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TALMAGE IN CHICAGO

HE PREPARES A SERMON ON RELIGION IN THE FAMILY.

The Prayers of Father and Mother Outlast All Other Early Influences—The Prayers of a Pious Grandmother Affected All Her Descendants—Curious Circumstance.

CHICAGO, March 19.—Rev. Dr. Talmage, who is now in this city on a brief visit, did not preach today. He prepared for the press, however, the following discourse on "Religion at Home," the text selected being Joshua xxiv, 15, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Absurd, Joshua! You will have no time for family religion; you are a military character, and your time will be taken up with affairs connected with the army; you are a statesman, and your time will be taken up with public affairs; you are the Washington, the Wellington, the McMahon of the Israelitish host; you will have a great many questions to settle; you will have no time for religion. But Joshua, with the same voice with which he commanded the sun and moon to halt and stack arms of light on the parade ground of the heavens, says, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Before we adopt the resolution of this old soldier we want to be certain it is a wise resolution. If religion is going to put my piano out of tune, and clog the feet of the children racing through the hall, and sour the bread, and put crape on the doorbell, I do not want it in my house. I once gave $6 to hear Jenny Lind warble. I have never given a cent to hear any one groan. Will this religion spoken of in my text do anything for the dining hall, for the nursery, for the parlor, for the sleeping apartment?

It is a great deal easier to invite a disagreeable guest than to get rid of him. If you do not want religion, you had better not ask it to come, for after coming it may stay a great while. Isaac Watts went to visit St. Thomas and Lady Abney at their place in Theobald and was to stay a week and staid 35 years, and if religion once gets into your household the probability is it will stay there forever.

Now, the question I want to discuss is, What will religion do for the household? Question the first: What did it do for your father's house if you were brought up in a Christian home?

THE FATHER'S PRAYER.

That whole scene has vanished, but it comes back today. The hour for morning prayers came. You were invited in. Somewhat fidgety, you sat and listened. Your father made no pretention to rhetorical reading, and he just went through the chapter in a plain, straightforward way. Then you all knelt. It was about the same prayer morning by morning and night by night, for he had the same sins to ask pardon for, and he had the same blessings for which to be grateful day after day and year after year.

The prayer was longer than you would like to have had it, for the game at ball was waiting, or the skates were lying under the shed, or the schoolbooks needed one or two more looking at the lessons. Your parents, somewhat rheumatic and stiffened with age, found it difficult to rise from their kneeling. The chair at which they knelt is gone, the Bible out of which they read has perhaps fallen to pieces, the parents are gone, the children scattered north, east, south and west, but that whole scene flashes upon your memory today.

Was that morning and evening exercise in your father's house debasing or elevating? Is it not among the most sacred reminiscences? You were not as devotional as some of the older members of your father's house who were kneeling with you at the time, and you did not bow your head as closely as they did, and you looked around and you saw just the posture your father and mother assumed while they were kneeling on the floor. The whole scene is so photographed on your memory that if you were an artist you could draw it now just as they knelt.

For how much would you have that scene obliterated from your memory? It all comes back today, and you are in the homestead again. Father is there, mother is there, all of you children are there. It is the same old prayer, opening with the same petition, closing with the same thanksgiving. The family prayers of 1840-50 as fresh in your memory as though they were uttered yesterday. The tear that starts from your eye melts all that scene. Gone, is it? Why, many a time it has held you steady in the struggles of life. You once started for a place, and that memory jerked you back, and you could not enter.

The broken prayer of your father has had more effect on you than all you ever read in Shakespeare and Milton and Tennyson and Dante. You have gone over mountains and across seas. You never for a moment got out of sight of that domestic altar. Oh, my friends, is it your opinion this morning that the 10 or 15 minutes subtracted from each day for family devotion was an economy or a waste of time in your father's household? I think some of us are coming to the conclusion that the religion which was in our father's house would be a very appropriate religion for our homes. If family prayers did not damage that household, there is no probability that they will damage our household.

DO NOT LET MOTHER'S RELIGION GO.

"Is God dead?" said a child to her father. "No," he replied. "Why do you ask that?" "Well," she said, "when mother was living, we used to have prayers, but since her death we haven't had family prayers, and I didn't know but that God was dead too." A family that is launched in the morning with family prayers is well launched. Breakfast over, the family scatter, some to school, some to household duties, some to business. During the day there will be a thousand perils abroad—perils of the street car, of the scaffolding, of the ungoverned horse, of the misstep, of the aroused temper, of multitudinous temptations to do wrong.

Somewhere between 7 o'clock in the morning and 10 o'clock at night there may be a moment when you will be in urgent need of God. Besides that, family prayers will be a secular advantage. A father went into the war to serve his country. His children stayed and cultivated the farm. His wife prayed. One of the sons said afterward, "Father is fighting, and we are digging, and mother is praying." "Ah," said some one, "Praying and digging and fighting will bring us out of our national troubles."

We may pray in the morning, "Give us this day our daily bread," and sit down in idleness and starve to death; but prayer and hard work will give a livelihood to any family. Family religion pays for both worlds. Let us have an altar in each one of our households. You may not be able to formulate a prayer. Then there are Philip Henry's prayers, and there are McDuff's prayers, and there are Philip Doddridge's prayers, and there are the Episcopal church prayers, and there are scores of books with supplications just suited to the domestic circle.

MOTHERS OF THE GOOD AND THE EVIL.

"Oh," says some man, "I don't feel competent to lead my household in prayer." Well, I do not know that it is your duty to lead. I think perhaps it is sometimes better for the mother of the household to lead. She knows better the wants of the household. She can read the Scriptures with a more tender enunciation. She knows more of God. I will put it plainly and say she prays better. Oh, these mothers decide almost everything! Nero's mother was a murderess. Lord Byron's mother was haughty and impious. You might have guessed that from their children.

Walter Scott's mother was fond of poetry. Washington's mother was patriotic. Samuel Budget's mother was a thorough Christian. St. Bernard's mother was noble minded. So you might have guessed from their children. Good men always have good mothers. There may once in 10 or 20 years be an exception to the rule, but it is only an exception. Benjamin West's mother kissed him after she had seen his first wonderful sketch with the pencil. Benjamin West afterward said, "That kiss made me a painter."

A young man received a furlough to return from the army to his father's house. Afterward he took the furlough back to the officer, saying, "I would like to postpone my visit for two weeks." At the end of the two weeks he came and got the furlough. He was asked why he waited. "Well," he replied, "when I left home I told my mother I would be a Christian in the army, and I was resolved not to go home until I could answer her first question." Oh, the almost omnipotent power of the mother! But if both the father and the mother be right, then the children are almost sure to be right. The young people may make a wide curve from the straight path, but they are almost sure to come back to the right road. It may not be until the death of one of the parents.

How often it is that we hear some one say, "Oh, he was a wild young man, but since his father's death he has been different!" The fact is that the father's coffin or the mother's coffin is often the altar of repentance for the child. Oh, that was a stupendous day, the day of father's burial. It was not the officiating clergyman who made the chief impression, nor the sympathizing mourners. It was the father asleep in the casket.

The hands that had toiled for that household so long, folded. The brain cooled off after 20 or 40 years of anxiety about how to put that family in right position. The lips closed after so many years of good advice. There are more tears falling in mother's grave than in father's grave, but over the father's tomb I think there is a kind of awe. It is at that marble pillar many a young man has been revolutionized.

ANCESTRAL RELIGION.

Oh, young man with cheek flushed with dissipation! how long is it since you have been out to your father's grave? Will you not go this week? Perhaps the storms of the last few days may have bent the headstone until it leans far over. You had better go out and see whether the lettering has been defaced. You had better go out and see whether the gate of the lot is closed. You had better go and see if you cannot find a sermon in the springing grass. Oh, young man, go out this week and see your father's grave!

Religion did so much for our Christian ancestry, are we not ready this morning to be willing to receive it into our own households? If we do receive it, let it come through the front door, not through the back door. In other words, do not let us smuggle it in. There are a great many families who want to be religious, but they do not want anybody outside to know it. They would be mortified to death if you caught them at family prayers. They would not sing in the worship for fear the neighbors would hear them. They do not have prayers when they have company.

They do not know much about the nobility of the western trapper. A traveler going along was overtaken by night and a storm, and he entered a cabin. There were firearms hung up around the cabin. He was alarmed. He had a large amount of money with him, but he did not dare to venture on into the night in the storm. He did not like the looks of the household. After awhile the father, the western trapper, came in, gun on shoulder, and when the traveler looked at him he was still more affrighted.

After awhile the family were whispering together in one corner of the room, and the traveler thought to himself, "Oh! now my time has come; I wish I was out in the storm and in the night rather than here." But the swarthy man came up to him and said: "Sir, we are a rough people; we get our living by hunting, and we are very tired when the night comes; but before going to bed we always have a habit of reading a little out of the Bible and having prayers, and I think we will have our usual custom tonight, and if you don't believe in that kind of thing if you will just step outside the door for a little while I will be much obliged to you."

Oh! there are many Christian parents who have not half the courage of that western trapper. They do not want their religion projecting too conspicuously. They would like to have it near by so as to call on it in case of a funeral, but as to having it dominant in the household from the 1st of January, 7 o'clock a. m., to the 31st of December, 10 o'clock p. m., they do not want it. They would rather die and have their families perish with them than to cry out in the bold words of the soldier in my text, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

There was, in my ancestral line, an incident so strangely impressive that it seems more like romance than reality. It has sometimes been so inaccurately put forth that I now give you the true incident. My grandfather and grandmother, living at Somerville, N. J., went to Baskingridge to witness a revival under the ministry of the Rev. Dr. Finley. They came home so impressed with what they had seen that they resolved on the salvation of their children.

The young people of the house were to go off for an evening party, and my grandmother said:

"Now, when you are all ready for the party, come to my room, for I have something very important to tell you." All ready for departure, they came to her room, and she said to them, "Now, I want you to remember, while you are away this evening, that I am all the time in this room praying for your salvation, and I shall not cease praying until you get back." The young people went to the party, but amid the loudest hilarities of the night they could not forget that their mother was praying for them. The evening passed, and the night passed.

The next day my grandparents heard an outcry in an adjoining room, and they went in and found their daughter imploring the salvation of the gospel. The daughter told them that her brothers were at the barn and at the wagon house under powerful conviction of sin. They went to the barn. They found my Uncle Jehiah, who afterward became a minister of the gospel, crying to God for mercy. They went to the wagon house. They found their son David, who afterward became my father, imploring God's pardon and mercy. Before a great while the whole family were saved, and David went and told the story to a young woman to whom he was affianced, who as a result of the story became a Christian, and from her own lips—my mother's—I have received the incident.

CONVERSION OF THE TALMAGE FAMILY.

The story of that converted household ran through all the neighborhood from family to family until the whole region was whelmed with religious awakening, and at the next communion in the village church at Somerville over 200 souls stood up to profess the faith of the gospel. My mother, carrying the memory of this scene from early womanhood into further life, in after years was resolved upon the salvation of her children, and for many years every week she met three other Christian mothers to pray for the salvation of their families. I think that all the members of those families were saved—myself, the youngest and last.

There were 12 of us children. I trace the whole line of mercy back to that hour when my Christian grandmother sat in her room imploring the blessing of God upon her children. Nine of her descendants became preachers of the gospel. Many of her descendants are in heaven, many of them still in the Christian conflict. Did it pay for her to spend the whole evening in prayer for her household? Ask her before the throne of God, surrounded by her children. In the presence of the Christian church today I make this record of ancestral piety. Oh, there is a beauty, and a tenderness, and a sublimity in family religion!

There are but four or five pictures in the old family Bible that I inherited, but Dore never illustrated a Bible as that book is illustrated to my eyes. Through it I can see into marriages and burials, joys and sorrows, meetings and partings, Thanksgiving days and Christian festivals, cradles and deathbeds. Old, old book, speak out and tell of the sorrows comforted and of the dying hours irradiated. Old, old book, the hands that held thee are ashes, the eyes that perused thee are closed. What a pillow thou wouldst make for a dying head. I salute all the memories of the past when I press it to my heart and when I press it to my lips.

BIBLE ASSOCIATIONS.

Oh, that family Bible! The New Testament in small type is not worthy of being called by that name. Have a whole Bible in large type, with the family record of marriages and births and deaths. What if the curious should turn over the leaves to see how old you are? You are younger now than you will ever be again. The curious will find out from those with whom you have played in your childhood how old you are. Have a family Bible. It will go down from generation to generation, full of holy memories. A hundred years after you are dead it will be a benediction to those who come after you. Other books, worn out or fallen apart, will be flung to the garret or the cellar, but this will be inviolate, and it will be your protest for centuries against iniquity and in behalf of righteousness.

Oh, when we see what family religion did for our father's household, do we not want it to come into the dining room to break the bread, into the nursery to bless the young, into the parlor to purify the socialities, into the library to control the reading, into the bedroom to hallow the slumber, into the hall to watch our going out and our coming in? Aye, there are hundreds of voices in this house ready to cry out: "Yes! Yes! As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

There are two arms to this subject. The one arm puts its hand on all parents. It says to them: "Don't interfere with your children's welfare, don't interfere with their eternal happiness, don't you by anything you do put out your foot and trip them into ruin. Start them under the shelter, the insurance, the everlasting help of Christian parentage. Catechisms will not save them, though catechisms are good. The rod will not save them, though the rod may be necessary. Lessons of virtue will not save them, though they are very important. Becoming a through and through, up and down, out and out Christian yourself will make them Christians."

The other arm of this subject puts its hand upon those who had a pious bringing up, but who as yet have disappointed the expectations excited in regard to them. I said that children brought up in Christian households, though they might make a wide curve, were very apt to come back to the straight path. Have you not been curving out long enough, and is it not most time for you to begin to curve in?

EARLY CHRISTIAN TRAINING.

"Oh," you say, "they were too rigid." Well now, my brother, I think you have a pretty good character considering what you say your parents were. Do not boast too much about the style in which your parents brought you up. Might it not be possible that you would be an exception to the general rule laid down, and that you might spend your eternity in a different world from that in which your parents are spending theirs?

I feel anxious about you; you feel anxious about yourself. Oh, cross over into the right path. If your parents prayed for you twice a day, each of them twice a day for 20 years, that would make 29,000 prayers for you. Think of them!

By the memory of the cradle in which your childhood was rocked with the foot that long ago ceased to move, by the crib in which your own children slumber night by night under God's protecting care, by the two graves in which sleep those two old hearts that beat with love so long for your welfare, and by the two graves in which you, now the living father and mother, will find your last repose, I urge you to the discharge of your duty.

Though parents may in covenant be
And have their heaven in view,
They are not happy till they see
Their children happy too.

Oh, you departed Christian ancestry, fathers and mothers in glory, bend from the skies today and give new emphasis to what you told us on earth with many tears and anxieties! Keep a place for us by your blissful side, for today, in the presence of earth and heaven and hell, and by the help of the cross, and amid overwhelming and gracious memories, we resolve, each one for himself, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

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