CURSING AND SWEARING.

REV. DR. TALMAGE DISCOURSES ON THE HABIT OF PROFANITY.

There Is No Excuse for It When We Have Such a Magnificent Language. It Comes from Infirmity of Temper and the Profuse Use of Bywords.

BROOKLYN, April 8. — One of the hymns sung at the Tabernacle this morning begins with the words:

So let our lips and lives express
The Holy Gospel we profess.

After reading appropriate passages of Scripture, the Rev. T. De Witt Talmage, D.D., preached on the habit of cursing and swearing. His text was from the Book of Job ii, 7, 8 and 9: "So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die."

A story oriental and marvelous. Job was the richest man in all the East. He had camels and oxen and asses and sheep, and, what would have made him rich without anything else, seven sons and three daughters. It was the habit of these children to gather together for family reunion. One day, Job is thinking of his children as gathered together at a banquet at the elder brother's house.

While the old man is seated at his tent door, he sees some one running, evidently from his manner bringing bad news. What is the matter now? "Oh," says the messenger, "a foraging party of Sabeans has fallen upon the oxen and the asses, and destroyed them, and butchered all the servants except myself." Stand aside. Another messenger running. What is the matter now? "Oh," says the man, "the lightning has struck the sheep and the shepherds, and all the shepherds are destroyed except myself." Stand aside. Another messenger running. What is the matter now? "Oh," he says, "the Chaldeans have captured the camels, and slain all the camel drivers except myself." Stand aside. Another messenger running. What is the matter now? "Oh," he says, "a hurricane struck the four corners of the tent where your children were assembled at the banquet, and they are all dead."

But the chapter of calamity has not ended. Job was smitten with elephantiasis, or black leprosy. Tumors from head to foot—forehead ridged with tubercles—eyelashes fall out—nostrils excoriated—voice destroyed—intolerable exhalations from the entire body, until with none to dress his sores, he sits down in the ashes with nothing but pieces of broken pottery to use in the surgery of his wounds. At this moment, when he needed all encouragement, and all consolation, his wife comes in, in a fret and a rage, and says: "This is intolerable. Our property gone, our children slain, and now you covered up with this loathsome and disgusting disease. Why don't you swear? Curse God, and die!"

Ah, Job knew right well that swearing would not cure one of the tumors of his agonized body, would not bring back one of his destroyed camels, would not restore one of his dead children. He knew that profanity would only make the pain more unbearable and the poverty more distressing and the bereavement more excruciating. But judging from the profanity abroad in our day, you might come to the conclusion that there was some great advantage to be reaped from profanity.

Blasphemy is all abroad. You hear it in every direction. The drayman swearing at his cart, the sewing girl imprecating the tangled skein, the accountant cursing the long line of troublesome figures. Swearing at the store, swearing in the loft, swearing in the cellar, swearing on the street, swearing in the factory. Children swear. Men swear. Women swear. Swearing from the rough calling on the Almighty in the low restaurant clear up to the reckless "Oh, Lord!" of a glittering drawing room; and the one is as much blasphemy as the other.

There are times when we must cry out to the Lord by reason of our physical agony or our mental distress, and that is only throwing out our weak hand toward the strong arm of a father. It was no profanity when James A. Garfield, shot in the Washington depot, cried out: "My God, what does this mean?" There is no profanity in calling out upon God in the day of trouble, in the day of darkness, in the day of physical anguish, in the day of bereavement; but I am speaking now of the triviality and of the recklessness with which the name of God is sometimes managed. The whole land is cursed with it.

A gentleman coming from the far west sat in the car day after day behind two persons who were indulging in profanity, and he made up his mind that he would make a record of their profanities, and at the end of two days several sheets of paper were covered with these imprecations, and at the close of the journey he handed the manuscript to one of the persons in front of him. "Is it possible," said the man, "that we have uttered so many profanities the last few days?" "It is," replied the gentleman. "Then," said the man who had taken the manuscript, "I will never swear again."

But it is a comparatively unimportant thing if a man makes record of our improprieties of speech. The more memorable consideration is that every improper word, every oath uttered, has a record in the book of God's remembrance, and that the day will come when all our crimes of speech, if unrepented of, will be our condemnation. I shall not today deal in abstractions. I hate abstractions. I am going to have a plain talk with you, my brother, about a habit that you admit to be wrong.

The habit grows in the community in the fact that young people think it manly to swear. Little children, hardly able to walk straight on the street, yet have enough distinctness of utterance to let you know that they are damning their own souls, or damning the souls of others. It is an awful thing the first time the little feet are lifted to have them set down on the burning pavement of hell!

Between 16 and 20 years of age there is apt to come a time when a young man is as much ashamed of not being able to swear gracefully as he is of the dizziness of his first cigar. He has his hat, his coat of the right pattern, he can only swear without [illegible], and as well as his com[illegible], he believes he is in the fashion. There are young men who walk in an atmosphere of imprecation—oaths on their lips, under their tongues, nesting in their shock of hair. They abstain from it in the elegant drawing room, but the street and the club house ring with their profanities. They have no regard for God, although they have great respect for the ladies! My young brother, there is no manliness in that. The most ungentlemanly thing a man can do is to swear.

Fathers foster this great crime. There are parents who are very cautious not to swear in the presence of their children; in a moment of sudden anger they look around to see if the children are present when they indulge in this habit. Do you not know, oh father, that your child is aware of the fact that you swear? He overheard you in the next room, or some one has informed him of your habit. He is practicing now. In ten years he will swear as well as you do. Do not, oh father, be under the delusion that you may swear and your son not know it. It is an awful thing to start the habit in a family—the father to be profane, and then to have the echo of his example come back from other generations; so that generations after generations curse the Lord.

The crime is also fostered by master mechanics, boss carpenters, those who are at the head of men in hat factories, and in dock yards, and at the head of great business establishments. When you go down to look at the work of the scaffolding, and you find it is not done right, what do you say? It is not praying, is it? The employer swears—his employe is tempted to swear. The man says: "I don't know why my employer, worth $50,000 or $100,000, should have any luxury I should be denied simply because I am poor. Because I am poor and dependent on a day's wages, haven't I as much right to swear as he has with his large income?" Employers swear, and that makes so many employes swear.

The habit also comes from infirmity of temper. There are a good many people who, when they are at peace, have righteousness of speech, but when angered they blaze with imprecation. Perhaps all the rest of the year they talk in right language, but now they pour out the fury of a whole year in one red hot paragraph of five minutes. I knew of a man who excused himself for the habit, saying: "I only swear once in a great while. I must do that just to clear myself out."

The habit comes also from the profuse use of bywords. The transition from a byword which may be perfectly harmless to imprecation and profanity, is not a very large transition. It is "my stars!" and "mercy on me!" and "good gracious!" and "by George!" and "by Jove!" and you go on with that a little while, and then you swear. These words, perfectly harmless in themselves, are next door to imprecation and blasphemy. A profuse use of bywords always ends in profanity. The habit is creeping up into the highest styles of society. Women have no patience with flat and unvarnished profanity. They will order a man out of the parlor indulging in blasphemy, and yet you will sometimes find them with fairy fan to the lip, and under chandeliers which bring no blush to their cheek, taking on their lips the holiest of names in utter triviality.

Why, my friends, the English language is comprehensive and capable of expressing all shapes of feeling and every degree of energy. Are you happy, Noah Webster will give you ten thousand words with which to express your exhilaration. Are you righteously indignant, there are whole armies in the vocabulary, righteous vocabulary—whole armies of denunciation and scorn, and sarcasm and irony, and caricature and wrath. You express yourself against some meanness, or hypocrisy, in all the oaths that ever smoked up from the pit, and I will come right on after you and give a thousandfold more emphasis of denunciation to the same meanness and the same hypocrisy in words across which no slime has ever trailed and into which the fires of hell have never shot their forked tongues—the pure, the innocent, God honored Anglo-Saxon in which Milton sang, and John Bunyan dreamed, and Shakspeare dramatized.

There is no excuse for profanity when we have such a magnificent language—such a flow of good words, potent words, mighty words, words just to suit every crisis and every case. Whatever be the cause of it, profanity is on the increase, and if you do not know it, it is because your ears have been hardened by the din of imprecations so that you are not stirred and moved as you ought to be by profanities in these cities which are enough to bring a hurricane of fire like that which consumed Sodom.

Do you know that this trivial use of God's name results in perjury? Do you know that people who take the name of God on their lips in recklessness and thoughtlessness are fostering the crime of perjury? Make the name of God a foot ball in the community, and it has no power when in court room and in legislative assembly it is employed in solemn adjuration! See the way sometimes they administer the oath: "S'help you God—kiss the book!" Smuggling, which is always a violation of the oath, becomes in some circles a grand joke. You say to a man: "How is it possible for you to sell these goods so very cheap? I can't understand it." "Ah!" he replies, with a twinkle of the eye, "the custom house tariff of these goods isn't as much as it might be." An oath does not mean as much as it would were the name of God used in reverence and in solemnity. Why is it that so often jurors render unaccountable verdicts, and judges give unaccountable charges, and useless railroad schemes pass in our state capitols, and there are most unjust changes made in the tariffs—tariff lifted from one thing and put upon another?

What is an oath? Anything solemn? Anything that calls upon the Almighty? Anything that marks an event in a man's history? Oh, no! It is kissing the book! There is no habit, I tell you plainly—and I talk to hundreds and thousands of men to-day who will thank me for my utterance—I tell you, my brother—I talk to you not professionally but just as one brother talks to another on some very important theme—I tell you there is no habit that so depletes a man's nature as the habit of profanity. You might as well [illegible] on the sides of [illegible] raise anything [illegible] which there pours out [illegible] fanity. You may swear [illegible] you cannot swear your[illegible] the Mohammedan finds [illegible] paper he cannot read, [illegible] the name of God may [illegible] this [illegible] their fortune to get rid of it. An aged man was in the delirium of a fever. He had for many years lived a most upright life and was honored in all the community; but when he came into the delirium of this fever he was full of imprecation and profanity, and they could not understand it. After he came to his right reason he explained it. He said: "When I was a young man I was very profane. I conquered the habit, but I had to struggle all through life. You haven't for forty years heard me say an improper word, but it has been an awful struggle. The tiger is chained, but he is alive yet."

If you would get rid of this habit, I want you, my friends, to dwell upon the uselessness of it. Did a volley of oaths ever start a heavy load? Did they ever extirpate meanness from a customer? Did they ever collect a bad debt? Did they ever cure a toothache? Did they ever stop the twinge of the rheumatism? Did they ever help you forward one step in the right direction? Come now, tell me, ye who have had the most experience in this habit, how much have you made out of it? Five thousand dollars in all your life? No. One thousand? No. One hundred? No. One dollar? No. One cent? No. If the habit be so utterly useless, away with it.

But you say: "I have struggled to overcome the habit a long while, and I have not been successful." You struggled in your own strength, my brother. If ever a man wants God, it is in such a crisis of his history. God alone by his grace can emancipate you from that trouble. Call upon him day and night that you may be delivered from this crime. Remember also in the cure of this habit that it arouses God's indignation. The Bible reiterates, from chapter to chapter, and verse after verse, the fact that it is accursed for this life and that it makes a man miserable for eternity. There is not a sin in all the catalogue that is so often peremptorily and suddenly punished in this world as the sin of profanity. There is not a city or a village but can give an illustration of a man struck down at the moment of imprecation. A couple of years ago, briefly referring to this in a sermon, I gave some instances in which God had struck swearers dead at the moment of their profanity. That sermon brought to me from many parts of this land and other lands statements of similar cases of instantaneous visitation from God upon blasphemers. My opinion is that such cases occur somewhere every day, but for various reasons they are not reported.

In Scotland a club assembled every week for purposes of wickedness, and there was a competition as to which could use the most horrid oath, and the man who succeeded was to be president of the club. The competition went on. A man uttered an oath which confounded all his comrades, and he was made president of the club. His tongue began to swell, and it protruded from the mouth, and he could not draw it in, and he died, and the physicians said: "This is the strangest thing we ever saw; we never saw any account in the books like unto it; we can't understand it." I understand it. He cursed God and died.

At Catskill, N. Y., a group of men stood in a blacksmith's shop during a violent thunder storm. There came a crash of thunder and some of the men trembled. One man said: "Why, I don't see what you are afraid of. I am not afraid to go out in front of the shop and defy the Almighty. I am not afraid of lightning." And he laid a wager on the subject, and he went out, and he shook his fist at the heavens, crying: "Strike, if you dare!" and instantly, he fell under a bolt. What destroyed him? Any mystery about it? Oh, no. He cursed God and died.

Oh, my brother, God will not allow this sin to go unpunished. There are styles of writing with manifold sheets, so that a man writing on one leaf writes clear through ten, fifteen or twenty sheets, and so every profanity we utter goes right down through the leaves of the book of God's remembrance. It is no exceptional sin. Do you suppose you could count the profanities of last week—the profanities of office, store, shop, factory? They cursed God, they cursed his word, they cursed his only begotten son.

One morning, on Fulton street, as I was passing along, I heard a man swear by the name of Jesus. My hair lifted. My blood ran cold. My breath caught. My foot halted. Do you not suppose that God is aggravated? Do you not suppose that God knows about it? Dionysius used to have a cave in which his culprits were incarcerated, and he listened at the top of that cave, and he could hear every groan, he could hear every sigh, and he could hear every whisper of those who were imprisoned. He was a tyrant. God is not a tyrant; but he bends over this world and he hears everything—every voice of praise—every voice of imprecation. He hears it all. The oaths seem to die on the air, but they have eternal echo. They come back from the ages to come.

Listen! Listen! "All blasphemers shall have their place in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." And if, according to the theory of some, a man commits in the next world the sins which he committed in this world—if unpardoned, unregenerated—think of a man's going on cursing in the name of God to all eternity!

The habit grows. You start with a small oath, you will come to the large oath. I saw a man die with an oath between his teeth. Voltaire only gradually came to his tremendous imprecation; but the habit grew on him until in the last moment, supposing Christ stood at the bed, he exclaimed: "Crush that wretch! Crush that wretch!" Oh, my brother, you begin to swear and there is nothing impossible for you in the wrong direction. [illegible] has sh[illegible] [illegible]ched you last night, [illegible] to-night. He wants [illegible] to help you, wants [illegible] to comfort you. [illegible] God and your mot[illegible] [illegible]ed them from the [illegible] to shelter you. Will [illegible] by an imprecation? [illegible] ever thrust him back by an oa[illegible]

Who is this Jesus whose na[illegible] in the imprecation? Has he pa[illegible] all your life long? What vile th[illegible] he done to you that you should [illegible] honor his name? Why, he was the [illegible] whose blood simmered in the fires of sacrifice for you. He is the brother that took off his crown that you might put it on. He has pursued you all your life long with mercy. He wants you to love him, wants you to serve him. He comes with streaming eyes and broken heart and blistered feet to save you. On the craft of our doomed humanity he pushed out into the sea to take you off the wreck.

Where is the hand that will ever be lifted in imprecation again? Let that hand, now blood tipped, be lifted that I may see it. Not one. Where is the voice that will ever be uttered in dishonoring the name of that Christ? Let it speak now. Not one. Not one. Oh, I am glad to know that all these vices of the community, and these crimes of our city will be gone. Society is going to be bettered. The world by the power of Christ's gospel is going to be saved, and this crime, this iniquity, and all the other iniquities will vanish before the rising of the sun of righteousness upon the nation.

There was one day in New England memorable for storm and darkness. I hardly ever saw such an evening. The clouds which had been gathering all day unlimbered their batteries. The Housatonic, which flows quietly, save as the paddles of pleasure parties rattle the oar locks, was lashed into foam, and the waves hardly knew where to lay themselves.

Oh, what a time it was! The hills jarred under the rumbling of God's chariots. Blinding sheets of rain drove the cattle to the bars, or beat against the window pane as though to dash it in. The grain fields threw their crowns of gold at the feet of the storm king. When night came in it was a double night. Its mantle was torn with the lightnings, and into its locks were twisted the leaves of uprooted oaks and the shreds of canvas torn from the masts of the beached shipping. It was such a night as makes you thank God for shelter, and open the door to let in the spaniel howling outside with terror.

We went to sleep under the full blast of heaven's great orchestra, the forests with uplifted voices, in chorus that filled the mountains, praising the Lord. We woke not until the fingers of the sunny morn touched our eyelids. We looked out the window, and the Housatonic slept as quiet as an infant's dream. Pillars of clouds set against the sky looked like the castles of the blessed, built for heavenly hierarchs on the beach of the azure sea. All the trees sparkled as though there had been some great grief in heaven, and each leaf had been God appointed to catch an angel's tear. It seemed as if our Father had looked upon the earth, his wayward child, and stooped to her tear wet cheek and kissed it. So will the darkness of sin and crime leave our world before the dawn of the morning. The light shall gild the city spire and strike the forests of Maine and the masts of Mobile and all between. And one end resting on the Atlantic coast and the other resting on the Pacific beach, God will spring a great rainbow arch of peace, in token of everlasting covenant that the world shall never more see a deluge of crime.

"But," says some one, "preaching against the evils of society will accomplish nothing. Do you not see that the evils go right on?" I answer, we are not at all discouraged.

It seemed insignificant for Moses to stretch his hand over the Red sea. What power could that have over the waters? But the east wind blew all night; the waters gathered into two glittering palisades on either side. The billows reared as God's hand pulled back upon their crystal bits. Wheel into line, oh Israel! March! March! Pearls crash under the feet. The shout of hosts mounting the beach answers the shout of hosts mid sea; until, as the last line of the Israelites have gained the beach, the shields clang, and the cymbals clap; and as the waters whelm the pursuing foe, the swift fingered winds on the white keys of the foam play the grand march of Israel delivered, and the awful dirge of Egyptian overthrow. So we go forth; and stretch out the hand of prayer and Christian effort over these dark, boiling waters of crime and sin. "Aha! Aha!" says the deriding world. But wait. The winds of divine help will begin to blow; the way will clear for the great army of Christian philanthropists; the glittering treasures of the world's beneficence will line the path of our feet; and to the other shore we will be greeted with the clash of all heaven's cymbals; while those who resist and deride and pursue us will fail under the sea, and there will be nothing left of them but here and there, cast high and dry upon the beach, the splintered wheel of a chariot, and, thrust out from the surf, the breathless nostril of a riderless charger.

Swellest Mourning Paper.

It may interest fastidious letter writers to know that the very swellest mourning paper used by the elite of France measures eight by five inches, and has a black border half an inch wide. The envelopes measure four and a quarter by five and three-quarter inches.—New York Tribune.

Teeth by Subscription.

A woman at Albany, Ga., wanted a new set of false teeth and hadn't money to pay for it. She went around among the business men of the place with a subscription paper and succeeded in raising the required sum.

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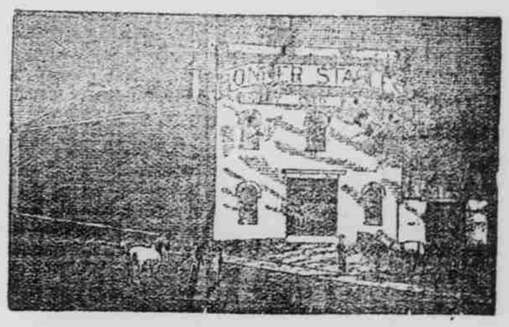

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