GOD LIKE A MOTHER.

A Characteristic Sermon on His Mercies by Dr. Talmage.

THE EXTREME OF TENDERNESS.

People Are Usually Struck by the Harsh Bible Passages

INSTEAD OF THOSE SHOWING FAVOR

[SPECIAL TELEGRAM TO THE DISPATCH.]

BROOKLYN, Dec. 11.—Rev. Dr. Talmage to-day, in selecting a subject for his sermon, chose an aspect of the divine character which is seldom considered. To an unusually large audience he discoursed on God as "The Mother of All," the text being taken from Isaiah, lxvi., 13: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

The Bible is a warm letter of affection from a parent to a child, and yet there are many who see chiefly the severer passages. As there may be 50 or 60 nights of gentle dew in one summer, that will not cause as much remark as one hailstorm of half an hour, so there are those who are more struck by those passages of the Bible that announce the indignation of God than by those that announce His affection. There may come to a household 20 or 50 letters of affection during the year, and they will not make as much excitement in that home as one Sheriff's writ; and so there are people who are more attentive to those passages which announce the judgments of God than to those which announce His mercy and His favor.

The text of this morning bends with great gentleness and love over all who are prostrate in sin and trouble. It lights up with compassion. It melts with tenderness. It breathes upon us the hush of an eternal lullaby, for it announces that God is our Mother. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

A Mother's Simplicity.

I remark, in the first place, that God has a mother's simplicity of instruction. A father does not know how to teach a child the A, B, C. Men are not skillful in the primary department, but a mother has so much patience that she will tell a child for the hundredth time the difference between F and G, and between I and J. So God, our Mother, stoops down to our infantile minds. Though we are told a thing a thousand times, and we do not understand it, our heavenly Mother goes on, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.

God puts us in the school of adversity, and the letters are black, and we cannot spoil them. If God were merely a king He would punish us; if He were simply a father He would whip us; but God is a mother, and so we are borne with and helped all the way through.

A mother teaches her child chiefly by pictures. If she wants to set forth to her child the hideousness of a quarrelsome spirit, instead of giving a lecture upon that subject, she turns over a leaf and shows the child two boys in a wrangle, and says, "Does that not look horrible?" If she wants to teach her child the awfulness of war, she turns over the picture book and shows the war charger, the headless trunks of butchered men, the wild, bloodshot eye of battle rolling under lids of flame, and she says, "That is war!" The child understands it. In a great many books the best part are the pictures. The style may be insipid, the type poor, but a picture always attracts a child's attention. Now God, our Mother, teaches us almost everything by pictures. Is the divine goodness to be set forth? How does God, our Mother, teach us? By an autumnal picture. The barns are full. The wheat stacks are rounded. The cattle are chewing the cud lazily in the sun. The orchards are dropping the ripe pippins into the lap of the farmer. The natural world, that has been busy all summer, seems now to be resting in great abundance. We look at the picture and say, "Thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy paths drop fatness." Our family comes around the breakfast table. It has been a very cold night, but the children are all bright, because they slept under thick coverlids, and they are now in the warm blast of the open register, and their appetites make luxuries out of the plainest fare, and we look at the picture and say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

The Sheep and the Goats.

God wishes to set forth the fact that in the judgment the good will be divided from the wicked. How is it done? By a picture; by a parable—a fishing scene. A group of hardy men, long-bearded, geared for standing to the waist in water; sleeves rolled up. Long oar, sungilt; boat battered as though it had been a playmate of the storm. A full net thumping about with the fish, which have just discovered their captivity, the worthless moss-bunkers and the useful flounders all in the same net. The fisherman puts his hand down amid the squirming fins, takes out the moss-bunkers and throws them into the water, and gathers the good fish into the pail. So, says Christ, it shall be at the end of the world. The bad He will cast away, and the good He will keep.

Does God, our Mother, want to set forth what a foolish thing it is to go away from the right, and how glad divine mercy is to take back the wanderer? How is it done? By a picture. A good father. Large farm, with fat sheep and oxen. Fine house, with exquisite wardrobe. Discontented boy. Goes away. Sharpers fleece him. Feeds hogs. Gets homesick. Starts back. Sees an old man running. It is father! The hand, torn of the husks, gets a ring. The foot, inflamed and bleeding, gets a sandal. The bare shoulder, showing through the tatters, gets a robe. The stomach, gnawing itself with hunger, gets a full platter smoking with meat. The father cannot eat for looking at the returned adventurer. Tears running down the face until they come to a smile—the night dew melting into the morning. No work on the farm that day; for when a bad boy repents, and comes back, promising to do better, God knows that is enough for one day. "And they began to be merry." Picture—Prodigal son returned from the wilderness. So God, our Mother, teaches us everything by pictures. The sinner is a lost sheep. Jesus is a bridegroom. The useless man a barren fig tree. The gospel is a great supper. Satan, a sower of tares. Truth, a mustard seed. That which we could not have understood in the abstract statement, God, our Mother, presents to us in this Bible-album of pictures, God-engraved. Is not the divine Maternity ever thus teaching us?

Has a Mother's Favoritism.

I remark again, that God has a mother's favoritism. A father sometimes shows a sort of favoritism. Here is a boy—strong, well, of high forehead and quick intellect. The father says, "I will take that boy into my firm yet;" or, "I will give him the very best possible education." There are instances where, for the culture of the one boy, all the others have been robbed. A sad favoritism; but that is not the mother's favorite. There is a child who at 2 years of age had a fall. He has never got over it. The scarlet fever muffled his hearing. He is not what he once was. That child has caused the mother more anxious nights than all the other children. If he coughs in the night she springs out of a sound sleep and goes to him. The last thing she does when going out of the house is to give a charge in regard to him. The first thing on coming in is to ask in regard to him. Why, the children of the family all know that he is the favorite, and say, "Mother, you let him do just as he pleases, and you give him a great many things which you do not give us. He is you favorite." The mother smiles; she knows it is so. So he ought to be; for if there is any one in the world that needs sympathy more than another, it is an invalid child, weary on the first mile of life's journey; carrying an aching head, a weak side, an irritated lung. So the mother ought to make him a favorite. God, our Mother, has favorites. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." That is, one whom he especially loves he chasteneth. God loves us all; but is there one weak, and sick, and sore, and wounded, and suffering, and faint? That is the one who lies nearest and more perpetually on the great, loving heart of God. Why it never coughs but our Mother, God, hears it. It never stirs a weary limb in the bed but our Mother, God, knows of it. There is no such a watcher as God. The best nurse may be overborne by fatigue, and fall asleep in chair; but God, our Mother, after being up a year of nights with a suffering child, never slumbers nor sleeps.

Refined by Affliction.

"O!" says one, "I cannot understand all that about affliction." A refiner of silver once explained it to a Christian lady, "I put the silver in a fire, and I keep refining it and trying it till I can see my face in it, and I then take it out." Just so it is that God keeps His dear children in the furnace till the divine image may be seen in them; then they are taken out of the fire. When I see God especially busy in troubling and trying a Christian, I know that out of that Christian's character there is to come some especial good. But after awhile the mantle of affliction will fall off, and his soul will be greeted by the one hundred and forty-four thousand, and the thousands of thousands, as more than conqueror. Oh, my friends, God, our Mother, is just as kind in our afflictions as in our prosperities. God never touches us but for our good.

I remark that God has a mother's capacity for attending to little hurts. The father is shocked at the broken bone of the child, or at the sickness that sets the cradle on fire with fever, but it takes the mother to sympathize with all the little ailments and little bruises of the child. So every wound of the soul, however insignificant, God is willing to bind up. As at the first cry of the child the mother rushes to kiss the wound, so God, our Mother, takes the smallest wound of the heart, and presses it to the lips of divine sympathy. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

I remark farther that God has a mother's patience for the erring. If one does wrong, first his associates in life cast him off; if he goes on in the wrong way, his business partner casts him off; if he goes on his best friends cast him off—his father casts him off. But after all have cast him off, where does he go? Who holds no grudge, and forgives the last time as well as the first? Who sits by the murderer's counsel all through the long trial? Who tarries the longest at the windows of a culprit's cell? Who, when all others think ill of a man, keeps on thinking well of him? It is his mother. God bless her gray hairs, if she be still alive, and bless her grave, if she be gone! And bless the rocking chair in which she used to rock, and bless the Bible she used to read!

God to the Rescue.

So God, our Mother, has patience for all the erring. After everybody else has cast a man off, God, our Mother, comes to the rescue. God leaps to take charge of a bad case. After all the other doctors have got through, the heavenly Physician comes in. Human sympathy at such a time does not amount to much. Even the sympathy of the Church, I am sorry to say, often does not amount to much. I have seen the most harsh and bitter treatment on the part of those who professed faith in Christ toward those who were wavering and erring. They tried on the wanderer sarcasm, and Billingsgate and caricature, and they tried tittle-tattle. There was one thing they did not try, and that was forgiveness.

Oh, Church of God, quit your sarcasm when a man falls! Quit your irony, quit your tittle-tattle, and try forgiveness. God, your Mother, tries it all the time. A man's sin may be like a continent, but God's forgiveness is like the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, bounding it on both sides.

The Bible often talks about God's hand. I wonder how it looks. You remember distinctly how your mother's hand looked, though 30 years ago it withered away. It was different from your father's hand. When you were to be chastised, you had rather have mother punish you than father. It did not hurt so much. And father's hand was different from mother's partly because God intended it to be different. The knuckles were more firmly set, and the palm was calloused. But mother's hand was more delicate. There were blue veins running through the back of it. Though the fingers, some of them were picked with a needle, the palm of it was soft. Oh! it was very soft. Was there ever any poultice like that to take pain out of a wound? So God's hand is a mother's hand. What it touches it heals. If it smite you it does not hurt as if it were another hand. Oh your poor wandering soul in sin, it is not a bailiff's hand that seizes you to-day. It is not a hard hand. It is not an unsympathetic hand. It is not a cold hand. It is not an enemy's hand. No. It is a gentle hand, a loving hand, a sympathetic hand, a soft hand, a mother's hand. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

Soothes Us in Death.

I want to say, finally, that God has a mother's way of putting a child to sleep. You know there is no cradle song like a mother's. After the excitement of the evening it is almost impossible to get the child to sleep. If the rocking chair stop a moment, the eyes are wide open; but the mother's patience and the mother's soothing manner keep on until, after awhile, the angel of slumber puts his wing over the pillow. Well, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the time will come when we will be wanting to be put to sleep. The day of our life will be done, and the shadows of the night of death will be gathering around us. Then we want God to soothe us, to hush us to sleep. Let the music at our going not be the dirge of the organ, or the knell of the church tower, or the drumming of a "dead march," but let it be the hush of a mother's lullaby. Oh! the cradle of the grave will be soft with the pillow of all the promises. When we are being rocked into that last slumber, I want this to be the cradle song: "As one whom a mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

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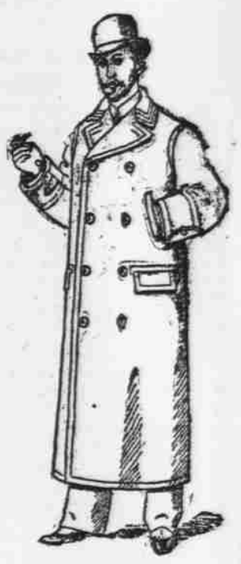

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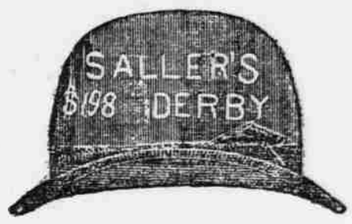

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