

REV. DR. TALMAGE

The Eminent New York Divine's Sunday Sermon.

Subject: "Conscience."

Text: "He took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying: I am innocent of the blood of this just person. See ye to it."—Matthew xxvii. 24.

At about 7 o'clock in the morning, up the marble stairs of a palace and across the floors of richest mosaic and under ceilings dyed with all the splendors of color and between snowbanks of white and glistening sculpture, passes a poor, pale, sick young man of thirty-three, already condemned to death, on His way to be condemned again. Jesus of Nazareth is His name.

Coming out to meet Him on this tessellated pavement is an unscrupulous, compromising, timeserving, cowardly man, with a few traces of sympathy and fair dealing left in his composition—Governor Pontius Pilate. Did ever such opposites meet? Luxury and pain, selfishness and generosity, arrogance and humility, sin and holiness, midnight and noon.

The bloated lipped governor takes the cushioned seat, but the prisoner stands. His wrists manacled. In a semicircle around the prisoner are the sanhedrists, with flashing eyes and brandished fists, prosecuting this case in the name of religion, for the bitter persecutions have been religious persecutions, and when Satan takes hold of a good man he makes up by intensity for brevity of occupation. If you have never seen an ecclesiastical court trying a man, then you have no idea of the foaming infernalism of these old religious sanhedrists. Governor Pilate cross questions the prisoner and finds right away He is innocent and wants to let Him go. His caution is also increased by some one who comes to the governor and whispers in his ears. The governor puts his hand behind his ear so as to catch the words almost inaudible. It is a message from Claudia Procula, his wife, who has had a dream about the innocence of this prisoner and about the danger of executing Him, and she awakens from this morning dream in time to send the message to her husband, then on the judicial bench. And what with the protest of his wife, and the entire failure of the sanhedrists to make out their case, Governor Pilate resolved to discharge the prisoner from custody.

But the intimation of such a thing brings upon the governor an equinoctial storm of indignation. They will report him to the emperor of Rome, they will have him recalled, they will send him up home, and he will be hung for treason, for the emperor at Rome has already a suspicion in regard to Pilate, and that suspicion does not cease until Pilate is banished and commits suicide. So Governor Pontius Pilate compromises the matter and proposes that Christ be whipped instead of assassinated. So the prisoner is fastened to a low pillar, and on His bent and bared back come the thongs of leather, with pieces of lead and bone intertwined, so that every stroke shall be the more awful. Christ lifts Himself from the scourging with flushed cheek and torn and quivering and mangled flesh, presenting a spectacle of suffering in which Rubens, the painter, found the theme for his greatest masterpiece.

But the sanhedrists are not yet satisfied. They have had some of His nerves lacerated; they want them all lacerated; they have had some of His blood; they want all of it, down to the last corpuscle. So Governor Pontius Pilate, after all this merciful hesitation, surrenders to the demoniacal cry of "Crucify Him!" But the governor craves for something. He sends a slave out to get something. Although the constables are in haste to take the prisoner to execution and the mob outside are impatient to glare upon their victim, a pause is necessitated. Yonder it comes—a wash basin. Some pure, bright water is poured into it, and then Governor Pilate put his white, delicate hands into the water and rubs them together and then lifts them dripping for the towel fastened at the slave's girdle, while he practically says: "I wash my hands of this whole homicidal transaction. I wash my hands of this entire responsibility. You will have to bear it." That is the meaning of my text when it says: "He took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying: I am innocent of the blood of this just person. See ye to it."

Behold in this that ceremony amounts to nothing if there are not in it correspondences of heart and life. It is a good thing to wash the hands. God created three-quarters of the world water and in that commanded cleanliness, and when the ancients did not take the hint He plunged the whole world under water and kept it there for some time. Handwashing was a religious ceremony among the Jews. The Jewish Mishna gave particular direction how that the hands must be thrust three times up to the wrists in water, and the palm of the hand must be rubbed with the closed fist of the other. All that is well enough for a symbol, but here in the text is a man who proposes to wash away the guilt of a sin which he does not quit and of which he does not make any repentance. Pilate's wash basin was a dead failure.

Ceremonies, however beautiful and appropriate, may be no more than this hypocritical ablution. In infancy we may be sprinkled from the baptismal font, and in manhood we may wade into deep immersion, and yet never come to moral purification. We may kneel without prayer and bow without reverence and sing without any acceptance. All your creeds and liturgies and sacraments and genuflections and religious convocations amount to nothing unless your heart life go into them. When that bronzed slave took from the presence of Pilate that wash basin,

he carried away none of Pilate's cruelty, or Pilate's wickedness, or Pilate's guilt.

Nothing against creeds; we all have them, either written or implied. Nothing against ceremonies; they are of infinite importance. Nothing against sacraments; they are divinely commanded. Nothing against a rosary, if there be as many heartfelt prayers as beads counted. Nothing against incense floating up from censer amid Gothic arches. If the prayers be as genuine as the aroma is sweet. Nothing against Epiphany or Lent or Ash Wednesday or Easter or Good Friday or Whitsuntide or Palm Sunday, if these symbols have behind them genuine repentance, and holy reminiscence, and Christian consecration. But ceremony is only the sheath to the sword, it is only the shell to the kernel, it is only the lamp to the flame, it is only the body to the spirit. The outward must be symbolical of the inward. Wash the hands by all means; but, more than all, wash the heart.

Behold, also, as you see Governor Pontius Pilate thrust his hand into this wash basin, the power of conscience. He had an idea there was blood on his hand—the blood of an innocent person, whom he might have acquitted if he only had the courage. Poor Pilate! His conscience was after him, and he knew the stain would never be washed from the right hand or the left hand, and until the day of his death, though he might wash in all the lavers of the Roman empire, there would be still eight fingers and two thumbs red at the tips.

Oh, the power of conscience when it is fully aroused! With whip of scorpions over a bed of spikes in pitch of midnight it chases guilt. Are there ghosts? Yes, not of the graveyard, but of one's mind not at rest.

And thus Brutus, amid his slumbering host, startled with Cæsar's stalwart ghost.

Macbeth looked at his hand after the midnight assassination, and he says:

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood

Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather

The multitudinous seas incarnadine, Making the green one red!

For every sin, great or small, conscience, which is the voice of God, has a reproof, more or less emphatic. Charles IX, responsible for St. Bartholomew massacre, was chased by the bitter memories, and in his dying moment said to his doctor, Ambrose Parry: "Doctor, I don't know what's the matter with me. I am in a fever of body and mind and have been for a long while. Oh, if I had only spared the innocent and the imbecile and the cripple!" Rousseau declared in old age that a sin he committed in his youth still gave him sleepless nights. Charles II. of Spain could not sleep unless he had in the room a confessor and two friars. Catiline had such bitter memories he was startled at the least sound. Cardinal Beaufort, having slain the Duke of Gloucester, often in the night would say: "Away, away! Why do you look at me?" Richard III., having slain his two nephews, would sometimes in the night start from his couch and clutch his sword, fighting apparitions. Dr. Webster, having slain Parkman in Boston, and while waiting for his doom, complained to the jailer that the prisoners on the other side of the wall all night long kept charging him with his crime, when there were no prisoners on the other side of the wall. It was the voice of his own conscience.

From what did Adam and Eve try to hide when they had all the world to themselves? From their own conscience. What made Cain's punishment greater than he could bear? His conscience. What made Ahab cry out to the prophet, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" What made the great Felix tremble before the little missionary? Conscience. What made Belshazzar's teeth chatter with a chill when he saw a finger come out of the black sleeve of the midnight and write on the plastering? Conscience, conscience.

Why is it that that man in this audience with all the marks of worldly prosperity upon him is agitated while I speak and is now flushed and is now pale, and then the breath is uneven, and then beads of perspiration on the forehead, and then the look of unrest comes to a look of horror and despair? I know not. But he knows, and God knows. It may be that he despoiled a fair young wife and turned innocence into a wail and the smile of hope into the brazen laughter of despair. Or it may be that he has in his possession the property of others, and by some stratagem he keeps it according to law, and yet he knows it is not his own, and that if his heart should stop beating this moment he would be in hell forever. Or it may be he is responsible for a great mystery, the disappearance of some one who was never heard of, and the detectives were baffled, and the tracks were all covered up, and the swift horse or the rail train took him out of reach, and there are only two persons in the universe who know of it—God and himself. God present at the time of the tragedy and present at the retrospection and conscience—conscience with stings, conscience with pinchers, conscience with flails, conscience with furnaces, is upon him, and until a man's conscience rouses him he does not repent.

What made that farmer converted to God go to his infidel neighbor and say: "Neighbor, I have four of your sheep. They came over into my fold six years ago. They had your mark upon them, and I changed it to my mark. I want you to have those sheep, and I want you to have the interest on the money, and I want you to have the increase of the fold. If you want to send me to prison, I shall make no complaint?" The infidel heard of the man's conversion, and he said: "Now, now, if you have got them sheep you are welcome to them. I don't want nothing of those things at all. You just go away from me. Something has got hold of you that I don't understand. I heard you were down at these religious meetings." But the converted man would

not allow things to stand in that way, and so the infidel said: "Well, now, you can pay me the value of the sheep, and six per cent. interest from that time to this, and I shan't say anything more about it. Just go away from me." What was the matter with the two farmers? In the one case a convicted conscience leading him to honesty, and in the other case a convicted conscience warning against infidelity.

Thomas Oliver was one of John Wesley's preachers. The early part of his life had been full of recklessness, and he had made debts wherever he could borrow. He was converted to God, and then he went forth to preach and pay his debts. He had a small amount of property left him, and immediately set out to pay his debts, and everybody knew he was in earnest, and to consummate the last payment he had to sell his horse and saddle and bridle. That was conscience. That is converted conscience. That is religion. Frank Tiebout, a converted rumrunner, had a large amount of liquor on hand at the time of his conversion, and he put all the kegs and barrels and demijohns in a wagon and took them down in front of the old church where he had been converted and had everything emptied into the street. That is religion. Why the thousands of dollars sent every year to the United States Treasury at Washington as "conscience money?" Why, it simply means there are postmasters and there are attorneys and there are officials who sometimes retain that which does not belong to them, and these men are converted, or under powerful pressure of conscience, and make restitution. If all the moneys out of which the State and the United States treasuries have been defrauded should come back to their rightful exchequers, there would be enough money to pay all the State debts and all the United States debt by day after to-morrow.

Conversion amounts to nothing unless the heart is converted, and the pocketbook is converted, and the cash drawer is converted, and the ledger is converted, and the fireproof safe is converted, and the pigeonhole containing the correspondence is converted, and his improvement is noticed even by the canary bird that sings in the parlor, and the cat that licks the platter after the meal, and the dog that comes bounding from the kennel to greet him. A man half converted or quarter converted, or a thousandth part converted is not converted at all. What will be the great book in the day of judgment? Conscience. Conscience recalling misimproved opportunities. Conscience recalling unforgotten sins. Conscience bringing up all the past. Alas, for this governor, Pontius Pilate! That night after the court had adjourned, and the sanhedrists had gone home, and nothing was heard outside the room but the step of the sentinel, I see Pontius Pilate arise from his tapestried and sleepless couch and go to the laver and begin to wash his hands, crying: "Out, out, crimson spot! Tellest thou to me, and to God, and to the night, my crime? Is there no alkali to remove these dreadful stains? Is there no chemistry to dissolve this carnage? Must I to the day of my death carry the blood of this innocent man on my heart and hand? Out, thou crimson spot!" The worst thing a man can have is an evil conscience, and the best thing a man can have is what Paul calls a good conscience.

But is there no such thing as moral purification? If a man is a sinner once, must he always be a sinner, and an unforgiven sinner? We have all had conscience after us. Or do you tell me that all the words of your life have been just right, and all the thoughts of your heart have been just right, and all the actions of your life just right? Then you do not know yourself, and I take the responsibility of saying you are a pharisee, you are a hypocrite, you are a Pontius Pilate, and do not know it. You commit the very same sin that Pilate committed. You have crucified the Lord of Glory. But if nine-tenths of this audience are made up of thoughtful and earnest people, then nine-tenths of this audience are saying within themselves: Is there no such thing as moral purification? Is there no laver in which the soul may wash and be clean? Yes, yes, yes. Tell it in song, tell it in sermon, tell it in prayer, tell it to the hemispheres. That is what David cried out for when he said, "Wash me thoroughly from my sin, and cleanse me from mine iniquities." And that is what, in another place, he cried out for when he said, "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." Behold, the laver of the gospel, filled with living fountains. Did you ever see the picture of the laver in the ancient tabernacle or in the ancient temple? The laver in the ancient tabernacle was made out of the women's metallic looking glasses. It was a great basin, standing on a beautiful pedestal, but when the temple was built, then the laver was an immense affair, called the brazen sea, and, oh, how deep were the floods there gathered! And there were ten lavers besides—five at the right and five at the left—and each laver had 300 gallons of water. And the outside of these lavers was carved and chased with palm trees so delicately cut you could almost see the leaves tremble, and lions so true to life that you could imagine you saw the nostril throb, and the chequibum with outspread wings. That magnificent laver of the old dispensation is a feeble type of the more glorious laver of our dispensation—our sunlit dispensation.

Here is the laver holding rivers of salvation, having for its pedestal the Rock of Ages, carved with the figures of the lion of Judah's tribe, and having palm branches for victory and wings suggestive of the soul's flight toward God in prayer and the soul's flight heavenward when we die. Come ye auditory, and wash away all your sins, however aggravated, and all your sorrows, however agonizing. Come to this fountain, open for all sin and uncleanness, the furthest, the worst. You need not carry your sins half a second. Come and wash in this glorious gospel laver. Why, that is an opportunity enough to swallow up all nations. That is an opportunity that will

yet stand on the Alps and beckon to Italy, and yet stand on the Pyrenees and beckon to Spain, and it will yet stand on the Ural and beckon to Russia, and it will stand at the gate of heaven and beckon to all nations. Pardon for all sin, and pardon right away, through the blood of the Son of God. A little child that had been blind, but through skillful surgery brought to sight, said: "Why, mother, why didn't you tell me the earth and sky are so beautiful? Why didn't you tell me?" "Oh," replied the mother, "my child, I did tell you often. I often told you how beautiful they are, but you were blind, and you couldn't see!"

Oh, if we could have our eyes opened to see the glories in Jesus Christ we would feel that the half had not been told us, and you would go to some Christian man and say, "Why didn't you tell me before of the glories in the Lord Jesus Christ?" and that friend would say, "I did tell you, but you were blind and could not see, and you were deaf and could not hear."

History says that a great army came to capture ancient Jerusalem, and when this army got on the hills so that they saw the turrets and the towers of Jerusalem they gave a shout that made the earth tremble and tradition, whether false or true, says that so great was the shout eagles flying in the air dropped under the atmospheric percussion. Oh, if we could only catch a glimpse of the towers of this gospel temple into which you are all invited to come and wash there would be a song jubilant, and wide resounding at New Jerusalem seen, at New Jerusalem taken, the hosannas of other worlds flying midair would fold their wings and drop into our closing doxology. Against the dis-appointing and insufficient laver of Pilate's vice and Pilate's cowardice and Pilate's sin I place the brazen sea of a Saviour's pardoning mercy.

TEMPERANCE.

A LESSON IN VERSE.

Little drops of porter, little sips of stout,
Make the breathing shorter, and will aid the
gout;

And these slight derangements (trifling
though they be)

Prompt on other ailments, or some malady,
Little drops of liquor, little sips of ale;
Pulses beating quicker, faces grim and pale;
Mixtures alcoholic, be they what you please,
Will increase a colic, or a heart disease.

Little drops of Burton, little sips of wine,
Are a sure and certain health-destroying
sign.

Little drops of Ailsopp, little drops of Bass,
Take away the senses, and make a man an
ass.

—Medical Pioneer.

THERE'S A FLAW.

Dr. Paul Garnier, of Paris, has made a special study of the children of habitual drunkards. He says: "There is a flaw in the very nature of these children that the physiologists see clearly and notes with apprehension—the absence of affectionate emotions. When they do not become lunatics they show insensibility and pitilessness."

FREE FROM THE SALOON CURSE.

The town of Harvey, Ill., is established on a solid temperance basis, and has proved that manufacturers can be more prosperous when their employes are prosperous and are free from the saloon curse. It has been fully demonstrated there that men can do better work in foundries and iron and steel works without beer than with it. They have just located three additional industries. One hundred and sixty-eight new houses are under contract, and there is great activity in this manufacturing town. Harvey is without a saloon, and the restrictions are such on every lot that saloons cannot come in the future.—Christian at Work.

TEMPERANCE NEWS AND NOTES.

Dr. Parker calls the saloon the "street corner god of London."

The saloon posing as the laboring man's friend is his worst enemy.

"The devil in solution" is Dr. Benjamin Ward Richardson's forcible description of alcohol.

Look into the drunkard's home, if you would see tracks that have been made by the cloven hoof.

A man has just died at Auburn, N. Y., who spent over two thousand hours in jail within eight years, all in short sentences for drunkenness.

Some Protestant ministers near Blackburn, England, the other day refused to accept a check for \$250 for church purposes, because it came from a brewer.

A prominent English physician of long experience with drunkards says that he can recall hundreds of recoveries among men, but only five among women.

A Temperance Toast.—"Here's to the man who cut down trees, who cleared the land, who plowed the ground, who planted the corn, who fed the goose that raised the quill with which was written the Total Abstinence Pledge!"

The American steamship line has it as an invariable rule that no captain or other officer, sailor or other employe shall use intoxicating liquors as a drink. A famous captain on one of its great lines recently said to one of our leaders: "Many a time has a glass of whisky wrecked a ship."

Mrs. Carlisle, wife of Secretary Carlisle, is not only known to be opposed to the use of intoxicating beverages, but is notably consistent in her convictions. Her dinners are served without the alcoholic concomitants which custom seems to have fixed so inflexibly upon less independent and enlightened society leaders.