A GRAND EXAMPLE.

Dr. Talmage on the Foundations of True Christianity.

Nehemiah's Wonderful Midnight Visit to Jerusalem in Ruins and the Lesson it Teaches—God Always the Best Friend.

In a recent sermon at the Brooklyn Tabernacle Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage's subject was "The Moonlight Ride," and the text, Nehemiah ii. 15: "Then I went up in the night by the brook and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned." He said:

A dead city is more suggestive than a living city—past Rome than present Rome—ruins rather than newly-frescoed cathedral. But the best time to visit a ruin is by moonlight. The colosseum is far more fascinating to the traveler after sundown than before. You may stand by daylight amid the monastic ruins of Melrose Abbey and study shafted oriel and rosetted stone and mullion, but they throw their strongest witchery by moonlight. Some of you remember what the enchanter of Scotland said in the "Lay of the Last Minstrel:"

"Wouldst thou view fair Melrose aright,
Go visit it by the pale moonlight."

Washington Irving describes the Andalusian moonlight upon the Alhambra ruins as amounting to an enchantment. My text presents you Jerusalem in ruins. The tower down. The gates down. The walls down. Every thing down. Nehemiah on horseback, by moonlight looking upon the ruins. While he rides, there are some friends on foot going with him, for they do not want the many horses to disturb the suspicions of the people. These people do not know the secret of Nehemiah's heart, but they are going as a sort of body guard. I hear the clicking hoofs of the horse on which Nehemiah rides, as he guides it this way and that, into this gate and out of that, winding through that gate amid the debris of once great Jerusalem. Now the horse comes to a dead halt at the masonry where he can not pass. Now he shies off at the charred timbers. Now he comes along where the water under the moonlight flashes from the mouth of the brazen dragon after which the gate was named.

Heavy hearted Nehemiah. Riding in and out, now by his old home desolated, now by the defaced temple, now amid the scars of the city that had gone down under battering ram and conflagration. The escorting party knows not what Nehemiah means. Is he getting crazy? Have his own personal sorrows, added to the sorrows of the nation, unbalanced his intellect? Still the midnight exploration goes on. Nehemiah on horse back rides through the fish gate, by the tower of the furnaces, by the King's pool, by the dragon well, in and out, until the midnight ride is completed, and Nehemiah dismounts from his horse, and to the amazed and confounded and incredulous body guard, declares the dead secret of his heart when he says: "Come, now, let us build Jerusalem." "What, Nehemiah, have you any money?" "No." "Have you any kingly authority?" "No." "Have you any eloquence?" "No." Yet that midnight, moonlight ride of Nehemiah resulted in the glorious rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. The people knew not how the thing was to be done, but with great enthusiasm they cried out, "Let us rise up now and build the city." Some people laughed and said it could not be done. Some people were infuriate and offered physical violence, saying the thing should not be done. But the workmen went right on, standing on the wall, trowel in one hand, sword in the other, until the work was gloriously completed. At that very time, in Greece, Xenophon was writing a history, and Plato was making philosophy, and Demosthenes was rattling his rhetorical thunder, but all of them together did not do so much for the world as this midnight, moonlight ride of prying, courageous, homesick, close-mouthed Nehemiah.

My subject first impresses me with the idea what an intense thing is church affection. Seize the bridle of that horse and stop Nehemiah. Why you are risking your life here in night? Your horse will stumble over these ruins and fall on you. Stop this useless exposure of your life. No; Nehemiah will not stop. He at last tells us the whole story. He lets us know he was an exile in a far-distant land, and he was a servant, a cup-bearer in the palace of Artaxerxes Longimanus, and one day while he was handing the cup of wine to the King, the King said to him, "What is the matter with you? You are not sick. I know you must have had some great trouble. What is the matter with you?" Then he told the King how that beloved Jerusalem was knocked down, how that his father's tomb had been desecrated; how that the temple had been dishonored and defaced; how that the walls was scattered and broken. "Well," says King Artaxerxes, "what do you want?" "Well," said the cup-bearer Nehemiah, "I want to go home. I want to fix up the grave of my father. I want to restore the beauty of the temple. I want to rebuild the masonry of the city wall. Besides, I want passports so that I shall not be hindered in my journey. And besides that," as you will find in the context, "I want an order on the man who keeps your forest for just so much timber as I may need for the rebuilding of the city."

"How long shall you be gone?" said the King. The time of absence is arranged. In hot haste this seeming adventurer comes to Jerusalem, and in my text we find him on horseback, in the midnight, riding around the ruins. It is through the spectacles of this scene that we discover the ardent attachment of Nehemiah for sacred Jerusalem, which in all ages has been the type of the Church of God, our Jerusalem, which we love just as much as Nehemiah loved his Jerusalem. The fact is that you love the Church of God so much that there is no spot on earth so sacred, unless it is your own fireside. The Church has been to you so much comfort and illumination that nothing makes you so irate as to have it talked against. If there have been times when you have been carried into captivity by sickness, you longed for the Church, our holy Jerusalem, just as much as Nehemiah longed for his Jerusalem, and the first day you came out you came to the house of the Lord.

When the temple was in ruins as ours was years ago, like Nehemiah, you walked around and looked at it, and in the moonlight you stood listening if you could not hear the voice of the dead organ, the psalm of the expired Sabbaths. What Jerusalem was to Nehemiah the Church of God is to you. Skeptics and infidels may scoff at the Church as an obsolete affair, as a relic of the dark ages, as a convention of goody-goody people, but all the impression they have ever made on your mind against the Church of God is absolutely nothing. You would make more sacrifices for it to-day than for any other institution, and if it were needful you would die in its defense. You can take the words of the kingly poet as he said, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning." You understand in your own experience the pathos, the home-sickness, the courage, the holy enthusiasm of Nehemiah in his midnight, moonlight ride around the ruins of his beloved Jerusalem.

Again, my text impresses me with the fact that before reconstruction there must be an exploration of ruins. Why was not Nehemiah asleep under the covers? Why was not his horse stabled in the midnight? Let the police of the city arrest this midnight rider out on some mischief. No, Nehemiah is in no mischief. He is in the service of the King. He is on a mission of patriotism. He is on a mission of philanthropy. He is on a mission of religion. He is on a mission of God. He is a type of those who are in the service of God, and who are willing to go out at any time, and in any way, and through any difficulties, and amid any discouragements, to do the work that God has assigned them. Why, I see in this midnight ride of Nehemiah a type of those who are willing to go out in the midnight of sorrow, and in the midnight of bereavement, and in the midnight of sickness, and in the midnight of poverty, and in the midnight of sin, and in the midnight of death