

Our Young People

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THE C. E. TOPIC.—Jan. 1.

OUR GOALS FOR 1905.

Phil. 3: 12-16.

BY AMOS R. WELLS.

Our lesson this week is Paul's famous prescription for a good new year. There are five portions, which, commingled make the perfect recipe.

First, as to the past, humility. "Not that I am already made perfect," says wise Paul. Confucius remarks that "humility is the solid foundation of all the virtues," and that is true, even if Dr. Holmes does slyly add, — "for other people!" Certainly humility is the master of goals; for if we think we have already won all trophies, we shall enter no race.

Second, as to the present: "Forgetting the things which are behind." A good "forgetting" is quite as useful as a good memory. Just enough memory of our mistakes not to repeat them, but not enough memory to discourage us, that is the ideal. No one can reach that ideal unless he knows Jesus Christ and has humbly committed to him the sins and follies of his past.

Third, as to the future: "I press on," eagerly, "stretching forward to the things which are before." Browning, in "Paracelsus," compares the God-inspired man to the young eagle, that "stoops at once into the vast and unexplored abyss," and goes on to say most manfully:

Be sure they sleep not whom God needs!
Nor fear
Their holding light His charge, when
every hour
That finds that charge delayed in a new
death.

There is not enough ambition in the Christian life of most of us. We are too easily satisfied with our own characteristics, too easily content with what we are doing for Christ. We need to be like all God's forces; heat, light, electricity, that never rest in one spot, but press on—on—on.

Fourth: The Christian's ambition must be definite. It is "toward the mark," or, as the Revised Version better translates it, "toward the goal." The goal is above us, it is a "high calling," an "upward calling," as the margin reads; it is a goal far up the mountain-side; but it is a definite goal, in plain sight.

If you want to make any achievement this year in Christian Endeavor, let your

planning for it be as explicit as our pledge! That you will contribute something original and helpful to every meeting, perhaps. That you will become able to offer public prayer. That you will give to God a certain portion of your money, your time. That you will read and study a chapter of the Bible every day. That you will try to lead one soul to Christ. These are goals worth reaching.

Because, in the first place, there are prizes! Some of them we receive at once—satisfaction, joy, the love of men and of God, new strength for new service, but we shall go on receiving them through all the ages of eternity. George Eliot writes of the terrible sorrow, "to love what is great and try to reach it, and yet fail." But there is no such sorrow when one works along God's lines and toward his goals. Failure is then impossible.

PLEDGE MAKING.

(Address by Rev. F. Clarke Hartley at League, Grand Harbor, August, 1904.)

In one of our most excellent papers, presented the other morning, the thought was suggested that a great blessing might be obtained through character study; that some man's character might be opened up for our study and our thought and suggestions, that this character might be helpful to us in the developing of our Christian lives. If we would take the thought of the making of pledges and the covenanting of ourselves and God, and how the pledges are performed by us, we may get great help and strength by having in mind four men of the word of God. There is:

- (1) The man who said he would and did not.
- (2) The man who said he would and could not.
- (3) The man who said he would and would not.
- (4) The man who said he would and did.

Now I wonder to-night how many of the congregation could pick this man out of the Word of God? The man who said he would and did not, who is that man? Peter. Do you remember what Peter said to Jesus Christ? "I will go with thee, Lord, to prison and to death." He had taken a covenant with God to be true to his aviator Jesus Christ, and in just a little time we find this man Peter denying that he had ever known the Lord.

The man who said he would and could not? Who was he but Samson?

When he had been bound repeatedly, and had broken strong cords that held him captive, had gone forth and had slaughtered the Philistines, and then the time came when he had been bound for the third time, and he rose up in his might and said: "I will go forth," but when he made the effort he could not. Why? Because the Spirit of the Lord God had unconsciously departed from him. He had so often grieved God that his pledge-making was of no benefit, and therefore was no advantage to him, simply because God had taken his Spirit from him.

The man who said he would and would not. Who was that? Who but Jacob. The man who said unto God: "Lord, if thou wilt, then I will." You remember how he had slept upon a stony pillow under Bethel's starry heavens, and when he awakened in the morning, he said: "The Lord was in this place, though I knew it not." Then he made a vow unto God and said: "O, God,

if thou wilt be with me and keep me and bless me in the way that I go, then I will do things for thee;" and he did not do it, because he would not.

The man who said he would and did. None other than the great and mighty apostle of the New Testament—the great Paul, the man who had been down before God in loving devotion and consecration and pledge-making, and who had said unto God: "I will give thee my life; I am determined to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and him crucified." That great man at the end of his apostolic mission was able to say: "I have kept the course and the faith and that which was committed unto me," and he had his honorable discharge.

It would not be profitable for us to-night to make a study of the four of these men, and so I select one, perhaps because it is out of the ordinary, for thought in the matter of our covenant with God and the way in which we keep our covenant. I want to call brief attention to the third character I have mentioned to-night. You will find it said of Jacob, in twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis, that Jacob vowed a vow, saying: "If God will be with me and will keep me in the way that I go, so that I come again, then I will surely give a tenth unto thee." He made his pledge; he got in the consecration mood; he built him his monument of stone, upon which he made his sacrifice and his offering, and he said unto God: "If thou wilt keep me and bless, then will I be faithful unto thee."

Subsequent events prove to us in the life of this man that God was exceptionally willing to keep his covenant with him, that God was not at all anxious to frustrate the plan that this man had in mind for the perfecting of his Christian life; but subsequent events prove along the same line that when the time of trial came, Jacob would not keep his covenant with God; he did not do it. Why did he not do it? Not because there was any impossibility of his keeping his covenant, of building in his life a monumental pillar to God's faithfulness (?) and man's faithfulness (?); not because there was any strong influence brought to bear upon his life that made it impossible to keep his covenant with God; but simply because there had not been, when he made that pledge, an understanding of the failings of the human life.

How many people there are in the world who are just exactly like Jacob! Now it is customary for us, when we meet on an occasion like this, to think that we are like Paul, that we will keep our covenants with God; but when we look back on the past, we think of the times that have been in our history when we have taken our C. E. pledge; when we have taken the church covenant and have said to God: "I will be Thy servant; I will engage in Thy work; I will be active and energetic in the spreading of the truths of Thy kingdom, and in seeking to build it up the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ." Many times we have failed to keep our covenants with God. Speaking personally to-night, I know that this is apt to be the case in my life; and I think human history will repeat itself very many times. I remember on one occasion there came two men into the parsonage at home, and these men had been addicted to the use of strong drink. One man had his wife with him, and they came in, one at a time, two days apart, and they said: "We want to try to stop drinking strong

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drink." I tried in my very imperfect way to help these men, and I said: "Boys, if you want to do the right thing, you must seek to get divine help as well as determination on your part to keep the covenant that you make with God." After prayer, I wrote out a little pledge, and these men both signed these little pledges. Well, I am sorry that one of these men broke his pledge; I met him afterwards, when he had broken his pledge. The other man to-day is a faithful citizen; he is a good man; he is a member of the church of Jesus Christ, and has strong influence for God in the community. What is the difference in the influence (?) that is in these men's lives? What is the reason that one man makes that failure of his pledge keeping, and the other man is successful in keeping the pledge that he has made? Is there any difference, brethren, with the Almighty God? That God should say to one man: "I will keep thee and help thee and strengthen thee," and that God should say to the other man: "I cannot help thee, I cannot keep thee, I cannot bless thee." Is that it? Can that be so? No; the only difference is that one man under the very strength of God, said unto himself: "Here, I have made a pledge, and I have covenanted with God, and I must perform my vows." He kept his vow because God helped him to keep his vow; and the other man, when the time of test and the time of trial came, while he could have kept his vow, because I believe he could, forgot to seek divine blessing and strength, and therefore failed. There will be many of us that will covenant with God; how are we going to keep the covenant, the engagements into which we enter to-night with God? We are to say unto the Lord to-night: "Lord, if Thou wilt be with me and wilt keep me and bless me, then I will be Thy servant, and will consecrate myself to Thee." A year hence will reveal in some lives failures and in some successes; and I want to be true to-night to you, brother and friend, and I want to say that if there is any failure, it will not be on God's part. It will be because when we might have kept our covenant with God and be true to the pledge which we took, we would not do it, because we asserted our own evil influence for wrong in the place of doing