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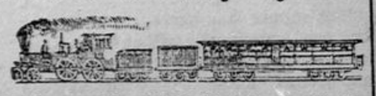

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THE GOSPEL AS REFRESHMENT.

"AS THE HART PANTETH AFTER THE WATER BROOKS."

DR. TALMAGE'S TIMELY THEME.

The Chase Furnishes the Preacher With the Text For a Graphic Description of the Refuge Which God's Word is to Those in Trouble and Misfortune.

Washington, Oct. 15.—The gospel as a great refreshment is here set forth by Dr. Talmage under a figure which will be found particularly graphic by those who have gone out as hunters to find game in the mountains; text, Psalm xlii, 1, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks."

David, who must some time have seen a deer hunt, points us here to a hunted stag making for the water. The fascinating animal, called in my text the hart, is the same animal that in sacred and profane literature is called the stag, the roebuck, the hind, the gazelle, the reindeer. In central Syria in Bible times there were whole pasture fields of them, as Solomon suggests when he says, "I charge you by the hinds of the field." Their antlers jutted from the long grass as they lay down. No hunter who has been long in "John Brown's tract" will wonder that in the Bible they were classed among clean animals, for the dews, the showers, the lakes, washed them as clean as the sky. When Isaac, the patriarch, longed for venison, Esau shot and brought home a roebuck. Isaiah compares the sprightliness of the restored cripple of the millennial times to the long and quick jump of the stag, saying, "The lame shall leap as the hart." Solomon expressed his disgust at a hunter who, having shot a deer, is too lazy to cook it, saying, "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting."

But one day David, while far from the home from which he had been driven and sitting near the mouth of a lonely cave where he had lodged and on the banks of a pond or river, hears a pack of hounds in swift pursuit. Because of the previous silence of the forest the clangor startles him, and he says to himself, "I wonder what those dogs are after." Then there is a crackling in the brushwood and the loud breathing of some rushing wonder of the woods, and the antlers of a deer rend the leaves of the thicket, and by an instinct which all hunters recognize it plunges into a pond or lake or river to cool its thirst and at the same time, by its capacity for swifter and longer swimming, to get away from the foaming harriers.

David says to himself: "Aha! That is myself! Saul after me, Absalom after me, enemies without number after me. I am chased, their bloody muzzles at my heels, barking at my good name, baeking after my body, barking after my soul. Oh, the hounds, the hounds! But look there!" says David. "That hunted deer has splashed into the water. It puts its hot lips and nostrils into the cool wave that washes the lathered flanks, and it swims away from the fiery canines, and it is free at last. Oh, that I might find in the deep, wide lake of God's mercy and consolation escape from my pursuers! Oh, for the waters of life and rescue As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."

Some of you have just come from the Adirondacks, and the breath of the balsam and spruce and pine is still on you. The Adirondacks are now populous with hunters, and the deer are being slain by the score. Once while there talking with a hunter I thought I would like to see whether my text was accurate io its allusion, and as I heard the dogs baying a little way off and supposed they were on the track of a deer I said to the hunter in rough corduroy, "Do the deer always make for the water when they are pursued?" He said: "Oh, yes, mister. You see, they are a hot and thirsty animal, and they know where the water is, and when they hear danger in the distance they lift their antlers and snuff the breeze and start for Racquet or Loon or Saranac, and we get into our cedar shell boat or stand by the runway with rifle loaded ready to blaze away."

My friends, that is one reason why I like the Bible so much. Its partridges are real partridges, its ostriches real ostriches and its reindeer real reindeer. I do not wonder that this antlered glory of the text makes the hunter's eye sparkle and his cheek glow and his respiration quicken, to say nothing of its usefulness, although it is the most useful of all game, its flesh delicious, its skin turned into human apparel, its sinews fashioned into bow strings, its antlers putting handles on cutlery and the shavings of its horns used as a restorative, its name taken from the hart and called hartshorn. By putting aside its usefulness this enchanting creature seems made out of gracefulness and elasticity. What an eye, with a liquid brightness as if gathered up from a hundred lakes at sunset! The horns a coronal branching into every possible curve, and, after it seems done, ascending into other projections of exquisiteness, a tree of polished bone, uplifted in pride or swung down for awful combat! It is velocity embodied, timidity impersonated.

Well, now, let all those who have coming after them the lean hounds of poverty or the black hounds of persecution or the spotted hounds of vicissitude or the pale hounds of death or who are in any wise pursued run to the wide, deep, glorious lake of divine solace and rescue. The most of the men and women whom I happen to know at different times, if not now, have had trouble after them, sharp, muzzled troubles, swift trnubles, all devouring troubles. Many of you have made the mistake of trying to fight them. Somebody meanly attacked you, and you attacked them. They depreciated you, and you depreciated them, or they overreached you in a bargain, and you tried in Wall street parlance, to get a corner on them. Or you have had bereavement, and, instead of being submissive, you are fighting that bereavement. You charge on the doctors who have failed to effect a cure. Or you charge on the carelessness of the railroad company through which the accident occurred. Or you are a chronic invalid, and you fret and worry and scold and wonder why you cannot be well like other people, and you angrily charge on the neuralgia or the larnygitis or the ague or the sick headache. The fact is you are a deer at bay. Instead of running to the waters of divine consolation and slaking your thirst and cooling your body and soul in the good cheer of the gospel and swimming away into the mighty deeps of God's love, you are fighting a whole kennel of harriers.

Some time ago I saw in the Adirondacks a dog lying across the road, and he seemed unable to get up, and I said to some hunters, "What is the matter with that dog?" They answered, "A deer hurt him," and I saw he had a swollen paw and a battered head, showing where the antlers struck him. And the probability is that some of you might give a mighty clip to your pursuers. You might damage their business, you might worry them into ill health, you might hurt them as much as they hurt you; but, after all, it is not worth while. You only have hurt a hound. Better be off for the Upper Saranac, into which the mountains of God's eternal strength look down and moor their shadows.

There are whole chains of lakes in the Adirondacks, and from one height you can see 30 lakes, and there are said to be over 800 in the great wilderness. So near are they to each other that your mountain guide picks up and carries the boat from lake to lake, the small distance between them for that reason called a "carry." And the realm of God's word is one long chain of bright, refreshing lakes, each promise a lake, a very short carry between them, and, though for ages the pursued have been drinking out of them, they are full up to the top of the green banks, and the same David describes them, and they seem so near together that in three different places he speaks of them as a continuous river, saying, "There is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God;" "Thou shalt make them drink of the rivers of thy pleasures;" "Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water."

But many of you have turned your back on that supply and confront your trouble, and you are soured with your circumstances, and you are fighting society, and you are fighting a pursuing world, and troubles, instead of driving you into the cool lake of heavenly comfort, have made you stop and turn round and lower your head, and it is simply antler against tooth. I do not blame you. Probably under the same circumstances I would have done worse. But you are wrong. You need to do as the reindeer does in February and March—it sheds its horns.

But very many of you who are wronged of the world—and if in any assembly between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans it were asked that all who had been badly treated should raise both their hands, and full response should be made, there would be twice as many hands lifted as persons present—I say many of you would declare, "We have always done the best we could and tried to be useful, and why we become the victims of malignment or invalidism or mishap, is inscrutable." Why, do you know that the finer a deer and the more elegant its proportions and the more beautiful its bearing the more anxious the hunters and the hounds to capture it?

Therefore sarcasm draws on you its "finest bead;" therefore the world goes gunning for you with its best Winchester breechloader. Highest compliment is it to your talent or your virtue or your usefulness. You will be assailed in proportion to your great achievements. The best and the mightiest Being the world ever saw had set after him all the hounds, terrestrial and diabolic, and they lapped his blood after the Calvarean massacre. The world paid nothing to its Redeemer but a bramble, four spikes and a rross. Many who have done their best to make the world better have had such a rough time of it that all their pleasure is in anticipation of the next world, and they would, if they could, express their own feelings in the words of the Baroness of Nairn, at the close of her long life, when asked if she would like to live her life over again:

Would you be young again?
So would not I.
One tear of memory given
Onward I'll hie.
Life's dark wave forded o'er,
All but at rest on shore,
Say, would you plunge once more,
With home so nigh?

If you might, would you now
Retrace your way,
Wander through stormy wilds,
Faint and astray?
Night's gloomy watches fled;
Morning, all beaming red;
Hope's smile around us shed,
Heavenward, away!

But what is a relief for all those pursued of trouble and annoyance and pain and bereavement? My text gives it to you in a word of three letters, but each letter is a chariot if you triumph, or a throne if you want to be crowned, or a lake if you would slake your thirst—yea, a chain of three lakes—G-o-d, the one for whom David longed and the one whom David found. You might as well meet a stag which, after its sixth mile of running at the topmost speed through thicket and gorge and with the breath of the dogs on its heels, has come in full sight of Schroon Lake and try to cool its projecting and blistered tongue with a blade of grass as to attempt to satisfy an immortal soul, when flying from trouble and sin, with anything less deep and high and broad and immense and infinite and eternal than God. His comfort—why, it embossoms all distress. His arm—it wrenches off all bondage. His hand—it wipes away all tears. His Christly atonement—it makes us all right with the past, and all right with the future, and all right with God, all right with man, and all right forever.

Lamartine tells us that King Nimrod said to his three sons: "Here are three vases, and one is of clay, another of amber and another of gold. Choose now which you will have." The eldest son, having the first choice, chose the vase of gold, on which was written the word "Empire," and when it was opened it was found to contain human blood. The second son, making the next choice, chose the vase of amber, inscribed with the word "Glory," and when opened it contained the ashes of those who were once called great. The third son took the vase of clay and, opening it, found it empty, but on the bottom of it was inscribed the name of God. King Nimrod asked his courtiers which vase they thought weighed the most. The avaricious men of his court said the vase of gold, the poets said the one of amber, but the wisest men said the empty vase, because one letter of the name of God outweighed a universe.

For him I thirst, for his grace I beg, on his promise I build my all. Without him I cannot be happy. I have tried the world, and it does well enough as far as it goes, but it is too uncertain a world, too evanescent a world. I am not a prejudiced witness. I have nothing against this world. I have been one of the most fortunate or, to use a more Christian word, one of the most blessed of men—blessed in my parents, blessed in the place of nativity, blessed in my health, blessed in my fields of work, blessed in my natural temperament, blessed in my family, blessed in my opportunities, blessed in the hope that my soul will go to heaven through the pardoning mercy of God, and my body, unless it be lost at sea or cremated in some conflagration, will lie down among my kindred and friends, some already gone and others to come after me.

Through Jesus Christ make this God your God, and you can withstand anything and everything, and that which affrights others will inspire you—as in time of earthquake, when an old Christian woman, asked whether she was scared, answered, "No; I am glad that I have a God who can shake the world," or as in a financial panic, when a Christian merchant, asked if he did not fear he would break, answered, "Yes; I shall break when the Fiftieth Psalm breaks in the fifteenth verse, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' "

We are told in Revelation xxii, 15, "Without are dogs," by which I conclude there is a whole kennel of hounds outside the gate of heaven, or, as when a master goes in a door, his dog lies on the steps waiting for him to come out, so the troubles of this life may follow us to the shining door, but they cannot get in. "Without are dogs." I have seen dogs and owned dogs that I would not be chagrined to see in the heavenly city. Some of the grand old watchdogs who are the constabulary of the homes in solitary places and for years have been the only protection of wife and child, some of the shepherd dogs that drive back the wolves and bark away the flock from going too near the precipice and some of the dogs whose neck and paw Landseer, the painter, has made immortal would not find me shutting them out from the gate of shining pearl.

I say if some soul entering heaven should happen to leave the gate ajar and these faithful creatures should quietly walk in it would not at all disturb my heaven. But all those human or brutal hounds that have chased and torn and lacerated the world—yea, all that now bite or worry or tear to pieces—shall be prohibited. "Without are dogs." No place there for harsh critics or backbiters or despoilers of the reputation of others. Down with you to the kennels of darkness and despair! The hart has reached the eternal water brooks, and the panting of the long chase is quieted in still pastures, anh "there shall be nothing to hurt or destroy in all God's holy mount."

Oh, when some of you get there it will be like what a hunter tells of when he was pushing his canoe far up north in the winter and amid the ice floes and a hundred miles, as he thought, from any other human beings. He was startled one day as he heard a stepping on the ice, and he cocked the rifle, ready to meet anything that came near. He found a man, barefooted and insane from long exposure, approaching him. Taking him into his canoe and kindling fires to warm him, he restored him, found out where he had lived and took him to his home and found all the village in great excitement. A hundred men were searching for this lost man, and his family and friends rushed out to meet him, and, as had been agreed at his first appearance, bells were rung, and guns were discharged, and banquets spread and the rescuer loaded with presents. Well, when some of you step out of this wilderness, where you have been chilled and torn and sometimes lost amid the icebergs, into the warm greetings of all the villages of the glorified, and your friends rush out to give you welcoming kiss, the news that there is another soul forever saved will call the caterers of heaven to spread the banquet and the bellmen to lay hold of the rope in the tower, and while chalices click at the feast and the bells clang from the turrets it will be a scene so uplifting I pray God I may be there to take part in the celestial merriment. And now do you not think the prayer in Solomon's Song where he compared Christ to a reindeer in the night would make an exquisitely appropriate peroration to my sermon, "Until the day break and the shadows flee away be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether?"

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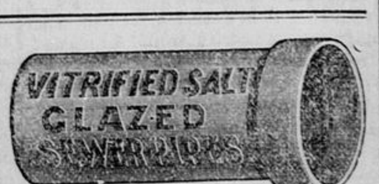

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