

REV. DR. TALMAGE.

THE 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 nature discharged in one bolt, a river put through a millrill. 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 appreciation of greater ones.

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, a camel, a creature 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 forehead and his upper jaw over the hump of the camel, 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 they did in church and in society 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 ever 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. Inspection for all generations to examine. Those Pharisees thought that Christ would flatter them and compliment them, and how they must have written under the red hot words as He said, "Ye fools, ye will strain out a gnat and swallow a camel."

There are in our day a great many gnat-strainers 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. Their church services today are 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 auditor. They 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 wretched soul in a pew with her fan keeps the flow of unconscious persons approximate.

No, 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 overtake 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 today is not too much vivacity, but too much somnolence. The one is an irritating cat 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, 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 they went. Job used it when he said to his self-concocted comforters, "Wisdom will die with you." Christ not only used it in the text, but when He ironically complimented the putrid 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 conversate 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. Christy, 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.

It is 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 scimitars, and then take them into the holy way which is a very short bridge from a smile and a tear, a suspicion 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 vulgar morning than in a sterner midday.

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 vagary—strain them out through the sieve of holy discrimination; but, on the other hand, beware of that monster which overhauls the Christian church to-day, conventionality, coming up from the Great Sahara Desert, 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 infinitesimal's warts that are quite reckless about the magnitudes. What did Christ say? Did He not exhortate 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 lives 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, in subject photographs are 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 would be a 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 full force while he gets control of the stock and then waters the stock and makes \$100,000 appear like \$300,000. He stole \$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, the evening of the day on which he watered the stock, will kneel with his hands 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 penalties for crimes dromedarian. No mercy for sins animalcula in magnitude, 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 cutriders in its carriage. Many a man is riding to the position ahead and lachry 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, who would not scruple to denude a peach 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 would not steal one peach basket steals fifty thousand peach baskets.

But let any one such 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. They 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 come 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 years that an abstruse took wider circuit with the millions of cycles of my post-terrestrial 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. As though a minnow were larger than a babe-moth, as though a swallow took wider circuit than an abstruse, 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 was flashed with lightning of wit as Christ uttered it, it followed by the crashing thunders of awful catastrophe to those who make the questions of time greater than the questions of the future, the 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 use in time of war.

Habits of the Moose. J. G. Lockhart says that moose generally lie with the tail windward, trusting to their senses of hearing and smelling, which are remarkably acute, to warn them of approaching danger from that quarter, using their eyes to warn them from danger to leeward. While they are sleeping or chewing the cud, their ears are in perpetual motion, one forward, the other backward alternately. Mr. Lockhart also claims that the moose has the remarkable habit of making a short turn and sleeping below the wind of their fresh track, so that any one falling thereon and following it up is sure to be heard or smelled before he can get within shooting distance.—Boston Cultivator.

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 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 merchandises 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 smaller lake is one cent 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 fifty 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 "Whiteback" vessel, which is revolutionizing the lake and ocean freight carrying trade. The twenty-eight institutions above mentioned include iron and steel plants, pump mills, stove foundries, wagon factories, flour mills, ship builders and saw 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 long drought of last fall and the stormy weather have made terrible inroads upon the sheep which have been kept on the ranges in Texas.

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Facts Worth Knowing. Q. Is Alabastine expensive? A. No, it is the cheapest article for the purpose on the market. Q. How is that? Cannot I purchase kalsomines at a few cents per pound? A. Yes, kalsomines can be purchased at almost any price. Q. Why then is Alabastine less expensive? A. In the first place a package of Alabastine, costing a few cents more, will cover double the surface that a package of kalsomine will. Q. What other advantages has Alabastine that kalsomines do not possess? A. Alabastine is entirely different from all kalsomines. It is manufactured from a base in itself a cement, and when applied to a wall sets hard. Q. How do kalsomines differ from this? A. Kalsomines are made from whitening, clays, chalks or some inert powder for a base and are entirely dependent on animal glue to hold them on the wall. Q. What are the results? A. In one case the Alabastine being a cement hardens with age, and the kalsomines as soon as the glue, which constitutes its binding quality, decays, rubs and scales off, as it has nothing to hold it on the wall. Q. Does Alabastine require washing and scraping off before re-coating? A. No, Alabastine when once applied to a clean surface can be re-coated for any length of time without having to wash or scrape the walls. Q. Does this feature count for much? A. Ask any practical housekeeper, who has been driven from home to have walls washed and scraped, whether it will be desirable to have all this overcome, and walls improved instead of spoiled by coating them. Q. How can I get Alabastine? A. From your local paint dealer. If he does not keep it in stock, and tries to sell you something else, tell him you are determined to try Alabastine, and if he will not keep it you will get it elsewhere.

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