

A PLAGUE OF UNBELIEF.

THE MOVING CAUSE OF ALL THE PLAGUES OF CITIES.

Dr. Talmage's Masterly Contrast of the Effects of Christianity and Agnosticism. The Glorious Results of a Living Faith. What Has Infidelity Done?

NEW YORK, April 3.—Continuing his course of sermons on "The Ten Plagues of the Cities," Rev. Dr. Talmage today took for his subject "The Plague of Infidelity." The discourse was delivered to large and appreciative audiences at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in the forenoon and the New York Academy of Music in the evening. The text was Romans III, 4, "Let God be true, but every man a liar."

It is if God says one thing and the whole human race says the opposite, Paul would accept the Divine veracity. But there are many in our time who have dared arraign the Almighty for falsehood. Infidelity is not only a plague, but it is the mother of plagues.

It seems from what we hear on all sides that the Christian religion is a huge blunder; that the Mosiac account of the creation is an absurdity large enough to throw all nations into rollicking guffaw; that Adam and Eve never existed; that the ancient flood and Noah's ark were impossibilities; that there never was a miracle; that the Bible is the friend of cruelty, of murder, of polygamy, of all forms of base crime; that the Christian religion is woman's tyrant and man's justification; that the Bible from lid to lid is a fable, a cruelty, a humbug, a sham, a lie; that the martyrs who fled for its truth were miserable dupes; that the church of Jesus Christ is properly gaseous as a fool; that when Thomas Carlyle, the skeptic, said, "The Bible is a noble book," he was dropping into imbecility; that when Theodore Parker declared in Musae hall, Boston, "Never a boy or girl in all Christendom but was profited by that great book," he was being very weak minded; that it is something to bring a blush to the cheek of every patriot that John Adams, the father of American independence, declared, "The Bible is the best book in all the world;" and that lion hearted Andrew Jackson turned into an unavailing coward when he said, "That book, sir, is the rock on which our republic rests;" and that Daniel Webster abdicated the throne of his intellectual power and resigned his logic, and from being the great expounder of the constitution and the great lawyer of his age turned into an idiot when he said, "My hearers assure me that the gospel of Jesus Christ must be a divine reality. From the time that at my mother's feet or on my father's knee I first learned to flip verses from the sacred writings they have been my daily study and vigilant contemplation, and if there is anything in my style or thought to be commended the credit is due to my kind parents in instilling into my mind an early love of the Scriptures;" and that William H. Seward, the diplomatist of the century, only showed his pecuniary wisdom by declaring, "The whole hope of human progress is suspended on the ever growing influences of the Bible;" and that it is wisest for us to take that book from the thrones in the affections of unaccounted multitudes and put it under our feet, to be trampled upon by hatred and hissing contempt; and that your old father was hoodwinked and cajoled and cheated and befooled when he leaned on this as a staff after his hair grew gray, and his hands were tremulous, and his steps shortened as he came up to the verge of the grave; and that your mother sat with a pack of lies on her lap while reading of the better country, and of the ending of all her aches and pains, and reunion not only with those of you who stood around her, but with the children she had buried with infinite heart-ache, so that she could read no more until she took off her spectacles and wiped from them the heaviest mist of many tears. Alas! that for forty and fifty years they should have walked under this delusion and had it under their pillow when they lay a-dying in the back room, and asked that some words from the vile page might be cut upon the tombstone under the shadow of the old country meeting house, where they sleep today waiting for a resurrection that will never come.

This book, having deceived them, and having deceived the mighty intellects of the past, must not be allowed to deceive our larger, mightier, vaster, more stupendous intellects. And so out with the book from the court room, where it is used in the solemnization of testimony. Out with it from under the foundation of church and asylum. Out with it from the domestic teacher. Gather together all the Bibles—the children's Bibles, the family Bibles, those newly bound, and those with lid nearly worn out and pages almost obliterated by the fingers long ago turned to dust—bring them all together, and let us make a bonfire of them, and by it warm our cold consciences, and after that turn under with the plowshare of public indignation the polluted ashes of that loathsome, adulterous, obscene, cruel and desecrated book which is so antagonistic to man's liberty, and woman's honor, and the world's happiness.

AGNOSTICS ATTACK THE VERY LIFE. Now that is the substance of what infidelity proposes and declares, and the attack on the Bible is accompanied by great jocosity, and there is hardly any subject about which more mirth is kindled than about the Bible. I like fun; no man was ever built with a keener appreciation of it. There is health in laughter instead of harm—physical health, mental health, moral health, spiritual health—provided you laugh at the right thing. The morning is found. The Indian with its own mist baptism the earnest Mimihaha, or Laughing Water. You have not kept your eyes open or your ears alert if you have not seen the sea smile, or heard the forests clap their hands, or the orchards in blossom weakle with redolence. But there is a laughter which is deathful, there is a laughter which has the rotund of despair. It is not healthy to gape about God or chuckle about eternity or smirk about the things of the immortal soul.

You know what caused the accident years ago on the Hudson River railroad. It was an intoxicated man who for a joke pulled the string of the air brake and stopped the train at the most dangerous point of the journey. But the lightning train, not knowing there was any impediment in the way, came down, crushing out of the mangled victims the immortal souls that were speeding instantly to God and judgment. It was only a joke. He thought it would be such fun to stop the train. He stopped it. And so infidelity is chiefly anxious to stop the long train of the Bible, as I the long train of the churches, and the long train of Christian influences, while coming down upon us as no doubt, judgment and eternity, coming a thousand miles a minute, coming with more force than all the avalanches that ever slipped from the Alps, coming with more strength than all

the lightning express trains that ever whirled or shrieked or thundered across the continent.

Now in this jocularity of infidel thinkers I cannot joke, and give no jest, and I cannot say why I cannot be an infidel, and so I will try to help out of this present condition any who may have been struck with the awful plague of skepticism.

First, I cannot be an infidel because infidelity has no good substitute for the consolation it proposes to take away. You know there are millions of people who get their chief consolation from this book. What would you think of a crusade of this sort? Suppose a man should resolve that he would organize a conspiracy to destroy all the medicines from all the apothecaries and from all the hospitals of the earth. The work is done. The medicines are taken, and they are thrown into the river, or the lake, or the sea.

A patient wakes up at midnight in a paroxysm of distress, and wants an anodyne. "Oh," says the nurse, "the anodynes are all destroyed; we have no drops to give you, but instead of that I'll read you a book on the absurdities of morphine and on the absurdities of all remedies." But the man continues to writhe in pain, and the nurse says, "I'll continue to read you some discourses on anodynes, the cruelties of anodynes, the indecencies of anodynes, the absurdities of anodynes. For your groan I'll give you a laugh."

ALAS! FOR THE SORROWING. Here in the hospital is a patient having a gangrened limb amputated. He says, "Oh, for ether! Oh, for chloroform!" The doctors say, "Why, they are all destroyed; we don't have any more chloroform or ether, but I have got something a great deal better. I'll read you a pamphlet against James Y. Simpson, the discoverer of chloroform as an anesthetic, and against Drs. Anest and Hamilton and Hosack and Mott and Harvey and Abernethy." "But," says the man, "I must have some anesthetic." "No," say the doctors, "they are all destroyed, but we have got something a great deal better." "What is that?" "Fun." Fun about medicines. Liedown, all ye patients in Bellevue hospital, and stop your groaning; all ye broken hearted of all the cities, and quit your crying; we have the osthooloon as last!

Here is a dose of wit, here is a strengthening plaster of sarcasm, here is a bottle of rights that you are to keep well shaken up and take a spoonful of it after each meal, and if that does not cure you here is a solution of blasphemy in which you may bathe, and here is a tincture of derision. Tickle the skeleton of death with a rapscallion. Make the King of Terrors quake! For all the agonies of all the ages a joke! Millions of people willing with uplifted hand toward heaven to affirm that the gospel of Jesus Christ is full of consolation for them, and yet infidelity proposes to take it away, giving nothing absolutely nothing, except fun. Is there any greater delight or depth or length or breadth or immensity of meanness in all God's universe?

Infidelity is a religion of "Don't know." Is there a God? Don't know! Is the soul immortal? Don't know! If we should meet each other in the future world will we recognize each other? Don't know! A religion of "don't know" for the religion of "I know." "I know in whom I have believed." "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Infidelity proposes to substitute a religion of awful negatives for our religion of glorious positives, showing right before our eyes a world of reunion and ecstasy and high companionship and glorious worship and stupendous victory, the mightiest joy of earth not high enough to reach to the base of the Himalaya of uplifted splendor awaiting all those who on wing of Christian faith will soar toward it.

Have you heard of the conspiracy to put out all the lighthouses on the coast? Do you know that on a certain night of next month, Eddystone lighthouse, Bell Rock lighthouse, Sherryvore lighthouse, Montank lighthouse, Hatteras lighthouse, New London lighthouse, Barnegat lighthouse, and the 60 lighthouses on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts are to be extinguished? "Oh," you say, "what will become of the ships on that night? What will be the fate of the one million sailors following the sea? What will be the doom of the millions of passengers? Who will arise to put down such a conspiracy?" Every man, woman and child in America and the world. But that is only a fable. That is what infidelity is trying to do—put out all the lighthouses on the coast of eternity, letting the soul go up the "Narrows" of death with no light, no comfort, no posse—all the coast covered with the blackness of darkness. Instead of the great lighthouse, a glowworm of wit, a firefly of jocosity. Which do you like the better, O voyager for eternity, the firefly or the lighthouse?

What a mission infidelity has started on! The extinguishing of lighthouses, the breaking up of lifeboats, the dismissal of all the pilots, the turning of the inscription on your child's grave into a farce and a lie. Walter Scott's "Old Mortality," chased in hand, went through the land to cut out in plainer letters the half obliterated inscriptions on the tombstones, and was a beautiful mission; but infidelity spends its time with hammer and chisel trying to cut out from the tombstones of your dead all the story of resurrection and heaven. It is the iconoclast of every village graveyard and of every city cemetery and of Westminster Abbey. Instead of Christian consolation for the dying, a freezing sneer. Instead of prayer a grimace. Instead of Paul's triumphant defiance of the snakes, a going out your know not where, to stop you know not when, to do you know not what. That is infidelity.

THE FALSE FILMS OF INFIDELITY. Furthermore: I cannot be an infidel, because of the false charges infidelity is all the time making against the Bible. Perhaps the slander that has made the most impression and that some Christians have not been intelligent enough to deny is that the Bible favors polygamy. Does the God of the Bible uphold polygamy, or did he? How many wives did God make for Adam? He made one wife. Does not your common sense tell you when God started the marriage institution he started it as he wished it to continue? If God had favored polygamy he could have created for Adam five wives or ten wives or twenty wives just as easily as he made one.

At the very first of the Bible God shows himself in favor of monogamy and antagonistic to polygamy. Genesis II, 24, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife." Not his wives, but his wife. How many wives did God spare for Noah in the ark? Two and two the birds; two and two the cattle; two and two the lions; two and two the human race. If the God of the Bible had favored a multiplicity of wives he would have spared a plurality of wives. When God first launched the human race he gave Adam one wife. At the second launching of the human race he spared for Noah one wife, for Ham one wife, for Shem one wife, for Japhet one wife. Does that look as though God favored polygamy? In Genesis VIII, 16, God orders his prohibition of more than one wife. "God permitted polygamy. Yes; just as he permits today's murder and theft and

arson and all kinds of crime. He permits these things, as you well know, but he does not sanction them. Who would dare to say he sanctions them? Because the crime of the United States have permitted polygamy in Utah you are not, therefore, to conclude that they patronized it, that they approved it, when, on the contrary, they denounced it. All of God's ancient Israel knew that the God of the Bible was against polygamy, for in the four hundred and thirty years of their stay in Egypt there is only one case of polygamy recorded—only one. All the mighty men of the Bible stood aloof from polygamy except those few, falling into the crime, were chastised within an inch of their lives. Adam, Aaron, Noah, Joseph, Joshua, Samuel, monogamists. But you say, "Didn't David and Solomon favor polygamy?" Yes; and did they not get well punished for it?

Read the lives of those two men and you will come to the conclusion that all the attributes of God's nature were against their behavior. David suffered for his crimes in the caverns of Adullam and Masada, in the wilderness of Ziklag. The Bedouins after him, sickness after him, Absalom after him, Abithophel after him, Adonijah after him, the Edomites after him, the Syrians after him, the Moabites after him, death after him, the Lord God Almighty after him. The poorest peasant in all the empire married to the plainest Jewess was happier than the king in his marital misbehavior. How did Solomon get along with polygamy? Read his warnings in Proverbs; read his self diagnosis in Ecclesiastes. He throws up his hands in loathing and cries out, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." His seven hundred wives nearly perished the life out of him. Solomon got well paid for his crimes—well paid.

I repeat that all the mighty men of the Scriptures were aloof from polygamy, save as they were pounded and failed and cut to pieces for their insult to holy marriage. If the Bible is the friend of polygamy why is it that in all the lands where the Bible predominates polygamy is forbidden, and in the lands where there is no Bible it is favored. Polygamy all over China, all over India, all over Africa, all over Persia, all over heathendom, save as the missionaries have done their work, which polygamy does not exist in England and the United States, except in defiance of law. The Bible abroad, God honored monogamy. The Bible not abroad, God abhorred polygamy.

THE GLORY OF CHRISTIAN WOMANHOOD. Another false charge which infidelity has made against the Bible is that it is antagonistic to woman, that it enjoins her degradation and belittles her mission. Under this impression many women have been overcome of this plague of infidelity. Is the Bible the enemy of woman? Come into the picture gallery, the Louvre, the Luxembourg or the more honored. Here is Eve, a perfect woman; as perfect a woman as could be made by a perfect God. Here is Deborah, with her womanly arm hurling a host into battle. Here is Miriam, leading the Israelitish orchestra on the banks of the Red sea. Here is motherly Hannah, with her own loving hand replenishing the wardrobe of her son Samuel, the prophet. Here is Abigail, kneeling at the foot of the mountain until the four hundred weary men, at the sight of her beauty and prowess halt, halt—a hurricane stopped at the sight of a water lily, a dew drop dashed back Niagara. Here is Ruth putting to shame all the modern slang about mothers-in-law as she turns her back on her home and her country, and faces wild beasts and exile and death that she may be with Naomi, her husband's mother. Ruth, the queen of the harvest fields. Ruth, the grandmother of David. Ruth, the ancestress of Jesus Christ. The story of her virtues and her life sacrifice is the most beautiful pastoral ever written. Here is Vashti, defying the bacchanal of a thousand drunken lords, and Esther with her sword drawn, and her life ready to deliver her people. And here is Dorcas, the sunlight of eternal fame gilding her philanthropic needle, and the woman with perfume in a box made from the hills of Palestine, pouring the holy chrism on the head of Christ, the aroma lingering all down the corridor of the centuries. Here is Lydia, the merchantess of Tyrian purple immortalized for her Christian behavior. Here is the widow with two mites, more famous than the Peabodys and the Lenoxes of all the ages, while here comes in slow and stately with careful attendant and with special honor and high favor, leaning on the arm of inspiration, one who is the joy and pride of any home so rarely fortunate as to have one, an old Christian grandmother, Grandmother Lois. Who has more worshippers today than any being that ever lived on earth except Jesus Christ? Mary. For what purpose did Christ perform his first miracle upon earth? To relieve the embarrassment of a womanly housekeeper at the falling short of a beverage. Why did Christ break up the silence of the tomb, and tear off the shroud, and rip up the rocks? It was to stop the bereavement of the two Bethany sisters. For whose comfort was Christ most anxious in the hour of dying execution? For a woman, an old woman, a wrinkle faced woman, a woman who in other days had held him in her arms, his first friend, his last friend, and it is very apt to be, his mother. All the paths of the ages compressed into one utterance, "Behold thy mother." Does the Bible antagonize woman?

A CALL FOR THE WITNESSES. If the Bible is so antagonistic to woman, how do you account for the difference in woman's condition in China and Central Africa, and her condition in England and America? There is no difference except that which the Bible makes. In lands where there is no Bible she is hitched like a beast of burden to the plow, she carries the hod, she submits to indescribable indignities. She must be kept in a private apartment, and if she comes forth she must be carefully hooded and religiously veiled as though were a shame to be a woman. Do you not know that the very first thing the Bible does when it comes into a new country is to strike off the shackles of woman's serfdom? O woman, where are your chains today? Hold up both your arms and let us see your handcuffs. Oh, we see the handcuffs. They are bracelets of gold bestowed by husbandly or fatherly or brotherly or sisterly or loverly affection? Unloosen the wren robe from your neck, O woman, and let us see the yoke of your bondage. Oh, I find the yoke a caracoon of silver, or a string of coral, or a cluster of pearls, that must gall you very much. How bad you must all have it.

Since you put the Bible on your stand in the sitting room, has the Bible been to you, O woman, a curse or a blessing? Why is it that a woman when she is troubled will go to her worst enemy, the Bible? Why do you not go for comfort to some of the volumes of the Bible? "Behold," says the Deacon, "any one of the 280 volumes of

Voltaire? No, the silly, deluded woman persists in hanging about the Bible verses, "Let not your heart be troubled." "All things work together for good." "Weeping may endure for a night," "I am the resurrection," "Yea, he will." Furthermore, rather than invite I resist this plague of infidelity because it has wrought no positive good for the world and is always a hindrance. I ask you to mention the names of the merciful and the educational institutions which infidelity founded and is supporting, and has supported all the way through—institutions pronounced against God and the Christian religion, and yet pronounced in behalf of suffering humanity. What are the names of them? Certainly not the United States Christian commission, or the sanitary commission, for Christian George H. Stuart was the president of the one, and Christian Henry W. Bellows was the president of the other.

COMPARE THE HOSPITALS AND COLLEGES. Where are the asylums and merciful institutions founded by infidelity and supported by infidelity, pronounced against God and the Bible, and yet doing work for the alleviation of suffering? Infidelity is so very loud in its braggadocio it must have some to mention. Certainly, if you come to speak of educational institutions it is not Yale, it is not Harvard, it is not Princeton, it is not West Point, it is not Cambridge or Oxford, it is not any institution from which a diploma would not be a disgrace. Do you point to the German universities as exceptions? I have to tell you that all the German universities to-day are under positive Christian influences, except the University of Heidelberg, where the ruffianly students cut and maul and mangle and murder each other as a matter of pride instead of infamy. Do you mention Girard college, Philadelphia, as an exception, that college established by the will of Mr. Girard which forbids religious instruction and the entrance of clergymen within its gates. My reply is that I lived for seven years near that college and knew many of its professors to be Christian instructors, and no better Christian influences are to be found in any college than in Girard college.

There stands Christianity. There stands infidelity. Compare what they have done. Compare their resources. There is Christianity, a prayer on her lip; a benediction on her brow; both hands full of help for all who want help; the mother of thousands of colleges; the mother of thousands of asylums for the oppressed, the blind, the sick, the lame, the imbecile; the mother of missions for the bringing back of the outcast; the mother of thousands of reformatory institutions for the saving of the lost; the mother of innumerable Sabbath schools bringing millions of children under a drill to prepare them for respectability and usefulness, to say nothing of the great future. That is Christianity.

Here is infidelity; no prayer on her lips, a benediction on her brow, both hands clenched—what the fight Christianity. That is the entire business. The complete mission of infidelity to fight Christianity. Where are her schools, her colleges, her asylums of mercy? Let me throw you down a whole ream of foolscap paper that you may fill all of it with the names of her beneficent institutions, the colleges, and the asylums, the institutions of mercy and of learning, founded by infidelity and supported alone by infidelity, pronounced against God and the Christian religion, and yet in favor of making the world better. "Oh," you say, "a ream of paper is too much for the names of those institutions." Well, then, I throw you a quire of paper. Fill it all up now. I will wait until you get all the names down. "Oh," you say, "that is too much." Well, then, I will just hand you a sheet of letter paper. Just fill up the four sides while we are talking of this matter with the names of the merciful institutions and the educational institutions founded by infidelity and supported all along by infidelity, pronounced against God and the Christian religion, yet in favor of humanity.

WHERE ARE YOUR FRUITS, AGNOSTICS? "Oh," you say, "it is too much room." We don't want a whole sheet of paper to write down the names. Perhaps I had better tear out one leaf from my memorandum book and ask you fill up both sides of it with the names of such institutions. "Oh," you say, "that would be too much room. I wouldn't want so much room as that." Well, then, suppose you count them on your ten fingers. "Oh," you say, "not quite so much as that." Well, then, count them on the fingers of one hand. "Oh," you say, "we don't want quite so many names as that." Suppose, then, you halt and count on one finger the name of any institution founded by infidelity, supported entirely by infidelity, pronounced against God and the Christian religion, yet tending to make the world better. Not one! Not one!

Is infidelity so poor, so starveling, so mean, so useless? Get out, you miserable pauper of the universe! Crawl into some rathole of everlasting nothingness. Infidelity standing today amid the suffering, groaning, dying nations, and yet doing absolutely nothing save trying to impede those who are tolling until they fall exhausted into their graves in trying to make the world better. Gather up all the work, all the miserable work, that infidelity has ever done, add it all together, and there is not so much nobility in it as in the smallest bead of that sister of charity who last night went up the dark alley of the town, put a jar of jelly for an invalid appetite on a broken stand, and then knelt on the bare floor praying the mercy of Christ upon the dying soul.

Infidelity scrapes no lint for the wounded, adds no bread for the hungry, shakes up no pillow for the sick, rouses no comfort for the bereft, gives no grave for the dead. While Christ, our Christ, our wounded Christ, our risen Christ, the Christ of this old fashioned Bible—blessed be his glorious name forever—our Christ stands this hour pointing to the hospital, or to the asylum, saying: "I was sick and ye gave me a couch, I was lame and ye gave me a crutch, I was blind and ye physical my eyesight, I was orphaned and ye mothered my soul, I was lost on the mountains and ye brought me home; inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these, ye did it to me."

But I thank God that this plague of infidelity will be stayed. Many of those who hear me now by the Holy Ghost upon their hearts will cease to be scoffers and will become disciples, and the day will arrive when all nations will accept the Scriptures. The book is going to keep right on until the fires of the last day are kindled. Some of them will begin on one side and some on the other side of the old book. They will not find a bundle of loose manuscripts easily consumed like tinder thrown into the fire. When the fires of the last day are kindled, some will burn on this side, from Genesis toward Revelation, and others will burn on this side, from Revelation toward Genesis, and in all their way they will not find a single chapter or a single verse out of the Bible. It is the first time we can afford to do without the Bible. What will be the use of the book of Gen-

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