



## SERMON.

## Lost Opportunities.

BY REV. WILLIAM MERLE SMITH, D. D., PASTOR OF THE CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEW YORK.

"Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.'"—John xiv, 22.

"What I have written I have written," said Pontius Pilate to the Jews, who came to ask him to change the inscription above the cross. He meant that it was too late. The writing had been nailed to the cross. It was gone beyond recall.

"What I have written I have written," echo our hearts, as we look back over the struggle we have made for character. The past with its history of failure or success is gone, and it is gone beyond recall. It is written in the lines of history which the world can read. It is written in the good or evil that lives after us. It is written in the grooves upon our minds and hearts which those actions have carved. It is written in wood, hair, stubble, or the gold, silver and precious stones with which we have reared our building. It is written, too, in God's great book of record, the pages of which shall be scanned at the Judgment day.

## Pilate's Confession of Faith.

With Pilate it was purposeful action. It had been done designedly. I have always felt that it was Pilate's confession of faith. He would not change it if he could. He had no desire to change it. Is it so with us? Has the record of the year been only the outcome of carefully formed purpose, and does it match what we had laid out for it? Alas, with some of us it is a nightmare, the memory of a mad dream. The past has no comfort for us. Few of us can say the text understandingly and thoughtfully without a tremor—"What I have written I have written."

## The Past Cannot Be Changed.

The first thought which the text throws into bold relief is the unalterableness of past. You can never change it.

Who is there here today who would not, if he could, blot out many chapters of his life, and forget many scenes, the memory of which gives him the keenest pain today? But they are gone, not gone from memory—would they were—but gone beyond our power to change them. Thoughtlessly we did the deeds. Without aim or purpose we drifted into such and such courses of life, thinking little of what was involved. And now we would give our fortunes to change the record. It never can be done. The past is written, written in the lines on the face and character, written in the good and evil that live after us, written in God's great book of judgment.

## The Scars Remain.

And closely allied with this thought of the unalterableness of the past is its irreparableness. The harm done can never be repaired. The sin may be forgiven, but its consequences remain. I remember in my boyhood days to have been much touched by the story of the boy who was told by his father every time he sinned to drive a nail into the doorpost. Soon the doorpost became studded with nails. Then the father told him every time he did a good act to pull one. The thought touched the boy and he changed his life, and by and by the nails were all withdrawn. He called his father, and there stood the doorpost with the history of his sin, for although the nails had been withdrawn the scars remained. My hearers, grace can take the nails out of the past, sins can be forgiven, all the guilt removed by the blood of Jesus Christ, which cleanseth us from all sin; but not even the gathered might of God himself can take away the scars. They are there forever. If we could see into each other's souls—thank God we cannot—we could read with unfailing accuracy from the scars upon the character the whole history of the past.

Oh! the endless difficulty in hasty, ill-considered action. All of us are spending time and thought in trying to atone and make amends for the mistakes of the past. The consequences may be mitigated. The sin may be forgiven. But the mistake cannot be recalled. It has entered into history. It has entered into character. It has entered into other lives than thine. It never can be altered. Is there a more solemn text in all the Word than this: "What I have written I have written."

Take again the thought of opportunity. Herein is the secret of much that is good in life. The seizing of opportunity tells more than all things else on the character; tells more than all things else on the human happiness. Sins of commission are bad enough, but I have sometimes thought that sins of omission were worse. Look at the opportunities that come to us every day. Here is a young man in his school life. The lessons that he is to master then if he neglects to learn can never be repaired. The discipline that school life gives, if shirked and avoided, can never be made up in after life. So to every age there are given opportunities which, if neglected, are lost forever.

There is something tremendously solemn to me when I stand before a life just ended, and see how large has been its opportunity for being helpful in the world, and see also how all those opportunities have been wasted. The same thing is approximately true when I look back over a single year of life. Here a soul which I might have led to the Master. Here a young man whom I might have saved from the love of drink. Here a sorrowing one whom I might have comforted better than I did. Have you never had such thoughts? But these opportunities are gone forever. They are gone beyond repair. In the matter of opportunity, "What I have written I have written."

But let us pass on to a second thought, which to me is still more momentous, viz., the coerciveness of the past. The thought of the irreparableness of the past is cer-

tainly one of great solemnity, but what about the irreparableness of the future. What I mean by that is this, that the past coerces the future, constrains the future, makes the future. To express the truth in the words of the text, would make it read thus, "What I have written I shall write again."

There is a tendency in every one of us to repeat the past in the future. Unless there are other influences of great power to work, we are sure to perform any act or think out any line of thought in the same way we have done it before. We are ever automatically repeating the past.

In my college days I wrote an oration upon the building of character. I worked upon it for many months, gave to it much thought and labor, and now today whenever I take up that old familiar subject of character, my mind begins almost before I know it to reproduce that old line of thought. The truth is these minds of ours are like the photographic rolls. There are little indentations, or channels, or cuts, call them what you will, which are made upon them by all our past experience. When you turn the roll for another year the song that comes out from it is the speech of the past. Hence it is that the present is ever repeating and reproducing the past.

## A Momentous Truth.

Yes, my friends, if the past could stand alone by itself without any coercing power over the future that would be one thing. It would make the whole problem of character and of salvation vastly easier than it is, but it cannot stand alone. One of the most awfully momentous truths that concerns us here is the dreadful coerciveness which the past exercises over the future.

We know what this experience is. Perhaps there is some one here who has tried to break away from some sin. The power of that sin lies in the fact that it has become more or less a matter of habit with us. We know too well then what the coerciveness of the past over the future means. The past has stood over us like a tyrant forcing us to do against our will and against our conscience what we would fain flee from. We have struggled against the sin. Have cried to heaven for help. Have fought it with the energy of despair. Often we have triumphed, but ever and again the power of an all-constraining past would rise up like an invisible army and force us almost before we know it to repeat the past history of sin in the present. The thought then has not been the sin and guilt of the past, that has perhaps all been forgiven in the mercy of God, but rather the despotism of the past. Its coercing tyranny, its vice-like hold and constraining grip on the future.

## A Hard Master.

Do you talk about the freedom of the will to a man who has lived for fifty years. It is nonsense. Theoretically his is free. Practically he is bound hand and foot by a thousand chains. Practically he is an absolute slave, serving a master, and that master is his past. Let him get away from his past if he can. Let him change his long fixed habits of life, his habits of thought, the trend of character. And he will find himself as helpless as the clay in the potter's hands. I know he himself has made the chains that bind him, has himself molded in early life the plastic character which now has hardened into flint, has indeed created the very master whom today he serves like a driven slave, and yet, nevertheless, he is helpless as a child. Only God, omnipotent, can help him.

I am sure this thought does not enter into life computations as it ought. We live careless of its deep and solemn meaning. To me no truth has graver import.

"What I have written I have written." Nay, infinitely more awful than that: "What I have written I shall write again."

It seems to me that this truth ought to throw into very conspicuous emphasis the danger which surrounds men who have lived for half a century without accepting Christ. Is there any chance that they will ever accept? Humanly speaking, no. Their past indifference shall ever constrain and coerce them.

As we have already seen, they are slaves to the past. With every added month of life it has grown in its tyrannous power. Humanly speaking, there is no probability that they will change at all save to become more and more confirmed in all the now well-established habits of life. Joseph Parker, of London, says he "Despairs of a man after he is 40." Before that age the past is persuasive, urgent, always seeking control, but without the gathered power of later years. Hence it is that men in early life come to change their lives for Christ. More easily; childhood has no past. With youth it has not the coercing power of later years, but with middle and declining life the past has the accumulating strength of Hercules to force its tyranny upon the soul. Humanly speaking there is little hope.

Oh! strong men, who have lived for half a century and not yet have made decision for the Christ, humanly speaking there is no hope for you. The power of the past indifference will surely constrain and coerce the present and the future. From the tyrannous grip of the past there is no escape to be found in human power. What you have written you will write again and again till the end.

Oh! but there is one hope for you. Over against the coercions of the past I place the power of the Holy Ghost. Against human conservatism I put the power of Heaven. Although fifty sixty, seventy years have passed of rejection of your Saviour, and though your soul be to all human sight crystallized into obdurate and seemingly eternal indifference to God, yet if you will only let the power of God work within your heart, it will break to pieces the hardened insensibility and make you like a child in Christ. It seems to me this truth ought to warn you to have a care. The time of opportunity is nearly past. Shall its record be the tighter gripping of the past upon you, the further fixing of your soul in its fatal unresponsiveness? Or will you, friend, in the power of God, break with the past today, and by the help of the Holy

Ghost turn your heart in childlike trust to the Master. God grant that this may be the history of this hour, and God forbid that in the lives of you who know not Christ that the sad and implied prophecy of the text should ever be true. "What I have written I have written." "What I have written I shall forever write."

## CHURCH WORKERS.

What they are Thinking and Doing Every-where.

The youngest of the prominent clergymen of America is said to be Rev. Samuel A. Eliot, son of President Eliot, of Harvard, and successor to Rev. Brooke Herford's pulpit in Boston.

India has sent a missionary to England, Miss Soonderlal Powar, a native high-caste Hindoo, who comes to point out the evils of the opium traffic. She wears an Oriental costume, but speaks English fluently. Her oratory is simple and direct, and she excites the sympathy of her hearers.

On the day of Cardinal Manning's consecration as an archbishop, an Irishwoman in the attendant throng audibly expressed disapproval after the ceremony, basing her criticism on the theory that he "had one foot in the grave already." The prelate, overhearing the remark, observed to someone beside him: "I think there are twelve years' work in me yet." That was twenty-six years ago.

In the two Methodist conferences of Maine last year, 72 churches, with \$271,850 worth of property and paying salaries aggregating \$30,779, gave \$1,505 to church benevolence and \$195 for the support of superannuated pastors, while the 23,544 Methodists in the state contributed for the support of veteran ministers the sum of \$2,704—a fraction over 11 cents each.

Spurgeon's church seems to be seeking another Spurgeon. The choice of a successor is said to lie between three men who most nearly approached the late preacher's distinctive powers. Beecher's church in Brooklyn made no attempt to find another Beecher, for the simple reason that he could not be found. The wisdom of Beecher's church has been amply demonstrated in the great success of the Rev. Dr. Abbott.

"Some church members are terribly afraid of science," says a clergyman. "They think that when St. Paul bids them 'fight the good fight of faith,' he means them to wage unceasing war on new ideas. Their notions of science are often as crude as that of the man who said he could understand how astronomers discovered the distance and the relative position of the stars, but that he could not conceive how they found out their names. The weapons of our warfare are not given us for the pulling down of science."

The physical condition of Pope Leo XIII. is said to be much worse than is popularly believed. It is reported that his life "hangs by a thread," but it is certain that his indomitable spirit keeps him, when he appears in public, from betraying any sign of decrepitude. At a recent ceremony in the Vatican, the Pope when borne up the aisle in his great chair of state looked pale and indeed feeble, but there was a gleam of brightness and mental strength in his face that showed the existence of strong vitality within.

John Knox used to preach political sermons and the practice is getting to be quite a bad nowadays with certain city divines. He was not as merry-minded a man as that other Dr. Knox, also an eminent divine, of whom this story is told: When the Dean of Armagh was summoned to preach in the Chapel Royal at Whitehall, Dr. Knox rallied him thus: "Be careful, Mr. Dean, at Whitehall, for there it was, you know, that King Charles lost his head." After the sermon the Dean said to his reverend friend: "I almost met a fate even worse, for the verger informed me that as soon as he had taken the choir up to their place he would return and conduct me to the altar!"

## A Bishop in an Earthquake.

In the course of a thrilling account of the recent terrible earthquake in Japan which Archdeacon Warren sends by mail, a remarkable incident is mentioned. He was entertaining as guests in his house at Osaka, Japan, on the night before the earthquake Bickersteth and his wife. The Bishop conducted family prayers before retiring and read the ninety-first Psalm: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, he is my refuge, my God in whom I will trust. He shall cover thee with his pinions, and under his wings shalt thou take refuge," etc. A few hours later the earthquake came and the room in which the bishop had read those words was an utter wreck. A large chimney crashed through the ceiling smashing the furniture and filling the place with bricks and timber. Had anyone been in the room at the time, death must have resulted. The room in which the bishop was when the shock came was in another part of the house. That, too, was overtopped by a high chimney which was thrown down. But it fell in a direction opposite to that of the room in which the bishop was and injured no one. At family prayer the next morning, the bishop read the same psalm with a new feeling of its meaning.

## Stonewall Jackson's Prayers.

In the new biography of Stonewall Jackson by his wife, an illustration of his proverbial habit of carrying prayer into everything is given. His colored servant Jim could tell by his prayers when there was to be a battle; and when his master got up in the night to pray, Jim would go straight and pack his haversack. His faith was the simple, strong faith of a child. When asked what he would do if the Lord should call him to go to Africa on a mission, he replied: "I would go without my hat." A friend once asked: "Major, if you should lose your health hopelessly, could you be happy still?" "Yes, I should be happy still." "But suppose you should become blind also?" "Even such a misfortune would not make me doubt the love of God." "Suppose, in addition, you should become dependent on charity—what then?" "There was," says his wife, "a strange reverence in his lifted eye, an exalted expression over his whole face, as he replied with slow deliberation: 'If it were God's will, I think I could lie there content a hundred years.'"

## The Unseen Power.

In a recent letter from Amritsar, India, where Miss Hewlett has charge of a Zenana mission in which a medical mission is included, that lady says: "There have been many willing and even encouraging listeners amongst all the number of people, and we believe some have had their hearts touched and softened. In each department of the work at this station, be it the medical school, the nursing, the refuge, the Sunday school, the evangelistic services, the hospital, or the blind school, there has been progress, and the feeling of the Hindu population may be judged from the following striking incident. A few faithful adherents of Islam, discussing together the affairs of the hospital, arrived at the conclusion that if they could have their own way they would pull the chapel down until not one brick remained upon another. 'You might do that,' interposed a Hindu who had overheard the conversation, 'but you could not take away the power behind the bricks.' The Hindu, while hardly appreciating the force of his words, gave utterance to a solemn truth, for, indeed, the few tired and somewhat discouraged worker rest their efforts upon the power of the Unseen."

## The Odor of Christians.

It appears on Chinese authority that Christians can be identified by their smell. But skeptical travelers are inclined to believe, after seeing the filthy condition of Chinese towns and villages, that it is by the comparative absence of odor among civilized races that a Chinaman can spot a Christian. By the best accounts Chinese towns are incredibly filthy, there being no pretense of sewerage, every thing being thrown on the street. During one of the wars with China Commissioner Yeh, who was vicerey over millions, was taken prisoner, and in consideration of his high rank he was kept on board the flagship. While there he lived after the fashion of Peter the Great, when he occupied Evelyn's house at Deptford, and his society was so unbearable that a formal complaint was made by the crew to the Admiral. The latter explained to Yeh through the interpreter that if he did not mend his ways the sailors would have to swab him down twice a day like a bullock on shipboard.

## Notice of Dissolution

THE undersigned hereby give notice and certify that a certain limited Partnership under the laws of the Province of New Brunswick, conducted under the firm name of "W. C. PITFIELD & Co.," for the buying and selling at wholesale of dry goods and other merchandise, and generally a wholesale dry goods and general jobbing and commission business, which by the certificate of Limited Partnership registered in the office of the Registrar of Deeds of the City and County of Saint John in the said Province, was to commence the Twenty-eighth day of December, A. D. 1889, and terminate the First day of January, A. D. 1892, did terminate and is and was dissolved the said First day of January, A. D. 1892.

(Signed) WARD C. PITFIELD.  
S. HAYWARD.  
CITY AND COUNTY OF SAINT JOHN, to wit:  
Be it remembered that WARD C. PITFIELD and SAMUEL HAYWARD, parties to and the signers of the annexed notice and certificate, personally came and appeared at the City of Saint John, in the City and County of Saint John and Province of New Brunswick, before me, J. E. BARNES, one of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace and for the said City and County of Saint John, and acknowledged the said WARD C. PITFIELD that he signed the said notice and certificate, and the said SAMUEL HAYWARD that he signed the same.

Given under my hand at the said City of Saint John this Twenty-first day of December, A. D. 1891.

(Signed) J. E. BARNES,  
J. P. City and County of Saint John.

## Partnership Notice.

THE undersigned, desirous of forming a Limited Partnership under the Laws of the Province of New Brunswick, hereby certify:

1. That the name of the firm under which such partnership is to be conducted is "W. C. PITFIELD & Co."  
2. That the general nature of the business intended to be transacted by such partnership is the buying and selling at wholesale of dry goods and other merchandise, and generally a wholesale dry goods and general jobbing and commission business.

3. That the names of all the general and special partners interested in said partnership are as follows:

WARD C. PITFIELD, who resides at the City of Saint John in the City and County of Saint John and Province of New Brunswick, is the general partner, and SAMUEL HAYWARD, who resides at the Parish of Hampton in the County of Kings and Province aforesaid, is the special partner.

4. That the said SAMUEL HAYWARD has contributed the sum of forty thousand dollars as capital to common stock.

5. That the period at which the said partnership is to commence is the Second day of January, A. D. 1892, and the period at which the said partnership is to terminate is the Second day of January, A. D. 1896.

Dated this Thirty-first day of December, A. D. 1891.  
(Signed) WARD C. PITFIELD.  
S. HAYWARD.

## PROVINCE OF NEW BRUNSWICK.

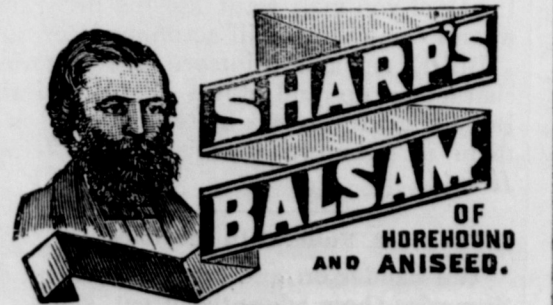
## CITY AND COUNTY OF SAINT JOHN, SS.

Be it remembered that on this Thirty-first day of December, A. D. 1891, at the City of Saint John and Province of New Brunswick, before me, JAMES A. BELYEA, a Notary Public in and for the said Province, by lawful authority duly commissioned and sworn, residing and practising in the said City of Saint John, personally came and appeared, WARD C. PITFIELD and SAMUEL HAYWARD, parties to and the signers of the annexed certificate, and in the said certificate mentioned and severally acknowledged, the said WARD C. PITFIELD that he signed the said certificate, and the said SAMUEL HAYWARD that he signed the said certificate.

In witness whereof, I the said Notary have hereunto set my hand and Notarial Seal at the said City and County of Saint John, the said

Thirty-first day of December, A. D. 1891.

(Signed) JAMES A. BELYEA,  
Notary Public.



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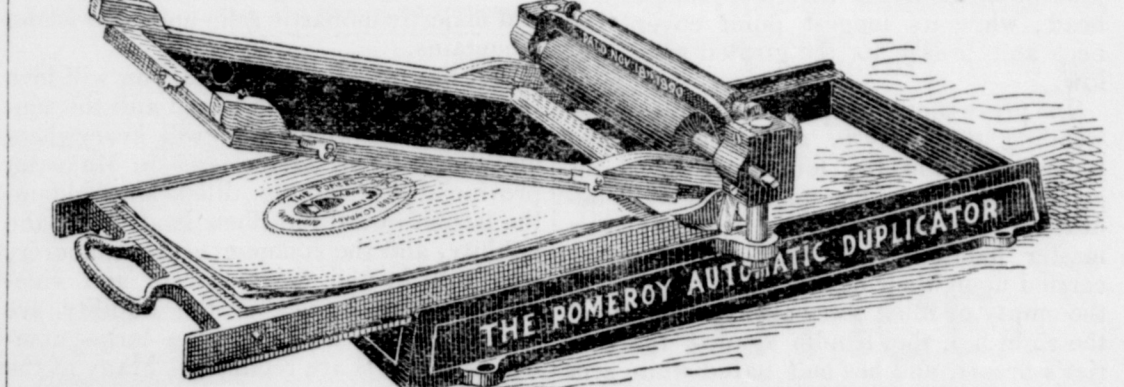
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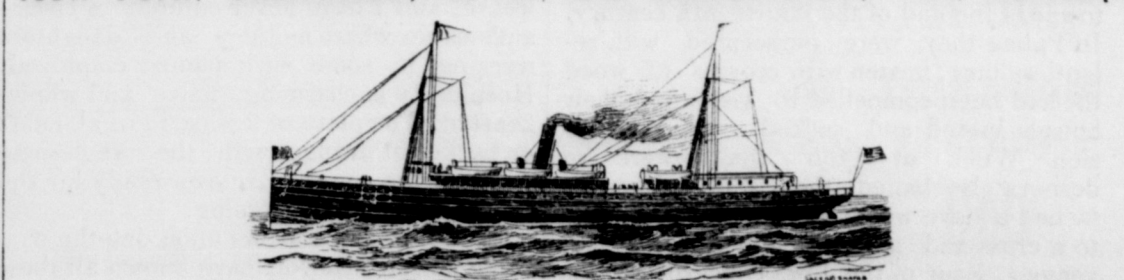
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