

YEAR 1902 IS DYING

"WE SPEND OUR YEARS AS A TALE THAT IS TOLD."

HOW YEARS ARE FLYING AWAY

A Vision of Life as Seen by the Preacher
—From Birth in the Old Homestead
Until the Day When Our Dead Bodies
Are Carried to the Newly Dug Graves
Reviewed.

Entered a reading to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1902, by William B. B. of Toronto, at the Dept. of Agriculture, Ottawa.

Chicago, Dec. 28.—In the following discourse, appropriate to the last Sunday of the year, Rev. P. De Witt Talmage shows in how many characteristics the Biblical comparison of life to the creations of the universe is justified. The text is Psalm xx, 9: "We spend our years as a tale that is told."

How the years are flying away! Henry Clay once stood upon the top of the Alleghany mountains in an attitude of listening. When some one asked him a what he was listening to, the great Kentucky statesman in his deep, powerful, resonant, oratorical voice, answered, "I am listening to the mighty tramp of the coming generations!" To-day we may not have an imaginative ear keen enough to hear the thunderous echoes of the earth, two centuries or a thousand years hence, but we can now hear the patter of feet of the multitudes of school children. We may hear, too, the rumbling of the hoar, which shall sooner or later carry out our dead bodies to the newly dug graves. We hear the inexorable warning that in a few years or perhaps even in the coming year of 1903 we shall look upon the rising sun for the last time. Then our bedrooms, where we have often slept and laughed, and cried, shall be called the chambers of death.

Dear old year of 1902! It seemed only yesterday that we welcomed thee into the world. In a few days, with thy snow white hair and shriveled form and pallid cheek and trembling limb, we shall have to carry thee out and lay thee away in the tomb. We meet thy coming and approving face at the judgment seat of heaven.

The inspired psalmist, considering the passing of an earthly life, uses a beautiful simile. Moses, to whom the psalm is ascribed, was not only a great legislator and a powerful leader, but a poet. He not only opened a path across the Red sea with his rod, but he cut a sure path into the gratitude and affection of all good men and women by the sharp point of his pen. Thus an ancient author, who was a pioneer in the making of books, compared the earthly existence of every human life "to a tale that is told." The seconds are the letters. The minutes are the words. The hours are the sentences. The days are the paragraphs. The weeks are the pages. The months are the chapters. The years are the books. May God help me on this last Sabbath of the dying year to interpret aright how "we spend our years as a tale that is told."

Every tale, whether fictitious or no, has a bright or a sad beginning. It is almost the first words which the narrator speaks he introduces his listeners to the hero or the heroine. Sometimes he rocks the hero's cradle down among the plantations of Louisiana or Georgia, sometimes among the snows of the New England hills or in a palace of Europe, where the prince or princess was born. But, though many heroes and heroines of fictitious tales may have had unhappy childhood influences, I do not believe it was thus with us. The brightest passages of the "tale of life" when applied to our own biographies are to be found for the most part in those first days which we spent in the old homestead.

But, alas, no sooner were we born and grown into young manhood and womanhood than the current of our lives led away from the pure of our youthful life circle. They led us into the haunts of sin and in to the cold, damp, dark caverns of selfishness. You know there are books numbered among the masterpieces of literature which you, as a wise parent, would not allow in your home. You may say your wife, "Child Harold" may be the most wonderful portrait of Lord Byron ever wrote, but it is a character of sin and infamy. It is a character glowing with poetic imagination, but a character with the worm that never dies sucking at its heart. Our children should not be allowed to read its pages. There are stories which are not fitted for public ears. Our biographies cannot be told to the world at large. The beautiful ancient ballad of "The Marriage of Sir Gawain" describes how the cavalier of old took to himself in marriage a hideous woman called the "loathly lady" merely because no one else would marry her. As soon as the "loathly lady" was wedded she immediately changed into a bride of the most winsome loveliness, because—so goes the story—that marriage ring was able to enchain a malignant enchanter who had been cursing her life heretofore. Alas, "The Marriage of Sir Gawain" has been reversed in many of our lives. Most of us came forth fair and beautiful from a Christian mother's nursery. Fair and beautiful though we once were, we accepted for our guide the proffered hand of sin. Then in the sight of God and all heaven we became, like the "loathly lady," accursed by the evil past in which we had lived. No matter how pure and bright our nature may have been, we have all sinned in the sight of God. "There is none that doeth good, no, not one, not one." The brightness of a gospel sunrise has been darkened by the stormy clouds of a sinful no-don.

There is no tale, whether fictitious or no, has his life intertwined in the existence of many other lives. We and this thought best illustrated per-

haps in Wilkie Collins' "Dead Secret" or "No Name" or "The Woman in White" or of Anna Katharine Green's "Leavenworth Case" or of Conan Doyle's famous and strange wanderings of Sherlock Holmes. These and similar authors we read not for their epigrammatic sayings, as we do the writings of a William M. Thackeray, but we read them for the deft way in which they tangle the tangled skein of a human plot. No other are their chief characters born than the authors let them worm their way through intricate and weird surroundings until at last they lead them to the marriage altar, or, if the story be a tragedy, into the gaping mouth of an open grave.

Some one took Ian MacLaren to task for creating so many dissolute characters in his books. The author of "Bonnie Brier Bush" answered: "Man, how can I help creating many dissolute characters? They live their own lives and do whatever damage they please. Some of them will be drunk; some of them will be thieves; some of them will be liars; some of them will be murderers. I cannot control them."

Every true story of life must represent it as mixed up in the lives of many others. This is always so. What a mother does may decide to a great extent what her children will do. In the dining room there are more than three fates influencing the lives of young men. What the father does may decide what his boys will do. A wife's position upon the temperance question may decide whether or no her husband shall die of delirium tremens. The tale of a human life is a plot in which the happiness of a mother, a father, a sister, a wife, a child, a friend, may be dependent upon the purity and the nobility of one man. When the heart of an old oak is eaten out, not only does the mighty tree fall, but also all the clinging vines which have clambered up the sides of the tree. All the birds' nests in which the feathered mothers have laid their eggs, also all of the leaves which are kissed of the sunlight and are rustling with joy. In the story of life, when the hero does wrong, it brings disaster upon every life with which he comes in contact. When the hero does right, it brings blessing upon every life with which he comes in contact.

Every tale, whether fictitious or no, has its depressions as well as its elevations. It has its disappointments and heartaches and sorrows, and often its graves, as well as its joys and reunions and happy marriages. It has its dark nights and quicksands and precipices, and often its murderers and highwaymen as well as its cities of refuge and gardens of Eden and Utopias, and rescuers and, if I might reverently use the word, its saviours or redeemers.

But, though every story, whether fictitious or no, may have its ups and downs, yet the general rule is, the greater the danger and the blacker the sorrow and the more overwhelming and imminent the peril, the greater the heroism and the more glorious the triumph of the deliverer, the saviour or the redeemer. It is when all hope seems to be forever gone that we are relieved by the entrance of some character who is able to chase away the black winged demon of despair and lead forth the white robes of hope.

You may remember an illustration of this rule in Lord Lytton's famous historical novel, "The Last Days of Pompeii." While old Mount Vesuvius was writhing in agony and belching forth a reservoir of burning lava and while the heavens were raining a tempest of fire and the midday was as black as the darkness of the Egyptian plague did not the blind girl Nydia take her love by the hand and lead him forth out of the doomed city, out past the Roman sentinel who stood by the gate, preferring to die rather than to do her post, out to the blue waters of the Mediterranean, in which there was safety? Is not this statement true of the beautiful story of Dickens' "Tale of Two Cities" or of Scott's "Ivanhoe" or Cooper's "Pathfinder"?

The story of the Shakespeare's "King Lear" and of almost any of the works of the ancient story writers as well as the stories written by the authors of the present day? So general is this rule that the psalmist may have had it in mind when he declared that "we spend our years as a tale that is told" and practically saying, "You know that in the tale the time of the greatest darkness is usually the time of rescue; so, in real life, every man and woman, every human hero or heroine, even in the darkest days of life, can have a divine rescuer, a Redeemer, a Saviour."

The story of life is always a finished tale. In the British National gallery are a few of the unfinished pictures of Turner, the famous English landscape painter. While the great artist, whom John Ruskin admired so much, was working upon those canvases the death angel entered his studio and called him away. In the world of story telling we find many unfinished tales.

Fictitious stories are often unfinished, but the human tales about which the psalmist wrote are always ultimately finished tales. These biographies may lead many of us through the school-room to the marriage altar. They may lead us to great honors in life, but they will always lead every one of us to the grave. When the epitaphs have been inscribed upon our tombstones, what has been done will be done forever, what has been left undone will be left undone forever. The story of mortal life will then be ended. The earthly covers of the volume will be forever closed. We have often heard of aged authors re-creating and re-writing the stories they had written in their youth. But the tale of human life after it has been once finished can never be recast. We have heard how one of the sweetest and purest poets of the west at great expense gathered up some vicious and impure stories which he had written when he was a boy. He gathered them up to destroy them. But when the human tale of life has

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When once told it can never be silenced. It shall be told and retold again and again as it was last told at the grave. Lives in the parable begged Father Abraham to send back to earth the redeemed Lazarus to warn his five sinful brethren. Abraham would not. "Nay, nay, nay," he answered in substance, "Lazarus' earthly tale of life has been forever finished." Another word could not be added thereto.

But there is yet one overwhelming thought we must not overlook. The tale of life is a spoken story. We may read "The Tales From the Aegean," "The Tales of a Wayside Inn," "The Tales Out of School," "Tales of New England" and "Twice Told Tales," but after all, the true definition of a tale is a story spoken by a human being into the ears of one or more listeners. Sometimes these ancient story tellers were able to excite their hearers to a frenzy. It has been recorded that when the Greeks used to listen to the recital of the "Adventures of Ulysses" or the story of "Helen of Troy," they would weep and cry and shout as they climbed from the lowest depths of grief to the highest heights of joy. What would be the effect on the hearers if the tale of our lives was told? Would it excite them to a frenzy of sin or would it draw from them triumphant and holy ejaculations?

But this was not the chief thought which I desired to impress upon you. When our tales of life are told, they are not only spoken into human ears, but also into the all hearing ear of God. It used to be a terrible thought for me to feel that in heaven there was a recording angel, to know that every time I opened my mouth my words were being recorded as a human voice spoken into the phonograph makes its indentations upon a revolving cylinder. Months after my father's death I can now hear his voice reciting the Lord's Prayer as he once did in one of those instruments at the national capital. But, oh, how much more overwhelming the thought that every word we utter is spoken directly into the ear of our Divine Father! How much more tremendous to know that when "we spend our years as a tale that is told" we can never get beyond the reach of God's ear! Ought not this nearness to God make us strive by divine grace to live better and purer lives?

Once read how a great king of old used to confine his prisoners within a chain of dungeons. Every one of those cells was connected by a whispering gallery with the king's own bedchamber. Thus the slightest word

these state prisoners might utter during their confinement was immediately echoed to the king's ear, and if the prisoners said anything against their king he heard it and these prisoners were immediately taken out and executed. Shall not you and I be more careful to live the right kind of lives when we fully realize that each word we utter is heard by our Divine Father? Shall we not be more careful—not because we fear the anger of a tyrant, but because we do not want to wound God's loving heart any more than we would say a harsh or sinful word before a loving earthly parent?

"We spend our years as a tale that is told." That means, in the story of life, that we are about to pass from one book to another. The year of 1902 is nearly finished. The year of 1903 is just about to begin.

The passing year has been a sad one for many of us. During the past twelve months two of my family have finished their earthly lives, as a tale that is told. As I sit writing this discourse, I hold in my hand one of the last letters my father ever wrote to me. It goes something like this: "Dear Frank—My last birthday tells me that I have reached the psalmist's limit—threescore years and ten. My earthly pilgrimage of life will not continue very much longer." Within a few months that journey ended. How soon it was to end he little thought. Within the past year my brother-in-law left us, leaving behind a widow and her little children, who are now nearer and dearer to us on account of their loss. In your life the year 1902 has been a sad year. You have had your troubles just the same as I. But the year 1903 has also been a joyful year. It has been a year of many blessings. It has also been a year when those who have left us have gone to be with him who is their Saviour and their King.

But the year 1903 has also been for all of us a year of sin. If this chapter of the tale of life is written, how many soiled pages there are! Not one of us has lived up to our many good opportunities. We have been guilty both of sins of omission and sins of commission. Live as psalmist, we have reason to cry out in agony, "O God, thou knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from thee." But, though the year 1902 has been a year of many shortcomings, it may yet be made a year of divine pardon. There are a few hours of the old year left. Can we, shall we not crowd these last few lines of the book of 1902 full of penitent prayers, of earnest and tender pleadings, full of resolves to undo as far as we can the wrongs we may have done to others?

O my loved ones, will you not get down upon your knees and ask God to make this year, even in its closing hours, a year of divine pardon and triumphant hope?

A Fox Bush 1,000 Years Old.
In the town of Hildersheim, Germany, is a rose bush one thousand years old, and sprouts from its branches have realized fabulous sums. Some years ago a rich Englishman offered \$250,000 for the plant, but the owner refused. This wonderful plant clings amid thickly grown moss against the side of the famous old church of St. Michael. It is claimed that it has bloomed perennially since the days of King Alfred, and this statement has never been disputed, for its record has been carefully kept as the pedigree of the blood-royal family in the kingdom. It is supposed to have been discovered by some mysterious means through the medium of King Louis of Hildersheim, as far back as 1022.

Theatrical
A DISTINGUISHED COMPANY.

It is safe to say that the company which will present the revival of Robertson's delightful comedy, "Caste," in this city at the Grand Opera House on Saturday, January 6, 1903, will contain more distinguished players than any organization which has visited this city this season. Several of them have started on their own account and some of them in addition to their dramatic distinction can lay claim to most distinguished eminence. For example Mary Scott, the beautiful Californian actress who starred for several seasons in Frohman's pieces on the Pacific Coast, is a cousin of the late Benjamin Harrison and a direct descendant of the famous novelist, Sir Walter Scott. The role of the "Marchioness" in "Caste" will be enacted by the Countess de Castelvetro, who the grand uncle was none other than the great Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. Her grandfather was Napoleon's brother, King of Holland. Robert V. Ferguson, who has been rated by dramatic authority as the best character actor in the country, will impersonate the drunken old Eccles. Mr. Ferguson's most recent achievement occurred last spring when he and Katherine Kidder appeared in their revival of "The Country Girl" under the management of George H. Brent, who is directing the present tour of "Caste."

AN OLD RESIDENT DEAD.
After an extended illness Mr. Archie McTavish, one of Howard's best known and most highly respected residents, died on Friday last at the age of 69 years. Deceased has lived in the township for a great many years and was up to the time of his demise a faithful member of the Botany Methodist church. The funeral service was conducted at the Methodist church, Botany, on Monday by Rev. T. W. Blatchford, pastor of the church, assisted by Rev. Burdette, of Bridgetown, and Rev. Robertson, of McKays' Corners, after which the remains were interred in the church cemetery. To the bereaved friends the sympathy of the community is extended.

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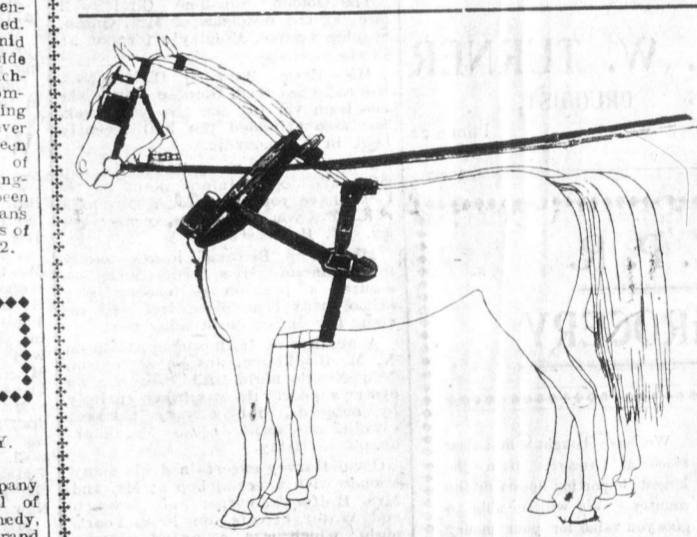
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