DARKNESS AND DAWN

REV. DR. TALMAGE'S SERMON IS FULL OF THE BREATH OF THE FIELDS.

He Points a Moral From the Bible Story of the Attachment of Boaz For Ruth. The Uses of Trouble—Value of Field Gleaning.

WASHINGTON, April 25.—The sermon of Dr. Talmage which we send out today could not have been prepared by any one not born in the country. It is full of the breath of the fields. The text is Ruth ii, 3, "And she went and came and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech."

The time that Ruth and Naomi arrive at Bethlehem is harvest time. It was the custom when a sheaf fell from a load in the harvest field for the reapers to refuse to gather it up. That was to be left for the poor who might happen to come along that way. If there were handfuls of grain scattered across the field after the main harvest had been reaped, instead of raking it, as farmers do now, it was, by the custom of the land, left in its place so that the poor, coming along that way, might glean it and get their bread. But, you say, "What is the use of all these harvest fields to Ruth and Naomi? Naomi is too old and feeble to go out and toil in the sun, and can you expect that Ruth, the young and the beautiful, should tan her cheeks and blister her hands in the harvest field?"

Boaz owns a large farm, and he goes out to see the reapers gather in the grain. Coming there, right behind the swarthy, sun browned reapers, he beholds a beautiful woman gleaning—a woman more fit to bend to a harp or sit upon a throne than to stoop among the sheaves. Ah, that was an eventful day!

It was love at first sight. Boaz forms an attachment for the womanly gleaner—an attachment full of undying interest to the church of God in all ages, while Ruth, with an ephah, or nearly a bushel of barley, goes home to Naomi to tell her the successes and adventures of the day. That Ruth, who left her native land of Moab in darkness, and traveled through an undying affection for her mother-in-law, is in the harvest field of Boaz, is affianced to one of the best families in Judah, and becomes in after time the ancestress of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. Out of so dark a night did there ever dawn so bright a morning?

Two Great Educators.

I learn in the first place from this subject how trouble develops character. It was bereavement, poverty and exile that developed, illustrated and announced to all ages the sublimity of Ruth's character. That is a very unfortunate man who has no trouble. It was sorrow that made John Bunyan the better dreamer, and Dr. Young the better poet, and O'Connell the better orator, and Bishop Hall the better preacher, and Havelock the better soldier, and Kitto the better encyclopaedist, and Ruth the better daughter-in-law.

I once asked an aged man in regard to his pastor, who was a very brilliant man, "Why is it that your pastor, so very brilliant, seems to have so little heart and tenderness in his sermons?" "Well," he replied, "the reason is our pastor has never had any trouble. When misfortune comes upon him, his style will be different." After awhile the Lord took a child out of that pastor's house, and though the preacher was just as brilliant as he was before, oh, the warmth, the tenderness of his discourses! The fact is that trouble is a great educator. You see sometimes a musician sit down at an instrument and his execution is cold and formal and unfeeling. The reason is that all his life he has been prospered. But let misfortune or bereavement come to that man, and he sits down at the instrument, and you discover the pathos in the first sweep of the keys.

Misfortune and trials are great educators. A young doctor comes into a sickroom where there is a dying child. Perhaps he is very rough in his prescription and very rough in his manner and rough in the feeling of the pulse and rough in his answer to the mother's anxious question. But years roll on, and there has been one dead in his own house, and now he comes into the sickroom, and with tearful eyes he looks at the dying child, and he says, "Oh, how this reminds me of my Charlie!" Trouble, the great educator. Sorrow—I see its touch in the grandest painting, I hear its tremor in the sweetest song, I feel its power in the mightiest argument.

Grecian mythology said that the fountain of Hippocrene was struck out by the foot of the winged horse Pegasus. I have often noticed in life that the brightest and most beautiful fountains of Christian comfort and spiritual life have been struck out by the iron shod hoof of disaster and calamity. I see Daniel's courage best by the flash of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. I see Paul's prowess best when I find him on the foundering ship under the glare of the lightning in the breakers of Melita. God crowns his children amid the howling of wild beasts and the chopping of blood splashed guillotine and the crackling fires of martyrdom. It took the persecutions of Marcus Aurelius to develop Polycarp and Justin Martyr. It took all the hostilities against the Scotch Covenanters and the fury of Lord Claverhouse to develop James Renwick and Andrew Melville and Hugh McKail, the glorious martyrs of Scotch history. It took the stormy sea and the December blast and the desolate New England coast and the war whoop of savages to show forth the prowess of the pilgrim fathers—

> When amid the storms they sang,
> And the stars heard, and the sea,
> And the sounding aisles of the dim wood
> Rang to the anthems of the free.

It took all our past national distresses, and it takes all our present national sorrows to lift up our nation on that high career where it will march long after the foreign aristocracies that have mocked and tyrannies that have jeered, shall be swept down under the omnipotent wrath of God, who hates despotism and who, by the strength of his own red right arm, will make all men free. And so it is individually, and in the family, and in the church, and in the world, that through darkness and storm and trouble men, women, churches, nations, are developed.

Faithful Friends.

Again, I see in my text the beauty of unfaltering friendship. I suppose there were plenty of friends for Naomi while she was in prosperity, but of all her acquaintances how many were willing to trudge off with her toward Judah, when she had to make that lonely journey? One—the heroine of my text. One—absolutely one. I suppose when Naomi's husband was living, and they had plenty of money, and all things went well, they had a great many callers, but I suppose that after her husband died, and her property went, and she got old and poor, she was not troubled very much with callers. All the birds that sung in the bower while the sun shone have gone to their nests now the night has fallen.

Oh, these beautiful sunflowers that spread out their color in the morning hour! But they are always asleep when the sun is going down. Job had plenty of friends when he was the richest man in Uz, but when his property went and the trials came then there were none so much that pestered as Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite.

Life often seems to be a mere game, where the successful player pulls down all the other men into his own lap. Let suspicions arise about a man's character, and he becomes like a bank in a panic, and all the imputations rush on him and break down in a day that character which in due time would have had strength to defend itself. There are reputations that have been half a century in building which go down under one push, as a vast temple is consumed by the touch of a sulphurous match. A hog can uproot a century plant.

In this world, so full of heartlessness and hypocrisy, how thrilling it is to find some friend as faithful in days of adversity as in days of prosperity? David had such a friend in Hushai; the Jews had such a friend in Mordecai, who never forgot their cause; Paul had such a friend in Onesiphorus, who visited him in jail; Christ had such in the Marys, who adhered to him on the cross; Noami had such a one in Ruth, who cried out: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee, for whither thou goest I will go, and whither thou lodgest I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

After Storm, Sunshine.

Again, I learn from this subject that paths which open in hardship and darkness often come out in places of joy. When Ruth started from Moab toward Jerusalem to go along with her mother-in-law, I suppose the people said: "Oh, what a foolish creature to go away from her father's house; to go off with a poor old woman toward the land of Judah! They won't live to get across the desert. They will be drowned in the sea, or the jackals of the wilderness will destroy them." It was a very dark morning when Ruth started off with Naomi. But behold her in my text in the harvest field of Boaz, to be affianced to one of the lords of the land and become one of the grandmothers of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. And so it often is that a path which often starts very darkly ends very brightly.

When you started out for heaven, oh, how dark was the hour of conviction; how Sinai thundered and devils tormented and the darkness thickened! All the sins of your life pounced upon you and it was the darkest hour you ever saw when you first found out your sins. After awhile you went into the harvest field of God's mercy. You began to glean in the fields of divine promise and you had more sheaves than you could carry as the voice of God addressed you saying, "Blessed is the man whose transgression are forgiven and whose sins are covered." A very dark starting in conviction, a very bright ending in the pardon and the hope and the triumph of the gospel!

So, very often in our worldly business or in our spiritual career we start off on a very dark path. We must go. The flesh may shrink back, but there is a voice within, or a voice from above, saying, "You must go." And we have to drink the gall, and we have to carry the cross, and we have to traverse the desert, and we are pounded and flailed of misrepresentation and abuse, and we have to urge our way through 10,000 obstacles that have been slain by our own right arm. We have to ford the river, we have to climb the mountain, we have to storm the castle, but, blessed be God, the day of rest and reward will come. On the tip top of the captured battlements we will shout the victory; if not in this world, then in that world where there is no gall to drink, no burdens to carry, no battles to fight. How do I know it? Know it! I know it because God says so: "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat, for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall lead them to living fountains of water, and God shall wipe all tears from their eyes."

It was very hard for Noah to endure the scoffing of the people in his day, while he was trying to build the ark and was every morning quizzed about his old boat that would never be of any practical use; but when the deluge came and the tops of the mountains disappeared like the backs of sea monsters, and the elements, lashed up in fury, clapped their hands over a drowned world, then Noah in the ark rejoiced in his own safety and in the safety of his family and looked out on the wreck of a ruined earth.

Christ, hounded of persecutors, denied a pillow, worse maltreated than the thieves on either side of the cross, human hate smacking its lips in satisfaction after it had been draining its last drop of blood, the sheeted dead bursting from the sepulchers at his crucifixion! Tell me, O Gethsemane and Golgotha, were there ever darker times than those? Like the booming of the midnight sea against the rock, the surges of Christ's anguish beat against the gates of eternity, to be echoed back by all the thrones of heaven and all the dungeons of hell. But the day of reward comes for Christ. All the pomp and dominion of this world are to be hung on his throne, crowned heads are to bow before him on whose head are many crowns, and all the celestial worship is to come up at his feet, like the humming of the forest, like the rushing of the waters, like the thundering of the seas, while all heaven, rising on their thrones, beat time with their scepters, "Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

> That song of love, now low and far,
> Ere long shall swell from star to star;
> That light, the breaking day which tips
> The golden spired Apocalypse.

Importance of Little Things.

Again, I learn from my subject that events which seem to be most insignificant may be momentous. Can you imagine anything more unimportant than the coming of a poor woman from Moab to Judah? Can you imagine anything more trivial than the fact that this Ruth just happened to alight—as they say—just happened to alight on that field of Boaz? Yet all ages, all generations, have an interest in the fact that she was to become an ancestress of the Lord Jesus Christ, and all nations and kingdoms must look at that one little incident with a thrill of unspeakable and eternal satisfaction. So it is in your history and in mine. Events that you thought of no importance at all have been of very great moment. That casual conversation, that accidental meeting—you did not think of it again for a long while, but how it changed all the phases of your life.

It seemed to be of no importance that Jubal invented rude instruments of music, calling them harp and organs, but they were the introduction of all the world's minstrelsy, and as you hear the vibration of a stringed instrument, even after the fingers have been taken away from it, so all music now of lute and drum and cornet is only the long continued strains of Jubal's harp and Jubal's organ. It seemed to be a matter of very little importance that Tubal Cain learned the uses of copper and iron, but that rude foundry of ancient days has its echo in the rattle of Birmingham machinery and the roar and bang of factories on the Merrimac.

It seemed to be a matter of no importance that Luther found a Bible in a monastery, but as he opened that Bible and the brass bound lids fell back they jarred everything, and the rustling of the wormed leaves was the sound of the wings of the angel of the reformation. It seemed to be a matter of no importance that a woman whose name has been forgotten dropped a tract in the way of a very bad man of the name of Richard Baxter. He picked up the tract and read it, and it was the means of his salvation. In after days that man wrote a book called "The Call to the Unconverted," that was the means of bringing a multitude to God, among others Philip Doddridge. Philip Doddridge wrote a book called "The Rise and Progress of Religion," which has brought thousands and tens of thousands into the kingdom of God and among others the great Wilberforce. Wilberforce wrote a book called "A Practical View of Christianity," which was the means of bringing a great multitude to Christ, among others Legh Richmond. Legh Richmond wrote a tract called "The Dairyman's Daughter," which has been the means of the salvation of unconverted multitudes. And that tide of influence started from the fact that one Christian woman dropped a Christian tract in the way of Richard Baxter, the tide of influence rolling on through Richard Baxter, through Philip Doddridge, through the great Wilberforce, through Legh Richmond, on, on, on, forever, forever. So the insignificant events of this world seem, after all, to be most momentous.

Female Toilers.

Again, I see in my subject an illustration of the beauty of female industry. Behold Ruth toiling in the harvest field under the hot sun or at noon taking plain bread with the reapers or eating the parched corn which Boaz handed to her. The customs of society, of course, have changed, and without the hardships and exposure to which Ruth was subjected every intelligent woman will find something to do.

I know there is a sickly sentimentality on this subject. In some families there are persons of no practical service to the household or community, and, though there are so many woes all around about them in the world, they spend their time languishing over a new pattern or bursting into tears at midnight over the story of some lover who shot himself. They would not deign to look at Ruth carrying back the barley on her way home to her mother-in-law, Naomi. All this fastidiousness may seem to do very well while they are under the shelter of their father's house, but when the sharp winter of misfortune comes what of these butterflies? Persons under indulgent parentage may get upon themselves habits of indolence, but when they come out into practical life their soul will recoil with disgust and chagrin. They will feel in their hearts what the poet so severely satirized when he said:

> Folks are so awkward, things so impolite,
> They're elegantly pained from morning until night.

Through that gate of indolence how many men and women have marched, useless on earth, to a destroyed eternity! Spinola said to Sir Horace Vere, "Of what did your brother die?" "Of having nothing to do," was the answer. "Ah," said Spinola, "that's enough to kill any general of us!" Oh, can it be possible in this world, where there is so much suffering to be alleviated, so much darkness to be enlightened and so many burdens to be carried, that there is any person who cannot find anything to do?"

Mme. de Stael did a world of work in her time, and one day, while she was seated amid instruments of music, all of which she had mastered, and amid manuscript books which she had written, some one said to her, "How do you find time to attend to all these things?" "Oh," she replied, "these are not the things I am proud of. My chief boast is in the fact that I have 17 trades, by any one of which I could make a livelihood if necessary." And, if in secular spheres there is so much to be done, in spiritual work how vast the field! How many dying all around about us without one word of comfort! We want more Abigails, more Hannahs, more Rebeccas, more Marys, more Deborahs, consecrated, body, mind, soul, to the Lord who bought them.

Gleaning.

Once more I learn from my subject the value of gleaning.

Ruth going into that harvest field might have said: "There is a straw, and there is a straw, but what is a straw? I can't get any barley for myself or my mother-in-law out of these separate straws." Not so said beautiful Ruth. She gathered two straws, and she put them together, and more straws, until she got enough to make a sheaf. Putting that down, she went and gathered more straws, until she had another sheaf, and another, and another, and another, and then she brought them together, and she threshed them out, and she had an ephah of barley, nigh a bushel. Oh, that we might all be gleaners!

Elihu Burritt learned many things while toiling in a blacksmith's shop. Abercrombie, the world renowned philosopher, was a philosopher in Scotland, and he got his philosophy, or the chief part of it, while as a physician he was waiting for the door of the sickroom to open. Yet how many there are in this day who say they are so busy they have no time for mental or spiritual improvement. The great duties of life cross the field like strong reapers and carry off all the hours, and there is only here and there a fragment left that is not worth gleaning. Ah, my friends, you could go into the busiest day and busiest week of your life and find golden opportunities, which, gathered, might at last make a whole sheaf for the Lord's garner. It is the stray opportunities and the stray privileges which, taken up and bound together and beaten out, will at last fill you with much joy.

There are a few moments left worth the gleaning. Now, Ruth to the field! May each one have a measure full and running over! Oh, you gleaners, to the field! And if there be in your household an aged one or a sick relative that is not strong enough to come forth and toil in this field, then let Ruth take home to feeble Naomi this sheaf of gleaning, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." May the Lord God of Ruth and Naomi be our portion forever!

A Legal Problem.

A curious little problem in law and ethics came up for solution the other day at Hazleton, Pa. A man was arrested there for practicing medicine without having been registered, as the law of Pennsylvania and most other states requires. He confessed his guilt and admitted that he was well acquainted with and approved of the regulation he had violated. Then he proceeded to assert and to prove by documentary evidence that he had been graduated from the Medical school of St. Petersburg university and had practiced in the Russian capital for years. He was therefore quite eligible for registration in this country, but on reaching Hazleton he had found himself penniless and without friends. After he, his wife and his three children had gone hungry for several days he determined to risk imprisonment in order to supply the wants of his family and incidentally to earn enough money to pay the register's fee. Immediate denunciation and arrest followed. Investigation showed that the man's story was true in every particular. His wants were supplied, and he is now openly and successfully following the profession the practice of which had made him a technical criminal. Now, admitting that this Russian could not have borrowed money to meet the law's requirements, a perfectly admissible supposition, what was he to do? Was or was not his offense a necessary one?—New York Times.

A Trick That Failed.

The dishonest man is pretty sure to overreach himself sooner or later, as in the following story, borrowed from an exchange:

In a hotel in Berlin there was a night watchman who did not take kindly to the system adopted a few years ago requiring him to go through the hotel at certain hours and touch a set of electric buttons.

After much thought he rigged up an automatic arrangement on several of the buttons so that they would report at certain hours. Soon the button system got so out of order that the management abolished it, and a pedometer was given to the watchman, which would register every step he took.

All went well the first two nights, but on the third morning the old man was missing. On search being made, he was found sound asleep in the engine room, and the pedometer so attached to the piston rod of the engine that with every stroke it registered a step. It had been traveling all night, and when taken off it registered 212 miles.

Transparent.

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Peter—A ladder.—Fliegende Blatter.

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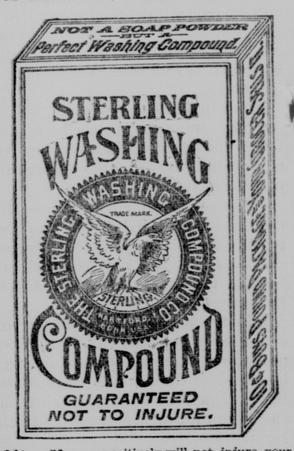


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