

CHEERFULNESS.

Rev. Dr. Talmage Enters a Strong Plea in Its Favor.

He Comments Out-door Sports and Lays Down Some Good Rules for the Selection of Pastimes and Amusements—Long-faced Forwardness Are Often Spurious.

In the following discourse Dr. Talmage places himself on record as in favor of lawful amusements and extracts a good lesson from the story of Samson. The text is Judges 16: 25: "And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport."

There were 3,000 people assembled in the temple of Dagon. They had come to make sport of eyeless Samson. They were all ready for the entertainment. They began to clap and pound, impatient for the amusement to begin, and they cried out, "Fetch him out! Fetch him out!" Yonder I see the blind old giant coming, led by the hand of a child to the very midst of the temple. At his first appearance there goes up a shout of laughter and derision. The blind old giant pretends he is tired and wants to rest himself against the pillars of the house, "Bring me where the main pillars are." The lad does so. Then the strong man puts his hands on one of the pillars, and, with the mightiest push that mortal ever made, throws himself forward until the whole house comes down in thunderous crash, grinding the audience like grapes in a wine press.

"And so it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house, and he made them sport." In order words there are amusements that are destructive and bring down disaster and death upon the heads of those who practise them. While they laugh and cheer they die. The three thousand who perished that day in Gaza are nothing compared with the tens of thousands who have been destroyed, body, mind, and soul, by bad amusements and by good amusements carried to excess.

In my sermons you must have noticed that I have no sympathy with ecclesiastical strait-jackets, or with that wholesale denunciation of amusements to which many are pledged. I believe the church of God has made a tremendous mistake in trying to suppress the sportfulness of youth and drive out from men their love of amusement. If God ever implanted anything in us he implanted this desire. But instead of providing for this demand of our nature, the church of God has for the main part ignored it. As in a riot the mayor plants a battery at the end of the street and has it fired off, so that everybody is cut down that happens to stand in the range, the good as well as the bad, so there are men in the church who plant their batteries of condemnation and fire away indiscriminately. Everything is condemned. They talk as if they would like to have our youth dressed in blue uniform, like the children of an orphan asylum, and march down the path of life to the tune of the Dead March in Saul. They hate a blue sash, or a rosebud in the hair, or a tasseled gaiter, and think a man almost ready for the lunatic asylum who utters a conundrum.

Young men's Christian associations of the country are doing a glorious work. They have fine reading rooms, and all the inducements of the best kind, and are now adding gymnasia and bowling alleys, where, without any evil surroundings, our young men may get physical as well as spiritual improvement. We are dwindling away to a narrow-chested, weak-armed, feeble-voiced race, when God calls us to a work in which he wants physical as well as spiritual athletes. I would to God that the time might soon come when in all our colleges and theological seminaries, as at Princeton, a gymnasium shall be established. We spend seven years of hard study in preparation for the ministry, and come out with bronchitis and dyspepsia and liver complaint, and then crawl up into the pulpit, and the people say, "Don't he look heavenly!" because he looks sickly. Let the church of God direct, rather than attempt to suppress, the desire for amusement. The best men that the world ever knew have had their sports. William Wilberforce trundled hoop with his children. Martin Luther helped dress the Christmas tree. Ministers have pitched quoits, philanthropists have gone a-skiing, prime ministers have played ball.

Our communities are filled with men and women who have in their souls unmeasured resources for sportfulness and frolic. Show me a man who never lights up with sportfulness and has no sympathy with the recreations of others, and I will show you a man who is a stumbling block to the kingdom of God. Such men are caricatures of religion. They lead young men to think that a man is good in proportion as he groans and frowns and looks sorrowful, and that the height of a man's Christian stature is in proportion to the length of his face. I would trade off 500 such men for one bright-faced, radiant Christian on whose face are the words, "Rejoice evermore!" Every morning by his cheerful face he preaches fifty sermons. I will go further and say that I have no confidence in a man who makes a religion of his gloomy looks. That kind of a man always turns out badly. I would not want him for the treasurer of an orphan asylum. The orphans would suffer.

Among 40 people whom I received into the church at one communion, there was only one applicant of whose piety I was suspicious. He had the longest story to tell; had seen the most visions, and gave an experience so wonderful that all the other applicants were discouraged. I was not surprised the next year to learn that he had run off with the funds of the bank with which he was connected. Who is this black angel that you call religion—wings black, feet black, feathers black? Our religion is a bright angel—feet bright, eyes bright, wings bright, taking her place in the soul. She pulls a rope that reaches to the skies and sets all the bells of Heaven a-chiming. There are some persons who, when talking to a minister, always feel it politic to look lugubrious.

Go forth, O people, to your lawful amusement. God means you to be happy. But, when there are so many sources of innocent pleasure, why tamper with anything that is dangerous and polluting? Why stop our ears to the hiss of a dragon? Why turn back from the mountain side all abloom with wild flowers and adash with the nimble torrents, and with blistered feet attempt to climb the hot sides of Cotopaxi?

Now, all opera houses, theaters, bowling alleys, skating rinks, and all styles of amusement, good and bad, I put on trial today and judge of them by certain cardinal principles. First, you may judge of any amusement by its healthful result or by its baneful reaction. There are people who seem to have a taste for bare facts. They are a combination of multiplication tables and statistics. If you show them an exquisite picture they will begin to discuss the pigments involved in the coloring; if you show them a beautiful rose they will submit it to a botanical analysis, which is only the post-mortem examination of a flower. They never do anything more than feebly smile. There are no great tides of feeling surging up from the depth of their soul in billow after billow of reverent laughter. They seem as if nature had built them by contract and made a bungling job out of it. But, blessed be God, there are people in the world who have bright faces and whose life is a song, an anthem, a psalm of victory.

Now, it is these exhilarant and sympathetic and warm-hearted people that are most tempted to a pernicious amusement. In proportion as a ship is swift it wants a strong helmsman; in proportion as a horse is gay it wants a strong driver; and these people of exuberant nature will do well to look at the reaction of all their amusements. If an amusement sends you home at night nervous so you cannot sleep, and you rise in the morning, not because you are slept out, but because your duty drags you from your slumbers, you have been where you ought not to have been. There are amusements that send a man next day to his work blood-shot, yawning, stupid, nauseated, and they are wrong kinds of amusements. There are entertainments that give a man disgust with the drudgery of life, with a loathing because they are not swords, with working aprons because they are not robes, with cattle because they are not infuriated bulls of the arena. If any amusement sends you home longing for a life of romance and thrilling adventure, love that takes poison and shoots itself, moonlight adventures and hair-breadth escapes, you may depend upon it that you are the sacrificed victim of unsanctified pleasure.

Still further: Those amusements are wrong which lead to expenditures beyond your means. Money spent in recreation is not thrown away. It is all folly for us to come from a place of amusement feeling that we have wasted our money and time. You may by it have made an investment worth more than the transaction that yielded you a hundred or a thousand dollars. But how many properties have been riddled by costly amusements? The table has been robbed to pay the club. The champagne has cheated the children's wardrobe. The carousing party has looted the boy's primer. The table cloth of the corner saloon is in debt to the wife's faded dress. Excursions that in a day make a tour around a whole month's wages; laddies whose lifetime business is to "go shopping," have their counterpart in uneducated children, bankruptcies that shock the money market and appall the church, and that send drunkennes staggering across the richly figured carpet of the mansion and dashing out the carol of merriment with the whooping of blooded sons come home to break their old mother's heart. When men go into amusements that they cannot afford, they first borrow what they cannot earn, and then they steal what they cannot borrow. First they go into embarrassment and then into theft, and when a man gets as far on as that he does not stop short of the penitentiary. There is not a prison in the land where there are not victims of unsanctified amusements.

You may judge of amusements by their effects upon physical health. The need of many good people is physical recuperation. There are Christian men who write hard things against their immortal souls when there is nothing the matter with them except an incompetent liver. There are Christian people who seem to think it is a good sign to be poorly, and because Richard Baxter and Robert Hall were invalids they think that by the same sickness they may come to the same grandeur of character. I want to tell Christian people that God will hold you responsible for your invalidism if it is your own fault, and when through right exercise and prudence you might be athletic and well. The effect of the body upon the soul you acknowledge. Put a man of mild disposition upon animal diet of which the Indian partakes, and in a little time his blood will change its chemical proportions. It will become like unto the blood of the lion or the tiger or the bear, while his disposition will change and become fierce, cruel and unrelenting. The body has a powerful effect upon the soul. There are people whose ideas of Heaven are all shut out with clouds of tobacco smoke. There are people who dare to shatter the physical vase in which God put the jewel of eternity. There are men with great hearts and intellects in bodies worn out by their own neglect. Magnificent machinery capable of propelling a great Etruria across the Atlantic, yet fastened in a rickety North River propeller. Physical development which merely shows itself in a fabulous lifting, or in perilous ropewalking, or in pugilist encounter, excites only our contempt, but we confess to great admiration for the man who has a soul in an athletic body, every nerve, muscle, and bone of which is concentrated to right uses. Oh, it seems to me outrageous that men through neglect should allow their physical health to go down beyond repair, spending the rest of their life, not in some great enterprise for God and the world, but in studying what is the best thing to take for dyspepsia. A ship which ought with all sails set and every man at his post to be carrying a rich cargo for eternity, employing all its men stopping up leaks! When you may through some of the popular and healthful recreations of our time work off your spleen and your querulousness and

one-half of your physical and mental ailments, do not turn your back from such a grand medicament.

Again, judge of the places of amusement by the company in which they put you. If you belong to an organization where you have to associate with the intemperate, with the unclean, with the abandoned, however well they may be dressed, in the name of God quit it. They will despoil your nature. They will undermine your moral character. They will drop you when you are destroyed. They will not give one cent to support your children when you are dead. They will weep not one tear at your burial. They will chuckle over your damnation. But the day comes when the men who have exerted evil influence upon their fellows will be brought to judgment. Scene: the last day. Stage: the rocking earth. Enter dukes, lords, kings, beggars, clowns. No sword. No tiara. No crown. For foot-lights the kindling flames of a world. For orchestra, the trumpets that wake the dead. For gallery, the clouds filled with angel spectators. For applause, the clapping floods of the sea. For curtains, the Heavens rolled together as a scroll. For tragedy, the doom of the destroyed. For farce, the effort to serve the world and God at the same time. For the last scene of the fifth act, the tramp of nations across the stage—some to the right, others to the left.

Again, any amusement that gives you a distaste for domestic life is bad. How many bright domestic circles have been broken up by sinful amusements? The father went off, the mother went off, the child went off. There are all around us fragments of blasted households. Oh! if you have wandered away, I would like to charm you back by the sound of that one word, "Home." Do you not know that you have but little more time to give to domestic welfare? Do you not see, father, that your children are soon to go out into the world, and all the influence for good you are to have over them you must have now? Death will break in on your conjugal relations, and, alas! if you have to stand over the grave of one who perished from your neglect.

Let me say to all young men, your style of amusement will decide your eternal destiny. One night I saw a young man at a street corner evidently doubting as to which direction he had better take. He had his hat lifted high enough so you could see he had an intelligent forehead. He had a stout chest; he had a robust development. Splendid young man. Cultured young man. Honored young man. Why did he stop there while so many were going up and down? The fact is that every man has a good angel and a bad angel contending for the mastery of his spirit. And there was a good angel and a bad angel struggling with that young man's soul at the corner of the street. "Come with me," said the good angel, "I will take you home. I will spread my wing over your pathway. I will lovingly escort you all through life. I will bless every cup you drink out of, every couch you rest on, every doorway you enter. I will consecrate your tears when you weep, your sweat when you toil, and at the last I will hand over your grave into the hand of the brightest angel of a Christian resurrection.

"In answer to your father's petition and your mother's prayer I have been sent of the Lord out of Heaven to be your guardian spirit. Come with me!" said the good spirit angel in a voice of unearthly sympathy. It was music like that which drops from a lute of Heaven when a seraph breathes on it. "No, no," said the bad angel, "come with me; I have something better to offer; the wines I pour from chalices of bewitching color; the dances I lead is over the floor tessellated with unrestrained indulgences; there is no God to frown on the temples of sin where I worship. The skies are Italian. The paths I tread are through meadows daisied and primrosed; come with me." The young man hesitated at a time when hesitation was ruin, and the bad angel smote the good angel until it departed, spreading wing through the starlight upward and away, until a good flash opened in the sky and forever the wings vanished. That was the turning point in that young man's history; for, the good angel flown, he hesitated no longer, but started on a pathway which is beautiful at the opening, but blasted at the last. The bad angel leading the way opened gate after gate, and at each gate the road became rougher and the sky more lurid, and, what was peculiar, as the gate slammed shut it came to with a jar that indicated that it would never open.

On the left side of the road, there was a lion, and the man asked the bad angel, "What is that lion?" and the answer was, "That is the lion of all-devouring despair." A vulture flew through the sky, and the man asked the bad angel, "What is that vulture?" and the answer was, "That is the vulture waiting for the carcasses of the slain." And then the man began to try to pull off of him the folds of something that had wound him round and round, and he said to the bad angel, "What is it that twists me in this awful convulsion?" and the answer was, "That is the worm that never dies!" and then the man said to the bad angel, "What does all this mean?" I trusted in what you said at the corner of the street that night; I trusted it all, and why have you thus deceived me?" Then the last deception fell off the charmer, and it said: "I was sent forth from the pit to destroy your soul; I watched my chance for many a long year; when you hesitated that night on the street I gained my triumph; now you are here. Hal! hal! You are here. Come now, let us fill these two chalices of fire and drink together to darkness and woe and death. Hal! hal!" O, young man, will the good angel sent forth by Christ, or the bad angel sent forth by sin, get the victory over your soul? Their wings are interlocked this moment above you, contending for your destiny, as above the Apennines eagle and condor fight mid-day. This hour may decide your destiny. God help you! To hesitate is to die!

Telephone Girls in France. The managers of the telephone company operating the system at Versailles, France, hold that the expression "Hello!" used in response to a call is impolite. The operators have been instructed to ask the subscriber who rings up the central office: "What do you want?"

MAKING OF A DESERT

THE YUMA WAS FERTILE UNTIL THE VINEGAROOON STRUCK IT.

A Big Spider Which was the Most "Plzen Thing That Ever Crawled or Flew When Its Anger Was Aroused"—A Vicious Tale From the Alkali Lands.

He had a solemn-looking face and dressed in rather a clerical style. His companions knew that he was a traveling man, but did not know what line of goods he was selling. Finally he was asked to tell a story or take the consequences.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I don't know any funny stories, as I am in a business where that kind doesn't go."

"What do you handle?" was then asked of him. "I sell coffins," he replied, "and you must admit that it is not the jolliest line that a man can carry. It's a good business, though, for it is always picking up. You see more people are dying every day and that means more coffins. Then out west a new territory has opened up in the last few years when I first went to traveling out there a bought coffin was considered a luxury. When a man died they knocked a pine box together, whitewashed it, marked the name of its occupant on it with a stencil plate and let it go at that, but now people are becoming educated and they want varnished coffins with big brass door plates on them, just the same as the people back East. As I deal mostly with dead things I will have to tell you about how the Yuma desert became a desert—and it is about the dearest thing I ever came across. The story was told to me by an old man who had drifted out West in the beginning of the century.

"He said that when he first struck the Yuma it was the most fertile spot he had ever seen; it was fairly rank with fine grass. A great many people came there and settled, and the only thing that bothered them was a big spider known as the 'Vinegaroon,' which he said was the most 'plzen thing that ever crawled or flew when its anger was aroused.' One day a cow puncher was sleeping on the prairie, when he was awakened by something crawling on his breast. He glanced down, and was horrified to see the dreaded spider. He slowly drew his gun and fired across his breast. He killed the spider, but not in time to keep it from stinging him. Of course, he died in a few minutes. The bullet, after passing through the spider's body and becoming coated with poison, struck a tree. You may not believe me, but it is as honest fact that the tree was killed, and that night all of the leaves fell off. A steer happened to pass the next morning and ate some of the leaves. He did not walk a dozen yards before he was a dead steer. Some of the ranch men in looking for the dead cow-puncher found the steer, and, as hides were very valuable then, one of them skinned it. In doing the work he cut his hand, and before his crowd got back to the ranch they had two dead men in the party instead of one. Well, the hide was sold to a tanner, and while tanning it he became inoculated with the poison and there was a funeral in his family. A shoemaker got the hide, and in cutting a pair of boots out of it, his knife slipped and clipped a piece out of his finger. A few days later there was crabs on his door. A drunken cow-puncher rode into town a short time after the sad occurrence and noticed the new boots in the shop window. There is nothing that appeals to a puncher's heart like a pair of new boots, and in a few minutes they were his and he was stalking around town in them. Of course, he did not wear socks, and the boots rubbed the skin off his heel. The next morning there was a cowboy funeral. The people were aroused by this time and proceeded to find out the cause of so many strange deaths. After a great deal of trouble they traced them back to the 'Vinegaroon,' through the hide, boots and to the spot on the cowboy's heel. Then they knew that the boots were poisoned. A man took them on the end of a pole and carried them out into the prairie, where he buried them, and, would you believe me, in less than a month all of the grass on the prairie had died and the once fertile spot was converted into what is now known as the Yuma desert."

For a few minutes after the story was finished the drummers looked at the coffin man with admiration. They they arose as one man and took their hats off to him.

Reading Newspapers on Sunday. It is very unusual to hear a preacher refer to the Sunday newspapers without censure; much more unusual to hear them speak of the Sunday newspapers with approval. The Rev. Doctor L. S. Osborne, rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Newark, N. J., recently addressed a meeting of the Wednesday Club of that city, and in reference to newspapers said that as far as Sunday papers are concerned, there is no reason for not reading them Saturday papers as long as they do not interfere with a man's religious duties. He does so, he said, and so do some of his parishioners. While he did not like papers "prying into personal affairs and family history," he considered them a necessary adjunct to the affairs of life. "The proper function of the newspaper, like that of the pulpit," he added, "is to have high, deep and broad views of men and things of the world at large."

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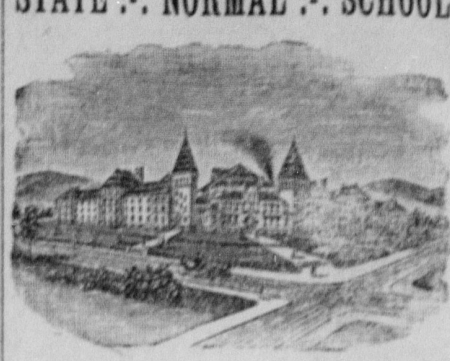
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