

AMONG THE PARSEES.

THE REV. DR. TALMAGE SPEADS TWO WEEKS AT BOMBAY.

His Talks with Nited Fire Worshipers—Investigation of Parsee Catechism—A Visit to a Tower of Silence—Heathen Matrimonial Rites.

BROOKLYN, Dec. 23.—The Rev. Dr. Talmage, continuing his series of round the world sermons through the press, chose today for his subject "The Fire Worshipers," the text selected being Matthew II, 1, "There came wise men from the East to Jerusalem."

These wise men were the Parsees, or the so-called fire worshipers, and I found their descendants in India last October. Their heathenism is more tolerable than any of the other false religions and has more alleviations, and while in this round the world series I have already shown you the worst forms of heathenism today I show you the least offensive.

The prophet of the Parsees was Zoroaster of Persia. He was poet and philosopher and reformer as well as religiousist. His disciples thrived at first in Persia, but under Mohammedan persecution they retreated to India, where I met them, and in addition to what I saw of them at their headquarters in Bombay, India, I had two weeks of association with one of the most learned and genial of their people on shipboard from Bombay to Brindisi.

A Tact of Faith.

The bible of the Parsees, or fire worshipers, as they are inaccurately called, is the Zend Avesta, a collection of the strangest books that ever came into my hands. There were originally twenty-one volumes, but Alexander the Great in a drunken fit set fire to a palace which contained some of them, and they went into ashes and forgetfulness. But there are more of their sacred volumes left than most people would have patience to read. There are many things in the religion of the Parsees that suggest Christianity, and some of its doctrines are in accord with our own religion. Zoroaster who lived about 1,400 years before Christ, was a good man, suffered persecution for his faith and was answered while worshipping at an altar. He announced the theory: "He is best who is pure of heart!" and that there are two great spirits in the world—Ormuzd, the good spirit, and Ahriman, the bad spirit—and that all who do right are under the influence of Ormuzd, and all who do wrong are under Ahriman.

Parsees on Virtue and Vice.

But here I must give three or four questions and answers from one of the Parsee catechisms: Question—Who is the most fortunate man in the world? Answer—He who is the most innocent. Q.—Who is the most innocent man in the world? A.—He who walks in the path of God and shuns that of the evil. Q.—Which is the will of God, and which that of the devil? A.—Virtue is the path of God, and vice that of the devil. Q.—What constitutes virtue, and what vice? A.—Good thoughts, good words and good deeds constitute virtue, and evil thoughts, evil words and evil deeds constitute vice.

Q.—What constitutes good thoughts, good words and good deeds and evil thoughts, evil words and evil deeds? A.—Honesty, charity and truthfulness constitute the former, and dishonesty, want of charity and falsehood constitute the latter. And now, the better to show you these Parsees, I tell you of two things I saw within a short time in Bombay. It was an afternoon of contrast.

We started for Malabar hill, on which the wealthy classes have their embowered homes and the Parsees their stately temple of the dead. As we rode along the water's edge the sun was descending the sky, and a disciple of Zoroaster, a Parsee, was in a lowly posture, and with reverential gaze looking into the sky. He would have been said to have been worshipping the sun, as all Parsees are said to worship the fire. But the intelligent Parsee does not worship the fire. He looks upon the sun as the emblem of the warmth and light of the Creator. Looking at a blaze of light, whether on earth, on mountain height or in the sky, he sees more easily bright or dark than the sun. Indeed, he is a peasantest heathen I have met. They treat their wives as equals, while the Hindus and Buddhists treat them as cattle. Although the cattle and sheep and swine are better off than most of the women of India.

This Parsee on the roadside on our way to Malabar hill was the only one of that religion I had ever seen engaged in worship. Who knows but that beyond the light of the sun on which he gazes he may catch a glimpse of the God who is light and "in whom there is no darkness at all?"

Where the Dead Lie.

We passed on up through gates into the garden that surrounds the place where the Parsees dispose of their dead. This garden was given by Jamshidji Jijibhai and is beautiful with flowers of all hue and foliage of all styles of vein and notch, and stature. There is an all sides great openness of fern and cypress. The garden is 100 feet above the level of the sea. Not far from the entrance is a building where the mourners at the funeral procession come in to pray. A light is here kept burning year in and year out. We ascend the garden by some eight stone steps. The body of a deceased dead woman was being carried toward the chief "tower of silence." There are five of these towers. Several of them have not been used for a long while. Four persons, whose business it is to do this, carry in the corpse. They are followed by two men with long boards. The tower of silence to which they come cost \$150,000 and is 25 feet high and 276 feet around and without a roof. The four carriers of the dead and the two board men come to the door of the tower, enter and leave the dead. There are three rows of places for the dead—the outer row for the men, the middle row for the women, the inner row for the children. The lifeless bodies are left exposed as far down as the waist. As soon as the employes retire from the tower of silence the vultures, now one, now two, now many swoop upon the lifeless form. These vultures fill the air with their discordant voices. We saw them in long rows on the top of the whitewashed wall of the tower of silence. In a few minutes they have taken the last particle of flesh from the bones. There had evidently been other opportunities for

them that day, and some flew away as though surprised. They sometimes carry away with them parts of a body, and it is no unusual thing for the gentlemen in their country coats to have dropped into their doorways a bone from the tower of silence. In the center of this tower is a well, into which the bones are thrown after they are bleached. The hot sun and the rainy season and charcoal do their work of disintegration and disinfection, and then there are sluices that carry into the sea what remains of the dead. The wealthy people of Malabar hill have made strenuous efforts to have these strange towers removed as a nuisance, but they remain and will not doubt for ages remain.

Reverence for the Elements of Nature.

I talked with a learned Parsee about these mortuary customs. He said: "I suppose you consider them very peculiar, but the fact is we Parsees reverence the elements of nature and cannot consent to defile them. We reverence the fire, and therefore will not ask it to burn our dead. We reverence the water and do not ask it to submerge our dead. We reverence the earth and will not ask it to bury our dead, and so we let the vultures take them away." He confirmed me in the theory that the Parsees act on the principle that the dead are unclean. No one must touch such a body. The carriers of this "tomb of silence" do not put their hands on the form of the departed. They wear gloves lest somehow they should be contaminated. When the bones are to be removed from the sides of the tower and put in the well at the center, they are touched carefully by tongs. Then these people believe have very decided theories about the democracy of the tomb. No such thing as caste among the dead. Philosopher and boor, the affluent and the destitute must go through the same "tower of silence" down side by side with other occupants, have their bodies dropped into the same abyss and be carried out through the same canal and float away on the same sea. No splendor of Necropolis, no sculpturing of mausoleum, no pomp of dome or obelisk. Zoroaster's teachings resulted in these "towers of silence." He wrote, "Naked you came into the world, and naked you must go out."

As I stood at the close of day in this garden on Malabar hill and heard the flap of the vultures' wings coming from their roost, the funeral custom of the Parsee seemed horrible beyond compare, and the dissolution of the human body by any means is awful, and the beaks of these fowl would do no more to me than the worms of the body devoting the sacred human form in cemeteries. Nothing but the resurrection day can undo the awful work of death. Zoroaster who lived about 1,400 years before Christ, was a good man, suffered persecution for his faith and was answered while worshipping at an altar. He announced the theory: "He is best who is pure of heart!" and that there are two great spirits in the world—Ormuzd, the good spirit, and Ahriman, the bad spirit—and that all who do right are under the influence of Ormuzd, and all who do wrong are under Ahriman.

At a Wedding.

Starting homeward, we soon were in the heart of the city and saw a building all a-flash with lights and resounding with merry voices. It was a Parsee wedding, in a building erected especially for the marriage ceremony. We came to the door and proposed to go in, but at first were not permitted. They saw we were not Parsees, and that we were not even natives. So very politely they halted us on the doorsteps. This temple of nuptials was chiefly occupied by women, their ears and necks and hands a-flame with jewels and imitations of jewels. By pantomime the Parsees were married. Gradually we worked our way inside the door, the building and the surroundings were illumined by hundreds of candles in glasses and lanterns, in unique and grotesque holdings. Conversation ran high, and all laughter and merriment was gay. Then there was a sound of an advancing band of music, but the instruments for the most part were strange to our ears and eyes, and louder were the shouts and laughter of the Parsees, and were curious to see by what procedure Parsees were married.

How Many Crimes are Committed in the Name of Hospitality.

How many mistakes are made in this world with the best intention! How often we condescend to each other when we should rejoice! How frequently a man urges a friend to do a thing which is not in the favor, when really the man is anxious to get home to his family! There is by mistake so hard to correct him. There are made with the best motives possible, says the Philadelphia Press.

At a Wedding.

The bridegroom invited Muggins out to dinner. Muggins is rather shy, but he managed to secure an enough courage to accept Mrs. Bugbins and the three Misses Bugbins had a court of war. "What is Mr. Muggins fond of?" queried Mrs. Bugbins. "I'm blessed if I know," quoth he. "Find out today if you can," was the edict. So Bugbins went to a friend for advice.

At a Wedding.

"I don't remember. Let's see; he either despises or is very fond of coffee. I think he is fond of it. Yes, I'm pretty sure. I remember his drinking eight cups one night." The truth of the matter is that Muggins hates coffee with a bitter, undying hatred that is inborn. He never drank eight cups of anything if surely was not coffee. But Bugbins went home and told his family that as long as Muggins had a cup of coffee he didn't care a row of pins about anything else.

At a Wedding.

The dinner came off. "Have a cup of coffee, Mr. Muggins," said pretty Miss Bugbins first. "I know you won't refuse," so Muggins took it. He gulped it down and tried to look calm. Then the second daughter of the hostess spilled his cup empty. She rushed up for another. His shyness overpowered him, and he drank it without a murmur. He swallowed that, too. The eagle eye of the youngest Miss Bugbins fell upon him. He quailed.

At a Wedding.

"Poor Mr. Muggins," said she sympathetically, "have they neglected you? Never mind; I'll take care of you. Here's a cup of coffee." How could he refuse. He never has discovered how he emptied that cup. All he remembers after that is the hostess coming up with another cup of coffee, one side of him and Bugbins with a genial smile insisting on giving him a fifth dose. "I want to make you feel at home," said he.

At a Wedding.

"Well, then," said Muggins, recovering from his shyness, "don't give me any more coffee." "Why not?" "Because when I'm home I never drink coffee. In fact, I loathe coffee."

At a Wedding.

Jes' Fore Christmas. Father calls me William, sister calls me Will. Mother calls me Willie; but the fellows call me Bill! Mighty glad, I ain't a girl—rather be a boy! I wish them sashes, curls an' things that's worn by fauntleroy! Love to them boys, apptes an' go swimmin' in the lake— Hate to take the castor-ile they give fr' before Christmas I'm as good as I kin be! Got a yaller dog named Sport—stick 'em on the cat; Fust thing she knows she doesn't know who she is, she's a cat! Got a clipper-sled, an' when us boys goes out to sled, she's the grocery cart an' we all but hook a ride! But, sometimes when the grocery man is worried and cross, He reaches at me with his whip, and larrups us his boys! An' then I laff and holler: "Oh, you never teched me!" But before Christmas I'm as good as I kin be!

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mourning to laughter! From gathering shadows to gleaming lights! From obsequies to wedding! But how much of all our lives is made up of such opposites! have carried in the same pocket and read from them in the same hour the liturgy of the dead and the ceremony of espousals. And so the light meets the light, and the dove meets the vulture.

The Glorious Gospel of Christ.

Thus I have set before you the best of all the religions of the heathen world, and I have done so in order that you might come to higher appreciation of the glorious religion which has put its benediction over us and over Christendom. Compare the absurdities and mummeries of heathen marriage with the plain "I will be Christ's marriage, the hands joined in pledge "thill death do you part." Compare the doctrine that the dead may not be touched with as sacred and tender and a kiss as in heaven, the last kiss of lips that never again will speak to us. Compare the narrow bridge Chinav, over which the departing Parsee soul must trudge across to the wide open gate of heaven, through which the departing Christian soul may triumphantly enter. Compare the two—one books of the Zend Avesta of the Parsees, which even the scholars of the earth despair of understanding, with our bible, so much of it as is necessary for the light of men's language so plain that a wayfarer man, though a fool, need not err therein. Compare the "tower of silence," with its vultures, at Bombay, with the Greenwood of Brooklyn, with its sculptured angels of resurrection, and bow yourselves in thanksgiving and prayer as you realize that if at the battles of Marathon and Salamis Persia had triumphed over Greece instead of Greece triumphing over Persia, Parsees might have been the national religion of Persia, might have covered the Greenwood of Brooklyn, instead of sitting in the noonday light of our glorious Christianity might have been groping in the depressing shadows of Parsism, a religion as inferior to that which is our inspiration in life and our hope in death as Zoroaster of Persia was inferior to our radiant and superhuman Christ, whose teachings have conquered and dominated and victory and song, world without end. Amen!

MAKING HIM FEEL AT HOME.

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FOR THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

LESSON XIII, FOURTH QUARTER, INTERNATIONAL SERIES, DEC. 30.

A Comprehensive Review of the Lessons of the Fourth Quarter—Golden Text, Heb. xiii, 8.—Commentary by the Rev. D. M. Stearns.

Lesson I—Jesus at Nazareth (Luke iv, 16-30). Golden text, Heb. xli, 25. "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh." As we see Jesus reading from the prophecy of Isaiah in the synagogue in His own town and proclaiming that "these words were fulfilled in Him we remember His words to the two with whom He walked to Emmaus and believe Him surely to have been the one of whom Moses and the prophets did write. Our hearts would say with Nathaniel: "Thou art the Son of God. Thou art the King of Israel."

Lesson II—The Draft of Fishes (Luke ix, 1-17). Golden text, Mark i, 17. "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men." See Him feeding hungry souls with the bread of life which never perishes, and then in a moment giving the weary toilers of that which perishes such an abundance as they had not dreamed of, and for which they had toiled all night in vain, then testing them by the command, "Follow Me."

Lesson III—A Sabbath in Capernaum (Mark i, 21-30). Golden text, Mark i, 22. "He taught them as one that had authority and not as the scribes." On Sabbath day and weekday He is ever doing good, healing bodies and souls and utterly forgetful of Himself. Healing the sick and preaching the word is His constant occupation, in all things glorifying God and honoring that word which is forever settled in heaven.

Lesson IV—A Paralytic Healed (Mark ii, 1-12). Golden text, Mark ii, 19. "The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sin." Again He is preaching the word, and the word is interrupted by a sick man being let down through the roof. Jesus is never upset or put about by any emergency. He commends the faith of the four friends by forgiving the paralytic. First He goes to the root of the matter and forgives his sins; then He heals his body and sends him away, carrying the bed which he carried him. There are many cases of paralysis today which would be healed if brought to Jesus. The hands and feet and eyes and voices that He could give life to if allowed first to forgive their sins—bring them all to Him.

Lesson V—Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath (Mark ii, 13-17). Golden text, Mark ii, 28. "The Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath." He allows His disciples to pluck and eat corn on the Sabbath day and in the synagogue has a withered hand. The Pharisees are grieved, and He would show them that not the mere hard letter of the word is to be observed, but the spirit of it. Sabbath, although commanded, may become an abomination for Him who will have mercy and not sacrifice (Isa. i, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18). God is not a respecter of persons, and He will have mercy and not sacrifice. He will have mercy and not sacrifice. He will have mercy and not sacrifice. He will have mercy and not sacrifice.

Lesson VI—The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. v, 1-12). Golden text, Matt. v, 14. "Ye are the light of the world." The Sermon on the Mount is the most precious of all His teachings. It is the foundation of our Christian life. It is the basis of our Christian faith. It is the basis of our Christian hope. It is the basis of our Christian love. It is the basis of our Christian service. It is the basis of our Christian witness. It is the basis of our Christian life.

Lesson VII—The Sermon on the Plain (Luke vi, 1-11). Golden text, Luke vi, 12. "He chose twelve apostles." The Sermon on the Plain is the most precious of all His teachings. It is the foundation of our Christian life. It is the basis of our Christian faith. It is the basis of our Christian hope. It is the basis of our Christian love. It is the basis of our Christian service. It is the basis of our Christian witness. It is the basis of our Christian life.

Lesson VIII—Opposition to Christ (Mark vi, 1-13). Golden text, Mark vi, 11. "He sent away the twelve." The Opposition to Christ is the most precious of all His teachings. It is the foundation of our Christian life. It is the basis of our Christian faith. It is the basis of our Christian hope. It is the basis of our Christian love. It is the basis of our Christian service. It is the basis of our Christian witness. It is the basis of our Christian life.

Lesson IX—Christ's Testimony to John (John vi, 24-35). Golden text, John vi, 27. "Behold I send my messenger before my face." The Testimony to John is the most precious of all His teachings. It is the foundation of our Christian life. It is the basis of our Christian faith. It is the basis of our Christian hope. It is the basis of our Christian love. It is the basis of our Christian service. It is the basis of our Christian witness. It is the basis of our Christian life.

Lesson X—Christ Teaching by Parables (Matt. xiii, 1-17). Golden text, Matt. xiii, 12. "The seed is the word of God." Christ Teaching by Parables is the most precious of all His teachings. It is the foundation of our Christian life. It is the basis of our Christian faith. It is the basis of our Christian hope. It is the basis of our Christian love. It is the basis of our Christian service. It is the basis of our Christian witness. It is the basis of our Christian life.

Lesson XI—The Twelve Sent Forth (Matt. x, 1-6). Golden text, Matt. x, 7. "Ye are the salt of the earth." The Twelve Sent Forth is the most precious of all His teachings. It is the foundation of our Christian life. It is the basis of our Christian faith. It is the basis of our Christian hope. It is the basis of our Christian love. It is the basis of our Christian service. It is the basis of our Christian witness. It is the basis of our Christian life.

Lesson XII—The Prince of Peace (Isa. ix, 1-7). Golden text, Isa. ix, 7. "Of the increase of His government and peace shall be without end." The Prince of Peace is the most precious of all His teachings. It is the foundation of our Christian life. It is the basis of our Christian faith. It is the basis of our Christian hope. It is the basis of our Christian love. It is the basis of our Christian service. It is the basis of our Christian witness. It is the basis of our Christian life.

Lesson XIII—The Kingdom of God (Matt. vi, 10). Golden text, Matt. vi, 10. "Thy kingdom come." The Kingdom of God is the most precious of all His teachings. It is the foundation of our Christian life. It is the basis of our Christian faith. It is the basis of our Christian hope. It is the basis of our Christian love. It is the basis of our Christian service. It is the basis of our Christian witness. It is the basis of our Christian life.

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