

# THE POWER OF A WORD

## Dr. Talmage Points Way to Life of Usefulness— An Effect of a Timely Word.

In this discourse Dr. Talmage shows an open door for anyone who desires to be useful and illustrates how a little thing may decide one's destiny. The text is Proverbs xxv. 11 (revised version): "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in baskets of silver."

A flitree basket loaded with fruit is put before us in the text. What is ordinarily translated "pictures" ought to be "baskets." Here is a silver net work basket containing ripe and golden apples, pippins or rennets. You know how such apples glow through the openings of a basket of silver network. You have seen such a basket of fruit on many a table. It whets the appetite, as well as regales the vision. Solomon was evidently fond of them. While he writes in glowing terms of pomegranates and figs and grapes and mandrakes, he seems to find solace as well as lusciousness in apples, calling out for a supply of them when he says in another place: "Comfort me with apples." Now you see the meaning of my text. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in baskets of silver."

You see the wise man eulogizes just one word. Plenty of recognition has been given for great orations. Cicero's arrangement of Catiline, the Philippians of Demosthenes, the five days argument of Edmund Burke against Warren Hastings, Edward Irving's discourse on the Bible and libraries full prolonged utterance, but my text extols the power of one word when it refers to "a word fitly spoken."

This may mean a single word or a small collection of words—something you can utter in one breath, something that you can compact into one sentence. "A word fitly spoken"—an encouraging word, a sympathetic word, an appropriate word. I can pass right down the aisle of any church and find between pulpit and front door men whose temporal and eternal destinies have been decided by a word.

### CHOOSING AN OCCUPATION.

I tell what is a great crisis in every man's history. It is the time he is entering an occupation or profession. He is opposed by men in middle life, because they do not want any more rivals, and by some of the aged, because they fear being crowded off and their places being taken by younger men. Hear the often severe and unfair examinations of young lawyers by old lawyers, of young doctors by old doctors, of young ministers by old ministers. Hear some of the old merchants talk about the young merchants. Trowels and hammers and scales are often jealous of new trowels and new hammers and new scales. Then it is difficult to get introduced. How long a time has many a physician had his sign out before he got a case. Who wants to

risk the life of his family to a young physician who has got his diploma only last spring and may not know measles from scarlatina, or to risk the obtaining of a verdict for \$20,000 to an attorney who only three years ago read the first page of Blackstone?

How is the young merchant to compete with his next-door neighbor, who can afford to undersell some things because he can more than make it up by the profit on other things, or has failed three times and had more money after each failure? How is that mechanic to make a livelihood when there are twice as many men in that trade as can in hard times find occupation? There are this very moment thousands of men who are just starting life for themselves, and they need encouragement. Not long harangue and quotation from profound books, not a page, not a paragraph, but one word, fitly spoken.

Why does not that old merchant, who has been 40 years in business, go into that young merchant's store and say, "Courage!" He needs only that one word, although, of course, you will illustrate it by telling your own experience, and how long you waited for customers, and how the first two years you lost money, and how the next year, though you did better, illness in your household swamped the surplus with doctor's bills. Why does not that old lawyer go into that young lawyer's office just after he has broken down in making his first plea before a jury and say that word of only two syllables, "Courage!" He needs only that one word, although, of course, you will illustrate it by telling him how you broke down in one of your first cases and got laughed at by court and bar and jury, and how hundreds of the most successful lawyers at the start broke down. Why does not the successful man go right away and tell those who are starting out what they went through, and how their notes get protested, and what unfortunate purchases they made, and how they were swindled, but kept right on until they reached the golden milestone? Even some who pretend to favor the new beginner and say they wish him well put obstacles in his way.

### THE NEED OF COURAGE.

There are so many men who have all the elements of usefulness and power except one—courage. If you can only utter God give them that you give them everything. In illustrating that one word show them that every man that ever amounted to anything had a terrible struggle. Show him what ships Decatur had to fight, and what a mountain Hannibal had to climb, and what a lame foot Walter Scott had to walk on, and that the greatest poet who ever lived—Milton—was blind, that one of the greatest musicians of all the ages—Beethoven was deaf, and that Stewart, in some respects the greatest merchant that America ever saw, began in his small store, dining on bread and cheese behind the counter in a snatched interregnum between customers, he opening the store and closing it, sweeping it, sweeping it out with his own broom and being his own errand boy. Show them that within ten minutes' walk there are stores, shops, and factories, and homes where as brave deeds have been done as those of Leonidas at Thermopylae, as that of Horatius at the bridge, as that of Colin Campbell at Balaklava. Tell them what Napoleon said to his staff officers when that officer declared a certain military attempt to be impossible. "Impossible!" said the great commander. "Impossible is the adjective of fools."

Show them also that which is true in worldly directions is true in spiritual directions. Call the roll of prophets, apostles and martyrs and private Christians from the time the world began and ask them to mention one man or woman greatly good or useful who was not depreciated and failed and made a laughing stock. Racks and prisons and whips and shipwrecks and axes of beheading did their worst, yet the heroes were more than conquerors. With such things you will illustrate that word "courage" and they will go out with your presence to start anew and fight, challenging all earth and hell to the combat.

### WORDS OF COMFORT.

That word "courage" fitly spoken with compressed lips and stout grip of the hand and intelligent flash of the eye—well the finest apples that ever thumped on the ground in an autumnal orchard and were placed in the most beautiful basket of silver network before keen appetites could not be more attractive.

Furthermore, a comforting word fitly spoken is a beautiful thing. No one but God could give the inventor of sick beds

(Continued on Third page.)



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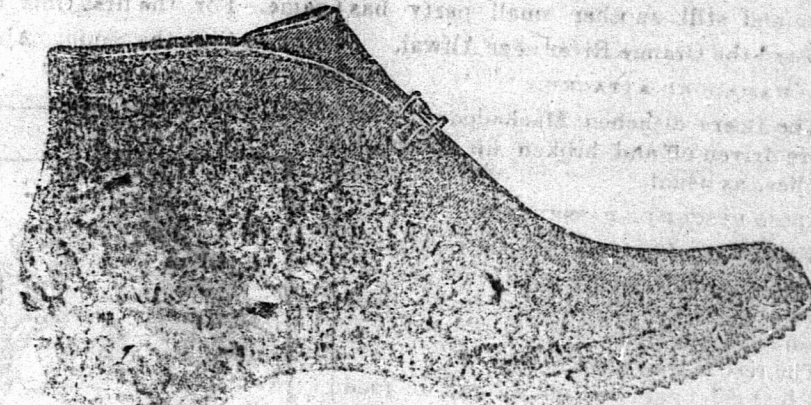
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