REV. DR. TALMAGE.

The Eminent Brooklyn Divine's Sunday Sermon.

Subject: "Straining at Gnats and Swallowing Camels."

TEXT: *"Ye blind guides, who strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel."*—Matthew xiii., 24.

A proverb is compact wisdom, knowledge in chunks, a library in a sentence, the electricity of many clouds discharged in one bolt, a river put through a millrace. When Christ quotes the proverb of the text He means to set forth the ludicrous behavior of those who make a great bluster about small sins and have no appreciations of great ones.

In my text a small insect and a large quadruped are brought into comparison—a gnat and a camel. You have in museum or on the desert seen the latter, a great awkward, sprawling creature, with back two stories high and stomach having a collection of reservoirs for desert travel, an animal forbidden to the Jews as food, and in many literatures entitled "the ship of the desert." The gnat spoken of in the text is in the grub form. It is born in pool or pond, after a few weeks becomes a chrysalis, and then after a few days becomes the gnat as we recognize it. But the insect spoken of in the text is in its very smallest shape, and yet it inhabits the water—for my text is a misprint and ought to read "strain out a gnat."

My text shows you the prince of inconsistencies. A man after long observation has formed the suspicion that in a cup of water he is about to drink there is a grub or the grandparent of a gnat. He goes and gets a sieve or a strainer. He takes the water and pours it through the sieve in the broad light. He says, "I would rather do anything almost than drink this water until this larva be extirpated." This water is brought under inquisition. The experiment is successful. The water rushes through the sieve and leaves against the side of the sieve the grub or gnat.

Then the man carefully removes the insect and drinks the water in placidity. But going out one day and hungry, he devours a "ship of the desert," the camel, which the Jews were forbidden to eat. The gastronomer has no compunctions of conscience. He suffers from no indigestion. He puts the lower jaw under the camel's forefoot and his upper jaw over the hump of the camel's back, and gives one swallow and the dromedary disappears forever. He strained out a gnat, he swallowed a camel.

While Christ's audience were yet smiling at the oppositeness and wit of His illustration—for smile they did in church, unless they were too stupid to understand the hyperbole—Christ practically said to them. "That is you." Punctilious about small things; reckless about affairs of great magnitude. No subject over withered under a surgeon's knife more bitterly than did the Pharisees under Christ's scalpel of truth.

As an anatomist will take a human body to pieces and put them under a microscope for examination, so Christ finds His way to the heart of the dead Pharisee and cuts it out and puts it under the glass of inspection for all generations to examine. Those Pharisees thought that Christ would flatter them and compliment them, and how they must have writhed under the red hot words as He said, "Ye fools, ye whited sepulchers, ye blind guides which strain out a gnat and swallow a camel."

There are in our day a great many gnats strained out and a great many camels swallowed, and it is the object of this sermon to sketch a few persons who are extensively engaged in that business.

First, I remark, that all those ministers of the Gospel are photographed in the text who are very scrupulous about the conventionalities of religion, but put no particular stress upon matters of vast importance. Church services ought to be grave and solemn. There is no room for frivolity in religious convocation. But there are illustrations, and there are hyperboles like that of Christ in the text that will irradiate with smiles any intelligent auditory. There are men like those blind guides of the text who advocate only those things in religious service which draw the corners of the mouth down, and denounce all those things which have a tendency to draw the corners of the mouth up, and these men will go to installations and to presbyteries and to conferences and to associations, their pockets full of fine sieves to strain out the gnats, while in their own churches at home every Sunday there are fifty people sound asleep. They make their churches a great dormitory, and their somniferous sermons are a cradle, and the drawled out hymns a lullaby, while some wakeful soul in a pew with her fan keeps the flies off unconscious persons approximate. Now, I say it is worse to sleep in church than to smile in church, for the latter implies at least attention, while the former implies the indifference of the hearers and the stupidity of the speaker.

In old age, or from physical infirmity, or from long watches with the sick, drowsiness will sometimes overpower one, but when a minister of the Gospel looks off upon an audience and finds healthy and intelligent people struggling with drowsiness it is time for him to give out the doxology or pronounce the benediction. The great fault of church services to-day is not too much vivacity, but too much somnolence. The one is an irritating gnat that may be easily strained out; the other is a great, sprawling and sleepy-eyed camel of the dry desert. In all our Sabbath schools, in all our Bible classes, in all our pulpits we need to brighten up our religious message with such Christ-like vivacity as we find in the text.

I take down from my library the biographies of ministers and writers of the past ages, inspired and uninspired, who have done the most to bring souls to Jesus Christ, and I find that without a single exception they consecrated their wit and their humor to Christ. Elijah used it when he advised the Baalites, as they could not make their God respond, telling them to call louder as their god might be sound asleep or gone a-hunting. Job used it when he said to his self-conceited comforters, "Wisdom will die with you." Christ not only used it in the text, but when He ironically complimented the putrefied Pharisees, saying, "The whole need not a physician," and when by one word He described the cunning of Herod, saying, "Go ye, and tell that fox."

Matthew Henry's Commentaries from the first page to the last coruscated with humor as summer clouds with heat lightning. John Bunyan's writings are as full of humor as they are of saving truth, and there is not an aged man here who has ever read "Pilgrim's Progress" who does not remember that while reading it he smiled as often as he wept. Chrysostom, George Herbert, Robert South, John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jeremy Taylor, Rowland Hill, Nettleton, George G. Finney and all the men of the past who greatly advanced the kingdom of God consecrated their wit and their humor to the cause of Christ.

So it has been in all the ages, and I say to these young theological students, who cluster in these services Sabbath by Sabbath, sharpen your wits as keen as scimiters and and then take them into the holy war. It is a very short bridge between a smile and a tear, a suspension bridge from eye to lip, and it is soon crossed over, and a smile is sometimes just as sacred as a tear. There is as much religion, and I think a little more, in a spring morning than in a starless midnight.

Religious work without any humor or wit in it is a banquet with a side of beef, and that raw, and no condiments and no dessert succeeding. People will not sit down at such a banquet. By all means remove all frivolity and all pathos and all lightness and all vulgarity—strain them out through the sieve of holy discrimination; but, on the other hand, beware of that monster which overshadows the Christian church to-day, conventionally, coming up from the Great Sahara Desert of Ecclesiasticism, having on its back a hump of sanctimonious gloom—and vehemently refuse to swallow that camel.

Oh, how particular a great many people are about the infinitesimals while they are quite reckless about the magnitudes. What did Christ say? Did He not excoriate the people in His time who were so careful to wash their hands before a meal, but did not wash their hearts? It is a bad thing to have unclean hands; it is a worse thing to have an unclean heart. How many people there are in our time who are very anxious that after their death they shall be buried with their feet toward the east, and not at all anxious that during their whole life they should face in the right direction so that they shall come up in the resurrection of the just whichever way they are buried. How many there are chiefly anxious that a minister of the Gospel shall come in the line of apostolic succession, not caring so much whether he comes from Apostle Paul or Apostle Judas. They have a way of measuring a gnat until it is larger than a camel.

Again, my subject photographs all those who are abhorrent of small sins while they are reckless in regard to magnificent thefts. You will find many a merchant, who while he is so careful that he would not take a yard of cloth or a spool of cotton from the counter without paying for it, and who if a bank cashier should make a mistake and send in a roll of bills five dollars too much would dispatch a messenger in hot haste to return the surplus, yet who will go into a stock company in which after awhile he gets control of the stock and then waters the stock and makes $100,000 appear like $200,000. He stole only $100,000 by the operation. Many of the men of fortune made their wealth in that way.

One of those men engaged in such unrighteous acts, that evening, the evening of the very day when he watered the stock, will find a wharf rat stealing an evening newspaper from the basement doorway, and will go out and catch the urchin by the collar and twist the collar so tightly the poor fellow cannot say that it was thirst for knowledge that led him to the dishonest act, but grip the collar tighter and tighter, saying: "I have been looking for you a long while. You stole my paper four or five times, haven't you? You miserable wretch!" And then the old stock gambler, with a voice they can hear three blocks, will cry out, "Police, police!"

That same man, the evening of the day on which he watered the stock, will kneel with his family in prayer and thank God for the prosperity of the day, then kiss his children good night with an air which seems to say: "I hope you will all grow up to be as good as your father!" Prisons for sins insectile in size, but palaces for crimes dromedarian. No mercy for sins animalcule in proportion, but great leniency for mastodon iniquity.

It is time that we learn in America that sin is not excusable in proportion as it declares large dividends and has outriders in equipage. Many a man is riding to perdition postilion ahead and lackey behind. To steal a dollar is a gnat; to steal many thousands of dollars is a camel. There is many a fruit dealer who would not consent to steal a basket of peaches from a neighbor's stall, but who would not scruple to depress the fruit market; and as long as I can remember we have heard every summer the peach crop of Maryland is a failure, and by the time the crop comes in the misrepresentation makes a difference of millions of dollars. A man who would not steal one peach basket steals fifty thousand peach baskets.

Any summer go down into the Mercantile library, in the reading rooms, and see the newspaper reports of the crops from all parts of the country, and their phraseology is very much the same, and the same men wrote them, methodically and infamously carrying out the huge lying about the grain crop from year to year and for a score of years. After a while there is a "corner" in the wheat market, and men who had a contempt for a petty theft will burglarize the wheat bin of a nation and commit larceny upon the American corncrib. And men will sit in churches and in reformatory institutions trying to strain out the small gnats of scoundrelism, while in their grain elevators and in their storehouses they are fattening huge camels which they expect after awhile to swallow. Society has to be entirely reconstructed on this subject. We are to find that a sin is inexcusable in proportion as it is great.

I know in our time the tendency is to charge religious frauds upon good men. They say, "Oh, what a class of frauds you have in the Church of God in this day," and when an elder of a church or a deacon or a minister of the Gospel or a superintendent of a Sabbath school turns out a defaulter what display heads there are in many of the newspapers—great primer type; five line pica—"Another Saint Absconded," "Clerical Scoundrelism," "Religion at a Discount," "Shame on the Churches," while there are a thousand scoundrels outside the church to where there is one inside the church, and the misbehavior of those who never see the inside of a church is so great it is enough to tempt a man to become a Christian to get out of their company.

But in all circles, religious and irreligious, the tendency is to excuse sin in proportion as it is mammoth. Even John Milton in his "Paradise Lost," while he condemns Satan, gives such a grand description of him you have hard work to suppress your admiration. Oh, this straining out of small sins like gnats, and this gulping down great iniquities like camels.

This subject does not give the picture of of one or two persons, but is a gallery in which thousands of people may see their likenesses. For instance, all these people who, while they would not rob their neighbor of a farthing, appropriate the money and the treasure of the public. A man has a house to sell, and he tells his customer it is worth $20,000. Next day the assessor comes around and the owner says it is worth $15,000. The Government of the United States took off the tax from personal income, among other reasons because so few people would tell the truth, and many a man with an income of hundreds of dollars a day made statements which seemed to imply he was about to be handed over to the overseer of the poor.

Careful to pay their passage from Liverpool to New York, yet smuggling in their Saratoga trunk ten silk dresses from Paris and a half dozen watches from Geneva, Switzerland, telling the custom house officer on the wharf, "There is nothing in that trunk but wearing apparel," and putting a five dollar gold piece in his hand to punctuate the statement.

Described in the text are all those who are particular never to break the law of grammar, and who want all their language an elegant specimen of syntax, straining out all the inaccuracies of speech with a fine sieve of literary criticism, while through their conversation go slander and innuendo and profanity and falsehood larger than a whole caravan of camels, when they might better fracture every law of the language and shock their intellectual taste, and better let verb seek in vain for its nominative, and every noun for its government, and every preposition lose its way in the sentence, and adjectives and participles and pronouns get into a grand riot worthy of the Fourth ward on election day, then to commit a moral inaccuracy. Better swallow a thousand gnats than one camel.

Such persons are also described in the text who are very much alarmed about the small faults of others and have no alarm about their own great transgressions. There are in every community and in every church watchdogs who feel called upon to keep their eyes on others and growl. They are full of suspicions. They wonder if that man is not dishonest, if that man is not unclean, if there is not something wrong about the other man. They are always the first to hear of anything wrong. Vultures are always the first to smell carrion. They are self appointed detectives. I lay this down as a rule without any exception—that those people who have the most faults themselves are most merciless in their watching of others. From scalp of head to sole of foot they are full of jealousies and hypercriticisms.

They spend their life in hunting for muskrats and mud turtles instead of hunting for Rocky Mountain eagles; always for something mean instead of something grand. They look at their neighbors' imperfections through a microscope, and look at their own imperfections through a telescope upside down. Twenty faults of their own do not hurt them half so much as one fault of somebody else. Their neighbor's imperfections are like gnats, and they strain them out; their own imperfections are like camels, and they swallow them.

But lest any might think they escape the scrutiny of the text, I have to tell you we all come under the divine satire when we make the questions of time more prominent than the questions of eternity. Come now, let us all go into the confessional. Are not all tempted to make the question, Where shall I live now? greater than the question, Where shall I live forever? How shall I get more dollars here? greater than the question, How shall I lay up treasures in heaven? the question, How shall I pay my debts to man? greater than the question, How shall I meet my obligations to God? the question, How shall I gain the world? greater than the question, What if I lose my soul? the question, Why did God let sin come into the world? greater than the question, How shall I get it extirpated from my nature? the question, What shall I do with the twenty or forty or seventy years of my sublunar existence? greater that the question, What shall I do with the millions of cycles of my postterrestrial existence? Time, how small it is! Eternity, how vast it is! The former more insignificant in comparison with the latter than a gnat is insignificant when compared with a camel. We dodged the text. We said, "That doesn't mean me, and that doesn't mean me," and with a ruinous benevolence we are giving the whole sermon away.

But let us all surrender to the charge. What an ado about things here. What poor preparation for a great eternity. Although a minnow were larger than a behemoth, as though a swallow took wider circuit than an albatross, as though a nettle were taller than a Lebanon cedar, as though a giant were greater than a camel, as though a minute were longer than a century, as though time were higher, deeper, broader than eternity. So the text which flashed with lightning of wit as Christ uttered it, is followed by the crashing thunders of awful catastrophe to those who make the questions of time greater than the questions of the future, the oncoming, overshading future. O Eternity! Eternity! Eternity!

Defeated Each Other's Intentions.

A very curious case, in which a husband executed a will which had been prepared for his wife, and the wife executed a will which had been prepared for her husband, has recently been decided by the general term of the Supreme Court of this State in the Fourth Judicial Department (Syracuse). John and Jane Nelson, being husband and wife, wanted to make wills each in favor of the other, and employed William Cowie to prepare the instrument, which he did in due form. The wills were read and placed upon the table for signature. Each then signed one of the wills, made the requisite declaration as to the character of the instrument, and asked the subscribing witnesses to sign. After execution the wills were sealed up in an envelope, which was not opened until after the husband's death, when it was discovered for the first time that each had by mistake signed the will intended for the other. The wife brought a suit in the Supreme Court to correct her husband's mistake in signing the wrong will, by reforming the language of the will which he did actually execute so as to make it conform to that which he certainly intended to execute. Her complaint was dismissed at the special term, however, and the Appellate branch of the Supreme Court holds that the dismissal was right. Mr. Justice Martin, in the opinion of the general term, says in substance that there is no will to correct, because the husband did not make any will at all. The instrument that he executed was his wife's will, and of no more legal significance than if it had been a blank piece of paper. No precisely similar case is reported in this State, but there are English and Pennsylvania decisions in point adverse to the position of the wife.—Albany (N. Y.) Argus.

Overeating vs. Overwork.

An abuse that tends to the injury of brain workers is excessive eating. A writer in the Medical Mirror recalls to mind several active brain workers who suddenly broke down, and fancied that it was due to brain fatigue, when, as a matter of fact, it was due to overstuffing of their stomachs. The furnace connected with mental machinery became clogged up with ashes and carbon in various shapes and forms, and as a result disease came, and before the cases were fully appreciated, a demoralized condition of the nervous systems was manifested, and they laid the flattering unction to their souls that they had indulged in mental overwork. Hard work, mental or physical, rarely ever kills. If a mild amount of physical exercise be taken, and a judicious amount of food be furnished, the bowels kept open in proper manner, the surface protected with proper clothing, and the individual cultivates a philosophical nature and absolutely resolves to permit nothing to annoy or fret him, the chances are that he can do an almost unlimited amount of work for an indefinite length of time, bearing in mind always that when weariness comes he must rest and not take stimulants and work upon false capital. The tired, worn-out slave should not be scourged to additional labor. Under such stimulus the slave may do the task, but he soon becomes crippled and unfit for work. The secret of successful work lies in the direction of selecting good, nutritious, digestible food, taken in proper quantities, the adopting of regular methods of work, the rule of resting when pronounced fatigue presents itself, determining absolutely not to permit friction, worry or fretting to enter into his life, and the cultivation of the three graces, charity, patience, and philosophy.—Scientific American.

An Armored Train.

The Midland railroad of India has had an armored train built which can be used either as a means of defense or attack, or for the repair of the railroad tracks and the telegraphs. The experiments with the train have yielded results so satisfactory that similar trains may be constructed for the sole purpose of the defense of the country. Evidently military armaments will never be finished, new means and weapons of war being invented continually.—Chicago Times.

The Austrian War Minister is about to establish a school to teach practical ballooning for army uses in time of war.

A Promising Situation.

(New York Daily Investigator.)

Good judges say that one of the next localities to achieve distinction by jumping from a substantial town to a thriving metropolis in a few years will be the city of Superior, Wisconsin, and this, too, without the effort and struggle through which inferior towns have passed while effecting the same result. Until a year or two ago the average man did not stop to think that Superior as a monopolist of the water and rail termini at one end of the lakes is in the same position as Buffalo at the other end. Figures are uninteresting unless given briefly, but comparisons are always important. This little Superior, credited by its last census with only 22,000 people, handled more coal last year than did Chicago; of grain it shipped nineteen million bushels, of flour sixteen hundred thousand barrels, of wool four million pounds, and of merchandise to the value of thirteen million dollars. Of all lake cities this business was second only to Chicago in magnitude. There is an economical reason for this condition of things. It is that the rail rate on freight sent west of Lake Michigan is one cent per ton per mile, while the water rate is one-tenth of one cent per ton per mile. This position at the extreme western end of Lake Superior is what gives the city of Superior its prestige, and is making it grow faster than Chicago ever did. Besides one hundred and one smaller industrial concerns, Superior has located twenty-eight large manufacturing enterprises in the past eighteen months, including the American Steel Barge Company, the builders of the famous "whaleback" vessel, which is revolutionizing the lake and ocean freight carrying trade. The twenty-eight institutions above mentioned include iron and steel plants, flour mills, stove foundries, wagon factories, pump makers, ship builders and saw and shingle mills. The most conservative business men in the Northwest believe that Superior will grow faster in the next ten years than any other city in that prosperous section of the country, and many of them claim that Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Milwaukee have never seen the rapid growth that will come to the head of the great chain of lakes and the city of Superior.

The only way to get a hen out of the garden is to go slow but shoo'er.

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LUCAS COUNTY.

Frank J. Cheney makes oath that he is the senior partner of the firm of F. J. Cheney & Co. doing business in the City of Toledo, County and State aforesaid, and that said firm will pay the sum of $100 for each and every case of catarrh that cannot be cured by the use of Hall's Catarrh Cure.

FRANK J. CHENEY.

Sworn to before me and subscribed in my presence, this 6th day of December, A. D., 1886.

{SEAL} A. W. GLEASON, *Notary Public.*

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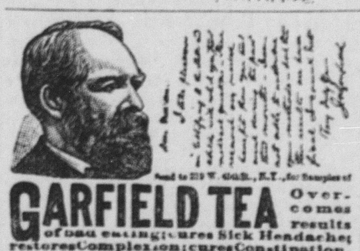

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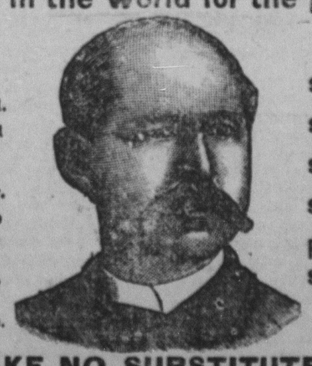

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