GOD AMID THE CORAL

REV. DR. TALMAGE ON THE SCULPTURE OF THE DEEP

Picking Up a Coral, He Says He Feels Like Crying Out, "There is a God, and I Adore Him!"—Comfort for Faithful Christian Workers

This picturesque discourse of Dr. Talmage leads his hearers and readers through unwonted regions of contemplation and is full of practical gospel; text, Job xxviii, 18, "No mention shall be made of coral."

Why do you say that, inspired dramatist? When you wanted to set forth the superior value of our religion, you tossed aside the onyx, which is used for making exquisite cameos, and the sapphire, sky blue, and topaz of rhombic prism, and the ruby of frozen blood, and here you say that the coral, which is a miracle of shape and a transport of color to those who have studied it is not worthy of mention in comparison with our holy religion. "No mention shall be made of coral." At St. Johnsbury, Vt., in a museum built by the chief citizen, as I examined a specimen on the shelf, I first realized what a holy of holies God can build and has built in the temple of one piece of coral. I do not wonder that Ernst Heckel, the great scientist, while in Ceylon was so entranced with the specimens which some Cingalese divers had brought up for his inspection that he himself plunged into the sea and went clear under the waves at the risk of his life, again and again and again, that he might know more of the coral, the beauty of which he indicates cannot even be guessed by those who have only seen it above water, and after the polyps, which are its sculptors and architects, have died and the chief glories of these submarine flowers have expired. Job in my text did not mean to depreciate this divine sculpture in the coral reefs along the seacoasts.

No one can afford to depreciate these white palaces of the deep, built under God's direction. He never changes his plans for the building of the islands and shores, and for uncounted thousands of years the coral gardens and the coral castle and the coral battlements go on and up. I charge you that you will please God and please yourself if you will go into the minute examination of the corals—their foundations, their pinnacles, their aisles, their pillars, their curves, their cleavages, their reticulation, their grouping—families of them, towns of them and continents of them. Indeed you cannot appreciate the meaning of my text unless you know something of the coral—labyrinthian, stellar, columnar, floral, dented like shields from battle, spotted like leopards, embroidered like lace, hung like upholstery—twilight and auroras and sunbursts of beauty! From deep crimson to milk white are its colors. You may find this wark of God through the animalcules 80 fathoms down, or amid the breakers, where the sea dashes the wildest and beats the mightiest and bellows the loudest. These creatures are ever busy. Now they build islands in the centre of the Pacific ocean. Now they lift barriers around the continent. Indian ocean, Red sea and coast of Zanzibar have specimens of their infinitesimal but sublime masonry. At the recession of the tides you may in some places see the top of their Alpine elevations, while elsewhere nothing but the deep sea soundings from the decks of the Challenger, the Porcupine and the Lightning of the British expedition can announce them. The ancient Gauls employed the coral to adorn their helmets and the hilts of swords. In many lands it has been used as amulets. The Algerian reefs in one year (1873) had at work amid the coral 311 vessels, with 3,150 sailors, yielding in profit $565,000. But the secular and worldly value of the coral is nothing as compared with the moral and religious, as when, in my text, Job employs it in comparison. I do not know how any one can examine a coral the size of the thumb nail without bethinking himself of God and worshiping him, and feeling the opposite of the great infidel surgeon lecturing to the medical students in the dissecting room upon a human eye which he held in his hand, showing its wonders of architecture and adaptation, when the idea of God flashed upon him so powerfully he cried out to the students, "Gentlemen, there is a God, but I hate him!" Picking up a coral, I feel like crying out, "There is a God, and I adore him!"

GOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL.

Nothing so impresses me with the fact that our God loves the beautiful. The most beautiful coral in the world never comes to human observation Sunrises and sunsets he hangs up for nations to look at; he may green the grass and round the dew into pearl and set on fire autumnal foliage to please mortal sight, but those thousands of miles of coral achievement I think he has had built for his own delight. In those galleries he alone can walk. The music of those keys, played on by the fingers of the wave, he only can hear. The snow of that white and the bloom of that crimson he alone can see. Having garnitured this world to please the human race and lifted a glorious heaven to please the angelic intelligencies, I am glad that he has planted these gardens of the deep to please himself. But here and there God allows specimens of submarine glory to be brought up and set before us for sublime contemplation. While I speak these great nations of zoophytes, meandrinas, and mad repores, with tentacles for trowel, are building just such coral as we find in our text. The diamond may be more rare, the crystal may be more sparkling, the chrysoprase may be more ablaze, but the coral is the long, deep, everlasting blush of the sea. Yet Job, who understood all kinds of precious stones, declares that the beauty and value of the coral are nothing compared with our holy religion, and he picks up this coralline formation and looks at it and flings it aside with all the other beautiful things he has ever heard of and cries out in ecstasy of admiration for the superior qualities of our religion, „No menton shall be made of coral."

Take my hand and we will walk through this bower of the sea while I show you that even exquisite coral is not worthy of being compared with the richer jewels i[illegible] Christian soul. The [illegible] me in looking at [illegible] accumu- [illegible] like Cotopaxi, but is an outbutting and an outbranching of ages. In Polynesia there are reefs hundreds of feet deep and 1,000 miles long. Who built these reefs, these islands? The zoophytes, the corallines. They were not such workers who built the pyramids as were these masons, these creatures of the sea. What small creations amounting to what vast aggregation! Who can estimate the ages between the time when the madrepores laid the foundations of the islands and the time when the madepores put on the capstone of a completed work? It puzzles all the scientists to guess through how many years the corallines were building the Sandwich and Society islands and the Marshall and Gilbert groups. But more slowly and wonderfully accumulative is grace in the heart. You sometimes get discouraged because the upbuilding by the soul does not go on more rapidly. Why, you have all eternity to build in. The little annoyances of life are zoophyte builders, and there will be small layer on top of small layer and fossilized grief. Grace does not go up rapidly in your soul, but, blessed be God, it goes up. Ten thousand million ages will not finish you. You will never be finished. On forever! Up forever! Out of the sea of earthly disquietude will gradually rise the reefs, the islands, the continents, the hemispheres of grandeur and glory. Men talk as though in this life we only had time to build. But what we build in this life as compared with what we shall build in the next life is as a striped shell to Australia. You go into an architect's study and there you see the sketch of a temple, the cornerstone of which has not been laid. Oh, that I could have an architectural sketch of what you will be after eternity has wrought upon you! What pillars of strength! What altars of supernal worship! What pinnnacles thrusting their glittering spikes into the sun that never sets! You do not scold the corallines because they cannot build an island in a day. Why should you scold yourself because you cannot complete a temple of holiness for the heart in this short lifetime? You tell me we do not amount to much now, but try us after a thousand million ages of hallelujah. Let us hear the angels chant for a million centuries. Give us an eternity with God and then see if we do not amount to something. More slowly and marvellously accumulative is the grace in the soul than anything I can think of. "No mention shall be made of coral."

THE VIRTUE OF PATIENCE.

Lord, help us to learn that which most of us are deficient in—patience! If thou canst take, through the sea anemones millions of years to build one bank of coral, ought we not to be willing to do work through ten years of 50 years without complaint, without restlessness, without chafing of spirit? Patience with the erring; patience that we cannot have the millennium in a few weeks; patience with assault of antagonists; patience at what seems a slow fulfillment of Bible promises; patience with physical ailments; patience under delays of providence; grand, glorious, all enduring, all conquering patience! Patience like that which my lately ascended friend, Dr. Abel Stevens, describes when writing of one of Wesley's preachers, John Nelson, who, when a man had him put in prison by false charges and being for a long time tormented by his enemy, said, "The Lord lifted up a standard when the anger was coming on like a flood, else I should have wrung his neck to the ground and set my foot upon it." Patience like that of Pericles, the Anthenian statesman, who, when a man persued him to his own door, hurling at him epithets and arriving there when it had become dark, sent his servant with a torch to light his enemy back to his home. Patience like the eulogized by the Spanish proverb when it says, "I have lost the rings, but there are the fingers still." Patience! The sweetest sugar for the sourest cup; the balance wheel for all mental and moral machinery; the foot that treads into placidity stormiest lake; the bridle for otherwise rash tongues; the sublime silence that conquers the boisterous and blatant. Patience like that of the most illustrious example of all the ages—Jesus Christ; patience under betrayal; patient under the treatment of Pilate's oyer and terminer; patient under the expectoration of his assailants; patient under flagellation; patient under the charging spears of the Roman cavalry; patient unto death. Under all exesperations employ it. Whatever comes, stand it. Hold on, wait, bear up.

CHRISTIAN HOPE.

Take my hand again, and we will go a little further into this garden of the sea, and we shall find that in proportion as the climate is hot the coral wealthy. Draw two isothermal lines at 60 degress north and south of the equator, and you find the favorite home of the coral. Go to the hottest part of the Pacific seas and you find the finest specimens of coral. Coral is a child of the fire. But more wonderfully do the heats and fires of trouble bring out the jewels of the Christian soul. Those are not the stalwart men who are asleep on the shaded lawn, but those who are pounding amid the furnaces. I do not know of any other way of getting a thorough Christian character. I will show you a picture. Here are a father and a mother 30 or 35 years of age, their family around them. It is Sabbath morning. They have prayers. They hear the children's catechism. They have prayers every day of the week. They are in humble circumstances. But, after awhile the wheel of fortune turns up and the man gets his $20,000. Now he has prayers on Sabbath and every day of the week, but he has dropped the catechism. The wheel of fortune turns up again, and he gets his $80,000. Now he has prayers on Sabbath morning alone. The wheel of fortune keeps turning up, and he has $200,000, and now he has prayers on Sabbath morning when he feels like it and there is no company. The wheel of fortune keeps on turning up, and he has his $300,000 and no prayers at all. Four leaf clover in a pasture field is not so rare as family prayers in the house of people who have more than $300,000. But now the wheel of fortune turns down, and the man looses $200,000 out of the $300,000. Now on Sabbath morning he is on a stepladder looking for a Bible under the old newspapers on the bookcase. He is going to have prayers. His affairs are more and more complicated and after awhile crash goes his last dollar. Now he has prayers every morning and he hears his grandchildren the catechism. Prosperity took him away from God; adversity drove him back to God. Hot climate to make the coral; hot and scalding trouble to make the jewels of grace in the soul. We all hate trouble and yet it does a great deal of good for us. You have heard perhaps of that painter who wished to get an expression of great distress for his canvas and who had his servant lash a man fast and put him to great torture, and then the artist caught the look on the victim's face and immediately transferred it to the canvas. Then he said to the servant, "More torture," and under more torture there was a more thorough expression of pain, and the artist said: "Stop there. Wait till I catch that expression. There! Now I have it upon the canvas. Let loose the victim. I have a work that will last forever." "Oh," you say, "he was an inhuman painter!" No doubt about it. Trouble is cruel and inhuman, but he is a great painter and out of our tears and blood on his palette he makes colors that never die. Oh, that it might be a picture of Christian fortitude, of shining hope!

On the day I was licensed to preach the gospel an old Christian man took my hand and said, "My son, when you get in a tight corner on Saturday night, without any sermon, send for me, and I will preach for you." Well, it was a great encouragement to be backed up by such a good old minister, and it was not long before I got into a tight corner on Saturday night, without any sermon, and I sent for the old minister, and he came and preached, and it was the last sermon he ever preached. All the tears I cried at his funeral could not express my affection for that man, who was willing to help me out of a tight corner. Ah, my friends, that is what we all want—somebody to help us out of a tight corner. You are in one now. How do I know it? I am used to judging of human countenances, and I see beyond the smile and beyond the courageous look with which you hide your feelings from others. I know you are in a tight corner. What to do? Do as I did when I sent for old Dr. Scott. Do better than I did—send for the Lord God of Daniel, and of Joshua, and of every other man who got into a tight corner. "Oh," says some one, "why cannot God develop me through prosperity instead of through adversity?" I will answer your question by asking another. Why does not God dye our northern seas with coral? You say, "The water is not hot enough." There! In answering my question you have answered your own. Hot climate for richest specimens of coral; hot trouble for the jewels of the soul. The coral fishers going out from Torre del Grecco never brought ashore such fine specimens as are brought out of the scalding surges of misfortune. I look down into the tropical sea, and there is something that looks like blood, and I say, "Has there been a great battle down there?" Seeming blood scattered all and down the reefs. It is the blood of the coral, and it makes me htink of those who come out of great tribulation and have their robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb. But these gems of earth are nothing to the gems of heaven. "No mention shall be made of coral."

Again, I take your hand and we walk on through this garden of the seas and look more particularly than we did at the beauty of the coral. The poets have all been fascinated with it. One of them wrote:

There, with a broad and easy motion,
The fan coral sweeps through the clear deep sea,
And the yellow and scallet tufts of the ocean
Are bent like corn on the upland lea.

CORAL SPECIMENS.

One specimen of coral is called the dendrophilia (because it is like a tree; another is called the astrara because it is like a star; another is called the fan coral because it is like the instrument with which you cool yourself on a hot day; another specimen is called the organ pipe coral because it resembles the kind of musical instruments. All the flowers and all the shrubs in the gardens of the land have their correspondencies in this garden of the sea. Corallum! It is a synonym for beauty. And yet there is no beauty in the coral compared with our religion. It gives physiognomic beauty. It does not change the features. It does not give features with which the person was not originally endowed, but it sets behind the features of the homliest person a heaven that shines clear through. So that often on first acquaintance you said of a man, "He is the homliest person I ever saw," when after you come to understand him and his nobility of soul shining through his countenance, you said, "He is the loveliest person I ever saw." No one ever had a homely Christian mother. Whatever the world may have thought of her, there were two thought well—your father, who had admired her for fifty years, and you, over whom she bent with so many tender ministrations. When you think of the angels of God and your mother among them, she outshines them all. Oh, that our young people could understand that there is nothing that so much beautifies the human countenance as the religion of Jesus Christ. It makes everything beautiful. Trouble beautiful. Sickness beautiful. Disappointment beautiful. Everything beautiful.

Near my early home there was a place called the Two Bridges. These bridges leaped the two streams. Well, my friends, the religion of Jesus Christ is two bridges. It bridges all the past. It arches and overspans all the future. It makes the dying pillow the landing place of angels fresh from glory. It turns the sepulcher into a May time orchard. It catches up the dying into full orchestra. Corallum! And yet that does not express the beauty. "No mention shall be made of coral."

I take your hand again and walk a little farther on in this garden of the sea and I notice the durability of the work of the coral. Montgomery speaks of it. He says, "Frail were their forms, ephemeral their lives, their masonry imperishable." Rhizopods are insects so small that they are invisible, and yet they built the Apennines and they planted for their own monument the cordilleras. It takes 187,000,000 of them to make one grain. Corals are changing the navigation of the sea, saying to the commerce of the world, "Take this channel," "Take that channel," "Avoid the other channel." Animal cules beating back the Atlantic and Pacific seas. If the insects of the ocean have built a reef 1,000 miles long, who knows but that they may yet build a reef 3,000 miles long, and thus that by one stone bridge Europe shall be united with this continent on one side and by another stone bridge Asia will be united with this continent on the other side, and the tourist of the world, without the turn of a steamer's wheel or the spread of a ship's sail, may go all around the world, and thus be fulfilled the prophecy, "There shall be no more sea."

WORK THAT ENDURES.

But the durability of the coral's work is not at all to be compared with the durability of our work of God. The coral is going to crumble in the fires of the last day, but our work for God will endure forever. No more discouraged man ever lived than Beethoven, the great musical composer. Unmercifully criticised by brother artists and his music sometimes rejected. Deaf for tweny-five years, and forced on his way to Vienna to beg food and lodging at a very plain house by the roadside. In the evening the family opened a musical instrument and played and sang with great enthusiasm, and one of the numbers they rendered was so emotional that tears ran down their cheeks while they sang and played. Beethoven, sitting in the room, too deaf to hear the singing, was curious to know what was the music that so overpowered them, and when they got through he reached up and took the folio in his hand and found it was his own music—Beethoven's "Symphony in A"—and hec ried out, "I wrote that!" The household sat and stood abashed to find that their poor looking guest was the great composer. But he never left that house alive. A fever seized him that night, and no relief could be afforded, and in a few days he died. But just before expiring he took the hand of his nephew, who had been sent for and arrived, saying, "After all, Hummel, I must have had some talent." Poor Beethoven! His work still lives, and in the twentieth century will be better appreciated than it was in the nineteenth, and as long as there is on earth an orchestra to play or an oratorio to sing, Beethoven's nine symphonies will be the enchantment of nations.

But you are not a composer, and you say that there is nothing remarkable about you—only a mother trying to rear your family for usefulness and heaven. Yet the song with which you sing your child to sleep will never cease its mission. You will grow old and die. That son will pass out into the world. The song with which you sang him to sleep last night will go with him while he lives, a conscious or unconscious restraint and inspiration here and may help open to him the gate of a glorious and triumphant hereafter. The lullabies of this century will sing through all the centuries. The humblest good accomplished in time will last through eternity. I sometimes get discouraged, as I suppose you do, the vastness of the work and at how little we are doing. And yet, do you suppose the rhizopod said, "There is no need of my working; I canot build the cordilleras?" Do you suppose the madrepore said, "There is no need of my working; I cannot build the Sandwich Islands?" Each one attended to his own business, and there are the Sandwich Islands and there are the cordilleras. Ah, my friends, the redemption of this world is a great enterprise. I did not see it start; I will not in this world see its close. I am only an insect as compared with the great work he done, but yet I must do my part. Help build this eternal corallum I will. My parents toiled on this reef long before I was born. I pray God that my children may toil on this reef long after I am dead. Insects all of us, but honored by God to help heave up the reef of light across which shall break the ocean's immortal gladness! Better be insignificant and useful than great and idle. The mastodons and megatheriums of the earth, what did they do but stalk their great corcasses across the land and leave their skeletons through the strata, while the coral lines went on heaving up the islands all covered with fruitage and verdure? Better be a coralline than a mastodon. So now I am trying to make one little coralline. The polyp picks out of the wave that smites it carbonate of lime, and with that builds up its own insectile masonry. So out of the wave of your tears I take the salt; out of the bruise I take the blue, and out of your bleeding heart I take the red, and out of them altogether I make this coral, which I pray may not be disowned in the day when God makes up his jewels.

POWER OF LITTLE THINGS.

Little things decide great things. All that tremendous career of the last Napolean hanging on the hand of a brakemen who, on one of our American railways, caught him as he was falling between the cars of a flying train. The battle of Dunbar was decided against the Scotch because their matches had given out. Aggregations of little things that pull down or build up. When an army or a regiment come to a bridge, they are always commanded to break ranks, for their simultaneous tread will destroy the strongest bridge. A bridge at Angiers, France, and a bridge at Broughton, England, went down because the regiment kept step while crossing. Aggregations of temptation, aggregations of sorrow, aggregations of assaults, aggregations of Christion effort, aggregations of self sacrifices—these make the irresistible power to demolish or to uplift, to destroy or to save. Little causes and great results. Christianity was introduced into Japan by the falling overboard of a pocket Bible from a ship in the harbor of Tokyo.

Written on the fly leaf of one of my books by one whom God took to himself out of our household were the following words. I do not know who composed them. Perhaps she composed them herself:

Not a sparrow falleth but its God doth know,
Just as when his mandate lays a monarch low;
Not a leaflet waveth but its God doth see.
Think not, then, O trembler, God forgetteth thee!

For more percious surely than the birds that fly
Is a Father's image to a Father's eye.
E'en thine hairs are numbered. Trust him full and free.
Cast thy care upon him, and he'll care for thee.

For the God that planted in thy breast a soul
On his sacred tables doth thy name enroll.
Cheer thine heart, thou trembler, never faithless be.
He that marks the sparrow will remember thee.

Oh, be encouraged! Do not any man say, "My work is so small." Do not any woman say, "My work is insignificant. I cannot do anything for the upbuilding of God's kingdom." You can. Remember the corallines. A Christian mother sat sewing a garment and her little girl wanted to help her, and so she sewed on another piece of the same garment and brought it to her mother, and the work was corrected. It was imperfect and had to be all taken out again. But did the mother chide the child? Oh, no. She said, "She wanted to help me, and she did as well as she could." And so the mother blessed the child, and while she blessed the child she thought of herself and said: "Perhaps it may be so with our poor work at the last. God will look at it. It may be very imperfect, and I know it is very crooked. He may have to take it all out. But he knows that I want to serve him, and he knows it is the best that I can do." So be comforted in your Christian work. Five thousand million corallines made one corallum. And then they passed away and other millions came, and the work is wonderful. But on the day when the world's redemption shall be consummated, and the names of all the millions of Christians who in all the ages have toiled on this structure shall be read, the work will appear so grand and the achievement so glorious and the durability so everlasting that "no mention shall be made of the coral."

An Iowa Bank Suspends

Oskaloosa, Iowa, December 30.—The Farmers and Traders' State bank closed its doors today. The following card from the directors was displayed: "This bank will receive no more deposits, but will at once pay its depositors in full as fast as their claims may be presented."

The bank has found business unprofitable and it was the sentiment of the great majority of stockholders to go out of business.