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FOREST MONARCHS.

Dr. Talmage Draws Inspiration From the Woods.

The Trees of the Woodlands Furnish the Theme For His Sermon. Laws of Nature Symbolic of Spiritual Life.

[Copyright, 1903, by Louis Klopsch.] CHICAGO, Nov. 29.—In this sermon the preacher takes us into the forests and from the life and death of the woodland monarchs draws an eloquent lesson that is rich in natural beauty and full of spiritual helpfulness. The text is Ecclesiastes ii. 3. "In the place where the tree falleth there it shall be."

Every intelligent student has been impressed with the inexorable sequences of natural causes. If a man should allow his rowboat to be pushed out into the middle of the roaring, rushing river which flings itself over Niagara falls, no human power on earth could save him. Why? The human arm is too powerful enough to stem that awful current. The on-sweeping rush of death is swifter than the would be resuscitator. If a man standing upon the top of the Eiffel tower in Paris should leap from its summit, his body would be whirled round and round until it was at last dashed into a mountainous heap of unrecognizable flesh when it struck the earth below. Why? The attraction of gravitation which dragged that body down could not be overcome by the vibrating arm as it is by the wings of a bird, which, launched from such a height, could arrest its fall in midair and fly higher and higher until it disappeared into the blue sky of the heavens' dome. There is an inevitable sequence in nature's laws. There is a natural sequence in spiritual laws. If a man plants the right seed for a spiritual harvest, he will reap a spiritual harvest. If he plants sinful seeds, he shall reap a sinful harvest. Furthermore, by the same kind of reasoning, after a man's earthly life's work is done, whether it be well or badly done, it is done forever. It is like a tree which has fallen to the north or to the south. "In the place where the tree falleth there it shall be."

I am going to use for my pulpit the trunk of a fallen tree upon which we have rested in our wanderings through the woods. I do not care whether this tree lies upon the steep mountain side covered with moss and creeping ivy, whether it spans some brook or whether it lies at the foot of a great precipice over which it has tumbled. The only thing I do care about is that this trunk should have fallen of its own accord. By that I mean it has not been cut down by a woodman's ax. When we study the laws of nature as symbols of the spiritual life we must study them in their simplicity. We must study them as nature was studied by King Solomon, who evidently spent as much time roaming over the Judean hills as he did in the Jerusalem palace.

A tree may live to be very old; but, after all, there must come a time when the tree's life shall cease to exist. Then, after it totters and falls, it is always a dead tree. What has been done by that tree has been done forever. Some trees have been known to live 100, 500, 1,000 and some are even supposed to have lived 5,000 years. Dr. Adhemus has declared that the baobab tree of Africa sometimes lives to be 5,000 years old. The explorer De Candolle has estimated that the Taxodium distichum lives even to a greater age than that. A tree's age can be estimated by sawing the trunk in two and counting the rings that are found in the wood, every ring representing a year. But, though the tree may live 5,000 years or even longer, there comes a time when that tree must fall. Then a fallen tree is always a dead tree. So there must come a time when a man's earthly life is done, and it is done forever. "In the place where the tree falleth there it shall be."

Is it not a startling thought that after a man's heart once ceases to beat he cannot change anything in his past life? Is it not a startling thought that a man who is president of the United States, with an army and navy and fifty millions of people back of him, as Abraham Lincoln had, can within a few hours be a cold corpse and unable to utter a word? One night sitting in Ford's theater, a short time afterward with Edwin Stanton bending over him and saying "He is gone; we must leave his work to be judged by the centuries!" Is it not an overwhelming fact that a man with all the mental powers of a Gidstone cannot arrange his papers after he is once dead, but had to leave them all to his literary executor? Oh, how often we have heard this sentence in a house where there has lately been a sad funeral: "If I could only bring him back for a few moments to ask him what he would like me to do about this matter!" But the fallen tree is a dead tree. What that tree has done is done forever and can never be undone. What has been left undone is left undone forever.

A dying man's last gasp is even more significant and overwhelming than a newborn baby's first cry. One is the rising, the other the setting, sun. The one is the first word of a story which is about to be told and may be told well; the other is the last word of the last sentence of the last page, when the story is ended. One is the reveille sounding the call to arms; the other is a tattoo beaten upon a muffled drum by the side of an open grave. One is the spring blossom, the other a falling snowflake. One is a bird's note sung among the growing leaves; the other is the snapping of a trunk when the old tree is about to make its last plunge and go down with a crash.

Living man may once have been as strong as the great tree for whose life

George P. Morris pleaded with eloquence, but when the human being could he cannot even lift himself into the air which may have been made for the tree trunk which his own arms hewed down. He cannot even get out to his own grave, but has to be carried there like a helpless log being dragged to the dam. One second after the pulse has ceased to beat he cannot raise his little finger one inch or change one word in his last will and testament any more than a fallen tree trunk, if it had the power of thought, could lift itself and stand upon the ragged stump which the buried roots are still anchoring in the ground and live its life over again. Choice may be given to the living man—choice to live right or wrong; choice to reach after the higher or the lower life—but the time will come when man, like the tree, which may live many centuries beyond the age of man, shall fall. Then there will be no power of choice. What has been done by him is done and never can be changed. What has been left undone by him will be left undone and will never, never be done by him as long as eternity lasts. A fallen log symbolizes it.

The fallen tree is a dead tree, which nearly always falls in the direction it has grown. I say nearly, because there are exceptions, which, though rare, do occur. Once in a great while a tree does not fall in the direction in which it has grown. But these exceptions are very rare. They are as exceptional as the man who has always lived a bad life and at the last moment is converted by a deathbed repentance and who is thereby able to fall, when the clock is striking 12, into the outstretched arms of a loving Christ. Most trees—indeed, it might be said practically all trees—when they die fall in the direction in which they have grown. About the tree's trunk and above the tree's branches and underneath the tree's roots are the great ever influencing laws of specific gravity. If a tree leans a little to the right, it almost invariably falls to the right; if to the left, it falls to the left.

When a man comes to die, as a rule, the only thing he can do is to die. When the messenger comes, he has no inclination to think about anything else but dying. If the fatal disease gnaws at the vitals for many months and perhaps years, the doctors and nurses and loved ones conceal the truth from the patient for fear of depressing him. Or death comes like a stroke of lightning out of a clear sky. It comes, as it did to my father, one moment clear brained and on a preaching tour, the next upon a deathbed and unable to speak a word.

Death often comes suddenly—as a thief, as a watch in the night. A man dies as a tree falls. He dies as he has lived. Among all the Bible records there is but one exception to this rule. The pages of the Bible contain only one account of a deathbed repentance.

The fallen tree is a dead tree, the influence of whose past life never dies. Trees have an earthly mission. They are mighty factors in the planet's daily life. In the celebration of Arbor day by the schools and educational institutions it would be appropriate, although it is not especially enjoined by statute, to couple with study of trees lessons on our birds and the great importance of their protection. The young people cannot have too great an appreciation of nature or too keen a sense of the relation between her many beauties and utilities. Atmospheric changes are more or less influenced by trees. Droughts and freshets are often caused by the lack of trees. Many countries of the far east have been absolutely ruined by the ruthless destruction of the forests. From an inhabitable country they have been changed into great wastes of arid deserts. So the influence of a human life, like that of a tree, never dies. Its good or evil lives on and on, long after the human tree has fallen.

Earthly demise would not be appalling if when a man died he had left behind upon the earth should be with him. But the trouble is that the bad lives on as well as the good. The wonderful book of Eugene Sue called "The Wandering Jew" is founded upon a well known Roman legend. It runs that when Christ had been condemned in Pilate's judgment hall the Jewish doorkeeper struck at him and cried: "Move on, man! Move on faster! Why dost thou linger? Move on!" With that the condemned Christ turned and said, "I will go, but thou shalt remain until I come." And so, says the legend, the brutal Jewish doorkeeper wanders up and down the world, begging God for death, but he cannot die. He cannot die. Though that is only a legend, it is a solemn truth that every good we have spoken or evil deed we have done lives on after we are dead. It lives on in the lives of others with whom we come in contact. We live on in the good we have done. Then we are like that beautiful tree mentioned in an Easter fable whose branches were laden with apples of solid gold and its leaves covered with silver bells. When the leaves of that tree were shaken by the soft winds those bells would begin to chime the sweetest music, and that would be the signal for the poor and the starving to come and gather the falling fruit. Or we shall live on after we are dead in the evil we have done to our neighbors. Down through the centuries has the evil been perpetuated of that first sin, when a tempted man and woman plucked the fruit hanging from the branch of a tree. So through all time the influence of our lives for good or evil shall go on bringing forth fruit.

There is another significant reason why the dead tree nearly always falls in the way it has grown—the direction is determined by the influences which were at work upon its younger life. The proverb declares that "old trees cannot be transplanted." The knots are too big. The trunk is too bent.

The branches are too heavy. The roots are too wide to be lifted and moved. The imperfections of trees may be the more readily recognizable in their old age, but the influences which caused the tree to grow to the north or to the south nearly always do their work for good or evil when the trees are hardly more than small saplings. If this fact be true, is it not of utmost importance that parents should carefully look after the work of rearing their children?

Young people, I would like to speak just one word to you. You are apt to think that the period of youth does not amount to much. I want to tell you that you are now forming the habits that will grow stronger and stronger as the years roll on. The bark of the tree is the place where the life is supposed to exist. But if the inside of the tree, or the wooden part, is allowed to be tunneled by a worm the inside of the tree will soon be eaten out. Then the whole tree will soon totter and fall. One small sinful habit can destroy the human heart. One little tug in youth in the wrong direction can pull off the branches of truth and purity and love and honor and make a lopsided tree. What you do now will decide the moral character of your future. Trees 1,000 years old are neither more nor less than the fully developed and expanded perfections and imperfections of a tree only four, five, ten, twenty, thirty years old. Nearly all the hardened criminals who spend most of their lives in the penitentiary committed their first crime when they were nothing more than boys under twenty years of age. Many a murderer has started on a quick journey for the gallows by whetting his taste for blood when as a child he tortured a dog or a caged rat.

But though a fallen tree is a dead tree, which nearly always falls in the way it has grown, a living tree, no matter how young or old, can become an ingrafted tree. Grafting may be accomplished in many different ways. In budding grafting a bud is selected. Then a strong young branch is cut crosswise with a sharp knife. Then the bud is placed upon the bare branch and the four pieces of bark are joined at the bud's base and the wound is covered over with Japanese matting. So the young human trees may be ingrafted. They can have Christ's perfections in all their freshness and fragrance made to grow into them. They can grow into the Christian life so gradually and sweetly that they will not be able to tell the exact moment of their conversion. They will be like that young girl who was asked on joining the church when she commenced to love the Lord Jesus. "Why," she answered, "I never commenced to love the Saviour. I feel that I have always loved him."

But there is another way of grafting. There is the sprouting grafting. By this process whole limbs will be cut off and new limbs from other trees will be placed into the fork shaped crotches. If necessary nothing need be left but the trunk of the old tree. This was the way Christ's life was ingrafted into Paul's. This was the way Baxter and Bunyan and Jerry McAuley and Harry Monroe and the seven-deviled Mary of ancient and modern times have been converted. Whole branches of sin, which have been growing for many years upon these sinful trunks, have been cut off. Guarded and worn eaten and disease producing branches, which have only produced poisonous leaves of sin, have been lopped off, and into those sinful trunks have been ingrafted the long, healthy, growing branches of the tree of life. My brother, from the oldest and the weakest and the poorest and the most twisted of human trees there is still hope that the branches of the beams of the cross can be ingrafted in them if they are only willing to have chopped off their branches of sin and to let Christ do the ingrafting.

But there is one thought of my text which ought to be emphasized. I do not believe many people have stopped to fully consider it. All fallen trees are dead trees. Yes, but some trees which are not fallen may be dead trees also. As we have said, the whole life of the tree is in the bark or the outside of the tree. There the sap flows up and down. There the connection is made between the roots of the tree and the leaves. If that bark can be once broken so that the sap cannot flow, then the tree dies. A short distance from my late country home a farm hand became angry at his employer. One night he took a knife and went into the orchard and cut a circle of the bark off each tree. In one night the man killed between fifty and sixty trees. For this crime he was sent to jail. And, oh, my brother, can it be that some one whom I am now addressing shall soon be a dead tree to Christ, although he is not a fallen tree? Can it be that, though receiving the gospel invitation again and again, you are going to let Satan take a knife and circle about the bark or the heart of your spiritual life? Then, indeed, you will be dead to all heavenly pleas. You will be dead to all the calls of the Holy Spirit. You will have no conscience left.

Would that instead of being a dead tree to Christ we could become a living tree in God! Arboriculturists declare that the roots are just as wide and strong underneath the ground as the branches of the tree growing overhead. I myself in climbing a mountain have seen a tree which by the strength of its roots has been able to grow upon the side of a precipice. Let us as living trees sink our roots deep and fasten them about the Calvary Rock. Let us lift our branches high, that our leafy hands may be cleansed with showers of heavenly benedictions. Then when the time comes for the human tree to fall Christ will lift us up and carry us above to become one of the pillars of the heavenly temple, as he once carried his own cross toward Calvary. Upon that cross he died for our sins.

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