WORD OF THE LORD

Rev. Dr. Talmage's Sermon on the Hen and Chickens.

THE LESSION OF PROTECTION.

Why Christ Selected the Homely Comparison—The World Is Just What We Make It.

BROOKLYN, Feb. 26.—Previous to the sermon in the Brooklyn Tabernacle this morning Rev. Dr. Talmage, in giving out a number of notices, dwelt upon the fact that certain picture makers of Brooklyn had used his name as a reference in their advertisements and circulars without his authority. Thousands of letters of complaint have come to him in this respect, and he wanted it distinctly understood that he knew nothing of these people or their business methods. The text selected for the morning sermon was Matthew xxiii, 37, "As a hen gatheredh her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."

Jerusalem was in sight as Christ came to to the crest of Mount Olivet, a height of 700 feet. The splendors of the religious capital of the whole earth irradiated the landscape. There is the temple. Yonder is the king's palace. Spread out before his eyes are the pomp, the wealth, the wickedness and the coming destruction of Jerusalem, and he bursts into tears at the thought of the obduracy of a place that he would gladly have saved, and apostrophizes, saying: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gatheredh her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."

Why did Christ select hen and chickens as a simile? Next to the appositeness of the comparison I think it was to help all public teachers in the matter of illustration to get down off their stilts and use comparisons that all can understand. The plainest bird on earth is the barnyard fowl. Its only adornments are the red comb in its headdress and the wattles under the throat. It has no grandeur of genealogy. All we know is that its ancestors came from India, some of them from a height of 4,000 feet on the sides of the Himalayas. It has no pretension of nest like the eagle's eyrie. It has no luster of plumage like the goldfinch. Possessing anatomy that allows flight, yet about the last thing it wants to do is to fly, and in retreat uses foot almost as much as wing.

Musicians have written out in musical scale the song of lark and robin redbreast and nightingale, yet the hen of my text hath nothing that could be taken for a song, but only cluck and cackle. Yet Christ in the text uttered, while looking upon doomed Jerusalem, declares that what he had wished for that city was like what the hen does for her chickens. Christ was thus simple in his teachings, and yet how hard it is for us, who are Sunday school instructors and editors and preachers and reformers, and those who would gain the ears of audiences, to attain that heavenly and divine art of simplicity.

We have to run a course of literary disorders as children a course of physical disorders. We come out of school and college loaded down with Greek mythologies and out of the theological seminary weighed down with what the learned fathers said, and we fly with wings of eagles and flamingoes and albatrosses, and it takes a good while before we can come down to Christ's similitudes, the candle under the bushel, the salt that has lost its savor, the net thrown into the sea, the spittle on the eyes of the blind man and the hen and chickens.

There is not much poetry about this winged creature of God mentioned in my text, but she is more practical and more motherly and more suggestive of good things than many that fly higher and wear brighter colors. She is not a prima donna of the skies nor a strut of beauty in the aisle of the forest. She does not cut a circle under the sun like the Rocky mountain eagle, but stays at home to look after family affairs. She does not sweep like the condor of the Cordilleras to transport a rabbit from the valley to the top of the crags, but just scratches for a living. How vigorously with her claws she pulls away the ground to bring up what is hidden beneath! When the breakfast or dining hour arrives, she begins to prepare the repast and calls all her young to partake.

WHAT OLD DOMINICK'S WINGS.

I am in sympathy with the unpretentious old faddened hen, because, like most of us, she has to scratch for a living. She knows at the start the lesson which most people of good sense are slow to learn—that the gaining of a livelihood implies work, and that successes do not lie on the surface, but are to be unearthed by positive and continuous effort. The reason that society, and the church, and the world are so full of failures, so full of loafers, so full of dead beats, is because people are not wise enough to take the lesson which any hen would teach them—that if they would find for themselves and for those dependent upon them anything worth having they must scratch for it.

Solomon said, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard." I say, "Go to the hen, thou sluggard." In the Old Testament God compares himself to an eagle stirring up her nest, and in the New Testament the Holy Spirit is compared to a descending dove, but Christ, in a sermon that begins with cutting sarcasm for hypocrites and ends with the paroxysm of pathos in the text, compares himself to a hen.

One day in the country we saw sudden consternation in the behavior of old Dominick. Why the hen should be so disturbed we could not understand. We looked about to see if a neighbor's dog were invading the farm. We looked up to see if a stormcloud were hovering. We could see nothing on the ground that could terrorize, and we could see nothing in the air to ruffle the feathers of the hen, but the loud, wild, affrighted cluck which brought all her brood at full run under her feathers made us look again around us and above us, when we saw that high up and far away there was a rapacious bird wheeling round and round, and down and down, and not seeing us as we stood in the shadow it came nearer and lower until we saw its beak was curved from base to tip, and it had two flames of fire for eyes, and it was a hawk.

But all the chickens were under old Dominick's wing, and either the bird of prey caught a glimpse of us, or not able to find the brood huddled under wing darted back into the clouds. So Christ calls with great earnestness to the young. Why, what is the matter? It is bright sunlight, and there can be no danger. Health is theirs. A good home is theirs. Plenty of food is theirs. Prospect of long life is theirs. But Christ continues to call, calls with more emphasis and urges haste and says not a second ought to be lost. Oh, do tell us what is the matter! Ah, now I see. There are hawks of temptation in the air; there are vultures wheeling for their prey; there are beaks of death ready to plunge; there are claws of allurement ready to clutch. Now I see the peril. Now I understand the urgency. Now I see the only safety. Would that Christ might this day take our sons and daughters into his shelter, "as a hen gatheredh her chickens under her wing."

The fact is that the most of them will never find the shelter unless while they are chickens. It is a simple matter of inexorable statistics that most of those who do not come to Christ in youth never come at all. What chance is there for the young without divine protection? There are the grog shops. There are the gambling hells. There are the infidelities and immoralities of spiritualism. There are bad books. There are the impurities. There are the business rascalities. And so numerous are these assailments that it is a wonder that honesty and virtue are not lost arts.

The birds of prey, diurnal and nocturnal, of the natural world are ever on the alert. They are the assassins of the sky. They have varieties of taste. The eagle prefers the flesh of the living animal. The vulture prefers the carcass. The falcon kills with one stroke, while other styles of beak give prolongation of torture. And so the temptations of this life are various. Some make quick work of death, and others agonize the mind and body for many years, and some like the living blood of great souls, and others prefer those already gangrened. But for every style of youth there is a swooping wing and a sharp beak and a cruel claw, and what the rising generation needs is a wing of protection.

EARLY SALVATION URGED.

Fathers, mothers, older brothers and sisters and Sabbath school teachers, be quick and earnest and prayerful and importunate and get the chickens under wing. May the Sabbath schools of America and Great Britain within the next three months sweep all their scholars into the kingdom. Whom they have now under charge is uncertain. Concerning that scrawny, puny child that lay in the cradle many years ago, the father dead, many remarked, "What a mercy if the Lord would take the child!" and the mother really thought so too. But what a good thing that God spared that child, for it became world renowned in Christian literature and one of God's most illustrious servants—John Todd.

Remember, your children will remain children only a little while. What you do for them as children you must do quickly or never do at all. "Why have you never written a book?" said some one to a talented woman. She replied: "I am writing two and have been engaged on one work 10 years and on the other five years—my two children. They are my life work." When the house of John Wesley's father burned, and they got the eight children out, John Wesley the last before the roof fell in, the father said: "Let us kneel down and thank God. The children are all saved; let the rest of the place go."

My hearers, if we secure the present and everlasting welfare of our children, most other things belonging to us are of but little comparative importance. Alexander the Great allowed his soldiers to take their families with them to war, and he accounted for the bravery of his men by the fact that many of them were born in camp and were used to warlike scenes from the start. Would God that all the children of our day might be born into the army of the Lord! No need of letting them go a long way on the wrong road before they turn around and go on the right road. The only time to get chickens under wing is while they are chickens.

Hannah Whitall Smith, the evangelist, took her little child at 2 years of age when ill out of the crib and told her plainly of Christ, and the child believed and gave evidence of joyful trust, which grew with her growth into womanhood. Two years are not too young. The time will come when by the faith of parents children will be born into this world and born into the bosom of Christ at the same time. Soon we parents will have to go and leave our children. We fight their battles now, and we stand between them and harm, but our arm will after awhile get weak, and we cannot fight for them, and our tongue will be palsied, and we cannot speak for them. Are we going to leave them out in the cold world to take their chances, or are we doing all we can to get them under the wing of eternal safety?

SHELTER FROM LIFE'S TEMPESTS.

But we all need the protecting wing. If you had known when you entered upon manhood and womanhood what was ahead of you, would you have dared to undertake life? How much you have been through! With most life has been a disappointment; they tell me so. They have not attained that which they expected to attain. They have not had the physical and mental vigor they expected, or they have met with rebuffs which they did not anticipate. You are not at 40 or 50 or 60 or 70 or 80 years of age where you thought you would be. I do not know any one except myself to whom life has been a happy surprise. I never expected anything, and so when anything came in the shape of human favor or comfortable position or widening field of work it was to me a surprise.

I was told in the theological seminary by some of my fellow students that I never would get anybody to hear me preach unless I changed my style, so that when I found that some people did come to hear me it was a happy surprise. But most people, according to their own statement, have found life a disappointment. Indeed we all need shelter from its tempests. About 3 o'clock on a hot August afternoon you have heard a rumble that you first took for a wagon crossing a bridge, but afterward there was a louder rumbling, and you said, "Why, that is thunder!" And sure enough the clouds were being convoked for a full diapason. A whole park of artillery went rolling down the heavens, and the blinds of the windows in the sky were closed. But the sounds above were not more certain than the sounds beneath.

The cattle came to the bars and moaned for them to be let down that they might come home to shelter, and the fowl, whether dark Brahma or Hamburg or Leghorn or Dominick, began to call to its young, "Cluck!" "Cluck!" "Cluck!" and take them under the wagon house or shed, and had them all hid under the soft feathers by the time that the first plash of rain struck the roof.

So there are sudden tempests for our souls, and, oh! how dark it gets, and threatening clouds of bankruptcy or sickness or persecution or bereavement gather and thicken and blacken, and some run for shelter to a bank, but it is poor shelter, and others run to friendly advisers, and they fail to help, and others fly nowhere simply because they know not where to go, and they perish in the blast, but others hear a divine call saying, "Come, for all things are now ready." "The spirit and the bride say come." And while the heavens are thundering terror the divine voice proffers mercy, and the soul comes under the brooding care of the Almighty "as a hen gatheredh her chickens under her wing."

DANGER OF ICY FORMALITY.

The wings of my text suggest warmth, and that is what most folks want. The fact is that this is a cold world whether you take it literally or figuratively. We have a big fireplace called the sun, and it has a very hot fire, and the stokers keep the coals well stirred up, but much of the year we cannot get near enough to this fireplace to get warmed. The world's extremities are cold all the time. Forget not that it is colder at the south pole than at the north pole, and that the Arctic is not so destructive as the Antarctic. Once in awhile the Arctic will let explorers come back, but the Antarctic hardly ever. When at the south pole a ship sails in, the door of ice is almost sure to be shut against its return.

So life to many millions of people at the south and many millions of people at the north is a prolonged shiver, but when I say that this is a cold world I chiefly mean figuratively. If you want to know what is the meaning of the ordinary term of receiving the "cold shoulder," get out of money and try to borrow. The conversation may have been almost tropical for luxuriance of thought and speech, but suggest your necessities and see the thermometer drop to 50 degrees below zero, and in that which till a moment before had been a warm room. Take what is an unpopular position on some public question and see your friends fly as chaff before a windmill.

As far as myself is concerned, I have no word of complaint, but I look off day by day and see communities freezing out men and women of whom the world is not worthy. Now it takes after one and now after another. It becomes popular to depreciate and defame and execrate and lie about some people. This is the best world I ever got into, but it is the meanest world that some people ever got into. The worst thing that ever happened to them was their cradle, and the best thing that will ever happen to them will be their grave. What people want is warmth.

Many years ago a man was floating down on the ice of the Merrimac, and great efforts were made to rescue him. Twice he got hold of a plank thrown to him and twice he slipped away from it, because that end of the plank was covered with ice, and he cried out, "For God's sake, give me the wooden end of the plank this time," and this done he was hauled to shore. The trouble is that in our efforts to save the soul there is too much coldness and icy formality, and so the imperiled one slips off and floats down. Give it the other end of the plank—warmth of sympathy, warmth of kindly association, warmth of genial surroundings.

The world declines to give it, and in many cases has no power to give it, and here is where Christ comes in, and, as on a cold day, the rain beating and the atmosphere full of sleet, the hen clucks her chickens under her wings, and the warmth of her own breast puts warmth into the wet feathers and the chilled feet of the infant group of the barnyard, so Christ says to those sick and frosted and disgusted and frozen of the world, Come in out of the March winds of the world's criticism; come in out of the sleet of the world's assault; come in out of a world that does not understand you and does not want to understand you; I will comfort and I will soothe and I will be your warmth, "as a hen gatheredh her chickens under her wing." Oh, the warm heart of God is ready for all those to whom the world has given the cold shoulder.

But notice that some one must use the storm for the chickens. Ah! the hen takes the storm. I have watched her under the pelting rain. I have seen her in the pinching frosts almost frozen to death or almost strangled in the waters, and what a fight she makes for the young under wing if a dog or a hawk or a man comes too near! And so the brooding Christ takes the storm for us. What flood of anguish and tears that did not dash upon his holy soul! What beak of torture did not pierce his vitals! What barking Cerberus of hell was not let out upon him from the kennels!

What he endured, oh, who can tell,
To save our souls from death and hell!

Yes, the hen took the storm for the chickens, and Christ takes the storm for us. Once the tempest rose so suddenly the hen could not get with her young back from the new ground to the barn, and there she is under the fence half dead. And now the rain comes in torrents and it is an awful night, and in the morning the whiteness about the gills and the beak down in the mud show that the mother is dead, and the young ones come out and cannot understand why the mother does not scratch for them something to eat, and they walk over her wings and call with their tiny voices, but there is no answering cluck. She took the storm for others and perished. Poor thing! Self sacrificing even unto death!

And does it not make you think of him who endured all for us? So the wings under which we come for spiritual safety are blood spattered wings, are night shattered wings, are tempest torn wings. In the Isle of Wight I saw the grave of Princess Elizabeth, who died while a prisoner at Carisbrook castle, her finger on an open Bible and pointing to the words, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Oh, come under the wings!

But now the summer day is almost passed, and the shadows of the house and barn and wagon shed have lengthened. The farmer, with scythe or hoe on shoulder, is returning fro the fields. The oxen are unyoked. The horses are crunching the oats at the full bin. The air is bewitched of honeysuckle and wild brier. The milkman, pail in hand, is approaching the barnyard. The fowls, keeping early hours, are collecting their young. "Cluck!" "Cluck!" "Cluck!" and soon all the eyes of that feathered nursery are closed.

The bachelors of the winged tribe have ascended to their perch, but the hens, in a motherhood divinely appointed, take all the risk of a slumber on the ground, and all night long the wings will stay outspread, and the little ones will not utter a sound. Thus at sundown, lovingly, safely, completely, the hen broods her young. So, if we are the Lord's, the evening of our life will come. The heats of the day will have passed. There will be shadows, and we cannot see as far. The work of life will be about ended.

The hawks of temptation that hovered in the sky will have gone to the woods and folded their wings. Sweet silences will come down. The air will be redolent with the breath of whole arbors of promises sweeter than jasmine or evening primrose. The air may be a little chill, but Christ will call us, and we will know the voice and heed the call, and we will come under the wings for the night—the strong wings, the soft wings, the warm wings—and without fear and in full sense of safety, and then we will rest from sundown to sunrise, "as a hen gatheredh her chickens under her wing." Dear me, how many souls the Lord hath thus brooded!

Mothers, after watching over sick cradles and then watching afterward over wayward sons and daughters, at last themselves taken care of by a motherly God. Business men, after a lifetime struggling with the uncertainties of money markets, and the change of tariffs, and the underselling of men who because of their dishonesties can afford to undersell, and years of disappointment and struggle, at last under wings where nothing can perturb them any more than a bird of prey which is 10 miles off disturbs a chick at midnight brooded in a barnyard.

TRUSTING IN DIVINE SHELTER.

My text has its strongest application for people who were born in the country, wherever you may now live, and that is the majority of you. You cannot hear my text without having all the rustic scenes of the old farmhouse come back to you. Good old days they were. You knew nothing much of the world, for you had not seen the world.

By law of association you cannot recall the brooding hen and her chickens without seeing also the barn, and the haymow, and the wagon shed, and the house, and the room where you played, and the fireside with the big backlog before which you sat, and the neighbors, and the burial, and the wedding, and the deep snowbanks, and hear the village bell that called you to worship, and seeing the horses which, after pulling you to church, stood around the old clapboarded meeting house, and those who sat at either end of the church pew, and indeed all the scenes of the first 14 years, and you think of what you were then and of what you are now, and all these thoughts are aroused by the sight of the old hencoop.

Some of you had better go back and start again. In thought return to that place and hear the cluck and see the outspread feathers and come under the wing and make the Lord your portion and shelter and warmth, preparing for everything that may come, and so avoid being classed among those described by the closing words of my text, "as a hen gatheredh her chickens under her wing, and ye would not." Ah, that throws the responsibility upon us! "Ye would not." Alas, for the "would nots!" If the wandering broods of the farm heed not their mother's call and risk the hawk and dare the freshet and expose themselves to the frost and storm, surely their calamities are not their mother's fault. "Ye would not!" God would, but how many would not!

When a good man asked a young woman who had abandoned her home and who was deploring her wretchedness why she did not return, the reply was: "I dare not go home. My father is so provoked he would not receive me home." "Then," said the Christian man, "I will test this." And so he wrote to the father, and the reply came back and in a letter marked outside "Immediate," and inside saying, "Let her come at once; all is forgiven." So God's invitation for you is marked "Immediate" on the outside, and inside it is written, "He will abundantly pardon."

Oh, ye wanderers from God and happiness and home and heaven, come under the sheltering wing. Under this call I see you turning from your old way to the new way, the living way, the gospel way. A vessel in the Bristol channel was nearing the rocks called the "Steep Holmes." Under the tempest the vessel was unmanageable, and the only hope was that the tide would change before she struck the rocks and and went down, and so the captain stood on the deck, watch in hand. Captain and crew and passengers were pallid with terror. Taking another look at his watch and another look at the sea he shouted: "Thank God, we are saved! The tide has turned! One minute more and we would have struck the rocks."

Some of you have been a long while drifting in the tempest of sin and sorrow and have been making for the breakers. Thank God, the tide has turned. Do you not feel the lift of the billow? The grace of God that bringeth salvation has appeared to your soul, and in the words of Boaz to Ruth I commend you to "the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou hast come to trust."

People Who Work While Asleep.

Not content with doing their duty throughout the day and when they are awake, there seem to be some people who are not content unless they keep themselves employed while they are asleep. Not infrequently individuals have projected and carried to a successful issue projects which they were quite incapable of tackling when awake—no doubt because they couldn't, even if they wished to, dream of doing them unless asleep.—Boston Globe.

London's Parks.

The open spaces in London, without reckoning the disused burial grounds, extend to 5,449 acres. Besides there are open spaces on its borders which bring up the total of parks accessible to Londoners to 22,000 acres.—Pall Mall Gazette.

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From every celebrated manufacturing center of the world. Just another proof of the wisdom that has controlled the buying.

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A fixed language. The bonnie Scotchman, the practical Englishman, the fashionable Frenchman, the passionate Italian, the soft-eyed Chang Lung, all have a hand in creating the swelling flood that adds daily to the ensemble of beautiful Dress Goods. And this is but a symbol of its 35 relatives. Like a great garden of crocus pushing their pretty heads up through the snow, anxious to announce the coming of birds and foliage, the new things are crowding to the front.

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