

Dr Talmage's Sermon

FOUR EXPERIENCES.

"When Jesus, therefore, had received the vinegar."—John 19: 30.

The brigands of Jerusalem had done their work. It was almost sundown, and Jesus was dying. Persons in crucifixion often lingered on from day to day—crying, begging, cursing; but Christ had been exhausted by years of maltreatment. Pillowless, poorly fed, flung—as bent over and tied to a low post. His bare back was inflamed with the scourges interlarded with pieces of lead and bone—and now for whole hours, the weight of His body hung on delicate tendons, and, according to custom, a violent stroke under the arm-pits had been given by the executioner. Dizzy, nauseated, feverish—

A WORLD OF AGONY

Is compressed in the two words: I thirst! O-kes of Judea, let a drop of rain strike on His burning tongue! O world, with rolling rivers, and sparkling lakes, and spraying fountains, give Jesus something to drink! If there be any pity in earth or heaven or hell, let it now be demonstrated in behalf of this royal sufferer. The wealthy women of Jerusalem used to have a fund of money with which they provided wine for those people who died in crucifixion—a powerful opiate to deaden the pain; but Christ would not take it. He wanted to die sober, and so He refused the wine. But afterward they got to a cup of vinegar and soaked a sponge in it, and put it on a stick of hyssop, and then press it against the hot lips of Christ. You say the wine was an anæsthetic, and intended to relieve or deaden the pain. But

THE VINEGAR WAS AN INSULT.

I am disposed to adopt the theory of the old English commentators, who believed that instead of its being an opiate to soothe, it was vinegar to insult. Malaga and Burgundy for grand dukes and duchesses, and costly wines from royal vats for bloated imperialists; but acids for a dying Christ. He took the vinegar.

In some lives the saccharine seems to predominate. Life is sunshine on a bank of flowers. A thousand hands to clap approval. In December or in January, looking across their table, they see all their family present. Health robust. Skies flamboyant. Days resilient. But in a great many cases there are not so many sugars as acids. The annoyances, and the vexations, and the disappointments of life overpower the successes. There is

A GRAVEL IN ALMOST EVERY SHOE.

An Arabian legend says that there was a worm in Solomon's staff, gnawing its strength away; and there is a weak spot in every earthly support that a man leans on. King George, of England, forgot all the grandeur of his throne because, one day, in an interview, Beau Brummel called him by his first name, and addressed him as a servant, crying: "George, ring the bell!" Miss Langdon, honored all the world over for her poetic genius, was so worried over the evil reports set afloat regarding her, that she was found dead, with an empty bottle of prussic acid in her hand. Goldsmith said that his life was a wretched being, and that all that want and contempt could bring to it had been brought, and cries out: "What, then, is there formidable in a jail? Correggio's fine painting is hung up for a favor's sign. Hogarth cannot sell his best paintings except through a raffle. Andrew Delsart makes the great fresco in the Church of the Annunziata, at Florence, and gets for pay a sack of corn; and there are annoyances and vexations in high places as well as in low places, showing that in a great many lives are the

SOUPS GREATER THAN THE SWEETS.

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar. It is absurd to suppose that a man who has always been well can sympathize with those who are sick, or that one who has always been honored can appreciate the sorrow of those who are despised, or that one who has been born to a great fortune can understand the distress and the straits of those who are destitute. The fact that Christ Himself took the vinegar, makes Him able to sympathize to-day and for ever with all those whose cup is filled with sharp acids of this life. He took the vinegar. Is the first place, there was

THE SOURNESS OF BETRAYAL.

The treachery of Judas hurt Christ's feelings more than all the friendship of His disciples did Him good. You have had many friends; but there was one friend upon whom you put especial stress. You feasted him. You loaned him money. You befriended him in the dark passes of life, when he especially needed a friend. Afterward, he turned upon you, and he took advantage of your former intimacies. He wrote against you. He talked against you. He microscopized your faults. He flung contempt at you when you ought to have received nothing but gratitude. At first, you could not sleep at nights. Then you went about with a sense of having been stung. That difficulty will never be the same, for though mutual friends may arbitrate in the matter until you

shall shake hands, the old cordiality will never come back. Now I commend to all such the sympathy of a betrayed Christ. Why, they sold Him for less than our twenty dollars! They all forsook Him and fled. They cut Him to the quick. He drank that cup to the dregs. He took the vinegar. There is also the sourness of pain. There are some of you who have not seen a well day for many years. By keeping out of draughts, and by carefully studying dietetics, you continue to this time, but oh, the headaches, and the sideaches, and the backaches, and the heartaches which have been your accompaniment all the way through! You have struggled under a heavy mortgage of

PHYSICAL DISABILITIES;

and instead of the placidity that once characterized you, it is now only with great effort that you keep away from irritability and sharp retort. Difficulties of respiration, of digestion, of locomotion, make up the great obstacle in your life, and you tug and sweat along the pathway, and wonder when the exhaustion will end. My friends, the brightest crowns in heaven will not be given to those who, in stirrups, dashed to the cavalry charge while the general applauded and the sound of clashing sabres rang through the land; but the brightest crowns in heaven, I believe, will be given to those who trod or amid chronic ailments which unnerved their strength yet all the time maintaining their faith in God. It is comparatively easy to fight in a regiment of a thousand men, charging up the parapets to the sound of martial music; but it is not so easy to endure when no one but the nurse and the doctor are the witnesses of the Christian fortitude. Besides that you never had any pains worse than Christ's. The sharpness that stung through His brain, through His hands, through His feet, through His heart, were as great as yours certainly. He was as sick and as weary. Not a nerve or muscle or ligament escaped. All the pangs of all the nations, of all the ages compressed into one sour cup. He took the vinegar!

THE SOURNESS OF POVERTY.

Your income does not meet your out-goings, and that always gives an honest man anxiety. There is no sign of destitution about you—pleasant appearance, and a cheerful home for you; but God only knows what a time you have had to manage your private finances. Just as the bills run up, the wages seem to run down. But you are not the only one who has not been paid for hard work. The great Wilkie sold his celebrated piece, "The Blind Fiddler," for fifty guineas, although afterwards it brought its thousands. The world hangs in admiration over the sketch of Gainsborough, yet that very sketch hung for years in the shop-window, because there was not any purchaser. Oliver Goldsmith sold his "Vicar of Wakefield" for a few pounds, in order to keep the bailiff out of the door; and the vast majority of men in all occupations and professions are not fully paid for their work.

You may say nothing, but life to you is a hard push; and when you sit down with your wife, and talk over the expenses, you both rise up discouraged. You abridge here and you abridge there, and you get things sung for smooth sailing, and lo! suddenly there is a large doctor's bill to pay, or you have lost your pocketbook, or some debtor has failed, and you are thrown abeam-end. Well, brother, you are

IN GLORIOUS COMPANY.

Christ owned not the house in which He stopped, or the colt on which He rode, or the boat in which He sailed. He lived in a borrowed house; He was buried in a borrowed grave. Exposed to all kinds of weather, yet He had only one suit of clothes. He breakfasted in the morning, and no one could possibly tell where He could get anything to eat before night. He would have been pronounced a financial failure. He had to perform a miracle to get money to pay a tax-bill. Not a dollar did He own. Privation of domesticity; privation of nutritious food; privation of a comfortable couch on which to sleep; privation of all worldly resources! The kings of the earth had chased chalcies out of which to drink; but Christ had nothing but a plain cup set before Him, and it was very sharp, and it was very sour. He took the vinegar.

THE SOURNESS OF BEREAVEMENT.

There were years that past long before your family circle was invaded by death, but the moment the charmed circle was broken everything seemed to dis-solve. Hardly have you put the black apparel in the wardrobe before you have again to take it out. Great and rapid changes in your family record. You got the house and rejoiced in it, but the charm was gone as soon as the crape hung on the door-bell. The one upon whom you most depended was taken away from you. A cold marble slab lies on your heart to-day. Once, as the children romped through the house, you put your hand over your aching head, and said: "Oh, if I could only have it still! Oh, it is too still now. You lost your patience when the tops, and strings, and the shells were left amid floor; but oh, you would be willing to have the trinkets scattered all over the floor again, if they were scattered by the same hands. With what

A RUTHLESS PLOUGHSHARE

bereavement rips up the heart. But Jesus knows all about that. You cannot tell him anything new in regard to bereavement. He had only a few friends, and when He lost one it brought tears to His eyes. Lazarus had often entertained Him at his house. Now Lazarus is dead and buried, and Christ breaks down with emotion, the convulsion of grief shuddering through all the ages of bereavement. Christ knows what it is to go through the house missing a familiar inmate. Christ knows what it is to see an unoccupied place at the table. Were there not four of them—Mary and Martha, and Christ and Lazarus? Four of them. But where is Lazarus? Lonely and afflicted Christ. His great loving eyes fill with tears, which drop from eye to cheek, and from cheek to beard, and from beard to robe; and from robe to floor. Oh, yes, yes. He knows all about the loneliness and the heart-break. He took the vinegar!

THE SOURNESS OF DEATH.

Then there is the sourness of the death-hour. Whatever else we may escape, that acid-sourness will be pressed to our lips. I sometimes have a curiosity to know how I will behave when I come to die; whether I will be calm or excited; whether I will be filled with reminiscence or anticipation. I cannot say. But come to the point I must and you must. In the six thousand years that have passed, only two persons have got into the eternal world without death, and I do not suppose that God is going to send a carriage for us, with horses of flame, to draw us up the steps of heaven; but I suppose we will have to go like the preceding generations. An officer from the future world will knock at the door of our hearts, and serve on us the writ of ejection, and we will have to surrender. And we will wake up after these autumnal and wintry and vernal and summery glories have vanished from our vision; we will wake up into a realm which has only one season, and that season of everlasting love.

But you say: I don't want to break out from my present associations. It is so chilly and so damp to go down the stairs of that vault. I don't want anything drawn so tightly over my eyes. If there were only some way of breaching through the partition between worlds without tearing this body all to shreds! I wonder if the surgeons and the doctors cannot compound a mixture by which this body and soul can all the time be kept together? Is there no escape from this separation? None; absolutely none. So I look over this audience to-day—the vast majority of you seeming in good health and spirits—and yet I realize that in a short time all of us be gone—gone from earth, and gone for ever. A great many men tumble through the gates of the future, as it were, and we do not know where they have gone, and they only add

GLOOM AND MYSTERY

to the passage; but Jesus Christ so mightily stormed the gates of that future world that they have never since been closely shut. Christ knows what it is to leave this world, of the beauty of which He was more appreciative than we ever could be. He knows the exquisiteness of the phosphorescence of the sea; He trod it. He knows the glories of the midnight heavens, for they were the spangled canopy of his wilderness pillow. He knows about the lilies. He twisted them into his sermon. He knows about the fowls of the air; they whirred their way through His discourse. He knows about the sorrows of leaving this beautiful world. Not a taper was kindled in the darkness. He died physicianless. He died in cold sweat, and dizziness and hemorrhage and agony, that have put Him in

SYMPATHY WITH ALL THE DYING.

He goes through Christendom, and He gathers up the strings cut of all the death pillows, and He puts them under His own neck and head. He gathers on His own tongue the burning thirrets of many generations. The sponge is soaked in the sorrows of all those who have died in the beds, as well as soaked in the sorrows of all those who perished in icy or fiery martyrdom. While heaven was pitying, and earth was mocking, and hell was deriding He took the vinegar!

To all those in this audience; to whom life has been an acerbity a dose they could not swallow, adraught that set their teeth on edge and a-raping. I preach the omnipotent system of Jesus Christ. The sister of Herschel, the astronomer, used to help him to his work. He got all the credit; she got none. She used to spend much of her time polishing the telescopes through which he brought the distant worlds nigh; and it is my ambition now, this hour, to clean the lens of your spiritual vision, so that looking through the dark night of your earthly troubles you may behold the glorious constellation of a Savior's love. O, my friends, do not carry all your ills alone. Do not put your poor shoulder under the Appennines when the Almighty Christ is ready to lift up all your burdens. When you have a trouble of any kind, you rush this way, and that way; and you wonder what that man will say about it, and what that man will say about it; and you try this prescription, and that prescription, and the other prescription. O, why do you not go straight to the heart of

Christ, knowing that for our own sinning and suffering race He took the vinegar?

There was a vessel that had been tossed on the seas for a great many weeks, and been disabled, and the supply of water gave out, and the crew were

DYING OF THIRST.

After many days they saw a sail against the sky. They signalled it. When the vessel came nearer, the people on the suffering ship cried to the captain of the other vessel: "Send us some water. We are dying for the lack of water. And the captain on the vessel that was hailed responded: "Dip your buckets where you are. You are in the mouth of the Amazon, and there are scores of miles of fresh water all around about you, and hundreds of feet deep." And then they dropped their buckets over the side and brought up the clear, bright fresh water, and put out the fire of their thirst. So I hail you to-day, after a long and perilous voyage, thirsting as you are for pardon, and thirsting for comfort and thirsting for eternal life, and I ask you what is the use of you going in that death-struck state, while all around you is the deep, clear, wide, sparkling flood of God's sympathetic mercy. "O, dip your buckets, and live forever. Whoever will let him come and take the water of life freely."

Yet my utterance is almost choked at the thought that there are people here who refuse this Divine sympathy and they will try to fight their own battles, and

DRINK THEIR OWN VINEGAR,

and carry their own burdens; and their life, instead of being a triumphal march from victory to victory, will hobbling-on from defeat to defeat, until they make a final surrender to retributive disaster. O, I wish I could to-day gather up in my arms all the woes of men and women all their heart-aches all their disappointments—all their chagrin—and just take them right to the feet of a sympathizing Jesus. He took the vinegar. Nana Sahib, after he had lost his last battle in India, fell back into the jungles so full of malaria that no mortal can live there. He carried with him also a ruby of great luster and of great value. He died in those jungles; his body was never found, and the ruby has never yet been discovered. And I fear that to-day there are some who fell back from this subject into the sickening killing jungles of their sin, carrying

A GEM OF INFINITE VALUE

—a priceless soul—to be lost forever; that that ruby might flash in the eternal coronation! But no. There are some, I fear, in this audience who turn away from this offered mercy, and comfort, and Divine sympathy; notwithstanding that Christ for all who would accept His grace, trudged the long way and suffered the lacerating thongs and received in the face the expectations of the filthy mob, and the discomforts of the race, took the vinegar. May God Almighty break the infatuation, and leave you out into strong hope, and the good cheer, and the glorious sunshine of this triumphant Gospel.

After Many Days—

Yes, she's the most decided beauty and the greatest sensation we've had for many a season, said Frank Driscoll to his friend, edging their way through a crowded portion of the brilliant rooms; but her heart, if she has one, is apparently made of flint. If you fail to make an impression on it, Louis, I shall begin to think her something more or less than woman. I remember what havoc you used to play with the hearts of the prettiest girls, and I suppose you haven't forgotten your old tricks—eh?

Louis Richmond laughed—his low, careless laugh that suited the indolent beauty of his dark face and soft dusky Southern eyes. I can hardly hope to succeed where Frank Driscoll has failed, he retorted lightly. And as to my old tricks, as you call them, it is a long time since I have seen a woman worth—

"Sh! here we are, at last, broke in Mr. Driscoll's low-modulated tones, for the way had suddenly opened before them. And then, immediately:—Miss Fane, my old friend, Mr. Richmond.

Louis Richmond raised his eyes—still with that laugh, careless and half cynical, in their velvety depths, to the face of the girl before him—the beauty of the season, as everybody called her.

Was it the flash of her starry blue eyes, the glitter of her burnished hair, or the enchantment of her smile, that dazzled him and held him speechless for a second, as if under the spell of a sorceress? For the dark eyes, riveted upon that peerless loveliness as though they beheld a vision, had lost their laughing mockery and every vestige of color had drifted out of the handsome olive face.

Humph! surrendered at sight—hit hard, too, by all that beautiful, muttered Frank Driscoll, somewhat astonished, as he turned away with a laughing I told you so, glance at his companion, and left him to his fate. So he did not catch that one startled, irrepressible word that fell from Louis' lips.

Cecil! It was a low, breathless cry, scarce-

ly more than a dazed whisper; yet the sound of it reached Miss Fane, and she glanced at him smilingly, with an air of polite interest.

You spoke, I think Mr. Richmond? she said questioningly, in a cool, sweet voice, and with a smiling glance at the chattering all about them—as a sufficient apology for her failure to catch his words.

He drew himself up with unconscious hauteur, and a hot, swift flush shot instantly across his tense white features.

Whatever vision he fancied he had seen—for whomever he had taken this cool, fair beauty with glittering golden hair—this queen of fashion in her sweeping satin train and glimmering jewels—there certainly was not the faintest sign of recognition on her part.

Her beautiful blue eyes were looking straight into his own; and there was a slight, half-interested smile on the perfect lips, and both look and smile were just such as the belle of the season might bestow upon any stranger—nothing more or less.

I believe I asked for the honor of a place on your card—if you chance to have one left, he replied unhesitatingly, bending his head low over the dainty bit of parchment she offered him.

And when he again looked up, having scribbled his name in the two unclaimed places thereon, he was thoroughly himself again—handsome, nonchalant, with that indolent touch of cynicism in look and manner which had deepened just a trifle, now that he had met the beautiful Miss Fane.

But how many times his eye wandered covertly to that graceful dazling figure, as she floated past him in the dance. How his heart thrilled and throbbed like some mad thing as he held that same perfect figure in his arms when his own number came, and he looked down with a strange light in his dusky eyes—a mingling of passionate yearning and contemptuous bitterness—upon the proud, lovely face leaning so near his breast.

For, looking over and beyond that drooping golden head, as they floated through the waltz together, and the slow, dreamy, exquisite strains of the music throbbed and surged about them, a picture rose before his memory—a picture of that self-same perfect face and willow form, but in how different a setting.

He saw a slender, graceful girl poised fearlessly upon a rugged western cliff, her cheap calico gown fluttering in the wind, and a cloud of golden hair unbound and floating about her shoulders at its own sweet will, while at her feet the coarse, wide-brimmed straw hat lay unheeded.

He seemed to see these same beautiful blue eyes, only then they looked with innocent, girlish love light into his; he saw, too, these same exquisite rose-red lips, but then they were smiling tenderly and trustingly upon him always and once—how wildly his heart beat now at the very thought!—he had left upon them, unproved, a lingering, impassioned lover's kiss.

Are there two such faces in this world? Louis asked himself, as the waltz-music rose and fell in wailing strains, seeming to mock his senses with its dreamy measures. Are there two such faces, or is this she, herself? I could almost swear that it is, and yet—pshaw! why should I care? Did she prove any truer, sweeter, purer than the rest? No! and yet—Heavens! after all these years the sight of a face like hers has power to madden me—Heavens!

He did not linger near her when the waltz was over, but strolled out into the cool night air to still the fever in his veins.

He was pacing up and down the flagged walk, thinking and smoking, when Frank Driscoll's cheery tones broke in upon his solitude.

Hello! Richmond, is it you? he exclaimed in mock surprise as he ran against him. I wish now I had laid a wager with you, he went on triumphantly, for you went down before her at the first glance, just as I predicted. Isn't she a peerless creature?

Who is she, Frank? questioned Louis, ignoring his personal allusions. Have you known her long? Do you happen to know anything of her history? Where's she from?

Hold on, and I'll answer some of your questions if you'll give me a fair chance, laughed Driscoll, holding up his hand prettily. Upon my honor, you're the worst case we've had yet. Well, to begin, she is Miss Cecil Fane. Louis started at the name—the undisputed belle and beauty of the season. Some few years ago, she was adopted by her grandfather—a wealthy old man—and sent to boarding school, and this winter she made her first appearance in society here, having just finished an extensive European tour. That's all I can tell you of her, except, come to think of it, her name was Halbert—Cecil Halbert. She took her grandfather's name when he adopted her.

Ah! Again Louis started, and this time a strange, half-sneering bitterness swept over his handsome features, and his lips closed tightly in a hard stern line. But in the starlight Frank never noticed the effect of his little chapter of biography.

Presently they went back together, and after a time Richmond found an opportunity to speak to Miss Fane alone.

For a moment his dark, Southern

eyes dwelt upon the fair, proud face, with a look that was hard to read; then:

I have just heard a bit of your interesting story, Miss Fane, he said. Permit me to congratulate you upon your good fortune. I learned also—in a low, firm tone, as he bent a little nearer—that you are Cecil Halbert, as I was sure you must be. I knew I could not be mistaken. Why did you refuse to recognize me?

Pard n' sir!—with an added hauteur in her bearing, and a touch of frostiness in her cool tones. I am Cecil Fane, and I made your acquaintance an hour or so ago, I believe Mr. Richmond. Why should I have recognized you, save as I would any other gentlemen introduced to me this evening? I am at a loss to know?

Cecil— Miss Fane, she corrected, icily. Please have the goodness to remember that your acquaintance with me dates from this evening, if at all.

He bowed—with a haughtiness equal to her own.

As you please, he retorted coldly. I only wish to assure you that in Miss Fane I recognized the little Western mountain girl, Cecil Halbert—that is all.

And, returning the scornful flash of her blue eyes with a quiet, half-contemptuous smile, he was gone—nor did he return to claim his other dance.

Come, Louis, out with it! For I confess I am dying to know what is the secret of this perpetual warfare between you and the beauty, Miss Fane. You've seemed to hate each other from the very first. Now, what is it? I looked for an interesting flirtation, at the very least.

And Frank Driscoll threw himself back in his seat, and confidently prepared to listen to a story.

Louis smoked away for a minute or two in silence; then, knocking the ashes from his cigar, glanced up, with a sort of dogged-recklessness upon his fine dark face.

Well, you can have the story, such as it is, and in a few words, too. Guess no one will overhear us in this deserted nook. You remember I went out West years ago—only four, by the way, yet it seems a lifetime, looking back upon it. Well, I met and loved a little girl out there, and her name was Cecil Halbert.

Ah! you are surprised! She was an innocent, trustful little thing, or seemed so, [bitterly] and I loved her because I thought her so pure and childlike, so different from most women I had known.

I was sure my love was returned, but I had never spoken of it, when I was suddenly called home by the illness and death of my sister, you remember? My sister Clara telegraphed me to come without a moment's delay and I obeyed, not waiting to say goodbye even to my little Cecil.

But I meant to return at once, and ask the little mountain girl what I would not have asked of any city belle of my acquaintance—I meant to ask, nay, to implore her to be my wife.

With a heart filled with love and hope I was getting ready to return, when, judge of this blow to my confidence in womankind, Frank! a letter reached me from the girl I loved, the girl I had thought so true and innocent—plainly and heartlessly informing me that she had only been amusing herself at my expense; that she had liked me well enough, but that she had since met one whom she loved, and who was far richer than I, in the bargain. And that if I had ever fancied she cared for me, etc.,—you know how they all write such things?—even the most unsophisticated of them.

Well, that ended the matter, then and there. I did not go West again, but I did become the hopeless woman-hater you are trying so vainly to cure. It seems she never married the man whose wealth had caught her fickle little heart, but it is quite certain she never cared much for me. And when I met her here—but, pshaw! what is the use—

Oh, Louis! Louis! broke in a sweet, half-tearful voice, as a woman's slender figure, in rustling silk, stepped swiftly through the open window, and, regardless of Frank's presence, went straight up to Richmond and laid her hand upon his shoulder. Oh, Louis! if I had only known!

Cecil! It was a strangely hoarse, choking cry of mingled doubt and joy, for he could not believe that it was really Cecil Fane, the belle of the season, who was softly sobbing in his arms.

And Frank, although the lovers took no thought of him, had kindly stepped through the window into the house, and left them there alone.

I was told that you had gone East to be married, and believed it, she explained, between her happy sobs; and so I sent that note after you, of course, to save my own pride in the matter. And the man I liked better than you? Why, my dear old grandfather, who came after me just then, and who gave me his name and his wealth.

But I never knew—I never really thought until this moment that you loved me, Louis!

And I never thought anything else, he laughed, in spite of your scorn, my naughty little darling.

"Fizzy is in hard luck."

"Why?"

"His wife has been learning short hand and has just read some of his memoranda."