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TALMAGE'S SERMON.

HIS GREAT DISCOURSE ON WOMAN'S WORK.

No Disgrace to Work—A Strange Line of Respectability—Let Woman Do What She Can Do Well—The Dread Alternative of Starvation or Dishonor.

Song of the Shirt.

Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage, who is now on his round the world journey, chose as subject Sunday "Martyrs of the Needle," the text being Matthew xix, 24, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle."

Whether this "eye of the needle" be the small gate at the side of the big entrance of the wall of the ancient city, as is generally interpreted, or the eye of a needle such as is now handled in sewing a garment I do not say. In either case it would be a tight thing for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. But there are whole caravans of fatigues and hardships going through the eye of the sewing woman's needle.

Very long ago the needle was busy. It was considered honorable for women to toil in olden time. Alexander the Great stood in his palace showing garments made by his own mother. The finest tapestries at Bayeux were made by the Queen of William the Conqueror. Augustus, the Emperor would not wear any garment except those that were fashioned by some member of his royal family. So let the toiler everywhere be respected!

The greatest blessing that could have happened to our first parents was being turned out of Eden after they had done wrong. Adam and Eve in their perfect state, might have got along without work, or only such slight employment as a perfect garden, with no weeds in it demanded. But as soon as they had sinned the best thing for them was to be turned out where they would have to work. We know what a withering thing it is for man to have nothing to do. Good old Ashbel Green, at fourscore years, when asked why he kept on working said, "I do so to keep out of mischief." We see that a man who has a large amount of money to start with has no chance. Of the thousand prosperous and honorable men that you know, 999 had to work vigorously at the beginning.

Idle Women Unhappy.

But I am now to tell you that industry is just as important for a woman's safety and happiness. The most unhappy women in our communities to-day are those who have no engagements to call them up in the morning, who, once having risen and breakfasted, lounge through the dull forenoon in slippers down at the heel and with dishevelled hair, reading the last novel, and who, having dragged through a wretched forenoon and taken their afternoon sleep, and having spent an hour and a half at their toilet, pick up their card case and go out to make calls, and who pass their evenings waiting for somebody to come in and break up the monotony. Arabella Stuart never was imprisoned in so dark a dungeon as that.

There is no happiness in an idle woman. It may be with hand, it may be with brain, it may be with foot, but work she must or be wretched forever. The little girls of our families must be started with that idea. The curse of our American society is that our young women are taught that the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, tenth, fiftieth, thousandth thing in their life is to get someone to take care of them. Instead of that, the first lesson should be how, under God, they may take care of themselves. The simple fact is that a majority of them do have to take care of themselves, and that, too, after having, through the false notions of their parents, wasted the years in which they ought to have learned how successfully to maintain themselves. We now and here declare the inhumanity, cruelty, and outrage of that father and mother who pass their daughters into womanhood, having given them no facility for earning their livelihood. Mme. de Stael said, "It is not these writings that I am proud of, but the fact that I have facility in ten occupations, in any one of which I could make a livelihood."

Riches Have Wings.

You say you have a fortune to leave them. O man and woman, have you not learned that, like vultures, like hawks, like eagles, riches have wings and fly away? Though you should be successful in leaving a competency behind you, the trickery of executors may swamp it in a night, or some elders or deacons of our churches may get up a fictitious company and induce your orphans to put their money into it, and if it be lost prove to them that it was eternally decreed that that was the way they were to lose it, and that it went in the most orthodox and heavenly style.

Oh, the damnable schemes that professed Christians will engage in—until God puts his fingers into the collar of the hypocrite's robe and rips it clear down to the bottom! You have no right because you are well off, to conclude that your children are going to be as well off. A man died, leaving a large fortune. His son fell dead in a Philadelphia grog shop. His old comrades came in and said as they bent over his corpse: "What is the matter with you, Boggsey?" The surgeon, standing over him, said: "Hush up; he is dead." "Ah, he is dead!" they said. "Come, boys, let us go and take a drink in memory of poor Boggsey!"

Have you nothing better than money to leave your children? If you have not, but send your daughters into the world with empty brain and unskilled hand, you are guilty of assassination, homicide, regicide, infanticide. There are women toiling in our cities for $3 and $4 per week who were daughters of merchant princes. These suffering ones now would be glad to have the crumbs that once fell from their father's table. That wornout, broken shoe that she wears is the lineal descendant of the silk gaiters in which her mother walked, and that torn and faded calico had ancestry of magnificent brocade that swept Broadway clean without any expense to the street commissioners. Though you live in an elegant residence and fare sumptuously every day, let your daughters feel it is a disgrace to them not to know how to work. I denounce the idea prevalent in society that, though our young women may embroider slippers, and crochet, and make mats for lamps to stand on without disgrace, the idea of doing anything for a livelihood is dishonorable. It is a shame for a young woman belonging to a large family to be inefficient when the father toils his life away for her support. It is a shame for a daughter to be idle while her mother toils at the washtub. It is as honorable to sweep house, make beds, or trim hats as it is to twist a watch chain.

Society is to be reconstructed on the subject of woman's toil. A vast majority of those who would have woman industrious shut her up to a few kinds of work. My judgment in this matter is that a woman has a right to do anything she can do well. There should be no department of merchandise, mechanism, art, or science barred against her. If Miss Hosmer has genius for sculpture, give her a chisel. If Rosa Bonheur has a fondness for delineating animals, let her make "The Horse Fair." If Miss Mitchell will study astronomy, let her mount the starry ladder. If Lydia will be a merchant, let her sell purple. If Lucretia Mott will preach the gospel, let her thrill with her womanly eloquence the Quaker meeting house.

The Toil of the Needle.

It is said if woman is given such opportunities she will occupy places that might be taken by men. I say, if she have more skill and adaptedness for any position than a man has, let her have it. She has as much right to her bread, to her apparel and to her home as men have.

But it is said that her nature is so delicate that she is unfitted for exhausting toil. I ask in the name of all past history what toil on earth is more severe, exhausting and tremendous than that toil of the needle, to which for ages she has been subjected? The battering ram, the sword, the carbine, the battle ax, have made no such havoc as the needle. I would that these living sepulchers in which women have for ages been buried might be opened, and that some resurrection trumpet might bring up these living corpses to the fresh air and sunlight.

Go with me, and I will show you a woman who, by hardest toil, supports her children, her drunken husband, her old father and mother, pays her house rent, always has wholesome food on the table, and when she can get some neighbor on the Sabbath to come in and take care of her family appears in church with hat and cloak that are far from indicating the toil to which she is subjected.

Such a woman as that has body and soul enough to fit her for any position. She could stand beside the majority of your salesmen and dispose of more goods. She could go into your wheelwright shops and beat one-half of your workmen at making carriages. We talk about woman as though we had resigned to her all the light work, and ourselves had shouldered the heavier. But the day of judgment, which will reveal the sufferings of the stake and inquisition, will marshal before the throne of God and the hierarchs of Heaven the martyrs of washtub and needle.

Now, I say, if there be any preference in occupation, let woman have it. God knows her trials are the severest. By her acuter sensitiveness to misfortune, by her hour of anguish, I demand that no one hedge up her pathway to a livelihood. Oh, the meanness, the despicability of men who begrudge a woman the right to work anywhere, in any honorable calling!

I go still further and say that women should have equal compensation with men. By what principle of justice is it that women in many of our cities get only two thirds as much pay as men, and in many cases only half? Here is the gigantic injustice—that for work equally well if not better done woman receives far less compensation than man. Start with the National Government. For a long while women clerks in Washington got $900 for doing that which men received $1,800.

One Grim Alternative.

To thousands of young women in our cities to-day there is only this alternative—starvation or dishonor. Many of the largest mercantile establishments of our cities are accessory to these abominations, and from their large establishments there are scores of souls being pitched off into death, and their employers know it!

Is there a God? Will there be a judgment? I tell you, if God rises up to redress woman's wrongs, many of our large establishments will be swallowed up quicker than a South American earthquake ever took down a city. God will catch these oppressors between the two millstones of His wrath and grind them to powder!

I hear from all this land the wail of womanhood. Man has nothing to answer to that wail but flatteries. He says she is an angel. She is not. She knows she is not. She is a human being, who gets hungry when she has no food, and cold when she has no fire. Give her no more flatteries; give her justice!

There are about 50,000 sewing girls in New York and Brooklyn. Across the darkness of this night I hear their death groan. It is not such a cry as comes from those who are suddenly hurled out of life, but a slow, grinding, horrible wasting away. Gather them before you and look into their faces, pinched, ghastly, hunger struck! Look at their fingers, needle pricked and blood tipped! See that premature stoop in the shoulders! Hear that dry, hacking, merciless cough!

At a large meeting of these women held in a hall in Philadelphia grand speeches were delivered, but a needlewoman took the stand, threw aside her faded shawl, and with her shriveled arm hurled a very thunderbolt of eloquence, speaking out the horrors of her own experience.

Stand at the corner of a street in New York in the very early morning as the women go to their work. Many of them had no breakfast except the crumbs that were left over from the night before or a crust they chew on their way through the street. Here they come, the working girls of the city! These engaged in beadwork, these in flower making, in millinery, enameling, cigar making, bookbinding, labeling, feather picking, print coloring, paper boxmaking, but, most overworked of all and least compensated, the sewing woman. Why do they not take the city cars on their way up? They cannot afford the 5 cents! If, concluding to deny herself something else, she gets into the car, give her a seat! You want to see how Latimer and Ridley appeared in the fire. Look at that woman and behold a more horrible martyrdom, a hotter fire, a more agonizing death!

Twenty-four Cents a Day.

One Sabbath night, in the vestibule of my church, after service, a woman fell in convulsions. The doctor said she needed medicine not so much as something to eat. As she began to revive, in her delirium she said gaspingly: "Eight cents! Eight cents! Eight cents! I wish I could get it done! I am so tired! I wish I could get some sleep, but I must get it done." We found afterward that she was making garments at 8 cents apiece, and that she could make but three of them in a day. Hear it! Three times eight are twenty-four! Hear it, men and women who have comfortable homes!

Some of the worst villains of the city are the employers of these women. They beat them down to the last penny and try to cheat them out of that. The woman must deposit a dollar or two before she gets the garments to work on. When the work is done, it is sharply inspected, the most insignificant flaws picked out, and the wages refused, and sometimes the dollar deposited not given back. The Women's Protective Union reports a case where one of these poor souls, finding a place where she could get more wages, resolved to change employers and went to get her pay for work done. The employer says, "I hear you are going to leave me?" "Yes," she said, "and I have come to get what you owe me." He made no answer! She said, "Are you not going to pay me?" "Yes," he said, "I will pay you," and he kicked her down the stairs.

How are these evils to be eradicated? What have you to answer, you who sell coats and have shoes made and contract for the Southern and Western markets? What help is there, what panacea, what redemption? Some say, "Give women the ballot." What effect such ballot might have on other questions I am not here to discuss, but what would be the effect of female suffrage upon woman's wages? I do not believe that woman will ever get justice by woman's ballot.

Indeed, women oppress women as much as men do. Do not women, as much as men, beat down to the lowest figure the woman who sews for them? Are not women as sharp as men on washerwomen and milliners and mantua makers? If a woman asks a dollar for her work, does not her female employer ask her if she will not take 90 cents? You say, "Only 10 cents' difference," but that is sometimes the difference between Heaven and hell. Women have often less commiseration for woman than men. If a woman steps aside from the path of virtue, man may forgive—woman, never! Woman will never get justice done her from woman's ballot.

The Flaming Sword.

Never will she get it from man's ballot. How, then? God will rise up for her. God has more resources than we know of. The flaming sword that hung at Eden's gate when woman was driven out will cleave with its terrible edge her oppressors.

But there is something for our women to do. Let our young people prepare to excel in spheres of work, and they will be able after awhile to get larger wages. If it be shown that a woman can in a store sell more goods in a year than a man, she will soon be able not only to ask but to demand more wages, and to demand them successfully. Unskilled and incompetent labor must take what is given. Skilled and competent labor will eventually make its own standard. Admitting that the law of supply and demand regulates these things, I contend that the demand for skilled labor is very great and the supply very small.

Start with the idea that work is honorable and that you can do some one thing better than any one else. Resolve that, God helping, you will take care of yourself. If you are after awhile called into another relation, you will all the better be qualified for it by your spirit of self reliance, or if you are called to stay as you are you can be happy and self supporting.

Her Freckles and Her Sins.

What will become of this godless disciple of fashion? What an insult to her sex! Her manners are an outrage upon decency. She is more thoughtful of the attitude she strikes upon the carpet than how she will look in the judgment; more worried about her freckles than her sins; more interested in her bonnet strings than in her redemption. Her apparel is the poorest part of a Christian woman, however magnificently dressed, and no one has so much right to dress well as a Christian. Not so with the godless disciple of fashion. Take her robes, and you take everything. Death will come down on her some day and rub the bistre off her eyelids and the rouge off her cheeks, and with two rough, bony hands scatter spangles and glass beads and rings and ribbons and lace and brooches and buckles and sashes and frisettes and golden clasps.

The dying actress, whose life had been vicious, said: "The scene closes. Draw the curtain." Generally tragedy comes first and the farce afterward, but in her life it was first the farce of a useless life and then the tragedy of a wretched eternity.

Compare the life and death of such a one with that of some Christian aunt that was once a blessing to your household. I do not know that she was ever offered a hand in marriage. She lived single, that untrammeled she might be everybody's blessing. Whenever the sick were to be visited, or the poor to be provided with bread, she went with a blessing. She could pray or sing "Rock of Ages" for any sick pauper who asked her. As she got older there were days when she was a little sharp, but for the most part auntie was a sunbeam—just the one for Christmas eve. She knew better than any one else how to fix things. Her every prayer, as God heard it, was full of everybody who had trouble. The brightest things in all the house dropped from her fingers. She had peculiar notions, but the grandest notion she ever had was to make you happy. She dressed well—auntie always dressed well—but her highest adornment was that of a meek and quiet spirit, which, in the sight of God, is of great price. When she died, you all gathered lovingly about her, and as you carried her out to rest the Sunday school class almost covered the coffin with japonicas, and the poor people stood at the end of the alley, with their aprons to their eyes, sobbing bitterly, and the man of the world said, with Solomon, "Her price was above rubies," and Jesus, as unto the maiden in Judæa, commanded, "I say unto thee, arise!"

A Ring's Autobiography.

Picking up from the sidewalk, the other morning, what appeared to be a gold ring, with empty claws showing the removal of a stone, the finder took it to a jeweler on Eleventh street for inspection. He examined it for a few minutes under a magnifying glass, and said: "Yes, this is a gold ring of 14 carats. The stone it contained was a ½-carat diamond. It was worn a number of years on a slender woman's third finger. Then it changed hands, and was enlarged by the insertion of a piece of gold of inferior alloy, and may have been worn on the third finger of a stout woman or the little finger of a man. The diamond was removed by a clumsy hand, probably by a thief, who either accidently dropped the ring or threw it away where you found it. I never saw the ring before, but plainly read its history by the same process of observation, analysis, and deduction that an Indian unconsciously employs in detecting the testimony of a forest trail."—Philadelphia Record.

Misplaced.

It is a curious fact that success is sometimes won by those who have no enthusiasm for the profession they follow. Fanny Kemble was by no means fond of acting, and would gladly have left the stage earlier, had not circumstances bound her there.

A brilliant young violinist played one day for Mrs. Gladstone, and the latter said to her.

"Is there anything you care more for than your St Adriatic us?"

The young lady colored a little. "The violin is not an absorbing passion with me," she replied modestly.

"Perhaps you have artistic talent?" the hostess suggested.

"Indeed, I have not," was the honest response. "But, Mrs. Gladstone, I love to cook. I really believe I could make a chef, if I had the opportunity to practice!"

Too Ambitious.

Many people who talk with simplicity and correctness become at once unnatural and awkward when they take up the pen. So it was with Johnny Bates.

In the reading lesson there was a reference to some one who had "contracted a cold," and the teacher called attention to the word "contracted. To "contract a cold," he explained, "meant nothing more than to catch a cold."

That afternoon Johnny had to write a composition, and like a sensible boy, chose for his subject an account of a fishing excursion. On the whole, it was a pretty creditable performance for a boy of Johnny's age, but the teacher was obliged to laugh when he came to this sentence.

"I fished half an hour, and contracted five perches and one hornpout."

Defined.

A servant-girl who was employed in a family in which there were several children became very much alarmed when one of them fell ill with scarlet fever. She was for leaving at once.

"You need not be afraid, Hetty," said her mistress. "We have isolated the little boy, and you need not go near him. Moreover, adults rarely take the disease."

An hour or two later Hetty was overheard saying to a fellow-servant:

"Julia, what does 'isolated' mean?"

"I don't exactly know," replied the brilliant Julia, "but I guess it means that they have put him on ice."

"That must be it. And what is an 'adult?'"

"I don't exactly know that, either; but I guess it means a girl who works out."

You hear a great deal about fate in the conversation of the shiftless.

The lowliest roof is often nearer Heaven than the loftiest steeple.

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