

A BUNCH OF GRAPES.

THE THEME OF DR. TALMAGE'S SERMON AT THE TABERNACLE.

That Terrible Trip Across the Wilderness. The Divinely Sanctioned Idea of Death. Mrs. Signoray's Beautiful Line—The Force of the Resurrection.

BROOKLYN, June 18.—Rev. Dr. Talmage in selecting a theme for today's sermon in the Brooklyn Tabernacle chose one peculiarly suitable to the season of fruits, the title being "A Bunch of Grapes From Canaan" and the text Numbers xiii, 23. "And they came unto the brook of Eschol and out down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they brought it back upon a staff."

The long trunk of the Israelites across the wilderness was almost ended. They had come to the borders of the promised land. Of the 600,000 adults who started from Egypt for Canaan, how many do you suppose are left? Five hundred thousand? Oh, no. Not 200,000, not 100,000, nor 50,000, nor 10,000, but only 2,000. Oh, it was a ruinous march that God's people made, but their children were living, and they were on the march, and now that they had come up to the borders of the promised land they were very curious to know what kind of a place it was and whether it would be safe to go over. So a scouting party is sent out to reconnoiter, and they examine the land, and they come back bringing specimens of its growth.

Just as you came back from California, bringing to your family a basket of pears or plums or apples to show that monstrous fruit they have there, so this scouting party cut off the biggest bunch of grapes they could find. It was so large that one man could not carry it, and they thrust a pole through the cluster, and there was one man at either end of the pole, and so the bunch of grapes was transported.

I was some time ago in a luxuriant vineyard. The vine dresser had done his work. The vine had clambered up and spread its wealth all over the arbor. The sun and shower had mixed a cup which the vine drank until with flushed cheek it lay slumbering in the light, cluster against the clasp of cluster. The rinds of the grapes seemed almost bursting with the juice in the warm lips of the autumnal day, and it seemed as if all you had to do was to lift a chalice toward the cluster and its lifeblood would begin to drip away. But, my friends, in these rigorous climes we know nothing about large grapes.

Starbo states that in Bible times and in Bible lands there were grapevines so large that it took two men with outstretched arms to reach round them, and he says there were clusters 3 cubits in length, or twice the length from the elbow to the tip of the long finger. And Achaicus, dwelling in those lands, tells us that during the time he was smitten with fever one grape would slake his thirst for the whole day. No wonder, then, in these Bible times two men thought it worth their while to put their strength together to carry down one cluster of grapes from the promised land.

THE DIVINE IDEA. But this morning I bring you a larger cluster from the heavenly Eschol—a cluster of hopes, a cluster of prospects, a cluster of Christian consolations, and I am expecting that one taste of it will rouse up your appetite for the heavenly Canaan. During the past winter some of this congregation have gone away never to return. The aged have put down their staff and taken up the scepter. Men in middle came home from office and shop and did not go back again and never will go back again. And the dear children, some of them, have been gathered in Christ's arms. He found this world too rough a place for them, and so he has gathered them in. And oh, how many wounded souls there are—wounds for which this world offers no medication—and unless from the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ there shall come a consolation there will be no consolation at all. Oh, that the God of all comfort would help me while I preach and that the God of all comfort would help you while you hear!

First, I console you with the divinely sanctioned idea that your departed friends are as much yours now as they ever were. I know you sometimes get the idea in your mind when you have this kind of trouble that your friends are cut off from you and they are no longer yours, but the desire to have all our loved ones in the same lot in the cemetery is a natural desire, a universal desire and therefore a God implanted desire and is a mighty suggestive of the fact that death has no power to break up the family relations.

If our loved ones go away from our possession, why put a fence around our lot in the cemetery? Why the gathering of four or five names on one family monument? Why the planting of one cypress vine so that it covers all the cluster of graves? Why put the husband beside the wife and the children at their feet? Why the bolt on the gate of our lot, and the charge to the keepers of the ground to see that the grass is cut and the vine attended to and the flowers planted? Why not put our departed friends in one common field and grave? Oh, it is because they are ours.

That child, O stricken mother! is as much yours this morning as in the solemn hour when God put it against your heart and said as of old, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages." It is no mere whim. It is a divinely planted principle in the soul, and God certainly would not plant a lie, and he would not culture a lie. Abraham would not allow Sarah to be buried in a stranger's grounds, although some very beautiful ground was offered him a free gift, but he pays 400 shekels for Machpelah, the cave, and the trees overshadowing it. The grave has been kept in today and the Christian traveler stands in thoughtful and admiring mood gazing upon Machpelah, where Abraham and Sarah are taking their long sleep of 4,000 years. Your father may be slumbering under

the staking of the bell of the Scotch kirk. Your brother may have gone down in the ship that foundered off Cape Hatteras. Your little child may be sleeping on the verge of the flowering western prairie. Yet God will gather them all up, however widely the dust may be scattered. Nevertheless it is pleasant to think that we will be buried together. When my father died and we took him out and put him down in the graveyard of Somerset, it did not seem so sad to leave him there, because right beside him was my dear, good, old, beautiful Christian mother, and it seemed as if she said: "I was tired, and I came to bed a little early. I am glad you have come; it seems as of old."

Oh, it is a consolation to feel that when men come and with solemn tread carry you out to your resting place they will open the gate through which some of your friends have already gone and through which many of your friends will follow. Sleeping under the same roof, at last sleeping under the same soil. The autumnal leaves that drift across your grave will drift across theirs, the bird songs that drop on their mound will drop on yours, and then in starless winter nights, when the wind comes howling through the gorge, you will be company for each other. The child close up to the bosom of its mother. The husband and wife remarried; on their lips the sacrament of the dust.

Brothers and sisters who used in sport to sing themselves on the grass now again reclining side by side in the grave, in flocks of sunlight sifting through the long, lithe willows. Then at the trumpet of the archangel to rise side by side, shaking themselves from the dust of ages. The faces that were ghastly and fixed when you saw them last all afresh with the light of incorruption. The father looking around on his children and saying, "Come, come, my darlings; this is the morning of the resurrection." Mrs. Signoray wrote beautifully with the tears and blood of her own broken heart:

There was a shaded chamber, A silent watching band, On a low couch a suffering child Grasping her mother's hand. But 'mid the gasp and struggle With shuddering lips she cried, "Mother, oh, dearest mother, Bury me by your side." Only one wish she uttered As life was ebbing fast, "Sleep by my side, dear mother, And rise with me at last."

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES. Oh, yes, we want to be buried together. Sweet antitype of everlasting residence in each other's companionship. When the wreckers went down into the cabin of the lost steamer, he found the mother and child in each other's arms. It was sad, but it was beautiful, and it was appropriate. Together they went down. Together they will rise. One on earth. One in heaven. Is there not something cheering in all this thought and something to impress upon us the idea that the departed are ours yet—ours forever?

But I console you again with the fact of your present acquaintanceship and communication with your departed friends. I have no sympathy, I need not say, with the ideas of modern spiritualism, but what I mean is the theory set forth by the apostle when he says, "We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses." Just as in the ancient amphitheater there were 80,000 or 100,000 people looking down from the galleries upon the combatants in the center, so, says Paul, there is a great host of your friends in all the galleries of the sky looking down upon our earthly struggles. It is a sweet, a consoling, a Scriptural idea. With wing of angel, earth and heaven are in constant communication.

Does not the Bible say, "Are they not sent forth as ministering spirits to those who shall be heirs of salvation?" And when ministering spirits come down and see us, do they not take some message back? It is impossible to realize, I know, the idea that there is such rapid and perpetual intercommunication of earth and heaven, but it is a glorious reality. You take a rail train, and the train is in full motion, and another train from the opposite direction dashes past you so swiftly that you are startled. All the way between here and heaven is filled with the up trains and the down trains—spirits coming—spirits going—coming—going—coming—going.

That friend of yours who died last month—do you not suppose he told all the family news about you in the good land to the friends who are gone? Do you not suppose that when there are hundreds of opportunities every day for them in heaven to hear from you that they ask about you—that they know your tears, your temptations, your struggles, your victories? Aye, they do.

Perhaps during the last war you had a boy in the army, and you got a pass, and you went through the lines, and you found him, and the regiment coming from your neighborhood you knew most of the boys there. One day you started for home. You said, "Well, now, have you any letters to send? Any messages to send?" And they filled your pockets with letters, and you started home. Arriving home, the neighbors came in, and one said, "Did you see my John?" and others, "Did you see George?" "Do you know anything about my Frank?" And then you brought out the letters and gave them the messages of which you had been the bearer. Do you suppose that angels of God, coming down to this awful battlefield of sin and sorrow and death and meeting us and seeing us and finding out all about us, carry back no message to the skies?

Oh, there is consolation in it! You are in present communication with that land. They are in sympathy with you now more than they ever were, and they are waiting for the moment when the hammer stroke shall shatter the last chain of your earthly bondage, and your soul shall spring upward, and they will stand on the heights of heaven and see you come, and when you are within halting distance your other friends will be called out, and as you flash through the pearl hung gate their shout will make the hills tremble. "Hallelu! Hallelu! Hallelu! to the city of the blessed!" I console you still further with the

idea of a resurrection. I know there are a great many people who do not accept this because they cannot understand it; but, my friends, there are two stout passages—I could bring a hundred, but two swarthy passages are enough—and one David will strike down the largest Goliath. "Marvel not at this, for in the hour is coming when all who are in their graves shall come forth." The other swarthy passage is this: "The Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, and the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first." Oh, there will be such a thing as a resurrection.

You ask me a great many questions I cannot answer about this resurrection. You say, for instance, "If a man's body is constantly changing, and every seventh year he has an entirely new body, and he lives on to 70 years of age and so has had 10 different bodies, and at the hour of his death there is not a particle of flesh on him that was there in the days of his childhood, in the resurrection which of the 10 bodies will come up or will they all rise?"

You say, "Suppose a man dies, and his body is scattered in the dust, and out of that dust vegetables grow, and men eat the vegetables, and cannibals eat the men and eat them, and cannibals fight with cannibals until at last there shall be a hundred men who shall have within them some particles that started from the dead body first named, coming up through the vegetable, through the first man who ate it and through the cannibals who afterward ate him, and there be more than a hundred men who have rights in the particles of that body—in the resurrection how can they be assorted when these particles belong to them all?"

You say, "There is a missionary buried in Greenwood, and when he was in China he had his arm amputated—in the resurrection will that fragment of the body fly 16,000 miles to join the rest of the body?"

You say, "Will it not be a very difficult thing for a spirit coming back in that day to find the myriad particles of its own body, when they may have been scattered by the winds or overlaid by whole generations of the dead, looking for the myriad particles of its own body, while there are a thousand million other spirits doing the same thing, and all the assortment to be made within one day?" You say, "If 150 men go into a place of evening entertainment and leave their hats and overcoats in the hall, when they come back it is almost impossible for them to get the right ones, or to get them without a great deal of perplexity, and yet you tell me that myriads of spirits in the last day will come and find myriads of bodies."

Have you any more questions to ask? Any more difficulties to suggest? Any more mysteries? Bring them on! Against a whole regiment of skepticism I will march these two champions: "Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves shall come forth." "The Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, and the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first." You see I stick to these two passages. Who art thou, O fool, that thou resist against God? Eath he promised, and shall he not do it? Hath he commanded, and shall he not bring it to pass? Have you not confidence in his omnipotence? If he could in the first place build my body, after it is torn down can he not build it again?

"Oh," you say, "I would believe that if you would explain it. I am not disposed to be skeptical, but explain how it can be done." My brother, you believe a great many things you cannot explain. You believe the process, this need planted comes up a blue flower. Another seed planted comes up a yellow flower. Another seed planted comes up a white flower. Why? Why that wart on your finger? Tell me why some cows have horns and other cows have no horns. Why, when two obstacles strike each other in the air, do you hear the percussion? What is the subtle matter that dissolves a solid in a crucible? What makes the notches on an oak leaf different from any other kind of leaf? What makes the orange blossom different from that of the rose? How can the almighty which rides on the circle of the heaven find room to turn its chariot on a heliotope? Explain these. Can you not do it? Then I will not explain the resurrection. You explain one-half of the common mysteries of everyday life, and I will explain all the mysteries of the resurrection. You cannot answer me very plain questions in regard to ordinary affairs. I am not ashamed to say that I cannot explain God, and the judgment, and the resurrection. I simply accept them as facts, tremendous and infinite.

NEAR UNTO HEAVEN'S GATES. Before the resurrection takes place everything will be silent. The mausoleums and the labyrinthine silent. The graveyards silent, the cemetery silent, save from the clashing of hoofs and the grinding of wheels as the last funeral procession comes in. No breath of air disturbing the dust where Persepolis stood and Thebes and Babylon. No winking of the eyelids long closed in darkness. No stirring of the feet that once bounded the hillside. No opening of the hand that once plucked the flower out of the edge of the wilderness. No clutching of swords by the men who went down when Persia battled and Rome fell. Silence from ocean beach to mountain cliff and from river to river. The sea singing the same old tune. The lakes hushed to sleep in the bosom of the same great hills. No hand disturbing the gate of the long barred sepulcher. All the nations of the dead motionless in their winding sheets. Up the side of the hills, down through the trough of the valleys, far out in the caverns, across the fields, deep down into the coral palaces of the ocean depths where Leviathan sports with his fellows—everywhere, layer above layer, height above height, depth below depth—dead! dead! dead! But in the twinkling of an eye, as quick as that, as the archangel's trumpet comes pealing, rolling, reverber-

ating, crashing across continents and seas, the earth will give one fearful shudder and the door of the family vault, without being unlocked, will burst open, and all the graves of the dead will begin to throb and heave like the waves of the sea, and the mausoleum of princes will fall into the dust, and Ostend and Sebastopol and Austerlitz and Gettysburg stalk forth in the lurid air, and the shipwrecked rise from the deep, their wet locks looming above the billow, and all the land and all the sea become one moving mass of life—all generations, all ages with upturned countenances—some kindled with rapture and others blanched with despair, but gazing in one direction, upon one object, and that the throne of resurrection.

When I was a little while chaplain in the army, I remember how at eventide we could easily hear the voices of the pickets across the Potomac just when they were using ordinary tones. And as we come today and stand by the river of Jordan that divides us from our friends who are gone it seems to me we stand on one bank, and they stand on the other, and it is only a narrow stream, and our voices go, and their voices come. Hark! Hark! I hear distinctly what they say. "These are they who came out of great tribulation and had their robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb." Still the voice comes across the water, and I hear, "We hunger no more; we thirst no more; neither shall the sun light on us, nor any heat, for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne leads us to living fountains of water, and God wipe away all tears from our eyes."

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