

MOTHERS IN ISRAEL.

REV. DR. TALMAGE'S ELOQUENT SERMON AND UNIQUE TEXT.

How Sisera Was Killed by Jael—The Real News Brought to His Mother—Sitting at the Palace Window—A Study of the Needle—Anxious Mothers.

BROOKLYN, JAN. 14.—This novel and unique subject was presented by Dr. Talmage this forenoon to the usual throngs crowding the largest Protestant church in America. The congregation, led by organ and organist, sang a gospel hymn to the tune of "Home, Sweet Home." Text, Judges v. 28, "The mother of Sisera looked out at a window."

Spiked to the ground of Jael's tent lay the dead commander in chief of the Canaanite host, General Sisera, not far from the river Kishon, which was only a dry bed of pebbles when in 1883, in Palestine, we crossed it, but the gullies and ravines which run into it indicated the possibility of great freshets like the one at the time of the text. General Sisera had gone out with 900 iron chariots, but he was defeated, and his chariot wheels interlocked with the wheels of other chariots, he could not retreat fast enough, and so he leaped to the ground and ran till, exhausted, he went into Jael's tent for safety. She had just been churning, and when he asked for water she gave him butter-milk, which in the east is considered a most refreshing drink. Very tired, and supposing he was safe, he went to sleep upon the floor, but Jael, who had resolved upon his death, took a tent pin, long and round and sharp, in one hand and a hammer in her other hand, and, putting the sharp end of the tent pin to the forehead of Sisera, with her other hand she lifted the hammer and brought it down on the head of the pin with a stout stroke, when Sisera struggled to rise, and she struck him again, and he struggled to rise, and the third time she struck him, and the commander in chief of the Canaanite host lay dead.

MEANING OF THE TEXT.

Meanwhile in the distance Sisera's mother sits amid surroundings of wealth and pomp and scenes palatial waiting for his return. Every mother expects her son to be victorious, and this mother looked out at the window expecting to see him drive up in his chariot followed by wagons loaded with embroideries and also by regiments of men vanquished and enslaved. I see her now sitting at the window, in high expectation. She watches the farthest turn of the road. She looks for the flying dust of the swift hoofs. The first flash of the bit of the horses' bridle she will catch.

The ladies of her court stand round, and she tells them of what they shall have when her son comes up—chains of gold and caracens of beauty and dresses of such wondrous fabric and splendor as the Bible only hints at, but leaves us to imagine. "He ought to be here by this time," says his mother. "That battle is surely over. I hope that freshet of the river Kishon has not impeded him. I hope those strange appearances we saw last night in the sky were not ominous, when the stars seemed to fight in their courses. No! No! He is so brave in battle I know he has won the day. He will soon be here." But alas for the disappointed mother! She will not see the glittering headgear of the horses at full gallop bringing her son home from victorious battle. As a solitary messenger arriving in hot haste rides up to the window at which the mother of Sisera sits, he cries, "Your armies are defeated, and your son is dead." There is a scene of horror and anguish from which we turn away.

Now you see the full meaning of my short text. "The mother of Sisera looked out at a window." Well, my friends, we are all out in the battle of life; it is raging now, and the most of us have a mother watching and waiting for news of our victory or defeat. If she be not sitting at the window of earth, she is sitting at a window of heaven, and she is going to hear all about it.

By all the rules of war Sisera ought to have been triumphant. He had 900 iron chariots and a host of many thousands vaster than the armies of Israel. But God was on the other side, and the angry freshets of Kishon, and the hail, the lightning and the unmanageable warhorses, and the capized chariots and the stellar panic in the sky discomfited Sisera. Josephus in his history describes the scene in the following words: "When they were come to a close fight, there came down from heaven a great storm with a vast quantity of rain and hail, and the wind blew the rain in the face of the Canaanites and so darkened their eyes their arrows and slings were of no advantage to them, nor would the coldness of the air permit the soldiers to make use of their swords, while this storm did not so much incommode the Israelites because it came on their backs. They also took such courage upon the apprehension that God was assisting them that they fell upon the very midst of their enemies and slew a great number of them, so that some of them fell by the Israelites, some fell by their own horses which were put into disorder, and not a few were killed by their own chariots."

Hence, my hearers, the bad news brought to the mother of Sisera looking out at the window. And our mother, whether sitting at a window of earth or a window of heaven, will hear the news of our victory or defeat—not according to our talents or educational equipment or our opportunities, but according as to whether God is for us or against us.

"Where's mother?" is the question most frequently asked in many households. It is asked by the husband as well as the child coming in at nightfall. "Where's mother?" It is asked by the little ones when they get hurt and come in crying with the pain. "Where's mother?" It is asked by those who

have seen some grand sight or heard some good news or received some beautiful gift. "Where's mother?" She sometimes feels weary by the question, for they all ask it and keep asking it all the time. She is not only the first to bear every case of perplexity, but she is the judge in every case of domestic appeal. That is what puts the premature wrinkles on so many maternal faces and powders white so many maternal foreheads. You see, it is a question that keeps on for all the years of childhood. It comes from the nursery, and from the evening stand where the boys and girls are learning their school lesson, and from the starting out in the morning, when the tippet or hat or slate or book or overcoat is lost, until at night, all out of breath, the youngsters come in and shout until you can hear them from collar to garret and from front door to the back fence of the back yard. "Where's mother?" Indeed a child's life is so full of that question that it is taken away one of the things that the mother most misses and the silence that most oppresses her is the absence of that question, which she will never hear on earth again, except she hears it in a dream which sometimes restores the nursery just as it was, and then the voice comes back so natural, and so sweet, and so innocent, and so inquiring that the dream breaks at the words, "Where's mother?"

If that question were put to most of us this morning, we would have to say, if we spoke truthfully, like Sisera's mother, she is at the palace window. She has become a queen unto God forever, and she is pulling back the rich folds of the king's upholstery to look down at us. We are not told the particulars about the residence of Sisera's mother, but there is in that scene in the book of Judges so much about embroideries and needlework and ladies in waiting that we know her residence must have been princely and palatial. So we have no minute and particular description of the palace at whose window our glorified mother sits, but there is so much in the closing chapters of the good old book about crowns, and pearls big enough to make a gate out of one of them, new songs and marriage suppers, and harps, and white horses with kings in the stirrups, and golden candlesticks that we know the heavenly residence of our mother is superb, is unique, is colonnaded, is domed, is embowered, is fountained, is glorified beyond the power of pencil or pen or tongue to present, and in the window of that palace the mother sits watching for news from the battle. What a contrast between that celestial surrounding and her once earthly surroundings! What a work to bring up a family, in the old time way, with but little or no hired help, except perhaps for the washing day or for the swine slaughtering, commonly called "the killing day!"

OLD FASHIONED MOTHERS.

There was then no reading of elaborate treatises on the best modes of rearing children, and then leaving it all to hired help, with one or two visits a day to the nursery to see if the principles announced are being carried out. The most of those old folks did the sewing, the washing, the mending, the darning, the patching, the millinery, the manta making, the housekeeping, and in hurried harvest time helped spread the hay or tread down the load in the mow. They were at the same time caterers, tailors, doctors, chaplains and nurses for a whole household all together down with measles or scarlet fever, or round the house with whooping coughs and croup and runround fingers and caraches and all the infantile distempers which at some time sweep upon every large household. Some of those mothers never got rested in this world. Instead of the self rocking cradles of our day, which, wound up, will go hour after hour for the solace of the young slumberer, it was weary foot on the rocker sometimes half the day or half the night—rock—rock—rock—rock. Instead of our drug stores filled with all the wonders of materia medica and called up through a telephone, with them the only apothecary short of four miles' ride was the garret, with its bunches of peppermint and pennyroyal and catnip and mustard and camomile flowers, which were expected to do everything. Just think of it! Fifty years of preparing breakfast, dinner and supper. The chief nurse they heard was that of spinning wheel and rocking chair. Fagged out, headachy and with ankles swollen. Those old fashioned mothers—if any persons ever fitted appropriately into a good, easy, comfortable heaven, they were the folks, and they got there, and they are rested. They wear no spectacles, for they have their third sight—as they lived long enough on earth to get their second sight—and they do not have to pant for breath after going up the emerald stairs of the Eternal palace, at whose window they now sit waiting for news from the battle.

But if any one keeps on asking the question "Where's mother?" I answer, she is in your present character. The probability is that your physical features suggest her. If there be seven children in a household at least six of them look like their mother, and the older you get the more you will look like her. But I speak now especially of your character and not of your looks. This is easily explained. During the first 10 years of your life you were almost all the time with her, and your father you saw only mornings and nights. There are no years in any life so important for impression as the first 10. Then and there is the impression made for virtue or vice, for truth or falsehood, for bravery or cowardice, for religion or skepticism. Suddenly start out from behind a door and frighten the child, and you may shatter his nervous system for a lifetime. During the first 10 years you can tell him enough spook stories to make him a coward till he dies. Act before him as though Friday were an unlucky day, and it were baleful to have 13 at the table, or see the moon over the left shoulder, and he will never recover from the idiotic superstitions. You may give that girl before she is 10 years old a fondness for dress that will make her a mere "dum-dum" or fashion plate, for 40 years. Elizabeth, 14. "As to the mother who is her daughter." Before one decade has passed you can decide whether that boy shall be a Shylock or a George Peabody. Boys and girls are generally echoes of fathers and mothers. What an incoherent thing for a mother out of temper to punish a child for getting mail, or for a father who smokes to slant his boy up in a dark closet because he has found him with an old stump of a cigar in his mouth, or for that mother to rebuke her daughter for staring at herself too much in the looking glass when the mother has her own mirrors so arranged as to repeat her form from all sides! The great English poet's less moral character was decided before he left the nursery, and his schoolmaster in the schoolroom overheard this conversation: "Byron, your mother is a fool," and he answered "I know it." You can hear throughout the heroic life of Senator Sam Houston the words of his mother when she in the war of 1812 put a musket in his hand and said: "There, my son, take this and never disgrace it, for remember I had rather all my sons should fill one honorable grave than that one of them should turn his back on an enemy. Go and remember, too, that while the door of my cottage is open to all brave men it is always shut against cowards." Agrippina, the mother of Nero, murderer, and she is not surprised that her son was a murderer. Give that child an over-dose of catechism, and make him recite verses of the Bible as a punishment, and make Sunday a bore, and he will become a stent antagonist of Christianity. Impress him with the kindness and the gentility and the loveliness of religion, and he will be its advocate and exemplar for all time and eternity.

A few days ago right before our express train on the Louisville and Nashville railroad the preceding train had gone down through a broken bridge, 12 cars falling 100 feet and then consumed. I saw that only one span of the bridge was down and all the other spans were standing. Plan a good bridge of morals for your sons and daughters, but have the first span of 10 years defective, and through that they will crash down, though all the rest keep standing. O man, O woman, if you have preserved your integrity and are really Christian, you have first of all to thank God, and I think next you have to thank your mother. The most impressive thing at the inauguration of James A. Garfield as president of the United States was that after he had taken the oath of office he turned round and in the presence of the supreme court and the senate of the United States kissed his old mother. If I had time to take statistics out of this audience, and I could ask what proportion of you who are Christians owe your salvation under God to maternal fidelity, I think about three-fourths of you would spring to your feet. "Ha! ha!" said the soldiers of the regiment to Charlie, one of their comrades. "What has made the change in you? You used to like sin as well as any of us." Pulling from his pocket his mother's letter, in which, after telling of some comforts she had sent him, she concluded, "We are all praying for you, Charlie, that you may be a Christian," he said, "Boys, that's the sentence."

THE NEEDLE ENTHRONED.

The trouble with Sisera's mother was that, while sitting at the window of my text watching for news of her son from the battlefield, she had the two bad qualities of being dissolute and being too fond of personal adornment. The Bible account says: "Her wise ladies answered her eye. She returned answer to herself: 'Have they not sped? Have they not divided the prey—to every man a damsel or two, to Sisera a prey of divers colors, a prey of divers colors of needlework, of divers colors of needlework on both sides?'" She makes no anxious utterance about the wondrous in battle, about the bloodshed, about the dying, about the dead, about the principles involved in the battle going on, a battle so important that the stars and the fishets took part, and the clash of swords was answered by the thunder of the skies. What she thinks most of is the bright colors of the wardrobes to be captured and the needlework. "To Sisera a prey of divers colors, a prey of divers colors of needlework, of divers colors of needlework on both sides." Now neither Sisera's mother nor any one else can say too much in eulogy of the needle. It has made more useful conquests than the sword. Pointed at one end and with an eye at the other, whether of bone or ivory, as in earliest times; or of bronze, as in Phiny's time; or of steel, as in modern times; whether laboriously fashioned as formerly by one hand, or as now, when 100 workmen in a factory are employed to make the different parts of one needle, it is an instrument divinely ordered for the comfort, for the life, for the health, for the adornment of the human race. The eye of the needle hath seen more domestic comfort and more gladdened poverty and more Christian service than any other eye. The modern sewing machine has in no wise abolished the needle, but rather enthroned it. Thank God for the needlework, from the time when the Lord Almighty from the heavens ordered in regard to the embroidered door of the ancient tabernacle, "Thou shalt make a hanging for the door of the tent of blue and purple and scarlet and fine twined linen wrought with needlework," down to the womanly hands which this winter in this tabernacle are presenting for benevolent purposes their needlework. But there was nothing except vanity and worldliness and social splash in what Sisera's mother said about the needlework she expected her son would bring home from the battle. And I am not surprised to find that Sisera fought on the wrong side when his mother at the window of my text, in that awful exigency had her chief thought on dry goods achievement and social display. God only knows how

many homes have made shipwreck on the wardrobe. And that mother who sits at the window watching for victorious triumph of military and fine colors and domestic pageantry will either awhile hear sad news from her children out in the battle of life as Sisera's mother heard from the struggle at Eadraclon.

AN APOSTROPHE TO MOTHERS.

But if you still press the question, "Where's mother?" I will tell you where she is not, though once she was there. Some of you started with her likeness in your face and her principles in your soul. But you have cast her out. That was an awful thing for you to do, but you have done it. That hard, grinding, dissipated look you never got from her. If you had seen any one strike her, you would have struck him down without much care whether the blow was just sufficient or fatal; but, my boy, you have struck her down—struck her innocence from your face and struck her principles from your soul. You struck her down! The tent pin that Jael drove three times into the skull of Sisera was not so cruel as the stab you have made more than three times through your mother's heart. But she is waiting yet, for mothers are slow to give up their boys—waiting at some window, it may be a window on earth or at some window in heaven. All others may cast you off. Your wife may seek divorce and have no more patience with you. Your father may disinherit you and say, "Let him never again darken the door of our house." But there are two persons who do not give you up—God and mother.

How many disappointed mothers waiting at the window! Perhaps the panes of the window are not great glass plate, level edged and hovered over by exquisite lambrequin, but the window is made of small panes, I would say about six or eight of them, in summer wreathed with trailing vine and in winter pictured by the Raphaels of the forest, a real country window. The mother sits there knitting, or busy with her needle on homely repairs, when she looks up and sees coming across the bridge of the meadow brook a stranger, who dismounts in front of the window. He lifts and drops the heavy knocker of the farmhouse door. "Come in!" is the response. He gives his name and says, "I have come on a sad errand." "There is nothing the matter with my son in the city, is there?" she asks. "Yes!" he says. "Your son got into an unfortunate encounter with a young man in a liquor saloon last night and is badly hurt. The fact is he cannot get well. I hate to tell you all. I am sorry to say he is dead." "Dead!" she cries as she totters back. "Oh, my son! my son! my son! Would God I had died for thee!" That is the ending of all her cares and anxieties and good counsels for that boy. That is her pay for her self sacrifices in his behalf. That is the bad news from the battle. So the tidings of derelict or Christian sons travel to the windows of earth or the windows of heaven at which mothers sit.

"But," says some one, "are you not mistaken about my glorified mother hearing of my evildoings since she went away?" Says some one else, "Are you not mistaken about my glorified mother hearing of my self sacrifice and moral bravery and struggle to do right?" No! Heaven and earth are in constant communication. There are trains running every five minutes—trains of immortals ascending and descending—spirits going from earth to heaven to live there. Spirits descending from heaven to earth to minister and help. They hear from us many times every day. Do they hear good news or bad news from this battle, this Sedan, this Thermopylae, this Austerville, in which every one of us is fighting on the right side or the wrong side. O God, whom I am, and whom I am trying to serve, as a result of this sermon, roll over on all mothers a new sense of their responsibility, and upon all children, whether still in the nursery or out on the tremendous Eadraclon of middle life or old age, the fact that their victories or defeats stand clear out, clear up to the windows of sympathetic maternity. Oh, is not this the minute when the cloud of blessing filled with the exhaled tears of anxious mothers shall burst in showers of mercy on this audience?

There is one thought that is almost too tender for utterance. I almost fear to start it lest I have not enough control of my emotion to conclude it. As when we were children we so often came in from play or from a hurt or from some childish injustice practiced upon us, and as soon as the door was opened we cried, "Where's mother?" and she said, "Here I am," and we buried our weeping faces in her lap, so after awhile, when we get through with the pleasures and hurts of this life, we will, by the pardoning mercy of Christ, enter the heavenly home, and among the first questions, not the first, but among the first, will be the old question that we used to ask, the question that is being asked in thousands of places at this very moment—the question, "Where's mother?" And it will not take long for us to find her or for her to find us, for she will have been watching at the window for our coming, and with the other children of our household of earth we will again gather round her, and she will say: "Well, how did you get through the battle of life? I have often heard from others about you, but now I want to hear it from your own souls. Tell me all about it, my children!" And then we will tell her of all our earthly experiences, the holidays, the marriages, the birth hours, the burials, the heartbreaks, the losses, the gains, the victories, the defeats, and she will say: "Never mind, it is all over now. I see each one of you has a crown, which was given you at the gate as you came through. Now cast it at the feet of the Christ who saved you and saved me and saved us all. Thank God, we are never to part, and for all the ages of eternity you will never again have to ask, 'Where's mother?'"

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Table with columns for Church and Society names and their meeting times. Includes: CHRISTIAN Church—Services Sunday at 10:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m.; CONGREGATIONAL Church—Services at 10:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m.; METHODIST Church—Services at 10:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m.; EPISCOPAL Church—Services every two weeks by appointment; LUTHERAN Church—Every third Sunday morning at 10 o'clock; CATHOLIC Church—Services by appointment; BAPTIST Church—No regular services, Sunday school (regular) at noon. B.Y.P.U. at 6:30 p.m.; CHAPEL—Sunday school at 3 p.m. every Sunday.