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TALMAGE'S SERMON.

THE BROOKLYN DIVINE PREACHES AT BIRMINGHAM.

The Miraculous Conversion of the Great Persecutor Both an Encouragement and a Warning—Out of Great Tribulations Come Zeal and Clear Views of Truth.

Talks in the South.

Rev. Dr. Talmage during his Southern tour last week spoke at Nashville, Memphis, and other cities, and on Sunday forenoon preached to a large audience at Birmingham, Ala., under the auspices of the Baptist Church. The subject was "Unhorsed," and the text chosen was Acts ix. 3-5: "And as he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shined round about him a light from Heaven, and he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

The Damascus of Bible times still stands, with a population of 135,000. It was a city of white and glistening architecture, its minarets and crescents and domes playing with the light of the morning sun; embowered in groves of olive and citron and orange and pomegranate; a famous river plunging its brightness into the scene; a city by the ancients styled "a pearl surrounded by emeralds."

The Coming Terror.

A group of horsemen are advancing upon that city. Let the Christians of the place hide, for that cavalry coming over the hills is made of persecutors; their leader small and unattractive in some respects, as leaders sometimes are insignificant in person—and the Duke of Wellington and Dr. Archibald Alexander. But there is something very intent in the eye of this man of the text, and the horse he rides is lathered with the foam of a long and quick travel of 135 miles. He urges on his steed, for those Christians must be captured and silenced, and that religion of the cross must be annihilated.

Suddenly the horses shy off and plunge until the riders are precipitated. Freed from their riders, the horses bound snorting away. You know that dumb animals, at the sight of an eclipse, or an earthquake, or anything like a supernatural appearance, sometimes become very uncontrollable. A new sun has been kindled in the heavens, putting out the glare of the ordinary sun. Christ, with the glory of Heaven wrapped about Him, looked out from a cloud, and the splendor was insufferable, and no wonder the horses sprang and the equestrians dropped.

Dust covered and bruised, Saul attempts to get up, shading his eyes with his hands from the severe luster of the heavens, but unsuccessfully, for he is struck stone blind as he cries out, "Who art thou, Lord?" and Jesus answered him: "I am the one you have been chasing. He that whips and scourges those Damascus Christians whips and scourges me. It is not their back that is bleeding; it is mine. It is not their heart that is breaking; it is mine. I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

The Deformed Transformed.

From that wild, exciting and overwhelming scene there rises up the greatest preacher of all the ages—Paul—in whose prisons were rocked down before whom soldiers turned pale, into whose hands Mediterranean sea captains put control of their shipwrecking craft, and whose epistles are the avante courier of a resurrection day.

I learn from this scene that a worldly fall sometimes precedes a spiritual uplifting. A man does not get much sympathy by falling off a horse. People say he ought not to have got into the saddle if he could not ride. Those of us who were brought up in the country remember well how the workmen laughed when, on our way back from the brook, we suddenly lost our ride. When in a grand review a general toppled from the stirrups, it became a national merriment.

Here is Paul on horseback—a proud man, riding on with government documents in his pocket, a graduate of a most famous school, in which the celebrated Dr. Gamaliel had been a professor, perhaps having already attained two of the three titles of the school—the first, rabbi, the second, and on his way to rabbi, the third and highest title. I know from his temperament that his horse was ahead of the other horses. But without time to think of what posture he should take, or without consideration for his dignity, he is tumbled into the dust. And yet that was the best ride Paul ever took. Out of that violent fall he arose into the apostleship. So it has been in all ages, and so it is now.

Purified By Suffering.

You will never be worth much for God and the church until you lose your fortune, or have your reputation upset, or in some way, somehow, are thrown and humiliated. You must go down before you go up. Joseph finds his path to the Egyptian Court through the pit into which his brothers threw him. Daniel never had walked among the bronzed lions that adorned the Babylonian throne if he had not first walked among the real lions of the cave. And Paul marshals all the generations of Christendom by falling flat on his face on the road to Damascus.

Men who have been always prospered may be efficient servants of the world, but will be of no advantage to Christ. You may ride majestically seated on your charger, rein in hand, foot in stirrup, but you will never be worth anything spiritually until you fall off. They who graduate from the school of Christ with the highest honors have on their diplomas the seal of a lion's muddy paw, or the splash of an angry wave, or the drop of a stray tear, or the brown scorch of a persecuting fire. In 999 cases out of 1,000 there is no moral or spiritual elevation until there has been a thorough worldly upsetting.

The Brave Christians.

Again, I learn from the subject that the religion of Christ is not a pusillanimous thing. People in this day try to make us believe that Christianity is something for men of small caliber, for women with no capacity to reason, for children in the infant class under 6 years of age, but not for stalwart men. Look at this man of the text! Do you not think that the religion that could capture such a man as that must have some power in it? He was a logician; he was a metaphysician; he was an all conquering orator; he was a poet of the highest type. He had a nature that could swamp the leading men of his own day, and hurled against the sanhedrin he made it tremble.

He learned all that he could get in the school of his native village; then he had gone to a higher school and there mastered the Greek and Hebrew and perfected himself in belle lettres, until in after years he astonished the Cretans, and the Corinthians, and the Athenians by quotations from their own authors. I have never found anything in Carlyle or Goeth or Herbert Spencer that could compare in strength or beauty with Paul's epistles. I do not think there is anything in the writings of Sir William Hamilton that shows such mental discipline as you find in Paul's argument about justification and the resurrection. I have not found anything in Milton finer in the way of imagination than I can find in Paul's illustrations drawn from the amphitheater.

There was nothing in Robert Emmet pleading for his life, or in Edmund Burke arraiving Warren Hastings in Westminster Hall, that compared with the scene in the courtroom when, before robed officials, Paul bowed and began his speech, saying, "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day." I repeat that a religion that can capture a man like that must have some power in it. It is time you stopped talking as though all the brain in the world were opposed to Christianity. Where 't'au leads, we can afford to follow.

Talented Christians.

I am glad to know that Christ has in the different ages of the world had in his discipleship a Mozart and a Handel in music, a Raphael and a Reynolds in painting, an Angelo and a Canova in sculpture, a Rush and a Harvey in medicine, a Crocius and a Washington in statesmanship; a Blackstone, a Marshall, and a Kent in law. And the time will come when the religion of Christ will conquer all the observatories and universities, and philosophy will through her telescope behold the morning star of Jesus, and in her laboratory see "that all things work together for good," and with her geological hammer discover the "Rock of Ages."

Oh, instead of cowering and shivering when the skeptic stands before you and talks of religion as though it were a pusillanimous thing—instead of that, take your New Testament from your pocket and show him the picture of the intellectual giant of all the ages prostrated on the road to Damascus while his horse is flying wildly away. Then ask your skeptic what it was that frightened the one and threw the other. Oh, no, it is no weak gospel. It is a glorious gospel. It is an all conquering gospel. It is an omnipotent gospel. It is the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation.

He Must Be Humbled.

Again, I learn from the text a man cannot become a Christian until he is humbled. The trouble is, we want to ride into the kingdom of God just as the knight rode into castle gate on palfrey, beautifully caparisoned. We want to come into the kingdom of God in fine style. No kneeling down at the altar, no sitting on "anxious seats," no crying over sin, no begging at the door of God's mercy. Clear the road and let us come in all prancing in the pride of our soul. No, we will never get into Heaven that way. We must dismount.

There is no knight errantry in religion, no fringed trappings of repentance, but an utter prostration before God, a going down in the dust, with the cry, "Unclean, unclean!"—a bewailing of the soul, like David from the belly of hell—a going down in the dust until Christ shall by his grace lift us up as he lifted Paul. Oh, proud hearted hearer, you must get off that horse! May a light from the throne of God brighter than the sun throw you! Come down into the dust and cry for pardon and life and Heaven.

Again, I learn from this scene of the text that the grace of God can overcome the persecutor. Christ and Paul were boys at the same time in different villages, and Paul's antipathy to Christ was increasing. He hated everything about Christ. He was going down then with writs in his pockets to have Christ's disciples arrested. He was not going as a sheriff goes to arrest a man against whom he had no spite, but Paul was going down to arrest those people because he was glad to arrest them.

The Bible says, "He breathed out slaughter." He wanted them captured, and he wanted them butchered. I hear the click and clack and clatter of the hoofs of the galloping steeds on the way to Damascus. Oh, do you think that proud man on horseback can ever become a Christian? Yes! There is a voice from Heaven like a thunderclap uttering two words, the second word the same as the first, but uttered with more emphasis, so that the proud equestrian may have no doubt as to who is meant: "Saul! Saul!" That man was saved, and he was a persecutor, and so God can by His grace overcome any persecutor.

Still Some Persecution.

The days of sword and fire for Christians seem to have gone by. The bayonets of Napoleon I pried open the "inquisition" and let the rotting wretches out. The ancient dungeons around Rome are to-day mere curiosities for the travelers. The Coliseum, where

wild beasts used to suck up the life of the martyrs while the Emperor watched and Lolita Paulina set with emerald ornaments worth 60,000,000 sesterces, clapping her hands as the Christians died under the paw and tooth of the lion—that Coliseum is a ruin now. The scene of the Smithfield fires is a hay-market. The day of fire and sword for Christians seems to have gone by. But has the day of persecution ceased? No. Are you not caricatured for your religion? In proportion as you try to serve God and be faithful to him, are you not sometimes maltreated?

That woman finds it hard to be a Christian as her husband talks and jeers while she is trying to say her prayers or read the Bible. That daughter finds it hard to be a Christian with the whole family arrayed against her—father, mother, brother, and sister making her the target of ridicule. That young man finds it hard to be a Christian in the shop or factory or store when his comrades jeer at him because he will not go to the gambling hell or other places of iniquity.

Oh, no, the days of persecution have not ceased and will not until the end of the world. But, oh, you persecuted ones, is it not time that you began to pray for your persecutors? They are no prouder, no fiercer, no more set in their way than was this persecutor of the text. He fell. They will fall if Christ from the heavens grandly and gloriously looks out on them. God can by His grace make a Roman believe in the divinity of Jesus and a Tyndall in the worth of prayer.

Robert Newton stamped the ship's deck in derisive indignation at Christianity only a little while before he became a Christian. "Out of my house," said a father to his daughter, "if you will keep praying." Yet before many months passed the father knelt at the same altar with the child. And the Lord Jesus Christ is willing to look out from Heaven upon that derisive opponent of the Christian religion and address him, not in glittering generalities, but calling him by name: "John! George! Henry!—Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"

Hope for the Worst.

Again, I learn from this subject that there is hope for the worst offenders. It was particularly outrageous that Saul should have gone to Damascus on that errand. Jesus Christ had been dead only three years, and the story of His kindness, and His generosity, and His love filled all the air. It was not an old story, as it is now. It was a new story. Jesus had only three summers ago been in these very places, and Saul every day in Jerusalem must have met people who knew Christ, people of good eyesight whom Jesus had cured of blindness, people who had been dead and who had been resurrected by the Saviour, and people who could tell all the particulars of the crucifixion—just how Jesus looked in the last hour, just how the heavens grew black in the face at the torture.

He heard that recited every day by the people who were acquainted with all the circumstances, and yet in the fresh memory of that scene he goes to persecute Christ's disciples, impatient at the time it takes to feed the horses at the inn, not pulling at the snaffle, but riding with loose rein faster and faster. Oh, he was the chief of sinners! No outbreak of modesty when he said that. He was a murderer. He stood by when Stephen died and helped in the execution of that good man.

When the rabble wanted to be unimpeded in their work of destroying Stephen and wanted to take off their coats, but did not dare to lay them down lest they be stolen, Paul said, "I'll take care of the coats," and they put them down at the feet of Paul, and he watched the coats, and he watched the horrid mangling of glorious Stephen. Is it a wonder that when he fell from the horse he did not break his neck—that his foot did not catch somewhere in the trappings of the saddle, and he was not dragged and kicked to death? He deserved to die miserably, wretchedly, and forever, notwithstanding all his metaphysics, and his eloquence, and his logic.

The Chief of Sinners.

He was the chief of sinners. He said what was true when he said that. And yet the grace of God saved him, and so will it save you. If there is any man in this house who thinks he is too bad to be saved and says, "I have wandered very grievously from God; I do not believe there is any hope for me," I tell you the story of this man in the text who was brought to Jesus Christ in spite of his sins and opposition. There may be some here who are as stoutly opposed to Christ as Paul was. There may be some here who are captive of their sins as much so as the young man who said in regard to his dissipated habits: "I will keep on with them. I know I am breaking my mother's heart, and I know I am killing myself, and I know that when I die I shall go to hell, but it is now too late to stop."

The steed on which you ride may be swifter and stronger and higher mettled than that on which the Cilician persecutor rode, but Christ can catch it by the bridle and hurl it back and hurl it down. There is mercy for you who say you are too bad to be saved. Oh, say you have put off the matter so long; Paul had neglected it a great while. You say that the sin you have committed has been among the most aggravating circumstances; that was so with Paul's.

You say you have exasperated Christ and coaxed your own ruin; so did Paul. And yet he sits to-day on one of the highest heavenly thrones, and there is mercy for you, and good days for you, and gladness for you, if you will only take the same Christ which first threw him down and then raised him up. It seems to me as if I can see Paul to-day rising up from the highway to Damascus, and brushing off the dust from his cloak, and wiping the sweat of excitement from his brow, as he turns to us and all the ages, saying, "This a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."

The Sublime Reality.

Once more, I learn from this subject that there is a tremendous reality in religion. If it had been a mere optical delusion on the road to Damascus, was not Paul just the man to find it out? If it had been a sham and pretense, would he not have pricked the bubble? He was a man of facts and arguments, of the most gigantic intellectual nature, and not a man of hallucinations. And when I see him fall from the saddle, blinded and overwhelmed, I say there must have been something in it. And, my dear brother, you will find that there is something in religion somewhere. The only question is, Where?

There was a man who rode from Stamford to London 95 miles, in five hours on horseback. Very swift. There was a woman of Newmarket who rode on horseback a thousand miles in a thousand hours. Very swift. But there are those here—aye, all of us are speeding on at tenfold that velocity, at a thousandfold that rate toward eternity. May Almighty God, from the opening heavens, flash upon your soul this hour the question of your eternal destiny, and oh, that Jesus would this hour overcome you with His pardoning mercy as He stands here with the pathos of a broken heart and sobs into your ear: "I have come for thee. I come with my back raw from the beating. I come with my feet mangled with the nails. I come with my brow aching from the twisted bramble. I come with my heart bursting for your woes. I can stand it no longer. I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

Almost Infallible.

A well-known contractor walked into a bank in this city the other day to cash a check for \$40. The paying-teller looked at the check a few minutes, then counted out \$400, and handed it to the contractor, who, although he noticed the error, said not a word, but rolled up the bills and wadded them down into his pocket. This happened in the morning, and about 2 o'clock the same afternoon, before the officials of the bank had an opportunity to discover the error, the contractor walked into the office of the President of the bank.

"Is this bank responsible for the errors of its clerks?" he asked the President.

"If it can be proved that any of our clerks have erred," replied the President, in a very chilly manner, "we will make the correction."

"Well, nobody saw this error made but myself," continued the contractor, "and my word ought to be sufficient proof, I think."

"I am sorry, sir," said the bank President, "but we shall have to have additional proof. We require this in order to protect ourselves; that is all."

"Very well, sir," replied the contractor, rising to leave, "I am sorry I cannot furnish what you demand. The error, I referred to was the payment of \$400 for a check that called for only \$40; but, as no one saw me receive the extra \$360, I suppose you will not want to correct the mistake. Good day, sir."

"Hold on! Come back!" shouted the bank President, who, by this time, was very wide awake to the abyss to which he had been led.

The matter was soon adjusted satisfactorily, and now when any person reports an error at that bank, the first question asked is: "In whose favor?"—Washington Post.

Astonished Savages.

The author of "Where Three Empires Meet" took some Kafirs from their desolate island home in the Himalayan gorges beyond the mountain ranges to the more civilized south.

"They were descending a road when one of them chanced to remark that he was hungry, and the English 'sahib' bought him some food at a wayside shop. The Kafir saw the money change hands.

"How is this? Do you have to pay for food in this country?" he inquired in surprise.

"Certainly," cried the man in amazement. Then, pondering a while he continued doubtfully, "Suppose a man had no money in this country; he might starve!"

"It is quite possible."

The Kafir shook with uncontrollable laughter. It was the best joke he had ever heard. He then explained the ridiculous system to his companions, and they roared in chorus.

Balloon Photography.

Some of the finest photographs from a balloon have recently been made by a Philadelphia photographer. The use of such pictures must eventually be recognized. Their value in map-making or in constructing a railway must not be underestimated. In the next great war there is no doubt but that aerial photography will play an important part in securing photographs from above the enemy, and thus obtaining information regarding their strength, position, and movements. To avoid loss of life the camera can be attached to a captive balloon and the plates changed and shutters released by means of electricity from the ground. An arrangement for a somewhat similar purpose has been recently tried with success. In this a kite is used, to which a camera is attached, and the exposure is made by a fuse, which burns until it reaches a certain point and then releases the shutter.

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