

A SERMON ON ORCHARDS.

Rev. Dr. Talmage Preaches One at Washington.

He Urged His Hearers to Take a Lesson From Adam's Orchard and Not Stretch Out After Forbidden Fruit.

The orchard of God's love was the theme chosen by Dr. Talmage for his Sunday discourse, and his text was Genesis, 1: 11: "The fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind."

It is Wednesday morning in paradise. The birds did not sing their opening piece, nor did the fish take their swim until the following Friday. The solar and lunar lights did not break through the thick, chaotic fog of the world's manufacture until Thursday. Before that there was light, but it was electric light or phosphorescent light, not the light of sun or moon. But the botanical and pomological productions came on Wednesday—first the flowers, and then the fruits. The veil of fog is lifted, and there stands the orchards. Watch the sudden maturity of the fruit! In our time pear trees must have two years before they bear fruit, and peach trees three years, and apple trees five years; but here, instantly, a complete orchard springs into life, and all the branches bearing fruit.

Why was the orchard created two days before the fish and birds, and three days before the cattle? Among other things, to impress the world with a lesson it is too stupid to learn—that fruit diet is healthier than meat diet, and that the former must precede the latter. The reason there are in the world so many of the imbruted and sensual is that they have not improved by the mighty, unnoticed fact that the orchards of paradise preceded the herds, and aviaries, and fishponds. Oh, those fruit-bearing trees on the banks of the Euphrates, and the Gihon, and the Hiddekel! I wonder not that the ancient Romans, ignorant of our God, adored Pomona, the goddess of fruits, and that all the sylvan deities were said to worship her, and that groves were set apart as her temples. You have thanked God for bread a thousand times. Have you thanked him for the fruits which he made the first course of food in the menu of the world's table? The acids of those fruits to keep the world's table from being insipid, and their sweets to keep it from being too sour?

At this autumnal season how the orchards breathe and glow, the leaves removed, that the crimson, or pink, or saffron, or the yellow, or brown may the better appear, while the aromatics fill the air with invitation and reminiscence. As you pass through the orchard on these autumnal days and look up through the arms of the trees laden with fruit, you hear thumping on the ground that which is fully ripe, and, throwing your arms around the trunk, you give a shake that sends down a shower of gold and fire on all sides of you. Pile up in baskets and barrels and bins and on shelves and tables the divine supply. But these orchards have been under the assault of at least 60 centuries—the storm, the droughts, the winters, the insectivora. What must the first orchard have been? And yet it is the explorer's evidence that is not an apricot, or an apple, or an olive—nothing but desert and desolation. There is not enough to forage the explorer's horse, much less to feed his own hunger. In other words, that first orchard is a lost orchard. How did the proprietor and the proprietress of all that intercommunication of fruitage let the rich splendor slip their possession? It was as now most of the orchards are lost; namely, by wanting more. Access they had to all the fig trees, apricots, walnuts, almonds, apples—bushes on bushes—and were forbidden the use of only one tree in the orchard. Not satisfied with all but one, they reached for that, and lost the whole orchard. Go right down through the business marts of the great cities and find among the weighers and clerks and subordinates, men who once commanded the commercial world. They had a whole orchard of successes, but they wanted just one more thing—one more house, or one more country seat, or one more store, or one more railroad, or one more million. They clutched for that and lost all they had gained. For one more tree they lost a whole orchard.

There are business men all around us worried nearly to death. The doctor tells them they ought to stop. Indigestion or indigestion or aching at the base of the brain or ungovernable nerves tell them they ought to stop. They really have enough for themselves and their families. Talk with them about their overwork, and urge more prudence and longer rest, and they say: "Yes, you are right; after I have accomplished one more thing that I have on my mind, I will hand over by business to my sons and go to Europe, and quit the exhausting life I have been living for the last 30 years." Some morning you open your paper and, looking at the death column, you find he suddenly departed this life. In trying to win just one more tree, he lost the whole orchard.

Yonder is a man with many styles of innocent entertainment and amusement. He walks, he rides, he plays tennis in private alleys, he has books on his table, pictures on his wall, and occasional outings, concerts, lectures, baseball tickets, and the innumerable delights of friendship. But he wants a key to the place of dissolute convocation. He wants association with some member of a high family as reckless as he is affluent. He wants, instead of a quiet Sabbath, one of carousal. He wants the stimulus of strong drinks. He wants the permissions of a profligate life. The one membership, the one bad habit, the one carousal robs him of all the possibilities and innocent enjoyments and noble inspirations of a lifetime. By one mouthful of forbidden fruit he loses a whole orchard of fruit unforbidden.

You see what an expensive thing it is. It costs a thousand times more than it is worth. As some of all kinds of quadrupeds and all kinds of winged creatures passed before our progenitor that he might announce a name, from eagle to bat, and from lion to mole, so I suppose there were in paradise specimens of every kind of fruit tree. And in that enormous orchard there was not only enough for the original family of two, but enough fruit felled up to supply whole towns and villages. If they had existed. But the infatuated couple turned away from all these other trees and faced this tree and fruits of that they will have thought it cost them all paradise.

This story of Eden is rejected by some as an improbability, if not an impossibility, but nothing on earth is easier for me to believe than the truth of this Edenic story, for I have seen the same thing in this year of our Lord 1897. I could call them by name, if it were polite and righteous to do so, the men who have sacrificed a paradise on earth and a paradise in Heaven for one sin. Their house went. Their library went. Their good name went. Their field of usefulness went. Their health went. Their immortal soul went. My friends! there is just one sin that will turn you out of paradise if you do not quit it. You know what it is, and God knows, and you had better drop the hand and arm lifted toward that bending bough before you pluck your own ruin. When Adam stood on tiptoe and took in his right hand that one round peach, or apricot, or apple, Satan reached up and pulled down the round, beautiful world of our present residence. Overworked artist, overwrought merchant, ambitious politician, avaricious speculator, better take that warning from Adam's orchard and stop before you put out for that one thing more.

But I turn from Adam's orchard to Solomon's orchard. With his own hand he writes: "I made me gardens and orchards." Not depending on the natural fall of rain, he irrigated those orchards. Pieces of the aqueduct that watered those gardens I have seen, and the reservoirs are as perfect as when thousands of years ago the mason's trowel smoothed the mortar over their gray surfaces. No orchard of olden or modern time, probably, ever had its thirst so well slaked.

What mean Solomon's orchards and Solomon's gardens? for they seem to mingle, the two into one, flowers under foot and pomegranates over head. To me they suggest that religion is a luxury. All along, the world has looked upon religion chiefly as a dire necessity—a lifeboat from the shipwreck, a ladder from the conflagration, a soft landing-place after we have been shoved off the precipice of this planet. As a consequence so many have said: "We will await preparation for the future until the crash of the shipwreck, until the conflagration is in full blaze, until we reach the brink of the precipice." No doubt religion is inexpressibly important for the last exigency. But what do the apples, and the figs, and the melons, and the pomegranates, and the citron, and the olives of Solomon's orchard mean? Luxury! They mean that our religion is the luscious, the aromatic, the pungent, the arborescent, the efflorescent, the foliated, the umbrageous. They mean what Edward Payson meant when he declared: "If my happiness continues to increase I cannot support it much longer."

You think religion is a good thing for a funeral. O, yes. But Solomon's orchard means more. Religion is a good thing now, when you are in health and prosperity and the appetite is good.

Religion for the funeral! O, yes; but religion for the wedding breakfast; religion for the brightest spring morning and autumn's most gorgeous sunset.

It may be a bold thing to say, but I risk it, that if all people, without respect to belief or character, at death passed into everlasting happiness, religion for this world is such a luxury that no man or woman could afford to do without it. If in sermons, or exhortatory, or social recommendations of religion we put the chief emphasis on the fact that the door of the next world is opened, poor human nature will take the risk and say: "I will wait until the door begins to open." But show them the radiant truth, that the table of God's love and pardon is now laid with all the fruits which the orchards of God's love, and pardon, and helpfulness can supply, and they will come in and sit down with all the other banqueters, terrestrial and celestial.

But having introduced you to Adam's orchard and carried you a while through Solomon's orchard, I want to take a walk with you through Pilate's orchard of three trees on a hill 70 feet high, ten minutes' walk from the gate of Jerusalem. After I have read that our great grandfather and great-grandmother had been driven out of the first orchard, I made up my mind that the Lord would not be defeated in that way. I said to myself that when they had been poisoned by the fruit of that one tree, somewhere, somehow, there would be provided an antidote for the poison. I said: "Where is the other tree that will undo the work of that tree? Where is the other orchard that will repair the damage received in the first orchard?" And I read on until I found the orchard, and its center tree as mighty for cure as this one had been for ruin; and as the one tree in Adam's orchard had its branches laden with the red fruit of carnage, and the pale fruit of suffering, and the spotted fruit of decay, and the bitter fruit of disappointment, I found in Pilate's orchard a tree which, though stripped of all its leaves and stuck through by an iron bolt as long as your arm, nevertheless bore the richest fruit that was ever gathered.

Like the trees of the first orchard, this was planted, blossomed, and bore fruit all in one day. Paul was impulsive and vehement of nature, and he laid hold of that tree with both arms, and shook it till the ground all round looked like an orchard the morning after an autumnal equinox, and

careful lest he step on some of the fruit, gathered up a basketful of it for the Galatians, crying out: "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." The other two trees of Pilate's orchard were loaded, the one with the hard fruits of obduracy and the other with the tender fruit of repentance, but the center tree (how will I ever forget the day I sat on the exact place where it was planted)—the center tree of that orchard yields the antidote for the poisoned pations. There is in old England the hollow of a tree where a king hid, and there is in New England a tree in which a document of national importance was kept inviolate; and there have been trees of great girth and immense shade and vast wealth of fruitage, but no other tree had such value of reminiscence, or depth of root, or spread of branch, or infinitude of fruitage as the center tree of Pilate's orchard.

I do not believe God put all the flowers, and all the precious stones, and all the bright metals, and all the music, and all the fountains, and all the orchards in this little world of ours. How much was literal and how much was figurative, I cannot say; but St. John saw two rows of trees on each side of a river, and it differed from other orchards in the fact that the trees bore 12 manners of fruits. The learned translators of our common Bible say it means 12 different kinds of fruits in one year. Albert Barnes says it means 12 crops of the same kind of fruit in one year. Not able to decide which is the more accurate translation, I adopt both. If it means 12 different kinds of fruit, it declares variety in Heavenly joy. If it means 12 crops of the same kind of fruit, it declares abundance in Heavenly joy, and they are both true. Variety? O, yes! Not an eternity with nothing but music; that Oratorio would be too protracted. Not an eternity of procession on white horses; that would be too long in the stirrups. Not an eternity of watching the river; that would be too much of the picturesque. Not an eternity of plucking fruits from the tree of life; that would be too much of the Heavenly orchard. But all manner of varieties, and I will tell you of at least 12 of those varieties: Joy of divine worship; joy over the victories of the Lamb who was slain; joy over the repentant sinners; joy of recounting our own rescue; joy of embracing old friends; joy of recognition of patriarchs, apostles, evangelists, and martyrs; joy of ringing harmonies; joy of rekindling broken friendships; joy at the explanation of providential mysteries; joy at walking the boulevards of gold; joy at looking at walls green with emerald, and blue with sapphire, and crimson with jasper, and flashing with amethyst, entered through awning gates, their posts, their hinges, and their panels of richest pearl; joy that there is to be no subsidence, no reaction, no terminus to the felicity.

All that makes 12 different joys, 12 manner of fruits. So much for variety. But if you take the other interpretation, and say it means 12 crops a year, I am with you still, for that means abundance. That will be the first place we ever get into where there is enough of everything. Enough of health, enough of light, enough of spiritual association, enough of love, enough of knowledge, enough of joy. The orchards of this lower world put out their energies for a few days in autumn, and then, having yielded one crop, their banners of foliage are dropped out of the air, and all their beauty is adjourned until the blossoming of the next May time. But 12 crops in the Heavenly orchard during that which on earth we call a year means abundance perpetually.

While there is enough of the pomp of the city about Heaven for those who like the city best, I thank God there is enough in the Bible about country scenery in Heaven to please those of us who were born in the country and never got over it. Now you may have streets of gold in Heaven; give me the orchards, with 12 manners of fruits, and yielding their fruit every month; and the leaves of the trees are for "the healing of the nations; and there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads; and there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever."

But just think of a place so brilliant that the noonday sun shall be removed from the mantle of the sky because it is too feeble a taper! Yet, most of all, am I impressed with the fact that I am not yet fit for that place, nor you either. By the reconstructing and sanctifying grace of Christ we need to be made all over. And let us be getting our passports ready if we want to get into that country. An earthly passport is a personal matter, telling our height, our girth, the color of our hair, our features, our complexion, and our age. I cannot get into a foreign port on your passport, nor can you get in on mine. Each one of us for himself needs a divine signature, written by the wounded hand of the Son of God, to get into the Heavenly orchard, under the laden branches of which, in God's good time, we may meet the Adam of the first orchard, and the Solomon of the second orchard, and the St. John of the last orchard, to sit down under the tree of which the church in the Book of Canticles speaks when it says: "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste; and there it may be found that to-day we learned the danger of hankering after one thing more, and that religion is a luxury, and that there is a divine antidote for all poisons, and that we had created in us an appetite for Heaven, and that it was a wholesome and saving thing for us to have discoursed on the pomology of the Bible; or God among the orchards."

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