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A HOLY REBUILDING.

DR. TALMAGE APPLIES THE EXAMPLE OF NEHEMIAH TO CHRISTIAN LIFE.

A Dead City - Nehemiah, a Captive, Longs to Rebuild the Home of His Fathers. His Moonlight Ride - Why and How the Heart of Man Must Be Reconstructed.

BROOKLYN, March 17. - At the tabernacle this morning the Rev. T. De Witt Talmage, D. D., expounded the seventh chapter of Ecclesiastes. He afterwards gave out the hymn beginning,

Grace 'tis a charming sound, Harmonious to the ear,

which was sung by the vast congregation with magnificent effect. The subject of Dr. Talmage's sermon was, 'The Moonlight Ride,' and the text, Nehemiah ii, 15: 'Then I went up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.' He said:

A dead city is more suggestive than a living city - past Rome than present Rome - ruins rather than newly frescoed cathedral. But the best time to visit a ruin is by moonlight. The Coliseum is far more fascinating to the traveler after sundown than before. You may stand by daylight amid the monastic ruins of Melrose Abbey and study shafted oriel, and resseted stone and mullion, and they throw their strongest witchery by moonlight.

Wouldst thou view fair Melrose aight, Go visit it by the pale moonlight.

Washington Irving describes the Andalusian moonlight upon the Alhambra ruins as amounting to an enchantment. My text presents you Jerusalem in ruins. The tower down. The gates down. The walls down. Everything down. Nehemiah on horseback, by moonlight looking upon the ruins. While he rides, there are some friends on foot going with him, for they do not want the many horses to disturb the suspicions of the people.

Now he shines off at the charred timbers. Now he comes along where the water under the moonlight flashes from the mouth of the brazen dragon after which the gate was named. Heavy hearted Nehemiah! Riding in and out, now by his old home desolated, now by the defaced temple, now amid the scars of the city that had gone down under battering ram and conflagration. The escorting party knows not what Nehemiah means. Is he getting crazy? Have his own personal sorrows, added to the sorrows of the nation, unbalanced his intellect? Still the moonlight exploration goes on. Nehemiah on horseback rides through the fish gate, by the tower of the furnace, by the king's pool, by the dragon well, in and out, in and out, until the midnight ride is completed, and Nehemiah dismounts from his horse, and to the amazed and confounded and incredulous body guard declares the dead secret of his heart when he says: 'Come, now, let us build Jerusalem.' 'What, Nehemiah, have you any money?' 'No.' 'Have you any kingly authority?' 'No.' 'Yet that midnight, moonlight ride of Nehemiah resulted in the glorious rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. The people knew not how the thing was to be done, but with great enthusiasm they cried out, 'Let us rise up now and build the city.'

Some people laughed and said it could not be done. Some people were infuriated and offered physical violence, saying the thing should not be done. But the workmen went right on, standing on the wall, trowel in one hand, sword in the other until the work was gloriously completed. At that very time, in Greece, Xenophon was writing a history, and Plato was making philosophy, and Demosthenes was rattling his rhetorical thunder, but all of them together did not do so much for the world as this midnight, moonlight ride of praying, courageous, homesick, close mouthed Nehemiah.

REBUILDING OF ZION.

My subject first impresses me with the idea what an intense thing is church affection. Seize the bridle of that horse and stop Nehemiah. Why are you risking your life here in the night? Your horse will stumble over these ruins and fall on you. Stop this useless exposure of your life. No; Nehemiah will not stop. He at last tells us the whole story. He lets us know he was an exile in a far distant land, and he was a servant, a cup bearer in the palace of Artaxerxes Longimanus, and one day, while he was handing the cup of wine to the king, the king said to him: 'What is the matter with you? You are not sick. I know you must have some great trouble. What is the matter with you?' Then he told the king how that beloved Jerusalem was broken down; how that his father's tomb had been desecrated; how that the Temple had been dishonored and defaced; how that the walls were scattered and broken. 'Well,' says King Artaxerxes, 'what do you want?' 'Well,' said the cup bearer Nehemiah, 'I want to go home. I want to fix up the grave of my father. I want to restore the beauty of the Temple. I want to rebuild the masonry of the city wall. Besides, I want passports so that I shall not be hindered in my journey. And besides that,' as you will find in the context, 'I want an order on the man who keeps your forest for just so much timber as I may need for the rebuilding of the city.' 'How long shall you be gone?' said the king. The time of absence is arranged. In hot haste this seeming adventurer comes to Jerusalem, and in my next text we find him on horseback, in the midnight, riding around the ruins. It is through the spectacles of this scene that we discover the ardent attachment of Nehemiah for sacred Jerusalem, which in all ages has been the type of the church of God, our Jerusalem, which we love just as much as Nehemiah loved his Jerusalem. The fact is that you love the church of God so much that there is no spot on earth so sacred, unless it is your own fire-side. The church has been to you so much comfort and illumination that there is nothing that makes you so irate as to have it talked against. If there have been times when you have been carried into captivity by sickness, you longed for the church, our holy Jerusalem, just as much as Nehemiah longed for his Jerusalem, and the first day you came out you came to the house of the Lord. When the Temple was in ruins as ours was years ago, like Nehemiah, you walked around and looked at it, and in the moonlight you stood listening if you could not hear the voice of the dead organ, the psalm of the expired Sabbath. What Jerusalem was to Nehemiah, the church of God is to you. Skeptics and infidels may scoff at the church as an obsolete affair, as a relic of the dark ages, as a convention of giddy goodly people, but all the impression they have ever made on your mind against the church of God is absolutely nothing. You would make more sacrifice for it today than for any other institution, and if it were needful you would die in its

defense. You can take the words of the kingly post as he said, 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.' You understand in your own experience the pathos, the homesickness, the courage, the holy enthusiasm of Nehemiah in his midnight, moonlight ride around the ruins of his beloved Jerusalem.

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE HEART.

Again, my text impresses me with the fact that, before reconstruction, there must be an exploration of ruins. Why was not Nehemiah asleep under the covers? Why was not his horse stabled in the midnight? Let the police of the city arrest this midnight rider, out on some mischief. No, Nehemiah is going to rebuild the city, and he is making the preliminary exploration. In this gate, out that gate, east, west, north, south. All through the ruins. The ruins must be explored before the work of reconstruction can begin. The reason that so many people in this day, apparently converted, do not stay converted is because they did not first explore the ruins of their own heart. The reason that there are so many professed Christians who in this day lie and forgo and stent, and commit adultery, and go to the penitentiary, is because they first do not learn the ruin of their own heart. They have not found out that 'the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.' They had an idea that they were almost right, and they built religion as a sort of extension, as an ornamental cupola. There was a superstructure of religion built on a substratum of unrepented sins. The trouble with a good deal of modern theology is that instead of building on the right foundation, it builds on the debris of an unregenerated nature. They attempt to rebuild Jerusalem before, in the midnight of conviction, they have seen the glassiness of the ruin. They have such a poor foundation for their religion that the first northeast storm of temptation blows them down. I have no faith in a man's conversion if he is not converted in the old-fashioned way - John Bunyan's way, John Wesley's way, John Calvin's way, Paul's way, Christ's way, God's way. A dentist once said to me: 'Does that hurt?' 'Said I: 'Of course it hurts. It is in your business as in my profession. We have to hurt before we can help.' You will never understand religion until you understand ruin. A man tells me that some one is a member of the church. It makes no impression on my mind at all. I simply want to know whether he was converted in the old-fashioned way, or whether he was converted in the new-fashioned way. If he was converted in the old-fashioned way he will stand. If he was converted in the new-fashioned way he will not stand. That is all there is about it. A man wishes to me to talk about religion. The first question I ask him is: 'Do you feel yourself to be a sinner?' If he says, 'Well, I - yes,' the hesitancy makes me feel that that man wants a ride on Nehemiah's horse by midnight through the ruins - in by the gate of his affections, out by the gate of his will; and before he has got through with that midnight ride he will drop the reins on the horse's neck, and will take his right hand and smite on his heart and say: 'God be merciful to me, a sinner!' and before he has stabled his horse he will take his feet out of the stirrups, and he will slide down on the ground and he will kneel, crying, 'Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy loving kindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions, for I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sins are ever before thee.' Ah, my friends, you see this is not a complimentary gospel. That is what makes some people so mad. It comes to a man of a million dollars and unrepentant in his sins, and says, 'You're a pauper.' It comes to a woman of fairest cheek, who has never repented, and says, 'You're a sinner.' It comes to a man priding himself on his independence, and says, 'You're bound hand and foot by the devil.' It comes to our entire race and says, 'You're a ruin, a ghastly ruin, an illimitable ruin.' Satan sometimes says to me, 'Why do you preach that truth? Why don't you preach a gospel with no repentance in it? Why don't you flatter men's hearts so that you make them feel all right? Why don't you preach a humanitarian gospel with no repentance in it, saying nothing about the ruin, talking all the time about redemption?' I say, 'Get thee behind me, Satan.' I would rather lead five souls the right way than twenty thousand the wrong way. The redemption of the gospel is a perfect farce if there is no ruin. 'The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.' If any one, though he be an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel than this,' says the apostle, 'let him be accursed.' There must be the midnight ride over the ruins before Jerusalem can be built. There must be the clicking of the hoofs before there can be the ringing of the trowels.

CHRISTIAN PERSEVERANCE.

Again, My subject gives me a specimen of buoyant and triumphant sadness. If there was any man in the world who had a right to moan and give up everything as lost, it was Nehemiah. You say, 'He was a cup bearer in the palace of Shushan, and it was a grand place.' So it was. The hall of that palace was two hundred feet square, and the roof hovered over thirty-six marble pillars, each pillar sixty feet high, and the intense blue of the sky, and the deep green of the forest foliage, and the white of the driven snow, all hung trembling in the upholstery. But, my friends, you know very well that fine architecture will not put down homesickness. Yet Nehemiah did not give up. Then when you see him going among these desolated streets, and by these dismantled towers, and by the torn up grave of his father, you would suppose that he would have been disheartened, and that he would have dismounted from his horse and gone to his room and said: 'Woe is me. My father's grave is torn up. The temple is dishonored. The walls are broken down. I have no money with which to rebuild. I wish I had never been born. I wish I were dead.' Not so says Nehemiah. Although he had a grief so intense that it excited the commentary of his king, yet that penniless, expatriated Nehemiah rouses himself up to rebuild the city. He gets his permission of absence. He gets his passports. He hastens away to Jerusalem. By night on horseback he rides through the ruins. He overcomes the most ferocious opposition. He arouses the pious and patriotic of the people, and in less than two months, namely, in fifty-two days, Jerusalem was rebuilt. That's what I call busy and triumphant sadness.

My friends, the whole temptation is with you when you have trouble, to do just the opposite to the behavior of Nehemiah, and that is to give up. You say, 'I have lost my child and can never smile again.' You say, 'I have lost my property, and I never can repair my fortunes.' You say, 'I have fallen into sin, and I never can start again for a new life.' If Satan can make you form that resolution, and make you keep it, he has ruined you. Trouble is not sent to crush you, but to arouse you, to animate you, to propel you. The blacksmith does not thrust the iron into the forge, and then blow away with the bellows, and then bring the hot iron out on the anvil and beat with stroke after stroke to ruin the iron, but to prepare it for a better use. Oh that the Lord God of Nehemiah would rouse up all broken hearted people to rebuild. Whipped, betrayed, shipwrecked, imprisoned Paul went right on. The Italian martyr Algerius sits in his dungeon writing a

(Continued on page three.)

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