

PLAGUE OF BAD BOOKS.

DR. TALMAGE'S THIRD SERMON ON THE EVILS OF CITIES.

He Makes a Strong Point Against Those Parents Who Take No Thought as to What Their Children Shall Read—An Attentive Audience Present.

NEW YORK, March 8.—The plague of pernicious literature formed the subject of Dr. Talmage's sermon today, which was the third of the series he is preaching on the "Ten Plagues of the Cities." The Brooklyn Academy of Music was filled in the morning by a dense crowd eager to hear it, and at night at the Christian Herald service in the New York Academy of Music the doors had to be closed long before the hour of service, there being no space available within the building for more hearers. So large is the number of those every week disappointed of gaining admission that the project of hiring the Madison Square Garden has again been revived. One citizen has offered to pay all the expenses if the Garden can be secured and Dr. Talmage can be induced to preach in it. The text of the preacher's discourse was taken from Ex. viii, 6, 7: "And the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt."

THE ANCIENT PLAGUE OF FROGS.

There is almost a universal aversion to frogs, and yet with the Egyptian they were honored, they were sacred, and they were objects of worship while alive, and after death they were embalmed, and today their remains may be found among the sepulchres of Thebes. These creatures, so attractive once to the Egyptians, at divine behest became obnoxious and loathsome, and they were croaking and hopping and leaping into the palace of the king, and into the broad trays and the couches of the people, and even the ovens, which now are uplifted above the earth and on the side of chimneys, but then were small holes in the earth, with sunken pottery, were filled with frogs when the housekeepers came to look at them. If a man sat down to eat a frog alighted on his plate. If he attempted to put on a shoe it was covered by a frog. If he attempted to put his head upon a pillow it had been taken possession of by a frog.

Frogs high and low and everywhere; loathsome frogs, slimy frogs, besetting frogs, innumerable frogs, great plague of frogs. What made the matter worse the magicians said there was no miracle in this, and they could by sleight of hand produce the same thing, and they seemed to succeed, for by sleight of hand wonders may be wrought. After Moses had thrown down his staff and by miracle it became a serpent, and then he took hold of it and by miracle it again became a staff, the serpent charmers imitated the same thing, and knowing that there were serpents in Egypt which by a peculiar pressure on the neck would become as rigid as a stick of wood, they seemed to change the serpent into the staff, and then, throwing it down, the staff became the serpent.

So likewise these magicians tried to imitate the plague of frogs, and perhaps by smell of food attracting a great number of them to a certain point, or by shaking them out from a hidden place, the magicians sometimes seemed to accomplish the same miracle. While these magicians made the plague worse, none of them tried to make it better. "Frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt, and the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt."

THE MODERN PLAGUE OF FROGS.

Now that plague of frogs has come back upon the earth. It is abroad today. It is smiting this nation. It comes in the shape of corrupt literature. These frogs hop into the store, the shop, the office, the banking house, the factory—into the home, into the cellar, into the garret, on the drawing room table, on the shelf of the library. While the lad is reading the bad book the teacher's face is turned the other way. One of these frogs hops upon the page. While the young woman is reading the forbidden novelette after retiring at night, rebounding by gaslight, one of these frogs leaps upon the page. Indeed they have hopped upon the news stands of the country and the mails at the postoffice shake out in the letter trough hundreds of them. The plague has taken at different times possession of this country. It is one of the most loathsome, one of the most frightful, one of the most ghastly of the ten plagues of our modern cities.

There is a vast number of books and newspapers printed and published which ought never to see the light. They are filled with a pestilence that makes the laud sweeter with a moral epidemic. The greatest blessing that ever came to this nation is that of an elevated literature, and the greatest scourge has been that of unclean literature. This literature is a pestilence in all occupations and departments. It has helped to fill insane asylums and penitentiaries and almshouses and dens of shame. The bodies of this infection lie in the hospitals and in the graves, while their souls are being tossed over into a lost eternity, an avalanche of horror and despair. The London plague was nothing to it. That counted its victims by thousands, but this modern pest has already shovelled its millions into the charnel house of the morally dead. The longest rail train that ever ran over the Erie or Hudson tracks was not long enough nor large enough to carry the beastliness and the putrefaction which have been generated up in bad books and newspapers of this land in the last twenty years. The literature of a nation decides the fate of a nation. Good books, good morals. Bad books, bad morals.

THE LOWEST OF BAD LITERATURE.

I begin with the lowest of all the literature, that which does not even pretend to be respectable—from cover to cover a blotch of leprosy. There are many whose entire business it is to dispose of this kind of literature. They display it before the school-boy on his way home. They get the catalogues of schools and colleges, take the names and postoffice addresses, and send their advertisements, and their circulars, and their pamphlets, and their books to every one of them.

In the possession of these dealers in bad literature were found nine hundred thousand names and postoffice addresses, to whom it was thought it might be profitable to send these corrupt things. In the year 1873 there were one hundred and sixty-five establishments engaged in publishing cheap, corrupt literature. From one publishing house there went out twenty different styles of corrupt books. Although ever thirty tons of vile literature have been destroyed by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, still there is enough of it left in this country to bring down upon us the thunderbolt of an increased God.

In the year 1888 the evil had become so great in this country that the congress of the United States passed a law forbidding the transmission of bad literature through

the United States mails, but there were large loops in that law through which criminals might crawl out, and the law was a dead failure—that law of 1883. But in 1873 another law was passed by the congress of the United States against the transmission of corrupt literature through the mails—a grand law, a potent law, a Christian law—and under that law multitudes of these scoundrels have been arrested, their property confiscated and they themselves thrown into the penitentiaries where they belonged.

HOW ARE WE TO WAR AGAINST IT?

Now, my friends, how are we to war against this corrupt literature, and how are the frogs of this Egyptian plague to be slain? First of all by the prompt and inexorable execution of the law. Let all good postmasters and United States district attorneys, and detectives and reformers concert in their action to stop this plague. When Sir Rowland Hill spent his life in trying to secure cheap postage not only for England, but for all the world, and in opening the blessing of the postoffice to all honest business, and to all messages of charity and kindness and affection, for all healthful intercommunication, he did not mean to make vice easy or to fill the mail bags of the United States with the scale of such a leprosy.

It ought not to be in the power of every bad man who can raise a one-cent stamp for a circular or a two-cent stamp for a letter to blast a man or destroy a home. The postal service of this country must be clean, must be kept clean, and we must all understand that the swift retributions of the United States government hover over every violation of the letter box.

There are thousands of men and women in this country, some for personal gain, some through ignate depravity, some through a spirit of revenge, who wish to use this great avenue of convenience and intelligence for purposes revengeful, satanic and diabolic. Wake up the law. Wake up all its penalties. Let every court room on this subject be a Sinai thundering with its law. Let the convicted offenders be sent for the full term to Sing Sing or Harrisburg.

I am not talking about what cannot be done. I am talking now about what is being done. A great many of the printing presses that give themselves entirely to the publication of vile literature have been stopped or have gone into business less obnoxious. What has thrown off what has kept off the rail trains of this country for some time back nearly all the leprosy periodicals? Those of us who have been on the rail trains have noticed a great change in the last few months and the last year or two. Why have nearly all those vile periodicals been kept off the rail trains for some time back? Who effected it? These societies for the purification of railroad literature gave warning to the publishers and warning to railroad companies, and warning to conductors, and warning to newsboys, to keep the infernal stuff off the trains. Many of the cities have successfully prohibited the most of that literature even from going on the news stands. Terror has seized upon the publishers and the dealers in impure literature, from the fact that over a thousand arrests have been made, and the aggregate time for which the convicted have been sentenced to the prison is over one hundred and ninety years, and from the fact that about two million of their circulars have been destroyed, and the business is not as profitable as it used to be.

THE LAW! THE LAW!

How have so many of the newsstands of our great cities been purified? How has so much of this iniquity been balked? By moral suspicion? Oh, no. You might as well go into a jungle of the East Indies and put a cobra on the neck, and with profound argument try to persuade it that it is morally wrong to bite and to sting and to poison anything. The only answer to your argument would be an uplifted hand and a hiss and a snarl, reeking tooth struck into your arteries. The only argument for a cobra is a shotgun, and the only argument for these dealers in impure literature is the clutch of the police and bean soup in a penitentiary. The law! The law! I invoke to consummate the work so grandly begun!

Another way in which we are to drive back this plague of Egyptian frogs is by filling the minds of our young people with healthful literature. Do not mean to say that all the books and newspapers in our families ought to be religious books and newspapers, or that every song ought to be sung to the tune of "Old Hundred." I have no sympathy with the attempt to make the young old. I would rather join in a crusade to keep the young young, boyhood and girlhood bright and clean. But there are good books, good histories, good biographies, good works of fiction, good books of all styles with which we are to fill the minds of the young, so that there will be no more room for the useless and the vicious than there is room for chaff in a bushel measure which is already filled with Michigan wheat. Why are 50 per cent of the criminals in the jails and penitentiaries of the United States today under twenty-one years of age? Many of them under seventeen, under sixteen, under fifteen, under fourteen, under thirteen! Walk along one of the corridors of the Tombs prison in New York and look for yourselves. Bad books, bad newspapers, bewitched them as soon as they get out of the cradle. Beware of all those stories which end wrong. Beware of all those books which make the road that ends in perdition, seem to end in Paradise. Do not glorify the dirk and the pistol. Do not call the desperado brave or the libertine gallant. Teach our young people that if they go down into the swampland and marshes to watch the jack-o'-lanterns dance on the decay and rottenness they will catch the malaria and death.

"Oh," says some one, "I am a business man, and I have no time to examine what my children read. I have no time to inspect the books that come into my household." If your children were threatened with typhoid fever, would you have time to go for the doctor? Would you have time to watch the progress of the disease? Would you have time for the funeral? In the presence of my God I warn you of the fact that your children are threatened with moral and spiritual typhoid, and that unless the thing be stopped it will be to them a matter of body, funeral of mind, funeral of soul. There is a funeral in every day.

My word is to this vast multitude of young people: Do not touch, do not borrow, do not buy a corrupt book or a corrupt picture. A book will decide a man's destiny for good or for evil. The book you read yesterday may have decided you for time and for eternity. Would it may be a book that may come into your possession tomorrow.

THE POWER OF A GOOD BOOK.

A good book—who can exaggerate its power? Benjamin Franklin's reading of Cotton Franks' "Good in Childhood gave him the rest of his life. Law declared that a biography of his childhood gave him all his subsequent

prosperities. A clergyman, many years ago, passing to the far west, stopped at a hotel. He saw a woman copying something from Doddridge's "Rise and Progress." It seemed that she had borrowed the book, and there were some things she wanted especially to remember. The clergyman had in his sachel a copy of Doddridge's "Rise and Progress," and so he made her a present of it. Thirty years passed on. The clergyman came that way, and he asked where the woman was whom he had seen so long ago. "She lives yonder in that beautiful house." He went there and said to her, "Do you remember me?" She said, "No, I do not." He said, "Do you remember a man gave you Doddridge's 'Rise and Progress' thirty years ago?" "Oh, yes; I remember. That book saved my soul. I loaned the book to all my neighbors, and they read it and they were converted to God, and a holier minister stood in his pulpit at Birmingham and said: 'Twenty-five years ago I had loaned to me an infamous book. He would loan it only fifteen minutes, and then I had to give it back, but that book has haunted me like a specter ever since. I have in agony of soul, on my knees before God, prayed that he would obliterate from my soul the memory of it, but I shall carry the damage of it until the day of my death.' The assessor, Sir William Russell declared that he got the inspiration for his crime by reading what was then a new and popular novel, 'Jack Sheppard.' Homer's 'Iliad' made Alexander the warrior. Alexander said so. The story of Alexander made Julius Cæsar and Charles XII both men of blood. Have you in your pocket, or in your trunk, or in your desk at business a bad book, a bad picture, a bad pamphlet? In God's name I warn you to destroy it."

THE CHRISTIAN PRESS.

Another way in which we shall fight back this corrupt literature and kill the frogs of Egypt is by rolling over them the Christian printing press, which shall give stopped or have gone into business less obnoxious. What has thrown off what has kept off the rail trains of this country for some time back nearly all the leprosy periodicals? Those of us who have been on the rail trains have noticed a great change in the last few months and the last year or two. Why have nearly all those vile periodicals been kept off the rail trains for some time back? Who effected it? These societies for the purification of railroad literature gave warning to the publishers and warning to railroad companies, and warning to conductors, and warning to newsboys, to keep the infernal stuff off the trains.

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WHAT IS A BOOK?

We see so many books we do not understand what a book is. Stand it on end. Measure it—the height of it, the depth of it, the length of it, the breadth of it. You cannot do it. Examine the paper and estimate the progress made from the time of the impressions on clay, and then on to the bark of trees, and from the bark of trees to papyrus, and from papyrus to the hide of wild beasts, and from the hide of wild beasts on down until the miracles of our modern paper manufacturers, and then see the paper, white and pure as an infant's soul, waiting for God's inscription. A book! Examine the type of it. Examine the printing of it, and see the progress from the time when Solon's laws were written on oak planks, and Hesiod's poems were written on tables of lead, and the Sinitic commands were written on tables of stone, on down to Hoe's perfecting printing press. A book! It took all the universities of the past, all the martyr fires, all the civilizations, all the battles, all the victories, all the defeats, all the glooms, all the brightenings, all the centuries to make it possible. A book! It is the chorus of the ages; it is the drawing room of which kings and queens and orators and poets and historians come out to greet you. If I worshiped anything on earth I would worship that. If I burned incense to any idol I would build an altar to that. Thank God for good books, beautiful books, inspiring books, Christian books, books of men, books of women, Book of God. It is with these good books, that we are to overcome corrupt literature. Upon the frogs swoop with these eagles. I depend much for the overthrow of iniquitous literature upon the mortality of books. Even good books have a hard struggle to live. Polybius wrote forty books; only five of them left. Thirty books of Tacitus have perished. Twenty books of Pliny have

perished. Livy wrote one hundred and forty books; only thirty-five of them remain. Æschylus wrote one hundred dramas; only seven remain. Euripides wrote over a hundred; only nineteen remain. Varro wrote the biographies of over seven hundred great Romans. All that wealth of biography has perished. If good and valuable books have such a struggle to live, what must be the fate of those that are diseased and corrupt and blasted at the very start. They will die as the frogs when the Lord turned back the plague. The work of Christianization will go on until there will be nothing left but good books, and they will take the supremacy of the world. May you and I live to see the illustrious day!

FIGHT THE BAD WITH THE GOOD.

Against every bad pamphlet send a good pamphlet; against every unclean picture send an innocent picture; against every scurrilous song send a Christian song; against every bad book send a good book; and then it will be as it was in ancient Toledo, where the Toletum missals were kept by the saints in six churches, and the sacrilegious Romans demanded that those missals be destroyed, and that the Roman missals be substituted; and the war came on, and I am glad to say that the whole matter having been referred to champions, the champion of the Toletum missals with one blow brought down the champion of the Roman missals.

So it will be in our day. The good literature, the Christian literature, in its championship for God and the truth, will bring down the evil literature in its championship for the devil. I feel tingling to the tips of my fingers and through all the nerves of my body, and all the depths of my soul, the certainty of our triumph. Cheer up, oh, men and women who are toiling for the purification of society! Toil with your faces in the sunlight. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Lady Hester Stanhope was the daughter of the third Earl of Stanhope, and after her nearest friends had died she went to the far east, took possession of a deserted convent, threw up the walls, and amid the mountains of Lebanon, opened the castle to the poor, and the wretched, and the sick who would come in. She made her castle a home for the unfortunate. She was a devout Christian woman. She was writing for the coming of the Lord. She expected that the Lord would descend in person, and she thought upon it until it was too much for her reason. In the magnificent stables of her palace she had two horses groomed and bridled and saddled and caparisoned and all ready for the day in which her Lord should descend, and he on one of them and she on the other should start for Jerusalem, the city of the Great King. It was a fanaticism and a delusion; but there was romance, and there was splendor, and there was thrilling expectation in the dream!

"Ah, my friends, we need no earthly palfreys groomed and saddled and bridled and caparisoned for our Lord when he shall come. The horse is ready in the equerry of heaven, and the imperial rider is ready to mount. "And I saw, and behold a white horse, and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him; and he went forth conquering and to conquer. And the armies which were in heaven followed him on white horses, and on his vesture and on his thigh were written, King of kings, and Lord of lords." Horsemen of heaven, mount! Cavalry of God, ride on! Charge! charge! until they shall be hurled back on their haunches—the black horse of famine, and the red horse of carnage, and the pale horse of death. Jesus forever!

A Strange Story.

Early in January of the present year a woodman engaged in chopping some of the monster oaks in the northern part of the great "Black Forest," Germany, and who had built a fire against a large dead log preparatory to partaking of his midday meal, was surprised to see a serpent of gigantic proportions crawl from the log as soon as the rotten wood had got well warmed through. The day was bitter cold the frozen ground, and his convulsions became smaller and smaller, until he finally ceased to wiggle and quietly coiled up near a large pile of brush.

The sturdy German chopper, who had been more surprised than scared, waited until the creature had become thoroughly benumbed with the cold and then approached and dispatched him with his axe. Measurements showed the almy creature to be 27 feet 6 inches in length and nearly 15 inches through the body in the middle. Just back of the immense head, which was 11 inches in length and almost as broad, a little gold ring had been put through the skin. It was in the form of two rings rather than one, being shaped not unlike a figure 8. One of the rings was through the skin, while the other was through a hole in a small copper coin bearing date of 1712. One side of the coin was perfectly smooth with the exception of these letters and figures, which had evidently been cut on it with a pocket knife, the workmanship being very rough, "Louis Krutner, B. G. O., 1781."

Some of the older inhabitants of the "Black Forest" remember hearing their parents tell of "Krutner, the serpent charmer," and they all unite in declaring that this gigantic serpent was formerly the property of the old "charmer," and that it was at least 115 years old when killed by the woodchopper on that cold January day of 1891.—St. Louis Republic.

A Unique Wedding Fee.

Last spring, when one of the younger ministers of the city was devising ways and means for a summer vacation trip, there was a ring at the doorbell and a caller upon the minister announced. The stranger introduced himself, explaining that he was recently from Buffalo, but now of Albany, and a salesman of barbers' supplies. With very few introductory words the gentleman asked the minister to perform the marriage ceremony for him in two weeks' time. Promptly at the hour appointed the couple came. An officer of the church had been invited in to witness the ceremony. While the necessary papers were being filled out the minister opened a small traveling bag and produced a half pint bottle, with glass stopper.

"There," said he, placing the bottle on the minister's desk. "I leave this with you as a token." Then the marriage ceremony was performed, congratulations offered the bride, the certificate placed in the hand of the bride. As the happy couple were leaving the study the groom drew from his pocket an envelope and handed it to the minister. A few minutes later the envelope was opened and the following found: "Albany, May 29—4 will call on you on Saturday Night and pay you my fee what you may ask." Many Saturday nights have come and gone since then, but the enthusiastic salesman of barbers' supplies has not been seen by the minister, but he still has the bottle.—Albany Journal.

Elizabeth Sargent, M. D., daughter of our former minister to Berlin, is an oculist of exceptional skill. She lives in California.

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