

DR. TALMAGE'S SERMON.

TWENTY-THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE GREAT DIVINE.

An Interesting and Instructive Review of the History of the Three Tabernacles That Have Been the Home of the Doctor's Church.

Triumph of the Tabernacles. Last Sunday was a festival day at the Tabernacle. Dr. Talmage celebrated the twenty-third anniversary of his settlement in Brooklyn. In white flow- ers embedded in green at the back of the pulpit stood the inscription, "1859 and 1892." Dr. Talmage's subject was "The Three Tabernacles, a Story of Trials and Triumphs," and his text, Luke ix, 33, "Let us make three tabernacles."

Our Arab ponies were almost dead with fatigue, as, in December, 1889, we rode near the foot of Mount Hermon in the Holy Land, the mountain called by one "a mountain of ice," by another, "a glittering breastplate of ice," by another "the Mont Blanc of Palestine." Its top has almost unceasingly brilliant. But what must it have been in the time to which my text refers? Peter and James and John were on that mountain top when suddenly Christ's face took on the glow of the Christ's day, and Moses and Elijah, who had been dead for centuries, came out from the heavenly world and talked with our Saviour. What an overwhelming scene—Moses representing the law, Elijah, representing the prophets, and Christ, representing all worlds.

Impetuous Peter was so wrought upon by the presence of this wondrous throng that, without waiting for time to consider how propitious was the propo- sition, he cried out, "Let us make three tabernacles: one for Thee, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Where would they get the material for building one tabernacle, much less material enough to build two tabernacles, and still, how would they get the material for building three? Where the gold? Where the silver? Where the curtains? Where the costly adornments? Heron is a barren peak, and the mountain tabernacle in such a place would have been an undertaking beyond human achievement, and Peter was propounding the impossible when he cried out in enthu- siasm, "Let us build three tabernacles."

And yet that is what this congrega- tion have been called to do and have done. The first Brooklyn Tabernacle was dedicated in 1870 and destroyed by fire in 1872. The second Brooklyn Tabernacle was dedicated in 1874 and destroyed by fire in 1889. The third Brooklyn Tabernacle was dedicated in April, 1891, and in that we are worship- ing to-day. What sounded absurd for Peter to propose, when he said on Mount Hermon, in the words of my text, "Let us build three tabernacles," we have not only done, but in the mysterious providence of God we were compelled to do.

We have been unjustly criticised by people who did not know the facts, sometimes for putting so much money in such buildings, and sometimes not giving as much as we ought to this or that denominational project, and no explanation has yet been made. Before I get through with the delivery of this sermon and its publication and distri- bution, I shall show that no church on earth has ever done more gloriously, and that no church ever conquered more trials, and that no membership ever had in it more heroes and heroines than this Brooklyn Tabernacle, and I mean to have it known that any individual or religious newspaper or secular paper that hereafter casts any reflection on this church's fidelity and generosity, is guilty of a wickedness for which God will hold him or it responsible.

One year it was sent out through a syndicate of newspapers that this church was doing nothing in the way of liberality, when we had that year raised \$94,000 in hard cash for religious uses. There has been persistent and hemis- pheric lying against this church. We have raised during my pastorate for church building and church purposes, \$998,000, or practically a million dollars. Not an Irish famine, or a Charleston earthquake, or an Ohio freshet, or a Chicago conflagration, but our church was among the first to help. We have given free seats in the morning and evening services to 240,000 strangers a year, and that in twenty years would amount to 4,800,000 auditors. We have received into our membership 5,357 members, and that is only a small portion of the num- ber of those who have been benedict- ed to God from all parts of this land and from other lands.

Under the blessing of God and through the kindness of the printing press my sermons now go every week into every neighborhood in Christendom, and are regularly translated into nearly all the great languages of Europe and Asia. The syndicates having charge of this sermonic publication informed me a few days ago that my printed sermons every week in this and other lands, go into the hands of 25,000,000 people. During the last year, I am authoritatively in- formed, over 2,000 different periodicals were added to the list of those who make this publication, and yet there are ministers of the gospel and religious newspapers that systematically and industriously and continuously charge this church with idleness and selfishness and parsimony.

I call the attention of the whole earth to this outrage that has been heaped upon the Brooklyn Tabernacle, though a more consecrated, benevolent and splendid convocation of men and women were never gathered together outside of Heaven. I have before responded to these injuries and probably will never refer to them again, but I wish the people of this country and other countries to know that what they read concerning the selfishness and indolence and lack of benevolence and lack of missionary spirit on the part of this church is from top to bottom and from stem to stern falsehood—dastardly false- hood—diabolical falsehood. What I said against myself has no effect, except the like that of a course Turkish towel, the rubbing down by which improves circula- tion and produces good health.

But this continuous misrepresentation of my beloved church, in the name of Almighty God, I denounce, while I appeal to the fair-minded men and women to see that justice is done this people, who, within a few years, have gone through a struggle that no other church in any land or any age has been called to endure, and I call no other church may ever be called to endure, viz., the building of three tabernacles. I ask the friends of the Brooklyn Taber-

nacle to cut out this sermon from the newspapers and put it in their pocket- books, so that they can intelligently an- swer our fathers, whether clerical or lay.

And with those you may put that other statement, which recently went through the country, and which I saw in Detroit, which said that the Brooklyn Taberna- cle had a financial struggle because it had all along been paying the pastor a monthly salary to his pastor, Dr. Talmage, when the fact is that, after our last dis- aster and for two years, I gave all my salary to the church building fund, and I received \$7,000 less than nothing. In other words, in addition to serving this church gratuitously for two years, I let it have \$6,000 for building purposes. Why is it that people could not do justice and say that all our financial struggles as a church cannot be traced to what Peter, in my text, absurdly proposed to do, but which, in the inscrutable providence of God, we were compelled to do—build three tabernacles.

Now, feel better that this is off my mind. The great sermon will be spun out of hosannahs. I announce to you this day that we are at last, as a church, in smooth waters. Arrangements have been made by which our financial difficulties are now fully and lastingly adjusted, and our income will exceed our outgo, and Brooklyn Taber- nacle will be yours and belong to you and your children after you, and any- thing you see contrary to this you may put down to the confirmed habit which I have of making a sermon for the benefit of this church and they cannot stop. When I came to Brooklyn I came to a small church and a big indebtedness. We have now this, the largest Protest- ant church in America, and financially a condition which is worth envy, and beyond all indebtedness, considerably more than \$150,000.

I have preached here twenty-three years, and I expect, if my life and health are continued, to preach here twenty- three years more. I would like to do well to remember that our breath is in our nostrils, and any hour we may be called to give an account of our stewardship. All we ask for the future is that you do your best, contributing all you can to the support of our insti- tutions. Our best hope is to come to our greatest revivals of religion and our mightiest outpourings of the Holy Ghost. We have got through the Red Sea, and stand to-day on the other bank clapping the cymbals of victory.

Do you wonder that last Sabbath I asked you in the midst of the service to rise and sing with jubilant voice the long meter Doxology:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,

Praise Him, all creatures here and below,

Praise Him above, ye heavenly host,

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Yes, twenty-three years have passed since I came to Brooklyn, and they have been to me eventful years, and they have been a protracted church to which I came, a church so flat down it could drop no further. Through controversies which it would be useless to rehearse it was all but extinct, and for a long while it had been a church of the dead, and a high box pulpit which slant in the preacher as though he were dangerous to be let loose, or it acted as a barricade that was unnecessary to keep back the people, for they were so few that a minister of ordinary capacity could have kept back all who were there. My first Sab- bath in Brooklyn was a sad day, for I did not realize how far the church was down until then, and on the evening of that day my own brother, through whose pulpit I entered the city, died, and the tidings of his decease reached me at 6 o'clock in the evening, and I was to preach at half past 7.

But from that day the blessing of God was on us, and in three months we began to see signs of new life in the building. Before the close of that year, we resolved to construct the first Tabernacle. By the help of God and the indomit- able and unparalleled energy of our trust- ees (here and there one of them present to-day, but the rest in a better world), we got the building ready for consecra- tion, and on Sept. 25, 1870, morning and evening dedicatory services were held, and in the afternoon the children with sweet and multitudinous voices consecrated the place to God. Twenty thousand dollars had to be raised to pay the floating debt. In the morning of Dr. Stephen H. Tyng, the clergyman of the Episcopal Church and the choristom of the American pulpit, preached a sermon which lingered in my gracious effects as long as the building stood. He read enough out of the Episcopal prayer book to keep himself from being reimprisoned by his bishop for preaching at a non- Episcopal service, and we, although be- longing to another denomination, re- spected his ministry. When I thought we were used to the liturgy "God Lord, deliver us!"

During the short time we occupied that building we had a constant down- pouring of religious awakenings. Hosannah! One Sunday morning, in December, 1872, the thermometer nearly down to zero, I was on my way to church. There was an excitement in the street and much smoke in the air. Fire engines rushed past, but my mind was on the sermon I was about to preach, and I sud- denly rushed up and told me that our shrewd was going up in the same kind of chariot that Elijah took from the banks of the Jordan. That Sunday morning I was with it, working my hands and my feet on the cheeks of many thou- sands standing in the street, and the crash that shook the earth, is as vivid as though it were yesterday. But it was not a perfect loss.

All we wish to do something, and as on such occasions sensible people are apt to do unusual things, one of the members, at the risk of his life, rushed in among the fallen walls, mounted the pulpit and took a glass of water from the table and brought it in safety to the street. So you see it was not a total loss. Within an hour from many churches came kind invitations to oc- cupy their buildings, and laughing against a lamp post, and they were ready, before 12 o'clock that morning, was on a board with the inscription, "The con- gregation of Brooklyn Tabernacle will worship to-night in Plymouth church."

It was full of commotion for me, and my homeless flock, and I preached that night the sermon that I intended to preach that morning in my own church, the text concerning the precious mas- taster box broken at the feet of Christ, and sure enough we had one very precious broken that day. We were, as I said, obliterated. "But arise and build," said many voices. Another architect took the amphitheatrical plan of a church, which, in the first instance, was necessarily somewhat rude, and de- veloped into an elaborate plan, which I immediately adopted. But how to raise the money for such an expensive undertaking was the question—expensive not because of any senseless adornment proposed, but expensive because of the size of the building needed to hold our congregation.

It was at that time when for years our entire country was suffering, not from a financial panic, but from that long con- tinued financial depression which all business men remember, and the cloud hung heavy year after year and com- mercial establishments without number went down. Through what struggles we passed the Eternal God and some brave souls to-day remember. Many a man I have gladly accepted, called to some other field, but I could not leave the flock in the wilderness. At last, after in the interregnum having wor- shipped in our beautiful Academy of Music, on the morning of Feb. 22, 1874, the anniversary of the Washington who conquered impossibilities and on the Sabbath that always celebrates the resurrection, Dr. Byron Sunderland, Chaplain of the United States Senate, thrilled us through and through with a dedicatory sermon from Isaiah li, 9, "The glory of this house shall be greater than that of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts."

The corner stone of that building had been laid by the illustrious and now en- throned Dr. James Freeman. On the whole a solemn day, and, as many others, Dr. Dowling, of the Baptist Church; Dr. Crook, of the Methodist Church; Mr. Beecher, of the Congrega- tional Church, and Dr. French, of the Presbyterian Church. Hosannah! Another \$25,000 was raised on that day. The following Sunday 325 souls were received into our communion, mostly on confession of faith. At two other com- munion of 500 souls joined at each one. At another inquiring 628 souls were added to our church, and many others, Dr. Dowling, of the Baptist Church; Dr. Crook, of the Methodist Church; Mr. Beecher, of the Congrega- tional Church, and Dr. French, of the Presbyterian Church. Hosannah! Another \$25,000 was raised on that day. The following Sunday 325 souls were received into our communion, mostly on confession of faith. At two other com- munion of 500 souls joined at each one. At another inquiring 628 souls were added to our church, and many others, Dr. Dowling, of the Baptist Church; Dr. Crook, of the Methodist Church; Mr. Beecher, of the Congrega- tional Church, and Dr. French, of the Presbyterian Church. Hosannah! Another \$25,000 was raised on that day.

The work done in that church on Schermerhorn street can never be un- done. What sacrifices on the part of many, who gave almost till the blood came! "What hallelujahs! What victo- ries! What triumphs! What plays with full organ! What baptisms! What sacraments! What obsequies! One of them on a snowy Sabbath afternoon, when all Brooklyn seemed to sympa- thize, and my eldest son, bearing my own name, lay beneath the pulpit in the last sleep, and Florence Rice Knox sang, and a score of ministers on and around the platform tried to interpret how it was best that one who had just come to manhood, and with brightest worldly prospects, should be taken, and we left with a heart that will not cease to ache until we meet where tears never fall.

That second Tabernacle! What a stupendous reminiscence! But if the Peter of my text had known what an undertaking it is to build two tabernacles, he would have proposed two, to get rid of nothing of three. As an anniversary sermon must needs be somewhat auto- biographical, let me say I have not been idle. During the standing of those two Tabernacles fifty-two books, under as many titles, made up from my writings, were published. During that time, also, I was permitted to discuss all the great questions of the day in all the great cities of this continent and in many of them many times, besides preaching and lecturing ninety-six times in England, Scotland and Ireland in ninety-four days.

During all that time, as well as since, I was engaged in editing a religious newspaper, believing that such a peri- odical was capable of great usefulness, and I have been a constant contributor to all the religious periodicals. Mean- while all things had become easy in the Brooklyn Tabernacle. On a Sabbath in October, 1889, I announced to my con- gregation that I would in a few weeks visit the Holy Land and that the officers of the church had consented to my going, and the wish of a lifetime was about to be fulfilled. The next Sabbath morning, about 2 o'clock or just after mid- night, a member of my household awakened me by saying that there was a strange light in the sky. A thunder- storm had left the air full of electricity, and from horizon to horizon everything seemed to blaze. But that did not dis- turb me, until an observation taken from the cupola of my house declared that the second Tabernacle was putting on its last gleam.

I scouted the idea and turned over on the pillow for another sleep, but a num- ber of excited voices called me to the roof, and I went up and saw clearly de- fined in the night the fiery catafalque of our second Tabernacle. When I saw that I said to my family: "I think that ends my work in Brooklyn. Surely the Lord will not call a minister to build three churches in one city. The building of one church generally ends the usefulness of a pastor; how can I have one beside at the building of three churches? But before twenty-four hours had passed we were compelled to cry out, with Peter of my text, "Let us build three tabernacles." We must have a home some- where.

The old site had ceased to be the center of our congregation, and the center of the congregation, as near as we could find it, is where we now stand. Having sold the site, we were to build on it a barn or a Tabernacle beautiful and mod- ern; our common sense, as well as our religion, commanded the latter. But what push, what industry, what skill, what self sacrifice, what faith in God were necessary! Impassioned sacrifices and dances without number were thrown in the way and had it not been for the perse- verance of our church officials and the practical help of many people and the prayer of millions of good souls in all parts of the earth and the blessing of Almighty God, the work would not have been done.

But it is done, and all good people who behold the structure feel in their hearts a lamp that never goes out with the day. "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts." On the third Sabbath of last April this church was dedicated, Dr. Hamilton of Washington, preaching an inspiring sermon, Dr. Wenden Prime of New York, reading the dedicatory prayer, and some fifteen clergymen during the day took part in the services. Hosannah!

How suggestive to many of us are the words spelled out in flowers above the pulpit—"1869" and "1892"—for those dates bound what raptures, what griefs, what struggles, what triumphs! I men- tion it as a matter of gratitude to God that in these twenty-three years I have missed but one Sabbath through physical indisposition, and but three in the thirty- six years of my ministry. And now, having reached the twenty-third mile- stone, I start anew. I have in my memorandum books analyses of more sermons than I have ever preached, and I have preached, as near as I can tell, about three thousand, three hundred and eighty.

During these past years I have learned two or three things. Among others I have learned that "all things work to- gether for good." My positive mode of preaching has sometimes seemed to stir the hostilities of all earth and hell. Feeling called upon fifteen years ago to explore underground New York city life, that I might report the evils to be com- bated, I took with me two elders of my church and a New York Police Commis- sioner and a policeman, and I explored and reported the horrors that needed re- moval, and the altitudes that endan- gered our young men. There came upon me an outbreak, assumed indig- nation that frightened almost every body but myself. That exploration put into my church thirty or forty newspaper correspondents, from north, south, east, and west, which opened for me new avenues in which to preach the Gospel that otherwise would never have been opened.

Years passed on and I preached a series of sermons on Amusements, and a false report of what I did say—and one of the sermons said to have been preached by me was not mine in a single word— roused a violence that threatened me with poison and dirk and pistol and other forms of extinguishment, until the chief of Brooklyn police, without any suggestion from me, took possession of the church and twenty-four policemen turned out for our advantage, and ought I to believe that "all things work to- gether for good?" Hosannah!

Another lesson I have learned during these twenty-three years is that it is not necessary to preach error or pick flaws in the old Bible in order to get an audi- ence; the old Book without any fixing up is good enough for me, and higher criti- cism, as it is called, means lower reli- gion. Higher criticism is another form of infidelity, and its disciples will be- lieve less and less, until many of them will land in Nowhere, and become the worshippers of an idol "What is it?" The most of these higher critics seem to be seeking notoriety by pitching into the Bible. It is such a brave thing to strike your grandmother. The old Gos- pel put in modern phrase, and without any of the conventionalisms, and adapted to all the wants and woes of humanity, I have found the mightiest magnet, and we have never lacked an audience.

Next to the blessing of my own family I account the blessing that I have al- ways had a great multitude of people to preach to. That old Gospel I have preached to you these twenty-three years of my Brooklyn pastorate, and that old Gospel I will preach till I die, and charge my son, who is on the way to the ministry, to preach it after me, for I remember Paul's thunderbolt, "If any man preach any other Gospel, let him be accursed." And now, as I stand be- fore my twenty-third anniversary, I see two audiences. The one is made up of all those who have worshipped with us in the past, but have been translated to higher realms.

What groups of children—too fair and too sweet and too lovely for earth, and the Lord took them, but they seem present to-day. The group has gone out of the world, and the pallor from the cheek, and they have on them the health and radiance of Heaven. Hall, groups of glorified children! How glad I am to have you come to us to-day! And here sit those aged ones who de- parted this life leaving an arid and des- erted home and church. Where are your staffs, and where are your gray locks, and where your stooping shoulders, ye blessed old folks? "Oh, they do say, 'we are all young again, and the bath in the river from under the throne has made us as agile as bounding. In the place from which we come they use no staffs, but scepters!" Hall, fathers and mothers in Israel! How glad we are to have you come back to greet us!

But the other audience I see in imagi- nation is made up of all those to whom we have had opportunity as a church, directly or indirectly, of representing the Gospel. Yea, all my parishies seem to come back to-day. The people of my first charge in Belleville, N. J. The people of my second charge in Syracuse, N. Y. The people of my third charge in Philadelphia. And the people of all these three Brooklyn Tabernacles. Look at them, and all those whom through the printing press we have invited to God and Heaven now seeming to sit in gal- leries—fifty galleries, 100 galleries, 1,000 galleries high.

I greet them all in your name and in Christ's name, and I have con- fronted from my first sermon in my first village charge, where my lips trembled and my knees knocked together from fright, speaking from the text, Jeremi- ah li, 6, "Ah, Lord God, behold I cannot speak for I am a child, until the morning I preach to-day from Luke ix, 33, "Let us make three tabernacles," those of the past and the present, all gather in imagination if not in reality, all of us grateful to God for past mercies, all of us anxious to improve our present opportunities, all hopeful for eternal raptures, and while the visible and the invisible audiences of the present and the past commingle, I give out to be sung by those who sit here to-day, and to be sung by those who shall read of this scene of reminiscence and congratulation, that hymn which has been con- rrolled on since Isaac Watts started it 150 years ago:

Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.

Some people never pray until they get into close quarters.

Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.

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