

FAIREST OF THE FAIR.

DR. TALMAGE'S ELOQUENT SERMON ON JESUS CHRIST.

"He is Altogether Lovely"—Christ Lovely in His Countenance and in His Habits, in His Sobriety, in His Sympathy—He was Lovely in His Sermons and in His Christ Life's Work.

BROOKLYN, April 23.—Mrs. Prentiss' hymn, "More Love to Thee, O Christ," was never more wonderfully rendered than this morning, by the thousands of voices in the Brooklyn Tabernacle, led on by organ and cornet, while by new vocabulary and fresh imagery, Dr. Talmage presented the Gospel. The subject of the sermon was, "Fairest of the Fair," the text chosen being Solomon's Song 5: 10: "Thou art altogether lovely." The human race has during centuries been improving. For awhile it deflected and degenerated, and from all I can read, for ages the whole tendency was towards barbarism. But under the ever widening and deepening influence of Christianity the tendency is now in the upward direction. The physical appearance of the human race is seventy-five per cent more attractive than in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From the pictures on canvas and the faces and forms in sculpture of those who were considered the grand looking men of the world, two hundred years ago, I conclude the superiority of the men and women of our time. Such looking people of the past centuries as the Greeks and Romans have presented as fine specimens of beauty and dignity, would be in our time considered deformity and repulsiveness completely. The faces of many men and women in antediluvian times were eight and ten feet high tended to make the human race obnoxious rather than winning. Such portable mountains of human flesh did not add to the charms of the world.

But in no climate and in no age did there ever appear anyone who, in physical attractiveness could be compared to Him whom myriads of millions of men of years before He put his infantile foot on the hill back of Bethlehem. He was and is altogether lovely. The physical appearance of Christ is the most perfect artistic genius. Some writers declare Him to have been a brunette or dark complexioned, and others a blonde or light complexioned. St. John of Damascus, writing eleven hundred years ago, and so much nearer than ourselves to the time of Christ, and hence more likelihood of an accurate tradition, represents Him with beard, black and curly, eyebrows joined together, and "yellow complexion, and long fingers like His mother." Another, writing fifteen hundred years ago, represents Christ as a blonde. His hair, the color of wine and golden at the root; straight and without lustre, but from the level of the ears curling and glossy, and divided down the center after the fashion of the Nazarenes; His forehead is broad and smooth, His face without blemish, and enhanced by a tempered bloom; His countenance ingenious and kind. Nose and mouth of the same color as His hair, and forked in form; His eyes blue and extremely brilliant.

My opinion is that a Jewish face, His mother was a Jewess, and there is no womanhood on earth more beautiful than Jewish womanhood. Alas! that He lived so long before the Daguerrean and photographic arts were born, or we might have known His exact features. I know that Sculpture and Painting were born long before Christ, and they might have transferred from olden times to our times the forehead, the nostril, the eye, the lips of our Lord. Phidias, the sculptor, put down his chisel of enchantment five hundred years before Christ came. Why did not someone take up the lines of our Lord, the eye, that eye of our Lord, the eye that sovereign of the face? Dionysius, the literary artist, who saw at Heliopolis, Egypt, the strange darkening of the heavens at the time of Christ's crucifixion near Jerusalem, and not knowing what it was, but describing it as a peculiar eclipse of the sun, and saying, "Either the Deity suffers or sympathizes with some sufferer," that Dionysius might have put his pen to the work, and drawn the portrait of our Lord. But the form and appearance of the world's favorites only, and not the form and appearance of the peasant, among whom Christ appeared.

It was not until the fifteenth century, or until more than fourteen hundred years after Christ, that talented painters attempted by pencil to give us the idea of Christ's face. The pictures before that time were so grotesque that the Council of Constantinople forbade their exhibition. But Leonardo Da Vinci, in the fifteenth century, presented Christ's face on two canvases, yet he gave a repulsive face and the other an effeminate face. Raphael's face of Christ is a weak face. Albert Durer's face of Christ was a savage face. Titian's face of Christ is an expressionless face. The mightiest artists, either with pencil or chisel, have made signal failures in attempting to give the forehead, the cheek, the eye, the nostril, the mouth of our blessed Lord.

But about His face I can tell you something positive and beyond controversy. I am sure it was a soul face. The face is only the curtain of the soul. It was impossible that a disposition like Christ's should not have demonstrated itself in His physiognomy. Kindness as an occasional impulse may give no illumination to the features, but kindness as a lifelong, dominant habit will produce attractiveness of countenance as certainly as the shining of the sun produces flowers. Children are often a repulsive face and a scowling or hard-visaged man. They cry out if he proposes to take them. If he tries to caress them, he evokes a slap rather than a kiss. His mothers know how hard it is to get their children to go to a man or woman of forbidding appearance. But no sooner did Christ appear in the domestic group than there was an infantile excitement, and the youngster began to struggle to get out of their mother's arms. They could not hold the children back. "Stand back with those children," said some of the disciples. "Perhaps the little ones may have been playing in the dirt, or their faces may not have been clean, or they may not have been well clad, or the disciples may have thought Christ's religion was a religion chiefly for big folks." But Christ made the infantile excitement still livelier by His saying that He liked children better than grown people, declaring "Except ye become as a little child, ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." That, I think, is one reason why the

vast majority of the human race are in infancy. Christ is so fond of children that He takes them to Himself, before the world has time to despise and harden them, and so they are now at the windows of the Palace, and on the doorsteps, and playing on the green. Sometimes Matthew or Mark, or Luke tells story of Christ and only one tells it, but Matthew, Mark and Luke all join in that picture of Christ girdled by children, and I know by what occurred at that time that Christ had a face full of gentility.

Not only was Christ altogether lovely in His countenance, but lovely in His habits. I know, without being told, that the Lord who made the rivers, and lakes, and oceans, was cleanly in His appearance. He disliked the disease of leprosy, not only because it was distressing but because it was not clean, and His curative words were, "I will; be thou clean." He declared Himself in favor of thorough washing, and opposed to superficial washing, when He denounced the hypocrites for making clean only the outside of the platter, and He applauds His disciples by saying, "Now are ye clean," and giving directions to those who fasted, among other things He says, "Wash thy face;" and to a blind man whom He was doing good, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." And He Himself actually wash the disciples' feet, I suppose not only to demonstrate His own humility, but to show that the feet needed to be washed. The fact is, the Lord was a great friend of water, I know that from the fact most of the world is water. Christ in His most constant commendation of water. I know He was personally neat, although He mingled much among very rough populations, and took such long journeys on dusty highways. He wore His hair long, according to the custom of His land and time, but neither trouble nor old age had thinned or injured His locks, which were never worn shaggy or unkempt. Yes, all His habits of personal appearance were lovely.

Sobriety was always an established habit of His life. In addition to the water, He drank the juice of the grape. When at a wedding party this beverage gave out, He made gallons on gallons of grape juice, but it was as unlike what the world makes in this time as health is different from disease, and as calm pulses are different from the paroxysms of delirium tremens. There was no strychnine in that beverage, or logwood, or any other poisonous substance. Some writers who now quote the wine-making in Cana of Galilee as an excuse for the fiery and damning beverages of the Middle Ages, forget that the wine at the New Testament wedding had two characteristics, the one that the Lord made it, and the other that it was made out of water. Buy all you can of that kind, and drink it, and there is no day, and send a barrel of it around to my cellar. You cannot make me believe that the blessed Christ, who went up and down healing the sick, would institute for man the style of drink which is the cause of disease more than all other causes combined; or that He who calmed the maniacs into their right mind, would create that style of drink which does more than anything else to fill insane asylums; or that He who was so helpful to the poor, would make a style of drink that drives the poor to pauperism; or that He who came to save the nations from sin, would create a liquor that is a source of the crime that now stupefies the penitentiaries. A lovely sobriety was in all over His face, from the hair-line of the forehead to the bottom of the beard-itch.

Domesticity was also His habit. Though too poor to have a home of His own, he went out to spend the night at Bethany, three miles' walk from Jerusalem, and over a rough and hilly road, and every one to six or seven or ten miles, every morning and night going to and fro. I would rather walk from here to Central Park, or walk from Edinburgh to Arthur's Seat, or in London clear around Hyde Park, than to walk that road that Christ walked twice a day from Jerusalem to Bethany. But He liked the quietness of home life, and He was lovely in His domesticity.

How He enjoyed handing over the resurrected body to His mother, and the resurrected girl to her father, and reconstructing homesteads which disease or death was breaking up. As the song "Home, Sweet Home," was written by a man who at that time had no home, so I think the homelessness of Christ added to His appreciation of domesticity. Furthermore, He was lovely in His sympathy. Now, dropsy is a most distressing complaint. It inflames, and tortures any limb or physical organ it touches. As soon as a case of that kind is submitted to Christ, He, without any use of diaphoretic, compress, or anything else, and without a word, was for opening the long-closed gates of sight to the blue of the sky, and the yellow of the flower, and the emerald of the grass. What a Christ for cooling fevers without so much as a spoonful of seltzer, and straightening crooked backs without any pang of surgery; and standing whole cloth around the silent galleries of a deaf ear; and giving healthful nervous system to cataleptics! Sympathy! He did not give them stolid advice, or philosophize about the science of grief, but he spoke of as the shortest verse in the Bible, but to me it is about the longest and grandest. "Jesus wept." And we were in a great trouble, some one came in with voluble consolation and quoted the Scripture in a sort of heartiness, and did not help us at all. But after awhile some one else came in, and, without saying a word, sat down and burst into a flood of tears at the sight of our woe, and somehow it helped us right away. "Jesus wept." You see it was a deeply-attached household, that of Mary and Martha and Lazarus. The father and mother were dead, and the girls depended on them. "Now, Mary, now, Martha, stop your worrying; I will take care of you. I will be to you both father and mother. My arm is strong. Girls, you can depend on me!"

But now Lazarus was sick; yes, Lazarus was dead. All broken up, the sisters sat disconsolate, and there is a knock at the door. "Come in," says Christ, entered, and He just broke down. It was too much for Him. He had been so often and so kindly entertained in that home before His sickness and death devastated it, that He choked up and sobbed aloud and the tears trickled down the sad face of the sympathetic Christ. "Jesus wept." Why do you not try that mode of helping? You say, "I am a man of few words." Why, you dear soul, words are not necessary. Imitate your Lord, and go to those afflicted homes and cry with them. John Murphy! Well, you did not know him. Once, when I was in great bereavement, he came to my house. Kind ministers of the Gospel had come and talked beautifully and prayed with

us, and did all they could to console. But John Murphy, one of the best friends I ever had, his eyes full of tears, his face full of grief, and his hands full of prayer, came in and looked into my face, put out his broad, strong hand, and said not a word, but sat down and cried with us. I am not enough of a philosopher to say how it was, but somehow from door to door and from floor to ceiling, the room was filled with an all-prevailing comfort. "Jesus wept."

I think that is what makes Christ such a popular Christ. There are so many who want sympathy. Miss Fiske, the famous New Yorker missionary, was in the chapel one evening talking with the heathen, and she was in very poor health, and so weak she sat upon a mat while she talked, and felt the need of something to lean against, when she felt a woman's form at her back, and heard a woman's voice saying, "Lean on me." She leaned a little, but did not want to be too cumbersome when the woman's voice said, "Lean hard, if you love me, lean hard." And that makes Christ so lovely. He wants all the sick, and troubled, and weary to lean against Him, and He says, "Lean hard, if you love me, lean hard." He is close by with His sympathetic help. Hadley Vicars, the famous soldier and Christian of the Crimean war, died of an illness which wounded his regiment was too far off from the tent of supplies. He was not mortally wounded, and if the surgeons could only get at his bandages and the medicines, he would have recovered. So much of human sympathy and helpfulness comes too late; but Christ is always close by if we want Him, and has all the needed medicines and the eternal life for all who ask for it. Sympathy!

He was lovely in His doctrines. Self-sacrifice, or the relief of the suffering of others by our own suffering. He was the only physician that ever proposed to cure His patients by taking their disorders. He sacrificed, and what did He give for his patients? The best climate in the universe, the air of heaven, for the wintry weather of Palestine; a sceptre of unlimited dominion for a prisoner's box in an early room; a flashing tiara for a crown of stinging thorns; a palace for a cattle pen; a throne for a cross. Self-sacrifice! What is more lovely? Mothers dying for their children, and with scarlet fever; railroad engineers going down through the open drawbridge to save the train; firemen scorched to death trying to help a man up a ladder from the fourth story of the consuming house; all these put together only faint and insufficient similes by which to illustrate the sacrifice of the farther-reaching self-sacrifice of the "Altogether Lovely."

Do you wonder that the story of His self-sacrifice has led hundreds of thousands to die for Him? The most persecutions over 300,000 were put to death for Christ's sake. For Him Blaudina was tied to a post and wild beasts were let out upon her, and when life continued after the style of that and paw, she was put in a net, and that net containing her was thrown to a wild bull, that tossed her with his horns till life was extinct. He raised a little and genuflecting for Christ! Albigenses dying for Christ! The Vaudois dying for Christ! Smithfield fire endured for Christ! The three who were crucified, would make martyrs, if they were farther-reaching self-sacrifice of the "Altogether Lovely."

Furthermore, He was lovely in His sermons. He knew when to begin, when to stop, and just what to say. The longest sermon He ever preached, as the Bible reports Him, namely, the Sermon on the Mount, was about sixteen minutes in delivery, at the ordinary rate of speech. His longest prayer reported, commonly called "The Lord's Prayer," was about half a minute. Time then by your own watch and you will find my estimate accurate. By which I do not mean to say that sermons ought to be only sixteen minutes long, and prayers only half a minute long. Christ had such infinite power of compression that He could put into His sixteen-minute sermon and His half-minute prayer to keep all the following ages busy in thought and action. No one but a Christ could do that, or preach as short as that, but He meant to teach us compression.

At Selma, Alabama, the other day, I was shown a cotton-press, by which cotton was put in bales, and it was coupled in transportation only one car, where three cars were formerly necessary; and one ship where three ships had been required. And I imagine that we all need to compress our sermons and our prayers into smaller spaces.

And His sermons were so lovely for sentiment and practicality, and simplicity, and illustration, the light of the candle, the crystal of the salt, the cluck of a hen for her chickens; the hypocrite's dolorous physiognomy; the moth in the clothes-closet; the black wing of a weaver; the snow on the mountain; the lilies; or his extreme boisterousness about the splinter of imprefection in some one else's character; the swine fed on the pease; the wolf made up of a cyclone in which you hear the crash of a tumbling house, unless the eye is in the center. It is a pity that Woodard, whose wife is spending some time at Virginia Beach, as he painfully and laboriously attached a button to his second best pair of trousers, "camel, indeed!" he tried to push the thread into the eye of the needle, which was too sizes too small for it, and which persisted in leaving the thread behind it at nearly every stitch. "That author knew nothing about domestic economy, or he would have said that it was as hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven as it is to break a needle with linen thread."

Then he broke it off viciously, forgetting to fasten it on the other side.—Detroit Tribune.

A Frontaine Amateur. Shoe Merchant (measuring her foot)—Size two, will just about fit you, I think, little girl. Little Girl (doing her own shopping)—Oh, dear, no! That's too large, I can wear half-past one.

The Clerk and the Cook. The cook at the boarding house, out on a shopping tour, was talking with the clerk at the restaurant, who was a boarder where she cooked. "One of these drygoods stores," she said, gazing around the place, "is some different from a boarding-house, ain't it?" "Well, rather," smiled the clerk, "leaving his chin." "Yes," she went on pleasantly; in years, three winters, three springs, three summers, three autumns. Our life is short, but would God we might see how much we could do in three years. Concentration, intensification, three years of kind words! Three years of living for others! Three years

of self-sacrifice. Let us try it. Aye! Christ was lovely in His sermons. He had a right that last hour to deal in anemization. Yet he had anyone been so meanly treated. Cradles of straw among goats and camels—that was the world's reception of Him! Rocky soil, what a lamentable soil! Yet he was through tortured nerves—that was the world's farewell salutation! The slaughter of that some sometimes hides the loveliness of the sufferer. Under the saturation of tears and blood we sometimes fail to see the sweetest face of earth and Heaven. Altogether lovely! Can cold criticism find an unkind word? He ever performed, or an unkind thought that He ever harbored? What a marvel it is that all the nations of earth do not rise up in rapturous affection for Him! He is here and now. I lift my right hand in solemn attestation. I love Him! I and the grief of my life is that I do not love Him more. It is an imperative for me to ask, do you, my hearer—you, my reader, love Him? Has He become a part of your nature? Have you committed your children on earth to His keeping, as you children of Heaven are already in His bosom? Has He done enough to win your confidence? Can you trust Him, living and dying, and forever? Is your faith, or your love toward Him? Would you give up have His hand to guide you? His might to protect you? His grace to comfort you? His sufferings to atone for you? His atonement to release you? His love to encircle you? His Heaven to crown you?

Oh, that we might all have something of the great German reference only for this Christ, which led him to say, "If anyone knocks at the door of my breast and says, 'Who lives there?' my reply is 'Jesus Christ lives here, and I am the door.' Will it not be grand if, when we get through this short and rugged road of life, we can go right up into His presence and live with Him world without end? He is the gate of the gate of that heavenly city, we should be so overwhelmed with our unworthiness on the one side, and the supernatural splendor on the other side, as to get us bewildered, and should for a few moments be lost on the streets of gold, and among the burnished temples, and the sapphire thrones, there would be plenty to show us the way, and take us out of our joyful bewilderment; and perhaps the women of Nain would say, "Come, let me take you to the Christ who raised my dead son to life." And Martha would say, "Come, and let me take you to the Christ who brought up my brother, Lazarus from the house of the dead." The disciples would say, "Come, and let me take you to the Christ who saved our sinking ship in the hurricane on Genesee." And Paul would say, "Come, and let me take you to the Christ for whom I died on the road to Asia." And whole groups of martyrs would say, "Come let us show you the place of our martyrdom, and the chain, and waded the flood, and dared the fires." And our own glorified kindred would flock around us, saying, "We have been waiting a good while for you, but before we wait old times, and we tell you of what we have enjoyed since we have been here, and you tell us of what you have suffered since we were parted from you, and you tell us of the greatest sight in all the place, the most resplendent throne, and upon it the mightiest Conqueror, the Exaltation of heaven, the King of the universe, the Christ, the Christ, the Christ for whom I died on the road to Asia." And whole groups of martyrs would say, "Come, and let me take you to the Christ who saved our sinking ship in the hurricane on Genesee." And Paul would say, "Come, and let me take you to the Christ for whom I died on the road to Asia." And whole groups of martyrs would say, "Come let us show you the place of our martyrdom, and the chain, and waded the flood, and dared the fires." 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