

TABERNACLE PULPIT.

TWENTY-THIRD ANNIVERSARY SERMON PREACHED BY DR. TALMAGE.

Subject of the Discourse, "The Three Tabernacles, a Story of Trials and Triumphs"—Review of the History of the Doctor's Church.

BROOKLYN, April 8.—This is a festive day at the Tabernacle. Dr. Talmage is celebrating the twenty-third anniversary of his settlement in Brooklyn. In white flowers embedded in green at the back of the pulpit stood the inscription, "1869 and 1892." Dr. Talmage's subject was, "The Three Tabernacles, a Story of Trials and Triumphs," and his text, Luke ix, 33, "Let us make three tabernacles."

Our Arab ponies were almost dead with fatigue, as, in December, 1889, we rode near the foot of Mount Hermon in the Holy Land, the mountain called by one "a mountain of ice," by another "the Mount of the Mountains," by a third "the Mount of the Mountains." Its top has an almost unearthly brilliance. But what must it have been in the time to which my text refers? Peter and James and John were on that mountain top with Jesus when, suddenly, Christ's face took on the glow of the noonday sun, and Moses and Elijah, who had been dead for centuries, came out from the heavenly world and talked with our Saviour. What an overwhelming scene—Moses, representing the law; Elijah, representing the prophets; and Christ, representing all worlds.

Impetuous Peter was so wrought upon by the presence of this wondrous throng, that, without waiting for time to consider how preposterous was the proposition, he cried out, "Let us make three tabernacles—one for thee, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Where would they get the material for building one tabernacle, much less material enough to build two tabernacles, and still less, how would they get the material for building three? Where would they get the silver? Where the gold? Where the silk? Where the curtains? Where the carvings? Hermon is a barren peak. To build one tabernacle in such a place would have been an undertaking beyond human achievement, and Peter was propounding the impossible when he cried out in enthusiasm, "Let us build three tabernacles."

And yet that is what this congregation has been called to do and has done. The first Brooklyn Tabernacle was dedicated in 1870, and destroyed by fire in 1873. The second Brooklyn Tabernacle was dedicated in 1874, and destroyed by fire in 1889. The third Brooklyn Tabernacle was dedicated in April, 1891, and in that we are worshipping today. What sounded absurd for Peter to propose, when he said on Mount Hermon, in the words of my text, "Let us build three tabernacles," we have not only done, but in the mysterious province of God were compelled to do.

People who were unjustly criticized by people who did not know the facts, sometimes for putting so much money in church buildings, and sometimes for not giving as much as we ought to this or that denominational project, and no explanation has yet been made. Before I get through with the delivery of this sermon and its publication and distribution, I shall show that no church on earth has ever done more magnificently and that no church ever conquered more trials and that no membership ever had in it more heroes and heroines than this Brooklyn Tabernacle, and I mean to have it known that any individual or religious newspaper or secular newspaper that hereafter casts any reflection on this church's fidelity and generosity is guilty of a wickedness for which God will hold him or it responsible.

One year it was sent out through a syndicate of newspapers that this church was doing nothing for the cause of liberty, when we had that year raised \$94,000 in hard cash for religious uses. There has been persistent and hemispheric lying against this church. We have raised during my pastorate, for church building and church purposes, \$998,000, or practically a million dollars. Not an Irish famine, or a Charleston earthquake, or an Ohio freshet, or a Chicago conflagration, but our church was among the first to help. We have given free seats in the morning and evening services to 240,000 strangers a year, and that in twenty years would amount to 4,800,000 auditors. We have received into our membership 3,357 members, and that is only a small portion of the number of those who have here been converted to God from all parts of this land and from other lands.

Under the blessing of God and through the kindness of the printing press my sermons go to every nook and every neighborhood in Christendom, and are regularly translated into nearly all the great languages of Europe and Asia. The syndicates having charge of this sermonic publication informed me a few days ago that this printed sermons every week, in this and other lands, go into the hands of 25,000,000 people. During the last year, I am authoritatively informed, over 2,000 different periodicals were added to the list of those who make this publication, and yet these ministers of the Gospel and religious newspapers that systematically and industriously and continuously charge this church with ill-will and selfishness and parsimony.

I call the attention of the whole earth to this outrage that has been heaped upon the Brooklyn Tabernacle, though a more consecrated, benevolent and splendid convocation of men and women were never gathered together outside of heaven. I have never before responded to these injustices, and probably will never refer to them again, but I wish the people of this country and other countries to know that what they read concerning the selfishness and indolence and lack of benevolence and lack of missionary spirit on the part of this church, is from top to bottom and from stem to stern, falsehood—dastardly falsehood—diabolical falsehood. What is said against myself has no effect except, like that of a coarse Turkish towel, the rubbing down by which it improves circulation and produces good health.

But this continuous misrepresentation of my beloved church, in the name of Almighty God, I denounce, while I appeal to the fair minded men and women to see that justice is done this people, who within a few years have gone through a struggle that no other church in any land or any age has been called to endure, and I pray God that no other church may ever be called to endure, viz., the building of three tabernacles. I ask the friends of the Brooklyn Tabernacle to cut out this sermon from the newspapers and put it in their pocketbooks, so that they can intelligently answer our falsifiers, whether clerical or lay.

And with these you may put that other statement, which recently went through the country, and which I saw in Detroit, which said that the Brooklyn Tabernacle had a hard financial struggle, because it

had all along been paying such enormous salaries to its pastor, Dr. Talmage, when the fact is that after our last disaster and for two years I gave all my salary to the church building fund, and I received \$5,000 less than nothing; in other words, in addition to serving this church gratuitously for two years, I let it have \$5,000 for building purposes. Why is it that people could not do us justice and say that all our financial struggle as a church came from doing what Peter, in my text, absurdly proposed to do, but which, in the inscrutable providence of God, we were compelled to do—build three tabernacles.

IN SMOOTH WATERS AT LAST.

Now I feel better, that this is off my mind. The rest of my sermon will be spent out of hosannahs. I announce to you this day that we are at last, as a church, in smooth waters. Arrangements have been made by which our financial difficulties are now fully and satisfactorily adjusted. Our income will exceed our outgo, and Brooklyn Tabernacle will be yours and be long to you and your children after you, and anything you see contrary to this you may put down to the confounding habit which some people have got of misrepresenting this church, and they cannot stop. When I came to Brooklyn I came to a small church and a big indebtedness. We have now this, the largest Protestant church in America, and financially as a congregation we are worth, over and beyond all indebtedness, considerably more than \$150,000.

I have preached here twenty-three years, and I expect, if my life and health are continued, to preach here twenty-three years more. I don't think we will all do well to remember that our breath is in our nostrils, and any hour we may be called to give an account of our stewardship. All we ask for the future is that you do your best, contributing all you can to the support of our institutions. Our best days are yet to come; our greatest revivals of religion, and our mightiest outpourings of the Holy Ghost. We have got through the Red sea and stand today on the other bank clapping the symbols of victory.

Do you wonder that last Sabbath I asked you in the midst of the service to rise and sing with jubilant voice the long meter Doxology:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise him, all creatures here below,
Praise him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Yes, twenty-three years have passed since I came to live in Brooklyn, and they have been to me eventful years. It was a protracted church to which I came, a church so flat down it could drop no farther. Thought controversies which were a useless to rehearse it was well nigh extinct, and for a long while it had been without a pastor. But nineteen members could be mustered to sign a call for my coming.

As a committee was putting that call before me in an upper room in my house in Philadelphia, there were two other committees on similar errands from other churches in other rooms, whom my wife entertained and keeping apart from unhappy collision. The auditorium of the Brooklyn church to which I came defied all the laws of acoustics; the church had a steeple that was the derision of the town, and a high box pulpit which shut in the preacher as though he were dangerous to be let loose, or it acted as a barricade that was unnecessary to keep back the people, for they were so few that a minister of ordinary means could have kept back all who were there.

My first Sabbath in Brooklyn was a sad day, for I did not realize how far the church was down until then, and on the evening of that day my own brother, through whose pocket I entered the ministry, died, and the tidings of his decease reached me at 6 o'clock in the evening, and I was to preach at half past 7. But from that day the blessing of God was on us, and in three months we began the enlargement of the building. Before the close of that year we resolved to construct the first Tabernacle. It was to be a temporary structure, and therefore we called it a Tabernacle instead of a Temple. What should be the style of architecture was the immediate question. I had always thought that the amphitheatrical shape would be appropriate for a church.

Two distinguished architects were employed, and after much hovering over designs they announced to us that such a building was impossible for religious purposes, as it would not be churchly and would subject themselves and us to ruinous criticism; in other words, they were not ready for a revolution in church architecture. Utterly disheartened as to my favorite style of architecture, I said to the trustees, "Build anything you please, and I must be satisfied." But one morning a young architect appeared at my house and asked if we had yet selected a plan for our church. I said, "No, and what do you suggest?" "What style of building do you want?" he asked. And taking out a lead pencil and a letter envelope from my pocket, in less than a minute by a few curved lines I indicated in the rough what we wanted. "But," I said, "old architects tell us it can't be done, and there is no use in your trying." He said: "I can do it. How long can I have to make out the plans?" "I said, "This evening at 8 o'clock everything is to be decided."

TWO CHURCHES AND NO MONEY.

At 8 o'clock of that evening the architect presented his plans, and the bids of builder and mason were presented, and in five minutes after the plans were presented they were unanimously adopted. So that I would not be in the way of the trustees during the work I went to Europe, and when I got back the church was well nigh done. But here came in a staggering hindrance. We expected to pay for the new church by the sale of the old building. The old one had been sold, but just at the time we must have the money the purchasers backed out and we had two churches and no money.

By the help of God and the indomitable and unparalleled energy of our trustees (here and there one of them present today, but the most in a better world), we got the building ready for consecration, and on Sept. 28, 1870, morning and evening dedicatory services were held, and in the afternoon the children, with sweet and multitudinous voices, consecrated the place to God. Twenty thousand dollars were raised that day to pay a floating debt. In the morning old Dr. Stephen H. Tyng, of the clergy of the Episcopal church and the Glastonbury of the American pulpit, preached a sermon which lingered in its gracious effects as long as the building stood. He read enough out of the Episcopal prayer book to keep himself from being reprimanded by his bishop for preaching at a non-Episcopal service; and we, although belonging to another denomination, responded with heartiness, as though we were used to the liturgy, "Good Lord, deliver us!"

During the short time we occupied that building we had a constant downpour of religious awakening. Hosanna! Ten million years in heaven will have no power to dim my memory of the glorious times we had in that first Tabernacle, which, because of its invasion of the usual style of church

architecture, was called by some "Talmage's Hippodrome," by others, "Church of the Holy Circus," and by other mirthful nomenclature. But it was a building perfect for its use, and most long enough to have its imitation in all the large cities of America and to completely revolutionize church architecture. People saw that it was the common sense way of seating an audience.

Instead of putting them in an angular church, where each one chiefly saw the back part of somebody else's head, the audience were arranged in semicircle, so that they could see one another's faces, and the auditorium was a great family circle seated around a fireplace which was the pulpit. It was an iron structure, and we supposed fireproof, but the insurance companies looked at it, and after we had gone too far to stop in its construction they declined to insure it except for a mere nothing, declaring that, being of iron, if the inflammable material between the sheets of iron took fire no engine hose could play upon it. And they were right. During those days we educated and sent out from a lay college under our charge some twelve hundred young men and women, many of them becoming evangelists and many of them becoming regularly ordained preachers, and I met them in all parts of the land toiling mightily for God.

THE FIRE OF 1873.

One Sunday morning in December, 1873, the thermometer nearly down to zero, I was on my way to church. There was an excitement in the street and much smoke in the air. Fire engines dashed past. But my mind was on the sermon I was about to preach, and I was so full of thought, that I did not see until it was too late, that I had stepped into the way of a chariot that Elijah took from the banks of the Jordan. That Sunday morning tragically, with its wringing of hands and frozen tears on the cheeks of many thousands standing in the street, and the crash that shook the earth, is as vivid as though it were yesterday. But it was not a perfect loss.

All were anxious to do something, and on such occasions sensible people are apt to do foolish things, one of them, at the risk of his life, rushed in among the fallen walls, mounted the pulpit and brought a glass of water from the table and brought it in safety to the street. So you see it was not a total loss. Within an hour from many churches came kind invitations to occupy their buildings, and hanging against a lamppost near the destroyed building, before 12 o'clock that morning, was a board with the inscription, "The congregation of Brooklyn Tabernacle will worship tonight in Plymouth church."

Mr. Beecher made the opening prayer, which was full of commiseration for me and my homeless flock, and I preached that night the sermon that I intended to preach that morning in my own church, the text concerning the precious alabaster box broken at the feet of Christ, and sure enough we had one very precious broken that day. We were, as a church, obliterated. "Be arise and build," said many of the members, and they took the architectural plan of the church, which in the first instance was necessarily somewhat rude, and developed it into an elaborate plan that was immediately adopted.

But how to raise the money for such an expensive undertaking was the question—expensive not because of any senseless adornment proposed, but expensive because of the immense size of the building needed to hold our congregation. It was at that time when for years our entire country was suffering, not from a financial panic, but from that long continued financial depression which all business men remember, as the cloud hung heavy year after year and commercial establishments without number went down. Through what struggles we passed the eternal God and some brave souls today remember. Many a time would I have gladly accepted calls to some other field, but I could not leave the flock in the wilderness.

At last, after in the interim, having worshipped in our beautiful Academy of Music, on the morning of Feb. 28, 1874, the anniversary of the Washington who conquered impossibilities and on the Sabbath that always celebrates the resurrection, Dr. Byron Sunderland, chaplain of the United States senate, thrilled us through and through with a dedicatory sermon from Hagai ii, 9, "The glory of this house shall be greater than that of the first; and the glory of this shall be greater than that of the former many times, because I will lay the foundation thereof." At another gathering 628 souls entered this communion, and so many of those gathered throngs have already entered heaven that we expect to feel at home when we get there. My! My! Won't we be glad to see them—the men and women who stood by us in days that were dark, and days that were jubilant! Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!

The following Sunday 328 souls were received into the church, and the next afternoon a large number of ministers and laymen gathered on the corner street can be unbroken. Who gave almost till the blood came! What halallelujahs! What victories! What wedding marches played with full organ! What baptisms! What sacraments! What obsequies! One of them on a snowy Sabbath afternoon, when all Brooklyn seemed to sympathize, and my eldest son, bearing my own name, lay beneath the pulpit in the last sleep, and Florence Rice Knox sang, and a score of ministers on either side around the platform tried to interpret how it was best that one who had just come to manhood, and with brightest worldly prospects, should be taken and we left until we meet where tears never fall.

THE SECOND TABERNACLE.

That second tabernacle! What a stupendous remembrance! But, if the Peter in my text had known what an undertaking it is to build two tabernacles, he would not have proposed two, to say nothing of three. As an anniversary sermon must needs be somewhat autobiographical, let me say I have not been idle. During the standing of those two tabernacles, fifty-two books, under as many titles, made up from my writings, were published. During that time also I was permitted to discuss all the great questions of the day in all the great cities of this continent, and in many of them many times, besides preaching and lecturing ninety-six times in England, Scotland and Ireland in ninety-four days. During all that time, as well as since, I was engaged in editing a religious newspaper, believing that such a periodical was capable of great usefulness, and I have been a constant contributor to newspapers and periodicals. Meanwhile all things have become easy in the Brooklyn Tabernacle. On a Sabbath in October, 1888, I announced to my congregation that I would in a few weeks visit the Holy Land, and that

the officers of the church had consented to my going, and the wish of a lifetime was about to be fulfilled. The next Sabbath morning, about 3 o'clock or just after midnight, a number of household awakened me by saying that there was a strange light in the sky. A thunderstorm had left the air full of electricity, and from horizon to horizon everything seemed to blaze. But that did not disturb me, until an observation taken from the cupola of my house declared that the second Tabernacle was putting on red wings.

I scouted the idea and turned over on the pillow for another sleep, but a number of excited voices called me to the roof, and I went up and saw clearly defined in the night the fiery outburst of our second Tabernacle. When I saw that I said to my family: "I think that ends my work in Brooklyn. Surely the Lord will not call a minister to build three churches in one city. The building of one church generally ends the usefulness of a pastor. How can any one reside at the building of three churches?" But before twenty-four hours had passed we were compelled to cry out, with Peter of my text, "Let us build three tabernacles." We must have a home somewhere. The old site had ceased to be the center of our congregation, and the center of the congregation, as near as we could find it, is where we now stand.

Having selected the spot, should we build on it a barn or a tabernacle, beautiful and commodious? Our common sense, as well as our religion, commanded the latter. But what push, what industry, what skill, what self sacrifice, what faith in God were necessary, to impede and hinderance without number, and in the way, and had it not been for the perseverance of our church officials, and the practical help of many people, and the prayers of millions of good souls in all parts of the earth, and the blessing of Almighty God the work would not have been done. But it is done, and all good people who behold the structure feel in their hearts, if they do not utter it with their lips, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, Lord! In holiness will we dwell." Sabbath of last April this church was dedicated, Dr. Hamlin, of Washington, preaching an inspiring sermon. Dr. Wendell Prime, of New York, offering the dedicatory prayer and some fifteen clergymen during the day taking part in the services. Hosanna!

1869—1892.

How suggestive to many of us are the words spelled out in flowers above the pulpit, "1869" and "1892" for those dates stand what our history we have known through struggles, what triumphs, I mention it as a matter of gratitude to God that in these twenty-three years I have missed but one Sabbath through physical indisposition, and but three in the thirty-six years of my ministry. And now, having reached this twenty-third milestone, I start anew. I have in my memorandum books analyses of more sermons than I have ever yet preached, and I have preached, as near as I can tell, about 3,398. During these past years I have learned two or three things. Among other things I have learned that "all things work together for good." My positive mode of preaching has sometimes seemed to stir the hostilities of all earth and hell. Feeling called upon fifteen years ago to explore underground New York city life, that I might report the evils to be combated, I took with me two elders of my church and a New York police commissioner and a policeman, and I explored and reported the horrors that needed removal and the allurements that endangered our young men. There came upon me an outburst of assumed indignation that frightened almost everybody but myself. That exploration put into my church thirty or forty newspaper correspondents from north, south, east and west; which opened for me new avenues in which to preach the Gospel that otherwise would never have been opened.

During these past years I preached a series of sermons on Amusements, and a false report of what I did say—and one of the sermons said I was—being preached by me was not mine in a single word—roused a violence that threatened me with poison and dirk and pistol and other forms of extinguishment, until the chief of Brooklyn police, without any suggestion from me, took possession of the church with twenty-four policemen to see that no harm was done. That excitement opened many doors which I entered for preaching the Gospel.

After awhile came an ecclesiastical trial, in which I was arraigned by people who did not like the way I did things, and although I was acquitted of all the charges, the contest shook the American church. That battle made me more friends than anything that ever happened and gave me Christendom and more than Christendom for my weekly audience. On the demolition of such church we got a better and a larger audience, and we got a better and a better cause, and higher criticism, as it is called, means lower religion. Higher criticism is another form of infidelity, and its disciples will believe less and less, until many of them will land in Nowhere and become the worshippers of an eternal "What is it." The most of these higher critics seem to be seeking notoriety by pitching into the Bible. It is such a brave thing to strike your grandmother. The old Gospel put in modern phrase, and with- out the dogma of the resurrection, and adapted to all the wants and weaknesses of humanity, I have found the mightiest magnet, and we have never lacked an audience.

Next to the blessing of my own family I account the blessing that I have always had a great multitude of people to preach to. That old Gospel I have preached to you these twenty-three years of my Brooklyn pastorate, and that old Gospel I will preach till I die, and charge my son, who is on the way to the ministry, to preach it after me, for I remember Paul's thanksgiving, "If any man preach any other Gospel, let him be accursed." And now, as I stand here on my twenty-third anniversary, I see two audiences. The one is made up of all those who have worshipped with us in the past, but have been translated to higher realms.

What groups of children—too fair and too sweet and too lovely for earth, and the Lord took them, but they seem present today. Their group has gone out of the swollen throat, and the salt runs on the cheek, and they lie on them the health and radiance of heaven. Hail groups of glorified children! How glad I am to have you come back to us today! And here sit those aged ones, who departed this life leaving an awful vacancy in home and church. Where are your staffs, and where are your gray locks, and where your stooping shoulders, ye blessed old folks? "Oh! they say, 'we are all young again, and

the bath in the river from under the Throne has made us agile and bounding. In the place from which we come they use no staffs, but scepters!" Hail, fathers and mothers in Israel, how glad we are to have you come back to greet us. But the other audience I see in imagination is made up of all those to whom we have had opportunity as a church, directly or indirectly, of presenting the Gospel. Yes, all my parishes seem to come back today. The people of my first charge in Belleville, New Jersey. The people of my second charge in Syracuse, New York. The people of my third charge in Philadelphia. And the people of all these three Brooklyn Tabernacles. Look at them, and all those whom, through the printing press, we have invited to God and heaven, now seeming to sit in galleries above galleries, fifty galleries, a hundred galleries, a thousand galleries high.

I greet them all in your name and in Christ's name, all whom I have confronted from my first sermon in my first village charge, where my lips trembled and my knees knocked together from affright, speaking from the text, Jeremiah i, 6, "Ah, Lord God, behold I cannot speak, for I am a child!" until the sermon I preach today from Luke ix, 33, "Let us make three tabernacles," those of the past and the present, all gather in imagination, if not in reality, all of us grateful to God for past mercies, all of us sorry for misimproved opportunities, all hopeful for eternal raptures, and while the visible and the invisible audiences of the present and the past commingle, I give out to be sung by those who are here today, and to be sung by those who are not, the words, "I am a child, and I cannot speak, for I am a child!" until the sermon I preach today from Luke ix, 33, "Let us make three tabernacles," those of the past and the present, all gather in imagination, if not in reality, all of us 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