THE FINGER OF GOD.

AN ELOQUENT SERMON FROM THE TABERNACLE PULPIT.

Dr. Talmage Selects a Text from Exodus and Preaches a Powerful Discourse—A Peroration of Wonderful Force and Beauty of Expression.

BROOKLYN, Oct. 28.—The capacity of the Tabernacle was tested this morning by the vast crowd that filled it in every part as soon as the doors were opened. After reading and commenting on several passages of Scripture illustrative of God's providential dealings, Dr. Talmage gave out the hymn beginning

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform.

His sermon was on the text Exodus viii, 19, "The Finger of God."

Pharaoh was sulking in his marble throneroom at Memphis. Plague after plague had come, and sometimes the Egyptian monarch was disposed to do better, but at the lifting of each plague he was as bad as before. The necromancers of the palace, however, were compelled to recognize the divine movement, and after one of the most exasperating plagues of all the series they cried out in the words of my text, "This is the finger of God"—not the first nor the last time when bad people said a good thing. An old Philadelphia friend visiting me the other day asked me if I had ever noticed this passage of Scripture from which I today speak. I told him no, and I said right away, "That is a good text for a sermon."

We all recognize the hand of God and know it is a mighty hand. You have seen a man keep two or three rubber balls flying in the air, catching and pitching them so that none of them fell to the floor, and do this for several minutes, and you have admired his dexterity. But have you thought how the hand of God keeps millions and millions of round worlds, vastly larger than our world, flying for centuries without letting one fall? Wondrous power and skill of God's hand! But about that I am not to discourse. My text leads me to speak of less than a fifth of the divine hand. "This is the finger of God." Only in two other places does the Bible refer to this division of the omnipotent hand. The rocks on Mount Sinai are basalt and very hard stone. Do you imagine it was a chisel that cut the ten commandments in that basalt? No; in Exodus we read that the tables of stone were "written with the finger of God." Christ says that he cast out devils with "the finger of God." The only instance that Christ wrote a word he wrote not with pen on parchment, but with his finger on the ground. Yet, though so seldom reference is made in the Bible to a part of God's hand, if you and I keep our eyes open and our heart right we will be compelled often to cry out, "This is the finger of God." It is my intention before long to begin a series of sermons on "The Astronomy of the Bible, or God Among the Stars;" "The Ornithology of the Bible, or God Among the Birds;" "The Pomology of the Bible, or God Among the Orchards;" "The Ichthyology of the Bible, or God Among the Fishes;" "The Geology of the Bible, or God Among the Rocks;" "The Waters of the Bible, or God Among the Seas;" "The Zoology of the Bible, or God Among the Beasts;" "The Precious Stones of the Bible, or God Among the Amethysts;" "The Conchology of the Bible, or God Among the Shells;" "The Botany of the Bible, or God Among the Flowers;" "The Chronology of the Bible, or God Among the Centuries," and I want this coming winter to get you and get myself into the habit of seeing the finger of God everywhere and in everything; but this morning I want to induce you to look for the finger of God in your personal affairs.

PROVIDENTIAL GESTURES.

To most of us gesticulation is natural. If a stranger accost you on the street and ask you the way to some place, it is as natural as to breathe for you to level your forefinger this way or that. Not one out of a thousand of you would stand with your hands by your side and make no motion with your finger. Whatever you may say with your lips is emphasized and re-enforced and translated by your finger. Now God in the dear old Book says to us innumerable things by the way of direction. He plainly tells us the way to go. But in every exigency of our life, if we will only look, we will find a providential gesture and a providential pointing, so that we may confidently say, "This is the finger of God." Two or three times in my life, when perplexed on questions of duty after earnest prayer, I have cast lots as to what I should do. In olden times the Lord's people cast lots. The land of Canaan was divided by lot. The cities were divided among the priests and Levites by lot. Matthias was chosen to the apostleship by lot. Now casting lots is about the most solemn thing you can do. It should never be done, except with a solemnity like that of the last judgment. It is a direct appeal to the Almighty. If after earnest prayer you do not seem to get the divine direction, I think you might without sin write upon one slip of paper "Yes," and upon another "No," or some other decisive words appropriate to the case, and then, obliterating from your mind the identity of the slips of paper, draw the decision and act upon it. In that case I think you have a right to take that indication as the finger of God. But do not do that except as the last resort and with a devoutness that leaves absolutely all with God.

For much that concerns us we have no responsibility, and we need not make appeal to the Lord for direction. We are not responsible for most of our surroundings. We are not responsible for the country of our birth, nor for whether we are Americans, or Norwegians, or Scotchmen, or Irishmen or Englishmen. We are not responsible for the age in which we live. We are not responsible for our temperament, be it nervous or phlegmatic, bilious or sanguine. We are not responsible for our features, be they homely or beautiful. We are not responsible for the height or smallness of our stature. We are not responsible for the fact that we are mentally dull or brilliant. For the most of our environments we have no more responsibility than we have for the mollusks at the bottom of the Atlantic ocean. Oh, I am so glad that there are about five hundred thousand things that we are not responsible for! Do not blame us for being in our manner cold as an iceberg or nervous as a cat amid a pack of Fourth of July firecrackers. If you are determined to blame somebody blame our great-grandfathers or great-grandmothers who died before the Revolutionary war, and who may have had habits depressing and ruinous. There are wrong things about us all which make me think that one hundred and fifty years ago there was some terrible crank in our ancestral line. Realize that and it will be a relief semi-infinite. Let us take ourselves as we are this moment, and then ask "which way?" Get all the direction you can from careful and constant study of the Bible, and then look up and look out and look around and see if you can find the finger of God.

LINCOLN'S WISE DELAY.

It is a remarkable thing that sometimes no one can see that finger but yourself. A year before Abraham Lincoln signed the proclamation of emancipation the White House was thronged with committees and associations, ministers and laymen, advising the president to make that proclamation. But he waited and waited, amid scoff and anathema, because he did not himself see the finger of God. After awhile, and at just the right time, he saw the divine pointing and signed the proclamation. The distinguished Confederates, Mason and Slidell, were taken off an English vessel by the United States government. "Don't give them up," shouted all the northern states. "Let us have war with England rather than surrender them," was the almost unanimous cry of the north. But William H. Seward saw the finger of God leading in just the opposite direction, and the Confederates were given up and we avoided a war with England, which at that time would have been the demolition of the United States government. In other words, the finger of God as it directs you may be invisible to everybody else. Follow the divine pointing as you see it, although the world may call you a fool. There has never been a man or a woman who amounted to anything that has not sometimes been called a fool. Nearly all the mistakes that you and I have made have come from our following the pointing of some other finger instead of the finger of God. But, now, suppose all forms of disaster close in upon a man. Suppose his business collapses. Suppose he buys goods and cannot sell them. Suppose by a new invention others can furnish the same goods at less price. Suppose a cold spring or a late autumn or the coming of an epidemic corners a man, and his notes come due and he cannot meet them, and his rent must be paid and there is nothing with which to pay it, and the wages of the employees are due and there is nothing with which to meet that obligation, and the bank will not discount, and the business friends to whom he goes for accommodation are in the same predicament, and he bears up and struggles on until, after awhile, crash goes the whole concern.

BETTER TREASURES THAN MONEY.

He stands wandering and saying: "I do not see the meaning of all this. I have done the best I could. God knows I would pay my debts if I could, but here I am hedged in and stopped." What should that man do in that case? Go to the Scriptures and read the promise about all things working together for good and kindred passages? That is well. But he needs to do something besides read the Scriptures. He needs to look for the finger of God that is pointing toward better treasures; that is pointing toward eternal release; that is urging him to higher realms. No human finger ever pointed to the east or west or north or south so certainly as the finger of God is pointing that troubled man to higher and better spiritual resources than he has ever enjoyed. There are men of vast wealth who are as rich for heaven as they are for this world, but they are exceptions. If a man grows in grace, it is generally before he gets $100,000 or after he loses it. If a man has plenty of railroad securities and has applied to his banker for more; if the lots he bought have gone up fifty per cent. in value; if he had hard work to get the door of his fireproof safe shut because of a new roll of securities he put in there just before locking up at night; if he be speculating in a falling market or a rising market and things take for him a right turn, he does not grow in grace very much that week. Do you know what made the great revival of 1857, when more people were converted to God, probably, than in any year since Christ was born? It was the defalcations and bankruptcy that swept American prosperity so flat that it could fall no flatter. I am speaking of whole souled men. Such men are so broken by calamity that they are humbled and fly to God for relief. Men who have no spirit and never expect anything are not much affected by financial changes. They are as apt to go into the kingdom under one set of circumstances as another. They are deadbeats wherever they are. The only way to get rid of them is to lend them a dollar and you will never see them again. I have tried that plan and it works well. But I am speaking of the effect of misfortune on high spirited men. Nothing but trial will turn such men from earth to heaven. It is only through clouds and darkness and whirlwind of disaster such a man can see the finger of God.

MERCIES NOT ACCIDENTS.

A most interesting as well as a most useful study is to watch the pointing of the finger of God. In the Seventeenth century South Carolina was yielding rosin and turpentine and tar as her chief productions. But Thomas Smith noticed that the ground near his house in Charleston was very much like the places in Madagascar where he had raised rice, and some of the Madagascar rice was sown there and grew so rapidly that South Carolina was led to make rice her chief production. Can you not see the finger of God in that incident? Rev. John Fletcher, of England, many will know, was one of the useful ministers of the Gospel who ever preached. Before conversion he joined the army and had bought his ticket on the ship for South America. The morning he was to sail some one spilled on him a kettle of water, and he was so scalded he could not go. He was very much disappointed, but the ship he was going to sail on went out and was never heard of again. Who can doubt that God was arranging the life of John Fletcher? Was it merely accidental that Richard Rodda, a Cornish miner, who was on his knees praying, remained unhurt, though heavy stones fell before him and behind him, and on either side of him, and another fell on top of these so as to make a roof over him?

A missionary in Jamaica lost his way, and in the night was wandering about, when a firefly flashed and revealed a precipice over which in a moment more he would have been dashed. F. W. Robertson, the great preacher of Brighton, England, had his life work decided by the barking of his dog. A neighbor whose daughter was ill was disturbed by the barking of that dog one night. This brought the neighbor into communication with Robertson. That acquaintanceship kept him from joining the dragoons and going to India and spending his life in military service, and reserved him for a pulpit the influence of which for Gospelization will resound for all time and all eternity.

Why did not Columbus sink when in early manhood he was afloat six miles from the beach with nothing to sustain him till he could swim to land but a boat's oar? I wonder if his preservation had anything to do with America? Had the storm that diverted the Mayflower from the mouth of the Hudson for which it was sailing and sent it ashore at Cape Cod no divine supervisal? Does anarchy rule this world, or God?

St. Felix escaped martyrdom by crawling through a hole in the wall across which the spiders immediately afterward wove a web. His persecutors saw the hole in the wall, but the spider's web put them off the track. A boy was lost by his drunken father and could not for years find his way home. Nearly grown he went into a Fulton street prayer meeting and asked for prayers that he might find his parents. His mother was in the room and rose and recognized her long lost son. Do you say that these things "only happened so?" Tell that to those who do not believe in a God, and have no faith in the Bible. Do not tell it to me. I said to an aged minister of much experience: "All the events of my life seem to have been divinely connected. Do you suppose it is so in all lives?" He answered, "Yes, but most people do not notice the divine leadings." I stand here this morning to say from my own experience that the safest thing in all the world to do is to trust the Lord. I never had a misfortune or a persecution or a trial or a disappointment, however excruciating at the time, that God did not make turn out for my good. My one wish is to follow the divine leading. I want to watch the finger of God.

A NATIONAL APPLICATION.

Nations also would do well to watch for the finger of God. What does the cholera scare in America mean? Some say it means that the plague will sweep our land next summer. I do not believe a word of it. There will be no cholera here next summer. Four or five summers ago there were those who said it would surely be here the following summer because it was on the way. But it did not come. The sanitary precautions established here will make next summer unusually healthful. Cholera never starts from where it stopped the season before, but always starts in the filth of Asia, and if it starts next summer it will start there again—it will not start from New York quarantine. But it is evident to me that the finger of God is in this cholera scare, and that he is pointing this nation to something higher and better. It has been demonstrated as never before that we are in the hands of God. He allowed the plague to come to our very gates, and then halted it. The quarantine was right and necessary, but oh, how easily the plague could have leaped the barriers lifted against it! Thanks to the president of the United States, and thanks to the health officers, and thanks to the Thirteenth regiment, and thanks to all who stood between this evil and our national health, but more than all and higher than all thanks to God! Out of that solemnity we ought to pass up to something better than anything that has ever yet characterized us as a nation. We ought to quit our national sins, our Sabbath breaking, and our drunkenness, and our impurities, and our corruptions of all sorts as a people. The tendency is in self gratulation at our prosperity to forget the mercy of God that has kept us from being blotted out for our crimes, and that still multiplies our temporal prosperities. Forward and upward! See you not the finger of God in this protecting mercy?

I rejoice that there are many encouraging signs for our nation, and one is that this presidential campaign has less malignity and abuse than any presidential campaign since we have been a nation. Turn over to the pictorials and the columns of the political sheets of the presidential excitements all the way back and see what contumely Washington and Jefferson and Madison and Monroe and Jackson went through. Now see the almost entire absence of all that. The political orators, I notice, this year are apt to begin by eulogizing the honesty and good intentions of the opposing candidate, and say that he is better than his party. Instead of vitriol, camomile flowers. That we seem to have escaped the degradation of the usual quadrennial billingsgate is an encouraging fact. Perhaps this betterment may have somewhat resulted from the sadness hovering over the home of one of the candidates, a sadness in which the whole nation sympathizes. Perhaps we have been so absorbed in paying honors to Christopher Columbus that we have forgotten to anathematize the prominent men of the present. No man in this country is fully honored until he is dead. Whatever be the reason, this nation has escaped many of the horrors that ordinarily accompany the presidential contest. But let us not pause too long in hilarity about the present and forget the fact that there are not only temporal possibilities far greater than those attained, but higher moral and religious possibilities. The God of our fathers is the God of their children, and his finger points us to a higher national career than many have yet suspected. For our churches, our schools, our colleges, our institutions of mercy, the best days are yet to come.

ONWARD THE WATCHWORD.

But notice that this finger of God almost always and in almost everything points forward and not backward. All the way through the Bible the lamb and pigeon on the altar, the pillar of fire poised above the wilderness, peace offering, sin offering, trespass offering, fingers of Joseph and Isaac and Joshua and David and Isaiah and Micah and Ezekiel, all together made the one finger of God pointing to the human, the divine, the gracious, the glorious, the omnipotent, the gentle, the pardoning and suffering and atoning Christ. And now the same finger of God is pointing the world upward to the same Redeemer and forward to the time of his universal domination. My hearers, get out of the habit of looking back and looking down, and look up and look forward. It is useful once in awhile to look back, but you had better for the most part of your time stop reminiscence and begin anticipation. We have none of us hardly begun yet. If we love the Lord and trust him—and you may all love him and trust him from this moment on—we no more understand the good things ahead of us than a child at school studying his A B C can understand what that has to do with his reading John Ruskin's "Seven Lamps of Architecture" or Dante's "Divina Commedia." The satisfactions and joys we have as yet had are like the music a boy makes with his first lesson on the violin compared with what was evoked from his great orchestra by my dear and illustrious and transcendent but now departed friend, Patrick Gilmore, when he lifted his baton and all the strings vibrated, and all the trumpets pealed forth, and all the flutes carroled, and all the drums rolled, and all the hoofs of the cavalry charge which he imitated were in full beat. Look ahead! The finger of God points forward.

"Oh, but," says some one, "I am getting old, and I have a touch of rheumatism in that foot, and I believe something is the matter with my heart, and I can not stand as much as I used to." Well, I congratulate you, for that shows you are getting nearer to the time when you are going to enter immortal youth and be strong enough to hurl off the battlements of heaven any bandit who by unheard of burglary might break into the Golden City. "But," says some one, "I feel so lonely. The most of my friends are gone, and the bereavements of life have multiplied until this world that was once so bright to me has lost its charm." I congratulate you, for when you go there will be fewer here to hold you back and more there to pull you in. Look ahead! The finger of God is pointing forward. We sit here in church, and by hymn and prayer and sermon and Christian association we try to get into a frame of mind that will be acceptable to God and pleasant to ourselves. But what a stupid thing it all is compared with what it will be when we have gone beyond psalmbook and sermon and Bible, and we stand, our last imperfection gone, in the presence of that charm of the universe—the blessed Christ—and have him look in our face and say: "I have been watching you and sympathizing with you and helping you all these years, and now you are here. Go where you please and never know a sorrow and never shed a tear. There is your mother now—she is coming to greet you—and there is your father, and there are your children. Sit down under this tree of life, and on the banks of this river talk it all over." I tell you there will be more joy in one minute of that than in fifty years of earthly exultation. Look ahead! Look at the finest house on earth and know that you will have a finer one in heaven. Look up the healthiest person you can find and know you will yet be healthier. Look up the one who has the best eyesight of any one you have ever heard of, and know you will have better vision. Listen to the sweetest prima donna that ever trod the platform, and know that in heaven you will lift a more enrapturing song than ever enchanted earthly auditorium.

A VISION OF SPLENDOR.

My friends, I do not know how we are going to stand it—I mean the full inrush of that splendor. Last summer I saw Moscow, in some respects the most splendid city under the sun. The emperor afterward asked me if I had seen it, for Moscow is the pride of Russia. I told him yes, and that I had seen Moscow burn. I will tell you what I meant. After examining nine hundred brass cannons which were picked out of the snow after Napoleon retreated from Moscow, each cannon deep cut with the letter "N," I ascended the tower of some two hundred and fifty feet, just before sunset, and on each platform there were bells, large and small, and I climbed up among the bells, and then as I reached the top all the bells underneath me began to ring, and they were joined by the bells of fourteen hundred towers and domes and turrets. Some of the bells sent out a faint tinkle of sound, a sweet tintinnabulation that seemed to bubble in the air, and others thundered forth boom after boom, boom after boom, until it seemed to shake the earth and fill the heavens—sounds so weird, so sweet, so awful, so grand, so charming, so tremendous, so soft, so rippling, so reverberating—and they seemed to wreathe and whirl and rise and sink and burst and roll and mount and die.

When Napoleon saw Moscow burn it could not have been more brilliant than when I saw all the fourteen hundred turrets aflame with the sunset, roofs of gold and walls of malachite, and architecture of all colors mingling the brown of autumnal forests and the blue of summer heavens, and the conflagration of morning skies, and the green of rich meadows, and the foam of tossing seas. The mingling of so many colors with so many sounds was an entrancement almost too much for human nerves or human eyes or human ears. I expect to see nothing to equal it until you and I see heaven. But that will surpass it and make the memory of what I saw that July evening in Moscow almost tame and insipid. All heaven aglow and all heaven a-ring—not in the sunset, but in the sunrise. Voices of our own kindred mingling with the doxologies of empires. Organs of eternal worship responding to the trumpets that have wakened the dead. Nations in white. Centuries in coronation. Anthems like the voice of many waters. Circle of martyrs. Circle of apostles. Circle of prophets. Thrones of cherubim. Thrones of seraphim. Throne of archangel. Throne of Christ. Throne of God. Thrones! Thrones! Thrones! The finger of God points that way. Stop not until you reach that place. Through the atoning Christ all I speak of and more may be yours and mine. Do you not now hear the chime of the bells of that metropolis of the universe? Do you not see the shimmering of the towers? Good morning.

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