

LIAR DROPPED DEAD

REV. DR. TALMAGE EMPHASIZES THE STORY OF ANANIAS.

AN ANTI-CLIMAX OF THE GRUESOME

Deposition of the Almighty's Wrath in the Case of Sapphira, Wife of Ananias, Who Joined in the Premeditated Lie to God, Further Furnishes a Perpetual Warning Against Falsehood in Every Form.

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1903, by William Lloyd Talbot, at the Dept. of Agriculture, Ottawa.

Chicago, Aug. 30.—In this sermon the preacher inculcates the duty of truthfulness in all the relations of life—in business, in politics, in our social intercourse and our religion. His text is Acts v. 8: "Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?" And she said, Yea, for so much."

Morbid curiosity is to the eye what gossip is to the ear. The gruesome, the hideous, the diseased, the appalling, are objects at which some of us never tire of looking. Let a poor workman tumble from a scaffolding and have his brains bespattered upon the city pavements below, or let a helpless washerwoman, staggering under her load of clothes, be crushed by the truckman's wheel, or a drunken human brute be battered by a policeman's club and the crowds will collect as rapidly as do carrion eating birds at the scent of a carcass. All day long a steady stream of sight-seers passes in and out of the Parisian morgue. The more bloated and deformed the corpses the stronger the fascination and the bigger the crowd.

Such is the scene of my text. There is great excitement in Jerusalem. The agitation is spreading everywhere. As the people are rushing along toward a common centre some bystander asks a runner, "What is the matter?" "Why," answers he, "haven't you heard the news? You know Ananias, who used to live next door to me? He was my dearest neighbor. Well, Peter was preaching this morning near the temple. He took up a collection for the poor. Ananias came forward and laid his contribution at the feet of the apostle and pretended that he had given all his money to the church. He wanted to appear well before his fellow church members. But Ananias told a falsehood. He had not given all, as he had pledged himself to do, but had kept back part of the money for his own use. Then Peter raised his finger toward heaven and said, 'Ananias, thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.' Immediately Ananias clutched at his heart. He gave one shriek and he dropped dead. Come on, let us go up and see what is next going to happen."

These two men rush on toward the temple. They come to the outskirts of a great throng. There the multitudes are crowding and pushing and jostling their neighbors and trying to get near to the speaker. Suddenly the cry is raised, "Make way, make way!" The sea of human faces surges to the right and to the left. Every head uncovers. The murmur of many voices is hushed to the silence of the tomb. Slowly and solemnly down through the open pathway come the pallbearers, carrying between them a shrouded form. For "the young man arose, wound him up and carried him out and buried him."

Hardly had the noise of the shuffling feet ceased when a newcomer, a woman, began to elbow her way through the crowd. She asks the people as she pushes along: "What is the matter? Is any one hurt?" No one answers. They pretend they do not hear her, but they do. As soon as she passes along many an eye is moist, many a lip quivers. "God pity her! God pity her!" This is Sapphira, the wife of the dead perjurer. She is her husband's confederate in the premeditated lie. As she passes Peter sees her points to the pile of silver and gold and says unto her, "Woman, tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?" And

she says, Yea, for so much. Quick as a flash the lightning of God's wrath struck. "Then fell she down straightway at his feet and yielded up the ghost, and the young men came in and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her with her husband." Such is the Biblical description of two capital punishments. The record stands there on the sacred page as a perpetual warning against falsehood. Every, of the divine attitude towards all kinds of lies and untruths and prevarications and intentional distortions and misrepresentations; wherever they may be found.

To catalogue some of the equivocations by which the Ananiases and the Sapphiras of the present day pervert the truth is the purpose of this sermon. We would prove that business lies and social lies and political lies and parental lies and church lies can never be clothed in white and called "white lies." Every falsehood is covered with the black pall of death—black as the darkness of the bottomless pit. We would try to do this because there is a theory abroad that some lies are innocent and respectable and that there is no harm in their black garments hang in the wardrobe of honest men.

Falsehoods in the business world: They nest and thrive especially well in the haunts of barter and gain. They greet you at the open doors of our large department stores. They pictorialize themselves in circulars and newspaper advertisements which are sent broadcast over the cities and country districts. They pose in fictitious reports of our large corporations and exaggerate the annual dividends. They have for their passports white slips of paper, purporting to represent bona fide stock, whereas the gold and silver and copper mines are purely imaginary. They enthrone themselves in the "pits" of the produce exchanges. They finger the keys of the telegraph instruments when the breadstuffs are about to be cornered.

They are just as much at home with the wholesale manipulator as with the retail dealer, with the great capitalist as with the humble trader seated behind the counter of the little country store. We have all felt upon our hot cheeks the baleful touch of their infectious breath. They ride down with us when we go shopping in the morning. They come home with us when we turn our backs upon the glass offices at night.

Falsehoods in the business world: They figure not only in the transactions of buyers and sellers, but in the declarations of the taxpayer. Here comes the county assessor. How much is your property worth? "Oh, you answer, if a farmer, 'not much. I hardly made a living off the place last year. My crops barely met expenses. The house is simply a 'white elephant' on my hands. I would get rid of it if I could. Put it down, say, for \$3,000." The assessor departs. About six months later a railroad corporation wishes to have the right of way through your property. The representative of that road comes to you. "How much is your property worth?" "Oh," you answer, "I do not want to sell under any conditions. This is the finest farm land in all this region. Besides, the place has for me a sentimental as well as an intrinsic value. My father was born here. My children were born here. Well, if I must, I must. That farm and that old homestead are worth at least \$10,000. They are cheap at that." There are your two answers. Why the discrepancies? Why did you make one statement to the assessor and another to the railroad corporation? Did you lie first? Did you lie last? Did you lie both times?

Falsehoods in the political world! Oh, how many! Like the seventeen year locusts, they never entirely depart from a region. They, however, swarm most at certain seasons of the year. They are especially numerous and virulent at election times. The ballot box is their footstool. Political falsehood will take the record of the purest and best public man that ever lived and absolutely bedaub it over with scandals and false accusations. But though the concoctors and utter-

ers of political falsehoods may never tire of blackguarding and misrepresenting public men, the acme of meanness is only reached when, without just cause, they drag into the political mire the wives and the children of the men whom they would indirectly attack. In this generation the family of any public man is never able, like Caesar's wife, to live above suspicion. Ah, then, I wonder not that some public men become bitter and lose their faith in mankind. I wonder not that many a public man is tempted to carry his political hatreds down to the grave. God pity the honest man who in public life is having his heart gashed open by the attacks made upon the characters of his loved ones. Truly, then, as at the cross, an ungrateful people are offering him a crown of thorns instead of a crown of treasured gold.

A lie is a lie, against whomsoever told. A lie is especially cowardly when it is told against public men—especially cowardly because for the most part the victims must write and twist under the misnaming and poisonous attack and suffer in silence. The nature of a lie is not changed by harnessing it to a qualifying adjective, nor is a political lie less heinous than other lies. A lie told to besmirch a political candidate or to benefit a political party is an offence in the sight of God which will have to be accounted for in the day of judgment. "All liars"—there are no exceptions to this rule—"all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Falsehoods in the social world! Why? Because, as David in his haste grossly declared, "All men are liars?" Oh, no. Because most people would intentionally and deliberately rob an innocent man of his character as a sneak thief might snatch a woman's pocket-book and run? Oh, no; but because most people would rather hear ill of their neighbors than good. Therefore when a falsehood is once started about a neighbor it travels on with seven league boots, and instead of having one emissary it gradually enlists ten, twenty, fifty, a thousand persons to peddle its evil and transmit its destroying venom.

Social falsehoods are prevalent everywhere. How are we to guard against them? First and foremost, by not making ourselves a medium for their propagation. As aspersions on a man's character are started, is passed from lip to lip until the whole community hears it. But the calumny, often undeserved, might be stopped by the observation of a simple rule. "Never believe any evil rumor, my father said, 'you may hear against your neighbor. Never believe it unless you have positively heard the evil confession from the man's own lips, and even then you must hope there is some mistake about it.' Never allow yourself to listen to any maligner of an innocent man's life and thereby make yourself a party in the crime. Never allow your imperfect memory to transmit what idle gossipers and scandal mongers may reveal in. A fatal lie, like a wolf in sheep's clothing, sometimes attempts to robe itself in the garments of sincerity. But by the execution of the two fail-lures of my text we know that God will condemn us when we repeat an evil report against our neighbors unless we positively and without any peradventure know that what we say is true.

Falsehoods in the parental world! We would have brooded this heading and called it "Falsehoods in the domestic world" but for one reason. When a husband deceives his wife or a wife her husband they do it deliberately and premeditatedly. They do it with their eyes wide open, and they fully realize the enormity of their sin and toward what destructive rocks they are leading. But though a father never tells a falsehood to his marital companion without forethought, that parent may thoughtlessly fall into the habit of deceiving his children. They are so young. He thinks they do not remember and do not understand. The same law applies to the wife as well to the husband. The mother some day, wearied by the perpetual racket, says to her child, "Now, Harry, if you will go to bed this afternoon and take a nice long nap I will take you out for a ride this evening." The child goes to bed with a murmur. When evening comes the mother wishes to do something else. The ride is postponed. What is the result? She deliberately breaks her promise. She falsifies because she does not think it necessary to be honest with her child.

The father comes to the side of the invalid's crib and says, "Now, my son, if you are patient and good and will take your medicines as you ought, when you get well I will give you a bicycle or a watch or a printing press or a scroll saw." The sick boy thinks and dreams about that coming present. But when the child gets well the bill begins to come in. The doctor's bill and the druggist's bill and the trained nurse's bill stagger the father. He neglects his promise, or he says: "I cannot afford that bicycle now. You must wait, my son; you must wait awhile." That night the mother says to her husband: "Husband, do you think it is right not to give the boy his present? Remember, you promised him." "Oh," says the father, "he is only a child and will soon forget it." Will he forget your promise? Never, no, never! A child's mind and heart are like the rolls of a phonographic instrument. Every time you speak into a child's ear the roll of memory receives an indentation. After awhile your human voice will speak forth the records of your broken promises. Tell your candidly I would sooner lie to any being on earth than to one of my own children. If I lie to them I not only destroy myself, like Ananias and Sapphira, but in all probability I absolutely destroy my little ones also.

Falsehoods in the church! That

means many of us are weekly and daily breaking the public pledges we have made to God. Take, for instance, that promise which you made when you joined the church. Have you kept it? Every Sunday night at the close of the meetings the members of hundreds and thousands of Christian Endeavor services are repeating the Christian Endeavor pledge. "I promise him that, I will strive to do whatever he would like to have me do; that I will make it the rule of my life to pray and read the Bible every day and to support my own church in every way, especially by attending all her regular Sunday and midweek services, unless prevented by some reason which I can conscientiously give to my Saviour." Do all the young people read the Bible every day and conscientiously try to attend the midweek church services? Are they simply perjuring themselves to God with their lips? Are they trying to conscientiously trying to live up to the teachings of the beautiful motto, "It is better to be than to seem?" Remember, the perjurers of my text were destroyed because they were making a false statement to the church. Many and many church members who deliberately at the church altars continue to lie to God and continue to break the promises which they are making Sunday after Sunday must answer to God for their sins as Ananias and Sapphira had to answer.

Thus, my friends, the whole trend of this sermon is to prove that every word we utter, whether true or false, that word shall never die. It shall at last meet us at the judgment seat of God and make us explain why we ever let it come forth from our lips. It is to prove that God does not have one language for the weekday and another for Sunday. The Paphlagonian pigeons were said to have had two hearts, but no human mortal can have two hearts. A man cannot have the honest tongue with which he speaks to God and another false tongue with which he talks to his fellow men. The Bible distinctly and emphatically states that Christians must come forth out of the sinful world and separate themselves from it. In no way can this be done better than by speaking the Christian language or straightforward truth. Are we ready to speak that truth, wherever it may be found?

But there is just one little suggestion I would like to make before I close. Remember, a lie is not always told with the lips. It can also be spoken by the hand and the foot. The last words my father ever wrote in his study were these, "The Language of Action." They were to be the caption of the next sermon he intended to write. Beware, oh, man, that when you attempt to speak in this "language of action" you shall not only have an honest tongue, but a truthful hand and a truthful smile, a truthful shrug of the shoulders, a truthful foot and also, very imperatively, a truthful silence. There is a time to speak. There is also a time to keep still. But if a man keeps still when he ought to speak then silence itself may speak in the thunderous tones of the loudest affirmatives or of the loudest negatives. Let you life in all its parts be "yea, yea," and "nay, nay." Some insects have thousand eyes. The human being by the "language of action" may have a thousand tongues. These worship either at the altar of truth or at the satanic shrine of endless falsities.

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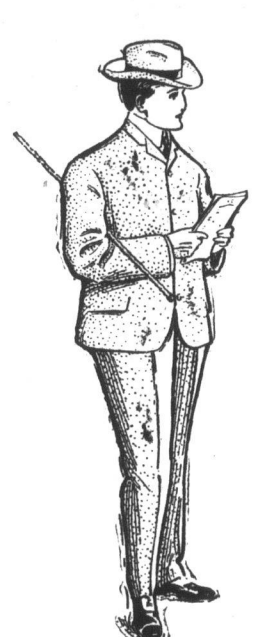
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