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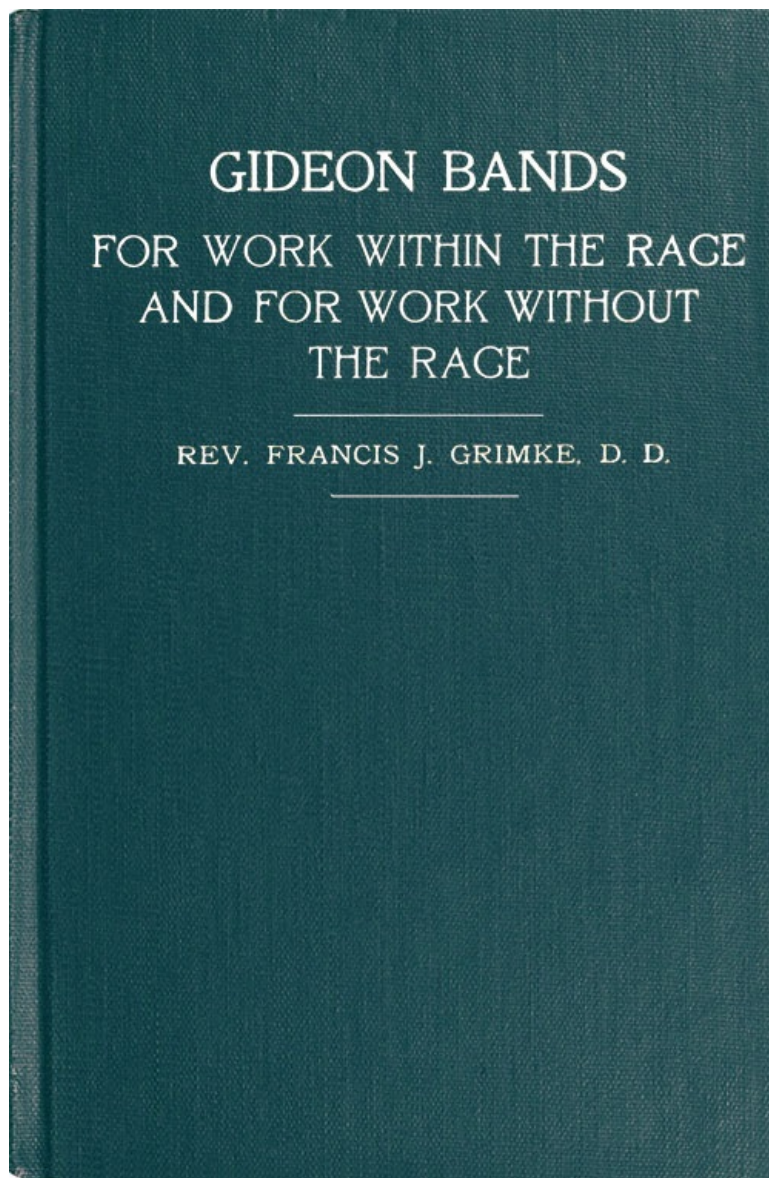
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RACE AND FOR WORK WITHOUT THE RACE ***

Gideon Bands



GIDEON BANDS

FOR WORK WITHIN THE RACE
AND FOR WORK WITHOUT
THE RACE

A Message to the Colored People
of the United States

A DISCOURSE DELIVERED IN THE FIFTEENTH STREET
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, WASHINGTON, D. C.,
SUNDAY, MARCH THE 2ND, 1913,
BY THE PASTOR,
REV. FRANCIS J. GRIMKE, D. D.

"BETTER NOT LIVE AT ALL THAN NOT BE NOBLE."

"UNLESS ABOVE HIMSELF HE CAN
ERECT HIMSELF, HOW POOR A THING IS MAN!"

“FOR FREEDOM’S BATTLE ONCE BEGUN,
BEQUEATH’D BY BLEEDING SIRE TO SON,
THOUGH BAFFLED OFT IS EVER WON.”

“EVERY BONDMAN IN HIS OWN HAND BEARS
THE POWER TO CANCEL HIS CAPTIVITY.”



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GIDEON BANDS FOR WORK WITHIN THE RACE AND FOR WORK WITHOUT IT.

And Jehovah said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Giliad. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand. And Jehovah said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down to the water, and I will try them for thee there; and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I shall say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. So he brought them down to the water: and Jehovah said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hands to their mouth, was 300; but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And Jehovah said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thy hand; and let all the people go every man to his place.—JUDGES 7:1-7.

Several years ago this passage formed a part of the annual programme of the Young Peoples' Society of Christian Endeavor, and was discussed under the heading, "Wanted: Men for Gideon's Band." And this is the subject that I desire to consider this morning. There are several lines of thought suggested by the topic. No one can read the narrative out of which it grows without being profoundly impressed.

I. In ringing terms there is the proclamation of a want. Wanted! is the note that rings out clear and distinct. There is a demand, a pressing need, a crying necessity. Wanted! Wanted! Wanted! We have all heard that cry before. It is not a new one. It is one with which we are all familiar. Along the street we often see the sign in the windows of stores or on the outside, "Boy wanted." "Man wanted." Every paper we take up, every magazine we read is full of advertisements of one kind or another, all of which are expressions of a want of some kind. They are put in and paid for by people who have goods that they want to sell, houses that they want to rent, property that they want to dispose of, money that they want to put out at interest, or, they want to find employment of some kind.

II. Another thought that grows naturally out of the topic is, Wanted by whom? The context leaves us in no doubt as to the answer. Wanted by the Lord God of hosts, by Jehovah. The great power that is working here is God:—he it is who is directing everything; he it is with whom Gideon is in communication and who is planning the whole campaign that is to be projected. It is

Jehovah who is expressing the need, and who is making the appeal. While primarily the reference is to God, in another sense, the need expressed here was felt by the whole Jewish community—the state, the church, the family, society at large. These were all in need, and in great and pressing need. No one can read the narrative without feeling the burden of this need pressing upon him.

III. Another thought that springs naturally into our minds as we think of the subject is, What is it that is wanted? And the answer is Men for Gideon's Band. Men are what is wanted; men to be welded together in one compact body for a definite and specific purpose. This band, which God is seeking to organize here, is called Gideon's Band. Who was Gideon? He was the son of Joash, of the tribe of Manasseh. He lived in the midst of distressing circumstances. His people were greatly oppressed. There were powerful enemies that harassed them; that made life miserable for them. The writer of this book of Judges gives us this insight into their sad condition: "And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. And because of Midian the children of Israel made them dens which are in the mountains, and the caves, and the strongholds. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east; they came up against them; and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till they came unto Gaza, and left no substance in Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents; they came in as locusts for multitude; both they and their camels were without number: and they came into the land to destroy it. And Israel was brought very low."

What is said here of Gideon reveals the same sad condition of things. "And the angel of Jehovah came and sat under the oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of Jehovah appeared unto him, and said unto him, Jehovah is with thee, thou mighty man of valor. And Gideon said unto him, Oh, my Lord, if Jehovah is with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where are all his wondrous work which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not Jehovah bring us up from Egypt? but now Jehovah hath cast us off, and delivered us into the hand of Midian."

What a wail of distress runs through the whole of this narrative. In order to preserve a little wheat, enough to keep soul and body together, it had to be hid away: and when the time came for threshing it out, it had to be done in secret, in obscure, out-of-the-way places, as we find Gideon doing here. They certainly were in a most pitiable condition. It is well for us to remember, in this connection, that the evils from which these people were suffering were due to their own misconduct. They had no one to blame but themselves. Their condition might have been very different if they had behaved themselves. And this fact is clearly brought out in the narrative: God is very careful to bring to their attention the secret of their misfortunes:—

"And it came to pass when the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah because of Midian, that Jehovah sent a prophet unto the children of Israel: and he said unto them, Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and gave you their land; and I said unto you, I am Jehovah your God; ye shall not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell. But ye have not hearkened unto my voice." When evils come upon us, it is well to ask ourselves the question, How far are we responsible for them? How far are they due to our own misconduct, or the misconduct of those who have gone before us? It isn't safe to assume that we are not to blame, that our skirts are clear. In nine case out of ten the opposite will be found to be true, as we find it here, in regard to these Israelites.

Gideon's Band was a body of men gotten together, in view of the distressing circumstances here set forth for the purpose of fighting the enemy, of shaking off the yoke of the oppressor. Let us study these men for a moment. There were three hundred of them in all. So far as the record goes not one of their names has been preserved to us, save that of the leader only. The names are all omitted, but the qualities that characterized them are preserved. We are not told who they were, but we are told what kind of men they were: and it is to this point particularly that I desire to direct attention just here. A careful study of what is written here in regard to these men will reveal the following facts about them:

(1). They were fully conscious of the evils from which they were suffering, and earnestly desired to be rid of them. It matters not how these evils originated, the point to which I am directing attention here is, that these men recognized them as evil. They were not satisfied with conditions as they were. They wanted a change. They were tired of the oppression of the Midianites. They realized that they were being oppressed, and that it was not good for them to continue in the condition in which they were. And it is only where such a mental attitude exists that there can be any successful warfare against oppressive conditions. Unless the evil to be remedied is felt, and keenly felt, it is not likely that there will be any effort put forth to remedy it, or any prospect of securing the cooperation of those who are suffering in an effort to do so.

(2). They were men of courage, of splendid daring. They came in response to a call from Gideon. Gideon had thrown down the altar of Baal which his father had erected; and because his father refused to turn him over to be put to death by the Midianites, the adherents of Baal, a large force was collected to enforce the decree of death against him. It was under such circumstances that Gideon issued his call. We are told, "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezar was gathered together after him. And he sent messengers

throughout all Manasseh; and they were also gathered together after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.”

As the result of this call some thirty-two thousand men came to his relief. Twenty-two thousand of these, however, came simply because they felt that they must come, but their hearts were not in it. They recognized the fact that there was danger in the step they were taking, that they might lose their lives in the conflict which was sure to ensue between them and the enemy. As soon therefore as the opportunity presented itself they went back to their homes. Of the ten thousand who remained however, who, with the full consciousness of what the outcome might be, kept their places, the three hundred of whom we are speaking were a part. The men who went back, who availed themselves of the permission granted by the proclamation “Whosoever is fearful and trembling, let him return from Mount Gilead,” would have been glad to have the oppressors’ yoke broken, to have been relieved of the evils from which they were suffering; but they were not willing to risk anything, to expose themselves to any danger. They were timid; they were afraid of making things worse; of bringing upon themselves still greater evils. Not so however with these men. They were willing to endure hardship; to encounter danger; to lay down their lives, if necessary. The enemies were all about them, and about them in vast numbers. The record is, “And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along the valley like locusts for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand which is upon the seashore for multitude.” But there is no fear discoverable in these three hundred men.

(3). They were men of faith. They believed in God. They were willing to trust God; to rest upon his promises. They knew perfectly well that, in and of themselves, they were no match for those who were opposed to them and with whom they were to measure arms; but they knew that Jehovah, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob—the God who had brought their forefathers out of Egypt and who had sustained them for forty years in the wilderness, was more than a match for them; and that it was under his direction that they were to fight. It was this element of faith in God that enabled them on that night, when the assault was made, to go forth as they did a bare handful and to take their places as indicated to them by Gideon. That their hope of victory was not in their own strength is clear from the manner in which they were armed. There was not a deadly weapon among them. There was not a single weapon of warfare, either offensive or defensive, among them. They were armed with what? The record is: “And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and put into the hands of all of them trumpets and empty pitchers, with torches within the pitchers.” This was a strange way to equip men to do battle with powerful and deadly enemies; and yet this was the way they were armed. The smallness of their number, as well as the manner in which they were equipped for battle, show, in a very striking manner, their faith in an arm that was mightier than theirs. If it had not been that God was back of them, and that they were conscious of that fact, they never would have budged a step. Gideon might have issued his order, but it would have met with no response. He would have called, and called in vain for help. Faith in Jehovah—in the Lord God Almighty—becomes important as an element of character: (1) Because of the subjective effect upon the individual exercising it. It is a real source of strength to him. And (2) because God can help, and does help those who put their trust in him. “All things are possible to them that believe,” we are told in the inspired record. And Jesus said to his disciples: “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.” In saying that these were men of faith means a great deal therefore. It is a great thing to be linked with God; to be consciously in league with the Almighty.

(4). These men were reliable. They could be depended upon. What they were directed to do; what they undertook to do, they did faithfully. The order which they received from their leader was: “Behold when I come to the outermost part of the camp, it shall be that as I do so shall ye do. When I blow the trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, For Jehovah and for Gideon.” This was the order which they received; and here is the record as to how they carried it out: “So Gideon and the three hundred men that were with him, came to the outermost part of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch, when they had but newly set the watch: and brake in pieces the pitchers that were in their hands. And the three companies blew the trumpets”—that is what they were directed to do; and brake in pieces the pitchers—that is what they were directed to do; and held the torches in their left hand and the trumpets in their right hand—that is what they were directed to do; and cried the sword of the Lord and of Gideon—that is what they were directed to do. What they were directed to do, they did. Not a man failed. The record is, “And there stood every man in his place round about the camp.” They did not skulk away; they were at the post of duty to which they had been assigned. Each one answered the call of duty; each one proved faithful.

(5). There is still another thing about these men that should be noted. It comes out in connection with the manner in which they drank water. The record is, “And Jehovah said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there; and it shall be that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. So he brought down the people unto the water: and Jehovah said unto Gideon, Every one that lapped of the water with his tongue, as a dog lapped, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink.” The three hundred men, of whom we are speaking, lapped the water and because of that fact were selected by Jehovah for the special work which he had in view. It is not quite clear, perhaps, exactly what the quality is which this is intended to indicate. The fact that they did not get down upon their knees to drink might indicate

that they were younger, more vigorous, more active than the rest; or it might indicate that they were more alert, more vigilant, more watchful. They were surrounded by enemies, and were liable at any time to be assailed. Their not getting down upon their knees would seem to indicate that they realized the danger to which they were exposed, and kept themselves in an attitude that would enable them instantly to defend themselves, to meet the enemy. The test to which they were subjected, if we take this view of the matter, shows that they were men of force, that they were active, wide awake. They fully appreciated the circumstances in which they were placed and the necessity on their part of being active, wide awake, on the alert.

Such was the character of the men of whom we are speaking. They were men of conviction—they felt, and felt keenly the evils from which they were suffering, and their minds were fully made up to endure them no longer, if by any effort of theirs they could escape them. They were men of genuine courage—they were not afraid to meet the enemy. They were men of faith—faith in God. They were men who were thoroughly reliable—who could be depended upon, to whom any duty could be assigned in the confident assurance that it would be faithfully attended to. And they were men who were active, vigorous—men of physical and mental stamina.

The getting together of such a company as this was a great achievement. It wasn't easily done. Thirty-two thousand men had to be sifted before they could be found; but they were found. When the time comes God is always able to find the men he wants to use. When the great Civil War broke out in this country, it was a singular fact, that there were three such men as Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan ready to lead the Union forces on to victory. And the same was true when the war between Russia and Japan occurred: God had already in waiting a Togo to send to the bottom of the sea of Japan the combined fleet of the enemy; and on the land an Ozama and a Kuroki to overwhelm in a succession of unprecedented victories the army of the enemy. And here God found three hundred men to do the work which he wanted done, and placed at their head a man who was worthy to lead them.

GIDEON'S BAND was organized for the purpose of fighting the Midianites—the enemies that were oppressing the Jews at that time. It is not of the Jews, however, that I desire to speak at this time, but of ourselves as a race. We too have enemies—present, ever-active, and powerful. These enemies may be divided into two general classes—those that are affecting injuriously our moral and economic condition, and those that are affecting injuriously our civil and political status.

(1). Those that are affecting injuriously our moral and economic condition. Under this head are to be classed the evil tendencies within our own hearts, and, which are not different from the evil tendencies in other races; for, after all, human nature is everywhere the same. The same radical tendencies are discoverable in all men. Human nature is not different in the black man from what we find it in the white man, or in the men of any other race. Everywhere, in the human heart are evil tendencies that lead inevitably downward, that gravitate towards lower levels. We, as a race, have these tendencies just as other races. Under this head may be classed also such organized forces of evil as strong drink, the saloon, the whole liquor business; impurity, all gambling institutions, the dance hall, the many agencies that encourage idleness, and frivolity. Everywhere among us these forces are at work. And just as the Jews, in the time of Gideon, suffered from the inroads of the Midianites, so are we suffering from the ravages of these foes. What inroads the saloon is making among us. How we are being ruined by it morally! How our physical strength is being depleted by it! How we are being impoverished by it! Think of what impurity is doing! How it is dragging down hundreds and thousands of our young men—down, down into that deepest hell of moral degradation; for there is nothing that sinks a man so low in the scale of being as impurity, as a lustful, lascivious life. Think of what the dance hall and the spirit of frivolity which it encourages, are doing to demoralize our young people. These and many other forces are at work among us, and are steadily, persistently, day and night, operating to destroy us, soul and body. The evil tendencies within us, and the evil influences without us are conspiring to destroy us—to destroy us physically, morally, economically. It is well for us as a race to know what these evil influences are and how we are being affected by them.

(2). As a race, in addition to those forces that affect injuriously our moral and spiritual, our physical and economic interests, we are also beset by enemies that are laboring earnestly to deprive us of our civil and political rights as American citizens. These enemies are most persistent in their efforts, and everywhere are endeavoring to create a sentiment against us. Every blunder that any member of the race makes, every misstep that any member of the race takes is by them magnified, and by them paraded through the press, and charged to the race as a whole. These are the enemies that are clamoring for Jim-Crow cars, for segregation in our cities, for laws against the inter-marriage of the races; and who are endeavoring in every possible way to humiliate us and to make life just as hard as possible for us. The marvel is, as a race, that we are doing as well as we are, in view of the many and deadly forces that are arrayed against us. The verdict seemingly is, If we are allowed to live at all we must be content to be menials, to occupy only the lowest places; and there is a disposition to crowd us out of even such places. The feeling is, not only that this is a white man's government, but that everything in this country is for the white man. The right of the colored man to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, to even the most ordinary courtesies of life, seems to be questioned. He is, nominally, in a Christian land; but when it comes to the treatment which it accords to him, there is no thought of Christianity, no effort or endeavor in any way to be governed by the simplest principle of the religion of Jesus Christ. In the treatment that is accorded to him every principle of Christianity is ignored. There is not the slightest disposition to recognize him as a brother, to treat him as a

man. The atmosphere in which he lives is a hostile atmosphere. The emigrant from Europe, with all his ignorance and degradation is welcomed with outstretched hands; but no such spirit greets the Negro. This is as much his home, and he has just as much right to be here as any other class of citizens; and yet he is treated, is made to feel as if he were an alien. During the Christmas holidays I received a Christmas card upon which was represented a very forlorn looking little colored boy, and under it was written: "No one loves me." Whether it was intended by the artist, who was colored, to represent the condition of the race in this country or not, I do not know; but, in a sense, and to a measure, it certainly does represent our condition among this white population in the midst of which we are living. This is not true, of course, of all of the white people. There are some who are, in a sense, friendly to us, and who, up to a certain point, are willing to stand by us; but there are comparatively few even among these who, in their heart of hearts, recognize us as brothers in the sense in which they recognize white men, or who feel that we are entitled to precisely the same treatment as white men are entitled to. They think we are entitled to some consideration, but not to all that white men are entitled to. The broad Christian principle of the brotherhood of man, not of white men, but of all men, is a principle that, in spite of our professed Christianity, and our professed passion for democratic institutions as a nation, has never been recognized in this country except so far as white men are concerned. And this is why the struggle of the colored man here for civil and political equality has encountered such wide-spread opposition on the part of the enemies of the race, and such half-hearted support on the part of even his professed friends. It is because, at bottom, on the part of both friends and foes, there is this denial, consciously or unconsciously, of brotherhood, this feeling that they are dealing with a different order of beings from themselves. Loyalty to Christianity and to democratic principles requires, however, that this barrier be broken down. And, sooner or later, I believe it will be broken down. The Negro cannot permanently be denied equality of rights and opportunities and Christianity and true democracy be maintained. One or the other will be sure to succumb. Christianity and true democracy cannot exist anywhere and inequality of rights and opportunities continue to exist. The whole tendency of both of these forces is to break down walls of separation and to bring about a state of universal brotherhood. And these are the great forces of the future—the forces that will more and more, control the destiny of humanity.

What now is our duty, in view of present conditions—in view of the forces that are arrayed against us—the forces that mean, if victorious, physical, intellectual, moral, economic, social, and political degradation? How are these evils to be met? God's method of meeting the enemy, as set forth in the passage we are considering, is the one that must be followed.

How was the yoke of the Midianites thrown off? It was through a band of faithful men, whom he had gotten together, and who worked in dependence upon him. And this is all that is needed to-day to bring victory, to overthrow the forces of evil, to drive out the enemy.

(1). We need the right kind of men and women—men and women who see the evil and deplore it—men and women of moral convictions—men and women whose sympathies are with the right, whose whole nature rises up in protest against the evil. One reason why it is so difficult to get anything done along moral lines is because there are so few who have any convictions, so few who feel, as the apostle felt when he said, "Necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is me if I preach not the gospel." So profoundly had the truth taken hold of him, such were his convictions in regard to the needs of humanity and the adaptation of the gospel to meet those needs that he simply could not keep still.

We need also men and women of courage—men and women who are not afraid to attack the evil, to speak out in condemnation of the things about them that are demoralizing in their tendency. Another reason why it is so difficult to make any headway in moral reforms is because there are so many cowards in society, so many who are timid, who are afraid to speak out, to lift up their voices for fear of hurting themselves or of offending somebody. Cowardice has silenced many a lip, has paralyzed many an arm that might have wrought mightily for God and truth.

We need also reliable men and women—men and women who can be depended upon; men and women who, when the crisis comes, when the conflict begins, will not desert, but will stand by their colors. There are so many who blow hot and cold on moral issues, who are with you to-day and with the enemy to-morrow.

We need also earnest men and women—men and women who are zealous in the cause of right—heartily in favor of what is pure, lovely, and of good report—who are not disposed to make any compromises with evil, who are out and out in their opposition to the forces of evil about them. And here is another reason why it is difficult to do very much—there are so many who are lukewarm, indifferent, who don't seem to care whether moral reforms go on or not. If they do anything at all it is in an indifferent, half-hearted, non-committal way.

We need also God-fearing men and women—men and women of faith—men and women who build on God, who stand on the promises of God. One thing we may be assured of—nothing can be effectively done for the moral uplift of the race, for the overthrow of the forces of evil that are at work in our midst, unless we have in every community men and women such as I have been describing, through whom to operate as the first great requisite.

(2). These men and women ought to be brought together in some form of organization. The three hundred men who formed Gideon's Band were welded together. They understood each other; they saw alike; they felt alike—all had the same object in view; all worked according to the

same plan; all were under the direction of one leader. An individual working alone may accomplish something; but the most effective way of working, especially where there is much to be done, is in combination, is by uniting our forces under intelligent leadership. Three hundred men working together can always do more than one man working by himself, however effectively he may work. The good people in every community, the people who feel the need of doing something, must come together and pull together—must join hands in waging war against the forces of evil, by directly opposing them, and by setting up counter influences. In other words, they must stand together if they are to make their influence felt, if they are to do the most effective work. And here is another reason why we do so little. The people who ought to stand together do not always stand together. The people who ought to say, Amen when a blow is struck for the right, when evils are assailed, are the very ones often who criticise the man or the woman who has the courage to speak out. And so the little that is done is often neutralized.

(3). We need still another thing. After we get the right kind of men and women; and get them organized we need help from God. The real secret of the success which came to these three hundred men was that God was with them. In other words, what I mean is, that we have got to carry on this fight against the forces that are arrayed against us, moral or otherwise, if we hope for success, in dependence upon God; we have got to feel as Luther did:—

“Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right man on our side—
The man of God’s own choosing:
Dost ask who that man may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth His Name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.”

Unless we fight in the consciousness that we are not fighting alone; unless God actually comes to our aid, our efforts are vain. God has promised to help; and he will help. And this we should remember and avail ourselves of.

With these conditions fulfilled—with the right kind of men and women among us, animated by the same spirit, working towards the same end, and linked with God all things in the way of moral uplift, and in the way of counteracting the influence of the forces of evil about us are possible. The gates of hell will not be able to withstand the united, aggressive, persistent effort of men and women of this stamp—men and women who are themselves thoroughly alive to the importance of keeping the standard high, and of waging unceasing warfare against the forces of evil. “One,” we are told, “shall chase a thousand, and two shall put ten thousand to flight.” And where the conditions are fulfilled the rule never fails to work—victory always follows. We are weak, because we haven’t faith; we are weak, because we are not united; we are weak, because we are not in earnest.

Such bands of men and women as I have been describing, are everywhere needed to-day—in the home, in the church, in the Sabbath school, in the Young Peoples’ Society of Christian Endeavor, in all our secret organizations—among the Masons and Odd Fellows; in all our benevolent societies, in our schools, colleges, universities, in all business corporations, banking and other establishments—everywhere such bands are needed—bands of clean men and women, pure men and women, men and women who stand up for what is right, who are willing to fight for what is right, who can always be depended upon in every moral crisis—who fight, and who fight always on the side of right, of honor, of decency—whose influence is always thrown in the interest of the things that are true, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report.

All that I have said in reference to meeting the moral evils that assail us, is also true as to meeting those enemies who are assailing our civil and political rights, as American citizens. They are to be met in the same way.

(1). In every community we have got to have men and women who put a proper estimate upon our civil and political rights—men and women who know what rights we are entitled to as American citizens, who value those rights; and who are deeply conscious therefore of the wrong which the enemies of the race are seeking to perpetrate upon us by depriving us of those rights. There are some members of our race, unfortunately, who, for one reason or another, have attempted to minify the importance of civil and political rights, or who, at least, pretend that they see no great evil in the deprivation of these rights. I say pretend, for, at heart, I do not believe they think anything of the kind. They cannot believe as they say they do, if they have any self respect, or any appreciation of what citizenship means. Such people are of no value to us in the fight which we are making for our rights under the Constitution: they are rather a hindrance to us, because they are used by the enemy in justification of the course which they are pursuing. The fact that there are colored people, and some so-called leaders, who don’t attach much importance to these rights, makes the white assailant feel that, after all, no great injury is done to the Negro. The colored people themselves, they say, in effect, don’t regard it as such, and why should we, why should we attach any more importance to the matter than they do. In every community therefore, as a foil to this pernicious doctrine, there must be men and women to

whom these rights mean something; there must be men and women who hold them in high estimation, who have a deep and abiding sense of their value, of their importance. Everywhere, throughout the race, very little patience ought to be shown, or respect either, to Negroes, whether big or little, who undervalue, and who are seeking to instill into the race a spirit of indifference to civil and political rights. To do so is to encourage the race to commit political suicide; and the race that is willing to commit political suicide is the race that will be driven to the wall, that will be the football of every other race within the Republic. Strange, that some of us are so stupid or so blinded by selfishness that we don't see this! Personally I have absolutely no patience with the Negro, big or little, who is content to live in a country, under laws which are made for his government without his consent and about which he, not only has nothing to say, but is purposely excluded from participation in the functions of government. The American colonies resisted the imposition of a tax by the British Parliament, because they were taxed without representation; and they were right in the resistance which they offered. The position in which our enemies are seeking to place us is a humiliating one, and I pity the race or individual who doesn't see it, and who doesn't feel the humiliation of being compelled to submit to laws without having a voice in the making of them, while others are accorded that right, and for no reason except the color of their skin. It is humiliating to be thus discriminated against; and the more deeply this sense of humiliation is felt by the average Negro, the more difficult it will be to permanently deprive him of that right.

(2). The men and women of our race, in every community, who value civil and political rights, who are not content to be legislated for without having a voice in saying who the legislators shall be, should work together, should come together in some form of organization, for the purpose:

(a). Of asserting in a kindly, but positive manner, whenever it shall be necessary, our claims as American citizens under the constitution. We have rights under the constitutions; we are American citizens, and we are not to forget this ourselves, nor are we to let others lose sight of it. The manly assertion of our rights is a duty which we owe to ourselves; and which at the proper time, we should never hesitate to perform.

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(b). We should come together for the purpose of resisting, in every lawful way, all attempts to abridge our rights, to curtail our privileges as citizens. Whatever other citizens enjoy we have a right to enjoy; and we ought not to submit quietly to discriminations which violate this principle. If we can't do anything else, at least, protest; cry aloud. Let those who are responsible know that we know that we are unjustly discriminated against.

(c). We ought also, as far as possible, to carry on a campaign of education, the design of which should be to strengthen our hold on the friends that we have among the whites, and to so present the facts touching the race, as to make a favorable impression upon, and, win over, if possible, our enemies, or, at least, to get them thinking along right lines. In this connection the *Crisis*, a magazine that is published under the auspices of The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, ought to appeal to our people in every community, and ought, through their support, to be given the widest circulation. It presents, as no other organ does, the bare naked facts as to our race along all lines; and, after all, the facts are the things that tell, that win their way, and that produce conviction. The more widely we can get this magazine distributed among the whites, the more hopeful will be the outlook for us.

(d). In every community also, through our churches, through our schools—Sunday and day schools, and through every other agency by which they may be reached, we should endeavor to impress upon our people the importance of being respectable, of behaving themselves, especially in their public deportment, when they are before the eyes of those who are prejudiced against them, and who will be sure to view them with a much more critical eye than they would their own race. We should impress upon them also, in every possible way, whenever the opportunity presents itself, the importance of being trustworthy, reliable, of qualifying themselves to do well whatever they undertake to do, so that as they come in contact with the whites, as they may find employment among the whites, the fact of their respectability, their efficiency, their reliability, their trustworthiness will stand out conspicuously. In this way much can be done to create a sentiment favorable to us, to set us in a better light, to give us a better standing with those who have been indifferent or hostile to us. We need, as a race, every one of us, to understand and to lay to heart, and to get our children to understand and lay to heart, that in the environment in which we find ourselves, we can do very much through our personal conduct, through the manner in which we bear ourselves, the manner in which we acquit ourselves, through what we make of ourselves and of our children, to intensify or to diminish this opposition to us. This won't accomplish everything, of course, but it will aid mightily in removing some of the obstacles out of the way. The better we behave ourselves, the more we make of ourselves, the more, I know, we are hated by some, but that doesn't destroy the force of the general principle we are here laying down.

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(3). There is still another force that we can utilize in the great struggle that we are making against our enemies, and that is the force that lies in effectual, fervent prayer, the force that links us with God, with the Mighty God. We have the reputation of being a religious people. I don't know whether we are really religious or not. We have, I know, a great many professors of religion among us; but as to whether there is a great deal real true religion, which consists in loving God and in keeping his commandments, among us, may be a question. One thing I know, however, in the days of slavery, when the iron heel of physical oppression was upon our necks, there were many, many of the fathers and mothers of the race who believed in God and in the power of

prayer, and who by day and by night, in the cotton fields and in the rice swamps, sent up their petitions to heaven. And while I know that Garrison and Philips and the noble band of anti-slavery worker labored earnestly and faithfully to quicken the national conscience; and that the armies of the North, under Grant, and Sherman, and Sheridan and others, marched in the South and grappled in a death struggle with the forces of rebellion; and that Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation, nevertheless, I believe that among the mightiest forces that wrought for the slave were the prayers which they themselves sent up to Almighty God. Prayer became a power in their hands mightier than armies and proclamations. And that power we can wield today and ought to be wielding it. God can do wonders for us if we will rely upon him, if we will put our trust in him. He can soften the hard hearts of our enemies; he can raise up friends for us; he can open ways for us that we know not of. I have just been reading over the Book of Esther, known as the book of God's Providential Care. How wonderfully did he interpose in behalf of the Jews; but it came as the result of days of fasting and prayer. When Esther suggested three days of fasting and prayer, everything seemed to be against them. Their arch enemy was highest in the favor of the king; and he had not only obtained permission to destroy the Jews throughout the empire, but the decree had already been issued and the day fixed for its execution. It was at this juncture that earnest, incessant prayer was made to Jehovah, and the result was the man that sought their ruin was hurled from power, and hurled into eternity to answer at a higher than earthly tribunal for his infamous conduct. We, as a people, would do well to ponder carefully the words of Esther to Mordicai in our struggle against the enemies in this country that are bent on our destruction just as truly as Haman was bent on the destruction of the Jews, and for the same reason, because we are not disposed to bow and cringe and debase ourselves before them. The statement is "When Haman saw that Mordicai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath." It was then that he formed the determination to destroy, not only Mordicai, but the whole race with which he was identified. And at the bottom it is the same spirit against which we have to struggle in this country. If we were willing to efface ourselves, to accept the position assigned us by our enemies there would be no trouble. The thing that offends, that excites the ire of the whites is the assertion or exhibition of manhood on the part of the Negro; it is because he has the temerity to claim for himself what they claim for themselves, and precisely on the same ground. The thought of the Negro as a slave has so taken possession of them as to entirely obliterate from their minds the thought of him as a man and citizen. And these are the people who are in the seat of power; these are the people who have the ears of the country, the people who control, largely, the press and pulpit, the business and labor organizations, and who command, in virtue of their wealth, the best legal talents of the country. We seem to be hopelessly in their power, as hopelessly as the Jews seemed to be in the power of Haman. But Haman did not succeed in carrying out his diabolical purpose; and the power that checked him, and that overthrew him, was the power of prayer. We, as a race, must use this power more than we have been in the habit of doing. Those among us, in every community, who believe in God, and who are trying earnestly to serve him in sincerity, for unless we are our prayers will avail nothing, should make it a business to take our race troubles to him as well as our individual and family troubles. God has promised to help, and to help right early if we call upon him. And this is what we must do; and do more largely than we have been in the habit of doing. The exhortation of the apostle is, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."—Phil. 4:6. A praying race or people has nothing to fear from enemies, however numerous or powerful. And the sooner we learn this the better it will be for us.

And now with the thought of Gideon's Band before us, the thought of the kind of men they were, and what they accomplished under the divine direction, and in reliance upon God, in view of the adverse influences against which we have to contend, we may well ask ourselves the question:

(1). Are we seeking, as members of this race, to possess the noble qualities of the men of Gideon's Band? They were men of character; men of courage; men dominated by a great purpose; men who fully realized the seriousness of the business in which they were engaged: they were not of the giddy, frivolous, pleasure-seeking, namby pamby type that is so often met with to-day, especially among our young people, and, often, it is no better among the older ones.

(2). Are we binding ourselves together in Gideon Bands in every community, to help uplift the race; to help battle against the evils which tend to drag us down, to undermine our health, our character, our good name? Are we coming to realize, more and more, the importance of cooperation, of working together for the general good?

(3). Are we, in our personal character and conduct, in all our bearings and relations so clearly, so distinctly of Gideon's Band—so unquestionably on the side of what is best and noblest, as to be a steady uplifting influence for good among ourselves: and in our contact and relation with the whites, as to lead them to think more highly of the race because of what they see and know of us? Gideon Bands we need everywhere—men and women of the highest character, whose clean pure lives will be not only an incentive to the race to live nobly, but also an unanswerable argument against the traducers of the race. We cannot, as a race, present in any considerable numbers, men and women conspicuous for moral and spiritual worth without producing a favorable impression for the race. Gideon Bands everywhere are needed, for work within the race, and for work without the race, upon those who need to be mollified, changed, converted. Such bands should not only be organized, but we should see to it, that we are members of them.

(4). Are we keeping alive within our own breasts, as individuals, and within the consciousness of the race the value of citizenship and of citizenship rights? It is our duty to cherish these rights ourselves, and to instill into our children a like appreciation of them. And it is our duty also, and the duty of our children to stand up manfully for them. It may not be a popular thing to do, but it must be done nevertheless. We may not be able to hold the pass of Thermopylæ, but it should never be surrendered. It may be taken, but it should be only when there is no one left to hold it. It is always more glorious to perish in a righteous cause than to survive with dishonor. And I believe as long as there is a spark of manhood left in the race the struggle for our rights, as American citizens, will go on. I do not believe that the time will ever come, when the Negro will be quiescent on his rights until those rights are fully accorded to him.

The call that I am making to this race to-day is for the self-respecting men and women of it, in every community, to band themselves together for the building up of character; for the setting up of lofty ideals; for the maintenance of a high standard of morals among men as well as women; for waging uncompromising warfare against all the forces of corruption—against the saloon, the gambling den, the bawdy house and every other demoralizing institution; for keeping alive in the race an interest in matters civil and political; and for active, aggressive work in resisting encroachments upon our rights. It is a call, I trust, that will be heeded; that, all over this land, there will be a rallying of the better elements of the race in concerted effort for race betterment; for enlarged opportunities; and for the full enjoyment of all of our rights as American citizens.

Once in four years, in connection with a Presidential Inauguration, is a good time to look each other in the face; to reaffirm our principles; and to pledge ourselves anew to go fearlessly forward in the good work which we have begun. If we do our part faithfully—if we work; if we do right; if we eschew evil; if we put our trust in God and make his word a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, there is no power anywhere that can defeat us in our purpose to rise to the full measure of a man, and to the full enjoyment of all the rights that belong to us as American citizens. We cannot fail; we will not fail, if we are wise, active, wide-awake, persistent, resistant, in earnest. Our future is largely within our own hands.

“In the field of destiny,
We reap as we have sown,”

is what the poet says. And that is true of races as well as individuals. It is important that we realize this, and that every latent energy within us, as a race, be aroused and enlisted in the great work of sowing such seeds as will insure a glorious harvest. If we sow frivolity, idleness, improvidence, intemperance; if we are lax in morals, if we put material things above spiritual things, if we are indifferent to our rights, as citizens, if we are content to be like dumb driven cattle, we will reap accordingly. And vice versa, if we discourage frivolity, idleness, improvidence, intemperance, if we insist upon enforcing a high standard of morals, if we put spiritual things above material things, if we stand up for our rights as men, and cultivate a divine unrest, keeping the eyes of the soul ever turned towards the heights, we will also reap accordingly. Every thing depends upon the sowing, and therefore let every member of this race, in the consciousness of his or her responsibility, say, as one of old, “God do so to me and more also,” if, in my personal character and life, in what I may do or say, I sow anything that will jeopardize the moral, economic, or political future of this race. If we, in this generation, will sow in the hearts of our people the right kind of seeds—seeds of morality, and religion, of civil and political equality, the next generation will catch our spirit and go on sowing the same kind of seeds, and when the harvest time comes we know what the reaping will be. Up then every member of this race! Let us do our level best to ensure a good harvest—a harvest of good men and women and children, of God-fearing men and women and children, of men, women, and children who know what their rights are and how to maintain them. To this end let every one of us here this morning pledge ourselves, and go forth with the solemn purpose and determination to inoculate every man, woman, and child of the race, with the same spirit, with the same purpose, with the same determination.



Transcriber's Note:

Changes to the original publication have been made as follows:

- enemies that harrassed them *changed to*
enemies that **harassed** them
- an delivered us into *changed to*
and delivered us into

Page 8

- three companies blew the trumpets
changed to
three companies blew the **trumpets**”

Page 9

- land a Ozama and *changed to*
land **an** Ozama and
- tendencies that lead inevitably
changed to
tendencies that lead **inevitably**

Page 12

- cause of right *changed to*
the cause of right

Page 14

- upon our civil and poltical *changed to*
upon our civil and **political**

Page 15

- under laws which are are made
changed to
under laws which **are** made
- reason except except *changed to*
reason **except**

Page 16

- to our race along all line *changed to*
to our race along all **lines**

Page 18

- at a higher than earthly tribunals
changed to
at a higher than earthly **tribunal**

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GIDEON BANDS FOR WORK WITHIN THE RACE AND FOR WORK WITHOUT THE RACE ***

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