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WHILE THE HEART BEATS YOUNG

By
James Whitcomb Riley.

While the heart beats young!—O the splendor of the Spring,
With all her dewy jewels on, is not so fair a thing—
The fairest, rarest morning of the blossom-time of May
Is not so sweet a season, as the season of to-day
While Youth's diviner climate folds and holds us,
Close caressed,
As we feel our mothers with us, by the touch of face and breast;—
Our bare feet in the meadows, and our fancies up among
The airy clouds of morning—
While the heart beats young.

While the heart beats young
and our pulses leap and dance,
With every day a holiday
and life a glad
romance,—
We hear the birds
with wonder,
and with wonder
watch their flight—
Standing still the more
enchanted,
both of hearing and of sight,
When they have vanished wholly—
for, in fancy,
wind to wing,
We fly to Heaven with them;
and, returning,
still we sing
The praises of
this lower Heaven with tireless
voice and tongue.
Even as the Master sanctions—
while the heart beats young!

While the heart
beats young!—
While the heart beats
young!
O green and gold old Earth of ours,
with azure overhung
And looped with rainbows!—
grant us yet this grassy
lap of thine—
We would be still thy children,
through the shower and the shine!
So pray we, lispings, whispering,
in childish love
and trust,
With our beseeching hands and faces,
lifted from the dust
By fervor of the poem,
all unwritten and unsung,
Thou givest us in answer,
while the heart
beats young.

SELECTING A CAREER

By Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D. D.

IT IS unfortunate that our most important decisions have to be made at a time when we are least qualified to make them. Almost any man could be a success if in laying out the plan of his life he could make use of the experience that will be his by the time his life is finished. A man needs to live once, in order to know how to live. Mistakes make good building material, but they take time. No man learns anything except by experience, and that experience must be his own.

Next to the matter of selecting a wife—which in the majority of cases is little more than a leap in the dark—the most important problem which a young man has to confront is that of deciding upon his trade, business or profession. It is a matter in regard to which he cannot afford to blunder, but in regard to which the probabilities are that he will blunder. Such a decision implies that the young man knows himself, and that he knows the world, neither of which is the case. Success in matters of this sort is primarily an affair of adaptation, but how can there be adaptation when the man has only a sophomoric knowledge of himself, and no more than an amateurish understanding of the field to which he is proposing to adjust himself?

INASMUCH, then, as the difficulty of selecting a career is occasioned largely by one's ignorance of himself and of the conditions under which his work is to be done it is important that the decision be deferred to the latest possible date. The case will very often be that bread-and-butter necessities will forbid postponement, and deliberation and option be peremptorily excluded. Such cases will, however, be no refutation of the principle here insisted upon. The fact will still remain that the likelihood of a man's doing the best work that it is in him to do will be enhanced by every wider understanding of what the world has to offer in the way of opportunity, and by each added development within himself of power to meet opportunity. Undoubtedly, if we are doomed to have our lives run in a groove and are destined to a career of small occupation in which breadth of preparation will play no necessary part, then it may be that the earlier the career is selected and entered upon the better. As was stated in a previous article, if a man is going to do only small work the work will be better work of its kind if the man who does it is kept small. The smaller the occupation the smaller will need to be the man if he is to remain contented and effective within the limits of his occupation. But there is probably no man who is proposing to doom himself to any such diminutiveness of character or of employment, or who will be disposed strenuously to except to the idea that the more completely a man is master of himself and the firmer the grasp he has upon the general situation, the greater the probability that the choice of his own sphere of operations will be a felicitous one, and one that will redound to the largest advantage of himself and of the world.

THE misleading and narrowing effects of a premature decision of the question of employment can be illustrated in this way: I will suppose a man to have conceived an early fancy for some branch of physical science, say geology. As soon as that is fixed upon as a life interest he will probably count as wasted time and effort any expenditure which he may be asked to make in the direction of any other branch of knowledge, and the younger he is when this geological whim seizes him the greater the obstinacy with which he will protest against all studies which in his judgment have no geological bearing. And the embarrassment in the case is that he is not in a situation to judge what branches do have a geological bearing and what branches do not. If he makes out his own curriculum—as he probably will in these days when parents defer to their children, and teachers and professors stuff the course with optionals—he will be influenced only by considerations of the most superficial kind, and the more intense his desire to become a geologist the less the likelihood of his being disciplined in a way to make him such. The fact is, a man must know everything in order to know anything as it ought to be known.

EDITOR'S NOTE—The seventh of a series of articles by Dr. Parkhurst addressed to young men, which began in the JOURNAL of February, 1896, and will continue throughout the year.

ALMOST any young man's decision as to what he is going to do will mean the narrowing of his preparation, whereas all success that is fairly worthy of the name means breadth of preparation. A man needs to get a great mass of foundation under him if he is going to put either a high or a wide structure on the top of it; and if he knows too soon exactly what it is he is going to do, that mass of foundation will not be forthcoming. In all cases where it is possible it is a great deal better for a man to get the knowledge first, and then let that decide what the vocation shall be, than to decide the vocation first, and let that determine what sort of knowledge he shall accumulate.

If a man is in earnest to do the best that is in him it will be much to his advantage to get over the feeling that there is any hurry about actually settling down to his life work. I used sometimes to wonder along what particular line my energies would be employed, but I had been for a number of years out of college before things took any definite shape, and although I am in the ministry I never decided to go into the ministry; I rather drifted there than decided to go there. I appreciate how imperfectly qualified I am for the work I am doing in that capacity, but understand very well how vastly more imperfect my qualifications would have been had I entered college with the ministry distinctly in view, and then narrowed all my equipment and engagement to that one particular end. There are circumstances where the policy here recommended would not be practicable, but, at the same time, it is a great deal wiser to drift, and to do almost anything that offers, as a temporary arrangement, than to make up one's mind finally and irrevocably to an employment that may possibly be a misfit, and that will involve, therefore, a certain amount of failure. We can safely depend upon it that in the case of a man who has a strenuous purpose there is a certain gravitating tendency between him and the work he is best fitted to do, and if that gravitating tendency is not hurried too much it will assert itself, and the man, without any excessively painful searchings of heart, will find himself where he belongs. Along this line the only safe decisions are the decisions that shape themselves, and that we settle into without being very distinctly conscious at any time that a conclusion is being reached.

ANY man is unfortunate who devotes himself to an occupation that is vetoed by his own tastes and preferences. The Scriptural injunction, "Whatsoever ye do do it heartily," is one to be respected quite independently of the moral consideration that was weighed by Saint Paul when he wrote it. What a man does not do heartily he never quite does, which is to say, what a man does not do with his heart he never quite does. There are touches of excellence to which an effort does not attain except as it is the outcome of a certain amount of enthusiasm. Work is doing a thing because we have to. Play is doing a thing because we like to; and there is a great deal more of one's true self in what he does because he likes to. Only a part, and that the drest part, of any workman is enlisted till his endeavors emanate from a spot deeper down than the level at which he keeps his intelligence and his skill, and begin to flow out from the fresher and juicier regions of the heart. So that in settling this question of a vocation it is a matter of prime importance for a young man to decide what that particular business or profession is into which he can go without a remainder, into which he can throw himself in unreserved investment. The problem I am just now considering is sometimes complicated by considerations of conscience. There are cases, known to us all probably, where some line of occupation has been adopted from a sense of duty. For instance, it is not infrequently the case that a man enters the ministry because he thinks he shall never be happy unless he does, although not much expecting that he shall ever be happy if he does. In all the world there is nothing that, in order to its success, stands in such urgent need of being done heartily, and with every fibre of resource that is in a man, as preaching the Gospel, and it is peculiarly pathetic, therefore, to see one enter upon such service at the slavish compulsion of an ought. There is in such devotion an element of grim heroism and frozen consecration that compels a certain kind of admiration, something as we are affected by the cold glitter of an icicle; but it was fire, and not frost, that baptized the original apostles.

WHAT has already been said upon the matter of selecting a career would hardly be worth while did I not supplement it by one consideration of a still more earnest character. I should have no particular interest in advising young men as to the means by which they could attain the largest success, in the ordinary sense of that term, did I not assume that those to whom the advice is being given were motivated by larger impulses than those of mere aggrandizement. The largest preliminary question that a man at the threshold of his adult life ever asks is not, "In what business can I best succeed?" but, "Am I going to regard my business or my profession as being primarily a means of mortgaging the world to myself or as a means of mortgaging myself to the world?" We are living in a Christian era, and no man with a head and a heart can be true to that era without propounding to himself and definitely answering the question just proposed. It was this question precisely that our Lord answered in the struggle of His forty days of temptation. Just prior to that experience it is related how He became for the first time distinctly conscious of the exceptional power which He possessed, and that consciousness of power led on immediately to the inquiry, "What am I going to do with that power? I can make bread out of stones; I can make the energies of air, earth and sea the servants of my bidding; I can set up again among the kingdoms of the earth the throne of a Cyrus or of an Alexander. I hold in my hands the power of God; now what am I going to do with it?" That was the crisis in our Lord's life, the pivotal ridge, the watershed of the Lord's destiny.

AND in the life of each one of us, when we reach a certain stage in our history, there comes a moment that is the thrilling counterpart of that, a moment when we become strangely conscious of resource, and when the fibres of body, mind and spirit knit themselves into a kind of rigid consciousness of power, and when that power is felt with bewildering distinctness in its relations to the times in which we are living and to the years that we are facing. And the same overwhelming question comes to us as came to Jesus when He heard God's voice; as came to Moses when he beheld the burning bush; as came to Paul amid the dazzling light by Damascus: "What am I going to do with it all? I can make myself great by means of it, or I can make the world great by means of it—now which?" It is a big question, and you cannot answer a big question in a small way. It strikes to the very root of the whole business of life, and you cannot possibly grasp the root by chewing the twigs on the branches. It is one of those crises in a man's life that for success or failure reaches clear out to the end of the years. The entire genius of the whole Christian business lies right in there.

IT IS a matter of throwing one's self for all he is worth into the scale of the world's necessities, and the process of choosing a career is simply the way in which one meets the question as to the particular channel along which the world's necessities can best be reached and supplied by his own personal resources. The young man who says, "I have given my heart to the Lord, and, therefore, I am going to study for the ministry," misses the entire point. There is no "therefore" about it. That is a pettifogging way of meeting a great situation. I quote from a letter that I received recently from a young lawyer in Ohio: "In my daily life about the criminal courts I have seen many a sad scene, and at last it has come to that point that I am almost decided to cast aside my bright future in law, and enter the service of the Lord." I answered him that he was writing nonsense. What he meant by "the service of the Lord" was the Christian ministry, and that is no more a service of the Lord than any other reputable calling. It is not what a man does that makes his service Christian; it is putting his career under contribution to the public weal, instead of mortgaging it to his own preferment, that makes his service Christian. There is a great lot of small thinking about these matters and well-meaning imbecility that works damagingly all around. My correspondent furthermore wrote that he had "learned to distrust the law." All the more reason, then, why he should stay in the law. We cannot improve a thing by standing off and "distrusting" it, but by jumping in and converting it. If all the consecration is put into the ministry and all the brains into the other professions neither the pulpit nor the world will profit. The sum and substance of all of which is that when a young man has come out on to the distinct Christian ground of putting himself under contribution to the public weal, the selection of a career, best suited to himself and to the needs of humanity, is simply a matter of studying adaptations, and deciding by what art, trade, business or profession he can subserve that weal the best.

C. H. Parkhurst

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