

JEPHTHA'S DAUGHTER.

DR. TALMAGE'S THIRD SERMON TO THE WOMEN OF AMERICA.

"Broken Promises of Marriage" the Subject of His Discourse—Betrotthal Is an Act So Solemn That to Break It Is an Everlasting Wrong.

BROOKLYN, Jan. 22.—The Rev. T. De Witt Talmage, D.D., preached this morning the third of his series of "Sermons to the Women of America, with Important Hints to Men." His subject was, "Broken Promises of Marriage," and his text from Judges xi, 35: "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back." He said:

Gen. Jephthah, the commander in chief of the Israelitish forces, is buckling on the sword for the extermination of the pestiferous Ammonites, and looking up to the sky he promises that if God will give him the victory he will put to death and sacrifice as a burnt offering the first thing that comes out from the door of his household when he goes back. The hurrahing of triumph soon runs along the line of all the companies, regiments and divisions of Jephthah's army. A woman heaves herself from the Ammonites never strewed any plain with their carcasses. Gen. Jephthah, fresh from his victory, is now on his way home. As he comes over the hills and through the valleys the whole march benevolence for his men is clear, but for him a great anxiety, for he remembers his vow to slay and burn the first thing that comes forth from his house to greet him after his victory.

Perhaps it may be the old watch dog that shall first come out, and who could get heart to bite on the life of a faithful creature like that, as he comes fawning and larking and frisking and putting up his paw against his master in merry welcome after long absence? No; it was not that which came forth to meet Jephthah. Perhaps it may be a young dove, let out from its cage in the general's home, which, gaining its liberty, may seem to rejoice in the public gladness and flutter on the shoulder of the familiar head of the household. But who could have the heart to slay such a winged innocent? No; it was not that which came forth to meet Jephthah. Or it may be some good neighbor that will rush out to greet him after having first been in to tell the family of the near approach of the general. But who could slay a neighbor who had come on the scene to rejoice over the reunited household? No; it was not that which came forth to meet Jephthah.

As he advances upon his home the door opens, and out of it comes one whose appearance under other circumstances would have been an indescribable joy, but under the pledge of a sacrifice becomes a horror which blanches his cheek and paralyzes his form and almost hurls him flat to the earth. His child, his only child, his daughter comes skipping out to greet him, her step keeping time to a timbrel, which she shakes and smites. Did ever a conqueror's cheer and in such a bitter groan? No wonder Dora, in two of his masterpieces, presents the scene. And Handel made it the last and climactic work of his life to put this pathetic and overpowering circumstance in an oratorio, seven months toiling amid its majestic harmonies until his eyesight gave out; and, as though the sad scene of Jephthah's daughter's sacrifice were too much for mortal vision, the grand old musician was led blind into the orchestra for the first rendering of Jephthah. All the glories of victorious war are blotted out from Jephthah's memory, and his banner is folded in grief, and his sword goes back into the scabbard with dolorous clang, and the muffled drum takes the place of the cymbals and the "tremolo," the place of the trumpet, and he cries out: "Alas, my daughter, thou hast brought me very low and thou art one of them that trouble me; for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back." During two months amid the mountains without shelter, the maidens who would have been at her wedding ranged with Jephthah's daughter up and down, bewailing her coming sacrifice.

Commentators and theologians are in dispute as to whether that girl was slain or not, and as to whether if she were slain it was right or wrong in Jephthah to be the executioner, a discussion into which I shall not be diverted from the overmastering consideration that we had better look out what we promise, better be cautious what engagement we make, better that in regard to all matters of betrothal and pledged vow we feel the responsibility, lest we have either to sacrifice the truth or sacrifice an immortal being, and we be led to cry out with the paroxysm of a Jephthah: "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back."

There is one ward in almost all the insane asylums and a large region in almost every cemetery that you need to visit. They are occupied by the men and women who are the victims of broken promises of marriage. The women in those wards and in those mortuary receptacles are in the majority, because woman lives more in her affections than does man, and laceration of them in her case is more apt to be a dementia and a fatality. In some regions of this land the promise of marriage is considered to have no solemnity or binding force. It was only made in fun. They may change their mind. The engagement may stand until some one more attractive in person or opulent in estate appears on the scene; then the rings are returned and the amatory letters and all relationship ceases. And so there are ten thousand Jephthah's daughters sacrificed as burnt offerings. The whole subject needs to be taken out of the realm of comedy into tragedy, and men and women need to understand that, while there are exceptions to the rule, once giving solemnly pledged to each other heart and hand, the forfeiture and abandonment of that pledge makes the transgressor in the sight of God a perjurer, and so the day of judgment will reveal it. The one has lied to the other; and all liars shall have their place in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.

If a man or woman make a promise in the business world, is there any obligation to fulfill it? If a man sign a note for \$500, ought he to pay it? If a con-

tract be signed involving the building of a house or the furnishing of a bill of goods, ought they stand by that contract? "Oh, yes," always answered. Then I ask the further question: Is the heart, the happiness, the welfare, the temporal and eternal destiny of a man or woman worth as much as the house, worth \$500, worth anything? The realm of profligacy is filled with men and women as a result of the wrong answer to that question. The most aggravating, stupendous and God defying lie is a lie in the shape of broken espousal.

But suppose a man changes his mind, ought he not back out? Not once in ten thousand times. What if I change my mind about a promissory note and decline to pay it, and suddenly put my property in such shape that you could not collect your note? How would you like that? That, you say, would be a fraud. So is the other a fraud, and punish it God will certainly as you live, and just as certainly if you do not live. I have known men betrothed to loving and good womanhood resigning their engagement and the victim went down in hasty consumption, while suddenly the recreant man would go up the aisle of a church in brilliant bridal party, and the two promised "I will" with a solemnity that seemed insurance of a lifetime happiness. But the simple fact was, that was the first act of a Shakespearean play entitled, "Taming the Shrew." He found out, when too late, that he had not married into the family of the "Greens," but into the family of the "Furies." To the day of his death the murder of his first betrothal followed him.

The Bible extols one who "sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not." That is, when you make a promise keep it at all hazards. There may be cases where deception has been used at the time of engagement, and extraordinary circumstances where the promise is not binding, but in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand engagement is as binding as marriage. Robert Burns, with all his faults, well knew the force of a marital engagement. In obedience to some rustic idea he, standing on one side the brook Ayr, and Mary Campbell on the other, they bathed their hands in the water and then put them on the boards of a Bible, making their pledge of fidelity. On the cover of the Old Testament of that book to this day, in Robert Burns' handwriting, may be found the words: "Leviticus xix, 12: Ye shall not swear by my name falsely; I am the Lord." And on the cover of the New Testament in his own handwriting: "Matthew v, 33: Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths."

Suppose a ship captain offers his services to take a ship out to sea. After he gets a little way he comes alongside of a vessel with a more beautiful flag, and which has perhaps a richer cargo and is bound for a more attractive port. Suppose he rings a bell for the engineer to slow up and the wheel stops. Now I see the captain being lowered over the side of the vessel into a small boat, and he crosses to the gayer and wealthier craft, and climbs up the sides, and is seen walking the bridge of the other ship. I pick up his resigned speaking trumpet and I shout through it: "Captain, what does this mean? Did you not promise to take this ship to Southampton, England?" "Yes," says the captain, "but I have changed my mind, and I have found I can do better, and I am going to take charge here. I shall send back to you all the letters I got while managing that ship and everything I got from your ship, and it will be all right." You tell me that the worst fate for such a captain as that is too good for him. But it is just what a man or woman does who promises to take one through the voyage of life, across the ocean of earthly existence, and then breaks the promise. The sending back of all the letters, and rings, and necklaces, and keepsakes cannot make that right which is in the sight of God, and ought to be in the sight of man, an everlasting wrong. What American society needs to be taught is that betrothal is an act so solemn and tremendous that all men and women must stand back from it until they are sure that it is right, and sure that it is best, and sure that no retreat will be desired. Before that promise of lifetime companionship any amount of romance that you may wish, any ardor of friendship, any coming and going, but espousal is a gate, a golden gate, which one should not pass unless he or she expects never to return. Engagement is the porch of which marriage is the castle, and you have no right in the porch if you do not mean to pass into the castle.

The trouble has always been that this whole subject of affiancing has been relegated to the realm of frivolity and joke, and considered not worth a sermon or even a serious paragraph. And so the massacre of human lives has gone on and the devil has had it his own cruel way, and what is mightily needed is that pulpits and platform, and printing press all speak a word of unmistakable and thunderous protest on this subject of infinite importance. We put clear out into thin poetry and light reading the marital engagements of Petrarch and his Laura, Dante and his Beatrice, Chaucer and his Philippa, Lorenzo de Medici and his Lucretia, Spenser and his Rosalind, Waller and his Sacercharissa, not realizing that it was the style of their engagement that decided their happiness or wretchedness, their virtue or their profligacy. All the literary and military and religious glory of Queen Elizabeth's reign cannot blot out from one of the most conspicuous pages of history her infamous behavior toward Seymour and Philip and Melville and Leicester and others. All the ecclesiastical robes that Dean Swift ever rustled through consecrated places cannot hide from intelligent people of all ages the fact that, by promises of marriage which he never fulfilled, he broke the heart of Jane Waring after an engagement of seven years and the heart of Stella after an engagement of fourteen years, and the poetic stanzas he dedicated to their excellencies only make the more immortal his own perfidy.

"But suppose I should make a mistake," says some man or woman, "and I find it out after the engagement and before marriage?" My answer is, you have no excuse for making a mistake on this subject. There are so many ways of finding out all about the character and

preferences and dislikes and habits of a man or woman, that if you have not brain enough to form a right judgment in regard to him or her, you are not so fit a candidate for the matrimonial altar as you are for an idiot asylum. Notice what society your especial friend professes, whether he is industrious or lazy; whether she is neat or slovenly, what books are read, what was the style of ancestry, noble or depraved, and if there be any unsolved mystery about the person under consideration postpone all promise until the mystery is solved.

Jackson's hollow, Brooklyn, was a part of the city not built on for many years, and every time I crossed it I said to myself or to others, why is not this land built on? I found out afterward that the title to the land was in controversy, and no one wanted to build there until that question was decided. Afterward I understood the title was settled, and now buildings are going up all over it. Do not build your happiness for this world on a character, masculine or feminine, that has not a settled and undisturbed title to honor and truth and sobriety and kindness and righteousness.

Oh woman, you have more need to pause before making such an important promise than man, because if you make a mistake it is worse for you. If a man blunders about promise of marriage or goes on to an unfortunate marriage, he can spend his evenings away, and can go to the club or the Republican or Democratic meetings and also to his night city or state or national elections, or smoke himself stupid or drink himself drunk. But there is no place of regular retreat for you, oh woman, and you could not take narcotics or intoxicants and keep your respectability. Before you promise, pray and think and study and advise. There will never again in your earthly history be a time when you so much need God.

It seems to me that the world credit to cast out from business credits and from good neighborhood those who boast of the number of hearts they have won, as the Indian boasts of the number of scalps he has taken. If a man will lie to a woman and a woman will lie to a man about so important a matter as that of a lifetime's welfare, they will lie about a bill of goods, and lie about finances, and lie about anything. Society today is brim full of gallants, and man miliners, and carpet knights, and coquettes, and those most God forsaken of all wretches—flirts. And they go about drawing rooms and the parlors of watering places, and spas, and watering, and scripping, and whispering, and then return to the club rooms if they be men, or to their special gatherings if they be women, to chatter and giggle over what was said to them in confidence. Condign punishment is apt to come upon them and they get paid in their own coin. I could point you to a score whom society has let drop very hard in return for their base traffic in human hearts. As to such men they walk around in their celibacy, after their hair is streaked with gray, and pretending they are naturally short sighted when their eyes are so old in sin that they need the spectacles of a septuagenarian, an eyeglass about No. 8, and think they are bewitching in their stride and overpowering in their glances, although they are simply laughing stocks for all mankind. And if these base dealers in human hearts be females, they are left after awhile severely alone, striving in a very desperation of agony of conscience to get back to the attractiveness they had when they used to have how many masculine affections they had slaughtered. Forsaken of God and honest men and good women, are sure to be all such masculine and feminine triflers with human and yet immortal affections. Oh, man! Oh, woman! having plighted your troth stick to it!

And here my idea widens and I have to say not only to those who have made a mistake in solemn promise of marriage, but to those who have already at the altar been pronounced one when they are two, or in diversity of tastes and likes and dislikes are neither one nor two, but a dozen—make the best you can of an awful mistake. And here let me answer letters that come from every state of the American Union, and from across the sea, and are coming year after year from men and women who are terrifically alienated and tied together in a hard knot, a very hard knot. The letters run something like this: "What ought I to do? My husband is a drunkard." "My wife is a gambler and will not stay at home." "My conversation is ignorant and letters books and I revel in them." "I like music, and a piano sits my husband crazy." "I am fond of social life and my companion is a recluse." "I am trying to do good and my lifelong associate is very bad. What shall I do?" My answer is, there are certain good reasons for divorce. The Bible recognizes them. Good society recognizes them. But it must be the very last resort, and only after all reasonable attempts at reclamation and adjustment have proved a dead failure. When such attempts fail it is generally because of meddling outsiders, and women tell the wronged wife how she ought to stand on her rights, and men tell the wronged husband how he ought to stand on his rights. And let husband and wife in an unhappy marriage relation stand punctiliously on their rights, and there will be no readjustment, and only one thing will be sure to them and that is a hell on earth.

If you are unhappily married, in most cases I advise you make the best you can of an awfully bad bargain. Do not project your peculiarities more than is necessary. Perhaps you may have some faults of your own which the other party in the marital alliance may have to suffer. You are in the same yoke. If you pull aside the yoke will only twist your neck. Better pull ahead. The world is full of people who made mistakes about many things, and among other things about betrothal and marriage, and yet have been tolerably happy and very useful in the strength of God and by the grace promised in every time of need, if those who seek it conquer the disadvantageous circumstances. I am acquainted with lovely women married to contemptible men, and genial men yoked with termagants inspired of the devil. And yet under these disadvantages my friends are useful and happy. God helps people in other kinds of martyrdom and to sing in the flame, and he will help you in your lifelong misfortune.

Remember the patience of Job. What a wife he had! At a time when he was one great blotch of eruptions, and his property was destroyed by a tornado, and, more than all, bereavement had come and the poor man needed all wise counsel, she advises him to go to cursing and swearing. She wanted him to pollute his boils with blasphemy. But he stood right on through his marital disadvantages, preserved his health and his fortune and raised a splendid family, and the closing paragraph of the book of Job has such a jubilation that I wonder people do not oftener read it.

"So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning, for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first, Jemimah, and the name of the second, Keziah, and the name of the third, Phelegah. And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job, and their father gave them in inheritance among their brethren. After this had Job a hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his son's sons, even four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days."

Now, my kindly married friend of either sex, if Job could stand by the lot of God, then you can stand by the same divine re-arrangement. You have other relations, oh woman, besides the family relation. If you are a mother, think of your children for God and heaven. If you are a member of a church, help move on its enterprises. You can do so much of the world's good that all your home trials will seem insignificant. How kind's difference does it make what your unrighteous husband calls you if God calls you his child and you are an inheritor of whole kingdoms beyond the sky?

Turne yourself in some kind of outside usefulness, something that will enlist your prayers, your sympathies, your hand, your needle, your voice. Get your heart on fire with love to God and the dehumanization of the human race, and the trouble of your home will be blotted out in the glory of your celestial life. Try out to you, oh woman, as Paul exclaims in his letter to the Corinthians: "What knowest thou, oh wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband?" And if you cannot save him you can help in the grander, mightier enterprise of helping save the world. Out of the awful mistake of your marriage rise into the sublimest life of self sacrifice for God and suffering humanity. Instead of settling down to mope over your domestic woes, enlist your energies for the world's redemption.

Some parts of Holland keep out the ocean only by dykes, or walls of stout masonry. The engineer having these dykes in charge was soon to be married to a maiden living in one of the villages, the existence of which depended on the strength of these dykes. And there was to be a great feast in one of the villages that approaching evening in honor of the coming bridegroom. That day a great storm threatened the destruction of the dykes, and hence the destruction of thousands of lives in the villages sheltered by that stone wall. The ocean was in full wrath, beating against the dykes, and the tides and the terror were still rising. "Shall I go to the feast?" says the engineer, "or shall I go and help my workmen take care of the dykes?" "Take care of the dykes," he said to himself, "I must and will." As he appeared on the wall the men working there were exhausted and shouted: "Thank comes the engineer. Thank God! Thank God!" The wall was giving way, and by stone, and the engineer had a reputation around his body, and some of the workmen had ropes fastened around their bodies and were let down until the will surges that beat the wall. Everything was giving way. "More stones!" cried the men. "More mortar!" But the answer came: "There is no more!" "Then," cried the engineer, "take off your clothes and with them stop the holes in the wall." And so in the child and dearest and air it was done, and with the workmen's aid the openings in the wall were gradually filled. But still the tide was wild with ocean roaring itself for many miles wide and lives in the villages. "Now we have done all we can," said the engineer, "down on your knees, men, and pray to God for help." And on the trembling and roaring dykes they prayed till the wind ceased and the sea subsided, and the village below, with its knowing nothing of the peril, was full of pomp and dance and hilarity, were gloriously saved.

Now, what we want in this work of walling back the oceans of poverty and deafness and impurity and sin is the help of more womanly and manly hands. Oh how the tides come in! Atlantic surge of sorrow after Atlantic surge of sorrow, and the tempests of human heat, and Satanic fury are in full cry. Oh woman of many troubles, what are all the feasts of worldly delight, if they were offered you, compared with the opportunity of helping build and support barriers which sometimes seem going away through man's treachery and the world's assault. Oh woman, to the dykes! Bring prayers, bring tears, bring cheering words! Help! Help! And having done all, kneed with us on the quaking wall until the God of the wind and the sea shall lull the one and silence the other. To the dykes, sisters, mothers, wives, daughters of America, to the dykes! The mightiest catholicon for all the wounds and wrongs of woman or man is complete absorption in the work to rescue others. Save some man, some woman, some child!

In that effort you will forget or be helped to bear your trials, and in a little while God will take you up out of your disturbed and harrowing conjugal relation of earth into a heaven all the happier because of preceding distress. When Queen Elizabeth of England was expiring it was arranged that the exact moment of her death should be signaled to the people by the dropping of a sapphire ring from a window into the hands of an officer, who carried it at the top of his speed to King James of Scotland. But your departure from the scene of your earthly woes, if you are ready to go, will not be the dropping of a sapphire to the ground, but the setting of a jewel in a king's coronet. Blessed be his glorious name forever!

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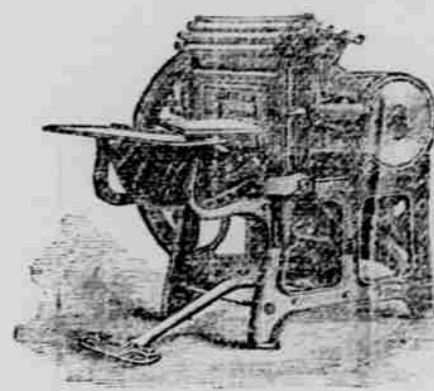
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