

"SHOW THYSELF A MAN"

"Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, "I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man." I Kings 2:1-2.

The last words of any one, as he takes his departure for the eternal world, are always of interest to those left behind. Even the last utterances of the criminal on the scaffold will be read by thousands, who would not have listened to one word of his when he stood begging at their door. The last words of great and good men, when spoken to those near and dear to them, are therefore of especial interest.

This text is the charge of a dying father. It is that of a king to his successor, who is soon to ascend the throne of Israel. The position is so responsible, the charge will be long and weighty. But no; how short the address, how few the directions---text. Be a man, that is all. Yes, but that is everything. Be a man, such as God made; not the distorted, crooked, perverted creature sin has made.

What is implied in this charge? VIR was the word the Romans used for man, and from which our word virtue comes. Virtue, too with them, meant courage and heroism. Whatever is virtuous is manly. Truthfulness is a virtue. Temperance, patience, kindness, gentleness, unselfishness, are all virtues, and therefore manly.

True manliness is to stick to your principles if they be good and right. When Garfield was a lad at Williams College, he climbed up Mount Greylock one day with a number of his companions, and spent the night on the mountain top. Seated around a camp fire they sang college songs and told stories all the evening. At length Garfield took a New Testament out of his pocket, and said: "Boys, it is my custom to read a chapter before going to bed and have a prayer. Shall we have it together?" And they all did. We admire the boy for his courage.

This text and context are very interesting in many ways, interesting as a picture, and as a specimen of counsel. It is an old man speaking to a young one, a king to his successor, an aged warrior to a youthful man of peace, a man of action to a man of knowledge, a dying man to a man on the threshold of his earthly career, one who was finishing with earth to one who was entering on its fulness a father to a son, a David to a Solomon.

When he advised Solomon to show himself a man, he attached no low and feeble sense to the term. David was a judge of manliness. Yet to his advice to Solomon to be manly he appends a description of character and a course of action, which was in his estimation manly, or at the least not unmanly. Religion therefore furnishes ample room for manly sentiments and manly courses of action. Nay, it requires them and makes them necessary.

It involves the choice of a great object. It sets a man upon living for a great purpose, the greatest one he can live for. We judge of men by the elevation and magnitude of their pursuits. There is manliness in decision, firmness, and constancy of purpose. It is characteristic of children that they do not know their own minds, that they are the sport of whim and caprice, unsteady, vacillating, freakish, easily diverted from their aim, easily discouraged by difficulties, deficient in persistency, resolution, and concentration. To see a grown man tossed about with the wind is wretched. We say then that fixedness, concentration, steadfastness, etc. are attributes of a man, are essential to the development of a truly manly character.

A very pathetic utterance is found in the second verse, namely, "I go the way of all the earth." From his earliest days he had been a favorite and a hero, and has it come to this, that at the last he must simply take his place in the great world-crowd, and go down to the common grave? His words to Solomon are the words of a soldier and a patriot -- verse 2. A noble motto this -- "SHOW THYSELF A MAN. By a man David means a soul thoroughly self-controlled, fearless, above all bribery and corruption, and vitally identified with the enduring interests of the people. This charge was intensely religious in its spirit. Not only was Solomon introduced to a throne, but the book of the law was placed in his hands, and he was simply to peruse it, understand it, and apply it. Be a man.

What are the marks by which a sterling manhood may be known?

I. Strength.

"Be thou strong." The very foundation of manhood is strength.

1. Physical strength.

2. Mental strength -- mind to be cultivated. Man who devotes himself entirely to physical development will be apt to forget the needs of the other two parts of his nature. If all the benery in a man's nature is running to brawn, there will be nothing left to run to brain. The men who have compelled the world's attention have not been physical giants but men of mental and moral muscle. Napoleon, Wellington, and Grant were not great in body. If the ideal of a perfect man consisted only in physical qualities, some animals would be higher in the scale than we. The ox surpasses a man in muscular strength; the antelope in speed; hound in keenness of scent; eagle in eyesight; rabbit in acuteness of hearing; honey-bee in delicacy of taste; spider in fineness of nervous energy. So we cannot measure a man by his body, nor by his material possessions.

A young man's value to the world and to himself depends largely on the cultivation of his intellect. The quality of our thoughts determines the quality of our character. Impure thoughts are the worms which eat away the tissues of moral character. Guard most sacredly the door of the mind, and keep it closed against the entrance of evil thoughts.

3. Moral strength.

You must put the element of conscience, love for righteousness and hatred of evil-doing into your conception of manly vigour.

Strength of purpose, will-power, determination, self-control, power to resist popular customs when wrong, are necessary. You need a courage that will not dilly-dally with evil, but that will "dare to do right, dare to be true."

To be a real man requires three qualities -- a strong body, a full-orbed mind, and a spiritual nature.

The source of this strength is in God. Moses, Joshua, Paul, Luther, etc., were mighty men, and they all found their strength in God. This strength is obtained only from God through our Lord Jesus Christ. How from Him? By repenting of all sins and cultivating personal trust in Him.

II. Sagacity.

Milton asks, "What is strength without a double share of wisdom?" and then he adds, "Strength is not made to rule, but to subserve, where wisdom bears command." To show thyself a man you must have wisdom as well as strength, for we live in a world of illusions and Satan is always trying to entrap us. Be positive and practical. Add sagacity to strength.

III. Saintliness.

A saint is one who lives unto God, and in whom God's will is law. Here manhood competes itself. No one will attain the ideal of manhood who does not in thought, purpose, impulse, and deed reflect the God in whom he lives, moves, and has his being. Saintliness includes honesty, for it accepts the golden rule.

IV. Men put a value upon us according to how we show ourselves. Don't leave it to others to show that you are a man; do it yourself. There is no instrument God can use in so many ways and places, and with such wonderful success, as a devoted Christian who can show himself a man--a man who has the tear of sympathy for the sorrowing, a word of comfort for the bereaved, a word of hope for the downcast and despondent, and a word of encouragement for all who need it.

On one occasion when Whitefield was surrounded by a mob, and began to show symptoms of alarm as the stones flew in all directions, his wife, standing by his side, cried out, "Now, George, play the man for God." We are to play the man in the battle of life because God made us to be manly and not unmanly; because the Son of Man came upon earth to show us how to suffer and be strong; because if we fear God we shall have no other fear.

At Trafalgar, Nelson sounded the war-cry: "England expects every man to do his duty." Play the man.