

A BRILLIANT RELIGION.

BERMON DELIVERED BY DR. TALMAGE ON SUNDAY, APRIL 19.

"The Crystal Cannot Equal It"—Job xxviii. 7. The Eminent Divine's Text. Religion is Far Superior to the Crystal in All Desirable Qualities.

NEW YORK, April 19.—The eagerness to hear Dr. Talmage's sermons at the Christian Herald services on Sunday evenings in this city continues unabated. As usual, there was this evening a dense mass of people waiting outside the Academy of Music long before the hour for commencement, and every seat in the huge building was occupied in a few minutes after the doors were opened. Dr. Talmage had preached to an immense audience in the morning in the Brooklyn Academy of Music. His text was, "The crystal cannot equal it" (Job xxviii. 7).

Many of the precious stones of the Bible have come to prompt recognition. But for the present I take up the less valuable crystal. Job, in my text, compares saving wisdom with a specimen of topaz. An infidel chemist or mineralogist would pronounce the latter worth more than the former, but Job makes an intelligent comparison, looks at religion, and then looks at the crystal and pronounces the former as of superior value to the latter, exclaiming, in the words of my text, "The crystal cannot equal it."

THE STAR OF THE MOUNTAIN.

Now, it is not a part of my sermon design to depreciate the crystal, whether it be found in Cornish mine or Hartz mountain or Mammoth Cave or tinkling among the pendants of the chandeliers of a palace. The crystal is the star of the mountain; it is the queen of the cave; it is the eardrop of the hills; it finds its heaven in the diamond. Among all the pages of natural history there is no page more interesting to me than the page crystallographic. But I want to show you that Job was right when, taking religion in one hand and the crystal in the other, he declared that the former is of far more value and beauty than the latter, recommending it to former people and to all the ages, declaring, "The crystal cannot equal it."

In the first place, I remark that religion is superior to the crystal in exactness. That shapeless mass of crystal against which you accidentally dashed your foot is laid out with more exactness than any earthly city. There are six styles of crystallization, and all of them divinely ordained. Every crystal has mathematical precision. God's geometry reaches through it, and it is a square, or it is a rectangle, or it is a rhomboid, or in some way it hath a mathematical figure. Now, religion beats that in the simple fact that spiritual accuracy is more beautiful than material accuracy. God's attributes are exact. God's law exact. God's decrees exact. God's management of the world exact—never counting wrong, though he counts the grass blades, and the stars, and the sands, and the cycles. His providences never dealing with us perpendicularly when those providences ought to be oblique, nor lateral when they ought to be vertical. Everything in our life arranged without any possibility of mistake. Each life a six-sided prism, with the right time; dying at the right time. There are no "happen so's" in our theology. If I thought this was a slipshod universe I would go crazy. God is not an anarchist. Law, order, symmetry, precision, a perfect square, a perfect rectangle, a perfect rhomboid, a perfect circle. The edge of God's robe of government never frays out. There are no loose screws in the world's machinery. It did not just happen that Napoleon was attacked with indigestion at Borodino so that he became incompetent for the day. It did not just happen that John Thomas, the missionary, on a heathen island, waiting for an outfit and orders for another missionary tour, received that outfit and those orders in a box that floated ashore, while the ship and the crew that carried the box were never heard of. The barking of F. W. Robertson's dog, he tells us, led to a line of events which brought him from the army into the Christian ministry, where he served God with world renowned usefulness. It did not merely happen so. I believe in a particular providence. I believe God's geometry may be seen in all our life more beautifully than in crystallography. Job was right. "The crystal cannot equal it."

THE TRANSPARENCY OF RELIGION.

Again I remark that religion is superior to the crystal in transparency. We know not when or by what means the first diamonds were covered. Beads of it have been found in the tomb of Alexander Severus. Vases of it are brought up from the ruins of Herculaneum. There were female adornments made out of it three thousand years ago—those adornments found now attached to the mummies of Egypt. A great many commentators believe that my text means glass. Why would we do without the crystal? The crystal in the window keeps out the storm and let in the day; the crystal over the watch defending its delicate machinery, yet allowing us to see the hour; the crystal of the telescope, by which the astronomer brings distant worlds so near he can inspect them. Oh, the triumphs of the crystals in the celebrated windows of Rouen and Salisbury!

But there is nothing so transparent in a crystal as in our holy religion. It is a transparent religion. You put it to your eye and you see man—his sin, his soul, his destiny. You look at God and you see something of the grandeur of his character. It is a transparent religion. Infidels tell us it is opaque. Do you know why they tell us it is opaque? It is because they are blind. The natural man perceiveth not the things of God because they are spiritually discerned. There is no trouble with the crystal; the trouble is with the eyes which try to look through it. We pray for wisdom, Lord, that our eyes might be opened. When the eye salve cures our blindness then we find that religion is transparent.

It is a transparent Bible. All the mountains of the Bible come out—Sinai, the mountain of the law; Pisgah, the mountain of prospect; Olivet, the mountain of instruction; Calvary, the mountain of sacrifice. All the rivers of the Bible come out—Hiddekel, or the river of paradisaical beauty; Jordan, or the river of holy christ; Cherith, or the river of prophetic supply; Nile, or the river of palaces, and the pure river of life from under the throne, clear as crystal. While reading this Bible after our eyes have been touched by grace we find it all transparent, and the earth rocks, now with crucifixion agony and now with judgment terror, and Christ appears in some of his two hundred and fifty-six titles, as far as I can count them—the bread, the rock, the captain, the commander, the conqueror, the star, and on and beyond any capacity of mine to rehearse them.

PROVIDENCE IS PELLUCID.

The providence that seemed dark before becomes pellucid. Now you find God is not trying to put you down. Now you understand why you lost that child, and why you lost your property; it was to prepare you for eternal treasures. And why sickness came, it being the precursor of immortal juvenescence. And now you understand why they lied about you and tried to drive you hither and thither. It was to put you in the glorious company of such men as Ignatius, who, when he went out to be destroyed by the lions, said: "I am the wheat, and the teeth of the wild beasts must first grind me before I can become pure bread for Jesus Christ;" or the company of such men as Polycarp, who, when standing in the midst of the amphitheater waiting for the lions to come out of their cave and destroy him, and the people in the galleries jeering and shouting, "The lions for Polycarp," replied, "Let them come on," and then stooping down toward the cave where the wild beasts were roaring to get out, "Let them come on." Ah, yes, it is persecution to put you in glorious company; and while there are many things that you will have to postpone to the future world for explanation, I tell you that it is the whole tendency of your religion to unravel and explain and interpret and illumine and irradiate. Job was right. It is a glorious transparency. "The crystal cannot equal it."

I remark again that religion surpasses the crystal in its beauty. That lump of crystal is put under the magnifying glass of the crystallographer, and he sees in it indescribable beauty—snowdrifts and splinters of hoar frost and corals and wreaths and stars and crowns and castellations of conspicuous beauty. The fact is that crystal is so beautiful that I can think of but one thing in all the universe that is so beautiful, and that is the religion of the Bible. No wonder this Bible represents that religion as the daybreak, as the apple blossoms, as the glitter of a king's banner. It is the joy of the whole earth.

TOO MUCH TALK OF THE CROSS.

People talk too much about their cross and not enough about their crown. Do you know the Bible mentions a cross but twenty-seven times, while it mentions a crown eighty times? Ask that old man what he thinks of religion. He has been a close observer. He has been culturing an aesthetic taste. He has seen the sunrise of a half century. He has been an early riser. He has been an admirer of carmine and corals and all kinds of beautiful things. Ask him what he thinks of religion, and he will tell you, "It is the most beautiful thing I ever saw." "The crystal cannot equal it."

Beautiful in its symmetry. When it presents God's character it does not present him as having love like a great protuberance on one side of his nature, but makes that love in harmony with his justice—a love that will accept all those who come to him, and a justice that will by no means clear the guilty. Beautiful religion in the sentiment it implants! Beautiful religion in the hope it kindles! Beautiful religion in the fact that it proposes to garland and enshrine and emparadise an immortal spirit. Solomon says it is a lily. Paul says it is a crown. The Apostle says it is a fountain kissed of the sun. Ezekiel says it is a foliaged cedar. Christ says it is a bridegroom come to fetch home a bride. While Job in the text takes up a whole vase of precious stones—the topaz, and the sapphire, and the chrysolite—and he takes out of this beautiful vase just one crystal, and holds it up until it gleams in the warm light of the eastern sky, and he exclaims, "The crystal cannot equal it."

Oh, it is not a stale religion, it is not a stupid religion, it is not a toothless hag, as some seem to have represented it; it is not a Meg Merriles with shrivelled arm come to scare the world. It is the fairest daughter of God, heiress of all his wealth. Her cheek the morning sky; her voice the music of the south wind; her step the dance of the sea. Come and woo her. The Spirit and the bride say come, and whosoever will, let him come. Do you agree with Solomon and say it is a lily? Then pluck it and wear it over your heart. Do you agree with Paul and say it is a crown? Then let this hour be your coronation. Do you agree with the Apocalypse and say it is a springing fountain? Then come and slake the thirst of your soul. Do you believe with Ezekiel and say it is a foliaged cedar? Then let this hour be your coronation. Do you believe with Christ and say it is a bridegroom come to fetch home a bride? Then strike hands with your Lord the King while I pronounce you everlastingly one. Or if you think with Job that it is a jewel, then put it on your hand like a ring, on your neck like a bead, on your forehead like a star, while looking into the mirror of God's Word you acknowledge "the crystal cannot equal it."

THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF RELIGION.

Again, religion is superior to the crystal in its transformations. The diamond is only a crystallization of coal. Carbonate of lime rises till it becomes calcite or aragonite. Red oxide of copper crystallizes into cubes and octahedrons. Those crystals which adorn our persons and our homes and our museums have only been resurrected from forms that were far from lustrous. Scientists for ages have been examining these wonderful transformations. But I tell you in the gospel of the Son of God there is a more wonderful transformation. Over souls by reason of sin black as coal and hard as iron God by his comforting grace stoops and says, "They shall be mine in the day when I make up my jewels." "What," say you, "will God wear jewelry?" If he wanted it he could make the stars of heaven his belt and have the evening cloud for the sandals of his feet, but he does not want that adornment. He will not have that jewelry. When God wants jewelry he comes down and digs it out of the depths and darkness of sin. These souls are all crystallizations of mercy. He puts them on, and he wears them in the presence of the whole universe. He wears them on the hand that was nailed, over the heart that was pierced, on the temples that were stung. "They shall be mine," saith the Lord, "in the day when I make up my jewels." Wonderful transformation! "The crystal cannot equal it."

DO NOT GO INTO PARTICULARS.

Now, I have no liking for those people who are always enlarging in Christian meetings about their early dissipation. Do not go into the particulars, my brethren. Simply say you were sick, but make no display of your ulcers. The chief stock in trade of some ministers and Christian workers seems to be their early crimes and dissolutions. The number of pockets you picked and the number of chickens you stole make very poor prayer meeting rhetoric. Besides that, it discourages other Christian people who never got drunk or stole anything. But it is pleasant to know that those who were farthest down have been brought highest up. Out of infernal serfdom into eternal liberty. Out of darkness into light. From coal to the solitaire. "The crystal cannot equal it."

Yes, He Bought It.

Tom—What a pretty rose! Where did you get it?
Jack (boastfully)—A lady gave it to me.
Tom (crucially)—A saleslady!—Puck.

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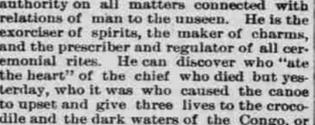
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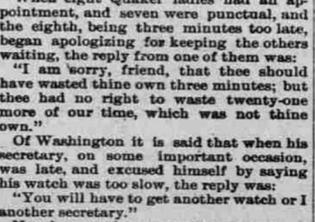
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