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TALMAGE'S SERMON.

THE BROOKLYN PREACHER ON
THE "IFS" OF THE BIBLE.

Two letters the Pivot on Which Every-
thing Turns—Only Four Steps Between
Faith and Unbelief—The Gospel of Jesus
Christ the Religion for Adversity.

The Tabernacle Pulpit.

In the Brooklyn Tabernacle Sunday
morning Rev. Dr. Talmage delivered
one of his most unique and useful ser-
mons from a text never before preached
from. Subject, The "Ifs" of the Bible.
The text chosen was Exodus xxxii. 32.
"If thou wilt forgive their sin—and if
not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy
book."

There is in our English language a
small conjunction which I propose, by
God's help, to haul out of its present
insignificance and set upon the throne
where it belongs, and that is the con-
junction "if." Though made of only
two letters, it is the pivot on which
everything turns. All time and all
eternity are at its disposal. We share
it in our utterances, we ignore it in our
appreciation, and none of us recog-
nizes it as the most tremendous word
in all the vocabulary outside of those
words which describe deity.

"If" Why, that word we take as a
tramp among words, now appearing
here, now appearing there, but having
no value of its own, when it really has
a millionfold of words, and in its
train walk all planetary, stellar, lunar,
solar destinies. If the boat of leaves
made watertight, in which the infant
Moses sailed out of Egypt? If the
Red Sea had not parted for the escape
of one host and then come to-
gether, or the submergence of another,
would the book of Exodus ever have
been written? If the ship on which
Columbus sailed for America had gone
down in an Atlantic cyclone, how much
longer would it have taken for the dis-
covery of this continent?

If Grouchy had come up with re-en-
forcements in time to give the French
the victory of Waterloo, what would
have been the fate of Europe? If the
Spanish armada had not been wrecked
off the coast, how different would have
been chapters in English history? If
the battle of Hastings, or the battle of
Polowa, or the battle of Valmy, or the
battle of Matarus, or the battle of
Arbela, or the battle of Chalons, each
one of which turned the world's des-
tiny, had been decided the other way.

The Infancy of "If."
If Shakespeare had never been born
for the drama, or Handel had never
been born for music, or Titian had
never been born for painting, or Thor-
waldsen had never been born for scul-
pture, or Edmund Burke had never been
born for eloquence, or Socrates had
never been born for philosophy, or
Blackstone had never been born for
the law, or Copernicus had never been
born for astronomy, or Luther had
never been born for the reformation!

Oh, that conjunction "if"! How
much has depended on it! The height
of it, the depth of it, the length of it,
the breadth of it, the immensity of it,
the infinity of it—who can measure?
It would swamp anything but omni-
potence. But I must confine myself to-
day to the "ifs" of the Bible, and in do-
ing so I shall speak of the "if" of over-
powering earnestness, the "if" of in-
credulity, the "if" of threat, the "if"
of argumentation, the "if" of eternal
significance, or so many of these "ifs"
as I can compass in the time that may
be reasonably allotted to pulpit dis-
course.

First, the "if" of overpowering ear-
nestness. My text gives it. The
Israelites had been worshipping an
idol, notwithstanding all that God had
done for them, and now Moses offers
the most vehement prayer of all his-
tory, and it turns upon an "if." "If
thou wilt forgive their sins—and if not,
blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book."
Oh, what an overwhelming "if"! It
was as much as to say: "If thou wilt
not pardon them, do not pardon me. If
thou wilt not bring them to the prom-
ised land, let me never see the prom-
ised land. If they must perish, let me
perish with them. In that book where
thou recordst their doom record my
doom. If they are shut out of heaven,
let me be shut out of heaven. If they
go down into darkness, let me go down
into darkness. What vehemence and
holy recklessness of prayer!"

A Mother's Tears.
Yet there are those here who, I have
no doubt, have, in their all absorbing
desire to have others saved, risked the
same prayer for their sakes. You must
not make it unless you are willing to
balance your eternal salvation on such
an "if." Yet there have been cases
where a mother has been so anxious
for the recovery of a wayward son that
her prayer has swung and trembled
and poised on an "if" like that of the
text. "If not, blot me, I pray thee,
out of thy book. Write his name in
the Lamb's Book of Life, or turn to the
page where my name was written ten
or twenty or forty or sixty years ago,
and with the black ink of everlasting
midnight erase my first name, and my
last name, and all my name. If he is
lost to shipwreck, let me be tossed
amid the same breakers. If he cannot
be a partner in my bliss, let me be a
partner in his woe. I have for many
years loved Thee, O God, and it has
been my expectation to sit with Christ
and all the redeemed at the banquet
of the skies, but now I give up my
promised place at the feast, and my
promised robe, and my promised crown,
and my promised throne unless John,
unless George, unless Henry, unless
my darling son can share them with
me. Heaven will be no Heaven with-
out him. O God, save my boy, or
count me among the lost!"

That is a terrific prayer, and yet
there is a young man sitting in the pew
on the main floor, or in the lower gal-
lery, or in the top gallery, who has al-
ready crushed such a prayer from his

mother's heart. He hardly ever writes
home, or living at home, what does he
care how much trouble he gives her?
Her tears are no more to him than the
rain that drops from the eaves of a
house on a dark night. The fact that
she does not sleep because of watching
for his return late at night does not
choke his laughter or hasten his step
forward.

She has tried coaxing and kindness
and self-sacrifices and all the ordinary
prayers that mothers make for their
children, and all have failed. She is
coming toward the vivid and venture-
some and terrific prayer of my text.
She is going to lift her own eternity
and set it upon that one "if," by which
she expects to decide whether you will
go up with her or she down with you.
She may be this moment looking
heavenward and saying, "O Lord, re-
claim him by thy grace," and then ad-
ding that heart-rendering "if" of my
text, "If not, blot me, I pray thee, out
of thy book."

After three years of absence a son
wrote his mother in one of the New
England whaling villages that he was
coasting home in a certain ship.
Motherlike, she stood watching, and
the ship was in the offing, but a fear-
ful storm struck it and dashed the ship
on the rocks that night. All that
night the mother prayed for the safety
of the son, and just at dawn there was
a knock at the cottage door, and the
son entered, crying out, "Mother, I
knew you would pray me home!" If I
would ask all those in this assemblage
who have been prayed home to God by
pious mothers to stand up, there would
be scores that would stand, and if I
should ask them to give testimony it
would be the testimony of that New
England son coming ashore from the
split timbers of the whaling ship, "My
mother prayed me home!"

The "If" of Incredulity.
Another Bible "if" is the "if" of in-
credulity. Satan used it when Christ's
vitality was depressed by forty days'
abstinence from food, and the tempter
pointed to some stones, in color and
shape like loaves of bread, and said,
"If thou be the Son of God, command
that these stones be made bread." That
was appropriate, for Satan is the
father of that "if" of incredulity.
Peter used the same "if" when, stand-
ing on the wet and slippery deck of a
fishing smack off Lake Galilee, he saw
Christ walking on the sea as though it
were as solid as a pavement of basalt
from the adjoining volcanic hills, and
Peter cried, "If it be thou, let me
come to these on the water."

What a preposterous "if"! What
a human foot was ever so constructed
as to walk on water? In what part of
the earth did law of gravitation make
exception to the rule that man will sink
to the elbow when he touches the
wave of river or lake and will sink still
farther unless he can swim? But here
Peter looks out upon the form in the
shape of a man defying the mightiest
law of the universe, the law of gravi-
tation, and standing erect on the
top of the liquid. Yet the in-
credulous Peter cries out to the Lord,
"If it be thou, let me come to these on
the water." Alas, for that incred-
ulous "if"! It is working as powerfully
in the latter part of this nineteenth
Christian century as it did in the early
part of the first Christian century.

Though a small conjunction, it is
the biggest block to-day in the way of
the gospel chariot. "If" "If" "If"
have theological seminaries which
spend most of their time and employ
their learning and their genius in the
manufacturing of "ifs." With that
weaponry are assailed the Pentateuch,
and the miracles, and the divinity of
Jesus Christ. Almost everybody is
chewing on an "if." Every man a
man hater for prayer, he puts his knee
on an "if." The door through which
people pass into infidelity and atheism,
and all immoralities has two doorposts,
and the one is made of the letter "if"
and the other of the letter "if."

Four Momentous Steps.
There are only four steps between
strong faith and complete unbelief:
First, surrender the idea of the verbal
inspiration of the Scriptures and adopt
the idea that they were all generally
supervised by the Lord. Second, sur-
render the idea that they were all
generally supervised by the Lord and
adopt the theory that they were not
all, but partly, supervised by the Lord.
Third, believe that they are the grad-
ual evolution of the ages, and then
write according to the wisdom of the
times in which they lived. Fourth,
believe that the Bible is a bad book
and not only unworthy of credence, but
pernicious and debasing and cruel.

Only four steps from the stout faith
in which the martyrs died to the blatant
caricature of Christianity as the
greatest sham of the centuries. But
the door to all that precipitation and
horror is made out of an "if." The
mother of unrests in the minds of
Christian people and in those who re-
gard sacred things is the "if" of in-
credulity. In 1879 in Scotland, I saw a
letter which had been written many
years ago by Thomas Carlyle to
Thomas Chalmers. Carlyle at the
time of writing the letter was a young
man. The letter was not to be published
until after the death of Carlyle. His
death having taken place, the letter
ought to be published.

It was a letter in which Thomas Car-
lyle expresses the tortures of his own
mind while relaxing his faith in Chris-
tianity, while at the same time he ex-
presses his admiration for Dr. Chal-
mers, and in which Carlyle wishes
that he had the same faith that the
great Scotch minister evidently ex-
perienced. Nothing that Thomas Carlyle
ever wrote in "Sartor Resartus," or
the "French Revolution," or his "Life
of Cromwell," or his immortal "Es-
says," had in it more wondrous power
than that letter which bewailed his
own doubts and extolled the strong
faith of another.

I made an exact copy of that letter,
with the understanding that it should
not be published until after the death
of Thomas Carlyle, but returning to
my hotel in Edinburgh, I felt un-
easy that somehow that letter should get out
of my possession and be published be-
fore its time. So I took it back to the

person by whose permission I had
collected it. All reasons for its privacy
having vanished, I wish it might be
published.

The Boy and His Bible.
Perhaps this sermon, finding its way
into a Scottish home, may suggest its
printing, for that letter shows more
mightily than anything I have ever
read the difference between the "I
know" of Paul, and the "I know" of
Job, and the "I know" of Thomas
Chalmers, and the "I know" of all
those who hold with a firm grip the
Gospel, on the one hand, and the un-
morning, bestorming, and torturing
"if" of incredulity on the other. I like
the positive faith of that sailor boy
that Captain Judkins of the steamship
Scotio picked up in a hurricane. "Go
alot," said Captain Judkins to his
mate, "and look out for wrecks."
Before the mate had gone far up the
rattles he shouted: "A wreck! A
wreck!" "Where away?" said Captain
Judkins. "Off the port bow," was the
answer. Lifeboats were lowered, and
forty men volunteered to put out across
the angry sea for the wreck. They
came back with a dozen shipwrecked,
and among them a boy of 12 years.

"Where are you?" said Captain Jud-
kins. The answer was: "I am a
Scotch boy. My father and mother
are dead, and I am on my way to Amer-
ica." "What have you here?" said
Captain Judkins as he opened the boy's
pocket and took hold of a rope around
the boy's body. "It is a rope," said
the boy. "But what is that tied by
this rope under your arm?" "That,
sir, is my mother's bible. She told me
never to lose that." "Could you not
have saved something else?" "Not
and saved that." "Did you expect to
go down?" "Yes, sir, but I meant to
take my mother's bible down with
me." "Bravo!" said Captain Judkins.
"I will take care of you."

Another Bible "if" is the "if" of
eternal significance. Solomon gives us
that "if" twice in one sentence when
he says, "If thou be wise, thou shalt be
wise for thyself, but if thou scornest
thou alone shalt bear it." Christ gives
us that "if" when he says, "If thou
hadst known in this thy day the things
which belong unto thy peace, but now
they are hidden from thine eyes."
Paul gives us that "if" when he says,
"If they shall enter into my rest." All
those "ifs" and a score more that I
might recall put the whole responsi-
bility of our salvation on ourselves.
Christ's willingness to pardon—no "if"
about that. Realms of glory awaiting
the righteous—no "if" about that.

The only "if" in all the case worth
a moment's consideration is the "if" that
attaches itself to the question as to
whether we will accept, whether we will
repent, whether we will believe,
whether we will rise forever. Is it
not time that we take our eternal fu-
ture off that swivel? Is it not time that
we extricate that "if," that miserable
"if," that hazardous "if"? We would
not allow this uncertain "if" to stay
long in anything else of importance.
Let some one say in regard to a rail-
road bridge, "I have reasons for as-
suring that bridge is safe," and you
would not cross it. Let some one say,
"I have reasons to assure that steamer
is trustworthy," and you would not
take passage on it.

Let some one suggest in regard to a
property that you are about to pur-
chase, "I have reasons to assure if
you can give a good title," and you
would not pay a dollar down until you
had some skillful real estate lawyer
examine the title. But I allowed for
years of my lifetime, and some of you
have allowed for years of your lifetime,
an "if" to stand tossing up and down
questions of eternal destiny. Oh, de-
cide! Perhaps your arrival here to-
day may decide. Stranger things than
that have happened to flight forever the "if"
of uncertainty.

The Miner's Moving Story.
A few Sabbath nights ago in this
church a man passing at the foot of the
pulpit said to me, "I am a miner from
England," and then he pushed back
his coat sleeve and said, "Do you see
that scar on my arm?" I said, "Yes;
you must have had an awful wound
there some time." He said: "Yes; it
nearly cost me my life. I was in a
mine in England 900 feet underground
and three miles from the shaft of the
mine, and a rock fell on me, and my
fellow laborer tried off the rock, and
I was bleeding to death, and he took a
newspaper from around his luncheon
and bound it around my wound and
then helped me over the three miles
underground to the shaft, where I was
lifted to the top, and when the news-
paper was taken off my wound I read in
it something that saved my soul, and
it was one of your sermons. Good
night," he said as he passed on, leav-
ing me transfixed with grateful emo-
tion.

And who knows but the words I now
speak, blessed of God, may reach some
wounded soul deep down in the black
mine of sin, and that these words may
be blessed to the stanching of the
wound and the eternal life of the soul?
Settle this matter instantly, positively
and forever. Slay the last "if." Bury
deep the last "if." How to do it:
Purge body, mind, and soul in a prayer
as earnest as that of Moses in the text.
Can you doubt the earnestness of this
prayer of the text? It is so heavy with
emotion that it breaks down in the
middle. It was so earnest that the
translators in the modern copies of the
Bible were obliged to put a mark, a
straight line, a dash, for an omission
that will never be filled up. Such an
abrupt pause, such a sudden snapping
off of the sentence!

A Great Explorer's Prayer Answered.
Between the first and last sentences
of my text there was a paroxysm of
earnestness too mighty for words. It
will take half of an eternity to tell
of all the answers of earnest and faithful
prayer. In his last journal David Liv-
ingstone, in Africa, records the prayer
so soon to be answered: "19 March—
birthday. My Jesus, my God, my life,
my all, I again dedicate my whole self
to thee. Accept me, and grant, O Gra-
cious Father, that ere this year is gone
I may finish my task. In Jesus' name
I ask it. Amen."

When the dusky servant looked into
Livingstone's tent and found him dead
on his knees, he saw that the prayer
had been answered. But notwith-
standing the earnestness of the prayer
of Moses in the text, it was a defeated
prayer and was not answered. I think
the two "ifs" in the prayer defeated
it, and one "if" is enough to defeat any
prayer, whatever other good charac-
teristics it may have. "If thou wilt
forgive their sins—and if not, blot me,
I pray thee, out of thy book." God did
not blot out one letter of the name
of Moses from the Book of Life.

The Six "Ifs" About Sodom.
Abraham's prayer for the rescue
of Sodom was a grand prayer in some
respects, but there were six "ifs" in it,
or "peradventures," which mean the
same thing. "Peradventure there
may be fifty righteous in the city, per-
adventure forty-five, peradventure
forty, peradventure thirty, peradventure
twenty, peradventure ten." Those six
peradventures, those six "ifs" killed
the prayer, and Sodom went
down under. Nearly all the prayers
that were answered had no "ifs" in
them—the prayer of Elijah that
changed dry weather to wet weather,
the prayer that changed Hezekiah
from a sick man to a well man with-
out shaking the universe in a prayer
no "ifs" in it! Say in substance:
"Lord, Thou hast promised pardon, and
I take it. Here are my wounds; heal
them. Here is my blindness; irradiate
it. Here are my chains of bondage;
by the Gospel hammer strike them off.
I am fleeing to the City of Refuge, and
I am sure this is the right way.
Thanks be to God, I am free!"

Once, by the law, my hopes were slain,
But now, in Christ, I live again.
With the Mosaic earnestness of my
text and without its Mosaic "ifs" let us
cry out to God. Aye, if words fail us,
let us take the suggestion of that
printer's dash of the text, and with a
wordless silence implore pardon and
comfort and life and Heaven. For this
assemblage, all of whom I shall meet
in the last judgment, I dare not offer
the prayer of my text, and so I change
it and say "Lord God, forgive our sins
and write our names in the book of
Thy loving remembrance, from which
they shall never be blotted out."

NO MORAL IN IT.
A Smart Aleck Fools with a Very Lively
Bear to His Discomfort.
He was a sturdy young man with
his trousers in his boot-legs and his
arm in a sling, and while waiting at
the ferry dock a poli eman asked him
if he had had his arm broken, says
the Detroit Free Press.

"No; only chawed," he replied.
"Were you bitten by a horse?"
"No; a bear."
"By a bear! Have you been off
hunting?"
"No; I didn't have to hunt for
that bear. He came along the road
to where I sat on the fence."
"And in his rage he tackled you?"
"No; in my blamed foolishness I
tackled him. He was one of those
performin' bears, you know, and three
of us smart Alecks sat on the fence.
We was feelin' mighty smart about the
time the man came along with his bear,
and we thought it would be an aw-
fully cute thing for one of us to roll
that animal in the dust and learn
him a new trick. Bein' as I was the
smartest of the smart Alecks I
jumped down and picked him up."
"So you mean you lifted him up?"
"No, sir, I picked him up for a
spring lamb. The fellow who owned
him hollered to me to keep off; but I
sailed right in and got hold. I was
calculatin' to astonish the bear, but
he didn't seem to be a bit surprised.
He stood up and fastened his teeth
into that shoulder, and how many
times do you think he shook me
around and pounded me up and down
in the dust?"
"Ten times?" timidly queried the
officer.

"Just 700 times! And I'll swear
to it, for I counted 'em. They used
up three long fence rails pounding
his head, but he didn't let go until
one of the boys got a pitchfork and
tackled him."
"Then you—you—?" stammered
the officer.

Marvelous Preaching by a Negro.
Probably the most remarkable reli-
gious service ever conducted behind
prison bars was held in the Petus
County jail by Mrs. Lena Mason of
Hannibal, better known as the
"Black Sam Jones of Missouri." Mrs.
Mason entered the jail in company
with Messrs. Douglas and Tyler, and
after prayers by the two gentlemen
she began a ten minutes' discourse
that caused every prisoner to plead
for forgiveness. The woman does
not talk like a colored person, but
uses the best of English, and her
earnestness is something remarkable.
She kept her eyes closed during the
entire service, and before she had
talked three minutes Dix, Robinson,
the convicted murderer, and other
notorious prisoners were on their
knees in prayer. Two colored women
serving out fines for vagrancy, scoffed
at the service when it began, but be-
fore it was concluded they grabbed
Mrs. Mason's hand and begged her to
pray for them, at the same time
calling upon the Lord to wash away
their sins! Mrs. Mason preached the
same night to nearly twenty-five
hundred people, acres of ground being
covered with vehicles containing
white people who had been attracted
by her singular exhortations.