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THE JAILER'S QUERY.

"SIRS, WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?"

Rev. Dr. Talmage on the Converted Sheriff—A Question of Incomparable Importance—The Cry of an Agitated Soul—A Call to the Unconverted.

Our Weekly Sermon.

For the closing discourse of the year Rev. Dr. Talmage chose a subject which appeals to the unconverted everywhere—viz., "The Philippian Jailer." The text selected was, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"—Acts xvi., 30.

Incarcerated in a Philippian penitentiary, a place cold and dark and damp and loathsome and hideous, unilluminated save by the torch of the official who comes to see if they are alive yet, are two ministers of Christ, their feet fast in instruments of torture, their shoulders dripping from the stroke of leathern thongs, their mouths hot with inflammation of thirst, their heads faint because they may not lie down. In a comfortable room of that same building and amid pleasant surroundings is a paid officer of the Government whose business it is to supervise the prison. It is night, and all is still in the corridors of the dungeon save as some murderer struggles with a horrid dream, or a ruffian turns over in his chains, or there is the cough of a dying consumptive amid the dampness, but suddenly crash go the walls! The two clergymen pass out free. The jail keeper, although familiar with the darkness and the horrors hovering around the dungeon, is startled beyond all bounds, and, flambeau in hand, he rushes through amid the falling walls, shouting at the top of his voice, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

I stand now among those who are asking the same question with more or less earnestness, and I accost you in this crisis of your soul with a message from heaven. There are those in this audience who might be more skillful in argument than I am; there are those here who can dive into deeper depths of science, or have larger knowledge; there are in this audience those before whom I would willingly bow as the inferior to the superior, but I yield to no one in this assemblage in a desire to have all the people saved by the power of an omnipotent gospel.

The Freeing of Paul and Silas.

I shall proceed to characterize the question of the agitated jail keeper. And, first, I characterize the question as courteous. He might have rushed in and said: "Paul and Silas, you vagabonds, are you tearing down this prison? Aren't you satisfied with disturbing the peace of the city by your infamous doctrines? And are you now going to destroy public property? Back with you to your places, you vagabonds!" He said no such thing. The word of four letters, "sirs," equivalent to "lords," recognized the majesty and the honor of their mission. Sirs! If a man with a captious spirit tries to find the way to heaven he will miss it. If a man comes out and pronounces all Christians as hypocrites, and the religion of Jesus Christ as a fraud, and asks irritating questions about the mysterious and the inscrutable, saying, "Come, my wise man, explain this and explain that; if this be true, how can that be true?" no such man finds the way to heaven. The question of the text was decent, courteous, gentlemanly, deferential. Sirs!

Again, I characterize this question of the agitated jail keeper by saying that it was a practical question. He did not ask why God let sin come into the world, he did not ask how Christ could be God and man in the same person, he did not ask the doctrine of the decrees explained or want to know whom Cain married, or what was the cause of the earthquake. His present and everlasting welfare was involved in the question, and was not that practical? But I know multitudes of people who are bothering themselves about the nonessentials of religion. What would you think of a man who should, while discussing the question of the light and heat of the sun, spend his time down in a coal cellar when he might come out and see the one and feel the other? Yet there are multitudes of men who, in discussing the chemistry of the gospel, spend their time down in the dungeon of their unbelief when God all the while stands telling them to come out into the noonday light and warmth of the sun of righteousness. The question for you, my brother, to discuss is not whether Calvin or Arminius was right, not whether a handful of water in holy baptism or a baptistry is the better, not whether foreordination and free agency can be harmonized. The practical question for you to discuss and for me to discuss is, "Where will I spend eternity?"

A Personal Question.

Again, I characterize this question of the agitated jail keeper as one personal to himself. I have no doubt he had many friends, and he was interested in their welfare. I have no doubt he found that there were persons in that prison who, if the earthquake had destroyed them, would have found their case desperate. He is not questioning about them. The whole weight of his question turns on the pronoun "I." "What shall I do?" Of course, when a man becomes a Christian, he immediately becomes anxious for the salvation of other people, but until that point is reached the most important question is about your own salvation. "What is to be my destiny?" "What are my prospects for the future?" "Where am I going?" "What shall I do?" The trouble is we shuffle the responsibility off upon others. We prophesy a bad end to that inebriate and terrific exposure to that defaulter and awful catastrophe to that profligate. We are so busy in weighing other people we forget ourselves to get into the scales. We are so busy watching the poor gardens of other people that we let our own dooryard go to weeds. We are so busy sending off other people into the lifeboat we sink in the wave. We cry "Fire!" because our neighbor's house is burning down and seem to be uninterested, although our own house is in the conflagration. O wandering thoughts, disappear to-day. Blot out this entire audience except yourself. Your sin, is it pardoned? Your death, is it provided for? Your heaven, is it secured? A mightier earthquake than that which demolished the Philippian penitentiary will rumble about your ears. The foundations of the earth will give way. The earth by one tremor will fling all the American cities into the dust. Cathedrals and palaces and prisons which have stood for thousands of years will topple like a child's block-house. The surges of the sea will submerge the land, and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans above the Alps and the Andes clap their hands. What then will become of me? What then will become of you? I do not wonder at the anxiety of this man of my text, for he was not only anxious about the falling of the prison, but the falling of a world.

Oh, what a question—what an important question! Is there any question that compares with it in importance? What is it now to Napoleon III. whether he triumphed or surrendered at Sedan, whether he died at the Tuileries or Chislehurst, whether he was emperor or exile? Because he was laid out in the coffin in the dress of a field marshal did that give him any better chance for the future than if he had been laid out in a plain shroud? What difference will it soon make to you or to me whether in this world we walked or rode, whether we were bowed to or maltreated, whether we were applauded or hissed at, welcomed in or kicked out? While laying hold of every moment of the future and burning in every splendor or every grief and overarching or undergirding all time and all eternity will be the plain, startling, infinite, stupendous question of the text, "What must I do to be saved?"

The Philippian Jailer.

Again, I characterize this question of the agitated jail keeper as one crushed out by his misfortunes, pressed out by his misfortunes. The falling of the penitentiary, his occupation was gone. Besides that the flight of a prisoner was ordinarily the death of the jailer. He was held responsible. If all had gone well; if the prison walls had not been shaken of the earthquake; if the prisoners had all staid quiet in the stocks; if the morning sunlight had calmly dropped on the jailer's pillow, do you think he would have hurled this red-hot question from his soul into the ear of his apostolic prisoners? Ah, no! You know as well as I do it was the earthquake that roused him up. And it is trouble that starts a great many people to asking the same question. It has been so with a multitude of you. Your apparel is not as bright as it once was. Why have you changed the garb? Do you not like solferino and crimson and purple as well as once? Yes, but you say: "While I was prospered and happy those colors were accordant with my feelings. Now they would be discord to my soul." And so you have plaited up the shadows into your apparel. The world is a very different place from what is was once for you! Once you said, "Oh, if I could only have it quiet a little while!" It is too quiet.

Some people say that they would not bring back their departed friends from heaven even if they had the opportunity, but if you had the opportunity you would bring back your loved ones, and soon their feet would be sounding in the hall, and soon their voices would be heard in the family, and the old times would come back just as the festal days of Christmas and Thanksgiving—days gone forever. Oh, it is the earthquake that startled you to asking this question—the earthquake of domestic misfortune. Death is so cruel, so devouring, so relentless, that when it swallows up our loved ones we must have some one to whom we can carry our torn and bleeding hearts. We need a balsam better than anything that ever exuded from earthly tree to heal the pang of the soul. It is pleasant to have our friends gather around us and tell us how sorry they are and try to break up the loneliness, but nothing but the hand of Jesus Christ can take the bruised soul and put it in his bosom, hushing it with the lullaby of heaven. O brother! O sister! The gravestone will never be lifted from your heart until Christ lifts it. Was it not the loss of your friends, or the persecution of your enemies, or the overthrow of your worldly estate—was it not an earthquake that started you out to ask this stupendous question of my text?

How to Get an Answer.

But I remark again, I characterize this question of the agitated jail keeper as hasty, urgent and immediate. He put it on the run. By the light of his torch as he goes to look for the apostles behold his face, see the startled look and see the earnestness. No one can doubt by that look that the man is in earnest. He must have that question answered before the earth stops rocking, or perhaps he will never have it answered at all. Is that the way, my brother, my sister, you are putting this question? Is it on the run? Is it hasty? Is it urgent? Is it immediate? If it is not, it will not be answered. That is the only kind of question that is answered. It is the urgent and the immediate question of the gospel Christ answers. A great many are asking this question, but they drawl it out, and there is indifference in their manner as if they do not mean it. Make it an urgent question, and then you will have it answered before an hour passes. When a man with all the earnestness of his soul cries out for God, he finds him, and finds him right away.

Oh, are there not in this house to-day those who are postponing until the last hour of living the attending to the things of the soul? I give it as my opinion that ninety-nine out of the hundred deathbed repentances amount to nothing. Of all the scores of persons mentioned as dying in the Bible, of how many do you read that they successfully repented in the last hour? Of 50? No. Of 40? No. Of 30? No. Of 20? No. Of 10? No. Of 5? No. Of 1—only 1, barely 1, as if to demonstrate the fact that there is a bare possibility of repenting in the last hour. But that is improbable, awfully improbable, terrifically improbable. One hundred to one against the man. If, my brother, my sister, you have ever seen a man try to repent in the last hour, you have seen something very sad. I do not know anything on earth to sad as to see a man try to repent on a deathbed. There is not from the moment that life begins to breathe in infancy to the last gasp such an unfavorable, completely unfavorable, hour for repentance as the death hour, the last hour. There are the doctors standing with the medicines. There is the lawyer standing with the half written will. There is the family in consternation as to what is to become of them. All the bells of eternity ringing the soul out of the body. All the past rising before us and all the future. Oh, that man is an infinite fool who procrastinates to the deathbed his repentance!

Twelve Open Gates.

My text does not answer the question. It only asks it, with deep and importunate earnestness asks it, and, according to the rules of sermonizing, you would say, "Adjourn that to some other time." But I dare not. What are the rules of sermonizing to me when I am after souls? What other time could I have, when perhaps this is the only time? This might be my last time for preaching. This might be your last time for hearing.

After my friend in Philadelphia died his children gave his church Bible to me, and I read it; looked over it with much interest. I saw in the margin written in lead pencil, "Mr. Talmage said this morning that the most useless thing in all God's universe is that any sinner should perish." I did not remember saying it, but it is true, and I say it now, whether I said it then or not. The most useless thing in all God's universe is that any sinner should perish. Twelve gates wide open. Have you not heard how Christ bore our sorrows and how sympathetic he is with all our woes? Have you not heard how that with all the sorrows of the heart and all the agonies of hell upon him he cried: "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do?" By his feet blistered of the mountain way, by his back whipped until the skin came off, by his death couch of four spikes, two for the hands and two for the feet, by his sepulcher, in which for the first time for thirty-three years the cruel world let him alone, and by the heavens from which he now bends in compassion, offering pardon and peace and life eternal to all your souls, I beg of you put down your all at his feet.

Condemned to Death.

In the troubled times of Scotland Sir John Cochrane was condemned to death by the king. The death warrant was on the way. Sir John Cochrane was bidding farewell to his daughter Grizel at the prison door. He said: "Farewell, my darling child. I must die." His daughter said, "No, father, you shall not die." "But," he said, "the king is against me, and the law is after me, and the death warrant is on its way, and I must die. Do not deceive yourself, my dear child." The daughter said, "Father, you shall not die," as she left the prison gate. At night, on the moors of Scotland, a disguised wayfarer stood waiting for the horseman carrying the mailbags containing the death warrant. The disguised wayfarer, as the horse came by, clutched the bridle and shouted to the rider—to the man who carried the mailbags, "Dismount!" He felt for his arms and was about to shoot, but the wayfarer jerked him from his saddle, and he fell flat. The wayfarer picked up the mailbags, put them on his shoulder and vanished in the darkness, and fourteen days were thus gained for the prisoner's life, during which the father confessor was pleading for the pardon of Sir John Cochrane.

The second time the death warrant is on its way. The disguised wayfarer comes along and asks for a little bread and a little wine, starts on across the moors, and they say: "Poor man, to have to go out on such a stormy night. It is dark, and you will lose yourself on the moors." "Oh, no," he says, "I will not!" He trudged on and stopped amid the brambles and waited for the horseman to come carrying the mailbags containing the death warrant of Sir John Cochrane. The mail carrier spurred on his steed, for he was fearful because of what had occurred on the former journey, spurred on his steed, when suddenly through the storm and through the darkness there was a flash of firearms, and the horse became unmanageable, and as the mail carrier discharged his pistol in response the horse flung him, and the disguised wayfarer put his foot on the breast of the overthrown rider and said, "Surrender now!" The mail carrier surrendered his arms, and the disguised wayfarer put upon his shoulders the mailbags, leaped upon the horse and sped away into the darkness, gaining fourteen more days for the poor prisoner, Sir John Cochrane, and before the fourteen days had expired pardon had come from the king. The door of the prison swung open, and Sir John Cochrane was free. One day when he was standing amid his friends, they congratulating him, the disguised wayfarer appeared at the gate, and he said, "Admit him right away."

Pardon from the Throne.

The disguised wayfarer came in and said: "Here are two letters. Read them, sir, and cast them into the fire." Sir John Cochrane read them. They were his two death warrants, and he threw them into the fire. Then said Sir John Cochrane: "To whom am I indebted? Who is this poor wayfarer that saved my life? Who is it?" And the wayfarer pulled aside and pulled off the jerkin and cloak and the hat, and, lo, it was Grizel, the daughter of Sir John Cochrane. "Gracious heaven," he cried, "my child, my savior, my own Grizel!" But a more thrilling story. The death warrant had come forth from the King of heaven and earth. The death warrant read, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The death warrant coming on the black horse of eternal night. We must die. We must die. But breasting the storm and putting out through the darkness was a disguised wayfarer who gripped by the bridle the oncoming doom and flung it back and put his wounded and bleeding foot on the overthrown rider. Meanwhile pardon flashed from the throne, and, Go free! Open the gate! Strike off the chain! Go free! And to-day your liberated soul stands in the presence of the disguised wayfarer, and as he pulls off the disguise of his earthly humiliation, and the disguise of his thorns, and the disguise of the seamless robe, you find he is bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh, your Brother, your Christ, your pardon, your eternal life. Let all earth and heaven break forth in vociferation. Victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

A guilty, weak and helpless worm,
On thy kind arm I fall.
Be thou my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus and my all.

GOWNS AND GOWNING

WOMEN GIVE MUCH ATTENTION TO WHAT THEY WEAR.

Brief Glances at Fancies Feminine, Frivolous, Mayhap, and Yet Offered in the Hope that the Reading Prove Restful to Wearied Womankind.

Gossip from Gay Gotham.

New York correspondence:

BELITTLE the work of fashion-makers as best they can, the critics of our brand-new year will find themselves weak in one respect. They cannot in reason find fault with all of the current rules of women's dress, and whatever the captious fault-finder picks out as the target for her volleys of wrath, there's pretty sure to be some dainty and fashionable alternative that will present itself at once. For, mark you, the fashions' code of 1896 says, if you don't like it this way, then have it that. There's no end to the possibilities. There's not only no excuse for not looking your best—there is never that—but there's not the slightest need of being in the smallest degree unfashionable at the same time. Begin at the top; you may wear your hair in whatever manner it looks best. Pass down to your dresses, and you may choose from a half-dozen centuries for

PLAIN OF CUT, BUT BRIGHTLY TRIMMED.

their key-notes. If you look well in a sumptuous rig, you may dress like a queen and wear real diamond crowns on your head, as the leaders of our social upper crust do at the opera; or, if you look more charming in a simplicity get-up, you may be unconventional and yet stylish, and as demure as ever was a Puritan Dorothy.

In the later role you may put yourself into a dresden figured dainty silk, full at the waist with the bodice all covered by the folds of a voluminous fichu, and the sleeves quaintly off the shoulder and puffed at the elbow; in the first role, you may wear court trains, jewelled crowns, real gold embroidery, and goodness knows what all. You may spend all the money your husband has and all he can borrow—that's a possibility with every new year—and yet with good taste to guide not overdress.

In the pictures the more simple dresses come first, the first two being suggestive of tailor styles, till knowledge of their materials and construction proves them to be otherwise. The first of these was found in dark-green cloth, its skirt trimmed with bias folds that extended upward at the left side after going all around near the hem. Your critic will quickly espy the buttons on this nearly perpendicular end, and will stoutly insist that there's

THE OVERSKIRT THAT LINGERS.

neither use nor sense in them, but anyone who is qualified to criticise dress matters knows that buttons may go anywhere, for no better reason than "just because," the reason the little girl gave for putting dolly's hat on back side in front, so here's no fault. At back and front this bodice terminated at the waist, but its sides formed tabs that were draped in cascades at one edge and finished with bias folds and buttons at the other. Just above the waist the bodice was cut away in front to show a white silk vest and from this to the neck there was a box-pleat of the silk decorated with buttons, and pieces of the same material were set into the sleeve cuffs.

Dark blue cloth was the fabric of the second pictured dress, blue and gold galloon being very freely used for trimming. With its jacket bodice was worn a blue silk blouse front finished with

CLOTH, FUR AND LACE COMBINED.

belt and collar to match, the jacket having revers and turned down collar of dark blue velvet edged with the galloon. Its seams were strapped with the galloon, and a border ran around the hem. Then the sleeves had a row around the cuffs a few inches from the wrists, and its employment on the skirt was as indicated. Blue shot silk was used for the jacket's lining.

Months and months ago women were expressing wonder on the slowness with which the overskirt refused to give up its attempt at general acceptance, and since then this style's persistency has become an old story. Even now it is occasionally seen on new dresses and is then found in good company and is usually worn by some very careful dresser. It is the apron form that is presented here, cut from green cloth, the skirt proper having a band of sable about its hem. This bodice fastens at the side and has a deep pleated yoke and a plain corselet part. The garniture consists of a series of straps of white ribbon with Dresden figures, ending in jet fringe. A fur band tops the stock collar.

While there is less of glitter in the next dress that the artist presents than in the last one described, there is, nevertheless, a great degree of richness. Made of smooth, satin-finished cloth, its skirt is cut away, as shown, from

SLASHED FOR ORNAMENTAL PURPOSES.

a wide band of fur, two jet stars ornamenting each of the tabs at the side. Alternate bands of fur and cloth make the bodice, the latter being covered with lace. At the bottom there is a tiny basque, and at the top a yoke and medici collar of fur. Black satin gives the belt, the sleeves being of the cloth. Whatever fur is chosen for the dress trimming should be matched in the muff, and should be used, freely or sparingly, as is preferred, upon the hat.

A less expensive method than this of attaining a suggestion of the petticoat modes is depicted in the final illustration. Here the material is dark-brown cloth, finely striped with lighter brown, and the two slashes are strapped with brown silk cord and buttons, and are filled with tiny dark brown velvet panels. This is repeated in slightly modified form upon the sleeves, while on the bodice the slashes show velvet insertions without the cording. The collar is of brown velvet covered with rich cream guipure, and is square in back, but in front there is a tab that extends to the waist. It is in one with the collar, which is finished with a chiffon ruching.

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Hat "bodies" have been made of cork, of willow, of palmetto, and many other substances.

LITERARY LITTLEBITS

Mr. W. D. Howells' forthcoming novel is to be entitled "The Landlord of the Lion's Head." It is a story of American summer hotel life.

"Taquisara" is the title of F. Marion Crawford's new story, a dramatic picture of Italian life and character. The story will run serially in the London Queen.

A new edition of Robert Louis Stevenson's little book, "The Child's Garden of Verses," is to be issued, illustrated by Charles Robinson, a young English artist.

The new edition of Byron's works is to be issued in ten handsome volumes. The addition to the poems of the letters of Byron was an excellent idea on the part of the editor, W. E. Henley.

A timely book published is "The City of the Sultans; or, Constantinople, the Sentinel of the Bosphorus," by Clara Erskine Clement, who contributed "The Queen of the Adriatic" and "Naples" to the Italian Cities Series.

Edwin Lester Arnold, the son of Sir Edwin Arnold, publishes "The Story of Ulla, Etc." This is not Mr. Arnold's first essay in fiction; his "Phra the Phoenician" was a success a year or so ago, and he has written other stories.

"The Poor in the Great Cities" brings together the best experience in dealing with the problems of the poor. The authors contributing to the volume are Walter Besant, Oscar Craig, W. T. Elsing, Joseph Kirkland, J. W. Mario, J. A. Riis, E. R. Spearman, Willard Parsons, W. J. Tucker and Robert A. Woods. The work will be illustrated, and will contain an appendix on tenement house building by Ernest Flagg.

The new "Cyclopedia of Architecture in Italy, Greece, and the Levant," is an elaborate and exhaustive work. There are twelve full-page plates and over two hundred and fifty text illustrations, also a glossary and a carefully edited bibliography. The work will be issued in a handsome quarto, decorated parchment binding, uniform with the "Cyclopedia of Painters and Painting" and "Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians," the edition limited to five hundred copies for America and England.

Badger Dog for His Pet.

At the foot of the middle butte of the Sweet Grass Hills in Montana lives a miner named Byron Banner. He is practically a recluse, seldom associating with any neighbors, or even talking to them. He works his claim all alone, and no one knows whether he is rich or poor.

Like most recluses, he has his pet, but Banner's pet is so uncommon, even unnatural, that it deserves to be put on record. This pet, says the Dupuyer Acantha, is a badger-dog. The animal is small, and has the feet and legs of a badger, while the body resembles a dog.

Its claws have to be trimmed every few months, as they grow out of all proportion to the foot. When it walks it has the peculiar waddle of a badger. Its bark is somewhat similar to that of the lapdog. It will bite savagely when teased, but is otherwise perfectly docile.

A cross between a wolf or coyote and a dog is not uncommon, nor it is so much of a freak, since they belong to the same family. But a cross between different families, as the dog and badger, is something for naturalists and evolutionists to think about.

Without Reptiles.

One hundred frogs taken from the marshes near Berlin have been imported into Iceland, where these animals are unknown. Certain portions of the island are infested by swarms of gnats and flies, and these frogs were imported to do away with the plague. The inhabitants near Lake Myvatn (meaning Mosquito water) must wear wire nets over the face and hands to protect themselves from the painful stings of the gnats. A Danish physician, Dr. Ehlers, was the first to propose the importation of frogs, since reptiles were absolutely unknown in Iceland. The entire batrachian colony was set free near a warm spring in the environs of Reykjavik, where after the long confinement of the sea voyage they disappeared, quacking happily. It was interesting to note how the native ducks drew away from the novel intruders, being evidently frightened at the unwonted apparition of a jumping animal that could swim.

Not Worthy a Wife.

The missing bridegroom is getting numerous. The latest one's absence from the wedding ceremony is said to have been due to his excessive bashfulness. A man who is too modest to attend his own wedding doesn't deserve a wife, and he isn't likely to get one.—Boston Herald.

American Excels in Electricity.

Hans Lepke says America is far ahead of any other country in the use of electricity.