

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT.

REV. DR. TALMAGE ON THE TEACHINGS OF THE SACRED SEASON.

THE HOME IS ITS FIT SETTING.

All Family Differences Should Be Healed and All Dissensions Should Be Forgiven. Put Aside—Everyone Should Try to Realize the Truth of the Words: "On Earth Peace, Good Will Toward Men."

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1905, by William Baily, of Toronto, at the Dept. of Agriculture, Ottawa.

Chicago, Dec. 6.—In this sermon, the preacher urges as a fitting commemoration of the Christmas time the healing of family differences and the putting aside forever of all dissensions, in accordance with the spirit and teachings of the sacred season. The text is Luke 11, 14, "On earth peace, good will toward men."

Christmas Day has the manger for its gem, with the home for a setting. From time immemorial the commemoration of the birth of Christ has had its true and real celebration not so much in public festivity and church ceremonial as in the family gathering around the domestic fire-side. Other customs may change, new movements may transform our social life, but the Christmas family gathering maintains its hold on society. But though many customs may change within a quarter of a century the customs of Christmas Day neither change in a generation or a century. Christmas Day always has been and we hope always will be a family day. It is well that at least once a year the children and the grandchildren, the brothers and the sisters and the nephews and the nieces, as well as the fathers and mothers and grandparents, should be gathered within the four walls of the old homestead, and it is appropriate that the season for such reunions should be that at which we celebrate the advent of our Lord.

But though God "setteth the solitary in families," though on Christmas Day, above all other days, he would have us worship him in communion with our kith and kin, though we should delight to prove that blood is thicker than water, yet the startling fact remains unconverted that the grinning skeleton, which rattles its bones and clatters its teeth almost every Christmas eve in almost every family closet, is the hideous skeleton of domestic strife. By this statement we do not mean that the father and mother and the little children living within the four walls of a house are necessarily unhappy or that most homes are not peaceful and loving. We do mean, however, that the family name, taken in its larger relation, is not always a loving and harmonious name. We do mean, by this statement that after the father and mother have been carried out to their last resting place, to sleep the sleep of death under a coverlid of snow, estrangements often arise between the married children. We do mean by this statement that many a home has been split from top to bottom on account of the second marriage of a father or a mother. We do mean that today all over the world brothers can be found at variance with brothers, sisters with sisters and cousins with cousins.

Christmas Day is essentially a family day. Would it not be possible in the weeks before its dawn for you to arrange your family differences so that on that day the old quarrel may be settled and all the hard thoughts and hard words it has engendered may be forgiven and forgotten? I would suggest to you to-day some reasons why such reconciliation may be and should be effected. I would try, in the name of Jesus Christ, to have over the manger brother elasp hands with brother, sister with sister, parent with child and child with parent. I would try to do this because when the Christmas bells are ringing their carol no man, no woman, can so truly honor the newborn child called the Christ as by doing his or her part to fulfill the angel message of "Peace on earth and good will toward men."

Family dissensions should cease, and immediately cease. Why? They have nearly all—aye, practically all—been caused by faults committed on both sides. They have been caused by the pet calling the kettle black, the kettle retaliating by calling the pot black, and at the same time both are so blinded by the hot fires of domestic dissensions that they cannot see that each is black. It may not be clear who started the family trouble. It is enough to show that if both parties had not erred there would not have been continued domestic disturbance.

Take, for illustration, the trouble between a father and his son. Every little while we hear of the son of some prominent man being at variance with his father. An inkling of the trouble may get into the newspaper or be gossiped about the neighborhood. Some of us side with the parent. We say: "No matter what the father may have done, the son has no right to turn his back upon his sire. He has no right to despise the parent who cared for him when he was a little child and who educated him and started him out as a young man into the world." On the other hand, some of us side with the son instead of the father. We say that some fathers are mean and selfish and grasping. They never want to give their sons their rights. It is told of old Emperor William I. of Germany, that when the court artist painted a picture of the German court, with Crown Prince Frederick's foot upon the lowest step of the throne, King William called the artist to him and said: "Take that boy's foot off that throne step. As long as I am King I want to have the throne for myself." But in all probability if you can get to the inside faces of that quarrel between father and son they can all be traced to a disposition in the father which has been inherited by the son. The father may have been a high strung, nervous, quick tempered, overworked, impetuous man. The son may have inherited the same fiery disposition. It is a scientific fact that opposites conjoin, not similarities. The positive and the negative poles work together in harmony, not the electric wires carrying the same current. The son the wife is able to live harmoniously with the husband is that her nature is entirely different from his and is its natural complement. The father and the son were continually irritating each other. One night there was a domestic explosion. The father ordered the son from the house. The boy never came back. He went to live in another city. He plunged into a life of dissipation. The father blamed the son. The son blamed the father. But are there not grievous faults on both sides?

Take, for illustration, that difficulty which exists between the daughter and her parents. There are faults there just the same. Faults are on both sides. The daughter may have grown up to be the pride of the parental heart. She was the idol of her father and mother. They sent her to school and gave her every educational advantage that money could procure, but while they were giving money and, seemingly, every advantage those parents were not careful about the acquaintances their daughter was forming. They were not careful about looking up the records of the young men who were calling during the evening hour. The result of this parental negligence was that the daughter formed an affection for a young man who was not regarded favorably by the parents. They did everything in their power to prevent the marriage, but the trouble was that the parents awoke to the danger too late. The young girl was obstinate; she married against their will. After the daughter left home she felt that her husband and children were not wanted back in the place where the wife and mother was born, therefore she does not visit where they are not welcomed. The parents, in an unguarded moment, may have said that all their children wanted of them was their money. The daughter is poor, but very proud. At times she has not had food enough even for her babies. How much happiness it would give on all hands if a reconciliation could be effected and if the parents, remembering that their negligence contributed to the trouble, and the daughter, remembering that hard words, spoken in a moment of irritation, should not weigh against long years of love and parental kindness, should come together again and agree to forget the faults on both sides!

What is true of the difficulties between parents and children is also true of the difficulties between brothers and brothers, sisters and sisters. Inevitably faults are to be found on both sides. Therefore what is the practical conclusion of all this trend of thought? You, O man, and you, O woman, have no right to complain about the injustices which others have done against you unless you at the same time have done all in your power to atone for the sins which you have, intentionally or unintentionally, done against your brother! If you will go and honestly ask your brother to forgive you the wrong you have done him, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred that brother will ask you to forgive the injuries he has done you. Then, as you are both ready to atone for the evils you have done each other, there will be no further cause for domestic strife. Try to smother the flames of family trouble by asking your brother to forgive you the wrongs you have done him. Try it, my friend. Try it. Try it before the coming Christmas festivities.

Family dissensions should cease, and immediately cease. Why? Because nearly all family troubles are caused by one member of a family mistaking the motives and position of other members of the family. Because it is almost impossible for people in one sphere of life to properly appreciate the difficulties and the trials and the worries and the disappointments and the heartaches which are continually nagging and sapping the lives of people in other spheres of life. Because it is not easy for one to read "the signs of the times" through another's spectacles. Because every pair of family glasses, as a rule, has a different lens and different focus.

Study the misunderstandings between the professional man and his sister, who is living a quiet domestic life. Such a lady says: "My brother never answers my letters now as he used to do. He never shows me those little courtesies of love I have a right to expect. The last time I wrote him he sent me back a very sharp reply." Yes, my sister, perhaps that is all true. But the reason you are angry with your brother is, you, a domestic woman, cannot understand the nervous exhaustion under which your professional brother is struggling. Perhaps the reason he does not answer his sister's letters as he used to do is because he is a clergyman, a lawyer or a newspaper man. Day after day he sits and writes and writes and writes. The pen is always in his hand until the very sight of ink and paper has for him a repulsion. Perhaps the reason the brother does not visit the sister is because he has been unable to take a vacation for the last ten years. Your difficulties with your brother are chiefly, my sister, because you cannot put yourself in his place.

Oh, that this coming Christmas we would one and all try to focus our eyes to our brother's spectacles! Then a great many of the family troubles would forever vanish from our darkened horizon. The man who travels about the planet with such a Christian spirit and goes from house to house—from the palace of the rich to the hovel of the poor, from the sumptuous private to the merchant prince to the counters of the small salaried clerk—soon discovers that this world is not altogether a mean world, a selfish world, a heartless world, but it is a tired world, a discouraged world, a misunderstood world. If every member of a family who has bitter troubles and trials could realize that his brothers and sisters along the great highways of life are struggling under burdens quite as heavy as his own—albeit their burdens may be made up in different kinds of packs and have silken cords around them instead of hempen rope—he would be more patient in his criticism of others, as he may hope that others will judge him more charitably. Most of the seeming insults by relatives to relatives are entirely unintentional. As every man hopes for mercy and pardon in the day of judgment, so there should be forgiveness for one who offends another through inadvertence and not through intention. The fancied injustices between relatives exist for the most part in the distorted imaginations of those who have no right to

indulge in unChristian and merciless judgments of relatives who really want to be friends.

Oh, my friends, if we are ever going to have Christmas reconciliations we had better have them now. Human life at the longest is short. When children have grown and scattered how soon they die. A family may exist intact for ten, twenty, thirty years, but after the death angel calls one child he is very apt to come back soon for another and another until all are gone. When the family plot is once selected and a couple of graves dug therein the hearse gets into the habit of traveling in the same direction and the black horses to stopping at the same gate. Then the sad truth is that when death does come regrets may be piled in flowers mountains high upon the casket, brothers may weep over the dead brother, the hands may be pressed and the lips pressed and the forehead stroked, but the dead will hear not one word. He will not lift one eyelid. He will not smile one look of forgiveness back to those who want to be forgiven. O regrets, regrets! How often have we wept our regrets over the coffin lids! How often that word might have been chiseled as epitaph upon the tombstone of the dead! Regrets, bitter, heartrending, but useless regrets! Regrets, burning regrets in reference to our kith and kin who are gone.

Family dissensions should cease. Dare any one, old or young, gainsay this imminent truth? But if this warning comes with mighty force to brothers and sisters how much more should it come to the father and mothers who are angry or indifferent with their children? Many people are apt to judge the children harshly when domestic troubles arise between parents and their offspring. But as men and women grow older and have children of their own they are more willing to blame the parent for the estrangement than they are to blame the child. Have you, parents, ever tried to win back the affections of your children? Did you ever try to recall that cruel remark you once made to your obstinate boy? That remark cut into his heart as a surgeon's knife buries itself in the flesh quivering upon the operating table. Have you, O parent, since that second marriage, which so trampled upon the love of your children, gone regularly to visit your children, as you used to do before their mother's death? Do you send to them the warm, cordial invitations to come home and insist that they come with their families? Do you, the parents, try to instill into your children the thought that their father and their mother are absolutely dependent for happiness upon their boys' and girls' affections?

Cannot the parents who are estranged from their children realize that the years are very few in which it is possible for them to have Christmas reconciliations? When a child despises a parent, living or dead, that child must suffer the most agonizing agonies that can ever come to a human being this side of the grave. Bear, forbear, forgive and be forgiven are the teachings, "On earth peace, good will toward men." Before the next Christmas comes around it will be impossible for some to forgive or be forgiven. The casket-maker is even now manufacturing a coffin. The gravedigger is even now sharpening his pick and spade. The quarryman is even now cutting a tombstone. The bellringer is even now ready to toll a knell. Brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, kith and kin, stop and attune your family reconciliations to the notes of the Christmas song.

Christmas days have not always heard the angels sing the song, "On earth peace, good will to men." In 1069 William the Conqueror, to complete his triumph over England, decreed that all the country should be devastated between York and Durham. In all that region every city, town or village was razed to the ground, and so literally was the order executed that a famine ensued in which 100,000 men, women and children perished. So many Christians since 1069 have witnessed their slaughters of thousands upon thousands. Not the slaughter of life alone, but the slaughter of heart loves and heart affections between brothers and sisters and parents and children. May the Christmas of 1908 not be a Christmas of domestic tragedy, but of family reunions. May it be the time when the very angels in heaven shall again be compelled to sing for joy that all relatives at the manger have become reconciled.



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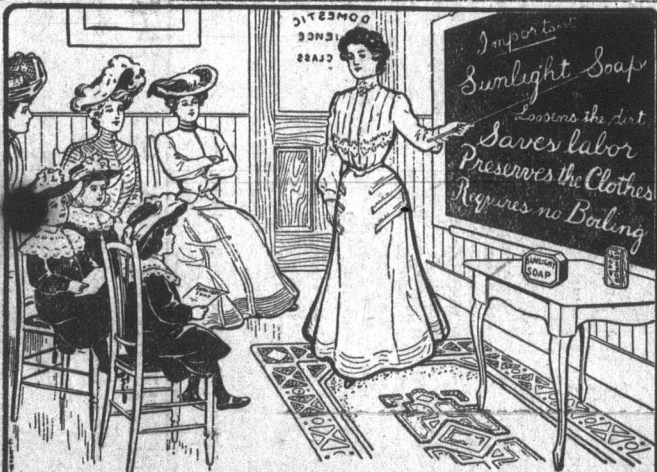
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