

IN GRIP OF STEEL.

Dr. Talmage Draws a Lesson from the Tenacity of Eleazar.

He Urges a Closer Adherence to the Gospel and Announces That He Will Not Cease to Preach.

(Washington, April 9. Copyright, 1899.)

In the first notice concerning Dr. Talmage that Pastor Charles H. Spurgeon, of London, wrote the great English minister said he was glad to find a preacher that believed something. This discourse of Dr. Talmage is in that vein, and urges close adherence to the old Gospel; text, II. Samuel, 23:10, "And his hand clave unto the sword."

What a glorious thing to preach the Gospel! Some suppose that because I have resigned a fixed pastorate I will cease to preach! No! No! I expect to preach more than I ever have. If the Lord will, four times as much, though in manifold places. I would not dare to halt with such opportunity to declare the truth through the ear to audiences and to the eye through the printing press. And here we have a stirring theme put before us by the prophet.

A great general of King David was Eleazar, the hero of the text. The Philistines opened battle against him, and his troops retreated. The coward fled. Eleazar and three of his comrades went into the battle and swept the field, for four men with God on their side are stronger than a whole regiment with God against them. "Fall back!" shouted the commander of the Philistine army. The cry ran along the host: "Fall back!" Eleazar, having swept the field, throws himself on the ground to rest, but the muscles and sinews of his hand had been so long bent around the hilt of the sword that the hilt was imbedded in the flesh, and the gold wire of the hilt had broken through the skin of the palm of his hand, and he could not drop this sword which he had so gallantly wielded. "His hand clave unto the sword." That is what I call magnificent fighting for the Lord God of Israel. And we want more of it.

I propose to show you how Eleazar took hold of the sword and how the sword took hold of Eleazar. I look at Eleazar's hand, and I come to the conclusion that he took the sword with a very tight grip. The coward who fled had no trouble in dropping their swords. As they fly over the rocks I hear their swords clanging in every direction. It is easy enough for them to drop their swords. But Eleazar's hand clave unto the sword. In this Christian conflict we want a tighter grip of the Gospel weapons, a tighter grasp of the two-edged sword of the truth. It makes me sick to see these Christian people who hold only a part of the truth, and let the rest of the truth go, so that the Philistines, seeing the loosened grasp, wrench the whole sword away from them.

The only safe thing for us to do is to put our thumb on the book of Genesis and sweep our hand around the book until the tips of the fingers clutch at the words: "In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth." I like an infidel a great deal better than I do one of these namby pamby Christians who hold a part of the truth and let the rest go. By miracle, God preserved this Bible just as it is, and it is a Damascus blade. The severest test to which a sword can be put in a sword factory is to wind the blade around a gun barrel like a ribbon, and then, when the sword is let loose, it flies back to its own shape. So the sword of God's truth has been fully tested, and it is bent this way and that way and wound this way and that way, but it always comes back to its own shape. Think of it! A book written near 19 centuries ago, and some of it thousands of years ago, and yet in our time the average sale of this book is more than 20,000 copies every week, and more than a million copies a year. I say now that a book which is divinely inspired, and divinely kept, and divinely scattered is a weapon worth holding a tight grip of. Bishop Colenso will come along and try to wrench out of your hand the five books of Moses, and Strauss will come along and try to wrench out of your hand the miracles, and Renan will come along and try to wrench out of your hand the entire life of the Lord Jesus Christ, and your associates in the office or the factory or the banking house will try to wrench out of your hand the entire Bible, but in the strength of the Lord God of Israel and with Eleazar's grip hold on to it. You give up the Bible, you give up any part of it, and you give up pardon and peace and life and Heaven.

Do not be ashamed, young man, to have the world know that you are a friend of the Bible. This book is the friend of all that is good, and it is the sworn enemy of all that is bad. An eloquent writer recently gives an incident of a very bad man who stood in a cell of a western prison. This criminal had gone through all styles of crime, and he was there waiting for the gallows. The convict standing there at the window of the cell, this writer says, "looked out and declared, 'I am an infidel.' He said that to all the men and women and children who happened to be gathered there, 'I am an infidel,' and the eloquent writer says, 'Every man and woman there believed him.' And the writer goes on to say, 'If he had stood there saying, 'I am a Christian,' every man and woman would have said, 'He is a liar!'"

This Bible is the sworn enemy of all that is wrong, and it is the friend of all that is good. Oh, hold on to it! Do not take part of it and throw the rest away. Hold on to all of it. There are so many people now who do not know. You ask them if the soul is immortal, and they say: "I guess it is; I don't know. Perhaps it is; perhaps it isn't." Is the Bible true? "Well, perhaps it is, and perhaps it isn't. Perhaps it may be partly, and perhaps it may not be at all." They

despise what they call the apostolic creed, but if their own creed were written out it would read like this: "I believe in nothing, the maker of heaven and earth, and in nothing which it hath sent, which nothing was born of nothing and which nothing was dead and buried and descended into nothing and arose from nothing and ascended to nothing and now sitteth at the right hand of nothing, from which it will come to judge nothing. I believe in the holy agnostic church and in the communion of nothingarians and in the forgiveness of nothing, and the resurrection of nothing and in the life that never shall be. Amen!" That is the creed of tens of thousands of people in this day. If you have a mind to adopt such a theory, I will not. "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ and in the holy Catholic church and in the communion of saints and in the life everlasting. Amen." Oh, when I see Eleazar taking such a stout grip of the sword in the battle against sin and for righteousness, I come to the conclusion that we ought to take a stouter grip of God's eternal truth—the sword of righteousness.

As I look at Eleazar's hand I also notice his spirit of self forgetfulness. He did not notice that the hilt of the sword was eating through the palm of his hand. He did not know it hurt him. As he went out into the conflict he was so anxious for the victory he forgot himself, and that hilt might go never so deeply into the palm of his hand, it could not disturb him. "His hand clave unto the sword." Oh, my brothers and sisters, let us go into the Christian conflict with the spirit of self abnegation. Who cares whether the world praises us or denounces us? What do we care for misrepresentation or abuse or persecution in a conflict like this? Let us forget ourselves. That man who is afraid of getting his hand hurt will never kill a Philistine. Who cares whether you get hurt or not if you get the victory? Oh, how many Christians there are who are all the time worrying about the way the world treats them. They are so tired, and they are so abused, and they are so tempted, when Eleazar did not think whether he had a hand or an arm or a foot. All he wanted was victory.

We see how men forget themselves in worldly achievement. We have often seen men who, in order to achieve worldly success, will forget all physical fatigue and all annoyance and all obstacle. Just after the battle of Yorktown, in the American revolution, a musician, wounded, was told he must have his limbs amputated, and they were about to fasten him to the surgeon's table, for it was long before the merciful discovery of anaesthetics. He said, "No, don't fasten me to that table; get me a violin." A violin was brought to him, and he said, "Now go to work as I begin to play," and for 40 minutes, during the awful pangs of amputation, he moved not a muscle nor dropped a note, while he played some sweet tune. Oh, is it not strange that with the music of the gospel of Jesus Christ and with this grand march of the church militant on the way to become the church triumphant we cannot forget ourselves and forget all pang and all sorrow and all persecution and all perturbation?

We know what men accomplish under worldly opposition. Men do not shrink back for antagonism or for hardship. You have admired Prescott's "Conquest of Mexico," as brilliant and beautiful a history as was ever written, but some of you may not know under what disadvantages it was written—that "Conquest of Mexico"—for Prescott was totally blind, and he had two pieces of wood parallel to each other fastened, and, totally blind, with his pen between those pieces of wood, he wrote, the stroke against one piece of wood telling how far the pen must go in one way, the stroke against the other piece of wood telling how far the pen must go the other way. Oh, how many men will endure for worldly knowledge and for worldly success, and yet how little we endure for Jesus Christ! How many Christians there are that go around saying: "Oh, my hand; oh, my hand, my hurt hand! Don't you see there is blood on the hand, and there is blood on the sword?" while Eleazar, with the hilt imbedded in the flesh of his right hand, does not know it.

What have we suffered in comparison with those who expired with suffocation or were burned or were chopped to pieces for the truth's sake? We talk of the persecution of olden times. There is just as much persecution going on now in various ways. In 1849, in Madagascar, 18 men were put to death for Christ's sake. They were to be hurled over the rocks, and before they were hurled over the rocks, in order to make their death the more dreadful in anticipation, they were put in baskets and swung to and fro over the precipice that they might see how many hundred feet they would have to be dashed down, and while they were swinging in these baskets over the rocks they sang:

Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the billows near me roil,
While the tempest still is high.

Then they were dashed down to death. Oh, how much others have endured for Christ, and how little we endure for Christ! We want to ride to Heaven in a Pullman sleeping car, our feet on soft plush, the bed made up early, so we can sleep all the way, the black porter of death to wake us up only in time to enter the golden city. We want all the surgeons to fix our hand up. Let them bring on all the lint and all the bandages and all the salve, for our hand is hurt, while Eleazar does not know his hand is hurt. "His hand clave unto the sword."

As I look at Eleazar's hand I come to the conclusion that he has done a great deal of hard hitting. I am not surprised when I see that these four men—Eleazar and his three companions—drove back the army of Philistines—that Eleazar's sword clave to his hand,

for every time he struck an enemy with one end of the sword the other end of the sword wounded him.

Oh, we have found an enemy who cannot be conquered by rosewater and soft speeches. It must be sharp stroke and straight thrust. There is intemperance, and there is fraud, and there is gambling, and there is lust, and there are 10,000 battalions of iniquity, armed Philistine iniquity. How are they to be captured and overthrown? Soft sermons in morocco cases laid down in front of an exquisite audience will not do it. You have got to call things by their right name. You have got to expel from our churches Christians who eat the sacrament on Sunday and devour widows' houses all the week. We have got to stop our indignation against the Hittites and the Amosites and the Girgashites and let those poor wretches go and apply our indignation to the modern transgressions which need to be dragged out and slain. Ahabs here. Herods here. Jezebels here. The massacre of the infants here. Strike for God so hard that while you slay the sin the sword will adhere to your own hand. I tell you, my friends, we want a few John Knoxes and John Wesleyes in the Christian church to-day.

The whole tendency is to refine on Christian work. We keep on refining on it until we send apologetic word to iniquity we are about to capture it. And we must go with sword, silver chased and presented by the ladies, and we must ride on white palfrey under embroidered housing, putting the spurs in only just enough to make the charger dance gracefully, and then we must send a missive, delicate as a wedding card, to ask the old black giant of sin if he will not surrender. Women saved by the grace of God and on glorious mission sent, detained from the Sabbath classes because their new hat is not done. Churches that shook our cities with great revivals sending around to ask some demonstrative worshiper if he will not please to say "amen" and "halleluiah" a little softer. It seems as if in our churches we wanted a baptism of cologne and balm of a thousand flowers when we actually need a baptism of fire from the Lord God of Pentecost. But we are so afraid somebody will criticize our sermons or criticize our prayers or criticize our religious work that our anxiety for the world's redemption is lost in the fear we will get our hand hurt, while Eleazar went into the conflict, "and his hand clave unto the sword."

But I see in the next place what a hard thing it was for Eleazar to get his hand and his sword parted. The muscles and the sinews had been so long grasped around the sword he could not drop it, and his three comrades, I suppose, came up and tried to help him, and they bathed the back part of the hand, hoping the sinews and muscles would relax. But no. "His hand clave unto the sword." Then they tried to pull open the fingers and to pull back the thumb, but no sooner were they pulled back than they closed again, "and his hand clave unto the sword." But after awhile they were successful, and then they noticed that the curve in the palm of the hand corresponded exactly with the curve of the hilt. "His hand clave unto the sword."

You and I have seen it many a time. There are in the United States to-day many aged ministers of the Gospel. They are too feeble now to preach. In the church records the word standing opposite their name is "emeritus," or the words are, "a minister without charge." They were a heroic race. They had small salaries and but few books, and they swam spring freshets to meet their appointments. But they did in their day a mighty work for God. They took off more of the heads of Philistine iniquity than you could count from noon to sundown. You put that old minister of the Gospel now into a prayer meeting or occasional pulpit or a sickroom where there is some one to be comforted, and it is the same old ring to his voice, and the same old story of pardon and peace and Christ and Heaven. His hand has so long clutched the sword in Christian conflict he cannot drop it. "His hand clave unto the sword."

I had in my parish in Philadelphia a very aged man who in his early life had been the companion and adviser of the early presidents, Madison and Monroe. He had wielded vast influence, but I only knew him as a very aged man. The most remarkable thing about him was his ardor for Christ. When he could not stand up in the meetings without propping, he would throw his arm around a pillar of the church, and though his mind was partially gone, his love for Christ was so great that all were in deep respect and profound admiration, and were moved when he spoke. I was called to see him die. I entered the room, and he said: "Mr. Talmage, I cannot speak to you now." He was in a very pleasant delirium, as he imagined he had an audience before him. He said: "I must tell these people to come to Christ and prepare for Heaven." And then in this pleasant delirium, both arms lifted, this octogenarian preached Christ and told of the glories of the world to come. There, lying on his dying pillow, his dying hand clave to his sword.

Oh, if there ever was anyone who had a right to retire from the conflict, it was old Joshua. Soldiers came back from battle have the names of the battles on their flags, showing where they distinguished themselves, and it is a very appropriate inscription. Look at that flag of old Gen. Joshua. On it, Jericho, Gibeon, Hazar, city of Ai, and instead of the stars sprinkled on the flag the sun and the moon which stood still. There he is, 110 years old. He is lying flat on his back, but he is preaching. His dying words are a battle charge against idolatry, and a rallying cry for the Lord of Hosts as he says: "Behold, this day I go the way of all the earth, and God hath not failed to fulfill his promise concerning Israel." His dying hand clave unto the sword.

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