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REV. DR. TALMAGE IN HIS SERMON DISCUSSES SOME OF THEM.

STRAINING OUT THE GNATS.

We Are Very Punctilious About Small Things, But Neglectful of Affairs of Great Magnitude—Pointed Remarks That May Well Be Feared Over by People of All Classes.

Washington, July 16.—Rev. Dr. Talmage took for his text this morning Matthew xxiii, 24, "Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel."

He said: "The proverb is compact wisdom, knowledge in chunks, a library in a sentence, the electricity of many clouds discharged in one bolt, a river put through a mill race. When Christ quotes the proverb of the text, he means to set forth the ludicrous behavior of those who make a great bluster about small sins and have no appreciation of great ones. In my text a small insect and a large quadruped are brought into comparison—a gnat and a camel. You have in museum or on the desert seen the latter, a great, awkward, sprawling creature, with back two stories high and stomach having a collection of reservoirs for desert travel, an animal forbidden to the Jews as food and in many literatures entitled 'the ship of the desert.' The gnat spoken of in the text is in the grub form. It is born in pool or pond, after a few weeks becomes a chrysalis and then after a few days becomes the gnat as we recognize it. But the insect spoken of in the text is in its very smallest shape, and it yet inhabits the water, for my text is a misprint and ought to read 'strain out a gnat.'

My text shows you the prince of inconsistencies. A man after long observation has formed the suspicion that in a cup of water he is about to drink, there is a grub or the grandparent of a gnat. He goes and gets a sieve or strainer. He takes the water and pours it through the sieve in the broad light. He says, 'I would rather do anything almost than drink this water until this larva be extirpated.' This water is brought under inspection. The experiment is successful. The water rushes through the sieve and leaves against the side of the sieve the grub or gnat. Then the man carefully removes the insect and drinks the water in placidity. But going out one day, and hungry, he devours a 'ship of the desert,' the camel, which the Jews were forbidden to eat. The gastronomer has no compunction of conscience. He suffers from no indigestion. He puts the lower jaw under the camel's forefoot, and his upper jaw over the hump of the camel's back, and gives one swallow and the dromedary disappears forever. He strained out a gnat, he swallowed a camel.

While Christ's audience was yet smiling at the appositeness and wit of his illustration—for smile they did, unless they were too stupid to understand the hyperbole—Christ practically said to them 'That is you.' Punctilious about small things; reckless about affairs of great magnitude. No subject ever winced under a surgeon's knife more bitterly than did the Pharisees under Christ's scalpel of truth. As an anatomist will take a human body to pieces and put the pieces under a microscope for examination, so Christ finds his way to the heart of the dead Pharisee and cuts it out and puts it under the glass of inspection for all generations to examine. Those Pharisees thought that Christ would flatter them and compliment them, and how they must have writhed under the red-hot words as he said, 'Ye fools, ye whitened sepulchers, ye blind guides, which strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.'

There are in our day a great many gnats strained out and a great many camels swallowed, and it is the object of this sermon to sketch a few persons who are extensively engaged in that business.

First, I remark that all those ministers of the gospel who are very scrupulous about the conventionalities of religion, but put no particular stress upon matters of vast importance, are photographed in the text. Church services ought to be grave and solemn. There is no room for frivolity in religious convocation, but there are illustrations, and there are hyperboles like that of Christ in the text that will irradiate with smiles any intelligent audience. There are men like those blind guides of the text who advocate only those things in religious service which draw the corners of the mouth down and denounce all those things which have a tendency to draw the corners of the mouth up, and these men will go to installations, and to presbyteries, and to conferences, and to associations, and their pockets full of fine sleeves to strain out the gnats, while in their own churches at home every Sunday there are churches a great dormitory, and their solemn sermons are a cradle and the drawled out hymns a lullaby, while some wretched soul in a pew, with her fan, keeps the flies off unconscious persons approximate. Now, I say it is worse to sleep in church than to smile in church, for the latter implies at least attention, while the former implies the indifference of the hearers and the stupidity of the speaker.

In old age, or from physical infirmity, or from long watching with the sick, drowsiness will sometimes overpower one, but when a minister of the gospel looks off upon an audience and finds healthy and intelligent people struggling with drowsiness it is time for him to give out the doxology or pronounce the benediction. The great fault of church services to-day is not too much vivacity, but too much somnolence. The one is an irritating gnat that may be easily strained out, the other is a great, sprawling and sleepy-eyed camel of the dry desert.

In all our Sabbath schools, in all our Bible classes, in all our pulpits, we need to brighten up our religious message with such Christlike vivacity as we find in the text.

I take down from my library the biographies of ministers and writers of the past ages, inspired and uninspired, who have done the most to bring souls to Jesus Christ, and I find that, without a single exception, they consecrated their wit and their humor to Christ. Elijah used it when he advised the Baalites, as they could not make their god respond, to call louder, as their god might be sound asleep or gone a-hunting. Job used it when he said to his self-conceited comforters, 'Wisdom will die with you.' Christ not only used it in the text, but when he ironically complimented the corrupt Pharisee, saying, 'The whole need not a physician,' and when, by one word, he described the cunning of Herod,

saying, 'Go ye, and tell that fox.' Matthew Henry's commentaries on the first page to the last crowded with humor as summer clouds with heat lightning.

John Bunyan's writings are as full of humor as they are of saving truth, and there is not an aged man here who does not remember that while reading it he smiled as often as he wept. Chrysostom, George Herbert, Robert South, George Whitfield, Jeremy Taylor, Rowland Hill, Ashael Nettleton, Charles G. Finney and all the men of the past who greatly advanced the kingdom of God consecrated their wit and their humor to the cause of Christ. So it has been in all the ages, and I say to all our young theological students, sharpen your wits until they are as keen as scimitars and then take them into this holy war. It is a very short bridge between a smile and a tear, a suspension bridge from eye to lip, and it is soon crossed over, and a smile is sometimes just as sacred as a tear. There is as much religion, and I think, a little more in a spring morning than in a starless midnight. Religious work without any humor or wit in it is a banquet with a side of beef, and that raw, and no condiments and no dessert succeeding. People will not sit down to such a banquet. By all means remove all frivolity and all paths and all lightness and vulgarity. Strain them out through the sieve of holy discrimination, but, on the other hand, beware of that monster which overshadows the Christian church to-day—conventionalism—coming up from the great Sahara desert of ecclesiasticism, having on its back a hump of sanctimonious gloom, and vehemently refuse to swallow that camel.

Oh, how particular a great many people are about the infinitesimals while they are quite reckless about the magnitudes! What did Christ say? Did he not exhort the people in his time who were so careful to wash their hands before a meal, but did not wash their hearts? It is a bad thing to have unclean hands. It is a worse thing to have an unclean heart. How many people there are in our time who are very anxious that after their death they shall be buried with their faces toward the east and not at all anxious that during their whole life they shall come up in the resurrection of the just, whichever way they are buried! How many there are chiefly anxious that a minister of the gospel shall come in the line of apostolic succession, not caring so much whether he comes from Apostle Paul or Apostle Judas! They have a way of measuring a gnat until it is larger than a camel.

Again, my subject photographs all those who are abhorrent of small sins while they are reckless in regard to magnificent thefts. You will find many a merchant who, while he is so careful that he would not take a yard of cloth or a spool of cotton from the counter without paying for it, and who, if a bank cashier should make a mistake and send in a roll of bills \$5 too much, would dispatch a messenger in hot haste to return the surplus, yet who will go into a stock company, in which after awhile he gets control of the stock, and then waters the stock and makes \$100,000 appear like \$2,000,000. He only stole \$100,000 by the operation. Many of the men of fortune made their wealth in that way.

One of those men engaged in such unrighteous acts that evening, the evening of the very day when he watered the stock, will find a wharf rat stealing a daily paper from the basement doorway and will go out and catch the urchin by the collar and twist the collar so tightly the poor fellow has no power to say that it was thirst for knowledge that led him to the dishonest act; but grip the collar tighter and tighter, saying: 'I have been looking for you a long while. You stole my paper four or five times, haven't you, you miserable wretch?' And then the old stock gambler, with a voice they can hear three blocks, will cry out, 'Police, police!' That same man the evening of the day in which he watered the stock will kneel with his family in prayers and thank God for the prosperity of the day, then kiss his children good night with an air which seems to say, 'I hope you all will grow up to be as good as your father.' Prisons for sins insectile in size, but palaces for crimes dromedarian.

No mercy for sins animalcule in proportion, but great leniency for mastodon iniquity. A poor boy slyly takes from the basket of a market woman a choke pear—saying some one else from the cholera—and you smother him in the horrible atmosphere of Raymond Street Jail or New York Tombs, while his cousin, who has been skillful enough to steal \$50,000 from the city, you make a candidate for the State Legislature.

There is a good deal of uneasiness and nervousness now among some people in our time who have got unrighteous fortunes—a great deal of uneasiness about dynamite. I tell them that God will put under their unrighteous fortunes something more explosive than dynamite—the earthquake of his omnipotent indignation. It is time that we learn in America that sin is not excusable in proportion as it declares large dividends and has outriders in equipage. Many a man is riding to perdition, postilion ahead and lackey behind. To steal one copy of a newspaper is a gnat; to steal many thousands of dollars is a camel. There is many a fruit dealer who would not consent to steal a bushel of peaches from a neighbor's stall, but who would not scruple to depress the fruit market, and as long as I can remember we have heard every summer the peach crop of Maryland is a failure, and by the time the crop comes in the misrepresentation makes a difference of millions of dollars. A man who would not steal one basket of peaches would steal 60,000 baskets of peaches.

Go down into the public library, in the reading rooms, and see the newspaper reports of the crops from all parts of the country, and their phraseology is very much the same, and the same men wrote them, methodically and infamously carrying out the huge lying about the grain crop from year to year and for a score of years. After awhile there will be a 'corner' in the wheat market, and men who had a contempt for petty theft will burglarize the wheat bin of a nation and commit larceny upon the American corncrib. And some of the men will sit in churches and in reformatory institutions trying to strain out the small gnats of soundness while in their grain elevators and in their storehouses they are fattening huge camels which they expect after awhile to swallow. Society has to be entirely reconstituted on this subject. We are to find that a sin is excusable in proportion as it is great. I charge religion as time the tendency is to charge religious frauds upon good men. They say, 'Oh, what a host of frauds you have in the church of God in this day!' And when an elder of a church,

or a deacon, or a minister of the gospel, or a superintendent of a Sabbath school turns out a defaulter, what display heads there are in many of the newspapers! Great primer type. Five line placard. 'Another Saint Absconded,' 'Clerical Scoundrelism,' 'Religion as a Discount,' 'Shame on the Churches,' while there are a thousand soundrels, and the church to one inside the church, and the misbehavior of those who never see the inside of a church is so great that it is enough to tempt a man to become a Christian and to get out of their company. But in all circles, religious and irreligious, the tendency is to excuse sin in proportion as it is mammoth. Even John Milton in his 'Paradise Lost,' while he condemns Satan, gives such a grand description of him you have hard work to withhold your admiration. Oh, this straining out of small sins like gnats and this gulping down great iniquities like camels!

The subject does not give the picture of one or two persons, but is a gallery in which thousands of people may see their likenesses. For instance, all those people who, while they would outside the money and the treasure of the public. A man has a house to sell, and the owner says it is worth \$30,000. Next day the assessor comes around and the Government of the United States took off the tax from personal income, among other reasons because so few people would tell the truth, and many a man with an income of hundreds of dollars a day made statements which seemed to imply he was about to be handed over to the overseer of the poor. Careful to pay their passage from Liverpool to New York, yet smuggling in their Saratoga trunk ten silk dresses from Paris and a half dozen watches from Geneva, Switzerland, telling the customs house officer on the wharf, 'There is nothing in that trunk but wearing apparel,' and putting a five dollar gold piece in his hand to punctuate the statement.

Described in the text are all those who are particular never to break the law of grammar and who want all their language an elegant specimen of syntax, straining out all the inaccuracies of speech with a fine sieve of literary criticism, while through their conversation go slander and innuendo and profanity and falsehood larger than a hole caravan of camels, when they might better fracture every law of the language and shock their intellectual taste, and better let every verb seek in vain for its nominative, and every noun for its government, and let every proposition lose its way in the sentence, and adjectives and participles and pronouns get into a grand riot worthy of the Fourth Ward of New York on election day, than to commit a moral inaccuracy. Better swallow a thousand gnats than one camel.

Such persons are also described in the text who are very much alarmed about the small faults of others and have no alarm about their own great transgressions. There are in every community and in every church watchdogs who feel called upon to keep their eyes on others and growl. They are full of suspicions. They wonder if this man is not dishonest, if that man is not unclean, if there is not something wrong about the other man. They are always the first to hear of anything wrong. Vultures are always the first to smell carrion. They are self-appointed detectives. I lay this down as a rule without any exception, that those people who have the most faults themselves are more merciless in their watching of others. From scalp of head to sole of foot they are full of jealousies and hypercriticalisms. They spend their life in hunting for muskrats and mud turtles instead of hunting for Rocky Mountain eagles, always for something mean instead of something grand. They look at their neighbors' imperfections through a microscope and look at their own imperfections through a telescope upside down. Twenty faults of their own do not hurt them so much as one fault of somebody else. Their neighbors' imperfections are like gnats, and they strain them out; their own imperfections are like camels, and they swallow them.

But lest too many think they escape the scrutiny of the text, I have to tell you that we all come under the divine satire when we make the questions of time more prominent than the questions of eternity. Come now, let us all go into the confessional. Are not all tempted to make the question, 'Where shall I live now? greater forever? How shall I get more dollars? greater than the question, 'How shall I lay up treasures in heaven?' the question, 'How shall I pay my debts to man? greater than the question, 'How shall I meet my obligations to God?' the question, 'How shall I gain the world? greater than the question, 'What if I lose my soul?' the question, 'Why did God let sin come into the world?' greater than the question, 'How shall I get it extirpated from my nature?' the question, 'What shall I do with the 20 or 40 or 70 years of my sub-lunar existence?' greater than the question, 'What shall I do with the million of cycles of my post terrestrial existence?' Time—how small it is! Eternity—how vast it is! The former more insignificant in comparison with the latter than a gnat is insignificant when compared with a camel. We dodged the text. We said, 'That does not mean me, and that does not mean me,' and with a ruinous benevolence we are giving the whole sermon away.

What an ado about things here! What poor preparation for a great eternity! As though a minnow were larger than a behemoth, as though a swallow took wider circuit than an albatross, as though a nettles were taller than a Lebanon cedar, as though a gnat were greater than a camel, as though a minute were longer than a century, as though time were higher, deeper, broader than eternity. So the text which flashed with lightning of wit as Christ uttered it is followed by the crashing thunders of awful catastrophes to those who make the questions of time greater than the questions of the future, the oncoming, overshadowing future. Oh! Eternity! Eternity! Eternity!

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