

A SHORT EARTHLY LIFE.

Rev. Dr. Talmage Says That is the Best.

Those Who Die When Young Are to Be Envyed by Those Who Remain on the Earth—Comfort for the Bereaved.

In his latest sermon Dr. Talmage makes the statement that "if we are ready and our work is done, the sooner we go the better," as we miss many temptations and much unhappiness. His text was Isaiah 57: 1: "The righteous is taken away from the evil to come."

We all spend much time in panegyric of longevity. We consider it a great thing to be an octogenarian. If any one dies in youth we say: "What a pity!" Dr. Muhlenberg, in old age, said that the hymn written in early life by his own hand, no more expressed his sentiment when it said:

I would not live alive.

If one be pleasantly circumstanced he never wants to go. William Cullen Bryant, the great poet, at 83 years of age, standing in his house in a festal group, reading "Thanatopsis" without spectacles, was just as anxious to live as when at 18 years of age he wrote that immortal threnody. Cato feared at 80 years of age that he would not live to learn Greek. Monaldesco, at 115 years, writing the history of his time, feared a collapse. Theophrastus, writing a book at 90 years of age, was anxious to live to complete it. Thurlow Wood, at about 86 years of age, found life as great a desirability as when he snuffed out his first politician. Albert Barnes, so well prepared for the next world at 70, said he would rather stay here. So it is all the way down. I suppose that the last time that Methuselah was out of doors in a storm he was afraid of getting his feet wet, lest it shorten his days. Indeed, I some time ago preached a sermon on the blessings of longevity, but I now propose to preach to you about the blessings of an abbreviated earthly existence. If I were an agnostic I would say a man is blessed in proportion to the number of years he can stay on terra firma, because after that he falls off the docks, and if he is ever picked out of the depths it is only to be set up in some morgue of the universe to see if anybody will claim him. If I thought God made man only to last 40 or 50 or 100 years, and then he was to go into annihilation, I would say his chief business ought to be kept alive, and even in good weather to be very cautious, and to carry an umbrella and take over-shoes, and life preservers, and bronze armor, and weapons of defense, lest he fall off into nothingness and obliteration.

But, my friends, you are not agnostics. You believe in immortality, and the eternal residence of the righteous in Heaven and, therefore, I first remark that an abbreviated earthly existence is to be desired, and is a blessing, because it makes one's life work very compact.

Some men go to business at 7 o'clock in the morning and return at 7 in the evening. Others go at 8 o'clock and return at 12. Others go at 10 and return at 4. I have friends who are ten hours a day in business; others who are five hours; others who are one hour. They all do their work well; they do their entire work and then return. Which position do you think the most desirable? You say, other things being equal, the man who is the shortest time detained in business, and who can return home the quickest, is the most blessed.

Now, my friends, why not carry that good sense into the subject of transference from this world? If a person die in childhood, he gets through his work at 9 o'clock in the morning. If he die at 45 years of age, he gets through his work at 12 o'clock, noon. If he die at 70 years of age, he gets through his work at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. If he die at 90 he has to toil all the way on up to 11 o'clock at night. The sooner we get through our work the better. The harvest all in barnack or barn, the farmer does not sit down in the stubblefield, but, shouldering his scythe, and taking his pitcher from under the tree, he makes a straight line for the old homestead. All we want to be anxious about is to get our work done, and well done, and the quicker the better.

Again: There is a blessing in an abbreviated earthly existence in the fact that moral disaster might come upon the man if he tarried longer. Recently, a man who had been prominent in churches, and who had been admired for his generosity and kindness everywhere, for forgery was sent to state prison for 15 years. Twenty years ago there was no more probability of that man's committing a commercial dishonesty than that you will commit commercial dishonesty. The number of men who fall into ruin between 50 and 70 years of age is simply appalling. If they had died 30 years before, it would have been better for them and better for their families. The shorter the voyage the less chance for a cyclone.

There is a wrong theory abroad, that if one's youth be right, his old age will be right. You might as well say there is nothing wanting for a ship's safety except to get it fully launched on the Atlantic ocean. I have sometimes asked those who were schoolmates or collegemates of some great defaulter: "What kind of a boy was he?" What kind of a young man was he?" and they have said: "Why, he was a splendid fellow; I had no idea he could ever go into such an outrage." The fact is, the great temptation of life sometimes comes far on in mid-life, or in old age.

The first time I crossed the Atlantic ocean it was as smooth as a millpond, and I thought the sea captains and the voyagers had slandered the old ocean, and I wrote home an essay for a magazine on "The Smile of the Sea," but I never afterward could have written that thing, for before we got home we got a terrible shaking up. The

first voyage of life may be very smooth; the last may be atrociously. Many who start life in great prosperity do not end it in prosperity.

The great pressure of temptation comes sometimes in this direction; at about 45 years of age a man's nervous system changes, and some one tells him he must take stimulants to keep himself up, and he takes stimulants to keep himself up, until the stimulants keep him down; or a man has been going along for 30 or 40 years in unsuccessfull business, and here is an opening where by one dishonorable action he can lift himself and lift his family from all financial embarrassment. He attempts to leap the chasm and he falls into it.

Then it is in after life that the great temptation of success comes. If a man makes a fortune before 30 years of age, he generally loses it before 40. The solid and the permanent fortunes for the most part do not come to their climax until in mid-life, or in old age. The most of the bank presidents have white hair. Many of those who have been largely successful have been flung of arrogance or worldliness or dissipation in old age. They may not have lost their integrity, but they have become so worldly and so selfish under the influence of large success that it is evident to everybody that their success has been a temporal calamity and an eternal damage. Concerning many people it may be said, it seems as if it would have been better if they could have embarked from this life at 20 or 30 years of age.

Do you know the reason why the vast majority of people die before 30? It is because they have not the moral endurance for that which is beyond the 30, and a merciful God will not allow them to be put to the fearful strain.

Again: There is a blessing in an abbreviated earthly existence in the fact that one is sooner taken off the defensive. As soon as one is old enough to take care of himself he is put on his guard. Bolts on the doors to keep out the robbers. Fire-proof safes to keep off the flames. Life insurance and fire insurance against accident. Receipts lest you have to pay a debt twice. Lifeboat against shipwreck. Westinghouse air brake against railroad collision, and hundreds of hands ready to overreach you and take all you have. Defense against cold, defense against heat, defense against sickness, defense against the world's abuse, defense all the way down to the grave, and even the tombstone sometimes is not a sufficient barricade.

If a soldier, who has been on guard, shivering and stung with the cold, pacing up and down the parapet with shouldered musket, is glad when some one comes to relieve guard and he can go inside the fortress, ought not that man to shout for joy who can put down his weapon of earthly defense and go into the king's castle? Who is the more fortunate, the soldier who has to stand guard 12 hours or the man who has to stand guard six hours? We have common sense about everything but religion, common sense about everything but transference from this world.

Again: There is a blessing in an abbreviated earthly existence in the fact that one escapes so many bereavements. The longer we live the more attachments and the more kindred, the more chords to be wounded or rasped or sundered. If a man live on to 70 or 80 years of age, how many graves are cleft at his feet! In that long reach of time father and mother go, brothers and sisters go, children go, grandchildren go, personal friends outside the family circle whom they had loved with a love like that of David and Jonathan. Besides that, some men have a natural tripartite about dissolution, and ever and anon during 40 or 50 or 60 years, this horror of their dissolution shudders through soul and body. Now, suppose the lad goes at 16 years of age? He escapes 50 funerals, 50 caskets, 50 obsequies, 50 awful wrenchings of the heart.

It is hard enough for us to bear their departure, but it is not easier for us to bear their departure than for them to stay and bear 50 departures? Shall we not by the grace of God rouse ourselves into a generosity of bereavement which will practically say: "It is hard enough for me to go through this bereavement, but how glad I am that he will never have to go through it." So I reason with myself, and so you will find it helpful to reason with yourselves. David lost his son. Though David was king, he lay on the earth mourning and inconsolable for some time. At this distance of time, which do you really think was the one to be congratulated, the short-lived child or the long-lived father? Had David died as early as that child died he would, in the first place, have escaped that particular bereavement, then he would have escaped the worse bereavement of Absalom, his recreant son, and the pursuit of the Philistines, and the fatigues of his military campaign, and the jealousy of Saul, and the perfidy of Ahithophel, and the curse of Shimei, and the destruction of his family at Ziklag, and, above all, he would have escaped the two great calamities of his life, the great sins of uncleanness and murder. David lived to be of vast use to the church and the world, but so far as his own happiness was concerned, does it not seem to you that it would have been better for him to have gone early?

Now, this, my friends, explains some things that to you have been inexplicable. This shows you why when God takes little children from a household, He is very apt to take the brightest, the most genial, the most sympathetic, the most talented. Why? It is because that kind nature suffers the most when it does suffer, and is most liable to temptation. God saw the tempest sweeping up from the Caribbean, and He put the delicate craft into the first harbor. "Taken away from the evil to come."

Again, my friends there is a blessing in an abbreviated earthly existence in the fact that it puts one sooner in the center of things. All astronomers, infidel as well as Christian, agree in believing that the universe swings around some great center. Any one who has studied the earth and studied

the heavens knows that God's favorite figure in geometry is a circle. When God put forth His hand to create the universe, He did not strike that hand at right angles, but He waved it in a circle until systems and constellations and galaxies and all worlds took that motion. Our planet swinging around other suns, but somewhere a great hub, around which the great wheel of the universe turns. Now the center is Heaven. That is the capital of the universe. That is the great metropolis of immensity.

Does not our common sense teach us that, in matters of study it is better for us to move out from the center toward the circumference, rather than to be on the circumference, where our world now is? We are like those who study the American continent while standing on the Atlantic beach. The way to study the continent is to cross it, or go to the heart of it. Our standpoint in this world is defective. We are at the wrong end of the telescope. The best way to study a piece of machinery is, not to stand on the doorstep and try to look in, but to go in with the engineer and take our place right amid the saws and the cylinders. We wear our eyes out, and our brain out, from the fact that we are studying under such great disadvantage. Millions of dollars for observatories to study things about the moon, about the sun, about the rings of Saturn, about transits and occultations and eclipses, simply because our studio, our observatory, is poorly situated.

If the spirit of this sermon is true, how consoled you ought to feel about members of your family that went early. "Taken from the evil to come," this book says. What a fortunate escape they had! How glad we ought to feel that they will never have to go through the struggles which we have had to go through. They had just time enough to get out of the cradle and run up on the springtime hills of this world and see how it looked, and then they started for a better stopping place. They were like ships that put in at St. Helena, staying there long enough to let passengers go up and see the barracks of Napoleon's captivity and then hoist sail for the port of their own native land. They only took this world in transit. It is hard for us, but it is blessed for them.

And if the spirit of this sermon is true then we ought not to go around sighing and groaning when another year is going; but we ought to go down on one knee by the milestone and see the letters and thank God that we are 365 days nearer home. We ought not to go around with morbid feelings about our health or about anticipated demise. We ought to be living not according to the old maxim which I used to hear in my boyhood, that you must live as though every day were the last; you must live as though you were to live forever, for you will. Do not be nervous lest you have to move out of a shanty into an Alhambra.

One Christmas day I witnessed something very thrilling. We had just distributed the family presents Christmas morning, when I heard a great cry of distress in the hallway. A child from a neighbor's house came in to say her father was dead. It was only three doors off, and I think in two minutes we were there. There lay the old Christian sea captain, his face turned toward the window as though he had suddenly seen the headlands, and with an illuminated countenance, as though he were just going into harbor. The fact was he had already got through the "Narrows." In the adjoining room were the Christmas presents waiting for distribution. Long ago, one night when he had narrowly escaped with his ship from being run down by a great ocean steamer, he had made his peace with God, and a kinder neighbor or a better man than Capt. Pendleton you would not find this side of Heaven. Without a moment's warning the Pilot of the Heavenly harbor had met him just off the light ship.

He had often talked to me of the goodness of God, and especially of a time when he was about to enter New York harbor with his ship from Liverpool, and he was suddenly impressed that he ought to put back to sea. Under the protest of the crew and under their very threat he put back to sea, fearing at the same time he was losing his mind; for it did seem so unreasonable that when they could get into harbor that they should put back to sea. But they put back to sea, and Capt. Pendleton said to the mate: "You call me at 10 o'clock at night." At 12 o'clock at night the captain was aroused and said: "What does this mean? I thought I told you to call me at 10 o'clock, and here it is 12." "Why," said the mate, I did call you at 10 o'clock, and you got up, looked around, and told me to keep right on the same course for two hours, and then call you at 12 o'clock." Said the captain: "Is it possible? I have no remembrance of that."

At 12 o'clock the captain went on deck, and through the rift of a cloud the moonlight fell upon the sea and showed him a shipwreck with 100 struggling passengers. He helped them off. Had he been any earlier or any later at that point of the sea he would have been of no service to those drowning people. On board the captain's vessel they began to band together as to what they should pay for the provisions. "Ah," says the captain, "my lads, you can't pay me anything; all I have on board is yours; I feel too greatly honored of God in having saved you to take any pay." Just like him. He never got any pay except that of his own applauding conscience.

Oh, that the old sea captain's God might be my God and yours! Amid the stormy seas of this life may we have always someone as tenderly to take care of us as the captain took care of the drowning crew and the passengers. And may we come into the harbor with as little physical pain and with as bright a hope as he had, and if it should happen to be a Christmas morning, when the presents are being distributed, and we are celebrating the birth of Him who came to save our shipwrecked world, all the better, for what grander, brighter Christmas present could we have than Heaven?

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