

DOWN FROM HEAVEN.

Dr. Talmage Speaks on the Only True Religion.

WASHINGTON, August 5.—From Trondheim, Norway, where Dr. Talmage is now staying, he sends the following discourse, in which he shows that the world is not to be benefited by a religion of human manufacture, which easily yields to one's surroundings, but must have a religion let down from heaven: text, Amos vii. 8: "And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb line."

The solid masonry of the world has for me a fascination. Walk about some of the triumphal arches and the cathedrals 400 or 600 years old, and see them stand as erect as when they were built, walls of great height, for centuries not bending a quarter of an inch this way or that. So greatly honored were the masons who built these walls that they were free from taxation and called the "free masons." The world gets most of the credit for these buildings, and its clear ringing on stone and brick has sounded across the ages. But there is another implement of just as much importance as the trowel and the level. It is the bricklayer and the mason and the carpenter, in the building of walls, use an instrument made of a cord, at the end of which a lump of lead is fastened. They drop it, and the plummet naturally seeks the centre of gravity in the earth, the workman discovers where the wall recedes and where it bulges out and just what is the perpendicular. Or, if he represents God as standing on the wall of character which the Israelites had built in that way testing it. "And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb line."

What the world wants is straight up and down religion. Much of the so-called piety of the day bends this way and that to suit the times. It is oblique, with a low state of sentiment and morals. We have all been building a wall of character, and it is glaringly imperfect and needs reconstruction. How shall it be brought into perpendicular? Only by the divine measurement. "And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb line."

The whole tendency of the times is to make us act by the standard of what others do. We throw over the wall of our character the tangled plumb line of the lives and actions of the world. There are 10,000 plumb lines in use, but only one is true and exact, and that is the line of God's eternal right. There is a mighty attempt being made to reconstruct and fix up the old conventionalities. To many they seem too rigid. The tower of Pisa leans over about 13 feet of the perpendicular, and people go thousands of miles to see its graceful inclination and to learn why it leans. It is leaning as good as a square. Why is not an oblique as good as straight up and down? My friends, we must have a standard. Shall it be God's or man's?

SOCIETY UTTERLY ASKEW.

The divine plumb line needs to be thrown over all merchandise. Thousands of years ago Solomon discovered the tendency of buyers to depreciate goods. He saw a man heaving down an article lower and lower, and saying it was not worth the price asked, and when he had purchased at the lowest point he told everybody what a sharp bargain he had struck and how he outwitted the merchant. "It is naught, saith the buyer, but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth." (Proverbs x. 14). Society is so utterly askew in this matter that you seldom find a seller asking a price that he expects to get. He puts on a higher value than he expects to receive, knowing that he will have to drop. And if he wants \$50, he asks \$75. And if he wants \$2,000, he asks \$2,500. "It is naught," saith the buyer. "The fabric is defective; the style of goods is poor; I can get elsewhere a better article at a smaller price. It is out of fashion; it is damaged; it will fade; it will not wear well." After awhile the merchant, from overpersuasion or from desire to dispose of the particular stock of goods, says: "Well, take it at your own price," and the purchaser goes home with light step and calls into his private office his confidential friends and chuckles while he tells how for half price he got the goods. In other words, he lied and was proud of it.

Nothing would make times so good and the earning of a livelihood so easy as the universal adoption of the law of right. Suspicion strikes through all bargain making. Men who sell know not whether the goods shipped will be according to the sample. And what with the large number of clerks who are making false entries and then absconding and the explosion of firms that fail for millions of dollars, honest men are at their wits' end to make a living. He who stands up amid all the pressure and does right is accomplishing something toward the establishment of a high commercial prosperity. I have deep sympathy for the laboring classes who toil with hand and foot. But I must not forget the business men who, without any complaint or bannered procession through the street, are enduring a stress of circumstances terrible. The fortunate people of today are those who are receiving daily wages or regular salaries. And the men most to be pitied are those who conduct a business while prices are falling, and yet try to pay their clerks and employees and are in such fearful straits that they must quit business tomorrow if it were not for the wreck and ruin of others. When people tell me at what a ruinously low price they purchased an

article, it gives me more dismay than satisfaction. I know it means the bankruptcy and defalcation of men in many departments. The men who toil with the brain need full as much sympathy as those who toil with the hand. All business life is struck through with suspicion, and panics are the result of want of confidence. The pressure to do wrong is strong from the fact that in our day the large business houses are swallowing up the smaller, the whales dining on bluefish and minnows. The large houses undersell the small ones, because they buy in greater quantities, and at lower figures from the producer. They can afford to make nothing, or actually lose, on some styles of goods, assured they can make it up on others. So, a great dry goods house goes outside of its regular line and sells books at cost or less than cost, and that swamps the booksellers; or the dry goods house sells bric-a-brac at lowest figures, and that swamps the small dealer in bric-a-brac. And the same thing happens in the sale of merchandise, and the consequence is that all along the business streets of all our cities there are merchants of small capital who are in terrific struggle to keep their heads above water. The ocean liners run down the Newfoundland fishing smacks. This is nothing against the man who has as large a store and as great a business as he can manage.

NEED OF DIVINE SUPPORT.

To feel right and do right under all this pressure requires martyr grace, requires divine support, requires celestial reinforcement. Yet there are tens of thousands of such men getting splendidly through. They see others going up and themselves going down, but they keep their patience and their courage and their Christian consistency, and after awhile their success will come. There is generally retribution in some form for greediness. The owners of the big business will die, and their boys will get possession of the business, and with a cigar in their mouth and a house to keep alive with the best liquor, and behind a pair of spanking grays, they will pass everything on the turnpike road to temporal and eternal perdition. Then the business will break up, and the smaller dealers will have far better opportunity. Or the spirit of contentment and right feeling will take possession of the large firm, as recently with a famous business house, and the firm will pass on to the hands of men for all the needs of our children. Now let us dissolve business and make way for the other men in the same line." Instead of being started at a solitary instance of magnanimity, let us have a general economy. I know of scores of great business houses that have had their opportunity of vast accumulation and who ought to quit. But perhaps for all the days of this generation the struggle of small houses to keep alive under the overshadowing pressure of great houses will continue; therefore, taking things as they are, you will be wise to preserve your faith and throw over all the counters and shelves and into the sea the line of divine right. "And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb line."

BEGIN AT THE TOP.

In the same way we need to rectify our theology. All sorts of religions are putting forth their pretensions. Some have a spiritualistic religion, and their chief work is with ghosts, and others a religion of politics and economy, proposing to put an end to human misery by a new style of taxation, and there is a humanitarian religion that looks after itself, and there is a legislative religion that proposes to rectify all wrongs by enactment of better laws, and there is an aesthetic religion that by rules of exquisite taste would lift the heart out of its deformities, and religions of all sorts, religions by the peck, religions by the square foot, religions by the ton, all of them devising a religion that would take the heart away from the only religion that will ever effect any good for the human race, and that is the straight up and down religion written in the book which begins with Genesis and ends with Revelation, the religion of the skies, the old religion, the God given religion, the everlasting religion, which says, "Love God above all and your neighbor as yourself." All religions begin at the bottom and end in the wrong place. The Bible religion demands that we first get right with God. It begins at the top and measures down, while the other religions begin at the bottom and try to measure up. They stand at the foot of the wall, up to their knees in the mud of human theory and speculation, and have a plummet and a string tied fast to it, and they throw the plummet this way and break a head here, and then throw the plummet another way and break a head there, and then they throw it up and it comes down upon their own pate. Pools! Why stand at the foot of the wall rectifying when you ought to stand at the top rectifying? I was in the country, thirsty after a long walk. And I came in, and my child was blowing soap bubbles, and they rolled out of the cup blue and gold and green and sparkling and beautiful and oblique, and in so small a space I never saw more splendor concentrated. But she blew once too often, and all the glory vaned into sudas. Then I took the glass of water and was refreshed. And so far as soul thirst is concerned I put against all the blowing, glittering soap bubbles of worldly reputation and human speculation one draft from the fountain of the eternal life, the throne of God clear as crystal. Glory be to God for the religion that drops from above, not coming up from beneath! "And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb line."

THE ONLY RELIGION.

I want you to notice this fact, that

when a man gives up the straight up and down religion of the Bible for any new fangled religion, it is generally to suit his sin. You first hear of his change of religion, and then you hear of some swindle he has practiced in a special mining stock, telling some one if he will put in \$10,000 he can take out \$100,000; or he has sacrificed his integrity or plunged into irremediable worldliness. His sin is so broad he has to broaden his religion, and he becomes as broad as temptation, as broad as the soul's darkness, as broad as hell. They want a religion that will allow them to keep their sins and then at death say to them, "Well done, good and faithful servant," and that tells them, "All is well, for there is no hell." What a glorious heaven they have before us! Come, let us go in and see it. There are Herod and all the babes he massacred. There are Charles Guiteau and Robespierre, the feeder of the French guillotine, and all the liars, thieves, house burners, gamblers, and all the abominations of all the centuries. They have all got crowns and thrones and harps and scepters, and when they chant they sing, "Thanksgiving and honor and glory and power to the broad religion that is generally accepted by all nations to let us go in and see it. There are Herod and all the babes he massacred. There are Charles Guiteau and Robespierre, the feeder of the French guillotine, and all the liars, thieves, house burners, gamblers, and all the abominations of all the centuries. They have all got crowns and thrones and harps and scepters, and when they chant they sing, "Thanksgiving and honor and glory and power to the broad religion that is generally accepted by all nations to let us go in and see it. There are Herod and all the babes he massacred. 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