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→ SERMONS ←

ABIGAIL, THE WIFE OF THE SHEPHERD KING.*

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Abigail was a woman of good understanding and of a beautiful countenance, etc.—I. SAM. xxv., 3-42.

THE character of Abigail introduces us to the most interesting period of Jewish history. It has been the design of these lectures not only to describe prominent women of the Bible, and draw practical lessons from them, but to give a somewhat connected account of sacred history, with allusions to the great men selected by the Divine Being as leaders in theocratic movements. The women of the patriarchal period brought out the characters of Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. Those of the Judges' reign exhibited Boaz, Barak, Jephthah, Samson, and Eli. Under the Kings we have already had glimpses of Samuel and Saul, and we come now to the time when, the wicked king, under the spell of the Witch of Endor, having gone down on the heights of Mount Gilboa, David the Shepherd King rises into power.

Abigail was remarkable for many things: for her personal attractiveness, for her unfortunate first marriage, for her fidelity under adverse circumstances, and for her happy second marriage to an illustrious man. I speak first of her personal attractions. She is represented as "a woman of a beautiful countenance." Say what we will of beauty, it is a wonderful power in the

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THE CONSTELLATIONS OF THE REDEEMED.

BY T. DEWITT TALMAGE, D.D. (PRESBYTERIAN), TABERNACLE, BROOKLYN.

They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.—DANIEL xii., 3.

EVERY man has a thousand roots and a thousand branches. His roots reach down through all the earth; his branches spread through all the heavens. He speaks with voice, with eye, with hand, with foot. His silence often is thunder, and his life is an anthem or a doxology. There is no such thing as negative influence. We are all positive in the place we occupy, making the world better or making it worse, on the Lord's side or on the devil's; making up reasons for our blessedness or banishment; and we have already done a mighty work in peopling Heaven or hell. I hear people tell of what they are going to do. A man who has burned down a city might as well talk of some evil that he expects to do, or a man who has saved an empire might as well talk of some good that he expects to do. By the force of your evil influence you have already consumed infinite values, or you have, by the power of a right influence, won whole kingdoms for God.

It would be absurd for me to stand here, and by elaborate argument, prove the world is off the track. You might as well stand at the foot of an embankment, amid the wreck of a capsized rail-train, proving by elaborate argument that something is out of order. Adam tumbled over the embankment sixty centuries ago, and the whole race, in one long train, has gone on tumbling in the same direction. Crash! crash! The only question now is, by what leverage can the crushed thing be lifted? By what hammer may the fragments be reconstructed?

I want to show you how we may turn many to righteousness, and what will be our future pay for so doing.

First: We may turn them by the charm of a right example. A child, coming from a filthy home, was taught at school to wash its face. It went home so much improved in appearance that its mother washed her face. And when the father of the household came home, and saw the improvement in domestic appearance, he washed his face. The neighbors, happening in, saw the change, and tried the same experiment until all that street was purified, and the next street copied its example and the whole city felt the result of one school-boy washing his face. That is a fable by which we set forth that the best way to get the world washed of its sins and pollution is to have our own heart and life cleansed and purified. A man with grace in his heart, and Christian cheerfulness in his face, and holy consistency in his behavior, is a perpetual sermon; and the sermon differs from others in that it has but one head and the longer it runs, the better. There are honest men who walk down Wall Street, making the teeth of iniquity chatter. There are happy men

who go into a sick room, and, by a look, help the broken bone to knit, and the excited nerves drop to calm beating. There are pure men whose presence silences the tongue of uncleanness. The mightiest agent of good on earth is a consistent Christian. I like the Bible folded between lids of cloth, of calf-skin, or morocco; but I like it better when, in the shape of a man, it goes out into the world—a Bible illustrated. Courage is beautiful to read about; but rather would I see a man with all the world against him confident as though all the world were for him. Patience is beautiful to read about; but rather would I see a buffeted soul calmy waiting for the time of deliverance. Faith is beautiful to read about; but rather would I find a man in the midnight walking straight on as though he saw everything. Oh, how many souls have been turned to God by the charm of a bright example!

When, in the Mexican war, the troops were wavering, a general rose in his stirrups and dashed into the enemy's lines, shouting "Men, follow!" They, seeing his courage and disposition, dashed on after him and gained the victory. What men want to rally them for God is an example to lead them. All your commands to others to advance amount to nothing so long as you stay behind. To affect them aright, you need to start for Heaven yourself, looking back only to give the stirring cry of, "Men, follow!"

Again: We may turn many to righteousness by prayer. There is no such detective as prayer, for no one can hide away from it. It puts its hand on the shoulder of a man ten thousand miles off. It alights on a ship in mid-Atlantic. The little child cannot understand the law of electricity, or how the telegraphic operator, by touching the instrument here, may dart a message under the sea to another continent; nor can we, with our small intellect, understand how the touch of a Christian's prayer shall instantly strike a soul on the other side of the earth. You take ship and go to some other country, and get there at eleven o'clock in the morning. You telegraph to New York, and the message gets here at six o'clock on the same morning. In other words, it seems to arrive here five hours before it started. Like that is prayer. God says: "Before they call, I will hear." To overtake a loved one on the road you may spur up a lathered steed until he shall outrace the one that brought the news to Ghent; but a prayer shall catch it at one gallop. A boy running away from home may take the midnight train from the country village, and reach the seaport in time to gain the ship that sails on the morrow; but a mother's prayer will be on the deck to meet him, and in the hammock before he swings into it, and at the capstan before he winds the rope around it, and on the sea, against the sky, as the vessel ploughs on toward it. There is a mightiness in prayer. George Muller prayed a company of poor boys together, and then he prayed up an asylum in which they might be sheltered. He turned his face toward Edinburgh and prayed, and there came a thousand pounds. He turned his face toward London and prayed, and there came a thousand pounds. He turned his face toward Dublin and prayed, and there came a thousand pounds. The breath of Elijah's prayer blew all the clouds off the sky, and it was dry weather. The breath of Elijah's prayer blew the

clouds together, and it was wet weather. Prayer, in Daniel's time, walked the cave as a lion-tamer. It reached up, and took the sun by its golden bit, and stopped it. We have all yet to try the full power of prayer. The time will come when the American Church will pray with its face towards the west, and all the prairies and inland cities will surrender to God; and will pray with face to the sea, and all the islands and ships will become Christian. Parents who have wayward sons will get down on their knees and say: "Lord, send my boy home," and the boy in Canton shall get right up from the gaming table, and go down to the wharf to find out which ship starts first to America.

We may turn many to righteousness by Christian admonition. Do not wait until you can make a normal speech. Address the one next to you. You will not go home alone to-day. Between this and your place of stopping you may decide the eternal destiny of an immortal spirit. Just one sentence may do the work. Just one question. Just one look. The formal talk that begins with a sigh, and ends with a canting snuffle is not what is wanted, but the heart-throb of a man in dead earnest. There is not a soul on earth that you may not bring to God if you rightly go at it. They said Gibraltar could not be taken. It is a rock, sixteen hundred feet high and three miles long. But the English and Dutch did take it. Artillery, and sappers, and miners, and fleets pouring out volleys of death, and thousands of men, reckless of danger, can do anything. The stoutest heart of sin, though it be rock, and surrounded by an ocean of transgression, under Christian bombardment may be made to hoist the flag of redemption.

But is all this admonition, and prayers, and Christian work for nothing? My text promises to all the faithful eternal lustre. "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever."

As stars, the redeemed have a borrowed light. What makes Mars, and Venus, and Jupiter so luminous? When the sun throws down his torch in the heavens, the stars pick up the scattered brands and hold them in procession, as the queen of the night advances; so all Christian workers, standing around the throne, will shine in the light borrowed from the Sun of Righteousness—Jesus in their faces, Jesus in their songs, Jesus in their triumph. Christ left Heaven once for a tour of redemption on earth, yet the glorified ones knew He would come back again. But let Him abdicate His throne, and go away to stay for ever, the music would stop; the congregation disperse; the temple of God be darkened; the rivers of light stagnate; and every chariot would become a hearse, and every bell would toll, and there would not be room on the hill-sides to bury the dead of the great metropolis, for there would be pestilence in Heaven. But Jesus lives, and so all the redeemed live with Him. He shall recognize them as His comrades in earthly toil, and remember what they did for the honor of His name, and for the spread of His kingdom. All their prayers, and tears, and work will rise before Him as He looks into their faces, and He will divide His kingdom with them; His peace—their peace; His holiness—their holiness; His joy—their joy. The

glory of the central throne reflected from the surrounding thrones, the last spot of sin struck from the Christian orb, and the entire nature a-tremble and a-flash with light, they shall shine as the stars forever and ever.

Again: Christian workers shall be like the stars in the fact that they have a light independent of each other. Look up at the night, and see each world show its distinct glory. It is not like the conflagration, in which you cannot tell where one flame stops and another begins. Neptune, Herschel, and Mercury are as distinct as if each one of them were the only star; so our individualism will not be lost in Heaven. A great multitude—yet each one as observable, as distinctly recognized, as greatly celebrated, as if in all the space, from gate to gate, and from hill to hill, he were the only inhabitant; no mixing up—no mob—no indiscriminate rush; each Christian worker standing out illustrious—all the story of earthly achievement adhering to each one; his self-denials, and pains, and services, and victories published. Before men went out to the last war, the orators told them they would all be remembered by their country and their names be commemorated in poetry and in song; but go to the graveyard in Richmond, and you will find there six thousand graves, over each one of which is the inscription, "Unknown." The world does not remember its heroes; but there will be no unrecognized Christian worker in Heaven. Each one known by all; grandly known; known by acclamation; all the past story of work for God gleaming in cheek, and brow, and foot, and palm. They shall shine with distinct light as the stars, for ever and ever.

Again: Christian workers shall shine like the stars in clusters. In looking up, you find the worlds in family circles. Brothers and sisters—they take hold of each other's hands and dance in groups. Orion in a group. The Pleiades in a group. The solar system is only a company of children, with bright faces, gathered around one great fireplace. The worlds do not straggle off. They go in squadrons and fleets, sailing through immensity.

So Christian workers in Heaven will dwell in neighborhoods and clusters. I am sure that some people I will like in Heaven a great deal better than others. Yonder is a constellation of stately Christians. They lived on earth by rigid rule. They never laughed. They walked every hour anxious lest they should lose their dignity. But they loved God; and yonder they shine in brilliant constellation. Yet I shall not long to get into that particular group. Yonder is a constellation of small-hearted Christians—asteroids in the eternal astronomy. While some souls go up from Christian battle, and blaze like Mars, these asteroids dart a feeble ray like Vesta. Yonder is a constellation of martyrs, of apostles, of patriarchs. Our souls, as they go up to Heaven, will seek out the most congenial society. Yonder is a constellation almost merry with the play of light. On earth they were full of sympathies and songs, and tears, and raptures, and congratulations.

When they prayed their words took fire; when they sang, the tune could not hold them; when they wept over a world's woes, they sobbed as if heart-broken; when they worked for Christ they flamed with enthusiasm. Yonder they are—circle of light! constellation of joy! galaxy of fire! Oh, that you

and I, by that grace which can transform the worst into the best, might, at last sail in the wake of that fleet, and wheel in that glorious group, as the stars for ever and ever !

Again: Christian workers will shine like the stars in swiftness of motion. The worlds do not stop to shine. There are no fixed stars save as to relative position. The star most thoroughly fixed flies thousands of miles a minute. The astronomer, using his telescope for an alpenstock, leaps from world-crag to world-crag, and finds no star standing still. The chamois hunter has to fly to catch his prey, but not so swift is his game as that which the scientist tries to shoot through the tower of observatory. Like petrels in mid-Atlantic, that seem to come from no shore, and be bound to no landing-place—flying, flying—so these great flocks of worlds rest not as they go—wing and wing—age after age—for ever and ever. The eagle hastes to its prey, but we shall in speed beat the eagles. You have not noticed the velocity of the swift horse under whose feet the miles slip like a smooth ribbon, and as he passes, the four hoofs strike the earth in such quick beat your pulses take the same vibration. But all these things are not swift in comparison with the motion of which I speak. The moon moves fifty-four thousand miles in a day. Yonder, Neptune flashes on eleven thousand miles in an hour. Yonder Mercury goes one hundred and nine thousand miles in an hour. So like the stars the Christian worker shall shine in swiftness of motion. You hear now of father, or mother, or child sick one thousand miles away, and it takes you two days to get to them. You hear of some case of suffering that demands your immediate attention, but it takes you an hour to get there. Oh, the joy when you shall, in fulfilment of the text, take starry speed, and be equal to one hundred thousand miles an hour. Having on earth got used to Christian work, you will not quit when death strikes you. You will only take on more velocity. There is a dying child in London, and its spirit must be taken up to God: you are there in an instant to do it. There is a young man in New York to be arrested from going into that gate of sin: you are there in an instant to arrest him. Whether with spring of foot, or stroke of wing, or by the force of some new law that shall hurl you to the spot where you would go, I know not; but my text suggests velocity. All space open before you, with nothing to hinder you in mission of light, and love and joy, you shall shine in swiftness of motion as the stars for ever and ever.

Again: Christian workers, like the stars, shall shine in magnitude. The most illiterate man knows that these things in the sky, looking like gilt buttons, are great masses of matter. To weigh them, one would think it would require scales with a pillar hundreds of thousands of miles high and chains hundreds of thousands of miles long, and at the bottom of the chains basins on either side hundreds of thousands of miles wide, and that then Omnipotence alone could put the mountains into the scales and the hills into the balance. But puny man has been equal to the undertaking, and has set a little balance on his geometry, and weighed world against world. Yea, he has pulled out his measuring line, and announced that Herschel is thirty-six

thousand miles in diameter, Saturn seventy-nine thousand miles in diameter, and Jupiter eighty-nine thousand miles in diameter, and that the smallest pearl on the beach of heaven is immense beyond all imagination. So all they who have toiled for Christ on earth shall rise up to a magnitude of privilege and a magnitude of strength, and a magnitude of holiness, and a magnitude of joy; and the weakest saint in glory become greater than all that we can now imagine of an archangel.

Brethren, it doth not yet appear what we shall be. Wisdom that shall know everything; wealth that shall possess everything; strength that shall do everything; glory that shall circumscribe everything! We shall not be like a taper set in a sick man's window, or a bundle of sticks kindled on the beach to warm a shivering crew; but you must take the diameter and the circumference of the world if you would get any idea of the greatness of our estate when we shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.

Lastly—and coming to this point my mind almost breaks down under the contemplation—like the stars, all Christian workers shall shine in duration. The same stars that look down upon us, looked down upon the Chaldean shepherds. The meteor that I saw flashing across the sky the other night, I wonder if it was not the same one that pointed down to where Jesus lay in the manger, and if, having pointed out His birthplace, it has ever since been wandering through the heavens, watching to see how the world would treat Him. When Adam awoke in the garden in the cool of the day, he saw coming out through the dusk of the evening the same worlds that greeted us on our way to church to-night.

In Independence Hall is an old cracked bell that sounded the signature of the Declaration of Independence. You cannot ring it now; but this great chime of silver bells that strike in the dome of night ring out with as sweet a tone as when God swung them at the creation. Look up at night, and know that the white lilies that bloom in all the hanging gardens of our King are century plants—not blooming once in a hundred years, but through all the centuries.

The star at which the mariner looks to-night was the light by which the ships of Tarshish were guided across the Mediterranean, and the Venetian flotilla found its way into Lepanto. Their armor is as bright to-night as when, in ancient battle, the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. To the ancients the stars were symbols of eternity. But here the figure of my text breaks down—not in defeat, but in the majesties of the judgment. The stars shall not shine forever. The Bible says they shall fall like autumnal leaves. It is almost impossible for a man to take in a courser going a mile in three minutes; but God shall take in the worlds, flying a hundred thousand miles an hour, by one pull of His little finger. As, when the factory band slips at nightfall from the main wheel, all the smaller wheels slacken their speed, and with slower and slower motion they turn until they come to a full stop, so this great machinery of the universe, wheel within wheel making revolution of appalling speed, shall, by the touch of God's hand slip the band of

present law and slacken and stop. That is what will be the matter with the mountains. The chariots in which they ride shall halt so suddenly that the kings shall be thrown out. Star after star shall be carried out to burial amid funeral torches and burning worlds. Constellations shall throw ashes on their heads, and all along and down the highways of space there shall be mourning, mourning, mourning, because the worlds are dead. But the Christian workers shall never quit their thrones—they shall reign for ever and ever. If, by some invasion from hell, the attempt were made to carry them off into captivity from Heaven, the souls they have saved would rally for their defence, and all the angels of God would strike with their sceptres, and the redeemed on white horses of victory, would ride on the foe, and all the steep of the sky would resound with the crash of the overwhelmed cohorts tumbled headlong out of Heaven.

WHAT IS MAN? (*What is man that Thou art mindful of him, etc.*—HEB. ii., 5-9.)—We need not only a true philosophy of God, but a true philosophy of man, in order to right thinking of the Gospel. See what gigantic systems of error have developed from mistaken conceptions of the true nature and dignity of man. I. Let us look at man as God made him. Read the 8th Psalm. At first man is utterly unworthy to be compared with those vast and wondrous spectacles revealed to us by the veiling of the sun. Yet God is *mindful* of him and *visits* him. There is not a moment in which he is unmindful of him, and no cot so lowly, no heart so wayward, no life so solitary but God visits it. God created man in the Divine likeness. In his mental and moral nature he is the Divine in miniature. He created him with royal supremacy (Gen. i. 28). Not a cringing slave, but a king in a palace crowned with the glory of rule and with the honor of universal supremacy. II. Man as sin has made him. His crown is rolled in the dust, his honor tarnished and stained and his sovereignty strongly disputed. So degraded has man become that he has bowed before the objects he was to command. Sin reigns. See man prostrating his royal form in shrines dedicated to birds, four-footed beasts, etc., and crowding the doors of gin palaces. Sin has defiled, debased, disfigured and blasted all in him and about him. III. Man as Christ can make him. See this, in the honor that has been conferred upon Christ—man's elder brother. He is crowned with glory and honor, has God's image and all power is given to Him in Heaven and on earth. The wreaths of empire are on His brow. The keys of death and Hades swing at His girdle. All worship Him and attest that He is worthy. As He is, so we too shall be, if we believe on Him. He is the type and specimen of what His followers shall be—crowned with glory and honor—sitting at His side—comrades in His glory. Oh destiny of surpassing bliss!—*Rev. F. B. Meyer, London.*