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THE ARBITER OF NATIONS

The Church Called to That High Position - Rev. Dr. Talmage on the Struggles Which Truth Must Endure Before It Is Enthroned Triumphantly—Martyrs to the Faith—Their Smoke a Pillar.

Washington, Dec. 17.—The trials through which the truth has struggled are by Dr. Talmage here set forth under a Bible symbol of great suggestiveness and power; text, Solomon's Song III, 6, "Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke?"

The architecture of the smoke is wondrous, whether God with his finger curves it into a cloud, or rounds it into a dome, or points it in a spire, or spreads it in a wing, or, as in the text, hoists it in a pillar. Watch it winding up from the country farmhouse in the early morning, showing that the pastoral industries have begun, or see it ascending from the chimneys of the city, telling of the homes fed, the factories turning out valuable fabrics, the printing presses preparing book and newspaper, and all the 10,000 wheels of work in motion.

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Witness the sufferings of the Waldenses, of the Albigenses, of the Nestorians. Witness St. Bartholomew's massacre. Witness the Duke of Alva driving out of life 18,000 Christians. Witness Herod and Nero and Decius and Hildebrand and Torquemada and Earl of Montfort and Lord Claverhouse, who, when told that he must give account for his cruelties, said: "I have no need to account to man, and, as for God, I will take him in my own hands."

The smoke of martyrs' homes and martyrs' bodies if rolling up all at once would have eclipsed the noon-day sun and turned the brightest day of the world ever saw into a midnight.

Has persecution ceased? Ask that young man who is trying to be a Christian in a store or factory, where from morning to night he is the butt of all the mean witticisms of unbelieving employes. Ask that wife whose husband makes her fondness for the house of God and even her kneeling prayer by the bedside a derision and is no more fit for her holy companionship than a filthy cow would be a fit companion for a robin or a golden oriole.

worthy to blacken your oldest shoes. When the bridge at Ashtabula broke and let down the most of the carload of passengers to instant death, Mr. P. P. Bliss was seated on one side of the aisle of the car writing down a Christian song which he was composing, and on the other side a group of men were playing cards.

A great complaint comes from the theatres about the ladies' high hats because they obstruct the view of the stage, and a lady reporter asked me what I thought about it, and I told her that if the indecent pictures of actresses in the show windows were accurate pictures of what goes on in many of the theatres night by night then it would be well if the ladies' hats were a mile high, so as to completely obstruct the vision.

For a compromise Christian character an easy time now, but for consecrated behavior grimace and caricature. For the body, thanks to the God of free America, there are now no swords or fiery stakes, but for the souls of thousands of the good, in a figurative sense, rack and gibbet and a torquemada. The symbol of the domestic and social and private and public suffering of a great multitude of God's dear children, pillars of smoke. What an exciting scene in India when during the Sepoy rebellion a regiment of Highlanders came up and found the dead body of one of General Wheeler's daughters, who had been insulted and mauled and slain by the Sepoys. So great was the wrath against these murderers that the Scotch regiment sat down, and, cutting off the hair of this dead daughter of General Wheeler, they divided it among them, and each one counted the number of hairs given him, and each took an oath, which was executed, that for each hair of the murdered daughter they would dash out the life of a bestial Sepoy.

But, as I already hinted in the first sentence of this sermon, nothing can be more beautiful than the figures of smoke of a clear sky. You can see what you will in the contour of this volatile vapor, now enchanted castles, now troops of horsemen, now banners, now processions, now winged couriers, now a black angel of wrath under a spear of the sunshine turned to an angel of light, and now from horizon to horizon the air is a picture gallery filled with masterpieces of which God is the artist, morning clouds of smoke born in the sunrise and evening clouds of smoke laid in the burnished sepulchres of the sunset.

The beauty of the transfigured smoke is a divine symbol of the beauty of the church. The fairest of all the fair is he. Do not call those persecutors of whom I spoke the church. They are the parasites of the church, not the church itself. Her mission is to cover the earth with a supernatural gladness, to open all prison doors, to balsam all the wounds, to moss all the graves, to burn up the night in the fireplace of a great morning, to change iron handcuffs into diamonded wristlets, to turn the whole race around, and whereas it faced death commanding it, "Right about face for heaven!"

Meet me at any depot the world over, and with my eyes closed take me by the hand and lead me so that my feet will not stumble, and without my once looking down or looking on the level take me to some high roof or tower and let me see the tops of the churches, and I will tell you the proportion of suicides, of arsonists, of murderers, of thieves. According as the churches are numerous as the churches are few the crimes are numerous. The most beautiful organization the world ever saw or ever will see is the much maligned church, the friend of all good, the foe of all evil, "fair as the moon and clear as the sun." Beautiful in her Author, beautiful in her mission, the heroine of the centuries, the bride of Christ, the queen of the nations!

You lying and hypocritical world, shut up those slanders about the church of Christ, an institution which, far from being what it ought to be, and never pretending to be perfect, is 500 times better than any other institution that the world ever saw or ever dreamed of. The highest honor I ever had, and the highest honor I shall ever receive, and the highest honor I ever want is to be my name on her records as a member. At her altars I repented. At her sacraments I believed. In her service let me die. From her doors let me be buried. O church of God! Thou home of the righteous! Thou harbor from tempest! Thou refuge from the weary! Thou lighthouse of many nations! Thou type of heaven! I could kiss thy very dust with ecstasy of affection.

Victor Hugo in his book entitled "Ninety-three," says: "Nothing calmer than smoke, but nothing more startling. There are peaceful smokes, and there are evil ones. The thickness and color of a line of smoke make the whole difference between war and peace, between fraternity and hatred. The whole happiness of man or his complete misery is sometimes expressed in this thin vapor which the wind scatters at will." The great Frenchman was right, but I go further and say that as the kingdom of God advances like pillars of smoke the black volumes belching

from batteries of war and pouring out from portholes of ships will vanish.

A distinguished general of our civil war told me that Abraham Lincoln proposed to avoid our civil conflict by purchase of all the slaves of the south and setting them free. He calculated what would be a reasonable price for them, and, when the number of millions of dollars that would be required for such a purchase was announced, the proposition was scouted, and the north would not have made the offer, and the south would not have accepted it if made. "But," said my military friend, "the war went on, and just the number of millions of dollars that Mr. Lincoln calculated would have been enough to make a reasonable purchase of all the slaves were spent in war, besides all the precious lives that were hurled away in the 250 battles." In other words there ought to be some other way for men to settle their controversies without butchery.

The church of God will yet become the arbiter of nations. If the world would allow it, it could today step in between Germany and France and settle the troubles about Alsace and Lorraine, and between England and her antagonists, and between all the other nations that are flying at each other's throats and command peace and disband armies and harness for the plow the war horse now being hitched to ammunition wagons or saddled for cavalry charge. That time must come, or through the increased facility for shooting men and blowing up cities and whelming hosts to instant death, so that we can kill a regiment easier than we could once kill a company and a brigade easier than we could once kill a regiment, the patent offices of the world more busy than ever in recognizing new machinery of destruction, the human race will after awhile go fighting with one arm, and hobbling with one foot, and stumbling along with one eye, and some ingenious inventor, inspired of the archangel of all mischief, will contrive a machine that will bore a hole to the earth's center, and some desperate nation will throw into that hole enough dynamite to blow this hulk of a planet into fragments, dropping the meteoric stones on surrounding stellar habitations.

But this shall not be, for whatever I let go I hang on to my Bible, which tells me that the blacksmith's shop shall yet come to its grandest use when the warrior and the husbandman shall enter it side by side, and the soldier shall throw his sword into its bank of fires his sword, and the farmer shall pick it up as a plowshare, and the straightest spear shall be bent into a crook at each end and then cut in two, and what was one spear shall be two pruning hooks. Down with Moloch and up with Christ! Let no more war horses eat out of the manger where Jesus was born. "Glorious to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men!"

It is demonstrated to all honest men that it is not so certain that William Cullen Bryant wrote "Thanatopsis" or Longfellow wrote "Hiawatha" as that God, by the hand of prophet and apostle, wrote the Bible. All the wise men in science and law and medicine and literature and merchandise are gradually coming to believe in Christianity, and soon there will be no people who disbelieve in it except those conspicuous for lack of brain or men with two families, who do not like the Bible because it rebukes their swinish propensities.

The time is hastening when there will be no infidels left except libertines and harlots and murderers. Millions of Christians were once there were thousands, and thousands where once there were hundreds. What a bright evening this, the evening of the nineteenth century! And the twentieth century, which is about to dawn, will, in my opinion, bring universal victory for Christ and the church that now is marching on with step double quick or, if you prefer the figure of the text, is being swept on in the mighty gales of blessing imposing and grand and majestic and swift like pillars of smoke.

Oh, come into the church through Christ the door, a door more glorious than that of the temple of Hercules— which had two pillars, and one was gold and the other emerald! Come in to-day! The world you leave behind is a poor world, and it will burn and pass off like pillars of smoke. Whether the final conflagration will start in the coal mines of Pennsylvania, which, in some places, have for many years, been burning and eating into the heart of the mountains, or whether it shall begin near the California geysers or whether from out the furnaces of Cotopaxi and Vesuvius and Stromboli it shall burst forth upon the astonished nations, I make no prophecy, but all geologists tell us that we stand on the lid of a world, the heart of which is a raging, roaring, awful flame, and some day God will let the red monsters out of their imprisonment of centuries, and New York on fire in 1835, and Charleston on fire in 1865, and Chicago on fire in 1872, and Boston on fire in 1873 were only like one spark from a blacksmith's forge as compared with that fast universal blaze which will be seen in other worlds. But gradually the flames will lessen, and the world will become a great living coal, and that will take on ashen hue, and then our ruined planet will begin to smoke, and the mountains will smoke, and the valleys will smoke, and the islands will smoke, and the seas will smoke, and the cities will smoke, and the five continents will be five pillars of smoke.

When wrapped in fire the realms of ether glow. And heaven's last thunders shake the earth below. Thou, undismayed, shalt o'er the ruins smile. And light thy torch at Nature's funeral pile.

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