may live to hold in our hearts the longing that somebody will understand what we cannot or dare not tell and will stretch out the hand to help, whether it be for the relief of unspoken necessity or hidden distress, with influence, sympathy or consolation, so should we teach ourselves to look and listen for opportunity to help. It is impossible for us to make better investments of time, patience or money.

A Golden Text.

A lady tells of a visit she made at one time in a beautiful home where lived a dear old lady, Aunt Abby. Seeing her sitting in her rocking-chair by the window one day, and looking a bit lonely, as she passed by she put her arm around her and kissed her cheek. The old lady flushed with pleasure, and said, "Thank you, dear. Thank you." "Why, Aunt Abbie," said the lady, "I am surprised that you should seem to care so much." "My dear," she said, earnestly, "kiss your mother; kiss her often. You don't know how much good it will do her. Ah! we kissed them so much when we were little ones, the darlings! But now they have so much to do, and so many cares, it is not strange that they seem to forget. They are so kind and good. They want us to have everything, and more than we need. It is only that they are always so busy. Don't forget, dear, to kiss your mother every day. It will make her very happy, and—when she is gone, the memory will be all the sweeter."

Having Faith.

I do not know when or how it may please God to give you the quiet of mind you need; but I tell you that I believe that it is to be had; and in the meantime you must go on doing your work, trusting in God even for this.—George Macdonald.

Seek and Find.

Find your purpose and fling your life out to it, and, the loftier your purpose is, the more sure you will be to make the world richer with every enrichment of yourself.—Phillips Brooks.

Coin on a Needle Point.

To spin a coin on a needle point: Insert a needle, head downward, in the cork of a bottle, and in another cork cut a slit that will just allow a coin to be held in it. In this cork stick the prongs of two forks, opposite to each other, and so that they will incline downward. The forks must be alike and of the same weight. Now, to spin the coin on the needle point, you have only to place the rim on the point, and as the forks establish an equilibrium the little system will work very nicely without danger of an upset or a fall.

COMMERCIAL REVIEW.

General Trade Conditions.

R. G. Dun & Co.'s "Weekly Review of Trade" says: Violent fluctuations in cotton and uncertainty regarding the situation in the Far East were the only factors in the business situation during the holiday week. Numerous expressions of confidence are heard regarding the future, however, especially at the West and South. Manufacturing plants have taken a longer vacation than last year.

Textile mills are confronted with a lack of proper proportion between prices of raw material and finished products, and it is evident that costs of production must be held down in some way or much machinery will become idle. Transportation lines are well engaged in handling grain, live stock, steel and lumber, while earnings thus far reported for December exceed the previous year an average of 5.6 per cent.

Few new contracts for iron and steel are reported, yet the general level of quotations is fairly maintained, and better conditions are expected early in 1904. Several special transactions are reported in billets and wire rods at concessions, but these do not affect list figures.

Failures this week numbered 232 in the United States, against 208 last year, and in Canada 17, compared with 8 a year ago.

LATEST MARKET QUOTATIONS.

Four—Spring clear, $3.85@4.05; best Patent $5.45; choice Family $4.35.

Wheat—New York No. 2, 90c; Philadelphia No. 2, 88½@89c; Baltimore No. 2, 88@88¼c.

Corn—New York, No. 2, 52c; Philadelphia No. 2, 43; Baltimore No. 2, 48¾c.

Oats—New York No. 2, 42c; Philadelphia No. 2, 43c; Baltimore No. 2, 42@43c.

Hay—No. 1 timothy, large bales, ——@$14.50; do, small bales, ——@$14.50; No. 2 timothy $13.50@14.00; No. 3 timothy, $12.00@13.00.

Green Fruits and Vegetables—Apples—Western Maryland and Pennsylvania, packed, per brl $1.50@2.50; do, New York, assorted, per brl $2.25@3.00; do, do, Baldwins, per brl $2.50@2.75; do, do, Kings, per brl $3.00@3.50; do, do, Gills, per brl $3.25@3.50; do, do, Tallman Sweets, per brl $2.25@2.50; do, New York Greenings, per brl $2.25@2.75; do, New York, No. 2s, per brl $1.25@1.75. Beets—Native, per bunch 1½@2c. Broccoli—New York, box, 20@25c. Cabbage—New York, per ton, domestic, $25.00@30.00; do, New York State, per ton, Danish, $30.00@35.00. Cranberries—Cape Cod, per brl, $6.50@8.00; do, per box $1.75@2.25. Celery—Native, per bunch 4@5c. Carrots—Native, per bunch 2@2½c. Eggplants—Florida, per basket $2.00@2.50. Grapes—Concords, per 5-lb basket 11@12c; do, Catawba, do, 11@12c. Horseradish—Native,