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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 xxxiii. 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 and 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 Infinity of "If."  
If Shakespeare had never been born  
for the drama, or Handel had never  
been born for music, or Thian had  
never been born for painting, or Thor-  
waldsen had never been born for sculp-  
ture, 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—how can we measure  
it? It would swamp anything but omni-  
potence. But I must confine myself to-  
day to the "ifs" of the Bible, and in  
doing so I shall speak of the "if" of over-  
powering earnestness, the "if" of in-  
creduity, 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 it is a risk. 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 add-  
ing 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 thee on the water."

What a preposterous "if"! What  
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." Alas, for that incred-  
ulous "if"! It is worthy 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" "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 men  
wrote 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 unbelief 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-  
merson, and in which Carlyle wishes  
that he had the same faith that the  
great Scotch minister evidently ex-  
pressed. 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 uncer-  
tain how 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  
hast 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 if 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 ex-  
amine 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:  
Fling 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 with-  
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, the  
prayer that halted sun and moon 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!"

One, 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 holloed 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.  
"Then I made a blamed fool of  
myself, and that's all there is to it,"  
said the young man.

Marvelous Preaching by a Negress.  
Probably the most remarkable reli-  
gious service ever conducted behind  
prison bars was held in the Petals  
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.