

"RELIGIOUS EARNESTNESS"

By A. M. Hills, LL. D.

Fervent in spirit; serving the Lord (Rom. 12:11). Earnestly desiring (2 Cor. 5:2). Always abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 1:58).

"I read in a religious English paper, recently, the single phrase, 'the curse of aimlessness!' It fairly haunts me. It has burned its way into my religious consciousness. It has started some reflections that will not be stilled.

"How many people seem to have no aim! 'Where are you going?' 'Oh, nowhere in particular!' 'What are you going to school for?' 'Oh, I have to; the state compels me to go to school.' 'What are you going to college for?' 'Dad wants me to go.' 'What are you going to do after graduation?' 'I don't know.' 'Have you any profession or occupation in view?' 'No.' 'What do you desire?' 'I would like to marry a rich man who would dress me and support me in idleness?' 'I would like to marry a rich girl and live on her pa's money.' 'What did you join the church for?' 'Nothing in particular. It gives entrance into ready-made society.' 'What did you join the lodge or club for?' 'For fun. It is fashionable stunt to pull off in these days!' And so on and so on, endlessly!

How thankful I am that my mother hired me to read the Bible through before I was eight years old. It inducted me into an atmosphere of noble aims and serious purpose. It is a book of holy ambitions and high ideals. The people it holds up for our respect and emulation were not aimless floats on the stream of time, but men of heroic purpose and mighty endeavor. Dead things float! Chaff and dust are carried by the wind any whither. Living things, even bees and birds, decide where they will go and what they will do and be.

Compare this wicked, disgraceful aimlessness with St. Paul's "fervent in spirit; serving the Lord." The Greek for "fervent in spirit," is "boiling hot." No coldness; no lukewarmness; no mild enthusiasm; but boiling hot with a passionate desire to achieve something and bring something to pass for the good of humanity and the glory of God. "Earnestly desiring," "always abounding in the work of the Lord!" What motives the Bible reveals for such a life!

I. The present condition of humanity! A race fallen and depraved! Fallen from virtue and victimized by sin. Sick with moral and physical bruises and wounds and putrefying sores that have not been healed or bound up, or mollified with ointment.

If it were possible to visit all the hospitals and hear at once all the shrieks and groans and cries of agony and despair extorted by sin from suffering humanity; if we could hear the moans of the heartbroken and the helpless, the wails of the dying and the lost, what ear could endure the voice of woe, what finite mind could comprehend its awful meaning!

Joseph Cook visited India and saw such exhibitions of the sufferings and horrors of the child-widows of that sin-cursed land, that when he came back home he told us that "the memory of the woes of those thirty million innocent widows beat upon my soul like the eternal moan of the sea."

But what he saw and felt was but one little, infinitesimal fraction of the sorrow and anguish that humanity is enduring daily from its sin. In the palace as well as the hut, among the rich as well as the poor, among the highbrows of learning, and the densely ignorant, sin strikes with its poison fangs, and men suffer and die, without hope and without God, and plunge with a wail into the horrors of a lost eternity.

It was this that brought Jesus from the skies to rescue the perishing. It is a similar mo-

tive that ought to stir to the depths every noble heart. It ought to wake from aimless lethargy everyone who has a touch of virtue and has had a taste of salvation, and start him out on the swift feet and wings of love to reach the imperiled, before sins overtake them. Blessed are they who shelter the young and fortify their unsullied natures from the approaches of Satan, and the solicitations of evil; who introduce them to the friendship of Jesus, before some emissary of hell conducts them to the haunts of vice!

But thrice blessed are they who, not having reached them before their pollution, have had the holy daring to follow the wandering and the lost down to the very gates of hell, to rescue them as brands plucked from the burning. It is a most Christlike enterprise to march down the declivities of falling society and battle with evil on its own ground, where vice is most strongly entrenched, and sin is the most daringly defiant, and wrestle with the powers of darkness on the very borders of hell for the rescue of the lost.

II. There is the motive of the cross God's suffering Son dying a death of shame on the accursed tree, to make atonement for the world's sin that all the stricken sons and daughters of men might have access to an altar of mercy and a chance to gain eternal life.

Oh, the power of that cross to arouse men. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me!" How it kindled the heroic in the hearts of the early disciples until they welcomed martyrdom itself to win the lost. How it aroused the enthusiasm of the imperial mind of Paul, as soon as the truth of Christ's deity dawned upon him! How he broke away from all racial limitations, and Jewish restraints, and rushed on from nation to nation, with his glad tidings of salvation, until the world became his parish and all humanity his debtor. Once in an outburst of emotion he exclaimed, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

It was the motive influence of that same cross that sent Adoniram Judson to Burma and sent Henry Martin to India, and Moffatt and Livingstone and Mackay to Africa, and John Paton to the cannibal islands of the Pacific, and all the other princely souls to the ends of the earth. Their own great hearts had been inspired by the cross, and they longed to carry its holy inspiration to all mankind.

III. There is the motive of assured success. "Always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Jesus does not let His laborers go unrewarded. Even a cup of cold water given in His name is not forgotten. And what astonishing results often follow a few spoken words. There was John B. Gough, a hopeless young drunkard. He had lost his young son and wife from hardship and want occasioned by his intemperance. He had lost every place of employment by drink. He saw no hope for the future and nothing before him but darkness and despair. He procured some poison, determined to end his worthless life by suicide. That Sunday afternoon, going down a street in Worcester, Massachusetts, a Christian man, one Joel Stratton, laid his hand on him and kindly invited him to a temperance meeting in a church that evening. He went and signed the pledge and was converted and gloriously redeemed. He became one of the most effective temperance lecturers and Christian orators this world has ever had. He afterward said, "I had not received a kind word in so long, that that kind invitation of Joel Stratton and the gentle touch of his hand was like the touch of an angel's wing!" Oh, the influence of a few kindly words spoken for Jesus to a poor wretch, within an hour of hell!

Another man, just out of Sing Sing, New York state prison, is shambling along the street intoxicated going still deeper and deeper in sin. A Christian worker speaks kindly to him, helps him to a coat to keep him from freezing, and induces him to go to the mission service at Water Street. He kneels at the famous old bench, prays six words, and is saved! "Oh," you may say, "that was only a state prison and Irish drunk that was saved, which is hardly worth mentioning!" But that poor drunk became one of the most successful soul-winners that that great city ever had. And when he died, Broadway Congregational Tabernacle was packed to the doors, and there were ten thousand more in the streets, the best Christian people in the city, who had assembled to honor the memory of that great Christian, Jerry McAuley.

Many years ago there was a revival in Yale College. There was a popular and gifted young professor who stood in the way, and hundreds were waiting to see what he would do. He went to his room to think it over. A voice said to him, "Horace, what do you believe?" "Well, I believe in the eternal difference between right and wrong." "Then take your stand on the side of right." He accepted Christ and over six hundred followed him into the kingdom of God. He became one of New England's most widely known preachers—Dr. Horace Bushnell.

Dr. Chapman and Billy Sunday were holding meetings in Indianapolis. Dr. Chapman asked the pastor of the First Presbyterian church to ask Benjamin Harrison, President of the United States, to the platform. He hesitated; he asked Sunday to ask him. Sunday said, "I went to President Harrison and asked him, 'Please take a seat on the platform; your presence might induce others to take a stand for Christ.' His daughter said, 'Papa, go.' He said, 'Mr. Sunday, if you think that my presence on the platform will honor my Saviour, and induce anybody to accept Him I will go.' He went, and the vast audience sprang to their feet and burst into cheers, and sang 'My Country 'Tis of Thee!'"

Some seventy years ago a venerable Baptist minister, Rev. James A. Haldane, died in Edinburgh. In his early manhood he commanded an English man-of-war, Melville Castle. One day in a naval battle he ordered a fresh set of men to take the place of those who had just been killed by a broadside of the enemy. The men, seeing the mangled bodies of their comrades, instinctively drew back. He poured forth a volley of oaths and wished them all in hell. A Christian seaman, shortly afterward said to him respectfully and reverently, "If God had heard your prayers just now where would you have been?" The pointed question was driven home by the Holy Spirit, and from that day he was a changed man. He resigned his captancy in the British navy to become a humble minister of Christ. His own brother became one of his converts, who afterwards studied in Geneva, and while there led Frederic Monod to Christ, who became one of the evangelical leaders of France; and also Merle Daubigne, the saintly historian of the Reformation. Who can measure the results of that rebuke administered by that pious private sailor, to his angry and blasphemous captain, in the name of Jesus!

O aimless ones! what are you doing? To what despairing one are you speaking a cheering word? On what broken and helpless sinner are you laying a healing hand? Before what curious eyes are you taking a stand for Jesus? Or before what vast audience are you voting for Christ? Work, for the night is coming and the shadows are lengthening. What you do must be done quickly. And, remember, "Your labor is not in vain in the Lord!"—Herald of Holiness.