THE SUNDAY SERMON.

ONE OF T. DEWITT TALMAGE'S STERLING DISCOURSES.

Subject: "A Cheerful Church."

TEXT: "Behold, thou art fair, my love."—Solomon's Song iv., 1.

"Higher criticism" says that this book of Solomon's song is a love scene, a forlorn maiden sighing for her beau. If so, it is an unclean and debauched utterance inserted in the pure word of God and is not fit for common reading. My opinion is that it is an inspired ode setting forth the feeling of Christ toward the church and of the church toward Christ. Christ is the bridegroom, and the church is the bride. The same words we can utter to-day truthfully, whether in regard to the church of God in general or this church in particular, "Behold, thou art fair, my love."

The past week has been one of prolonged congratulation for that we have for twenty-five years been permitted to associate with each other in the relation of pastor and people. When I came to Brooklyn, I found a small band of Christian disciples who from various causes had become less and less until they stood upon the very verge of extinction as a church, and the question was being agitated from time to time whether it would be possible to maintain a church life longer. Indeed, had not those men and women been consecrated and earnest, they would have surrendered to the adverse circumstances. They marshaled a congregational meeting, and gathering up all the forces possible they cast nineteen votes for a pastor, all of which I am happy to have received.

It was not through any spirit of personal courage or reckless adventure that I was led from one of the warmest and most congenial pastorates in Philadelphia that a man ever enjoyed to this then most uninviting field, but it was the feeling that God had called me to the work, and I was sure He would see me through.

I have thought that it might be profitable to us to state briefly what kind of a church we have been trying to establish.

In the first place, I remark that we have been trying to build here a Christian church—distinctively such—in other words, a church where we should preach the Lord Jesus Christ and Him crucified. My theology is all gone into five letters—Jesus. Jesus, the pardon of all offenses. Jesus, the foundation for all structures. Jesus, the balm for all wounds. Jesus, the eye salve for all blindness. Jesus, the guide through all perplexities. Jesus, the hope for all discouragements. Jesus, the reform for all wrongs.

I have faith to believe that there is more power in one drop of the blood of Jesus Christ to cure the woes of the world than in an ocean full of human quackery. Jesus is the grandest note in any minstrelsy. He is the brightest gem in any crown; height overtopping all height; the centre of every circumference, the circumference to every centre; the pacifier of all turbulence; the umpire of all disputes. Jesus, Jesus! At His table all nations are to sit. Around His throne all worlds are to revolve. He is to be the irradiation of the universe. Jesus, Jesus! It is that truth that we have tried to preach in this Tabernacle.

Do you ask more minutely what we believe? I can tell you. We have no dry, withered, juiceless theology. We believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, the deliverer of the distressed, the home for the homeless, the friend for the friendless. We believe in Jesus Christ, able to save to the uttermost, pardoning the guilty, imputing His righteousness to the believer. We believe in the Holy Ghost, the comforter, the sanctifier, cheering up the heart in life's ills and kindling bright lights in every dark landing place. We believe that the whole race is so sunken in sin that nothing but the omnipotent arm of God can ever lift it out. We believe in grace—free grace, sovereign grace, triumphant grace, eternal grace. We believe in a Bible—authentic in its statements, immaculate in its teachings, glorious in its promises.

We believe in heaven, the abode of the righteous, and in hell, the residence of those who are soul suicides—of their own free choice refusing the divine mercy. We believe in the salvation of all men who accept Christ by faith, be they sprinkled or immersed, worship they in cathedral or in log cabin, believe they in Presbyterianism or Episcopacy, dwell they under Italian skies or in Siberian snowstorms, be they Ethiopian or American. All one in Christ. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, on the way to heaven. We built this Tabernacle for the purpose of setting forth these great theories of the gospel of the Son of God. Would that we had been more faithful in the pulpit! Would that we had been more faithful in the pew!

I remark, further, that we have tried here to build a church distinctively unconventional. Instead of asking, as some people are disposed to do, how other people do it, we have asked the question how people do not do it. Imperious custom has decided that churches shall be angular, cheerless, gloomy, unsympathetic, forgetting that what men call a pious gloom is impious, and that that church has the best architecture where the people are the most comfortable, and that that is the most efficient Christian service where the people are made most sick of sin and most anxious after Christ and heaven. And so we called the architects together for our first church building and said "Give us an amphitheater"—that is, a large family circle, gathered around a fireplace.

For many years we had felt that an amphitheater was the only proper shape for an audience room. The prominent architects of the country said: "It cannot be done. You need a church building." And so we had plan after plan of churchly buildings presented, but in due time God sent a man who grasped our idea and executed it. So far from being a failure, it satisfied our want, and all our three churches were built on the amphitheatrical plan, and scores of churches all over the country have adopted the same plan.

And, my brethren and sisters, we fail in our work just in proportion as we try to be like other churches. We believe that God intended every church, like every man, to be individual, gathering up all its peculiarities and idiosyncracies and hurling them all toward some good and grand object. In other words, no two churches ought ever to be just alike. Here is a church, for instance, whose object is to prepare philosophers and artists and critics for heaven. God speed them in the difficult work! Here is a church, on the other hand, that proposes to bring only the poor into the kingdom of Jesus Christ, looking not after the rich. God speed such a church in its undertaking! But there is a larger idea that a church may take—bringing in the rich and the poor, the wise and the ignorant, the high and the low, so that kneeling beside each other shall be the man faring sumptuously every day and the man who could not get his breakfast. God speed such a church!

Oh, my friends, we need to break away from slavery to ecclesiastical custom. We dare not sing if anybody hears us. We dare not preach unless we have rounded off our sentences to suit the criticism of the world. We dare not dress for church until we have examined the fashion plates and would rather stay at home than appear with a coat or a hat not sanctioned by custom. When will the day of deliverance come to the church of God, when, instead of a dead religion laid out in state on a catafalque of pomp and insincerity, we shall have a living, bounding, sympathetic, glowing Christianity?

I remark, further, that we have tried here to build and to conduct a cheerful church. While, as you know, we have not held back the terrors of the law and the sterner doctrines of the gospel, we have tried in this house to present to this people the idea that the gladdest, brightest, happiest thing in all the universe is the Christian religion. There is so much trouble in the world. Business men have so many anxieties. Toiling men have so many fatigues. Orphans have so many desolations. For God's sake, if there be any bright place on earth, show it to them! Let the church of Jesus Christ be the most cheerful spot on earth.

Let me say that I do not want anybody to come whining around me about the Christian religion. I have no faith in a religion made up of equal parts of wormwood, vinegar and red pepper. If the religion that is presented to us be a depression, we will get along better without it. If it be a joy, let it shine out from your face and from your conversation. If a man comes to my house to talk of religion with lugubrious countenance and manner full of sniffle and dolorousness, I feel like saying to my wife, "You had better lock up the silver before he steals something." I have found it an invariable rule that men who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, priding themselves at the same time on their sanctimoniousness, always turn out badly—I never knew an exception—while those who are the most consistent, the most useful and the most consecrated have perfume in their conversation and heaven in their face.

The happiest Christians that I have ever known have been persons from sixty to eighty years of age. By that time people get over the shams and the pretenses of society and have no longer any patience with anything like imposture in religion. O Christian, how dare you be gloomy? Is not God your Father? Is not Jesus Christ your Saviour? Has not your path all through life been strewn with mercies? Are you insensible to the fact that there are glories awaiting you in the better land—doxologies of celestial worship, eternal chorals, tearless eyes, songs that resound under arches of strength and hosannas that clap their hands at the foot of the throne?

Is it nothing to you that all the hills of heaven are radiant with the faces of those who have gone up from you and who are waiting for your coming, ready to keep with you eternal holiday? Is there nothing in songs that never cease, in hearts that never ache, in splendors that never die, to make you glad? Then take no more mercy at the hand of thy God! Give back the marriage ring of love that Jesus put on your finger in the day of your espousal! Plant no more of the flowers of heaven where there ought to be nothing but nettles and nightshade!

We try to make this church a cheerful church. A man on Saturday afternoon stands in his store and says: "How shall I meet these obligations? How can I endure this new disaster that is coming upon me?" He goes home. Sabbath morning finds him in the house of God. Through the song, through the sermon, through the prayer, the Lord Jesus Christ says to that man: "O man, I have watched thee. I have seen all thy struggles. It is enough. I will see thee through. I will stand between thee and thy creditors. I will make up in heavenly treasures what you have lost in earthly treasures. Courage, man, courage! Angels of God, I command you to clear the track for that man; put your wings over his head; with your golden scepters strike for his defense; throw around him all the defenses of eternity." What is the consequence? That business man is strengthened. He goes to the store next day feeling that God is with him and ready to deliver.

That same Sunday there is a poor old woman in the church hearing the gospel. Oh, how shrunken she is! She wears the same dress she wore twenty years ago. How faded it is and now out of date! She sits and listens as well as she can. Her eyes are so dim she cannot see half way across the church. Her ear is so imperfect that she can only catch occasionally a note of the psalm or a word of the preacher. Some one sitting next to her gives her a book and finds the place for her. She says, "Thank you, miss; thank you." She holds the book close up to her eyes and with a voice all full of tremors sings:

> Jesus, lover of my soul,
> Let me to Thy bosom fly
> While the billows near me roll,
> While the tempest still is high.
> Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
> Till the storm of life is past.
> Safe into the heaven guide—
> Oh, receive my soul at last.

And Jesus says to her, "Mother, are you weary?" And she says, "Yes, Jesus, I am very tired." Jesus says, "Mother, are you poor?" And she says: "Yes, I am very poor. I cannot sew any more. I cannot knit any more. I am very poor." Jesus says to her, "Mother, would you like to rest?" She says, "Yes, Lord; that is what I want—rest." "Courage, mother," says Jesus. "I will see thee through."

She goes home. The next morning in the tenement house some one dwelling on another floor comes to her room and knocks. No answer. The door is opened. She is dead! The night before the chariots of God halted at that pillow of straw, and Jesus kept His promise. He said that He would give her rest, and He has given her rest. Glory be to God for the height, the depth, the length and the breadth of such Christian comfort! Oh, that we might have such joy as that which inspired the men at the battle of Leuthen! They were singing a Christian song as they went into battle. A general said to the king, "Shall I stop those people singing?" "No," said the king. "Men that sing like that can fight." I would that we had a singing church, a joyful church, a jubilant church, a comforting church, for then we would have a triumphant church.

I remark, further, that we have here tried to build a church abreast of the times. It is all folly for us to try to do things the way they did fifty or 100 years ago. We might as well be plowing with Elijah's crooked stick, or go into battle with Saul's armor, or prefer a canalboat to an express train, as to be clinging to old things. What we most need now is a wide awake church. People who are out in the world all the week, jostling against this lightning footed century, come into the church on the Sabbath and go right to sleep unless they have a spirited service. Men engaged in literary callings all the week, reading pungent, sharp writings, cannot be expected to come and hear our ecclesiastical humdrum.

If a man stay at home on Sundays and reads the newspapers, it is because the newspapers are more interesting. We need, my brethren, to rouse up and stop hunting with blank cartridges. The church of God ought to be the leader, the interpeter, the inspirer of the age. It is all folly for us to be discussing old issues—arraigning Nero, hanging Absalom, striking the Philistines with Shamgar's ox goad—when all around about us are iniquities to be slain.

Did I say that the church ought to be abreast of the times? I take that back. The church of God ought to be ahead of the times—as far in advance as the cross of Christ is ahead of all human invention. Paul was 1000 years ahead of the day in which he lived. The swift footed years that have passed since Luther died have not yet come up to Luther's grave. [illegible] it will catch up and pass it by two bounds. The church of God ought to be ahead of the times.

I remark, further, that we have tried here, in the love and fear of God, to build a church that would be characterized by conversions. I have heard of very good people who could preach on for fifteen or twenty years and see no conversions, but yet have faith. It takes a very good man to do that. I do not know how a man can keep his faith up if souls are not brought to the Lord Jesus Christ. That church that does not bring men and women to the feet of the Saviour is a failure. I care not how fine the building, or how sweet the music, or how eloquent the preaching, or how elegant the surroundings—it is a failure. The church of God was made for just one thing—to get men out of the world into the kingdom of heaven.

The tendency in churches is to spend their time in giving fine touches to Christians already polished. We keep our religion too much indoors and under shelter, when it ought to be climbing the rocks or hewing in the forests. Then it would be a stalwart religion, a robust religion, a religion able to digest the strong meat of the word, instead of being kept on the pap and gruel of spiritual invalidism. It is high time that we threw off the Sunday clothes of sickly sentimentality and put on the working dress of an earnest, active Christianity.

Here is Brooklyn, here is New York, here are the United States, here is the whole world to be converted. It is 1894 years since Christ came, and yet Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America are still unevangelized. More people born every year into the world than are born into the kingdom of God. At that rate I ask any one who can do a simple sum in arithmetic to calculate when this world will be brought to Jesus. At that rate, never, never, never! And yet we know that it is to be brought to Christ. But the church will have to change its tact and take a wider sweep with the gospel net than it has yet taken. I believe that the great mass of the people are now ready to receive the gospel if we give them a chance.

A boy goes along the street at night and sees a fine house beautifully lighted up and hears music, and he says, "I wish I was in there, but I have not been invited," and so he passes on. Here is the church of God, lighted up with festivity and holy mirth, and the world passes along outside, hears the music and sometimes wishes it was inside, but says that it is not invited. Oh, invite the world to come in! Go out into the highways and hedges. Send a ticket of invitation printed in these words, "Come, for all things are now ready."

Some years ago 200 men were buried in the Hartley colliery of England. The Queen of England from her throne telegraphed, "Is there any hope for the men?" After awhile the answer came over the wires: "No hope. They are dead." Here is a whole race buried in sin and darkness and woe. The question that thrills up to the throne of God to-day is, "Is there any hope for the men?" Answering intelligence comes back from the throne of God, thrilling through the world's darkness, thrilling through the world's woe: "Yes. Hope for one, hope for all! Whosoever will let him come. And the spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let him that is athirst come."

We have had conventions all over the country discussing the subject, "How Shall the Great Masses be Brought to Christ?" They have passed splendid resolutions at the close of the meeting—a long list of eight, ten or fifteen have been read, and then the presiding officer has said, "All those in favor of the resolution for the conversion of the world, purifying the cities and redeeming the masses and making everything all right say aye." "Aye, aye!" say a thousand voices. "All opposed—no." "The ayes have it." There, the whole world is converted! Ah, we do not seem to get along by such a process.

If this world is ever to be brought to God, it will not be by the handful of ministers we have in this country. It will be by the great masses of Christian men and women discharging their duty. If the private church membership of this country would put on their armor and go forth, I believe that in fifteen years the whole land would be redeemed for Christ. Would God that all the people were prophets! I am never afraid to hear a man say that he is going to preach. If he cannot preach, people will not go to hear him. If he can, he has a message from the Almighty, and I would have him deliver it. Look out how you interfere with him.

Since we have been together as pastor and people how many have been promoted to the glories of heaven? They died sweetly, calmly, as only Christians can die. They have put down the staff of their pilgrimage. They have taken up the palm of the victor. The Lord Jesus has swung His arm through this church a good many times. He has been up and down all these aisles. He has taken the little children—the dear little children. He came down into the garden to gather the lilies and the aged as well. One who sat right here, so that when I used to preach I could almost put my hand on his head, when I came back from my summer vacation was gone. Oh, how the glories of heaven shone around that old man's face as he sat here Sabbath after Sabbath! Gone now. Happy spirit. Happy with all those who have passed the flood.

> One army of the living God—
> To His command we bow.
> Part of the host have crossed the flood,
> And part are crossing now.

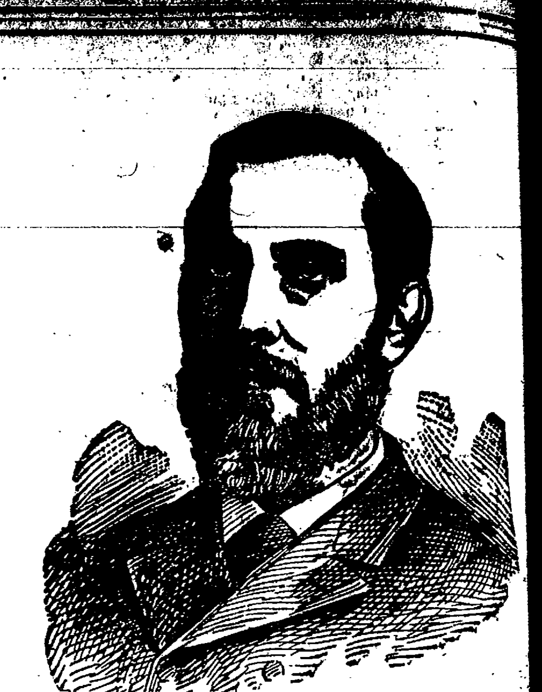
I thank you for all your kindness, for all your sympathy, for all your prayers for me as pastor. It is a sorrow to me that I am to be absent even for a few months. I have worked to the full extent of physical, mental and spiritual endurance for this church.

Now we start out on our twenty-sixth year. How many of us will close it here I know not. But, living or dying, let us cling to Christ. Oh, that all the people would love Him! I wish that I could take this audience this morning and wreath it around the heart of my Lord Jesus Christ! Oh, He is such a dear Saviour! He is such a loving Jesus! He is so precious! He is all the world to me. He is heaven to me. He washed away my sins. He comforted me in days of darkness and trouble. He is mine. Oh, blessed Jesus! Sweetest sound I ever heard or ever expect to hear is Thy name!

My closing prayer this morning is that God will have mercy on the dying population of our great cities, and that the whole earth will put on bridal array for the coming of the Lord. Ride on, King Jesus; ride on! Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting, and let the whole earth be filled with His glory! Amen and amen!

Lost Twenty-three Sons in the War.

Up in the mountains near Casey's Knob, Md., lives Jerry Reese, a man of many brothers and half-brothers. His father had three wives, each of whom had eight sons. Twelve of these were in the Union army during the war of the rebellion, eleven of whom were killed—some at the battles of Bull Run and Antietam. Jerry was also wounded at Antietam. The remaining brothers were in the Confederate army and were never heard from, and are supposed to be numbered among the unknown dead.



The subject of the above portrait is the Rev. Charles Prosser, a much beloved and most devout minister of the gospel of Carmel, Northumberland Co., Pa. Mr. Prosser's usefulness, was, for a long time, greatly impaired by a distressing, obstinate disease. How his malady was finally conquered we will let him tell in his own language. He says: "I was a great sufferer from dyspepsia, and I had suffered so long that I was a wreck; life was rendered undesirable and it seemed death was near; but I came in contact with Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery and his 'Pleasant Pellets.' I took twelve bottles of 'Discovery,' and several bottles of the 'Pellets,' and followed the hygenic advice of Dr. Pierce, and I am happy to say it was indeed a cure, for life is worth living now."

For dyspepsia, or indigestion, "liver complaint," or torpid liver, biliousness, constipation, chronic diarrhea and all derangements of the liver, stomach and bowels, Doctor Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery effects perfect cures when all other medicines fail. It has a specific tonic effect upon the lining membranes of the stomach and bowels. As an invigorating, restorative tonic it gives strength to the whole system and builds up *solid flesh* to the healthy standard, when reduced by "wasting diseases."

Mr. J. F. Hudson, a prominent lawyer of Whitcherville, Sebastian Co., Ark., writes: "Having suffered severely, for a long time, from a torpid liver, indigestion, constipation, nervousness and general debility, and finding no relief in my efforts to regain my health, I was induced to try Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery and 'Pleasant Pellets.' Under this treatment, I improved very much and in a few months was able to attend to my professional duties."

Yours truly,

J. F. Hudson

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If you have any considerable num[ber of] these symptoms, you are suffering [from] torpid liver, associated with dysp[epsia or] indigestion. The more complicate[d the] disease the greater the number of sym[ptoms]. No matter what stage it has reach[ed, Dr.] Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery w[ill sub]due it.

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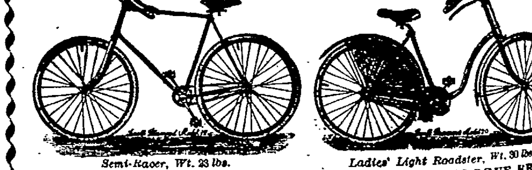

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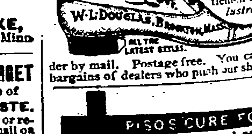

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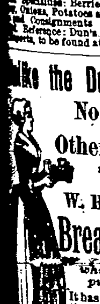

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