

PAUL IN THE BASKET.

REV. DR. TALMAGE PREACHES AT MARTHA'S VINEYARD.

Great Results Hang on Apparently Slender Circumstances—The Casual, the Accidental Are Parts of a Great Plan. An Island Between Two Eternities.

MARTHA'S VINEYARD, MASS., July 3.—Many hundreds of Brooklyn Tabernacle people and their friends have made a pilgrimage to this place. It is one point in an excursion of six days, taking in Newport, Nantucket and this island. The Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage, D.D., preached here this morning in the great camp meeting tabernacle. Thousands of people were present from all parts of New England. The music was conducted by a band.

Dr. Talmage's text was "Through a window in a basement was I let down by the sermons."—II Cor. xi. 33. He said:

Sermons on Paul in jail, Paul on Mars Hill, Paul in the shipwreck, Paul before the Sanhedrim, Paul before Felix are plentiful, but in my mind the most interesting is a sermon on Paul in a basket. Damascus is a city of white and glistening architecture, sometimes called "the eye of the East," sometimes called "a pearl surrounded by emeralds," at one time distinguished for swords of the best material called Damascus blades, and upholstery of richest fabric called damask. A horseman by the name of Saul, riding towards this city, had been thrown from the saddle. The horse had dropped under a flash from the sky, which at the same time was so bright it blinded the rider for many days, and I think, so permanently injured his eyesight that this defect of vision became the thorn in the flesh he afterward speaks of. He started for Damascus to butcher Christians, but after that had fall from his horse he was a changed man and preached Christ in Damascus till the city was shaken to its foundation.

The mayor gives authority for his arrest, and the popular cry is "Kill him! kill him!" The city is surrounded by a high wall and the gates are watched by the police lest the Cilician preacher escape. Many of the houses are built on the wall, and their balconies projected clear over and hovered above the gardens outside. It was customary to lower baskets out of these balconies and pull up fruits and flowers from the gardens. To this day visitors at the monastery at Mount Sinai are lifted and let down in baskets. Detectives prowled around from house to house looking for Paul, but his friends hid him, now in one place now in another. He is no coward, as fifty incidents in his life demonstrate. But he feels his work is not done yet, and so he evades assassination. "Is that preacher here?" the foaming mob shout at one house door. "Is that fanatic here?" the police shout at another house door. Sometimes on the street incognito he passes through a crowd of clenched fists and sometimes he secretes himself on the housetops. At last the infuriated populace get on sure track of him. They have positive evidence that he is in the house of one of the Christians, the balcony of whose home reaches over the wall. "Here he is! Here he is!" The vociferation and blasphemy and howling of the pursuers are at the front door. They break in. "Fetch out that gospeller, and let us hang his head on the city gate. Where is he?" The emergency was terrible. Presumably there was a good stout basket in the house. Paul's friends fasten a rope to the basket. Paul steps into it. The basket is lifted to the edge of the balcony on the wall, and then while Paul holds on to the rope with both hands his friends lower away, carefully and cautiously, slowly at first, and then more and further down, until the basket strikes the earth and the apostle steps out and afoot, and alone starts on that famous missionary tour, the story of which has astonished earth and heaven. Appropriate entry in Paul's diary of travels: "Through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall."

Observe, first, on what a slender tenure great results hang. The ropemaker who twisted that cord fastened to that lower lip basket never knew how much would depend upon the strength of it. How it had been broken and the apostle's life had been dashed out? What would have become of the Christian church? All that magnificent missionary work in Pamphilia, Cappadocia, Galatia, Macedonia would never have been accomplished. All his writings that make up so indispensable and enchanting a part of the New Testament would never have been written. The story of resurrection would never have been so gloriously told as he told it. That example of heroic and triumphant endurance at Philippi, in the Mediterranean Euroclydon, under flagellation and at his beheading would not have kindled the courage of ten thousand martyrs. But that rope holding that basket, how much depended on it! So, again and again, great results have hung on what seemed slender circumstances.

Did ever ship of many thousand tons crossing the sea have such important passenger as had gone a boat of leaves from raffra to stern, only three or four feet, the vessel made waterproof by a coat of bitumen, and floating on the Nile with the infant lawgiver of the Jews on board? What if some crocodile should crunch it? What if some eagle should swoop in for a drink should sink it? Vessels of war sometimes carry forty guns looking through the port holes, ready to open battle. But that tiny craft on the Nile seems to be armed with all the guns of thunder that bombard Sinai at the giving. On how fragile craft sailed how much historical importance!

The parsonage at Epworth, England, is on fire in the night, and the father rushed through the hallway for the rescue of his children. Seven children are out and safe on the ground, but one remains in the consuming building. That one wakes, and finding his bed on fire and the building crumbling, comes to the window, and two peasants make a ladder of their bodies, one peasant standing on the shoulder of the other, and down the human ladder the boy descends—John Wesley. If you would know how much depended on that ladder of peasants, ask the millions of Methodists on both sides of the sea. Ask their mission stations all around the world. Ask their hundreds of thousands already ascended to join their founder who would have perished but for the living stairs of peasants' shoulders.

An English ship stopped at Pitcairn Island, and right in the midst of surrounding cannibalism and squalor the passengers discovered a Christian colony of churches and schools and beautiful homes and highest style of religion and civilization. For fifty years no missionary and no Christian influence had landed there. Why this oasis of light amid a desert of heathendom? Sixty years before a ship had met disaster and one of the sailors, unable to save anything else, went to his trunk and took out a Bible which his mother had placed there, and swam ashore, the Bible held in his teeth. The

book was read on all sides until the rough and vicious population were evangelized, and a church was started and an enlightened commonwealth established, and the world's history has no more brilliant page than that which tells of the transformation of a nation by one book. It did not seem of much importance whether the sailor continued to hold the book in his teeth or let it fall in the breakers, but upon what small circumstance depended what mighty result!

Practical inference: There are no insignificances in our lives. The minutest thing is part of a magnitude. Infinity is made up of infinitesimals. Great things are aggregation of small things. Bethlehem manger pulling on a star in the eastern sky. One book in a drenched sailor's mouth the evangelization of a nation. One boat of papyrus on the Nile freighted with events for all ages. The fate of Christendom in a basket let down from a window on the wall. What you do, do well. If you make a rope make it strong and true, for you know not how much may depend on your workmanship. If you fashion a boat let it be waterproof, for you know not who may sail in it. If you put a Bible in the trunk of your boy as he goes from home, let it be heard in your prayers, for it may have a mission as far reaching as the book which the sailor carried in his teeth to the Pitcairn beach. The plainest man's life is an island between two eternities—eternity past rippling against his shoulders, eternity to come touching his brow. The casual, the accidental, that which merely happened so, are parts of a great plan, and the rope that lets the fugitive apostle from the Damascus wall is the cable that holds to its mooring the ship of the church in the northeastern storm of the centuries.

Again, notice unrecognized and unrecorded services. Who spun that rope? Who tied it to the basket? Who steadied the illustrious preacher as he stepped into it? Who reached not a muscle of the arm, or dismissed an anxious look from his face until the basket touched the ground and discharged its magnificent cargo? Not one of their names has come to us, but there was no work done that day in Damascus or in all the earth compared with the importance of their work. What if the hand in the agitation tied a knot that could slip? What if the sound of the mob at the door had led them to say: "Paul must take care of himself, and we will take care of ourselves?" No, no! They held the rope, and in doing so did more for the Christian church than any tongue and no pen will ever accomplish. But God knows and has made eternal record of their undertaking. And they know. How exultant they must have felt when they read their letters to the Romans, to the Corinthians, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, Titus, to Philemon, to the Hebrews, and when they heard how he walked out of prison with the earthquake unlocking the door for him, and took command of the Alexandrian corn ship when the sailors were nearly scared to death, and preached the sermon that nearly shook Felix off his judgment seat. I hear the men and women who helped him down through the window and over the wall talking in private over the matter, and saying: "How glad I am that we effected that rescue! In coming times others may get the glory of Paul's work, but no one shall rob us of the satisfaction of knowing that we held the rope."

Once for thirty-six hours we expected every moment to go to the bottom of the ocean. The waves struck through the skylights and rushed down into the hold of the ship and hissed against the boilers. It was a fearful time; but, by the blessing of God and the faithfulness of the men in charge, we came out of the cyclone and we arrived at home. Each one before leaving the ship thanked Capt. Andrews. I do not think there was a man or woman that went off that ship without thanking Capt. Andrews, and when years after I heard of his death I was impelled to write a letter of condolence to his family in Liverpool. Everybody recognized the goodness, the courage, the kindness of Capt. Andrews; but it occurs to me now that we never thanked the engineer. He stood away down in the darkness amid the hissing furnaces doing his whole duty. Nobody thanked the engineer, but God recognized his heroism and his continuance and his fidelity, and there will be just as high reward for the engineer who worked out of sight as for the captain who stood on the bridge of the ship in the midst of the howling tempest.

There are said to be about 69,000 ministers of religion in this country. About 50,000 I warrant came from early homes which had to struggle for the necessities of life. The sons of rich bankers and merchants generally become bankers and merchants. The most of those who become ministers are the sons of those who had terrific struggle to get their everyday bread. The collegiate and theological education of that son took every luxury from the parental table for eight years. The other children were more scantily apparelled. The son at college every little while got a bundle from home. In it were the socks that mother had knit, sitting up late at night, her sight not as good as once it was. And there also were some delicacies from the sister's hand for the voracious appetite of a hungry student. The father swung the heavy cradle through the wheat, the sweat rolling from his chin bedewing every step of the way, and then sitting down under the cherry tree at noon thinking to himself: "I am fearfully tired, but it will pay if I can once see that boy through college, and if I can know that he will be preaching the Gospel after I am dead." The younger children want to know why they can't have this and that as others do, and the mother says: "Be patient, my children, until your brother graduates, and then you shall have many luxuries; but we must see that boy through."

The years go by, and the son has been ordained and is preaching the glorious Gospel, and a great revival comes, and souls by scores and hundreds accept the Gospel from the lips of that young preacher, and father and mother, quite old now, are visiting the son at the village parsonage, and at the close of a Sabbath of mighty blessing father and mother retire to their room, the son lighting the way and asking them if he can do anything to make them more comfortable, saying if they want anything in the night just to knock on the wall. And then, all alone, father and mother talk over the gracious influences of the day and say: "Well, it was worth all we went through to educate that boy. It was a hard pull, but we held on till the work was done. The world may not know it, but, mother, we held the rope, didn't we?" And the voice, tremulous with joyful emotion, responds: "Yes, father, we held the rope. I feel my work is done. Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." "Fahaw!" says the father, "I never felt so much like living in my life as now. I want to see that fellow is going on to do, he has begun so well."

Something occurs to me quite personal.

I was the youngest of a large family of children. My parents were neither rich nor poor; four of the sons wanted collegiate education, and four obtained it, but not without great home struggle. We never heard the old people say once that they were denying themselves to effect this, but I remember now that my parents always looked tired. I don't think they ever got rested until they lay down in the Seaview cemetery. Mother would sit down in the evening and say: "Well, I don't know what makes me feel so tired?" Father would fall immediately to sleep, seated by the evening stand, overcome with the day's fatigues. One of the four brothers, after preaching the gospel for about fifty years, ended upon his heavenly rest. Another of the sons is on the other side of the earth, a missionary of the cross. Two of us are in this land in the holy ministry, and I think all of us are willing to acknowledge our obligation to the old folks at home. About twenty-one years ago the one, and about twenty-three years ago the other, put down the burdens of this life, but they still hold the rope.

O, men and women here assembled, you brag sometimes how you have fought your way in the world, but I think there have been helpful influences that you have not fully recognized. Fully recognized it has not been some influence in your early or present home that the world cannot see? Does there not reach to you from among the New England hills, or from western prairie, or from southern plantation, or from English or Scottish or Irish home a cord of influence that has kept you right when you would have gone wrong, and which, after you had made a crooked track, recalled you? The rope may be as long as thirty years, or five hundred miles long, or three thousand miles long, but hands that went out of mortal sight long ago still hold the rope. You want a very swift horse, and you get one with him with sharpest spurs, and to let the reins lie loose upon the neck, and to give a shout to the racer, if you are going to ride out of reach of your mother's prayers. Why, a ship crossing the Atlantic in six days can't sail away from that. A sailor finds the lookout as he scans his place, and finds that on the mast as he climbs the ratlines to disentangle a rope in the tempest, and finds them swinging on the hammock when he turns in. Why not be frank and acknowledge it—the most of us would long ago have been dashed to pieces had not loving and mighty hands steadily, lovingly and mightily held the rope.

But there must come a time when we shall find out who these Damascenes were who lowered Paul in the basket, and greet them and all those who have rendered to God and the world unrecognized and unrecorded services. This is going to be one of the glad excitements of heaven—the hunting up and picking out of those who did great good on earth and got no credit for it. Here the church has been going on for nineteen centuries, and yet the world has not recognized the services of the people in that Damascus balcony. Charley said to me once, in the Christian: "Give my love to St. Paul when you meet him." When you and I meet him, as we will, I shall ask him to introduce me to those people who got him out of the Damascus peril.

We go into long sermons to prove that we are able to recognize the good of heaven, when there is other reason we fail to present, and that is better than all—God will introduce us. We shall have them all pointed out. You would not be guilty of the impoliteness of having friends in your parlor not introduced, and celestial politeness. Surely they must have been made acquainted with all the heavenly household. What rehearsal of old times and recital of stirring reminiscences! If others fail to give introduction, God will take us through, and before our first twenty-four hours in heaven—if it were calculated by earthly timepieces—have passed shall meet and talk with mighty heavenly celebrities than in our entire mortal state we met with earthly celebrities. Many who made great noise of usefulness will sit on the last seat by the front door of the heavenly temple, while right up within arm's reach of the heavenly throne will be many who, though they could not preach themselves or do great exploits for God, nevertheless held the rope.

Come, let us go right up and accost those on this circle of heavenly thrones. Surely they must have killed in battle a million men. Surely they must have been made acquainted with all the cathedral sounding a dirge and all the towers of all the cities tolling the national grief. Who art thou, mighty one of heaven? "I lived by choice the unmarried daughter in an humble home that I might take care of my parents in their old age, and I married without complaint all their querulousness and administered to all their wants for twenty years."

Let us pass on round the circle of thrones. Who art thou, mighty one of heaven? "I was for thirty years a Christian in all things, and I was occasionally writing a note of sympathy for those worse off than I, and was general confidant of all those who had trouble, and once in a while I was strong enough to make a garment for that poor family in the back lane. Pass on to another throne. Surely they must have been one of heretofore. 'I was the mother who raised a whole family of children for God, and they are out in the world Christian merchants, Christian mechanics, Christian wives, and I have had full reward of all my toil.' Let us pass on in the circle of thrones. Who art thou, mighty one of heaven? 'I was always on my heart, and they all entered the kingdom of God, and I am waiting for their arrival.' But who art thou, the mighty one of heaven on this other throne? 'In time of bitter persecution I owned a house in Damascus, a house on the way from the street to street and I hid him from the assassins, and when I found them breaking in my house and I could no longer keep him safely, I advised him to flee for his life, and a basket was let down over the wall with the father and mother and me, and we were helped hold the rope.' And I said: 'Is that all?' And he answered: 'That is all.' And while I was lost in amazement I heard a strong voice that sounded as though it might come have been hoarse from many exposures and triumphant as though it might have belonged to one of the martyrs, and it said: 'Not many mighty, not many noble are called, but God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not to bring to naught things which are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.' And I looked to see from whence the voice came, and lo! it was the very one who had said: 'Through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall.'

Henceforth think of nothing as insignificant. A little thing may decide your all. A Cunnard put out from England for New York. It was well equipped, but in putting up a stove in the pilot box a nail

was driven too near the compass. You know how that nail would affect the compass. The ship's officer, deceived by what distracted compass, put the ship 200 miles off her right course, and suddenly the man on the look out cried: "Land ho!" and the ship was halted within a few yards of her demolition on Nantucket shoals. A sixty-year-old man came near wrecking a Cunnard. Small ropes hold mighty destinies.

The old pacing Pilot blood is what made Maud S., Jay Eye See, and others of lesser note trot. The pacer Blue Ball sired more trotters in the 2:30 list than any other horse in the world, and their net value far exceeds all horses in Cass county. Speed and bottom in horses, if not wanted for sporting purposes, are still of immense benefit in saving time and labor in every occupation in which the horse is employed. It is an old saying that "he who causes two blades of grass to grow where only one grew before is a public benefactor;" why less a benefactor he who produces a horse, which, with same care and expense, will with ease travel double the distance, or do twice the work of an ordinary horse. It costs no more to feed and care to raise a good horse than a poor one. The good are always in demand, and if sold bring double or treble the price of the common horse.

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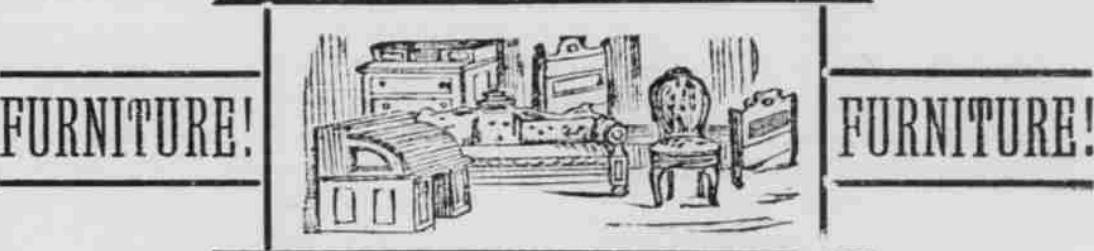
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