

TALMAGE'S SERMON.

STORY OF THE HEROIC RESCUE OF ISAAC.

Golden Text: Behold the Fire and the Wood, But Where is the Lamb?—Gen 22-7 Abraham's Supreme Trial—Delivered Oct. 13, 1895.



HERE are Abraham and Isaac: the one a kind, old, gracious, affectionate father; the other a brave, obedient, religious son. From his bronzed appearance you can tell that this son has been much in the fields, and from his shaggy dress you know that he has been watching the herds. The mountain air has painted his cheek rufous. He is twenty, or twenty-five, or, as some suppose, thirty-three years of age; nevertheless a boy, considering the length of life to which people lived in those times, and the fact that a son never is anything but a boy to a father. I remember that my father used to come into the house when the children were home on some festival occasion, and say: "Where are the boys?" although "the boys" were twenty-five, and thirty, and thirty-five years of age. So this Isaac is only a boy to Abraham, and his father's heart is in him. It is Isaac here and Isaac there. If there is any festivity around the father's tent, Isaac must enjoy it. It is Isaac's walk, and Isaac's apparel, and Isaac's manners, and Isaac's prospects, and Isaac's prosperity. The father's heart-strings are all wrapped around that boy, and wrapped again, until nine-tenths of the old man's life is in Isaac. I can just imagine how lovingly and proudly he looked at his only son.

Well, the dear old man had borne a great deal of trouble, and it had left its mark upon him. In hieroglyphics of wrinkle the story was written from forehead to chin. But now his trouble seems all gone, and we are glad that he is very soon to rest forever. If the old man shall get decrepit, Isaac is strong enough to wait on him. If the father get dim of eyesight, Isaac will lead him by the hand. If the father become destitute, Isaac will earn him bread. How glad we are that the ship that has been in such a stormy sea is coming at last into the harbor. Are you not rejoiced that glorious old Abraham is through with his troubles? No! no! A thunderbolt! From that clear eastern sky there drops into that father's tent a voice with an announcement enough to turn black hair white, and to stun the patriarch into instant annihilation. God said: "Abraham!" The old man answered: "Here I am." God said to him: "Take thy son, thy only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt-offering." In other words, slay him; cut his body into fragments; put the fragments on the wood; set fire to the wood, and let Isaac's body be consumed to ashes.

"Cannibalism! Murder!" says some one. "Not so," said Abraham. I hear him soliloquize: "Here is the boy on whom I have depended! Oh, how I loved him! He was given in answer to prayer, and now must I surrender him? O Isaac, my son! Isaac, how shall I part with you? But then it is always safer to do as God asks me to; I have been in dark places before, and God got me out. I will implicitly do as God has told me, although it is very dark. I can't see my way, but I know God makes no mistakes, and to him I commit myself and my darling son." Early in the morning there is a stir around Abraham's tent. A beast of burden is fed and saddled. Abraham makes no disclosure of the awful secret. At the break of day he says: "Come, come, Isaac, get up! We are going off on a two or three days' journey." I hear the axe hewing and splitting amid the wood until the sticks are made the right length and the right thickness, and then they are fastened on the beast of burden. They pass on—there are four of them—Abraham, the father; Isaac, the son; and two servants. Going along the road, I see Isaac looking up into his father's face, and saying: "Father, what is the matter? Are you not well? Has anything happened? Are you tired? Lean on my arm." Then, turning around to the servants, the son says: "Ah! father is getting old, and he has had trouble enough in other days to kill him."

The third morning has come, and it is the day of the tragedy. The two servants are left with the beast of burden, while Abraham and his son Isaac, as was the custom of good people in those times, went up on the hill to sacrifice to the Lord. The wood is taken off the beast's back, and put on Isaac's back. Abraham has in one hand a pair of coals or a lamp, and in the other a sharp, keen knife. Here are all the appliances for sacrifice, you say. No, there is one thing wanting; there is no victim—no pigeon, or heifer, or lamb. Isaac, not knowing that he is to be the victim, looks up into his father's face, and asks a question which must have cut the old man to the bone: "My father!" The father said: "My son, Isaac, here I am." The son said: "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb?" The father's lip quivered, and his heart faint, and his knees knocked together, and his entire body, mind and soul shivered in sickening anguish as he struggles to gain equipoise; for he does not want to break down. And then he looks into his son's face, with a thousand rushing tendernesses, and says: "My son, God will provide himself a lamb."

The twain are now at the foot of

the hill, the place which is to be famous for a most transcendent occurrence. They gather some stones out of the field, and build an altar of three or four feet high. Then they take this wood off Isaac's back and sprinkle it over the stones, so as to help and invite the flame. The altar is done—it is all done. Isaac has helped to build it. With his father he has discussed whether the top of the table is even, and whether the wood is properly prepared. Then there is a pause. The son looks around to see if there is not some living animal that can be caught and butchered for the offering. Abraham tries to choke down his fatherly feelings and suppress his grief, in order that he may break to his son the terrific news that he is to be the victim. Ah! Isaac never looked more beautiful than on that day to his father. As the old man ran his emaciated fingers through his son's hair, he said to himself: "How shall I give him up? What will his mother say when I come back without my boy? I thought he would have been the comfort of my declining days. I thought he would have been the hope of ages to come. Beautiful and loving, and yet to die under my own hand. Oh, God! is there not some other sacrifice that will do? Take my life, and spare his! Pour out my blood, and save Isaac for his mother and the world!" But this was an inward struggle. The father controls his feelings, and looks into his son's face, and says: "Isaac, must I tell you all?" His son said: "Yes, father. I thought you had something on your mind; tell it." The father said: "My son, Isaac, thou art the lamb!" "Oh," you say, "why didn't that young man, if he was twenty or thirty years of age, smite into the dust his infirm father? He could have done it." Ah! Isaac knew by this time that the scene was typical of a Messiah who was to come, and so he made no struggle. They fell on each other's necks, and wailed out the parting. Awful and matchless scene of the wilderness. The rocks echo back the breaking of their hearts. The cry: "My son! my son!" The answer: "My father! my father!"

Do not compare this, as some people have, to Agamemnon, willing to offer up his daughter, Iphigenia, to please the gods. There is nothing comparable to this wonderful obedience to the true God. You know that victims for sacrifice were always bound, so that they might not struggle away. Rawlings, the martyr, when he was dying for Christ's sake, said to the blacksmith who held the manacles: "Fasten those chains tight now, for my flesh may struggle mightily." So Isaac's arms are fastened, his feet are tied. The old man, rallying all his strength, lifts him on to a pile of wood. Fastening a thong on one side of the altar, he makes it span the body of Isaac, and fastens the thong at the other side the altar, and another thong, and another thong. There is the lamp flickering in the wind, ready to be put under the brush-wood of the altar. There is the knife, sharp and keen. Abraham, struggling with his mortal feelings on the one side, and the commands of God on the other—takes that knife, rubs the flat of it on the palm of his hand, cries to God for help, comes up to the side of the altar, puts a parting kiss on the brow of his boy, takes a message from him for mother and home, and then, lifting the glittering weapon for the plunge of the death-stroke—his muscles knitting for the work—the hand begins to descend. It falls! Not on the heart of Isaac, but on the arm of God, who arrests the stroke, making the wilderness quake with the cry: "Abraham! Abraham! lay not thy hand upon the lad, nor do him any harm!"

What is this sound back in the woods! It is a crackling as of tree branches, a bleating and a struggle. Go, Abraham, and see what it is. Oh, it was a ram that, going through the woods, has its crooked horns fastened and entangled in the brushwood, and could not get loose; and Abraham seizes it gladly, and quickly unloosens Isaac from the altar, puts the ram on in his place, sets the lamp under the brushwood of the altar, and as the dense smoke of the sacrifice begins to rise, the blood rolls down the sides of the altar, and drops hissing into the fire, and I hear the words: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

Well, what are you going to get out of this? There is an aged minister of the Gospel. He says: "I should get out of it that when God tells you to do a thing, whether it seems reasonable to you or not, go ahead and do it. Here Abraham couldn't have been mistaken. God didn't speak so indistinctly that it was not certain whether he called Sarah, or Abimelech, or somebody else; but with divine articulation, divine intonation, divine emphasis, he said: 'Abraham!' Abraham rushed blindly ahead to do his duty, knowing that things would come out right. Likewise do so yourselves. There is a mystery of your life. There is some burden you have to carry. You don't know why God has put it on you. There is some persecution, some trial, and you don't know why God allows it. There is a work for you to do, and you have not enough grace, you think, to do it. Do as Abraham did. Advance, and do your whole duty. Be willing to give up Isaac, and perhaps you will not have to give up anything. 'Jehovah-jireh—the Lord will provide.' A capital lesson this old minister gives us. Out yonder, in this house, is an aged woman; the light of heaven in her face; she is half-way through the door; she has her hand on the pearl of the gate. Mother, what would you get out of this subject? 'Oh,' she says, 'I would learn that it is in the last pinch that God comes to the relief. You see the altar was ready, and Isaac was fastened on it, and the knife was lifted; and just at the last moment God broke in and stopped proceedings. So it has been

in my life of seventy years. Why, sir, there was a time when the flour was all out of the house; and I set the table at noon and had nothing to put on it; but five minutes of one o'clock a loaf of bread came. The Lord will provide. My son was very sick, and I said: 'Dear Lord, you don't mean to take him away from me, do you? Please, Lord, don't take him away. Why, there are neighbors who have three and four sons; this is my only son; this is my Isaac. Lord, you won't take him away from me, will you?' But I saw he was getting worse and worse all the time, and I turned round and prayed, until after awhile I felt submissive, and I could say: 'Thy will, O Lord, be done!' The doctors gave him up. And, as was the custom in those times, we had made the grave-clothes, and we were whispering about the last exercises when I looked, and I saw some perspiration on his brow, showing that the fever had broken, and he spoke to us so naturally, that I knew that he was going to get well. He did get well, and my son Isaac, whom I thought was going to be slain and consumed of disease, was loosened from that altar. And bless your souls, that's been so for seventy years; and if my voice were not so weak, and if I could see better, I could preach to you younger people a sermon; for though I can't see much, I can see this: whenever you get into a tough place, and your heart is breaking, if you will look a little farther into the woods, you will see, caught in the branches, a substitute and a deliverance. 'My son, God will provide himself a lamb.' Thank you, mother, for that short sermon. I could preach back to you for a minute or two and say, never do you fear. I wish I had half as good hope of heaven as you have. Do not fear, mother; whatever happens, no harm will ever happen to you. I was going up a long flight of stairs; and I saw an aged woman, very decrepit, and with a cane, creeping on up. She made but very little progress, and I felt very exuberant; and I said to her: 'Why, mother, that is no way to go up-stairs;' and I threw my arms around her and I carried her up and put her down on the landing at the top of the stairs. She said: 'Thank you, thank you; I am very thankful.' O mother, when you get through this life's work and you want to go up-stairs and rest in the good place that God has provided for you, you will not have to climb up—you will not have to crawl up painfully. The two arms that were stretched on the cross will be flung around you, and you will be hoisted with a glorious lift beyond all weariness and all struggle. May the God of Abraham and Isaac be with you until you see the Lamb on the hill-tops.

Now, that aged minister has made a suggestion, and this aged woman has made a suggestion; I will make a suggestion: Isaac going up the hill makes me think of the great sacrifice, Isaac, the only son of Abraham. Jesus, the only Son of God. On those two "onlys" I build a tearful emphasis. O Isaac! O Jesus! But this last sacrifice was a most tremendous one. When the knife was lifted over Calvary, there was no voice that cried "Stop" and no hand arrested it. Sharp, keen, and tremendous, it cut down through nerve and artery until the blood sprayed the faces of the executioners, and the mid-day sun dropped a veil of cloud over its face because it could not endure the spectacle. O Isaac, of Mount Moriah! O Jesus, of Mount Calvary! Better could God have thrown away into annihilation a thousand worlds than to have sacrificed his only Son. It was not one of ten sons—it was his only Son. If he had not given up him, you and I would have perished. "God so loved the world that he gave his only—" I stop there, not because I have forgotten the quotation, but because I want to think: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Great God! break my heart at the thought of that sacrifice. Isaac the only, typical of Jesus the Only.

You see Isaac going up the hill and carrying the wood. O Abraham, why not take the load off the boy? If he is going to die so soon, why not make his last hours easy? Abraham knew that in carrying that wood up Mount Moriah, Isaac was to be a symbol of Christ carrying his own cross up Calvary. I do not know how heavy that cross was—whether it was made of oak, or acacia, or Lebanon cedar. I suppose it may have weighed one, or two, or three hundred pounds. That was the heaviest part of the burden. All the sins and sorrows of the world were wound around that cross. The heft of one, the heft of two worlds: earth and hell were on his shoulders. O Isaac, carrying the wood of sacrifice up Mount Moriah. O Jesus, carrying the wood of sacrifice up Mount Calvary, the agonies of earth and hell wrapped around that cross. I shall never see the heavy load on Isaac's back, that I shall not think of the crushing load on Christ's back. For whom that load? For you. For you. For me. For me. Would that all the tears that we have ever wept over our sorrows had been saved until this morning, and that we might now pour them out on the lacerated back and feet and heart of the Son of God.

C. S. Phelps and Henry Ruggen of Ottawa, Ill., were killed by a train near that place.

Christopher Dalton died in jail at Nevada, Mo., of consumption.

A handsome female photographer ought to do a good business with her taking ways.

It is as easy for some men to be witty as it is difficult for some to be otherwise than dull.

"Never play at any game of chance." The man who hides four aces in his sleeve observes this rule.

A courtesy or kindness on the part of a stranger should be received in the spirit in which it is meant.

Some years ago as I sat on the piazza of a summer hotel, I noticed among the crowd a party of young people—two or three pretty girls and as many bright young men—all "waiting for the mail."

"Oh, dear," said the prettiest of the girls, impatiently, "why don't they hurry? Are you expecting a letter, Mr. Allison?"

And she turned to a tall youth standing near.

"I'll get one surely," he said. "It's my day. Just this peculiar letter always comes. Nell is awfully good; she's my sister, you know; and no fellow ever had a better one."

The pretty girl laughed, saying as he received his letter:

"Harry would think he was blessed if I wrote once a year."

Gradually the others drifted away; but Frank Allison kept his place, scanning eagerly the closely written sheets, now and again laughing quietly. Finally, he slipped the letter into his pocket, and, rising, saw me.

"Good morning, Miss Williams," he said, cordially; for he always had a pleasant word for his older people.

"Good news?" I questioned, smiling.

"My sister's letters always bring good

news," he answered. "She writes such jolly letters."

And, unfolding this one, he read me scraps of it—bright nothings, with here and there a little sentence full of sisterly love and tenderness. There was a steady light in his eyes, as, half apologizing for "boring" me, he looked up and said quietly:

"Miss Williams, if I ever make anything of a man it will be sister Nell's doing."

And as I looked at him I felt strongly what a mighty power "sister Nell" held in her hands—just a woman's hands like yours, dear girls, and perhaps no stronger or better; but it made me wonder how many girls stop to consider over those boys growing so fast toward manhood, unworthy or noble, as the sister may choose.

There is but one way, dear girls—begin at once while they are still boys of the home circle, ready to come to "sister" with anything. Let them feel that you love them. These great, honest boy hearts are both tender and loyal, and if you stand by these lads now while they are neither boys nor men, while they are awkward and heedless, they will remember it when they become the courteous, polished gentlemen you desire to see them. Do not snub them; nothing hurts a loving boy's soul more than a snub, and nothing more effectually closes the boy heart than thoughtless ridicule.

Bible Proof.

"Madam," said a tramp to the lady of the house, "will you please give a man that is out work something to eat?"

"Yes, sir, if you will go to the woodpile yonder and split wood awhile."

"Oh, I am so hungry!" he pleaded. "Won't you give me a bite to eat first?"

"No," she said. "I have to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow, and you must too."

"Madam, I can prove by the Bible that it is wrong for me to split that wood."

"How can you do that?"

"Will you give me my dinner if I tell you?"

"Maybe."

"Well, didn't God make that wood and join its splinters?"

"Certainly."

"Well, the Bible says, 'What God hath joined together let no man put asunder.'"

"Well, but—"

"None of your highflown explainin's, madam—I want my dinner."

And he got it.

A Thought.

Were children accustomed from infancy to hear nothing but correct conversation there would be but little need of their learning arbitrary rules of grammar—they would naturally speak and write correctly. Hence it is that children of educated parents are generally so much more easy and graceful in their conversation than the children of the uneducated. Our language, like our manners, is caught from those with whom we associate; and if we would have the young improve in this important part of education, we must be careful that they hear no vulgarisms from us. Parents and teachers cannot be too particular in their use of language in the presence of imitative children.

Jacob and the Sea Lion.

Near Tillamook, Ore., lives an old German farmer. One day as he chanced to be driving along the beach, what should greet his watchful gaze but a large, fat sea lion some distance out on the sand, fast asleep. It was the work of but a moment for Jacob to make a lasso of a stout rope he had in his wagon, and adjust the noose over Mr. Sealion's head. He jumped into the wagon and started homeward with his prize. Mr. Sealion did the same, and as he was the stronger of the two teams, Mr. Jacob started seaward at a good pace, and only saved himself and outfit by springing quickly out, grasping his jackknife as he went and cutting his end of the rope.

Show This to Mamma.

Don't send my boy where your girl can't go.

And say, "There's no danger for boys, you know."

Because they all have their wild oats to sow."

There is no more excuse for my boy to be low

Than your girl. Then please do not tell him so.

Don't send my boy where your girl can't go.

For a boy or a girl, sin is sin, you know.

And my baby boy's hands are as clean and white,

And his heart is as pure as your girl's to-night.

—Woman's Voice.

Earning an Honest Penny.

Miss Lily nestles familiarly on the lap of a young gentleman who has been paying his addresses to her big sister all through the springtime of this year.

"Tell me, sir, are you well off?"

"Yes, my little pet."

"You are very well off?"

"Why, what difference can it make to you whether I am rich or not?"

"You see, my big sister said yesterday that she would give twenty francs to know if you were well off, and I should like to earn the money."—La Gaudriole.

A Law-Abiding Girl.

Mrs. McBride (entering the kitchen)—Bridget, didn't I see that policeman kiss you?

Bridget—Well, mum, sure an' yez wouldn't hev me lay meself open to arrist for resistin' an officer, mum.—Harper's Bazar.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS.

CHOICE READING FOR THE RISING GENERATION.

The Right Road for Little Feet—A Bible Lesson for Next Sunday—The Tramp Was Bible Proof—Anecdote and Incident.

LITTLE Two Year Old, my son, Life for you has just begun; Dew is fresh upon the grass All along the way you pass; Every blade your dear feet press Gives a gentle, cool caress.

Violets and buttercups Chronicle your downs and ups; Blue and gold, and gold and blue, Seemeth all the world to you.

Little Two Year Old, too soon You will know the heat of noon; Dust along your path will lie. And the grass be sere and dry. Every blade will give a thrust, Cry and urge, "You must! You must!" Rose and flame with cruel thorn, Best will tell the sweet pain borne, Red and brown, and brown and red, Seems the world the sun o'erhead.

Little Two Year Old, the light Softens when you say "Good Night." Sweet the journey will be when You are almost home again. Every footstep brings you near Faces, voices, long held dear; Gentian blue, and goldenrod Lead you onward up to God. Blue and gold, and gold and blue, So the world will be to you.

Bible Lesson.

(The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork.—Psalm xix, 1.)

Yes, the firmament above is the great album of the Creator, the suns are the syllables, and the stars the letters which record God's handiwork. Let us go out to-night and read a few paragraphs in this album of the heavens. We will see the same stars, the same sky record, which the generations before the flood gazed on and tried to read. The men who saw the evenings of nearly 1,000 years looked up at these same golden eyes that now look down on us. The splendid Orion of which Job speaks has not lost a single jewel from his belt, nor has his hands been "loosed" by the long years of his rising and setting. The seven stars—the little Pleiades also mentioned in the Bible—were there when the first man spent his first evening on our earth. You can all locate the big Dipper in the constellation Ursa Major, with its four stars forming the bowl of the Dipper, and the three others forming the curved handle. You can see it these evenings about 9 o'clock, in the northwestern part of the sky. Something else which you may not know will help you find it, which is: the upper right hand star in the bowl of the Dipper always points to the North Star. Now when you have found the Dipper, if you will look a little south and west of the last star in the handle farthest from the bowl you will see a bright star, one of the prettiest twinklers in the sky. This star is Arcturus (also mentioned by Job; see chapter ix, 9) and is in the constellation Bootes. Next week I will tell you where to find another or two. I want you to begin to look up into the blue star spangled sky above you; to make these star fields a part of your home. You may drift far away from your childhood's home and you can take none of the familiar home scenes on the earth with you. The old homestead, the trees beneath which you played, the mountains, the hills, and the brook, all of which were your companions, you must leave behind, but if you will study the stars, learn to call them by name, and associate them with all the other objects to which your home affections cling, then you may carry your home with you the world over. Then Orion, Arcturus, Syra, the Dolphin, the celestial companions of Job, Noah and David will be yours in every place, and in every condition, and when lonely or homesick you can always look up and see there your acquaintances and neighbors at the old home. And as you study these wonderful works of God, you cannot but feel the truth of our text: "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork."

Sister's Letters.

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