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THE CHOICE OF A VOCATION.

1 Tim. 3:1. "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work."

BY REV. THORNTON WHALING.

We all make the choices which in their turn make us. No other being can force upon us by power from without any of those decisions which are freely created by each one of us through the power which dwells within us. *We do what we choose*, and the Almighty Being would have to convert us into an entirely different kind and order if we could be made to do what we do not choose to do. It is, therefore, a prerogative which belongs to our personality that we each decide for ourselves what shall be our vocation, our business, our profession, our work in life. None of us can have any masters, however holy or wise, who can do for us this solemn and strategic thing by which we pick out our own place and sphere through which we make, each one of us, our own peculiar contribution to the world's work and the world's life.

And yet there are certain regulative principles by which such a choice should be guided, which may be starred and emphasized for the use and inspiration of those who have yet to face this issue which oftentimes hangs like a black mysterious cloud over the horizon of the young man's mind. What shall be my vocation and business in life? I venture to suggest, *first*, that our own aptitudes, desires and tastes should have ample consideration as we make the choice of a life vocation.

There are so many square pegs in round holes and so many round pegs in square holes that we should each fear lest we prove another one of those tragical and ghastly misfits with which the world is crowded. Our own aptitudes give us a prophetic key which may tell us what door it is best for us, to open, the door into law, medicine, the ministry, engineering, commerce, or what not. The great Power which made this complex, many-sided world of ours, with so many different kinds of work to be done, must make also (as we know He does) many different kinds of men, each different kind of

man fitted to do a correspondingly different kind of work; and the work and the man must fit or the work will not be well done, and the man himself will not do well. The call to the lawyer, to the physician, to the teacher, to the farmer, to the minister, is at this point the same, viz: that the man has the particular outfit of gifts which fit to do the work of the engineer, the chemist, the lawyer, the physician, the teacher, the farmer the minister or what not.

Our *aptitudes* frequently can not be directly detected but are indirectly revealed in the unbidden desires which assume the throne within us. If I say "I want to be a lawyer, a physician, an engineer, a chemist, a minister," it is most likely the unconscious expression of the deepest instincts and impulses of the profounder self, but the sub-conscious self which is the motor, the dynamo, really driving every man who is driven forward with any momentum or force. Our desires are frequently the summation and incarnation of all the practical energy there is within, and they are not to be trodden under foot like Michael trampling upon the dragon, but they are to be weighed upon scales which will accurately register their values.

A man's *tastes* oftentimes are mirrors which show him what his life work may most successfully be. If a young fellow loves to analyze acids and salts, better let him be a chemist instead of insisting on his becoming an artist; if he likes to handle bugs and worms and such like, better let him become a biologist instead of insisting on his entering the law; if he delights in construction and calculating the stress on building material, better let him become an engineer instead of urging him into journalism; if he finds deep interest in the pathology of the animals, better let him become a veterinary surgeon than to thrust him into the ministry, which deals largely with the minds and souls of men. No man is wise who ignores his own aptitudes and desires and tastes in locating himself at his own place in the world's work, because any man does with ten-fold force the work he is fitted to do, that he loves to do, and that it gratifies his tastes and inner impulses to do. That man is a slave who is engaged in doing the thing which does not appeal to him as the thing that he would prefer above all things else to do.

But, I remark, *next*, that there are some subordinate principles which may be helpfully used in making our choice of a life vocation. For example, we may well ask:

(1) What kind of a man will be created by the prosecution of the life vocation which I am now choosing for myself? It is one of the evils of our day that our industrial system apportioned to some men the job of putting a head on pins or of driving endless pegs into the soles of endless shoes. The job isn't big enough for a man. Imagine the kind of man developed at the end of thirty years by working ten hours per day, six days in the week, as pin-header or peg-driver. I knew a young man who was A. B. and LL. B. from a great Southern University, and a young man of parts, who worked for some time for one of the Armour factories, and whose sole business was to deftly catch with proper instruments innumerable turkeys, hoist them in the air by the legs, and then quickly cut their throats as they hung suspended, that the blood might all run out. I don't think he will ever recover from the partial atrophy of his power which ensued from his condescending to play for a while the role of turkey throat-cutter. A thousand forms of big work are going on in the world, any one of which is big enough to task and develop all the powers which belong to the normal man; and he ought to choose that one of the forms of big work which will best fit him and best make out of him a bigger and bigger man. A man like Col. Roebing, who went down amongst those gallant souls on the ill-starred Titanic, and who built the Brooklyn Bridge, and whose life was given to planning serviceable structures which will last for generations—such a man could not have been any little, one-horse man, with an outlook like a razor's edge and with sympathies and capacities measured something like two by four. There are plenty of big vocations, beginning with the ministry right down through teaching, law, medicine, journalism, or to bend the curve up a little, like engineering, scientific farming and so on; and in choosing which of these we may well ask, Which am I best fitted for? and Which will make the most of a man out of me? Where is the vocation which will require me to put into it everything that is in me, and which will yield me big interest in growth and satisfaction

by the use of all my powers? My young friend, you are too big a creature to go into a little life work, which will exercise just the least bit of the princely faculties and powers God locked up inside of you that you may unlock them by use in life.

(2) Nor should we forget to estimate the social influence of the life vocation we may choose. No man can divorce his life from the lives of his fellow-men, and his own success, judged even by material standards, depends on the contribution he may make to the enrichment of his fellow-men. Money is a good thing; the good book says "money answereth all things," *i. e.*, it will get you some part of everything else; and yet not quite; it is not really everything. I will suppose a man might make more money by loading ships with cheap whiskey and selling it by the wholesale to the naked savages in Africa, and yet after he had made his millions, he wouldn't really seem like a success even to himself; and the important person to convince you have succeeded is that baffling and mysterious person you call *self*, and whom you have to live with whether you wish to or not. We are talking much today of social service, and we have invented a new science which we call sociology; but these are but larger applications of our Lord's great command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," or of the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them to do unto you." In fact this is a world-old principle, for man by creation is a *socius* as well as an *ego*, and way down yonder at the outset of human history Cain had the red mark put on him because he asked the anti-social, murderous question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The usual life vocations are magnificent opportunities of social service; the engineer who bridged the Mississippi River, the farmer who raises wholesome wheat and corn, or potatoes and rice, the chemist who detects the adulteration of food, the sanitarian who tells a whole city how to avoid the contagion of smallpox, tuberculosis or typhoid fever, are serving their fellow-men, though they may not be fully conscious of it, as truly as the brave editor, the inspiring if sometimes caustic teacher, or the earnest prophet-like preacher. In choosing a life vocation I may well ask both questions, What will come out of it for

me? and What will come out of it for my fellow-men? I would like to have a life vocation that would tie me happily to my fellow-men and make them glad that I have lived amongst them, and when gray hairs and old age comes make them rise up and call me blessed; and if there be any great beyond it would be pleasant to have so served your fellows that they would receive you with applause and glad acclamations into the "everlasting habitations."

(3) In choosing a life vocation the hypothesis that there is a God should be remembered, for the wisest men still think it is wise to live as if there were a God—to live as if we knew that He had a profound interest in our world which is also His, and that He is a party to all rightful enterprises and legitimate business. If there is a world there is likely a God, and if there is a God He is in His world. The building of bridges and running of engines, the plowing of fields and launching of ships, the invention of new machines and the wise use of old ones concern Him as certainly as the building of churches and the meeting of presbyteries and the ordination of bishops. But we ought to interpret Him by the highest which we know; our godly fathers and saintly mothers; and higher still, by that Name which I need not call before we all shall know it. I need not dogmatize here; I need only report that our world puts one Name first—that Name which stands for Him in *whom* our fathers and mothers lived and from whom they all drew their spiritual beauty and moral charm. It is well to remember the world's Engineer and Architect and Governor, and in living and working on His world it is wise to build our lives to some purpose which He not only approves, but which, with divine enthusiasm, He indorses. I can choose a life vocation which stands for the highest which we can think of God, and which is linked to the most sacred interests of His divine heart. I can make my life vocation hitch on to that which God thinks most "worth while," and to which He stands most committed. Am I not wise if, passing by many splendid vocations, I choose that one which makes me most effectually a fellow-worker with Him in the service of His Kingdom of righteousness, and joy, and peace?