THE TABERNACLE PULPIT

DR. TALMAGE ENLARGES HIS FIELD OF WORK.

The Crooked Things of This Earth Are to Be Made Straight, Alike in Business, Government, Domestic Life and Labor—Answers to Prayer.

BROOKLYN, Sept. 21.—Preliminary to his sermon at the Academy of Music in this city this forenoon Rev. Dr. Talmage announced that until the new Brooklyn Tabernacle was completed he would preach in the Brooklyn Academy of Music on Sunday mornings. He was glad to add that by an arrangement made through The Christian Herald, of New York city, he would be enabled to preach in the New York Academy of Music, on Fourteenth street, on Sunday evenings, beginning with the evening of Sept. 28. He also announced that on next Sabbath morning, Sept. 28, he would begin a series of sermons entitled, "My Recent Journey Through the Holy Land and Neighboring Countries; What I Saw and Learned."

The subject of today's sermon was, "Crooked Things." Text, Isa. xl, 4: "The crooked shall be made straight."

Geometry, from the time it was discovered on the banks of the Nile, which by its overflow annually obliterated the landmarks, and the restoration of these landmarks made such a science necessary—I say geometry ever since then has been busy with lines, straight lines, curved lines, lines in angles and cones and spheres, but has never been able to evolve any beauty from a line that was merely crooked. The circle and the square were always considered admirable. Isaiah recognizes the circle and says, "The Lord sits upon the circle of the earth." The altar of the ancient tabernacle was "four square," and the breastplates of the priests "four square," and heaven, according to St. John, is "four square." But the Bible has no admiration for lines that are merely crooked. Indeed my text in prophesying the world's complete rectification declares, "The crooked shall be made straight."

There have been so many moral earthquakes that many things have got into a terrible twist—crooked laws, crooked governments, crooked fortunes, crooked dispositions—and many of the efforts to straighten things have only made them more crooked. And some good people sit down in despair and become pessimistic, and give up life, and the church, and the world as dead failures. With such lachrymose behavior I have no sympathy. It is a promise of the Lord Almighty: "The crooked shall be made straight." I propose, as I may be divinely helped, to mention some of the crooked things that are going to be straightened.

INJUSTICE AND INEQUALITY.

Much of the wealth of the world is in the hands of the profligate, while many of the best people are subjected to distressing privation; and there is going to be a redistribution of property. If it were possible it would be a bad thing to have things divided equally. Some men are able to endure more success than others, and prosperity that might not unbalance you might destroy me. The Declaration of American Independence declares that all men are born equal, but the opposite is the truth, for they are born unequal. In no respect is this more evident than in their capacity to endure success, financial or social. I have seen men by the acquisition of fifty thousand dollars made arrogant and overbearing, and I have known others with their millions of dollars childlike and unassuming and Christian. We would all be affluent, but the Lord cannot trust us. I am glad there are those he can trust. Much is said against capitalists, but the world would be a very shaky world without them.

Who built the great railroads which, while they give such facilities of travel, employ tens of thousands of laborers, supporting them and their families? Capitalists. Who built great ships that stir the rivers and bridge the ocean? Capitalists. Who reared the thousands of factories all over the land in which hundreds of thousands of employes earn their daily bread? Capitalists. Who endowed your colleges, and opened free libraries, and built asylums for the orphan, the crippled and the insane? Capitalists. But for them there would not be an academy of music, or a picture gallery, or a free library, or a steamboat, or a railroad in America. Who put the world on seventy-five years beyond what it would have been in enterprise, in comforts, in educational advantage, in good things without number? Capitalists.

The more money a man gets the better if it come honestly and is employed righteously. Nevertheless we all see that there needs to be a redistribution of property. Communism proposes to make that distribution by torch and dagger and dynamite. Throw the midnight express train off the track and put the factory into conflagration; disrupt society, burglarize, assassinate. Such people believe neither in God nor man nor woman, and they know how to make things worse, but never have made and never can make anything better.

GOD'S METHOD OF REDISTRIBUTION.

I tell you how there will come a redistribution of property. Under the divine blessing good people will get more alertness and acumen and assiduity. Many good people are kept in straitened circumstances because they have been indolent, or lacked courage to take honest advantage of circumstances, and were too stupid to get on. With the very same surroundings others went on to competency. In the better days to come good men will have their faculties wakened, and will in consequence rise to larger share of prosperity. On the other hand, estates wrongfully accumulated will dissolve. If not the sons, then the grandsons will make the money fly, and it will gradually scatter in their hands, and become a part of the general wealth.

Then as to vast properties righteously gathered—and there are thousands of them—such estates will contribute toward helping the unfortunate, not more by charities than by helping struggling people into lucrative business, and the man who has amassed enough and a surplus will say: "There is a young merchant without any capital. I will start him on Fulton street;" and "there is a young mechanic who has no means of his own, and I will put him on a career of prosperity;" and "there is a farmer with too big a mortage on his land, and I will help him lift the incumbrance." The fact is that if the kindliness and generosity manifested by moneyed men toward the struggling during the last fifty years increases in the same ratio for the next fifty years there will be a condition of society paradisiac. We are going to have a multiplication of William E. Dodges and Peter Coopers and James Lenoxes and George Peabodys. So will come redistribution, and the crooked will be made straight.

Mind this, God never yet undertook a failure. The old book, which is worth all other books put together, makes it plain that God has undertaken to regulate this world by gospel influences, and if he has the power he will do what he says he will, and no one who amounts to anything will deny his power. God has said a hundred times, "I will," but never once has said, "I cannot." We may with our tack hammers pound away, trying to mend and improve and straighten the financial condition of the world, and be disappointed in the result because our arm is too weak and the hammer we wield too small, but the most defiant difficulty will flatten and disappear when God with a hammer made of summer thunderbolts strikes it, saying, "The crooked shall be made straight."

GOD'S HELP IN BUSINESS AFFAIRS.

In your business concerns there are influences perplexing. Your affairs may seem all right to outsiders, for business firms do not advertise their private troubles; but where one firm has everything just as they want it there are a hundred firms at their wits' end what to do with that partner who draws more than his share of the profits, or with that stockholder who comes in just often enough to upset things, or with that disappearance of funds which you cannot account for, although you have auspicions you cannot mention; or with that investment which was made contrary to your judgment because there was a determination to push it through, or because you are going behind month by month without any prospect of extrication. The trouble is putting a wrinkle on your forehead that ought not to appear there for ten years yet, and you will be 40 years old when you ought to be only 30, or 60 when you ought to be 50, or 70 when you ought to be only 60. Stop worrying; either by the dissolution of that firm or by readjusting matters you will be brought safely through if you put your trust in God.

When commercial houses fail the suspension is advertised, but of the tens of thousands of men who are every day extricated no public mention is made. Yesterday was Saturday, and I warrant that at the windows of banks, and in counting rooms of stores, and on every street of every city, God appeared for the deliverance of good men as certainly as when with his right foot he trod Lake Galilee into placidity, and made Daniel as safe among the lions as though they had been house dogs asleep on a rug before a winter's fire. Throw yourself on the promise of the text, or a hundred other texts meaning about the same thing.

I never yet asked God to do anything but he did it if it were best, and in all the cases where my prayer has not been answered I have found out afterward that it was best not to have been answered in my way. But none of us has tested the full power of prayer. It is a force very like some of the forces of nature that were in existence, but not employed. For ages electricity was thought good for nothing but to burn barns and kill people with one fell stroke. The lightning rod on the top of houses was the spear with which the world charged on the thunder storm, as much as to say, "If you dare to come this way I will hurl you into the ground." But now electricity lightens homes and churches and cities and Christendom and moves rail cars, and he is a rash man who mentions anything as impossible to this natural energy.

So the power of prayer was to the world rather a frightful power, if it was any power at all. But that has been changed, and men begin to use it in some things, and the time will come when it will be used in all things, and there will be a Bible in every counting room, and supplication will ascend from every commercial establishment, and when business firms are formed the question will not only be asked as to how much this one and that one put in of capital, but the question will be asked, "Do you know how to pray?"

GOD IN EVERYTHING.

Mightier agent than any natural force yet developed will be this gospel electricity, flashing heavenward for help, flashing earthward with divine response. God in business life. God in agricultural life. God in mechanical life. God in artistic life. God in every kind of life. Your religion for the most part is hung up so high you cannot reach it. It is hung up on the cloudy rafters of the sky, where you expect to snatch it up as you finally go through for heavenly residence. Oh, have your religion within easy reach now! Religion is not for heaven, but for this world. Once in heaven we will need no prayer, for we shall have everything we want. We will need no repentance, for we shall have forever got rid of our sins. We shall have no need of comfort, for there will be no trouble. The Christian religion is not for heaven, where everything is all right, but for this world, where so many things are all wrong.

Washington Allston, whose name you recognize as that of a great American painter, was reduced to extreme poverty, and one day got on his knees and asked for a loaf of bread for himself and his starving family. While he was bowed in that prayer there was a knock at the door and a man came in and said: "How about your painting, the 'Angel Uriel,' that received the prize at the royal academy? Has it been sold?" "No," said Allston. "How much do you want for it?" Allston replied: "I am done fixing a price, for I cannot get it." "Will four hundred pounds be enough?" asked the stranger. "Why, that is more than I asked," said Allston. The four hundred pounds (two thousand dollars) were paid, and the purchaser introduced himself as Marquis of Stafford, who thereafter was one of the most liberal patrons of the rescued artist. "Oh, that all just happened so!" Did it? Tell that to some ignorant man, some benighted woman, who has never read the promise, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee," or that other promise, "The crooked shall be made straight."

"Well," says one, "you don't apply this in every direction." Yes, I do. Take the most uncertain thing on earth—the weather. The Bible distinctly says that prayer controls the weather. James v, 17, 18: "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain." Do you say that was the weather of olden time? There have been instances in modern times just as marvelous. There's not a Christian ship captain but could give you instances of divine interference with the weather in answer to prayer.

It has been my good fortune to know many ship captains. They are in all our services. They leave their vessels on Sunday mornings and join us in worship. I warrant there are enough of them present this morning to take a whole fleet in safety across the Atlantic. Whenever I have heard them testify it has mightily confirmed me in what I knew before, that God answers prayer concerning the weather. And there have been cyclones that started up from the Carribbean sea, sweeping down every sail, and every smokestack, and every mast in their course, which in answer to specific petition have been diverted and made to curve around some particular ship, leaving that in calm waters, and then resuming their original path of destruction. The weather probabilities again and again have announced a tempest, and we were all ready for it, but to the surprise of most people the next day we saw the announcement that the atmospheric fury had changed its course. The probability is it struck a prayer. The probability is it struck a prayer and glanced off. If Elias' prayer affected the weather of Palestine for forty-two months I should think somebody now might have a prayer that would affect it for a couple of days.

REMARKABLE ANSWER TO PRAYER.

John Easter was many years ago an evangelist in Virginia. A large outdoor meeting was being held in that state. Many thousands had assembled in the open air, and heavy storm clouds began to gather. There was no shelter to which the multitudes could retreat. The rain had already reached the adjoining fields when John Easter cried out, "Brethren, be still while I call upon God to stay the storm till the gospel is preached to this multitude." Then he knelt and prayed that the audience might be spared from the rain, and that after they had gone to their homes there might come refreshing showers. Behold the clouds parted as they came near, and passed to either side of the crowd, and then closed again, leaving the place dry where the audience had assembled, and the next day the postponed showers came upon the ground that had been the day before omitted. Do you say it only happened so? I cannot see what you keep your Bibles for, and the God you worship is not my God. Your God is an autocrat, and he is so far off and so far up that the world cannot touch him, and his throne is an eternal iceberg. My God is a father, here and now, and a father will give his child what he asks for if it is best for him to have it. Pray about everything that concerns you, secularities as well as spiritualities. Take to God all your annoyances and perplexities. The crooked shall be made straight.

Some people talk as though God controlled things in general, but not in particular; that he started everything under certain laws and then let it take care of itself, as an engineer might start his locomotive on an iron railroad track and then jump off. What would happen to such a locomotive is what would long ago have happened to our world if God had started it and afterward allowed it to look out for itself. There is no such thing as a general providence. It is a particular providence. God has no general care for a forest. It is a care of every cell of every leaf and root in that forest. God has no general care of the ocean. It is a care of every drop of water in the liquid magnitude. God has no general care for the human race. It is a care of every individual of that race and of every item of individual history. I preach him, a God in infinitesimals, an everyday God, a God responsive, and one breath of earnest prayer, though that breath should not be strong enough to make a candle flicker, will absorb more of the divine attention than if the archangel standing at the foot of the throne should flap both wings.

GOD LOVES THIS NATION.

It is remarkable how many crooked things are in the providence of God being made straight. About thirty years ago our national affairs were as crooked as depraved American politics and bad men and Satan could make them. From the top of Maine to the foot of Florida the nation was red with wrath. It was wrangle and fight all the way through, and one of the mildest things that the north and south promised each other was assassination. During this summer I have traveled through New York and Ohio and Illinois and Indiana and Minnesota and Kansas and Nebraska and Missouri and Texas and Louisiana and Georgia and North and South Carolina and Virginia and Pennsylvania, and I have shaken hands with tens of thousands of people, and talked with men of all sections and degrees, and I have to tell you it is all peace, and in all the states of the Union you could not now marshal a military company of one hundred soldiers to fight against the United States government, unless you got your men out of the penitentiary. Did the corrupt and gangrened political parties do this work of rectification and pacification? No! It was by divine interposition that the crooked has been made straight.

On the 2d of December, 1851, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte rode down the Champs Elysee of Paris, and under the hoofs of his horse a republic was trampled as the rider went to take a throne. It was the outrage of the century. For nineteen years the wrong triumphed. The will of one man who wanted to remain emperor kept down a nation who wanted a republic. But September, 1870, arrived, and Sedan unrolled its crimson scroll. The emperor surrenders with 83,000 troops, 419 field guns, 6,000 horses and 60,000 muskets. From that day the ballot box was up and the throne was down. Free institutions have been substituted for an infamous monarchy. Thank God! The crooked has been made straight.

But why go so far to find fulfillment of my text? In all our lives there are crooked things that need to be made straight, and each hearer or reader will enumerate for himself or herself. With one it is dilapidated physical health, and you are saying, "Why cannot I be in good health when I have such opportunities and such responsibilities?" Alas for the sick headaches and the rheumatic joints, and the neuralgic thrusts, and the lame foot! But you will be well soon. Life at the longest is an abbreviated durance. There is a black doctor that will cure you. Some people call him Death.

No disease was ever able to stand before his touch. Use all the means afforded for physical recuperation, but if they fail the hour of release is not far away. There need be no incurables. There is no sorrow that heaven cannot cure. Those who in this world have always been well will not get the best part of heaven. They will not have the advantage of contrast. They were well before they left this world, and why should they be so gratulated at being well in the next world? But to those who on earth were hindered or broken down in health what a contrast as they step into that domain where there has never been an aching brow, or lame foot, or inflamed muscle, or disordered nerve! For forty years there may have been a stooping in the back, or a twisted muscle, or a curved spine, or a crooked limb, but the promise has been fulfilled, "The crooked shall be made straight."

THE UNHAPPILY MARRIED.

In many a domestic life are difficulties to be removed. There are thousands of matches that were not made in heaven. Some of the loveliest women have been united to some of the meanest, men and some of the grandest men to the most worthless women. There may be no sufficient cause of divorcement, but there has never been any accord. For them the wedding march ought never to have been played. The twain divergent in sentiment, the north pole and the south pole might just as well have been married. A twist of nettles would have been more appropriate than a garland of orange blossoms. The unutterable mistake was made to please parents, or for the acquisition of estate, or for heightening of social position, or from thorough thoughtlessness. I call the attention of such to the rapid dissolution of families.

This thought, which is a sadness to a happy marital state, might be consolatory to those unequally yoked. A very short path is the path of life. The rolling years will give quick emancipation. Everybody, for discipline, must have some kind of trouble, and that is your trouble. Put in a song now and then to cheer your spirit. Make the best of things. Find in God that peace which no one else can bestow. The days and months and years are crowding past, and the last of the procession, so far as you are concerned, will soon have gone by. Remember that some of the best men and women who ever lived have had the same lifetime of misfortune. They bore up under it and so can you. The expiration of the life of one of you will, after a while, remove the affliction. Let the one that remains make no hypocritical mourning at the obsequies of the one that goes, or imitate those whom we have all noticed, who fought like cats and dogs all their married state and then could not get organs to sound dirges doleful enough, or furnishing stores to prepare weeds black enough, or tombstone cutters to chisel epitaphs eulogistic enough.

It is a matter of congratulation that the unhappiest conjugal relation will terminate. The crooked shall be made straight. In the ages of the world when people lived five or six or eight or nine hundred years such consolation for any kind of trouble would have been inapt. It would have brought no relief to some of those old patriarchs to say, "You will have only seven hundred years more of this." But life has been abbreviated by the cutting off of century after century until we can console people, whether their trouble be financial or social or domestic, by saying it will not be long before the crooked shall be made straight.

GOD WILL RELIEVE THE SORROWFUL.

But to those who were once happily united on earth but are now separated the same thought comes in a good cheer. Not long separated! Tradition says that two bells were molded and sent from Spain for a distant land to chime in a church tower. But while in a storm at sea one of these bells was wrecked, and only one reached the shore and was hung in the church tower. And some people thought that when standing on the land they heard that bell ringing for worship or in a wedding peal they could at the same time hear from the sea the lost bell ringing as if in response. Some of our friends and kindred have crossed the stormy sea, and are in the tower of God on high. But we are still in the tempest, and sometimes the surges beat over us, but our souls are still in accord with those who are gone, and they ring down to us and we ring up to them, and there is a sympathy between us that can never die.

"Oh," says some one, "the crook in my lot you have not mentioned, and I sit clear outside of all the consolations you have offered." Well, I will take after you with gospel comfort and reach you before I close. Do you think your wound is so deep the divine Surgeon cannot treat it? Have you a trouble that overmasters God? Is your annoyance of such a nature that you must suppress it? Ah, that is what is killing you. Trouble must be told, or it stings to death the one who carries it. If there is no man or woman that you can trust with the secret you can trust God. Hie away to him. Tell him all about it. Lock your door and tell him aloud, and if you do not get relief you will be the first soul in the six thousand years of the world's existence, and the only one of the hundreds of millions of the human race, who ever called on God for help and did not get it. In all the universe, in all eternity there is not an exception. Stop brooding and commence praying.

I bless my God that while there are so many crooked things in life there are some things so straight God himself could not make them straighter. Divine help comes straight to those who will have it. The angels of mercy fly straight when they undertake a rescue. The hour of your final deliverance marches straight out of the eternities. And as the carpenter puts down his rule on a piece of timber, and with his ax hews away until the last inequality and irregularity disappears, so when God in the last great day shall put down his unfailing measuring rule beside that event which seemed the most twisted in our lives or in the world it will be found out that the last discrepancy has vanished, and the last wrong has been righted, and the last crooked thing has been made straight.

Old Time "Circuit Riders."

It is impossible for the present generation of preachers to appreciate the toils of their predecessors in the west and south. The labor of "riding a circuit" was incredibly great. Roads were mere bridlepaths through the wilderness. There were no bridges. When streams were narrow and shallow they were forded; when deep and wide the lonely rider tied his clothes in a bundle on his head and forced his horse to swim. Often there was not even a semblance of a road, and the preacher found his way by the compass, or, if he had none, by the course of the sun by day and the position of certain well known stars by night. If he lost his course there was nothing for him to do but camp out all night. If he had the means he built a fire to scare away the wolves, bears and even more feared panthers. If the wild beasts were not numerous he slept, but if he saw half a dozen pairs of glowing eyes in the circle of darkness round his fire he stayed awake, piled on more wood and now and then shouted and cast flaming brands at the "varmints" that came too close.

Nor were the discomforts of travel his only annoyances. After a day's severe riding he would reach, long after nightfall, a settlement where Methodists were in plenty. Tired almost to death he enters the log cabin of a good brother, and would give all his worldly possessions for a chance to lay his head on his saddle and go to sleep at once. But not so. The preacher must be entertained. The old woman and the girls began hurried culinary operations. A boy is sent out of the cabin with whispered orders about "that red pullet." Five minutes later the preacher hears a chicken squall, and knows he must wait for supper before he will be allowed to sleep.

An hour passes away, relieved by the old man's inquiries about Brother So-and-so and Sister Such-a-one on the same or another circuit, and the weary preacher sits down to a supper of corn bread burned on the outside, dough in the middle; fried chicken swimming in fat, and rye coffee sweetened with maple sugar. And he must eat, too, else his host and hostess may think him proud and "stuck up," and "too good to eat common folks' victuals."—St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

A prisoner in jail at Freehold, N. J., was on the verge of escaping, when, as he has since explained, his conscience smote him and he concluded to stay where he was.