INFLUENCE OF CLUBS.

Dr. Talmage portrays in a clear and concise manner the good and bad effect on a man's life of these attractive places. His text is II Samuel ii, 14, "Let the young men now arise and play before us."

There are two armies encamped by the pool of Gibeon. The time hangs heavily on their hands. One army proposes a game of sword fencing. Nothing could be more healthful and innocent. The other army accepts the challenge. Twelve men against twelve men, the sport opens. But something went adversely. Perhaps one of the swordsmen got an unlucky clip or in some way had his ire aroused, and that which opened in sportfulness ended in violence, each one taking his contestant by the hair and then with the sword thrusting him in the side, so that that which opened in innocent fun ended in the massacre of all the twenty-four sportsmen. Was there ever a better illustration of what was true then and is true now, that that which is innocent may be made destructive?

At this season of the year the clubhouses of our towns and cities are in full play. I have found out that there is a legitimate and an illegitimate use of the clubhouse. In the one case it may become a healthful recreation, like the contest of the twenty-four men in the text when they began their play: in the other case it becomes the massacre of body, mind and soul, as in the case of these contestants of the text when they had gone too far with their sport. All intelligent ages have had their gatherings for political, social, artistic, literary purposes—gatherings characterized by the blunt old Anglo-Saxon designation of "club."

If you have read history, you know that there was a King's Head Club, a Ben Jonson Club, a Brothers' Club, to which Swift and Bolingbroke belonged; a Literary Club, which Burke and Goldsmith and Johnson and Boswell made immortal; a Jacobin Club, a Benjamin Franklin Junto Club—some of these to indicate justice, some to favor the arts ,some to promote good manners, some to despoil the habits, some to destroy the soul. If one will write an honest history of the clubs of England, Ireland, Scotland, France and the United States for the last 100 years, he will write the history of the world. The club was an institution born on English soil, but it has thrived well in American atmosphere. Who shall tell how many belong to that kind of club where men put purses together and open house, apportioning the expense of caterer and servants and room, and having a sort of domestic establishement—a style of clubhouse which in my opinion is far better than the ordinary hotel or boarding-house? But my object now is to speak of clubhouses of a different sort, such as the Cosmos or Chevy Chase or Lincoln Club of this capital, or the Union Leagues of many cities, the United States Service Club of London, the Lotos of New York, where journalists, dramatists, sculptors, painters and artists from all branches gather together to discuss newspapers, theatres and elaborate art, like the Americus, which camps out in Summer time, dimpling the pool with its hook and arousing the forest with its stag hunt; like the Century Club, which has its large group of venerable lawyers and poets; like the Army and Navy Club, where those who engaged in warlike service once on the land or the sea now come together to talk over the days of carnage; like the New York Yacht Club, with its floating palaces of beauty, upholstered with velvet and paneled with ebony, having all the advantages of electric bell and of gaslight and of king's pantry; like the American Jockey Club, to which belong men who have a passionate fondness for horses, fine horses, as had Job when, in the Scriptures, he gives up a sketch of that king of beasts ,the arch of its neck, the nervousness of its foot, the majesty of his gait, the wrilwind of its power, crying out: "Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?" During the day they are comparatively lazy places. Here and there an aged man reading a newspaper, or an employee dusting a sofa ,or a clerk writing up the accounts, but when the curtain of the night falls on the natural day then the curtain of the clubhouse hoists for the entertainment. Let us hasten up now the marble stairs. What an imperial hallway! See, here are parlors on the side, with the upholstery of the Kremlin and the Tuileries, and here are dining halls that challenge you to mention any luxury that they cannot afford, and here are galleries with sculpture and paintings and lithographs and drawings from the best of artists. Cropsey and Bierstadt and Church and Hart and Gifford—pictures for every mood, whether you are impassioned or placid; shipwreck or sunlight over the sea, Sheridan's ride or the noonday party of the farmers under the trees, foaming deer pursued by the hounds in the Adirondacks or the sheep on the lawn. On this side there are reading rooms where you find all books, from hermeneutics to the fairy tale. Coming in and out there are gentlemen, some of whom stay ten minutes, others stay many hours.

But the evening is passing on ,and so we hasten through the hall, and down the steps into the street, and from block to block until we come to another style of clubhouse. Opening the door, we find the fumes of strong drink and tobacco something almost intolerable. These young men at this [illegible] they are at from the flushed cheek, the intent look, the almost angry way of tossing the dice or of moving the "chips." They are gambling. At another table are men who are telling vile stories. They are three-fourths intoxicated, and between 12 and 1 o'clock they will go staggering, hotting, swearing, shouting on their way home. That is an only son. On him all kindness, all care, all culture has been bestowed. He is paying his parents in this way for their kindness. That is a young married man, who only a few months ago at the altar made promises of kindness and fidelity, every one of which he has broken. Walk through and see for yourself. Here are all the implements of dissipation and of quick death. As the hours of the night go away the conversation becomes imbecile and more debasing. Now it is time to shut up. Those who are able to stand will get out on the pavement and balance themselves against the lamppost or against the railings of the fence. The young man who is not able to stand will have a bed improvised for him in the clubhouse, or two not quite so overcome with liquor will conduct him to his father's house, and they will ring the doorbell, and the door will open, and the two imbecile escorts will introduce into the hallway the ghastliest and most hellish spectacle that ever enters a front door—a drunken son. If the dissipating clubhouses of this country would make a contract with the inferno to provide it 10,000 men a year, and for twenty years, on the condition that no more should be asked of them, the clubhouses could afford to make that contract, for they would save homesteads, save fortunes, save bodies, minds and souls. The 10,000 men who would be sacrificed by that contract would be but a small part of the multitude sacrificed without the contract. But I make a vast difference between clubs. I have belonged to four clubs—a theological club, a ball club and two literary clubs. I got from them physical rejuvenation and moral health. What shall be the principle? If God will help me, I will lay down three principles by which you may judge whether the club where you are a member or the club to which you have been invited is a legitmate or an illegitimate clubhouse.

First of all I want you to test the club by its influences on home, if you have a home. I have been told by a prominent gentleman in the club life that three-fourths of the members of the great clubs of these cities are married men. That wife soon loses her influence over her husband who nervously and foolishly looks upon all evening absence as an assault on domesticity. How are the great enterprises of art and literature and beneficence and public weal to be carried on if every man is to have world bounded on one side by his front doorstep, and on the other side by his back window, knowing nothing higher than his own attic of nothing lower than his own cellar? That wife who becomes jealous of her husband's attention to art or literature or religion or charity is breaking her own scepter of conjugal power. I know an instance where a wife thought that her husband was giving too many nights to Christian service, to charitable service, to prayer-meetings and to religious convocation. She systematically decoyed him away until now he attends on church and is on a rapid way to destruction, his morals gone, his money gone, and, I fear, his soul gone. Let any Christian wife rejoice when her husband consecrates evenings to the service of God, or to charity ,or to art, or to anything elevated, but let not men sacrifice home life to club life. I can point out to you a great many names of men who are guilty of this sacrilege. They are as genial as angels at the clubhouse and as ugly as sin at home. They are generous on all subjects of wine suppers, yachts and fast horses, but they are stingy about the wife's dress and the children's shoes.

I tell you there are thousands of houses in the cities being clubbed to death. There are clubhouses where membership always involves domestic shipwreck. Tell me that a man has joined a certain club, tell me nothing more about him for ten years, and I will write his history if he be still alive. The man is a wine guzzler, his wife broken-hearted or prematurely old, his fortune gone or reduced, and his home a more name in a directory. Here are six secular nights in the week. "What shall I do with them?" says the father and the husband. "I will give four of those nights to the improvement and entertainment of my family, either at home or in good neighborhood. I will devote one to charitable institutions. I will devote one to the club." I congratulate you. Here is a man who says: "I will make a different division of the six nights. I will take three for the club and three for other purposes." I tremble. Here is a man who says, "Out of the six secular nights of the week I will devote five to the clubhouse and one to the home, which night I will spend in scowling like a March squall, wishing I was out spending it as I had spent the other five." That man's obituary is written. Not one out of 10,000 that ever gets so far on the wrong road ever stops.

I think that damage is often done by the scions of some aristocratic family who belong to one of these dissipating clubhouses. People coming up from humbler classes feel it an honor to belong to the same club, forgetting the fact that many of the sons and grandsons of the large commercial establishments of the last generation are now, as to mind, imbecile; as to body, diseased; as to morals, rotten. They would have got through their property long ago if they had had full possession of it, but the wily ancestors who earned the money by hard knocks foresaw how it was to be be, and they tied up everything in the will. Now, there is nothing of that unworthy descendant but his grandfather's name and roast beef rotundity. And yet how many steamers there are which feel honored to lash fast to that worm-eaten tug, though it drags them straight into the breakers.

A third test by which you may know whether the club to which you belong or the club to whose membership you are invited ,is a legitimate club or an illegitmate club, is this: What is its effect on your sense of moral and religious obligation? Now, if I should take the names of all the people in any audience and put them on a roll and then I should lay that roll back of the organ and 100 years from now some one should take that roll and call it from A to Z there would not one of you answer. I say that any association that makes me forget that fact is a bad association.

The influence which some of the clubhouses are exerting is the more to be deplored because it takes down the very best men. The admission fee sifts out the penurious and leaves only the best fellows. They are frank, they are generous, they are whole-souled, they are talented. Oh, I begrudge the devil such a prize! After awhile the frank look will go out of the face and the features will be haggard, and when talking to you, instead of looking you in the eye, they will look down, and every morning the mother will kindly ask, "My son, what kept you out so late last night?" and he will make no answer, or he will say, "That's my business." Then some time he will come to the store or the bank cross and befogged, and he will neglect some duty, and after awhile he will lose his place, and then with nothing to do he will come down at 10 o'clock in the morning to curse the servant because the breakfast is cold. The lad who was a clerk in the cellar has got to be chief clerk in the great commercial establishment; the young man who ran errands for the bank has got to be cashier; thousands of the young men who were at the foot of the ladder have got to the top of the ladder, but here goes the victim of the dissipating clubhouse, with staggering step and blood-shot eye and mud-bespattered hat set sidewise on a shock of greasy hair; his cravat dashed with cigar ashes. Look at him! Pure hearted young man, look at him! The clubhouse did that. I know one such who went the whole round, and turned out of the higher clubhouses, went into the lower clubhouses, and on down, until one night he leaped out of a third-story window to end his wretchedness.

Let me say to fathers who are becoming dissipated, your sons will follow you. You think your son does not know. He knows all about it. I have heard men who say, "I am profane, but never in the presence of my children." Your children know you swear. I have heard men say, "I drink, but never in the presence of my children." Your children know you drink. I describe now what occurs in hundreds of households in this country. The tea hour has arrived. The family are seated at the tea table. Before the rest of the family arise from the table the father shoves back his chair, says he has an engagement, lights a cigar, goes out, comes back after midnight, and that is the history of 365 nights of the year. Does any man want to stultify himself by saying that that is healthy, that that is right, that that is honorable? Would your wife have married you with such prospects?

Oh, my heart aches! I see men struggling against evil habits, and they want help. I have knelt beside them and I have heard them cry for help, and then we have risen, and he has put one hand on my right shoulder and looked into my face with an infinity of earnestness which the judgment day will have no power to make me forget, as he has cried out with his lips scorched in ruin, "God help me!" For such there is no help except in the Lord God Almighty. I am going to make a very stout rope. You know that sometimes a ropemaker will take very small threads and wind them together until after awhile they become ship cable. And I am going to take some very small, delicate threads and wind them together until they make a very stout rope. I will take all the memories of the marriage day, a thread of laughter, a thread of light, a thread of music, a thread of banqueting, a thread of congratulation, and I twist them together and I have one strand. Then I take a thread of the hour of the first advent in your house, a thread of the darkness that preceded and a thread of the light that followed, and a thread of the beautiful scarf that little child used to wear when she bounded out at eventide to greet you, and then a thread of the beautiful dress in which you laid her away for the resurrection. And then I twist all these together, and I have another strand. Then I take a thread of the scarlet robe of a suffering Christ, and a thread of the white raiment of your loved ones before the throne, and a string of the harp cherubic, and a string of the heart seraphic, and I twist them together, and I have a third strand. "Oh," you say, "either strand is strong enough to hold fast a world!" No. I will take these strands and I will twist them together, and one end of that rope I will fasten, not to the communion table, for it shall be removed; not to the pillar of the organ, for that will crumble in the ages, but I wind it round and round the cross of a sympathizing Christ, and having fastened one end of the rope to the cross I throw the other end to you. Lay hold of it! Pull for your life! Pull for heaven!

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

International Lesson for January 10, 1898.—Beginning of Jesus' Ministry—Matt. 4:17-25.

[Arranged from Peloubet's Notes.]

GOLDEN TEXT. The people which sat in darkness saw great light. Matt. 4:16.

THE SECTION includes the general view of Christ's ministry in Galilee, as given in Matt. 4:12-25, and the parallels, and a glance at Christ's few earlier works there (1) John 2:1-11; (2) John 4:43-54; (3) Luke 4:16-31.

PARALLELS.—Mark 1:14-20. Luke 4:14, 15. 5:1-11. With vs 23-25. Mark 1:35-39; Luke 4:42-44

TIME.—A. D. 28. Spring and summer, a year and a half after the temptation

LESSON COMMENT

I. The First Year of Jesus' Ministry.—A. D. 27. The Judean Ministry. The Year of Beginnings. Recorded chiefly by John, chaps. 1-4. The chief events were the first Disciples, the first Miracle, the first Reform, the first Discourse, the first Tour, the first Converts in Samaria. John the Baptist was still preaching and preparing the way.

II. Opening of the Great Galilean Ministry, which extended from December, A. D. 27, to October, A. D. 29—a year and nine months. The first part of this is The Second Year of Jesus' Ministry, A. D. 28, which may best be called The Year of Development—the growth from the small beginnings of the first year into a great work, with marked results.

III. A General View of His Galilean Ministry.—Vs. 17-25. First. The Field. Galilee contained about 2,000 square miles, or about one-third of Palestine proper, with a population of 3,000,000. Josephus says that it included 204 cities and villages, the smallest of which had 15,000 inhabitants. The Sea of Galilee "was covered with vessels engaged in traffic and fisheries.

Second. The Preaching of Jesus.—V. 17. "From that time:" From His coming into Galilee, after the imprisonment of John. "Jesus began:" Jesus had been teaching for more than a year, but for most part privately and individually; but now began a new era; the preparatory work was completed; John had ceased preaching; Jesus had gained followers enough to enter fully upon His work, and "preach"—i. e., as the Greek word means, proclaim as a herald—His message from God, and announce publicly the coming of the kingdom, as a herald running before the king announces his approach. "Repent:" Change your mind and conduct. "For the kingdom of Heaven:" The new Heavenly community about to be established by a new message from God, a new means of salvation through the life and death of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Is at hand," in the person and teachings of the Son of God. It was the beginning of a new era.

Third. The Calling of Helpers for Work and Training.—Vs. 18-22. 18. "And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee:" On the first morning after His arrival at Capernaum, and probably these busy fishermen did not know of His arrival till He spoke to them.

"Simon called Peter," the Rock, "and Andrew his brother:" These had become followers of Christ at the very beginning of His ministry, more than a year before (John 1:35-44.) But after being with Jesus for a time they again returned to their business for support.

19. "And He saith unto them:" The circumstances in which this call was made are related with much greater fulness by Luke (5:1-11.)

"Follow me," not only be a disciple, but spend your time in going around with me, to learn, to help, to be trained for future work. "I will make you fishers of men:" You shall draw men into the kingdom of Heaven, as you have drawn fishes ashore by your skill.

20. "And they straightway:" There was no indecision. They knew well Him who had called them. "Left their nets, and followed Him:" Their nets were the means of their living, and they gave them up and trusted to the precarious living of a poor man.

21. "James:" The Greek form of Jacob. He became the first martyr among the apostles (Acts 12:2), "son of Zebedee" (Jehovah's gift.) "John:" The disciples whom Jesus loved.

22. "They immediately left the ship and their father:" The call of God is above all earthly demands (Matt. 10:37.)

Fourth. His Methods of Work.—Vs. 23-25. 23. "And Jesus went about all Galilee:" This was His first tour of the country. "Teaching in their synagogues:" The Jewish churches of that day, where any distinguished teacher could speak. This was probably interpreting the Scriptures, and was to be distinguished from "preaching," which was heralding, proclaiming "the Gospel of the kingdom" of God, which was at hand. It was the good news of God's fatherly love and care, of His forgiveness of sin, of knowledge of the way of life, of the power of the Holy Spirit, of new light breaking over all the earth. "Healing all manner of sickness:" Severe, dangerous diseases. "Of disease:" Debility, weakness.

25. "And there followed Him great multitudes:" Imagine, if you can, the condition of a country in which there are no doctors, where the healing art is only practiced by a few quacks, who rely more on charms than on physic for their cures.

In such a country as this, with sick and crippled in every village, picture the eager excitement when the news spread that there is a good physician arrived in town; that he has healed a fierce demoniac by a word, and a great fever by a touch.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

We are not to be discouraged at small beginnings. All great things were once small. To all reformers the first year and a half of Christ's ministry is an encouragement.

The kingdom of Heaven is at hand. It lies all around us, as the sunlight around a darkened building, waiting for the blinds to be thrown back and the windows to be opened. It has already begun in the world, and is coming faster and faster.