

'REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE'

OLD STORY TEXT FOR POWERFUL
SERMON ON SOCIETY SINS.

WAGES OF SIN ALWAYS DEATH

Preacher Shows How to Escape Modern Society Sins and Their Consequences—Trespassing of Temptation and Fall and Glorious Ones of Victory Over Temptation—Value of Good Home Training.

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1905, by Frederick Divers, of Toronto, at the Department of Agriculture, Ottawa.

Los Angeles, Cal., April 30.—In this sermon the preacher draws from the old story a powerful lesson on the sins of modern society and shows the way of escape from such sins and their consequences. The text is Luke xvii, 32, "Remember Lot's wife."

Truth is truth at all times. But truth is never more powerfully driven home to the consciences of men than when illustrated by parable or symbolized by biography or exemplified by anecdote. Christ always symbolizes truth in a very simple way. To-day he appears to us, as well as to the Pharisees of old, and says: "Men, you know the history of Lot's wife. With great opportunity of usefulness, yet she became false to her trust. Do not make the sinful mistakes she made. Do not have her doom your doom. By yonder pillar of salt learn that the wages of sin is always death. Repent of your sins while there is yet time. Repent as John the Baptist exhorted you to repent. Come and bow at God's mercy seat, and bow now." May God teach us one and all to linger only long enough in the plains of Sodom and Gomorrah to learn the mighty gospel lesson that there is no safety anywhere for sinful men outside the protecting and forgiving love of Jesus Christ.

Like Lot's wife, the most of us! Why? We are freed from the bitter temptations which, as a pack of hungry wolves follow in the wake of merciless poverty. We have never known what it is to arise in the morning and have nothing to eat. We have never known what it is to shiver in cold because we could not afford a warm garment for our backs. We never knew what it was to stagger about a great city after the hours of midnight in a snowstorm because we did not know where to lay our heads and then had to apply to the police station and sleep with a lot of filthy, dirty tramps upon the stone floors, with our ragged shoes under our heads for a pillow. We may not have been able to count our sheep by the thousands and our herds by the hundreds, as Lot's wife did. We may not have servants galore and messengers to do our slightest bidding. But, like Lot's wife when she and her husband separated from the Abraham household, we have all ways had enough food to eat, enough clothing to wear and a comfortable place in which to slumber. We have never been in a position where hunger was gnawing at our throats and where temptation came, snarling and snapping at our heels in our desperate struggle for a physical existence. We never knew what it was to long to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow and never be able to crunch a crumb.

Even murder, the worst of crimes, has degrees of turpitude. God pity the man who is placed in the awful position of one who realizes that he has to slay his brother or die himself. God pity the starving shipwrecked sailor who crouches upon the edge of a raft in the middle of the Atlantic ocean watching his companion at the other side of the raft, who is hungry, mad like himself. God pity him as he leaps forward as a tiger might leap upon the back of a trembling fawn and buries his teeth in the jugular vein of his friend and drinks the flowing blood in deathly glee as a mountain lioness would bury her teeth in the soft fur of a rabbit or a fat prairie dog. I tell you, my friends, God has different standards of judgment for sin. It makes a great deal of difference how one condemns us sin. On the one hand, we, like Lot's wife, have financial plenty and if, on the other hand, we are poor, hungry outcasts, with no work and no means of earning any kind of a honest, livelihood. To sin for pleasure and to sin because you do not

know which way to turn for food are two entirely different propositions in God's economy.

Oh, the temptations that come to some men on account of their struggles for a physical existence! I was never more impressed with the awfulness of such temptations than when reading this tragic story. Some years after the overthrow of Napoleon a banquet was being given in London to the British officers who had fought under Wellington at Waterloo. During their dinner the old commander, then the most honored man in England, took out of his pocket a beautifully jeweled snuffbox which had been presented to him by his Sovereign. In order that his companions in arms might see it he passed it down the table. A short time after Wellington asked where it was, and no one could find it. The jeweled snuffbox had disappeared. Of course all the officers present felt that there was a thief among them. Some one proposed that the doors be looked and every one searched. Much to the surprise of the company, an honored ex-colonel of a line regiment refused to be searched. Evidence, of course, pointed to him as the guilty man, but on account of his associations' sake Wellington let him go.

That night when the great duke was undressing for bed much to his surprise he found the jeweled snuffbox in his pocket. It had not been stolen. He had absently thrust it into his pocket. At once Wellington ordered his carriage and rode to the residence of the suspected colonel. In and out of the streets he went until his coachman drew up before a poor tenement house. Wellington climbed the rickety stairs and found his old companion living in poverty and squalor. He threw his arms about the colonel's neck and begged his pardon. Then he said, "Colonel, why did you not let us search you and free you from the suspicion of the theft?" "Because," answered the colonel, "though I am poor, I am very proud. My wife and children have not had enough to eat for months. Meat they have not had for a week. And while you were eating I slipped the meat off my plate and hid it in my pockets, that they might eat it after I reached home." Ah, the temptations of sin, which must continually abide with such starving men and the homeless! God is going to judge such sinners differently from the way he will condemn our sins. Like Lot's wife, we have had our physical necessities supplied. Aye, alms of us have had more than the necessities. God has given to us many luxuries as well. When we entered into sin we went there to seek pleasure, and not for the necessities of food and clothing. We sinned because we wanted to sin, and not because in one sense we felt we had to sin to live.

Like Lot's wife, are we? Most of us—aye, all—have felt the gospel inspiration of a Christian home. I know not whether this woman was born in a home, but I know that she was a young girl. I know not whether in her younger days she was taught to say her evening prayers at her mother's knee. But I do know that as soon as she married she was taken to a godly home. Lot, her husband, was Abraham's foster child and nephew. His father died when Lot was very young. Abraham and Sarah had no children; therefore they adopted this orphan—his mother was evidently dead—and brought him up as their own son. No sooner did Lot bring home his young bride than, methinks, I can see this old gray-haired patriarch Abraham welcome her to his home. I can see him place his hand upon her head and say: "My child, I welcome thee in the name of the Lord. I welcome thee as my daughter." Methinks I can see Sarah take the young girl in her arms and press her to her heart and place a holy kiss upon her fresh young lips. That night, as usual, the aged couple had family prayers. Lot and his bride kneeled by the old folks' side. Step by step Lot's wife is taught to trust God and to live for God and to be one of God's little children. She is not a cannibal on the Congo, taught from her infancy that the best banquet she can have is the quivering flesh of a captive whom her husband has brought home in chains. She is not an Aztec Indian, who thinks the best offering she can make to God is the bleeding heart of a human sacrifice torn out from the ribs of a pleading suppliant. She is a child of the covenant, having lived at least for years amid the highest and noblest of godly surroundings. She was destroyed because she refused to obey the teachings of God which she learned from her father-in-law and mother-in-law.

But do the lessons of Lot's wife end here? No. Drawing near to-day to the Abraham encampment we hear a great strife and turmoil. The herdmen

of Lot and the herdmen of his uncle are in bitter strife. Perhaps the cause of the quarrel was down at the well when the men were drawing water. Perhaps the cause was due to one shepherd persisting in his claims that he had a right to all the grass in one valley. Anyway, the row was on, and the employees appealed to their masters for settlement of the difficulty. That evening Abraham and his foster son determined to part. They came to the conclusion that as their flocks were so great and the pasture so scant they had better separate and each go his own way. But Abraham, with the one parental split, said to his foster son: "My boy, you can have your choice of the land for your future home. Then, after you have made your selection, I will make mine."

Then what happens? The Bible says that Lot went to Sodom because the grass was rich and the pasture good. But reading between the lines I think I can tell other reasons for the choice. That night when the great shepherd encampment was asleep I see the lights burning in Lot's tent. I hear a woman in earnest conversation with her husband. She is talking about like this: "Lot, what is the good of our living in a tent all our lives? We have lots of sheep and horses and cattle. We are rich. We can do what we like. You can let the overseers look after the herds. Take life easy and have some fun. Why not go down to Sodom and mingle in the society of wealthy and refined and aristocratic people? Our girls are growing up. They need a 'coming out' party. Oh, I know there are bad people living down there, but because they are bad we do not necessarily have to be very bad. Besides, Lot, don't you remember those big merchants of Sodom who stopped with us last year on their way to Damascus? They were very charming people. They moved in the best society. They asked me to come to Sodom to live, and they would introduce me to their friends. Come, let us go and live in Sodom! The grass is good in the plains of Jordan. There we can find good pasture for the flocks and herds and have lots of pleasure besides." And Lot and his wife went to live in Sodom. Why?

Can you find one circumstance, one ground for hope of spiritual development, that could have induced Lot and his wife to have gone to live in Sodom or Gomorrah? What Pompeii and Herculaneum were to the ancient Romans these vile cities were to the inhabitants of the east. The people were so vile and awful and debauched that no public teacher of this day dare mention them or write them for print. To-day as you walk among the ruins of Pompeii you see the most revolting and disgusting pictures painted upon the walls, which prove how the inhabitants of the aristocratic suburbs of Rome gloried in their bestialities. Such were the inhabitants of Sodom. They were a vile, depraved, and concupiscent. They not only sinned, but they gloried in their sins. They published those sins everywhere. They practiced them openly. Yet that was the place where Lot and his wife, with their two daughters, deliberately decided to dwell after they had left the sweet, holy fellowship of Abraham's home. My brother, my sister, are your companions to-day evil companions? Are they men and women who are as sin openly? Are they inhabitants of the evil cities of the plain?

Man, how is it about that club? I do not say all men's clubs are bad. But some certainly are bad. Is your club made up of Christian members? When you go there do you feel you are honoring Christ? Do you ever hear the lewd jokes, the ribaldry, the drunken bellowing, there? Do you associate there with men who are neglecting their homes and who are accustomed to speak lightly of woman's purity and the sacred nobility of motherhood? Wife, how is it with your associates? For years you have been struggling to get into "society." What "society?" The "society" of Sodom or of Nazareth? The "society" of wives and daughters who are trying to make the world better through Christ or the "society" of avowed worldlings? Why did Lot's wife long to associate with the sinful inhabitants of the cities of the plain? Why are you, O men and women, struggling to associate with people who care no more for your Christ than for Buddha or Mohammed or Confucius or Plato? Are your associates to-day made up of a gambling, drinking, card playing, dancing, Sabbath breaking, and God dishonoring set? If you are deliberately associating with such associates you are like Lot's wife, living with the wicked in the evil cities of the plain.

Now we come to the great climax of this symbol. Lot's wife was half way converted. She was in exactly the same position as you were when you lost your baby. You knelt by that casket and said, "Oh, God, give me back my baby! Give me back to you!" "Daughter, I will give you back your baby if you will flee that city of sin." I have taken your baby as a beautiful flower growing by the sinful quagmires and the worldly destructive misadventures of the wicked. I have plucked her and planted her in the river of life. If you will live as my child and turn your back upon sin you can come into my heavenly garden and lift again your face as the child of Sharon to your lips. Then you said: "Lord, I will come! I will come!" Or you are like Lot's wife because you were a few years ago in the surging of a great revival. It may have been in a village or city church. The religious movement as a great tidal wave swept over that community and carried your brothers, your sisters, your wife, your children, upon the Rock of Ages in the midst of the great sea of sin. You were at that time mightily moved. You turned to flee from the "city of destruction" as the inhabitants of Pompeii fled when old Vesuvius was belching forth her stream of hot lava and lighting the heavens as with the destructive flames of hell; but, like Lot's wife, after you had started away from your old companions of sin and your evil haunts you began to soliloquize. You said to yourself: "What is the good of my running away from sin? Can't I look back and enjoy the sight just for once? Cannot I go back and have one more carnival with evil?" As Lot's wife looked back after the angel of God had told her to flee with her husband and daughters from the "city of sin" you looked back, and you were lost.

Oh friends, can it be, after you have

once started for the "city of God," that you will look back longingly toward the "city of Death?" "An old Christian legend," says Dr. Baxendale, "tells us that the mountain of Calvary can be compared to a high mountain, on the top of which is a palace filled with all treasures—gold, gems, singing birds, a paradise of pleasure. Up its sides men and women are climbing to reach the top, but every one who looks back is turned into stone. And yet thousands of evil spirits are around the climbers, whispering, shouting, flashing their treasures, singing their love songs to draw their eyes from the palace at the top and to make them look back." Such is the history of your Christian life. Like Lot's wife, you started away from Sodom. You began to climb the hills of safety. But you looked back. You fatally looked back. My apostate friend, can it be, after you have once started for the "city of God," that you will linger longer by this "city of Death?" Can it be that a second call, and perhaps a last call, is not coming to you in this morning's sermon to seek the divine safety? Will you heed the call to-day?

But I cannot close these suggestions without one more thought. Christian church members having fled from the "city of destruction," will you not try to persuade others to flee with you? You must wish to be saved; yes, but you must also try to save others. If Lot's wife had by the power of the Holy Spirit saved ten others she would have saved all in the evil cities of the plain. If all of us who are professing Christians will save ten each year for Christ it will not be long before the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth, and even the waters cover the seas. Is that too much for Christians? Is that too much to ask? It is not too much if you and I heart and soul have consecrated our lives for the service of our Master. If we each save ten souls a year for Christ we will have saved ten thousand souls. We will have determined to exterminate the cities of the plain. Abraham said: "O Lord, wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked? If there are fifty righteous, wilt thou save Sodom?" For the "city of Sodom" sake? If forty-five, for the "city of Sodom" sake? If ten, for the "city of Sodom" sake? Then the Lord said, "Yes, I will save Sodom for ten righteous' sake." So Abraham arose from his knees and in all his ability said: "I will go down to Sodom and visit my niece and her chief friends. I will get all the names of the people with whom she is identified in religious work, and I will save that whole town from destruction for the ten righteous' sake."

The old man comes to the city. He is welcomed by his aristocratic foster daughter. He says to her, "My child, where live the godly people whom you have led to repentance?" "Why, uncle," she answers, "to tell the truth, I do not know if any of my neighbors and society friends are servants of God. Yesterday I was at the great chariot race, but there we only talked of horses. Let us attend court, but there we only talked politics. I do not know if even there are ten righteous people living in Sodom. During all the years I have lived here I have not brought one of my friends to Sodom. Is Lot's wife smarter than I am?" Church members, will you not during the next year at least try to bring ten immortal souls to Christ? Is it too much to ask? Let's wife could have saved Sodom. The Christian people of this country can bring this city and this state and this nation to Christ if they each will bring ten souls a year to Jesus. Is it too much to ask for Christ? Ten souls per year for each member. Is it too much to ask for Christ?

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