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Rehab; or, "Dare to do right." A
sermon on "The Red Ribbon" (Febru-
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RAHAB;

OR,

“DARE TO DO RIGHT.”

A SERMON ON

“THE RED RIBBON”

(FEBRUARY 18TH, 1877).

“NON-LEGAL, NON-POLITICAL, NON-SECTARIAN.”

By GEORGE DUFFIELD,

PASTOR OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, LANSING, MICH.

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TO

H. A. REYNOLDS, M. D.,

AND

THE LANSING REFORM CLUB.

Hope on and hope ever,
Nor yield to dismay;
The night is the darkest
Just before day:
While an inch of red ribbon
Is still left to wear,
Oh! never, my brother,
No NEVER DESPAIR!

R A H A B .

NOW THEREFORE, I pray you, * * give me a true token ; that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

And the man said unto Rahab, * * Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind *this line of scarlet thread* in the window which thou didst let us down by ; and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee.

And she said, According unto your words, so be it, * * and *she bound the scarlet line* in the window.

—*Joshua ii., 12, 13, 18, 21.*

THIS scarlet line had a memorable history, and one that has immortalized its original possessor, both in the old testament and in the new. Let us study the history first, and then the important lessons to be derived from it, even down to “the red ribbon” and the present hour.

While Joshua yet lingered on the wilderness side of Jordan, before attempting the conquest of Canaan, he sent out two young men as spies. They were strong, active, courageous, full of enterprise, and full of faith. The name of one we have reason to believe was Salmon, a grandson of the faithful Caleb, and one of the princes of the house of Judah. Of the name of his comrade we have no trace, but we have no doubt he was equally distinguished for his devotion to his nation and to his God. On the day of their departure there was no public ovation ; their instructions were given them in the privacy of Joshua's tent. Somehow they were to cross the swollen river, and then at every step of the way, taking their lives in their hands, they were even to enter the gates of Jericho. As a parting word Joshua may have said, “The twelve spies sent out by Moses returned in safety ; it is to be hoped that you will return in the same manner.”

But the people of Canaan no longer dwelt after the careless manner of the Zidonians. Israel was now on their very borders, and every man was keeping a sharp look-out for the long-expected invasion. Joshua's spies were not to have so easy a time of it as those of Moses,—no grapes of Eshcol for them.

Arrived at the city of Jericho, and probably very near the gate at which they entered, they take their lodgings in a house that was partly built upon the wall. It may be that they were directed there by the keeper of the gate, for a double purpose; first, to quiet the suspicion of the spies, and next, according to orders, to report their appearance to the king. The unsuspecting travelers soon find themselves in the house to which they had been directed. The name of their shrewd and sagacious hostess is Rahab—not a Canaanite, who dwelt in the lowlands by the sea; but an Amorite, one of the proud and warlike nation who dwelt among the mountains; and who, under Sihon, their king, had already fought a great battle with Israel, at the fords of the Jordan. From the flax in her dwelling, and the scarlet thread, it would seem that she was engaged in the manufacture of linen, and in the art of dyeing. Though young and unmarried, and having a father and mother, and sisters, and brothers living in the city, she dwelt in her own house alone. Unpleasant as it may be to our Pharisaic pride, and however shocking to our conventional prejudices, we cannot accept the interpretation of Josephus and the Jews, that she was only an inn-keeper. We open our Hebrew lexicon, and the ugly word that stares us in the face is and can be nothing else than *harlot*. It may be, as some have charitably suggested, that she was ignorant of the moral iniquity of that peculiar mode of life; but I very much doubt it. It may be also, and this I am much more inclined to believe, that even before the arrival of the spies, there had been a change in her views of God and a corresponding change in conduct. With a purer faith she had entered upon a purer life!

Living in constant communication with travelers coming from Egypt or Mesopotamia to Phenicia, she was well posted, as we would say, not only as to the two great events that signalized the beginning and the end of Israel's career from Egypt to Canaan,

and of which she makes mention to the spies, but as to all the leading incidents between. Whatever the effect of this history on the Canaanites, or on the unbelieving Jews, who perished by sword, and serpent, and pestilence, in the wilderness, Rahab at least, with a candor and sagacity far beyond her people and her times, had learned that the Jehovah of Israel was the true God; the God of Heaven above and of the Earth beneath. From the first moment that she had the fear of God before her, we doubt not, she had the beginning of wisdom, and of reformation from vice. As that fear can prevent men from sinning, so when a downward course of sin has been already commenced it can arrest their sliding steps ere they plunge into perdition.

Well was it for Salmon and his companion that their steps were directed by Providence, of all other houses in Jericho to that of Rahab; otherwise they had never brought back to Joshua the joyful news, of the preparation of the Lord for Israel's victory. Scarcely had they washed their feet and taken a mouthful of bread, when some swift-footed messenger conveys the news to the King of Jericho:—"Behold! there came men in hither to-night of the children of Israel, to search out the country." Taking it for granted that Rahab is ignorant of the true object of the men that are her guests, the King at once commands her to deliver them up. But the quick-witted woman, as soon as the King's guard came in sight, took them up to the roof of the house, and hid them under the stalks of flax, that she had judiciously disposed for this purpose. While going down to the door, her old habit of untruthfulness comes upon her, and she has her story all ready: "Yes, there *were* two such men, but I did not know who they were, or for what purpose they were here! They left the *house*, about seven o'clock—to leave the city; I suppose, just before the closing of the gates. Where they went I don't know, but off with you at once, lose no time in pursuit, and you will certainly catch them, and bring them to the King!" Away went the men in the direction of the Jordan, if the spies had left the city. Hard and fast were the gates shut by the keeper and the strong bolts shot back to prevent their egress if they

were still *in it*. We have nothing to say in defence of her falsehood by calling it a lawful strategy to save life. It is the one blemish in the midst of faith so great and unexpected, that some have been almost disposed to think it no blemish at all. Simply as a case of casuistry, it was not one easily settled *while coming down stairs!* If she had told the truth she would have betrayed the spies. Had she been silent only, they would have been caught, and hanged. To her at least, for the time being, this ruse seemed the only way to save them. At all events, I am inclined to think, that when the soldiers had gone, and Rahab came up on the roof, and told what she had said, the two men whom she had thus saved, were very willing to give her an easy absolution.

But there was something here of mystery! What *could* it mean, that a woman of Jerico, an Amorite and a harlot, should risk her own life, to save theirs, expose herself to the execration of all her kindred, and her countrymen, as a traitor and an ingrate, to protect spies? Why prefer the honor and interests of a hostile and invading nation to her own?

The story is soon told, and the seeming mystery easily solved. For one who had always dwelt among heathen, to be persuaded of the power of the God of Israel, and of the right that Israel had to that land, it could only be explained as she did explain it. She had become a believer in the true God, as the God of Israel, and this belief brought her into sympathy with Israel! Thus realizing the existence of the true God, she was at once made to feel her personal accountability to him. Whatever may have been the number of her lovers, who had given her her bread, and her water, her wool and her flax, her oil and her wine, she will put away her whoredom out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts, and follow such lovers no more. If she dare not any longer support herself in affluence by vice, she can at least earn her daily bread by honest industry.

As God sees her, yes, and as the grateful spies see her, she is no more a Gentile and an alien from the stock and covenant of Abraham; no longer an Amorite, and as such devoted with all the rest of her nation to utter destruction; no longer a harlot, and

her name cast out as evil, and herself to be treated with utter indignity and contempt. Nothing of the kind! Salmon and his comrade are willing to swear and enter into covenant with her, in the name of the great Jehovah himself. Now that she has made a confession of her faith, and of the means of her conversion unto God; now that she has separated herself from the cause and interest of her own sinful people, and, like Ruth, the wife of one of her own descendants, in after times, cast in her lot with the people of God; now that she has so plainly shown and testified her faith by her works, the grateful spies can see no real difference, in the sight of God, between Rahab and themselves. In return for her kindness to them, they swear unto her by the Lord, that they will deal kindly and truly with her; and for her sake, with all her father's house. They give her a *true token*: "Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this *line of scarlet thread* in the window, which thou dost let us down by. Those of your family who are in the house shall be safe; those who go out into the streets, and are not under the protection of 'the sure token,' their blood shall be on their own head." Giving them some further instructions for their safety, Rahab lets the spies down over the wall, and they escape to the mountains. With her usual promptitude she at once binds the scarlet line in the window, and confidently expects the promised deliverance. Returning faith in God, in this, as in every other case, returning not alone, but sure to be accompanied, with increasing faith in man.

And now comes another great day in the history of this remarkable woman. The overflowing Jordan had dried up as the Red Sea had done before, at the command of the Lord; and the host of Israel had passed over on dry ground. Rahab understood this, as one more miraculous pledge, that Jehovah was leading on his people to victory; and her faith was stronger than ever. Then came the siege of Jericho. So strange a siege was never known in all history! No mount raised, no sword drawn, no engine planted, no undermining, no sounding of trumpets, but only seven priests, seven rams' horns, seven blasts of the horns seven times repeated! To all except Rahab, such preparations were utterly ridiculous. To her the Ark of

the Covenant meant what it did not mean to her people. Even when the walls of the city fall flat to the ground, and her house is shaken as if by an earthquake, she is not alarmed. She has faith in God; she has faith in man.

Had she known all that was going on in the camp of Israel, well she might have! One of the two charges of Joshua to the host is to spare the house on whose windows they find the scarlet line. 'Till that of Rahab is found no other house in the devoted city is to be set on fire; 'till she and her kindred are saved, according to the promise of the spies, the avenging sword is to sleep in its scabbard. Her dwelling is no part of Jericho; her family is no portion of the people. The two spies that received life *from* her, now return it *to* her; and the very same scarlet line that was the means of their deliverance, becomes the means of similar deliverance to Rahab and her family.

And now what becomes of her, after the Sodomites of Jericho are put to the sword and their city burnt like a hornet's nest with purifying fire? Was it all loss to Rahab; and no gain? In losing her citizenship as an Amorite, was she still treated as an alien from the commonwealth of Israel? In forsaking her old friends did she find no new ones? On her entrance into the camp, was there no tent open to receive her? Did the mothers and daughters of Israel stand on fashionable etiquette and give her the cold shoulder, and hold up their proud heads just a little more magnificently than ever? Did they refuse to enter the same tabernacle and bow with her at the same altar, and gather up their immaculate skirts (always provided they wore them in those days), lest by a single touch they should receive a social contamination, more deadly than the plague or leprosy? Did they slip round the back way, and certify from one tent to another, and one tribe to another, that they had it on the very best authority, that this new comer into the camp of Israel had, at one time in her life, kept a house of more than doubtful reputation, and was herself no better than she ought to be? Did they one and all agree together, by common consent, that she ought to be tabooed, and put under an interdiction, and excluded from the

exclusive circles of vulgar greatness? No! my friends, not so do I read either the letter or the spirit of the Sacred Record. "Pure and undefiled religion" is very near akin to philanthropy; and indeed, so far as man is concerned, is actually identical with it. True religion and even-handed justice; true religion and common sense, always go together. *All blood is of one color*; and he who loves God, *will* love his neighbor also. There is a wonderful law of moral compensation that by some subtle sympathy links the strongest with the weakest; links the wisest with the most ignorant; links the purest with the most degraded. Even Miriam herself, had she been still living, I doubt not would have been the very first to embrace and welcome the woman of Jericho as a sister and a friend.

And as for the men of Israel; good old Caleb, for example, and the noble-hearted Joshua, who lingers so lovingly on the faith of Rahab in his book of the wars of the Lord, no doubt they fully anticipated the eulogy of Paul and James! Certain it is, that there was one Salmon, a grandson of Caleb, and one of the Princes of the house of Judah, who had good occasion to remember Rahab; and to treat her very kindly, and who was glad indeed, in the presence of all Israel, to make her his lawful and wedded wife. I don't think there were many foolish virgins who stayed away from that wedding; or torches that were allowed to go out, for want of oil! Little did Salmon suppose, that in marrying a Gentile and an Amorite, and once a woman of the town, and marrying her *because of her faith*, that through Boaz and Ruth, he was founding the royal family of David. Still less did he suppose that of this same family, as concerning the flesh, the great Messiah himself was to come as the Savior of the World. Coming to *save* sinners, he was not ashamed to have it known in his recorded pedigree, and on the very same page, that he was descended from sinners, numbered with the transgressors, the innocent with the guilty, that by his stripes they might be healed.

Thus far we have had the running application of our text, now for the more particular one.

1. It has always been a marked feature in God's providential

plan of working (as giant oaks spring from acorns) to make great results spring from little causes; to work with weak instruments and do wonders by bruised reeds. He chooses the foolish things of the world, and the weak, and the base, and the despised, and the utterly insignificant, to confound the wise and the mighty, and for this good and all-sufficient reason—that no flesh should glory in *His* presence! God ripens the fruit on the tree of Temperance. Dr. Reynolds comes along and shakes it!

When He would stimulate the faith and courage of Israel to cross the river in the face of the enemy, and overthrow six and thirty nations, He does it through the single faith of Rahab. When He would have the Gospel proclaimed, He does not send angels for this purpose—with whom we as sinners could be in no real sympathy—but the treasure is committed to earthen vessels, to a few sinful and illiterate fishermen, that the power might be of God. When the evil of intemperance comes in like a flood, and all human and Divine law is at once made void, and the men of might no longer find their hands, He causes the agonizing wail of woman to be heard, and the very men who have been already in the drunkard's hell, are made the forlorn-hope of christendom, and the instruments of reform, so sudden and wide-extended, that it seems nothing less than the opening of the windows of heaven. Twelve thousand men within a few weeks, here in Michigan! eight hundred of them in Lansing, taking the iron-clad pledge against everything that can intoxicate, wine and cider included! Truly this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes. As the Old Puritans used to say after a great and crowning victory, that "great courages were the gift of the Almighty," so may we all say, with one accord, "that there is something warmer than human breath" in this tremendous movement. If the walls of Jericho have fallen, it has been by other agency than their own! Surely this is the very finger of God! And if it be of God, it will stand.

A *second* lesson is equally obvious, viz.: that "God is no respecter of persons." Faith in God, by a man or woman of vicious and infamous life, is as good a thing in itself, and as

truly acceptable in the sight of God, as in the case of any other sinners. Yes, says one of the earliest infidels in history, the scoffing Celsus, "The Gospel of Christ is a sanctuary for thieves and robbers, for murderers and harlots." "So it is," replies Origen, "but that is not all. It is a HOSPITAL too; it heals their sins, and delivers them from their diseases, and they are not afterward what they were before." From the very moment that Rahab learned the great truth taught to Hagar in the wilderness: Gen. XVI. 13, "THOU GOD SEEST ME," she had a new heart, and a right spirit. For a while indeed she might "plow with an ox and an ass," in her religious duties; but it was her comfort to know that God overlooked that which was weak and unintentionally evil in her, and saw only that which was good. As the skillful artist sketched the portrait of Alexander, when he had a scar on his face, with his finger on the scar, so, says an old writer, when we are truly penitent, "God puts the fingers of His mercy on our scars." He "casts all our sins behind His back." "Our iniquities he remembers no more;" He sinks them as with a mill-stone into the deepest depths of the sea. He measures us by what we *are*, and not by what we *were*. One single stroke of His pen, and the handwriting that is against us, in the book of final account, is blotted out forever. "God be merciful to me a sinner," says the Publican, and from that time he is a Publican no more. "Lord remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom," prays the dying thief, and he is a thief no more. "God of Israel be *my* God," is the prayer of Rahab, and she is a harlot no more. "Oh! that an Almighty arm were stretched out for my deliverance," prays the drunkard, and recognizing that arm in Christ he is a drunkard no more.

And if God deals so with sinners, if he does not "break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax;" if the scars and marks of old sins, remain not to our dishonor, but to His glory, if He welcomes the returning prodigal with open arms, and brings forth the best robe, and puts a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and even kills the fatted calf and makes a great feast, and all are merry, who are we as sinners, that we should do otherwise to our fellow sinners? Follow the example

of the "elder brother" who may, and out of envy rehearse to unwilling ears, in long detail the prodigal's record. Imitate, who will the accursed Ham, and make the follies and frailties of the inebriate, the subject of ill-timed mirth and derision; be it ours with Shem and Japhet to lay the garment of charity on our shoulders, and "go backward," and *cover* his moral nakedness. If we cannot with the good Samaritan pour oil and wine into his wounds, God forbid that, as the exasperated rum-sellers are now doing, we should pour in oil of vitriol.

Gentlemen! (if there are any of you still left who are worthy of the name), it may be that you have better means of knowing, than any one else, who of the red ribbon men *are* Reformed Drunkards, but it strikes me that you who have made them drink, and have put their hard earnings into your own pockets for no value received, are the very last men in the world to stand at the door of your deserted grog-shops and stigmatize them as "drunkards." No doubt you would rather see a "confirmed" drunkard than a "reformed" drunkard, and I suppose the real stigma is on the word "reformed;" but such sort of venom is only that of the viper, when it turns upon himself. When John Hawkins, or John B. Gough, or Dr. Reynolds, or Jerry McCauley, in the fullness of their gratitude to God and their philanthropy to man, speak of *themselves* as "Reformed Drunkards," we know what *they* mean; but when, like so many bulls of Bashan, you become frantic at the sight of the red ribbon, and paw the dust over your heads in your rage, and roar in dismal chorus, "Reformed Drunkards! Reformed Drunkards! one and all," we know what *that* means also; and the sooner you stop such foolish noise the better. If any of these men are losing your good opinion, they are gaining much more than they lose, in the good opinion of every honorable man and generous woman in the community. Even a dog would be ashamed to show himself on the street, with the cardinal ornament some of you affix to him as a caudal appendage, if he only knew *who* and *what* he was made to represent; and you may as well know, once for all, that the very moment "old Bill Witham" signs the pledge, he is old Bill Witham no more; he is William Witham; he is Mr. Witham, to whom

we are proud to take off our hat; and it will be our fault if we don't one day make him Captain Witham also. *And what would you have made of him?*

So far as I understand the situation, this movement is not so temporary and effervescent as the rumsellers would be glad to suppose. We have now got nearer than ever before to that great objective point to which, consciously or unconsciously, the cause of temperance has all along been tending for the last forty years, viz: *where people of all classes and conditions are beginning to be of the same mind in regard to this enormous social evil.* According to the well known law of human progress, with each successive phase of the Reform, there has been an apparent retrocession, but a real advance, in the public conscience. We have not read our bibles in vain. No longer do we despair of the reform of any man or of any class of men; the only limit we dare assign to human hope in this respect, the all-abounding grace of God. We have not read "The Barton Experiment" in vain. In that excellent satire, the author has only developed what has long been the conviction of many,—that almost as much reform is needed *in* the church and even among those who never drink, as *out* of it. There is too much of the spirit of Cain—"Am I my brother's keeper?"—too little of the spirit of Christ, who "fed when he preached, and healed when he exhorted;" the infirm will and a depraved appetite want something more to help them, than mere words or great public meetings. The man who drinks rum or whisky wants to see the man who drinks wine or cider give up *his* beverage, and then they both take the pledge together. If we want to see more Tom. Adamses, and Harry Wainwrights, and Sam. Craymes, we must have more Mr. Crupps and Fred. MacDonalds, and Ettie Wedgewells. Squire Tomple was right when he said that "hurrahing and singing for temperance will make a hypocrite out of a saint, if he don't *use money and effort at the same time.*" Never was the *harvest* so plenteous; never was there greater loss, should the laborers be few! I will not argue the case in detail; it is scarcely worth while; but from the very bottom of my heart, I really *pity* those who, at such a time as this, will not deny themselves even so much as a glass of cider for the temporal and eternal good of others. They must certainly

be suffering from an organic difficulty of the heart, when the centre and circumference so nearly coincide; or, in fact, have no heart at all.

And now in conclusion, let me commend to all who wear the red ribbon, the noble example of Rahab, as that of one WHO DARED TO DO RIGHT! Though it must have cost her a hard struggle, as an idolater, to give up her false gods, and the gods of her country, she did give them up, and utterly repudiate them, in favor of the one only living and true God. Though it must have been a still greater struggle, to withdraw herself from her life-long friends and relatives, and start single-handed and alone in the work of personal reform; she was ready to make this sacrifice also. Though every suggestion of worldly prudence and expediency would have induced her to conceal her newly found faith, she nevertheless confessed it boldly, and that on the very first opportunity. Though in aiding the spies to escape and preserve their lives, she thereby forfeited her own to the wrath of the King, yet, as the apostle James says, "she showed her faith by her works." That scarlet thread was a true token of deliverance, not only for herself but for her family; because, *she had faith in God.*

As the faith of Jacob triumphed over the infirmity of old age, and that of Abraham over natural affection, and that of Noah over time, and that of Enoch over death itself; so the faith of Rahab triumphed over that kind of vice which of all others is the most effectual in detaining its victim under its power! *Similar faith can effect similar triumphs in all time to come.*

Never was a truer word spoken, than by one of our Red Ribbon-men in the Opera House last Sabbath night: "A man cannot save himself from *within* himself; he must lay hold on some help from *without*." True indeed, every word of it. As a man, he needs the sympathy of his fellow men. As a creature, he must look to his Creator. As a sinner, he must lay hold on the helping hand of Christ!

Oh, glory everlasting,
More than this earth can show,
When sins that are as scarlet,
Shall whiter be than snow!

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