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QUIT YOU LIKE MEN

SERMON PREACH-
ED AT THE
VIRGINIA MILI-
TARY INSTITUTE
JUNE 24th, 1906, *by the*
REV. JAMES POWER
SMITH, ~~LLD~~ FORMER
CAPTAIN *and* A. D. C.
STAFF of STONEWALL
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1 Cor. 16 : 13.

“Quit You Like Men; Be Strong.”

It is a happy thing for us, that a man never gets far away from his boyhood. What he saw and heard, what he learned and did in his youth are most vividly impressed, and never wholly obliterated. A man is better and happier when he keeps his boyhood into old age.

The Apostle Paul never forgot Tarsus, the city in Citicia where he was brought up. To the end of his years with a boyish pride, that was most admirable, he protested that it was “no mean city.” In all that he said, and all that he wrote there are traces of his young life in his native town, in the northeast corner of the Mediterranean. He saw the ships that came into the river Cydnus, and cast anchor before the town, and remembered the parts of a ship, and their uses, and the skill of the navigator. He saw the Greek athletic games in his own town; the foot-race, and could write, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize.” “So run that ye may obtain.” He saw the combat of the boxers and wrote, “So fight I, not as one that beateth the air.” Over and over again in the Apostle’s words are the memories of the training, the rules, the umpire, the prize, the “cloud of witnesses,” “the finishing the course with the joy of triumph.”

It is especially evident that he saw the soldiers. There was a Roman garrison in Tarsus, and when under the eagle the centurion and his band came marching through the streets, Saul was one of the boys that followed. He knew the armour, defensive and offensive; he knew the discipline and drill which

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From Pamphlets.

made a seasoned soldier; he caught the idea of soldierly courage and steadfastness, the obedience and subordination, and personal sacrifice to duty which in all the ages are essential to the good soldier. Military words and images abound in all that he said and wrote. The faithful Christian was to him "a good soldier of Jesus Christ." He bears a shield and a breastplate, on his head is a helmet, and in his hand is a sword, and Paul exhorts us—"Put on the whole armour of God." In old age, in bonds in Rome, waiting for death at the bidding of Nero, he writes calmly, without a tremor of fear, "I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of glory which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day!"

As he comes to the close of this letter to the Christians of Corinth, the Apostle's words grow vigorous and tense, until he breaks out in a ringing appeal—"Watch ye; stand fast in the faith; quit you like men; be strong!"—Along a battle line he seems to pass, as a commanding officer, with the fire of battle in his eye, with anticipation of the fierce conflict to which they were come, and deep conviction of the serious issues that were suspended. And to the long line in bristling array he cries, "Watch ye"—you have a cunning foe, let there be no false security—"Stand fast in the faith," remember your oath, that in the shock there be no yielding—"Quit you like men"—that in all this action you deport yourselves like men, and not like frightened children. "Be strong"—summoning all the strength of body and will and high motive to aid you in this day of trial and conflict.

Out of this stirring battle-cry I take the words—"Quit you like men! Be strong!"

I. Young gentlemen of the graduating class of the V. M. I., my heart goes out to you today with a concern that I cannot express in words—an interest in which are mingled admiration and hope, and a deep love for the old Commonwealth of Virginia, whose honor and well-being are to be so largely

entrusted to your keeping. In a few days you are to be dismissed from the tasks and discipline of this institution, the lines will be broken and the arms be stacked. You will take off the uniform, worn so long that it has seemed a part of you. Will you cease to be soldiers? Will there be for you no more of discipline and of marching and the bearing of arms? It is my errand today to tell you that you have now come to the beginning, not to the ending. It has been a misconception of the purpose of the years you have spent in these walls and on this drill ground if you do not understand that this has been the preparation, and before you are the campaign, the toil, the battle, the peril; with all my heart, I trust, the victory, and then the palms!

The manly life upon which you now enter is not a life of ease and inactivity and pleasure. Life is a conflict, and it is given you that you may prove your manhood, and win victories for your fellow-men, and help the world in its struggle for all things right and true and good. "No man liveth to himself," and all men "bear one another's burdens," and fight one another's battles. You are, like those that have gone before, and like your fellows, to win your bread by the sweat of your brow; and I count it a great blessing to you that you will have it to do. You are to win your own growth in character, and on one can do it for you. You are to help to bear the burden of the Commonwealth. You are to be good citizens of the communities in which you dwell. You are to love the truth, and seek its progress and success. You are to take up problems for the good of mankind, some that are pending, and some that are not yet proposed. You are to be forces that make for righteousness and peace among men. You are to take your country, and the world into your care and love, and use your manhood for its good.

II. "Quit you like men!" It is as if the great Apostle, the superb leader of the Christian host for all times, knew no higher standard. "Be a man!" He does not cry down the ages, to the successive lines of young humanity marching on

to the field, "Quit you like angels," or "like saints," or acquit yourselves as heroes have done. It is a splendid encomium on our manhood, that the Apostle urging all men to faithfulness and courage and high endeavor should have no other ideal; as if there were no higher abilities, no nobler possibilities than are lodged in the breast of every man—"Quit you like men!" An old Roman, quoted by Sallust, said, "Every man is the architect of his own fortune!" But a later Christian author wrote, not of fortune, but of man himself, "Each man makes his own stature—builds himself."

Certainly the ideal man, the man who fills the measure of his being in all its parts, who measures up to the standard of manhood, physically, mentally, morally, spiritually, is a splendid image. It is as if he were to say, in your own being there are faculties, energies, aspirations, motives, that are so noble, so lofty, that to approximate their completion is the most splendid accomplishment. The world in its sore need asks no more of you. Christ, with his love for you and his love for the world to which you are sent, makes no other appeal. God, before whom you will give account, will not judge you by any other standard.

The standard is a very lofty one. If it be true that no one has perfectly accomplished his own manhood, I do yet affirm that there have been a great company of those who in the fiercest battles of life have quitted themselves 'like men.' They are not all on the rolls of fame. The world is not growing better so much by its governments, its institutions, its great benefactions, its munificent charities, or its superb literature, and it does grow upward by all these things. But the world grows in the number of its men and women of unselfish purpose, of high principle, of lofty and far-reaching aims. There are more of such men in the world today than ever before; lovers of truth—seekers after light—friends of humanity—soldiers of the Cross where once met all the world's hope of righteousness and peace!

Frederick the Great had a standard of stature for his regiment of grenadiers. In the palace of Sans Souci, at Potsdam, I have seen the little platform on which the soldier stood and the tall scaled rod at the back by which he was measured to be enlisted in the tall grenadiers. Tall men were brought from many lands, some that were bought with money, some that were seized and carried unwillingly to fill up the ranks. But no battalion of grenadiers has furnished the tall men the world needs—tall in the measure of true manliness, in courage, in purpose and patience, in faith and love and hope. These are the men the world needs, and these are the men, whom out of all our littleness, Christ our Lord would make us to be. “Quit you like men!”

The country and the world need recruits, the battalions of young men especially that are coming each summer out of our institutions of education and discipline. The lines are thin that advance to the battle and many are falling on the field.

Wherever battles have been fought young men have fought them. Young men from the American colonies fought the battles of independence from Bunker Hill to Yorktown. In the war between the sections, young men filled the ranks, and largely it was true that young men led them. I go out to Hollywood and find the small stone, stained and yellow, that marks the grave of a private in the Rockbridge Artillery, the purest and manliest boy I ever knew, who fell near me in the battle of Fredericksburg—Randolph Fairfax. And not far away I find the fair marble that bears the name of Edward Willis, who fell commanding a brigade in Hanover. And both of them were scarcely twenty-one. Alexander the Great at twenty-one was at the head of an army on the plains of Thessaly, and at thirty-three had no more worlds to conquer. I have climbed on foot the Simplon Pass all one glorious, inspiring day, over which at twenty-nine Hannibal, and 2,000 years later, at thirty-one, Napoleon led their armies into Italy. It is a marvellous story which history tells of the achievements of young men. Galileo at twenty saw the lamp swinging in the

Cathedral at Pisa and discovered the pendulum and the equal measure of time. Isaac Newton at twenty-three saw an apple fall in his father's yard and learned the law of gravitation. Michael Angelo at twenty-three completed his masterpiece in marble.

How splendid are the possibilities of the young! Of each young man of this superb class! To find one's possibility, to pursue it with singleness and ardour, to win its full accomplishment—this is an aim worthy of your manhood, this is an endeavor in which we bid you "Quit yourselves like men!" There is no wilderness so remote, there are no difficulties so encompassing, out of which there may not come, erect, stalwart and compelling, a young man on his way to usefulness and honor. Living aright anywhere, in light or in darkness, in the public eye or in obscurity, each man, every man of this class, may fulfill a lofty manhood, clean, untarnished, unselfish, honorable, a blessing to the home where he was bred, and to the country which calls him, and the world which waits for his coming. "Success," says Carlyle, "is growing to our full spiritual stature under God's sky!"

It is eminently the appeal of the Gospel of Christ. Nothing has ever done so much for young men. No book has ever told the truth about humanity so plainly, so completely. No teaching has ever been as faithful in the warning of evils within and perils without. No teachings have ever set so high a standard, nor expected so much, nor beckoned with so much encouragement. No teacher has ever set so lofty an example. No friend has ever given such sympathy, or spoken words so helpful and inspiring. Beyond all doubt the Christian life is the true manhood. There has never lived and toiled and suffered on earth but one person who was a perfect man. There is but one perfect example of a true manhood: He is the Son of God from heaven. And He came that He might give life, and give it more abundantly. To know Him, and be joined to Him, to be renewed by a life that is His, to be bound to Him by a tie that cannot be broken, to have the

Christ dwell in us by faith—this is manhood itself, a surrendered life—a saved life—and a victorious life—a life divine and eternal. It is with Christ that young men—that you, my young comrades—can “Quit yourselves like men!”

III. “Be strong!” You will surely need all the strength you can command! Do you know just what your weaknesses are? Do you suspect just what your weaknesses are likely to be? Sloth, or selfish ambition, or some bad habit—or some low and shameful passion—or the fear of man—or some low ideal? Seize it and throttle it as your enemy, and trample it under your feet. Master it and slay it at the beginning, and out of your slain and savage foe shall come strength to your heart and arm.

“Be strong” in your self-respect. Not your self-esteem, for that is a vice and a downward force; but in your self-respect, for that is a virtue and an upward power. With all the infirmities and weaknesses to be deplored—and all the failures and wrong-doings to be repented of and forsaken—there is that in the nature of every man, worthy of respect, and to be cherished in affection and honored in life. Respect yourself and your own manhood, and expect much of it, and you will win the world’s respect. Be the master of yourself, that nothing base and unworthy rise to rule your imagination or constrain your will, and you will grow strong—strong to endure and strong to act.

“Be strong” in moral earnestness. Stonewall Jackson wrote some boyish maxims in his youth, the most remarkable of which was the first—“You may be whatever you resolve to be!” It might be written on the walls of this Memorial Hall, a strong bidding and appeal to every man of every class to pass through this institute. Let there be an aim to make the best use of yourself, with every talent occupied, every opportunity unselfishly used for the world’s good; and in ways unseen of men, and perhaps unconscious to yourself, you will grow by day and by night into the full stature of your manhood.

"Be strong" by association with the strong. Association with men and women, good and strong, will surround you with moral support and incentive, and add strength to all your being. Not the living men and women only, but those whose noble characters and beneficent lives are living in books, living and beneficent more widely than when they were seen on earth, and through generations. A small shelf will hold the biographies of the largest men, and they will come down and live with you. You may read the Life of Mr. Gladstone, and the strong iron of two great men, Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Morley, his biographer, will get into your blood. You may read the Life of Phillips Brooks, and then feel to the end of your days that you have made an acquaintance and found a friend, greater than any clergyman, greater than any bishop, a man of God, and therefore a servant of all humanity.

Again and again I read the Life and the Letters of Robert E. Lee, and my own manhood is enlarged and elated, I am filled with the enthusiasm of my own career, and once again and to the end I am a follower of my great Commander. Across my own fields of toil and conflict, I hear the bidding of that noblest man of all American story.

"Be strong in the Lord!" I may not fail to remind you today that there is a loftier association, that there is a supernatural source of strength; which is the supreme need of every man, without which all other strength may prove a broken reed. If I am not mistaken, it is the lesson of all great biography, that the source of really great and useful lives is from above this world of ours. "Be strong in the Lord"—with a hand reaching daily upward to His hand, which is so constantly and so lovingly stretching down to you; with an eye looking to His example, and His leading; with an ear open to every bidding of His will; with a heart that trusts Him and seeks ever after Him; and His divine power will come down to fill the weak places and quicken into new and better life all the elements of your manhood.

Young gentlemen! My comrades and friends; I bring you an appeal that comes down through the Christian ages. It has been heard in all the generations of the marching host of humanity, and has quickened the steps and stirred the hearts of a great company—"Quit you like men; be strong!"

Once more I fancy that I am an aid-de-camp, and across the field of more than forty years I bear the battle-cry of Stonewall Jackson, and his great and honored commander. For the need of the country and the world, for the honor and fulfilment of your young manhood, for the bidding of the Captain of our Salvation, "Quit you like men; be strong!"