

# THE SUICIDE.

### He Who Takes His Own Life Commits the Greatest Crime.

Rev. Dr. Talmage says the American Conscience Needs Toning Up—Infidelity Has Done More to Foster Suicide Than Anything Else.

The following sermon seems particularly appropriate at this time when so many are leaving the world by means of their own hand. The text chosen by the popular Washington divine is Acts 16: 28: "Do thyself no harm."

Here is a would-be suicide arrested in his deadly attempt. He was a sheriff, and, according to the Roman law a bailiff himself must suffer the punishment due an escaped prisoner; and if the prisoner breaking jail was sentenced to be endueged for three or four years, then the sheriff must be endueged for three or four years, and if the prisoner breaking jail was to have suffered capital punishment, then the sheriff must suffer capital punishment. The sheriff had received special charge to keep a sharp lookout for Paul and Silas. The government had not much confidence in two clergymen, about whom there seemed to be something strange and supernatural. Sure enough, by miraculous power, they are free, and the sheriff, waking out of a sound sleep, and supposing these ministers have run away, and knowing that they were to die for preaching Christ, and realizing that he must therefore die, rather than go under the executioner's ax on the morrow and suffer, resolved to precipitate his own decease. But before the sharp, keen, glittering dagger of the sheriff could strike his heart, one of the unloosed prisoners arrests the blade by the command, "Do thyself no harm."

In olden times, and where Christianity had not interfered with it, suicide was considered honorable and a sign of courage. Demosthenes poisoned himself when told that Alexander's ambassador had demanded the surrender of the Athenian orators. Isocrates killed himself rather than surrender to Philip of Macedonia. Cato, rather than submit to Julius Caesar, took his own life, and three times after his wounds had been dressed, before them open and perished. Mithridates killed himself rather than submit to Pompey, the conqueror. Hannibal destroyed his life by poison from his ring, considering life unbearable. Lycurgus a suicide, Brutus a suicide. After the disaster of Moscow, Napoleon always carried with him a preparation of poison, and one night his servant heard the ex-emperor arise, put something in a glass and drink it, and soon after the groans aroused all the attendants, and it was only through the utmost medical skill that he was resuscitated. Times have changed, and yet the American conscience needs to be toned up on the subject of suicide. Have you seen a paper in the last month that did not announce the passage out of life by one's own behest? Defaulters, alarmed at the idea of exposure, quit life precipitately. Men losing large fortunes go out of the world because they cannot endure earthly existence. Frustrated affection, domestic infelicity, dyspeptic impatience, anger, remorse, envy, jealousy, destitution, misanthropy, are considered sufficient causes for absconding from this life by Paris green, by laudanum, by belladonna, by Othello's dagger, by halter, by leap from the abutment of a bridge, by firearms. More cases of felo de se in the last two years than any two years of the world's existence, and more in the last month than in any twelve months. The evil is more and more spreading.

A pulpit not long ago expressed some doubt as to whether there was really anything wrong about quitting this life when it became disagreeable, and there are found in respectable circles people apologetic for the crime which Paul in the text arrested. I shall show you before I get through that suicide is the worst of all crimes, and I shall lift a warning unmistakable. But in the early part of this sermon I wish to admit that some of the best Christians that have ever lived have committed self-destruction, but always in dementia, and not responsibly. I have no more doubt about their eternal felicity than I have of the Christian who dies in his bed in the delirium of typhoid fever. While the shock of the catastrophe is very great, I charge all those who have had Christian friends under cerebral aberration step off the board of their happiness.

Scotland, the land prolific of intellectual giants, had none grander than Hugh Miller. Great for science and great for God. He was an elder in St. John's Presbyterian church. He came of the best Highland blood, and was a descendant of Donald Roy, a man eminent for piety and the rare gift of second sight. His attainments, climbing up as he did from the quarry and the wall of the stonemason, drew forth the astonishment and admiration of Buckland and Murchison, the scientists, and Dr. Chalmers, the theologian, and held universities spell-bound while he told them the story of what he had seen of God in the old red sandstone. That man did more than any other being that ever lived to show that the God of the hills is the God of the Bible, and he struck his tuning-fork on the rocks of Cromarty until he brought geology and theology accordant in divine worship. His two books, entitled "Foot-prints of the Creator" and "The Testimony of the Rocks" proclaimed the banners of an everlasting marriage between genuine science and revelation. On this latter book he toiled day and night, through love of nature and love of God, until he could not sleep, and his brain gave way, and he was found dead with a revolver by his side, the cruel instrument having had two bullets—one for him and the other for the gunsmith, who at the coroner's inquest was examining it and fell dead. Have you any doubt of the beatifications of Hugh Miller after his hot brain had ceased throbbing that winter night in his study at Portobello? Among the mightiest of earth, among the mightiest of Heaven.

No one doubted the piety of William Cowper, the author of those three great hymns: "O for a Closer Walk With God," "What Various Hindrances We Meet," "There is a Fountain Filled With Blood"—William Comper, who

shares with Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley the chief honors of Christian hymnology. In hypochondria he resolved to take his own life, and rode to the river Thames, but found a man seated on some rocks at that very point from which he expected to spring, and rode back to his home, and that night threw himself upon his own knife, but the blade broke; and then he hanged himself to the ceiling, but the rope broke. No wonder that when God mercifully delivered him from that awful dementia he sat down and wrote that other hymn just as memorable:

"God moves in a mysterious way,  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants his footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.  
"Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan his work in vain;  
God is his own interpreter,  
And he will make it plain."

While we make this merciful and righteous allowance in regard to those who were plunged into mental incoherence, I declare that the man who, in the use of his reason, by his own act, snaps the bond between his body and his soul, goes straight into perdition, shall I prove it? Revelations 21: 8: "Murderers shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." Revelations 27: 15: "Without are dogs and sorcerers and whoremongers and murderers." You do not believe the New Testament? Then, perhaps, you believe the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not kill." Do you say that all these passages refer to the taking of the life of others? Then I ask you if you are not as responsible for your own life as for the life of others? God gave you a special trust in life, and made you the custodian of your life, and he made you the custodian of no other life. He gave you as weapons with which to defend it two arms to strike back assailants, two eyes to watch for invasion, and a natural love of life which ought ever to be on the alert. Assassination of others is a mild crime compared with the assassination of yourself, because in the latter case it is treachery to an especial trust; it is the surrender of a castle you were especially appointed to keep; it is treason to a natural law, and it is treason to God added to ordinary murder.

To show how God in the Bible looked upon this crime, I point you to the rogues' picture gallery in some parts of the Bible, the pictures of the people who have committed this unnatural crime. Here is the headless trunk of Saul on the walls of Bathsheba. Here is the man who chased little David—ten feet in stature chasing four. Here is the man who consulted a clairvoyant, Witch of Endor. Here is a man who, whipped in battle, instead of surrendering his sword with dignity, as many a man has done, asks his servant to slay him, and when the servant declined, then the giant plants the hilt of his sword in the earth, the sharp point sticking upward, and he throws his body on it and expires—the sword, the suicide! Here is Ahiotep, the Machiaveli of olden times, betraying his best friend, David, in order that he may become prime minister of Absalom, and joining that fellow in his attempt at parricide. Not getting what he wanted by change of politics, he takes a short cut out of a disgraceful life into the suicide's eternity. There he is, the ingrate!

Here is Abimelech, practically a suicide. He is with an army, bombarding a tower, when a woman in the tower takes a grindstone from its place and drops it upon his head, and with what life he has left in his cracked skull he commands his armor-bearer, "Draw thy sword and slay me, lest men say a woman slew me." There is his post-mortem photograph in the Book of Samuel.

But the hero of this group is Judas Iscariot. Dr. Donne says he was a martyr, and we have in our day apologists for him. And what wonder, in this day when we have a book revealing Aaron Burr as a pattern of virtue, and this day when we uncover a statue of George Sand as the benefactress of literature, and in this day when there are betrayals of Christ on the part of some of his pretended apostles—a betrayal so black it makes the infamy of Judas Iscariot white! Yet this man by his own hand hung up for the execration of all ages, Judas Iscariot.

Notwithstanding the Bible is against the evil and the aversion which it creates by the loathsomeness and ghastly spectacle of those who have hurled themselves out of life, and notwithstanding Christianity is against it and the arguments and the useful lives and the illustrious deaths of its disciples, it is a fact alarmingly patent that suicide is on the increase. What is the cause? I charge upon infidelity and agnosticism this whole thing. If there be no hereafter, or if that hereafter be blissful without reference to how we live and how we die, why not move back the folding doors between this world and the next? And when our existence here becomes troublesome why not pass right over into Elysium? Put this down among your most solemn reflections. There has never been a case of suicide where the operator was not either demented, and therefore irresponsible, or an infidel. I challenge all the ages and I challenge the universe. There never was a case of self-destruction while in full appreciation of his immortality and of the fact that that immortality would be glorious or wretched according as he accepted Jesus Christ or rejected him.

A man in London heard Mr. Owen deliver his infidel lecture on socialism, and went home, sat down, and wrote these words: "Jesus Christ is one of the weakest characters in history, and the Bible is the greatest possible deception." And then shot himself. David Hume wrote these words: "It would be no crime for me to divert the Nile or the Danube from its natural bed. Where, then, can be the crime in my diverting a few drops of blood from their ordinary channel?" And having written the essay he loaned it to a friend, the friend read it, wrote a letter of thanks and admiration, and shot himself. Appendix to the same book.

the strychnine for the last swallow. If infidelity could carry the day and persuade the majority of people in this country that it does not make any difference how you go out of this world you will land safely, the Potomac would be so full of corpses the boats would be impeded in their progress, and the crack of the suicide's pistol would be no more alarming than the rattle of a street car.

Would God that the coroners would be brave in rendering the right verdict, and when in a case of irresponsibility they say: "While this man was demented he took his life;" in the other case say: "Having read infidel books and attended infidel lectures, which obliterated from this man's mind all appreciation of future retribution, he committed self-slaughter!"

Have nothing to do with an infidel, so cruel, so debasing. Come out of that bad company into the company of those who believe the Bible. Benjamin Franklin wrote: "Of this Jesus of Nazareth I have to say that the system of morals he left, and the religion he has given us are the best things the world has ever seen or is likely to see." Patrick Henry, the electric champion of liberty, says: "The book worth all other books put together is the Bible." Benjamin Rush, the leading physiologist and anatomist of his day, the great medical scientist—what did he say? "The only true and perfect religion is Christianity?" Isaac Newton, the leading philosopher of his time—what did he say? "The sublimest philosophy on earth is the philosophy of the gospel." David Brewster, at the pronunciation of whose name every scientist the world over bows his head; David Brewster, saying: "Oh, this religion has been a great light to me, a very great light all my days." President Thiers, the great French statesman, acknowledging he prayed when he said: "I invoke the Lord God, in whom I am glad to believe." David Livingstone, able to conquer the lion, able to conquer the panther, able to conquer the savage, yet conquered by this religion, so when they find him dead they find him on his knees.

Salmon P. Chase, chief justice of the supreme court of the United States, appointed by President Lincoln, will take the witness stand. "Chief Justice Chase, please to state what you have to say about the book commonly called the Bible." The witness replies: "There came a time in my life when I doubted the divinity of the Scriptures, and I resolved as a lawyer and judge I would try the book as I would try anything in the court room, taking evidence for and against. It was a long and serious and profound study, and using the same principles of evidence in this religious matter as I always do in secular matters, I have come to the decision that the Bible is a supernatural book, that it has come from God, that the only safety for the human race is to follow its teachings." "Judge, that will do. Go back into your pillow of dust on the banks of the Ohio." Next I put upon the witness stand a president of the United States, John Quincy Adams. "President Adams, what have you to say about the Bible and Christianity?" The president replies: "I have for many years made it a practice to read through the Bible once a year. My custom is to read four or five chapters every morning immediately after rising from my bed. It employs about an hour of my time and seems to me the most suitable manner of beginning the day. In what light soever you regard the Bible, whether with reference to revelation, to history, or to morality, it is an invaluable and inexhaustible mine of knowledge and virtue."

Young men of America, come out of the circle of infidels—mostly made up of cranks and imbeciles—into the company of intellectual giants, and turn your back on infidelity, which destroys body and soul.

Ah! Infidelity, stand up and take your sentence. In the presence of God, angels, and men, stand up, thou monster! Thy lip blasted with blasphemy, thy cheek scarred with uncleanness, thy breath foul with the corruption of the ages! Stand up, Satyr, filthy goat, buzzard of the nations, leper of the centuries! Stand up, thou monster, infidelity! Part man, part panther, part reptile, part dragon, stand up and take thy sentence! Thy hands, red with the blood in which thou hast washed, thy feet crimson with the human gore through which thou hast waded, stand up and take thy sentence! Down with thee to the pit and sup on the sob and groans of those thou hast destroyed, and let thy music be the everlasting misery of those whom thou hast damned. I brand the forehead of infidelity with all the crimes of self-immolation for the last century on the part of those who had their reason.

My friends, if ever your life, through its blissful and its molestations, should seem to be unbearable, and you are tempted to quit it by your own behest, do not consider yourself as worse than others. Christ himself was tempted to cast himself from the roof of the temple, but as he resisted, so resist ye. Christ came to medicine all wounds. In your trouble I prescribe life instead of death. People who have had it worse than you will their way. Remember that God keeps the chronology of your life with as much precision as he keeps the chronology of nations, your grave as well as your cradle.

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