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— Sermons —

FEELING AFTER GOD.

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*That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us.—ACTS xvii., 27.*

THE insensibility is not to be envied which does not melt under the exquisite pathos of this Scripture. Let us picture the scene. Here lies Athens before us in her ancient splendor, as in the days of the great Pericles. In the heart of the city is the famous Agora; not a mere "market place," as you might infer from the seventeenth verse of this chapter; but a beautiful valley, whose slopes were studded with the statues of historical and deified heroes. It was the place where all Athens delighted to assemble for enjoyment. Here, philosophers, wrapping their mantles around them, discoursed wisdom to their followers as they walked. The surrounding heights were crowned with temples and altars dedicated to the gods of classic mythology; in the midst of which was the altar with the melancholy inscription, "To the unknown God"—a sad confession that in all their search after God, they found only nature; whose wide domain was parcelled out amongst divinities, which were only the personifications of human attributes. But who is this solitary man that with solemn tread and thoughtful mien moves amongst these triumphs of Grecian culture and art? It is the man of Tarsus; versed in all

## ➤✠ YOUNG MEN'S SERVICE ✠➤

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### YOUNG MANHOOD: ITS PERIL AND ITS RESCUE.

BY CHARLES H. PARKHURST, D. D., MADISON SQUARE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, N. Y.

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*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?—PSALM cxix., 9.*

YOUNG manhood: its peril and its rescue. The theme is always apropos; doubly so to-day. This second Sunday of November is coming with increasing earnestness and unanimity to be regarded as a day of thought and prayer for young men. The subject is too long and our half-hour too short to allow time for preliminaries. Such an occasion does not lean for its effects upon fine wording and pretty phrasing. "Go speak to that young man," writes the prophet. All we can effect is to get the matter in a general way opened up to our regards, so that we can think it more intelligently, and feel it with a deeper grasp of interest, sympathy and fervor. Only let there be in our minds and hearts now at the outset of our study a live and prayerful expectation, that something is going to come of this. Let us preach and hear for a strenuous purpose, and along the whole line of our thinking this morning may there be a running accompaniment of devout petition to Almighty God that He will bless our concerted meditation to the enlargement of our own sympathies with the imperiled young, to the opening of our eyes that we may see what there is that can be done for them, and to the quickening of our appreciation of that special quota of aid that we are individually in a condition to contribute to their service.

And in the first place we have to try and *understand* their perils in some degree. There is no effective working done in the dark. And not only understand their perils from the outside but feel them from the inside. All appreciation has in it one strand of feeling to each strand of thinking. There is in us only as much power of rescue as there is in us power to identify ourselves with the man we are trying to rescue. The emancipator must of necessity be at once liberator and bondman. We have to be two men at once, and grasp the double situation. "Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them," is as sound a philosophy as it is beautiful a Gospel. All successful approaches must be from the affectionate side. You remember the story of the young man that Jesus tried to help and the graphic way in which Mark describes the Lord's feelings toward him when it is said, "And Jesus beholding him loved him," where we seem to see the tenderness of the Lord so irradiating His face and suffusing His eyes that the very glance He bent upon the young inquirer told its own love-story, "And Jesus *beholding* him loved him." I do hope there is enough of the spirit of the Saviour in our hearts that we can approach with like gentleness and appreciation the whole class of

young men that are on our regards this morning, with whatever severity they may be tempted, all of them, to whatever depths they may have fallen, many of them. Like the Lord Himself, we are here not to judge the world, but that the world through us may be saved.

This is not a city or time when young men can come easily out of the furnace of youthful imperilment with no smell of fire upon their garments. The furnace here, like that in the plain of Dura, is glowing with a sevenfold heat. Our young Daniels too, like the premier of Darius, are thrown among lions that tear the flesh with sharp incisors and grind it up with monstrous molars.

1. One thing that makes it hard for a young man to succeed in his manhood is the prevalence among us of influences that work distractingly and scatteringly. It takes time and a certain amount of leisure if a man is going to be at his best. We are torn hither and thither by multiplicity of interest. We are interested in too many things, split up into too many ambitions and purposes. We go to bed tired with what we have done and wake up tired with what we are going to do. But it is not so much that a great deal is attempted as that we are broken up into an oppressive and nervous variety of aim and ambition. Telegraphy has learned to send several messages at the same time on one wire. We are imitating telegraphy and are teaching one nerve to be vehicle of any number of simultaneous communications. Character has little opportunity given it to gather itself together and consolidate. Day does not knit itself into day. The thread is constantly broken. Stitches are dropped. It is the steady cold that yields the solid ice. Flowers will not blossom in a whirlwind. Plant-life appears to need its breezy days; but it waits also on quiet days, breathless nights and still dews. As for us there is no getting out of the noise. Hurry is in the air. We begin to race with the next man as soon as we step out into the street. It is not the matter of hard work that we are reflecting upon but that nervous disintegration of ourselves that comes from having multiplicity of interests, cares, aims, burdens. A young man with no aim and with nothing to do is in bad plight to be sure. A "man of leisure" is the devil's darling. Only a strained string will be musical. But it is trying to play a dozen tunes on the same string all at once that makes the mischief we have just now in hand. It stands in the way of all clear, defined and permanent impression. It creates about us that sort of tremulous air that falsifies reports, distorts images, and blurs effects. My meaning there will be made clear by asking you if you have ever seen the photograph of a tree taken while the wind was blowing? That is a fair representation of the kind of impression produced upon a man who is all the time in a condition of inward tornado. "In quietness shall be your strength," wrote the prophet. The truth can get no fair chance at us. Even the Holy Ghost can scarcely overtake us. That is *one* of the disadvantages that handicaps our young men in the midst of the business and bustle of our noisy, nervous life.

2. Another disadvantage under which our young men are suffering is that

they have so largely slipped their old anchorages. They have cut adrift from the past. Hereditary tastes, ideas and methods are ignored. The age to which a custom or doctrine has attained is taken as measure of its inherent absurdity. To be old-fashioned is, with them, to be silly. Without doubt there is a great deal in the past that can be improved upon; but there is hazard in any spirit of abandonment that is not counter-weighted by a spirit of adoption. The man will get rained upon and weather-beaten who tears down his old log-cabin before he has at least drawn the stone and cut the timber for a new framed house. The unanchored man will get driven in whatever direction the wind happens at the time to be blowing. It is thought to be good form now to be languid in our notions. With a certain large class of young men it is the acme of philosophy to have no philosophy. It is a tenet of advanced thought not to be convinced of anything and not to be surprised at anything. As relates to the moral and the religious the air is full of negativeness. If there is not positive *dis*belief, there is *un*belief which in some respects is still worse and harder to deal with. Unbelief is disbelief that has not the discernment or the resoluteness to understand itself or to confess itself. In this way such people get almost beyond the reach of truth or beyond the reach of truth's power. They will give attention perhaps to a moral address even, if it is skilfully worked out, or, possibly, to a religious discourse if it betrays acumen and masterliness, but their interest in it will be like their interest in the exploits of an equilibrist, due to the genius evinced in the manner, not to any suspected significance in the matter. It is a high grade of æstheticism, which even at its best never gets underneath the contour. There is an amount of artistic sense, but what we deplore in so many of our young men is the lack of a keen, quick moral sense, that would enable them to be powerfully affected by truth as truth and strongly wrought upon by exhibitions and presentations of integrity, righteousness and holiness seen in their own light. More than we need anything else we need a good old-fashioned Pentecostal revival of religion and down-pouring of the Holy Ghost, that shall shake these young tyros out of the conceit of their ignorance, that shall stir their whole moral being to its deepest depths, and restore to normal sensitiveness the paralyzed optic and auditory nerves, so that they shall see to the innermost the things that are shaped before their eyes, and come *at*, and come *under*, the truth articulated into their ears.

3. Another tooth in the jaw of the Babylonian lion is the rum-shop and the wine-cup. Strong drink is eating up the nerves and feeding on the marrow of our domestic, social and national life. It is undermining us; it is honeycombing us; it is a curse that puts its blight upon all classes. There is many a home represented here this morning where tears are daily wept before God because of the liquid hell that is being dealt out to the dear boys. Old men with white hairs are being brought down in sorrow to their graves. There are nice young fellows who step daintily along our avenues who will be surprised when they stand before the throne of judgment to find themselves red with the blood of their own father and mother. "Murderers of fathers and murderers of

mothers," wrote Paul in one of his letters. Our only interest just now, however, is to notice that this is a pretty difficult time and city for a young man to live in and maintain his integrity. A year or so ago I was informed by one abundantly competent to estimate that there are in this city between forty-six and forty-seven miles of liquor shop; which would be more than sufficient to line on both sides four avenues running all the way from Central Park to the Battery. I have no intention of dwelling at length upon the matter now. It is a question with which both press and pulpit in the near future have got vigorously to occupy themselves. We all feel to welcome any laudable expedients that can be adopted for the encouragement of American manufactures and the protection of home industries; but as important as it is to "protect" home industries, more important by far is it to "protect" the boys. During these last animated weeks very few things have been written or spoken that will survive the official count. But dead as are the issues behind us, live are the issues in front of us; and this is one of them; and in regard to it burning words are going to be written and words spoken that will be charged with the fervor of long reverberation. It touches the home, presses upon society, lies very close to our nation's character, and is therefore most intimately bound up with our national weal, solidity and perpetuity.

4. Still another incisor that pricks into and tears the life of our young manhood is the prevalence among us of so much that works effects of personal impurity, in the shape of coarse literature, dirty pictures and houses of ill-repute. A man can break the Seventh Commandment and not lose caste by it even though it be well enough understood what his practices are and that he has neither forsaken them nor repented of them. We lack the safeguards of resolute public sentiment in the matter. Houses of assignation are not licensed by the law, but they are licensed by tacit consent. Perhaps there is no practical possibility of exterminating them. Perhaps it is better to regulate them than it is to try to enact laws that cannot be executed. That is not our question. These institutions exist, and scattered about with convenient frequency, and there seems to be no very general or acute distress about it. One of our city dailies awhile ago in a series of articles uncovered some of the iniquity festering over on the West side. The revelations were appalling and heart-sickening. I never heard that the articles created any great sensation. The worst thing about the existence among us of the social evil is not the mere fact that it exists, but that it can be regarded by clean and decent people with such a semi-indifference. And the boys, older and younger, draw their own inferences from that semi-indifference. They conclude that if it is not bad enough for their parents to be agonized about it, it is not bad enough for them to be afraid of it or ashamed of it. Impurity will diminish only about at the rate that society has moral earnestness enough to ostracise such as are supposed to be in the instant practice of impurity. All this is a terribly wrenching condition of things to a young man who depends to a large degree, as we all must, upon the safeguards of a pronounced and strenuous public sentiment. And then there is obscenity

enough in our shop-windows, and indeed in some of our furnished parlors, to topple over a man that has not a good grounding in moral and Christian principle. I am not talking now about marble nudity which is one thing, but about tinted nakedness, which is a distinct thing. The placards in our shop-windows become a little more suggestive year by year. As moral sensibilities become blunted by the bad discipline, more piquancy must be put into the illustration to reach the same grade of effect. There is no curriculum that has ever been devised, so nicely shaded to the advancing proficiency of pupils as that which has been demoniacally graded to the wants of those who are taking lessons in sin.

Perhaps a complete statement of the obstacles that a young man has to encounter in maintaining and enlarging his manhood would include a reference to the theatre; but I do not know. Data are not at my hand derived either from observation or from hearsay that enable me to reach a conclusion in which I can myself put confidence. I will only say in passing this delicate point that there is a certain discrepancy between the opinions reached by habitues of the dress circle and opinions reached by certain men and women of national and international reputation who have long stood behind the foot-lights and been at home in the green-room that lead me to think that perhaps there is a good deal here that might be said by any one who was able to speak both with the candor that comes from impartiality, and the authority that comes from close observation and intimate experience.

5. I will mention only one more obstacle that so sadly obstructs the efforts of our young men to maintain their manliness, and that is the engrossing love of money. Acquisition is with us a passion and a disease. The American people are money-crazy. Every other impulse and instinct gets sucked into the draft. It is in the air and spreads by contagion. Mr. Greeley once said, "It is an unhappy day for a young man when he first suspects that there is any other way of getting a dollar than by squarely earning it." The suspicion Mr. Greeley deprecated has become pretty general and grows more so. To get only a dollar in return for a dollar's worth of work is not a mode of becoming rich that commends itself to the young American mind. "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread," is an old maxim and a slow one. The standing problem of to-day is how to convert one dollar into two without perspiration. It is easier to turn two into four than one into two, and so the process becomes more fascinating at each stage. And the degree of mania in which it is liable to eventuate among the high numbers you can calculate even if you have not seen it illustrated. This gold-delirium spreading down from older to younger is a kind of inward Sahara in which perishes every bright, green thing. It becomes a tyranny working the enslavement of every sweet affection and delicious appreciation. Said a man to me a little while ago, "I have retired from business, because I am afraid if I go on making money awhile longer, I shall get to the point where the passion of money will be stronger than I am, and I not be good for anything afterward." Men are ambitious for power, but principally because power holds its finger on the

spigot of revenue. Preferment is largely estimated among us at its cash value. If a man buys office it is because the perquisites of the position will be more than enough to refund him. All of this and a good deal more, if it were best, only to illustrate the environment in which our young men are placed and the sort of atmosphere they are breathing. A dollar can be held so near the eye as to eclipse the sun. A certain amount of gold will neutralize a given amount of integrity—probably. He is a rare man who can bear an unlimited strain. It is not an easy thing for a young man to stand alongside of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego and come out of the furnace uncrisped and unsinged.

And now a word at least must be said as to the service of succor that it is in our power to render them. I am sorry we shall be obliged to deal with this part of the matter so hastily. If, however, we have learned to know and to feel the odds against which they struggle, the main thing is accomplished. For wherever there is intelligence and sympathy combined, some policy suited to the needs of the case will be almost certain to suggest itself. A wise affection will generally find its way out. Tenderness that understands itself is full of deft devices, and can be left to its own gracious ingenuity; exactly as when the Heavenly Father loved us, in His combined love and wisdom He was able to invent a way by which without sacrificing His justice He could save us.

1. In the first place let me say in a word that there is one thing that we can all do for the tempted young of our homes and town, that is to pray for them: this is distinctively a day of *prayer* for young men. Christ teaches us that He not only regards the prayer of faith when offered by those who need help, but that He regards the prayer of faith when offered in *behalf* of those who need help. We can all pray, then, and I trust that in conformity with the judicious recommendation of the Young Men's Christian Associations of our country and of foreign countries, a great deal of fervent effectual prayer will be crowded into to-day and into the days of this week. One or two suggestions just at this point. Let us not lay out all our prayers for them in the gross. Wholesale prayer that aims at everything will be likely to hit nothing. Concentrated devotion, like concentrated sunshine, does most execution. And if, as is possibly the case, some of you are praying for a son or brother in your own household, do not let him be too *conscious* that he is being prayed for. This applies not only to this week, but to all weeks. I know it is an exceedingly uncomfortable not to say awkward and embarrassing position for a young man to be in, to receive continual tacit reminders that his mother and sisters are making him the subject of their supplications. It is chilling and alienating rather than winning and reconciling. Very likely the young man first edged off from the home circle as long ago as when he was a boy, because he did not find that at home that was congenial. Perhaps the home policy was purely prohibitive: it may be that if you had taken more pains before he was fifteen to have him have a good time at home you would not be suffering so much pain since he was fifteen in knowing that he was having a riotous time away from home. A boy is going to be a boy, and the

home policy must be shaped with that distinctly in view. Let me then caution these mothers and sisters not to indulge in devout insinuations and innuendoes when the young prodigal happens to be about the house. Observe the Lord's direction and pray in your *closet*. Pray for the boy and not *at* him, and supplement your secret devotions by unwearied attempts to make the home a bright, genial, cordial place for him when he is in it. Study his wants, and study to make home fit them. It is one of the wholesome effects of prayer that it not only sets us drawing upon the divine resources, but puts us upon the wise expenditure of our own resources. Prayer generates work, and so makes us co-operate with God in bringing the answer to our own prayer.

2. Another thing we can do which will be more general in its aim and wider in its reach is to contribute in a material way to the work of the Young Men's Christian Association that has the interests of our un-homed young men in particular charge. The Association is doing a great deal of work that the churches ought to do, but at the same time a great deal of work that the churches in their local and denominational character cannot do. They are not a locally organized church, but are as truly an element in the great Church and body of Christ as is this particular church here in which we have our special membership and local habitat.

Among other facts stated in their International Report is the existence of 181 College Associations, with an aggregate membership of 9,700; 66 organizations of railroad men maintained at an annual expense of \$75,000, two-thirds of it met by the railroad companies themselves, which is a tacit way that railroad directors have of saying that a commandment-keeping brakeman and a God-fearing stoker has a higher market value than one that is not. As indicating the growth of their work, 60 associations in 1866 have increased to 834; one building then has multiplied into 80 now, with an aggregate value of three and a half million dollars. The enterprise has earned our respect and confidence and challenges our material assistance. Larger vigor and increased results wait upon more money.

3. But as a finishing suggestion I want to say in a word that we must not relegate to organization the work and responsibility that devolves upon us in our character of individual Christians. That is one of the disadvantages of organization, that we let it enfeeble our sense of private and personal accountability. I would have every young man among us feel that he is himself a little Christian association, complete, furnished for practical and immediate work. Cain asked a significant question a considerable time ago, "Am I my brother's keeper?" which hung in the air unanswered for four thousand years till Christ came and with His Gospel answered back across the dreary interval and said, "Yes, Cain, you are your brother's keeper." That is the essence of all "Christian association," organized or individual, "you are your brother's keeper." You are responsible for yourself and responsible for the next man. Every man is accountable for two. How long would it take to redeem the world if that principle were adopted into immediate and universal practice?



Geometrical ratio works with gigantic rapidity up among the high figures. Or perhaps you have got a bright, cozy home that is not full; room in it for one more. Find an un-homed young man and let him be that "one more." Not live there; of course I don't mean that, but let him have an opportunity once in a while to breathe the brightness that makes your home beautiful and to revel, poor fellow, in the hominess that his soul is hungry for. Some of you are doing that thing; some of you instead of coming to church again to-night and seeing how much Gospel and holy entertainment you can store up for yourselves between sunrise and bedtime, will spend the evening in widening out the border of your delightful home till it will include some one besides your own number, and make your hearthstone a point of blessing and holy Sunday evening enrichment to some thirsty soul who remembers the old days and the old-time Sunday nights and the father that is gone and the mother that is asleep. That is Young Men's Christian Association in its purest type and most effective form. All of that is a very little thing. Yes, and that is just the reason I am going to *leave* the matter *there*. Little things are just what is wanted. Little things are the greatest things there is. Take that paradox, dear friend, go away with it and pray over it. The Spirit of the Lord beam upon you through it, open your eyes to your little gospel opportunities, and keep us all true to our little occasions of service and succor.

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## CHILDREN'S SERVICE

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### THE LAD AND THE HUNGRY MULTITUDE.

BY M. M. G. DANA, D.D., CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA.

*There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?*—JOHN vi., 9.

As we read over the story of the way Jesus fed the five thousand, we cannot help wondering how this little boy came to be in the great company. Here was a crowd of people who had left their homes and sought out the Saviour that they might hear more of His gracious words. And yet, without much forethought, they had, it seems, brought no lunch or food with them, so that the question arose, How shall they be fed? Two hundred pennyworth of bread (that is about six pounds' worth), says Philip, one of Christ's disciples, would not be sufficient. Another disciple, Andrew by name, ventured the rather strange suggestion that there was a lad present who had five loaves of coarse barley bread, such as the poor people in that country used to eat, and two small fishes, probably caught in the lake near by. He evidently thought it was a circumstance hardly worth mentioning, for he immediately adds, "But what are they among so many?" Well, Andrew was wiser than he seemed; for, as the narrative tells us, this little which the lad had, as blessed and used by Jesus, was sufficient to feed five thousand people. So, as a matter of fact, it was