PLAGUES OF THE CITIES.

STRONG DISCOURSE PREACHED BY REV. T. DE WITT TALMAGE.

Baleful Amusements the Subject—A Great Concourse Present—The Speaker Specifies Amusements That Are Harmful and Those That Are Not.

NEW YORK, March 15.—The series of sermons Dr. Talmage is preaching in this city and Brooklyn on "The Plagues of the Cities" is attracting general attention. At the morning service in Brooklyn and at the evening services held under the auspices of The Christian Herald, in this city, the number of persons who come to hear the sermons is far larger than either of the buildings can accommodate. The sermon to-day, which is the fourth of the series, is on "Baleful Amusements." The text was II Samuel, ii, 14: "Let the young men now arise and play before us."

There are two armies encamped by the pool of Gibeon. The time hangs heavily on their hands. One army proposes a game of sword fencing. Nothing could be more healthful and innocent. The other army accepts the challenge. Twelve men against twelve men, the sport opens. But something went adversely. Perhaps one of the swordsmen got an unlucky clip, or in some way had his ire aroused, and that which opened in sportfulness ended in violence, each one taking his contestant by the hair, and then with the sword thrusting him in the side, so that that which opened in innocent fun ended in the massacre of all the twenty-four sportsmen. Was there ever a better illustration of what was true then, and is true now, that that which is innocent may be made destructive?

What of a worldly nature is more important and strengthening and innocent than amusement, and yet what has counted more victims? I have no sympathy with a straitjacket religion. This is a very bright world to me, and I propose to do all I can to make it bright for others.

YOUTH'S SPORTIVENESS SHOULD NOT BE SUPPRESSED.

I never could keep step to a dead march. A book years ago issued says that a Christian man has a right to some amusements. For instance, if he comes home at night weary from his work, and feeling in need of recreation, puts on his slippers, and goes into his garret and walks lively round the floor several times there can be no harm in it. I believe the church of God has made a tremendous mistake in trying to suppress the sportfulness of youth and drive out from men their love of amusement. If God ever implanted anything in us he implanted this desire.

But instead of providing for this demand of our nature, the church of God has, for the main part, ignored it. As in a riot, the mayor plants a battery at the end of the street, and has it fired off so that everything is cut down that happens to stand in the range, the good as well as the bad, so there are men in the church who plant their batteries of condemnation and fire away indiscriminately. Everything is condemned. But my bible commends those who use the world without abusing it, and in the natural world God has done everything to please and amuse us. In poetic figure we sometimes speak of natural objects as being in pain, but it is a mere fancy. Poets say the clouds weep, but they never yet shed a tear; and the winds sigh, but they never did have any trouble; and that the storm howls, but it never lost its temper. The world is a rose, and the universe a garland.

And I am glad to know that in all our cities there are plenty of places where we may find elevated, moral entertainment. But all honest men and good women will agree with me in the statement that one of the worst plagues of these cities is corrupt amusement. Multitudes have gone down under the blasting influence never to rise. If we may judge of what is going on in many of the places of amusement by the Sodomic pictures on board fences and in many of the show windows there is not a much lower depth of profigacy to reach. At Naples, Italy, they keep such pictures locked up from indiscriminate inspection. These pictures were exhumed from Pompeii and are not fit for public gaze. If the effrontery of bad places of amusement in hanging out improper advertisements of what they are doing night by night grows worse in the same proportion, in fifty years New York and Brooklyn will beat not only Pompeii, but Sodom.

To help stay the plague now raging I project certain principles by which you may judge in regard to any amusement or recreation, finding out for yourself whether it is right or whether it is wrong.

BY ITS FRUITS KNOW IT.

I remark in the first place that you can judge of the moral character of any amusement by its healthful result or by its baleful reaction. There are people who seem made up of hard facts. They are a combination of multiplication tables and statistics. If you show them an exquisite picture they will begin to discuss the pigments involved in the coloring. If you show them a beautiful rose they will submit it to a botanical analysis, which is only the post-mortem examination of a flower. They have no rebound in their nature. They never do anything more than smile. There are no great tides of feeling surging up from the depths of their soul in billow after billow of reverberating laughter. They seem as if nature had built them by contract and made a bungling job of it.

But, blessed be God, there are people in the world who have bright faces, and whose life is a song, an anthem, a pean of of victory. Even their troubles are like the vines that crawl up the side of a great tower, on the top of which the sunlight sits, and the soft airs of summer hold perpetual carnival. They are the people you like to have come to your house; they are the people I like to have come to my house. If you but touch the hem of their garments you are healed.

Now it is these exhilarant and sympathetic and warm hearted people that are most tempted to pernicious amusements. In proportion as a ship is swift it wants a strong helmsman; in proportion as a horse is gay, it wants a stout driver; and these people of exuberant nature will do well to look at the reaction of all their amusements. If an amusement sends you home at night nervous so that you cannot sleep, and you rise up in the morning, not because you are slept out, but because your duty drags you from your slumbers, you have been where you ought not to have been. There are amusements that send a man next day to his work bloodshot, yawning, stupid, nauseated; and they are wrong kinds of amusement. They are entertainments that give a man disgust with the drudgery of life, with tools because they are not swords, with working aprons because they are not robes, with cattle because they are not infuriated bulls of the arena.

If any amusement sends you home longing for a life of romance and thrilling adventure, love that takes poison and shoots itself, moonlight adventures and hairbreadth escapes, you may depend upon it that you are the sacrificed victim of unsanctified pleasure. Our recreations are intended to build up, and if they pull us down as to our moral or as to our physical strength you may come to the conclusion that they are obnoxious.

There is nothing more depraving than attendance upon amusements that are full of innuendo and low suggestion. The young man enters. At first he sits far back, with his hat on and his coat collar up, fearful that somebody there may know him. Several nights pass on. He takes off his hat earlier and puts his coat collar down. The blush that first came into his cheek when anything indecent was enacted comes no more to his cheek. Farewell, young man! You have probably started on the long road which ends in consummate destruction. The stars of hope will go out one by one, until you will be left in utter darkness. Hear you not the rush of the maelstrom, in whose outer circle your boat now dances, making merry with the whirling waters? But you are being drawn in, and the gentle motion will become terrific agitation. You cry for help. In vain! You pull at the oar to put back, but the struggle will not avail! You will be tossed and dashed and shipwrecked and swallowed in the whirlpool that has already crushed in its wrath ten thousand hulks.

YOUNG MAN BE ON YOUR GUARD.

Young men who have just come from country residence to city residence will do well to be on guard and let no one induce you to places of improper amusement. It is mightily alluring when a young man, long a citizen, offers to show a new comer all around.

Still further. Those amusemunts are wrong which lead you into expenditure beyond your means. Money spent in recreation is not thrown away. It is all folly for us to come from a place of amusement feeling that we have wasted our money and time. You may by it have made an investment worth more than the transaction that yielded you hundreds or thousands of dollars. But how many properties have been riddled by costly amusements.

The first time I ever saw the city—it was the city of Philadelphia—I was a mere lad. I stopped at a hotel, and I remember in the eventide one of these men plied me with his infernal art. He saw I was green. He wanted to show me the sights of the town. He painted the path of sin until it looked like emerald; but I was afraid of him. I shoved back from the basilisk—I made up my mind he was a basilisk. I remember how he wheeled his chair round in front of me, and with a concentrated and diabolical effort attempted to destroy my soul; but there were good angels in the air that night. It was no good resolution on my part, but it was the all encompassing grace of a good God that delivered me. Beware! beware! oh, young man. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is death."

The table has been robbed to pay the club. The champagne has cheated the children's wardrobe. The carousing party has burned up the boy's primer. The tablecloth of the corner saloon is in debt to the wife's faded dress. Excursions that in a day make a tour around a whole month's wages; ladies whose lifetime business it is to "go shopping;" large bets on horses have their counterparts in uneducated children, bankruptcies that shock the money market and appal the church, and that send drunkenness staggering across the richly figured carpet of the mansion and dashing into the mirror and drowning out the carol of music with the whooping of bloated sons come home to break their old mother's heart.

A SAD STORY.

I saw a beautiful home, where the bell rang violently late at night. The son had been off in sinful indulgences. His comrades were bringing him home. They carried him to the door. They rang the bell at 1 o'clock in the morning. Father and mother came down. They were waiting for the wandering son, and then the comrades, as soon as the door was opened, threw the prodigal headlong into the doorway, crying: "There he is, drunk as a fool! Ha, ha!" When men go into amusements they cannot afford they first borrow what they cannot earn, and then they steal what they cannot borrow. First they go into embarrassment, and then into lying, and then into theft; and when a man gets as far on as that he does not stop short of the penitentiary. There is not a prison in the land where there are not victims of unsanctified amusements.

Merchant of Brooklyn or New York, is there a disarrangement in your accounts? Is their a leakage in your money drawer? Did not the cash account come out right last night? I will tell you. There is a young man in your store wandering off into bad amusements. The salary you give him may meet lawful expenditures, but not the sinful indulgences in which he has entered, and he takes by theft that which you do not give him in lawful salary.

How brightly the path of unrestrained amusement opens. The young man says: "Now I am off for a good time. Never mind economy. I'll get money somehow. What a fine road! What a beautiful day for a ride! Crack the whip, and over the turnpike! Come, boys, fill high your glasses. Drink! Long life, health, plenty of rides just like this!" Hard working men hear the clatter of the hoofs and look up and say: "Why, I wonder where those fellows get their money from! We have to toil and drudge. They do nothing." To these gay men life is a thrill and an excitement. They stare at other people, and in turn are stared at. The watch chain jingles. The cup foams. The cheeks flush. The eyes flash. The midnight hears their guffaw. They swagger. They jostle decent men off the sidewalk. They take the name of God in vain. They parody the hymn they learned at their mother's knee: and to all pictures of coming disaster they cry out, "Who cares!" and to the counsel of some Christian friend, "Who are you?"

Passing along the street some night you hear a shriek in a grog shop, the rattle of the watchman's club, the rush of the police. What is the matter now? Oh, this reckless young man has been killed in a grog shop fight. Carry him home to his father's house. Parents will come down and wash his wounds and close his eyes in death. They forgive him all he ever did, although he cannot in his silence ask it. The prodigal has got home at last. Mother will go to her little garden and get the sweetest flowers, and twist them into a chaplet for the silent heart of the wayward boy, and push back from the bloated brow the long locks that were once her pride. And the air will be rent with the agony. The great dramatist says, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child."

LIFE AN EARNEST THING.

I go further, and say those are unchristian amusements which become the chief business of a man's life. Life is an earnest thing. Whether we were born in a palace or hovel, whether we are affluent or pinched, we have to work. If you do not sweat with toil, you will sweat with disease. You have a soul that is to be transfigured amid the pomp of a judgment day; and after the sea has sung its last chant and the mountain shall have come down in an avalanche of a rock, you will live and think and act, high on a throne where seraphs sing, or deep in a dungeon where demons howl. In a world where there is so much to do for yourselves, and so much to do for others, God pity that man who has nothing to do.

Your sports are merely means to an end. They are alleviations and helps. The arm of toil is the only arm strong enough to bring up the bucket out of the deep well of pleasure. Amusement is only the bower where business and philanthropy rest while on their way to stirring achievements. Amusements are merely the vines that grow about the anvil of toil and the blossoming of the hammers. Alas for the man who spends his life in laboriously doing nothing, his days in hunting up lounging places and loungers, his nights in seeking out some gas lighted foolery! The man who always has on his sporting jacket, ready to hunt for game in the mountain or fish in the brook, with no time to pray or work or read, is not so well off as the greyhound that runs by his side, or the fly bait with which he whips the stream.

A man who does not work does not know how to play. If God had intended us to do nothing but laugh he would not have given us shoulders with which to lift, and hands with which to work, and brains with which to think. The amusements of life are merely the orchestra playing while the great tragedy of life plunges through its five acts—infancy, childhood, manhood, old age and death. Then exit the last earthly opportunity. Enter the overwhelming realities of an eternal world!

I go further, and say that all those amusements are wrong which lead into bad company. If you go to any place where you have to associate with the intemperate, with the unclean, with the abandoned, however well they may be dressed, in the name of God quit it. They will despoil your nature. They will undermine your moral character. They will drop you when you are destroyed. They will give not one cent to support your children when you are dead. They will weep not one tear at your burial. They will chuckle over your damnation.

I had a friend at the west—a rare friend. He was one of the first to welcome me to my new home. To fine personal appearance he added a generosity, frankness and ardor of nature that made me love him like a brother. But I saw evil people gathering around him. They came up from the saloons, from the gambling hells. They plied him with a thousand arts. They seized upon his social nature, and he could not stand the charm. They drove him on the rocks, like a ship full winged, shivering on the breakers. I used to admonish him. I would say, "Now I wish you would quit these bad habits and become a Christian." "Oh," he would reply, "I would like to, I would like to, but I have gone so far I don't think there is any way back." In his moments of repentance he would go home and take his little girl of 8 years, and embrace her convulsively, and cover her with adornments, and strew around her pictures and toys and everything that could make her happy; and then, as though hounded by an evil spirit, he would go out to the enflaming cup and the house of shame, like a fool to the correction of the stocks.

A DEATHBED SCENE.

I was summoned to his deathbed. I hastened. I entered the room. I found him, to my surprise, lying in full every day dress on the top of the couch. I put out my hand. He grasped it excitedly and said, "Sit down, Mr. Talmage, right there." I sat down. He said: "Last night I saw my mother, who has been dead twenty years, and she sat just where you sit now. It was no dream. I was wide awake. There was no delusion in the matter. I saw her just as plainly as I see you. Wife, I wish you would take these strings off of me. There are strings spun all around my body. I wish you would take them off of me." I saw it was delirium.

"Oh," replied his wife, "my dear, there is nothing there, there is nothing there." He went on, and said: "Just where you sit, Mr. Talmage, my mother sat. She said to me, 'Henry, I do wish you would do better.' I got out of bed, put my arms around her, and said: 'Mother, I want to do better. I have been trying to do better. Won't you help me to do better? You used to help me.' No mistake about it, no delusion. I saw her—the cap, and the apron, and the spectacles, just as she used to look twenty years ago; but I do wish you would take these strings away. They annoy me so. I can hardly talk. Won't you take them away?" I knelt down and prayed, conscious of the fact that he did not realize what I was saying. I got up. I said, "Good-by; I hope you will be better soon." He said, "Good-by, good-by."

That night his soul went to the God who gave it. Arrangements were made for the obsequies. Some said, "Don't bring him in the church: he was too dissolute." "Oh," I said, "bring him. He was a good friend of mine while he was alive, and I shall stand by him now that he is dead. Bring him to the church."

LAST SCENE OF ALL.

As I sat in the pulpit and saw his body coming up through the aisle I felt as if I could weep tears of blood. I told the people that day: "This man had his virtues, and a good many of them. He had his faults, and a good many of them, but if there is any man in this audience who is without sin let him cast the first stone at this coffin lid." On one side the pulpit sat that little child, rosy, sweet faced, as beautiful as any little child that sat at your table this morning, I warrant you. She looked up wistfully, not knowing the full sorrows of an orphan child. Oh, her countenance haunts me today like some sweet face looking upon us through a horrid dream. On the other side of the pulpit were the men who had destroyed him. There they sat, hard visaged, some of them pale from exhausting disease, some of them flushed until it seemed as if the fires of iniquity flamed through the cheeks and crackled the lips. They were the men who had done the work. They were the men who had bound him hand and foot. They had kindled the fires. They had poured the wormwood and gall into that orphan's cup. Did they weep? No. Did they sigh repentingly? No. Did they say, "What a pity that such a brave man should be slain?" No, no; not one bloated hand was lifted to wipe a tear from a bloated cheek. They sat and looked at the coffin like vultures gazing at the carcass of a lamb whose heart they had ripped out! I cried in their ears as plainly as I could, "There is a God and a judgment day!" Did they tremble? Oh, no, no. They went back from the house of God, and that night, though their victim lay in Oakwood cemetery, I was told that they blasphemed, and they drank, and they gambled, and there was not one less customer in all the houses of iniquity. This destroyed man was a Samson in physical strength, but Delilah sheared him, and the Philistines of evil companionship dug his eyes out and threw him into the prison of evil habits. But in the hour of his death he rose up and took hold of the two pillared curses of God against drunkenness and uncleanness, and threw himself forward, until down upon him and his companions there came the thunders of an eternal catastrophe.

Again, any amusement that gives you a distaste for domestic life is bad. How many bright domestic circles have been broken up by sinful amusements! The father went off, the mother went off, the child went off. There are today the fragments before me of blasted households. Oh, if you have wandered away, I would like to charm you back by the sound of that one word, "home." Do you not know that you have but little more time to give to domestic welfare? Do you not see, father, that your children are soon to go out into the world, and all the influence for good you are to have over them you must have now? Death will break in on your conjugal relations, and alas! if you have to stand over the grave of one who perished from your neglect!

AT HIS WIFE'S DEATHBED.

I saw a wayward husband standing at the deathbed of his Christian wife, and I saw her point to a ring on her finger and heard her say to her husband, "Do you see that ring?" He replied, "Yes, I see it." "Well," said she, "do you remember who put it there?" "Yes," said he, "I put it there," and all the past seemed to rush upon him. By the memory of that day when, in the presence of men and angels, you promised to be faithful in joy and sorrow, and in sickness and in health; by the memory of those pleasant hours when you sat together in your new home talking of a bright future; by the cradle and the joyful hour when one life was spared and another given; by that sick bed, when the little one lifted up the hands and called for help, and you knew he must die, and he put one arm around each of your necks and brought you very near together in that dying kiss; by the little grave in Greenwood that you never think of without a rush of tears; by the family Bible, where, amidst stories of heavenly love, is the brief but expressive record of births and deaths; by the neglects of the past, and by the agonies of the future; by a judgment day, when husbands and wives, parents and children, in immortal groups, will stand to be caught up in shining array or to shrink down into darkness; by all that, I beg you give to home your best affections.

Ah, my friends, there is an hour coming when our past life will probably pass before us in review. It will be our last hour. If from our death pillow we have to look back and see a life spent in sinful amusement there will be a dart that will strike through our soul sharper than the dagger with which Virginius slew his child. The memory of the past will make us quake like Macbeth. The iniquities and rioting through which we have passed will come upon us, weird and skeleton as Meg Merrilies. Death, the old Shylock, will demand and take the remaining pound of flesh, and the remaining drop of blood, and upon our last opportunity for repentance and our last chance for heaven the curtain will forever drop.

A Polynesian Legend.

Tura, coming from over seas, found himself in a land named Otea, and leaving his canoe journeyed inland. Traveling through the dense forest, he saw fairies sitting in the flowers of the climbing plants and swinging on the lianas which trailed from the high boughs across the vistas of the wood. These fairies were curiously shaped beings, having small heads and large bodies, while their hands and feet were attached to limbs so short that they seemed as if extruding from their bodies.

Tura had brought with him the sticks wherewith fire is produced by friction, and he proceeded to kindle a fire and to cook some food, much to the astonishment of the fairies, who had always consumed their food in its natural state. Tura fell in love with one of the fairy women and married her. His wife reciprocated his affection and they lived happily together; but one day when the elfin spouse was combing out her husband's hair she suddenly cried out, "Oh, Tura, what is this white hair among the black ones?"

He told her that it was a sign of age and of approaching decay, the forerunner of death. Then his wife wept bitterly and refused to be comforted. It is a touching story, the sudden surprise and grief of this child of the immortals on her discovery of that which to us poor sons of clay is so common and obtrusive a fact. The old legend has given rise to a proverbial saying, "The weeds of Tura," as a synonymous expression for gray hair.—Longman's Magazine.

Queer Artistic Blunders.

Some very curious blunders may be seen in old pictures. It is related that Burgonne in his "Travels in Spain" noticed a painting where Abraham is preparing to shoot Isaac with a pistol, and in a country church in Germany the painter, in representing the sacrifice of Isaac, places a blunderbus in Abraham's hand as argument for obedience, and paints an angel coming down to pour water on the pan.

Huer has painted the Blessed Virgin as resting on a velvet sofa playing with a cat and a paroquet, and about to pour herself coffee from an engraved coffee pot.

In Durer's picture of St. Peter denying the Saviour a Roman soldier may be seen smoking a pipe.—Providence Journal.

The Scotch Beadle.

Of course he was fond of his snuff, and made free with the "mull," as the Scot terms his snuff box, right and left. An old beadle himself tells of having got a sharp reproof from the pulpit because of his too devoted attention in this particular. "When the minister was preaching," says he, "a neighbor asked a snuff, and I gave him my box. The minister saw us and just leaned over the pulpit, looked straight in our faces, and said, 'There are some of you more concerned about your noses than about your souls' salvation.' After that I was very careful never to pass my box in church again."—Gentleman's Magazine.

Two Opinions of Southey.

One year when I was up in the Lake country I was sketching at Rydal Water, when a gentleman came up behind me, and after watching me as I painted for some time said, "The man who can do that should have a name." I answered just as he moved away, "The man who can see that ought to have a name, too." He looked very peculiar, and I asked some men who were working in a stone quarry close by if they knew who he was. "Oh, yes," they said; "why, that's Southey, the poet. He's a funny fellow." "How funny?" I asked. "Why, he's mad," they answered.—T. Sidney Cooper.

Satisfied.

Little Man (excitedly)—I'm hunting for a man named Bibbs, who said I was a toadstool.

Big Man (calmly)—I'm Bibbs, but I didn't call you a toadstool. I said you belonged to the mushroom aristocracy.

Little Man (backing off)—That's all right. We're all fond of mushrooms.—Good News.

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