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TALMAGE'S SERMON.

AN ELOQUENT DISCOURSE ON SHORTENED LIVES.

Too Much Time Spent in a Panegyric of Longevity—The Temptations of Success—Compensations of Death—The Worth of a Clear Conscience.

Between Two Years.

In the forenoon service at the Brooklyn Tabernacle Sunday, Rev. Dr. Talmage preached on the subject of "Shortened Lives, or a Cheerful Good-bye to 1893." The text selected was Isaiah lvi, 1. "The righteous is taken away from the evil to come."

We have written for the last time at the head of our letters and business documents the figures 1893. With this day closes the year. In January last we celebrated its birth. To-day we attend its obsequies. Another twelve months have been cut out of our earthly continuance, and it is a time for absorbing reflection.

We all spend much time in panegyric of longevity. We consider it a great thing to live to be an octogenarian. If any one dies in youth, we say, "What a pity!" Dr. Muhlenberg in old age said that the hymn written in early life by his own hand no more expressed his sentiment when it said, "I would not live always."

If one be pleasantly circumstanced, he never wants to go. William Cullen Bryant, the great poet, at 82 years of age, standing in my house in a festive group reading "Thanatopsis" without spectacles, was just as anxious to live as when at 15 years of age he wrote the immortal threnody. Cato feared at 80 years of age that he would not live to learn Greek. Monaldesco at 115 years, writing the history of his time, feared a collapse. Theophrastus writing a book at 90 years of age was anxious to live to complete it. Thurlow Weed at about 80 years of age found life as great a desirability as when he snuffed out his first politician.

Albert Barnes, so well prepared for the next world, at 70 said he would rather stay here. So it is all the way down. I suppose that the last time Methuselah was out of doors in a storm he was afraid of getting his feet wet lest it shorten his days. Indeed I some time ago preached a sermon on the blessings of longevity, but in this, the last day of 1893, and when many are filled with sadness at the thought that another chapter of their life is closing, and that they have 365 days less to live, I propose to preach to you about the advantages of an abbreviated earthly existence.

Industry Inculcated.
If I were an agnostic, I would say a man is blessed in proportion to the number of years he can stay on "terra firma," because after that he falls off the docks, and if he is ever picked out of the depths it is only to be set up in some morgue of the universe to see if anybody will claim him. If I thought God made man only to last forty or fifty or one hundred years, and then he was to go into annihilation, I would say his chief business ought to be to keep alive and even in good weather to be very cautious, and to carry an umbrella and take overshoes and life preservers and bronze armor and weapons of defense lest he fall off into nothingness and obliteration.

But, my friends, you are not agnostics. You believe in immortality and the eternal residence of the righteous in Heaven, and therefore I first remark that an abbreviated earthly existence is to be desired, and is a blessing because it makes one's life work very compact.
Some men go to business at 7 o'clock in the morning and return at 7 in the evening. Others go at 8 o'clock and return at 12. Others go at 10 and return at 4. I have friends who are ten hours a day in business, others who are five hours, others who are one hour. They all do their work well—they do their entire work, and then they return. Which position do you think the most desirable? You say, other things being equal, the man who is the shortest time detained in business and who can return home the quickest is the most blessed.

Now, my friends, why not carry that good sense into the subject of transference from this world? If a person die in childhood, he gets through his work at 9 o'clock in the morning. If he die at 15 years of age, he gets through his work at 12 o'clock noon. If he die at 70 years of age, he gets through his work at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. If he die at 90, he has to toil all the way on up to 11 o'clock at night. The sooner we get through our work the better. The harvest all in barrack or barn, the farmer does not sit down in the stubble field, but, shouldering his scythe and taking his pitcher from under a tree, he makes a straight line for the old homestead. All we want to be anxious about is to get our work done and well done; the quicker the better.

Again, there is a blessing in an abbreviated earthly existence in the fact that moral disaster might come upon the man if he tarried long. A man who had been prominent in churches, and who had been admired for his generosity and kindness everywhere, for forgery was sent to State Prison for fifteen years. Twenty years before there was no more probability of that man's committing a commercial dishonesty than that you will commit a commercial dishonesty. The number of men who fall into ruin between fifty and seventy years of age is simply appalling. If they had died thirty years before, it would have been better for them and better for their families. The shorter the voyage the less chance for a cyclone.

Partis of Success.
There is a wrong theory abroad that if one's youth be right, his old age will be right. You might as well say there is nothing wanting for a ship's safety except to get fully launched on the Atlantic Ocean. I have some-

times asked those who were school-mates or college mates of some great defrauder: "What kind of a boy was he?" and they have said, "Why, he was a splendid fellow. I had no idea he could ever go into such an outrage." The fact is the great temptation of life sometimes comes far in middle life or in old age.

The first time I crossed the Atlantic Ocean it was as smooth as a millpond, and I thought the sea captains and the voyagers had slandered the old ocean, and I wrote home an essay for a magazine on "The Smile of the Sea," but I never afterward could have written that thing, for before we got home we got a terrible shaking up. The first voyage of life may be very smooth; the last may be a euroclydon. Many who start life in great prosperity do not end it in prosperity.

The great pressure of temptation comes sometimes in this direction: At about 45 years of age a man's nervous system changes, and some one tells him he must take stimulants to keep himself up, and he takes stimulants to keep himself up until the stimulants keep him down, or a man has been going along for 30 or 40 years in unsuccessful business, and here is an opening where by one dishonest action he can lift himself and lift his family from all financial embarrassment, and attempts to leap the chasm, and he falls into it.

Then it is in after life that the great temptation of success comes. If a man make a fortune before 30 years of age, he generally loses it before 40. The solid and the permanent fortunes for the most part do not come to their climax until middle life or in old age. The most of the bank presidents have white hair. Many of those who have been largely successful have been full of arrogance or worldliness or dissipation in old age. They may have lost their integrity, but they have become so worldly and so selfish under the influence of large success that it is evident to everybody that their success has been a temporal calamity and an eternal damage.

If a soldier who has been on guard, shivering and stung with the cold, pacing up and down the parapet with shouldered musket, is glad when some one comes to relieve guard and he can go inside the fortress, ought not that man to shout for joy who can put down his weapon of earthly defense and go into the King's castle? Who is the more fortunate, the soldier who has to stand guard twelve hours, or the man who has to stand guard six hours? We have common sense about everything but religion, common sense about everything but transference from this world.

The Evil to Come.
Again, there is a blessing in an abbreviated earthly existence in the fact that one escapes so many bereavements. The longer we live the more attachments and the more kindred, the more chords to be wounded or snapped or sundered. If a man live on to 70 or 80 years of age, how many graves are cleft at his feet? In that long reach of time father and mother go, brothers and sisters go, children go, grandchildren go, personal friends outside the family circle whom they had loved with a love like that of David and Jonathan.

Besides that, some men have a natural propension toward dissolution, and even at an age during 40 or 50 or 60 years this horror of their dissolution shudders through soul and body. Now, success the lad goes at 15 years of age. He escapes 50 funerals, 50 caskets, 50 obsequies, 50 awful wrenchings of the heart. It is hard enough for us to bear their departure, but is it not easier for us to bear their departure than for them to stay and bear 50 departures? Shall we stay, by the grace of God, and ourselves into a generosity of bereavement which will practically say, "It is hard enough for me to go through this bereavement, but how glad I am that he will never have to go through it!"

So I reason with myself, and so you will find it helpful to reason with yourselves. David lost his son. Though David was King, he lay on the earth mourning and inconsolable for some time. At this distance of time, which do you really think was the one to be congratulated, the short-lived child or the long-lived father? Had David died as early as that child died, he would in the first place have escaped that particular bereavement, then he would have escaped the worse bereavement of Absalom, his rebellious son, and the pursuit of the Philistines, and the fatigues of his military campaign, and the jealousy of Saul, and the perfidy of Ahithophel, and the curse of Shimei, and the destruction of his family at Ziklag, and, above all, he would have escaped the two great calamities of his life, the great sins of uncleanness and murder. David lived to be of vast use to the church and the world, but so far as his own happiness was concerned, does it not seem to you that it would have been better for him to have gone early?

Now, this, my friends, explains some things that to you have been inexplicable. This shows you why when God takes little children from a household he is very apt to take the brightest, the most genial, the most sympathetic, the most talented. Why? It is because that kind of nature suffers the most when it does suffer and is most liable to temptation. God saw the tempter sweeping up from the Caribbean, and he put the delicate craft into the first harbor. "Taken away from the evil to come."

Again, my friends, there is a blessing in an abbreviated earthly existence in the fact that it puts one sooner in the center of things. All astronomers, indeed, as well as Christians, agree in believing that the universe swings around some great center. Any one who has studied the earth and studied the heavens knows that God's favorite figure in geometry is a circle. When God put forth His hand to create the universe, He did not strike that hand at right angles, but He waved it in a circle and kept on waving it in a circle until systems and constellations and galaxies and all worlds took that

metion. Our planet swinging around the sun, other planets swinging around other suns, but somewhere a great hub around which the great wheel of the universe turns. Now, that center is Heaven. That is the capital of the universe. That is the great metropolis of immensity.

Knowledge at First Hands.

Now, does not our common sense teach us that in matters of study it is better for us to move out from the center toward the circumference rather than to be on the circumference, where our world now is? We are like those who study the American continent while standing on the Atlantic beach. The way to study the continent is to cross it or go to the heart of it. Our standpoint in this world is defective. We are at the wrong end of the telescope. The best way to study a piece of machinery is not to stand on the doorstep and try to look in, but to go in with the engineer and take our place right amid the saws and the cylinders. We wear our eyes out and our brain out from the fact that we are studying under such great disadvantages.

Does not our common sense teach us that it is better to be at the center than to be clear out on the rim of the wheel, holding nervously fast to the tire lest we be suddenly hurled into light and eternal felicity? Through all kinds of optical instruments trying to peer in through the cracks and the keyholes of heaven—afraid that both doors of the celestial mansion will be swung wide open before our entranced vision rushing about among the apocalyptic shops of this world, wondering if this is good for rheumatism, and that is good for neuralgia, and something else is good for a bad cough, lest we be suddenly ushered into a land of everlasting health, where the inhabitant never says, "I am sick."

What fools we all are to prefer the circumference to the center! What a dreadful thing it would be if we should be suddenly ushered from this wintry world into the Maytime orchards of Heaven, and if our paperiness of sin and sorrow should be suddenly broken up by a presentation of an Emperor's castle, surrounded by parks with springing fountains and paths up and down which angels of God walk two and two!

We stick to the world as though we preferred cold drizzle to warm habitation, discolored to cantata, sackcloth to royal purple, as though we preferred a piano with four or five keys out of tune to an instrument fully attuned, as though earth and Heaven had exchanged apparel and earth had taken on bridal array and Heaven had gone into deep mourning, all its waters stagnant, all its harps broken, all chalices cracked at the dry wells, all the laws sloping to the river plowed with gravel, with dead angels under the furrow. Oh, I want to break up my own infatuation, and I want to break up your infatuation for this world. I tell you if we are ready, and if our work is done, the sooner we go the better, and if there are blessings in longevity, I want you to know right well there are also blessings in an abbreviated earthly existence.

A Fortunate Escape.
If the spirit of this sermon is true, how consoled you ought to feel about members of your families that went early. "Taken from the evil to come," this book says. What a fortunate escape they had! How glad we ought to feel that they will never have to go through the struggles which we have had to go through. They had just time enough to get out of the cradle and run up the springtime hills of this world and see how it looked, and then they started for a better stopping place. They were like ships that put in at St. Helena, staying there long enough to let passengers go up and see the barracks of Napoleon's captivity and then hoist sail for the port of their own native land. They only took this world "in transitu." It is hard for us, but it is blessed for them.

And if the spirit of this sermon is true, then we ought not to go around sighing and groaning because another year has gone. But we ought to go down on one knee by the milestone and send letters and thank God that we are 365 miles nearer home. We ought not to go around with morbid feelings about our health or about anticipated demise. We ought to be living, not according to that old maxim which I used to hear in my boyhood, that you must live as though every day were the last; you must live as though you were to live forever, for you will. Do not be nervous lest you have to move out of a shanty into an Alhambra.

The Bitter Bit.
On Christmas morning one of my neighbors, an old sea captain, died. After life had departed, his face was illuminated as though he was just going into harbor. The fact was, he had already got through the "Narrows." In the adjoining room were the Christmas presents waiting for his distribution. Long ago, one night, when he had narrowly escaped with his ship from being run down by a great ocean steamer, he had made his peace with God, and a kinder neighbor or a better man you would not find this side of Heaven. Without a moment's warning the pilot of the heavenly harbor had met him just off the lightsight.

The captain often talked to me of the goodness of God, and especially of a time when he was about to go in New York harbor with his ship from Liverpool, and he was suddenly impressed that he ought to put back to sea. Under the protest of the crew and under their very threat, he put back to sea, fearing at the same time he was losing his mind, for it seemed so unreasonable that when they could get into harbor that night they should put back to sea, and the captain said to his mate, "You will call me at 10 o'clock at night."

At 12 o'clock at night the captain was aroused and said: "What does this mean? I thought I told you to call me at 10 o'clock, and here it is 12." "Why," said the mate, "I did call you at 10 o'clock, and you got up, looked around and told me to keep right on this same course for two hours, and

then to call you at 12 o'clock." Said the captain: "Is it possible? I have no remembrance of that."

At 12 o'clock the captain went on deck, and through the rift of the cloud the moonlight fell upon the sea and showed him a shipwreck with 100 struggling passengers. He helped them off. Had he been any earlier or any later at that point of the sea he would have been of no service to those drowning people. On board the captain's vessel they began to band together as to what they should pay for the rescue and what they should pay for the provisions. "Ah," says the captain, "my lads, you can't pay me anything. All I have on board is yours. I feel too greatly honored of God, having saved you to take any pay. Just like him. He never got any pay except that of his own applauding conscience."

Oh, that the old sea captain's God might be my God and yours. Amid the stormy seas of this life may we have always some one as tenderly to take care of us as the captain took care of the drowning crew and the passengers. And may we come into the harbor with as little physical pain and with as bright a hope as he had, and if it should happen to be a Christmas morning when the presents are being distributed and we are celebrating the birth of Him who came to save our shipwrecked world, all the better, for what grander, brighter Christmas present could we have than Heaven?

The Astronomer and the Tailor.

Bessel, the celebrated astronomer and professor at the University of Konigsberg, till his twentieth year was a clerk in a mercantile house at Bremen, where he devoted the whole of his leisure to the study of that science which subsequently rendered his name European. By his mercantile engagements he had acquired a knowledge of manufactures and a taste for elegance and neatness in his wardrobe.

Family affairs having called him for a short time to Leipzig, during the great Michaelmas fair, while sauntering there amongst the numerous stalls, and looking at the various articles exposed for sale with the eye of a connoisseur, he was struck by the beauty and pattern of a piece of new fabricated cloth, which had just been patented at Bradford, and a small sample of which had been sent to Leipzig. Bessel at once bought a few yards for a coat.

On his return home he sent for his tailor, and showing him the cloth, the latter admired the article, but declared that the quantity procurable was not sufficient. Bessel knew perfectly well that he could not get at Konigsberg the stuff required, and in his despair he sent for another tailor, who declared the quantity quite sufficient, and actually brought in a few days the coat, to the entire satisfaction of the astronomer.

On his walk to the university one morning, a schoolboy passed him with his books under his arm, and clad in a jacket of the very same pattern and cloth he was so proud of. Stopping the lad, he inquired of him to whom he belonged, and was not a little surprised that the father was the very tailor who had made him the coat. There was no doubt that the tailor had found the quantity ample enough to cut out of the excess a jacket for his boy.

He asked the boy to accompany him home for a few minutes, whence he sent for his first tailor. The latter having arrived, he told him to look at the coat and the jacket of the boy, and say whether both were made out of one and the same piece. The tailor having affirmed the fact, Bessel told him that the boy belonged to the tailor who had actually made him the coat.

"And now I ask you, my good fellow," continued the professor, in a serious tone, "how comes it that you thought the quantity insufficient even for my own coat, while your brother tailor found it enough to spare something for his boy. How do you explain that, man?"

"In the most simple way, your honor. My Fritz is several inches taller and bigger than his boy."

A new story is told of Oliver Walton, who in his day was the greatest dealer in good horses near Boston. On one occasion he came into Maine and bought an "extra good" horse for one hundred dollars. The horse-breeder was one of the niggardly kind, and asked:

"How are you going to lead the horse away?"

"With that halter, to be sure, said Walton, busy counting out the money for the horse."

"No, sir," said the breeder; "the halter don't go with the horse; it belongs to me. I did not sell you that."

"What—not let me have a halter after I have given you your price for the horse?" asked old Oliver. "What do you want for it?"

"A dollar, sir," said the farmer.

"All right," said Walton; "here is the dollar." He put the rest of the money into his pocket, then stepped quickly to the horse's head and remarked, "I will take the halter, but I guess I will not take the horse." He too, off the halter, let the horse go loose, and the breeder had many a long day in which to repent of his overreaching.

This more annoying a hound is around the house, the better he hunts.

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