

## CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

The Kind of Christians That Are Needed in the World.

The Half-an-I-Half Sort the Greatest Obstacles to Church Advancement—  
How Best to Qualify for Christian Duties.

Rev. Dr. Talmage, in the following sermon, points out the style of Christian character required for the times in which we live. The text is:

Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?—Esther iv., 14.

Esther, the beautiful, was the wife of Ahasuerus, the abominable. The time had come for her to present a petition to her infamous husband in behalf of the Jewish nation, to which she had once belonged. She was afraid to undertake the work, lest she should lose her own life; but her cousin, Mordecai, who had brought her up, encouraged her with the suggestion that probably she had been raised up of God for that peculiar mission. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Esther had her God-appointed work. You and I have ours. It is my business to tell you what style of men and women you ought to be in order that you meet the demands of the age in which God has cast your lot. So this discourse will not deal with the technicalities, but only with the practicalities. When two armies have rushed into battle, the officers of either army do not want a philosophical discussion about the chemical properties of human blood or the nature of gunpowder; they want some one to man the batteries and take out the guns. And now, when all the forces of light and darkness, of Heaven and hell, have plunged into the fight, it is no time to give ourselves to the definitions and formulas and technicalities and conventionalities of religion. What we want is practical, earnest, concentrated, enthusiastic and triumphant help.

In the first place, in order to meet the special demand of this age, you need to be an unmistakable, aggressive Christian. Of half and half Christians we do not want any more. The church of Jesus Christ will be better without them. They are the chief obstacle to the church's advancement. I am speaking of another kind of Christian. All the appliances for your becoming an earnest Christian are at your hand, and there is a straight path for you into the broad daylight of God's forgiveness. You may this moment be the bondmen of the world, and the next moment you may be princes of the Lord God Almighty. You remember what excitement there was in this country, years ago, when the prince of Wales came here—how the people rushed out by hundreds of thousands to see him. Why? Because they expected that some day he would sit upon the throne of England. But what was all that honor to which God calls you—to be sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty; yea, to be queens and kings unto God. "They shall reign with Him forever and forever."

But you need to be aggressive Christians, and not like those persons who spend their lives in hugging their Christian graces and wondering why they do not make progress. How much robustness of health would a man have if he hid himself in a dark closet? A great deal of the piety of to-day is too exclusive. It hides itself. It needs more fresh air, more outdoor exercise. There are more Christians who are giving their entire life in self-examination. They are feeling their pulses to see what is the condition of their spiritual health. How long would a man have robust physical health if he kept all the day feeling his pulse instead of going out into active, earnest

everyday work?

I was once amid the wonderful, bewitching cactus growths of North Carolina. I never was more bewildered with the beauty of flowers, and yet when I would take up one of these cactuses and pull the leaves apart the beauty was all gone. You could hardly tell that it had ever been a flower. And there are a great many Christian people in this day just pulling apart their Christian experiences to see what there is in them, and there is nothing left in them.

This style of self-examination is a damage instead of an advantage to their Christian character. I remember when I was a boy I used to have a small piece in the garden that I called my own, and I planted corn there, and every few days I would pull it up to see how fast it was growing. Now, there are a great many Christian people in this day whose self-examination merely amounts to the pulling up of that which they only yesterday or the day before planted. Oh, my friends, if you want to have a stalwart Christian character, plant it right out of doors, in the great field of Christian usefulness, and though storms may come upon it, and though the hot sun of trial may try to consume it, it will thrive until it becomes a great tree, in which the fowls of Heaven may have their habitation. I have no patience with these flower-pot Christians. They keep themselves under shelter, and all their Christian experience in a small, exclusive circle, when they ought to plant it in the great garden of the Lord, so that the whole atmosphere could be aromatic with their Christian usefulness. What we want in the church of God is more strength of piety. The century plant is wonderfully suggestive and wonderfully beautiful, but I never look at it without thinking of its parsimony. It lets whole generations go by before it puts forth one blossom; so I have really more admiration when I see the dewy tears in the blue eyes of the violets, for they come every spring. My Christian friends, time is going by so rapidly that we can not afford to be idle.

A recent statistician says that human life now has an average of only 32

years. From these 32 years you must subtract all the time you take for sleep and the taking of food and recreation; that will leave you about 16 years. From these 16 years you must subtract all the time that you are necessarily engaged in the earning of a livelihood; that will leave you about eight years. From these eight years you must take all the days and weeks and months—all the length of time that is passed in sickness—leaving you about one year in which to work for God. O my soul wake up! How darest thou sleep in harvest time, and with so few hours in which to reap? So that I state it as a simple fact that all the time that the vast majority of you will have for the exclusive service of God will be less than one year.

"But," says some man, "I liberally support the Gospel, and the church is open, and the Gospel is preached; all the spiritual advantages are spread before men, and if they want to be saved let them come and be saved—I have discharged all my responsibility." Ah! is that my Master's spirit? Is there not an old Book somewhere that commands us to go out into the highways, and the hedges and compel the people to come in? What would become of you and me if Christ had not come down off the hills of Heaven; and if He had not come through the door of the Bethlehem caravansary; and if He had not with the crushed hand of the crucifixion knocked at the iron gate of the sepulchre of our spiritual death, crying: "Lazarus, come forth?" Oh, my Christian friend! this is no time for inertia when all the forces of darkness

are at their full blast—when steam printing presses are publishing infidel tracts, when express trains are carrying messengers of sin, when fast clip-pers are laden with opium and strong drink, when the night air of our cities is polluted with the laughter that breaks up from the ten thousand saloons of dissipation and abandonment, when the fires of the second death already are kindled in the cheeks of some who, only a little while ago, were incorrupt. Oh, never since the curse fell upon the earth has there been a time when it was such an unwise, such a cruel, such an awful thing for the church to sleep. The great audiences are not gathered in Christian churches; the great audiences are gathered in temples of sin—tears of unutterable woe their baptism, the blood of crushed hearts the awful wine of their sacrament, blasphemies their litany, and the groans of the lost world the organ dirge of their worship.

Again, if you want to be qualified to meet the duties which this age demands of you, you must, on the one hand, avoid reckless iconoclasm, and, on the other hand, not stick too much to things because they are old. The air is full of new plans, new projects, new theories of government, new theologies, and I am amazed to see how so many Christians want only novelty in order to recommend a thing to their confidence; and so they vacillate and swing to and fro; and they are useless, and they are unhappy. New plans—secular, ethical, philosophical, religious, cisatlantic, transatlantic—long enough to make a line reaching from the German universities to Great Salt Lake City. Ah, my brother, do not take hold of a thing merely because it is new! Try it by the realities of the judgment day. But, on the other hand, do not adhere to anything merely because it is old. There is not a single enterprise of the church or the world but has sometime been scoffed at. There was a time when men derided even Bible societies, and when a few young men met in Massachusetts and organized the first missionary society ever organized in this country there went laughter and ridicule all around the Christian church. They said the undertaking was preposterous. And so also the work of Jesus Christ was assailed. People cried out: "Who ever heard of such theories of ethics and government? Who ever noticed such a style of preaching as Jesus has?" Ezekiel had talked of mysterious wings and wheels. Here came a man from Capernaum and Gennessaret, and He drew His illustrations from the lakes, from the sand, from the mountain, from the lilies, from the corn-stalks. How the Pharisees scoffed! How Herod derided! And this Jesus they plucked by the beard, and they spat in His face, and they called Him "this fellow!" All the great enterprises in and out of the church have at times been scoffed at, and there have been a great multitude who have thought that the chariot of God's truth would fall to pieces if it once got out of the old rut. And so there are those who have no patience with anything like improvement in church architecture, or with anything like good, hearty, earnest church singing, and they deride any form of religious discussion which goes down walking among every-day men, rather than that which makes an excursion on rhetorical stilts. Oh, that the church of God would wake up to an adaptability of work! We must admit the simple fact that the churches of Jesus Christ in this day do not reach the great masses. There are 50,000 people in Edinburgh who never hear the Gospel. There are 1,000,000 people in London who never hear the Gospel. The great majority of the inhabitants of this capital come not under the ministrations of Christ's truth, and the church of God in this day, in-

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