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CHRIST TEACHING BY PARABLE



THE HOME-PULPIT.

POSTHUMOUS OPPORTUNITY.

SERMON, BY THE REV. DR. T. DE WITT TALMAGE, PREACHED IN THE BROOKLYN TABERNACLE

"If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be."—Ecol. ii. 3.

THERE is a hovering hope in the minds of a vast multitude of people that there will be an opportunity in the next world of correcting the mistakes of this; that however complete a shipwreck we may make of our earthly life, it will be on a beach up which we may walk to a palace; that as the defendant may lose his case in a circuit court and appeal it and have it go up to the Supreme Court or Court of Chancery and all the costs thrown over on the other party, so a man may lose his case in this world, but in the higher jurisdictions of eternity have the earthly case—the decision of the earthly case—set aside, all the costs remitted and the defendant be triumphant for ever.

The object of my sermon this morning is to show you that common sense declares with the text that such an expectation is chimerical. "If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be." There are those who say that if the repentant and unforgiven man enters the next world and sees the disaster, as a result of that disaster he will turn, the distress the cause of his reformation; but we have ten thousand instances all around about us of people who have done wrong and disaster suddenly came upon them—did the disaster heal them? No, they went on. There is a man flung of dissipations. The doctor says to him: "Now, my friend, if you don't stop drinking and don't stop this fast life you are living, you will die." The patient thanks the physician for his warning and gets better; he begins to sit up, begins to walk around the room, begins to go to business and takes the same round of grogshops where he got his morning dram and his evening dram and the drams between. Down again. Same doctor. Same physical anguish. Same medical warning. But now the sickness is more protracted, the liver more obstinate, the stomach more irritable, the digestive organs more rebellious. But still, under medical skill he gets better, goes forth, commits the same sacrilege against his physical health. Sometimes he wakes up to see what he is doing, and he realizes he is destroying his family and that his life is a perpetual perjury against his marriage vows, and that that broken-hearted woman is so different from the roseate wife he married that her old schoolmates do not recognize her on the street, and that his sons are going out in life under the taunt of a father's drunkenness, and that his daughters are going out in life under the scarification of a disreputable ancestry. His nerves are all a jangle. From crown of head to sole of foot he is one aching, rasping, crucifying, damning torture. Where is he? He is in hell on earth. Does it stop him? Ah! no. After a while delirium tremens pours out upon his pillow a whole jungle of hissing reptiles. His screams horrify the neighbors as he dashes out of the bed crying: "Take these things off me!" He is drinking down the comfort of his family, the education of his children, their prospects for this life and perhaps their prospects for the life to come. Pale and convalescent he sits up. Physician says to him: "Now, my good fellow, I am going to have a plain talk with you. If you ever have an attack of this kind again you will die. I can't save you, and all the doctors in creation can't save you." The patient gets up,

starts out, goes the same round of dissipation and is down again; but this time medicines do not touch his case. Consultations of physicians say there is no hope. Death ends the scene. That process of inebriation and physical suffering and medical warning and dissolution is taking place within a stone's throw of this church and in every neighborhood of Christendom. Pain does not reform. Suffering does not cure. What is true in regard to one sin is true in regard to all sins, and yet men are expecting in the next life there will be opportunity for purgatorial regeneration. Take up the printed reports of the prisons of the United States and find that the vast majority of the criminals were there before, some for two times, three times, four times, six times. Punished again and again, but they go right on. Millions of incidents and instances working the other way, and yet men think that in the next world punishment will work out for them salvable effects. Why you and I cannot imagine any worse torture from another world than we have seen men in in this world, and without any salutary consequence. Furthermore, the prospect of reformation in another world is more improbable than here. Do you not realize the fact that a man starts in this world with the innocence of infancy? in the other case, starting in the other world, he starts with the accumulated bad habits of a lifetime. Is it not to be expected that you could build a better ship out of new timber than out of an old hulk that has been ground up in the breakers? If starting with comparative innocency the man does not become godly, is it possible that starting with sin a seraph can be evolved? Is there not more prospect that a sculptor will make a finer statue out of a block of pure, white Parian marble than out of a black rock that has been cracked and twisted and split and scarred with the storms of a half century! Could you not write a last will and testament, or write a deed, or write an important document on a pure white sheet of paper easier than you could write it upon a sheet scribbled all over with infamy and blotted and torn from top to bottom? And yet there are those who are so uncom-monsensical as to believe that though a man starts in this world with infancy and its innocence and turns out badly, in the next world he can start with a dead failure and turn out well. "But," say some people, "we ought to have another chance in the next world because our life here is so very brief; we scarcely have room to turn around between the cradle and the grave, the wood of the one almost striking against the marble of the other. We ought to have another chance because of the brevity of this life." My friends, do you know what made the ancient deluge a necessity? It was the longevity of the ante-diluvians. They were worse in the second century than in the first, and worse when they got three hundred years old, and worse at four hundred, and worse at five hundred, and worse at six hundred, and worse at eight hundred; until the world had to be washed and scoured and scrubbed and soaked and sunk and anchored a whole month under water before it was fit for decent people to live in. I have seen many pictures of old Time with his scythe to cut, but I never saw any picture of Time with a chest of medicines to heal. Seneca said that in the first

few years of his public life Nero was set up as an example of clemency and kindness, but he got worse and worse, the path descending, until at sixty-eight years of age he was the suicide. If eight hundred years of lifetime could not cure the antediluvians of their iniquity, I undertake to say that all the ages of eternity would be only prolongation of depravity. "But," says some one, "in the next life the evil surroundings will be withdrawn and good influences will be substituted, and hence, expurgation, sublimation, glorification." But you must remember that the righteous, all their sins forgiven, pass right up into a beatific state, and then having passed up into the beatific state, not needing any other chance, that will leave all those who have never been forgiven, and who were impenitent, alone—alone! and where are the salvable influences to come from? Can it be expected that Dr. Duff, who spent his whole life in pointing the Hindoos to heaven, and Dr. Abeel, who spent his life in evangelizing China, and that Judson, who spent his life in preaching the Gospel to Borneo—can it be expected that they will be sent down from some celestial Missionary Society to educate and to save those who wasted their earthly existence? No. We are told distinctly that all missionary and evangelistic influences will be ended for ever, and the good, having passed up to their beatific state, all the morally bankrupt will be together, and where are the salvable influences to come from? Will a specked or bad apple put in a barrel of diseased apples make the other apples good? Will one who is down be able to lift others up? Will those who have miserably failed in the business of this life be able to pay the debts of other spiritual insolvents? Will a million wrongs make one right? Poneropolis was the city where King Rufus of Thracia put all bad people of his kingdom, and whenever there were iniquitous people found in any part of the land they were all sent to Poneropolis. It was the great capital of wickedness. Suppose a man or a woman had opened a primary school in Poneropolis, would the parents of other cities have sent their children there to be educated and reformed?

If a man in this world was surrounded with temptation, in the next world, all the righteous having passed up into the beatific state, the association will be more deteriorating, depreciating and down. You would not send to a cholera or yellow fever hospital a man for his health, and the great lazaretto of the future, in which are gathered the diseased and the plague-struck, will be a poor place for moral recovery. The Count of Chateaubriand, in order to make his child courageous, made him sleep in the turrets of the castle, where the winds howled and spectres were said to haunt the place. The mother and the sisters almost died of fright, but the son afterward gives his account, and he says: "That gave me nerves of steel, and gave me courage that has never faltered." But, my friends, I do not think the turrets of darkness or the spectral world swept by sirocco and euroclydon, will ever prepare a soul for the eternal land of sunshine. I wonder what is the curriculum in the College Inferno, where a man having been prepared by enough sin enters and goes up from freshman of iniquity to sophomore of abomination, and on up, from sophomore to junior and from junior to senior, and day of graduation comes, and the diploma is signed by Satan, the president, and all the professional demoniacs attest the fact that the candidate has been a sufficient time under their drill, and then enters heaven. Pandemonium, a preparatory school for celestial admission! Ah, my friends, while Satan and his cohorts have fitted a vast multitude for ruin, they never fitted one soul for happiness—never. My friends, I wish you further to notice that another chance in another world

means the ruin of this. Now, suppose a wicked man is assured that after a lifetime of wickedness he can fix it all right up in the future. That would be the demoralization of society, that would be the demolition of the human race. There are men who are now kept on the limits of sin by their fear. The fear that if we are bad and unforgiven here it will not be well with us in the next existence is the chief influence that keeps civilization from rushing back into semi-barbarism, and keeps semi-barbarism from rushing back into midnight savagery, and keeps midnight savagery from rushing back into extinction. Now, the man is kept on the limits of sin. But this idea coming into his soul, this idea of another chance, he says, "Go to, now; I'll get out of this world all there is in it. Come gluttony and revenge and uncleanness and all sensualities, and wait upon me. It may abbreviate my earthly life by dissoluteness, but that will only give me heavenly indulgence on a larger scale in a shorter length of time. I will overtake the righteous before long, I will only come in heaven a little late, and I will be a little more fortunate than those who have behaved themselves on earth and then went straight to the bosom of God, because I will see more and have wider excursion, and I will come into heaven via Gehenna, via Sheol!" Another chance in the next world means free license and the demolition of this. Suppose you had a case in court, and all the judges and all the attorneys agreed in telling you the first trial of it—it would be tried twice—the first trial would not be of very much importance, but the second trial would decide everything. On which trial would you put the most expenditure? on which trial would you employ the ablest counsel? on which trial would you be most anxious to have the attendance of all the witnesses? "Oh," you would say, "if there are to be two trials, and the first trial does not amount to much, the second trial being everything, everything depending upon that, I must have the most eloquent attorney, and I must have all my witnesses present, and I will expend my money on that." If these men who are impenitent and who are wicked felt there were two trials, and the first was of no very great importance, and the second trial was the one of vast and infinite importance, all the preparations for eternity would be post-mortem, post-funeral, post-sepulchral, and this world would be jerked off into impenitency and godlessness. Another chance in another world means the demolition of this.

Furthermore, my friends—for I am preaching to myself as well as to you; we are on the same level, and though the platform be a little higher than the pew, it is only for convenience, and that we may the better speak to the people; we are all on the same platform, and I am talking to my soul while I talk to yours—my friends, why another chance in another world when we have declined so many chances in this? Suppose you spread a banquet and you invite a vast number of friends, and among others you send an invitation to a man who disregards it, or treats it in an obnoxious way. During twenty years you give twenty banquets, a banquet a year; and you invite your friends, and every time you invite this man, who disregards your invitation or sends back some indignity. After a while you move into a larger house and amid more luxuriant surroundings, and you invite your friends, but you do not invite that man to whom twenty times you sent an invitation to the smaller house. Are you to blame? You would only make yourself absurd before God and man to send that man another invitation. For twenty years he has been declining your offers and sending insult for your kindness and courtesy, and can he blame you? Can he come up to your house on the night of the banquet?



THE POST.—FROM A STATUE BY KAFFSACK.—SEE PAGE 153. Digitized by Google



THE TELEGRAPH.— FROM A STATUE BY KAFFSACK.— SEE PAGE 153. Digitized by Google

Looking up and seeing it is a finer house, will he have any right to say: "Let me in. I declined all those other offers, but this is a larger house, a brighter house, a more luxuriant abode. Let me in. Give me another chance"? God has spread a banquet of His grace before us. For three hundred and sixty-five days of every year, since we knew the difference between our right hand and our left, He has invited us by His Providence and by His Spirit. Suppose we decline all these offers and all this kindness. Now the banquet is spread in a larger place, in the heavenly palace. Invitations are sent out, but no invitation is sent to us. Why? Because we declined all those other banquets. Will God be to blame? Will we have any right to rap on the door of heaven and say, "I ought not to be shut out of this place; give me another chance"? Twelve gates of salvation standing wide for free admission all our life and then when the twelve gates close we rush on the bosses of Jehovah's buckler, saying: "Give me another chance." A ship is to sail for Hamburg. You want to go to Germany by that line. You see the advertisement of the steamer's sailing. You see it for two weeks. You see it in the morning papers and you see it in the evening papers; you see it placarded on the walls. Circulars are thrown into your office telling you all about that steamer. One day you come down on the wharf and the steamer has swung out into the stream. You say: "Oh, that isn't fair. Come back, swing up again to the docks. Throw the plank ashore that I may come on board. It isn't fair. I want to go to Germany by that steamer. Give me another chance." Here is a magnificent offer for heaven. It has been anchored within our sight year after year, and year after year, and year after year, and all the benign voices of earth and heaven have urged us to get on board, since it may sail at any moment. Suppose we let that opportunity sail away, and then we look out and say: "Send back that opportunity; I want to take it; it isn't treating me fairly. Give me another chance." Why, my brother, you might as well go out and stand on the Highlands at the Navesink three days after the *Aurania* has gone out, and shout: "Captain Haines, come back; I want to go to Liverpool on the *Aurania*. Come back over the sea and through the Narrows and up to the docks. Give me another chance!" You might as well do that as, after the last opportunity of heaven has sped away, try to get it back again. Just think of it! It came on me yesterday in my study with overwhelming impressiveness. Just think of it. All heaven offered us as a gratuity for a whole lifetime, and yet we wanting to rush against God, saying: "Give me another chance!" There ought to be, there will be, no such thing as posthumous opportunity.

You see common sense agrees with my text in saying that "if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be." You see this idea lifts this world from an unimportant way-station to a platform of stupendous issues, and makes all eternity whirl around this hour. Oh, my soul! my soul! Only one trial, and all the preparations for that trial to be made in this world, or never made at all. Oh, my soul! my soul! You see this piles up all the emphasis and all the climaxes and all the destinies into this life. No other chance. Oh, how that intensifies the value and the importance of this chance. Alexander and his army used to come around a city, and they would kindle a great light, with the understanding that as long as that light was burning the city might surrender, and all would be well, but if they let that light go out, then the battering rams would swing against the walls and there would come disaster and demolition. Oh, my friends, all you

and I need to do to prepare for eternal safety is just to surrender to the King and Conqueror, Christ. Surrender hearts, surrender life, surrender everything. The great light keeps burning, light kindled by the wood of the cross, light flaming up against the dark night of our sin and sorrow. Oh, let us surrender before the light goes out, and with it our last opportunity of making our peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, my brother, talk about another chance; this the supernal chance. In the time of Edward II., at the battle of Mueselburg, a private soldier saw that the Earl of Huntley had lost his helmet. The private soldier took off his helmet and went up to the Earl of Huntley and put the helmet on his head. Now, the head of the private soldier uncovered, he was soon slain, while his commander rode in safety through and out of the battle. But it is different in our case. Instead of a private offering a helmet to an earl, it is the King of heaven and earth offering a crown to an unworthy subject, the King dying that we might live! Oh, tell it to the points of the compass, tell it to day and night, tell it to earth and heaven, tell it to all the centuries and all the millenniums that God has given us such a magnificent chance in this world that we need no other chance in another!

A dream. I am in the burnished judgment hall on the last day. The great white throne is lifted, but the Judge has not yet taken it. While we are waiting for His arrival I hear the immortals in conversation. "What are you waiting for?" says a soul that went up from Madagascar to a soul that went up from America. The latter responds: "I was in America forty years ago, and I heard the Gospel preached, and I had plenty of Bibles in my house, and from the time that I knelt at my mother's knee in prayer until my last hour, I had great opportunities; but I did not improve them, and I am here to-day waiting for another chance." "Strange, strange," says the soul just come up from Madagascar. "Strange. Why, I never heard the Gospel call but once in all my life, and I accepted it, and I don't want another chance." "What are you waiting for?" says one who on earth had very feeble intellect to one who had great brain and whose voice was silvery, and who had sceptres of power. The latter replies: "I had great power on earth, I must admit; and I mastered languages and I mastered libraries, and colleges conferred upon me learned titles, and my name was a synonym for eloquence and power; but somehow I neglected the matters of my soul, and I must confess to you I am here to-day waiting for another chance." Now, the ground trembles with the advancing chariot. The great folding doors of the burnished hall of judgment are thrown open. "Stand back," cry the ushers, "and let the Judge of quick and dead pass through." He takes the throne. He looks off upon the throngs of nations come to the last judgment, come to the only judgment, and one flash from the throne reveals each man's history to himself, and reveals it to all the others. And then the Judge says, "Divide!" and the burnished walls echo it, "Divide!" and the guides angelic answer, "Divide!" and the immortals are rushing this way and that, until there is an aisle between them, a great aisle; and then a vacuum, widening and widening and widening, until the Judge looks to one side of that vacuum, and addresses the throng, and says: "Let him that is righteous be righteous still, and let him that is holy be holy still." And then, turning to the throng on the other side of the vacuum, He says: "Let him that is unjust be unjust still, and let him that is filthy be filthy still." And then He stretches out both hands, one toward the throng on each side the vacuum, and says "If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the

place where the tree falleth, there it shall be." And now there is a great jar as from tremendous sound. It is the closing of the ponderous book of judgment, and the Judge ascends the stairs back of the throne, and the great burished hall of the judgment is cleared and shut, the High Court of Eternity adjourned for ever!

LOST ON AN ICE-FLOE.

ONE Easter Monday, a few years since, the fishermen of Upernavik, in Greenland, descried in the open sea, driving into the shore, vast cakes of ice, on which their practiced eyes detected a number of seals.

Among the first to start in their sleds were Peter Neswig's family. Peter took his three younger children in his sled; his son Karl had his mother and the rest in his, to which twelve large dogs were harnessed, as he was loaded with the tents and provisions.

As soon as they reached the most favorable point on the shore, the tent was pitched and the two men started for the seals.

To their disappointment, only one was within reach. This was soon secured, and, not to be disappointed of the harvest so temptingly offered, they started over the floes that had wedged in near the shore to get a shot at some which, in the distance, seemed like dots. Their eagerness led them far beyond the limit that prudence would have dictated, and, before they could cover any with their guns, an ominous report roused them to a sense of their danger.

The ice was breaking behind them, and, in the rough sea and high wind, they would soon be swept out.

They rushed back, but the gap was too wide to leap. They ran along the fissure, hoping to reach a narrower spot, but all in vain; their floe was completely detached and again on its voyage.

A moment of prayer, a moment of tears, and the hardy men faced their fate. Indeed, as the seals climbed up on the floe near Peter and Karl, they fired and killed two splendid fellows.

The shots drew the rest of the family from the tent, and it was consoling, at least, to find that the hunters' danger was seen. Relief would soon come. Vain hope! Night set in, and with it a fearful storm. The floe drove before the wind, crashing, in the darkness, against berg and cake, till they expected every moment to see it yawn beneath their feet, and consign them to the treacherous bosom of the ocean. At last, with a shock, the floe parted, and in the obscurity they beheld their dogs, which had hitherto been near them, float away.

Deprived of these faithful comrades, the hunters gave up all hope.

* * * * *

While merry-making was going on in Upernavik, the quick ear of Nicholina, the betrothed of Karl, caught the baying of dogs from the seaside.

She called attention to it, but no one heeded her. When at last it rose to a dismal wail, the head man determined to see what it really was.

A party started, Nicholina in the front, so far ahead that her father called her back. But she had made a discovery that sent the blood thrilling through her veins.

"They are Neswig's dogs!" she cried, as she sped on. "Yes, they are! One—two—three—twenty-one! And what has become of him?"

"They are lost!" cried one near.

"Never!" she exclaimed. "The night will soon clear. Scatter along the shore to save them!"

As the girl had predicted, a dim light at last enabled them to scan the vexed surface of the sea. Keen eyes descried a floe with two men on it.

"It is Karl," she cried—"my Karl! Quick! Man the boats!"

She was the first at the life-saving boat and aiding to run it down. In vain the young men tried to detain her, but she was the first to seize a paddle and leap into the boat when it touched the water.

Plying their paddles as only men of that sea can, the crew sent their boat spinning from foamy crest to crest. Those on the shore watched in deep anxiety till their friends in the boat were almost lost to sight.

In vain they toiled on. Two black spots in the distance seemed to recede more rapidly than they advanced, till at last the young men lost heart, and cried out that they must give up.

But Nicholina cheered them on, and, although they lost sight of the floe and its burden, she spurred them on till, rounding a floe that lay in their way, they saw Peter lying covered up.

Nicholina's heart sank. Was Karl lost after all her struggle to save him? No, the brave fellow had heaped on his exhausted father all the clothing he could spare, and crouched down behind a sheltering spur of ice sought to defy the cold.

"Thank God, they are alive!" she cried, as, plying the paddle with new vigor, she drove the boat to the edge.

Men jumped on the ice and soon lifted Peter, now insensible, into the boat, while Karl, helped to enter, fell before Nicholina's feet, and murmured words that her heart caught sooner than her ears.

They were soon laid in the bottom of the boat, and the now wearied crew turned shoreward. There, all were alike anxious for the missing men and their rescuers.

As the boat approached, not seeing Karl and his father, their friends believed Nicholina had periled her life in vain; but their strong hands were soon bearing the rescued men to a warm cabin.

Nicholina was borne in triumph through the street of Upernavik, and her heroism is the theme of Greenland stories to this day.

It was the custom in Venice to head official documents with portraits of the doges, and these miniatures are now very valuable.

HUMILITY.—I believe the first test of a truly great man is his humility. I do not mean by humility doubt of his own power, or hesitation of speaking his opinions; but a right understanding of the relation between what he can do and say, and the rest of the world's sayings and doings. All great men not only know their business, but usually know that they know it; and are not only right in their main opinions, but they usually know that they are right in them; only they do not think much of themselves on that account. Arnolfo knows he can build a good dome at Florence; Albert Dürer writes calmly to one who has found fault with his work, "It cannot be better done"; Sir Isaac Newton knows that he has worked out a problem or two that would have puzzled anybody else; only they do not expect their fellow-men, therefore, to fall down and worship them. They have a curious under-sense of powerlessness—feeling that the greatness is not *in* them, but *through* them; that they could not do or be anything else than God made them—and they see something Divine and God-made in every other man they meet, and are endlessly, foolishly, incredibly merciful.—*Ruskin in "Modern Painters."*