

THE LITERARY DIGEST

May 4, 1912

RELIGIOUS VIEWS OF THE "TITANIC"

WHAT DR. MANNING, the rector of Trinity Church, New York, said in his pulpit about the *Titanic* disaster was practically the same message as went forth from many pulpits in the land on the Sunday of April 21. This was spontaneously chosen as a day of memorial services, and the thought uppermost in many a speaker's mind was thanksgiving for the splendid heroism displayed by sufferers and survivors. "We can give thanks for the heroism, the calmness, and the courageousness shown on that boat in the last few horrible minutes," said Dr. Manning. "There must be joy in our hearts that these men and women, when they met the supreme test, faced it in such a manner. Their example on board that sinking ship has made the world richer, has given this generation a greater heritage to leave to those generations to come." There are few instances of the expression of a view of God's relation to the affairs of men that might have followed such a catastrophe in the preaching of an earlier day. Our forefathers dwelt much on the judgments of God; to-day the point of view is shifted and men see instead the follies of man. "A change of Tyre to *Titanic*," says the Rev. R. S. Donaldson of Milwaukee (reported in *The Sentinel* of that city), "makes the twenty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel a veritable lamentation over the steamship which met disaster during the past week." It was a matter of Providence, not judgment, he says. "No need of life-boats. No need to listen to any warnings along the way. This is the spirit of a thousand walks of life, and sooner or later leads to the latitude and longitude of defeat. God was forgotten." These two are the notes that are struck in the religious reflection on the event. Thanksgiving for man's heroism; dismay for man's improvidence. The Rev. Dr. Leighton Parks of St. Bartholomew's Church, New York, said in his sermon:

"Above all of the sorrow of the time, above the cries of the suffering, the hysterical shrieks of those who are well-nigh insane with their grief, there comes one strong, clear word, 'Be with us and comfort all,' the message of the noble-minded widow of the gallant commander of the *Titanic* to a sorrowing world. Let us leave to the Government the investigation of the great disaster, to the newspapers the repetition of its horrors, and to public opinion to award the crown of honor or the infamy of cowardice. And let us inquire if these men, who were not afraid to die, have died in vain.

"You and I will be better in life and in death because of

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their good example. The real message of this great and overwhelming affliction is that it is the latest revelation of the power of the cross. Not all those who cry 'Lord, Lord,' are followers of Christ, he taught us, but they who do the will of the Father, and he also said that those who are not against him are for him.

"Some of those people, who could only look back on a foolish, wasted past, acquitted themselves like men. The Master taught us to be strong and to do what we do in love. Those men were strong, and did what they did in love. We have plenty of examples of bravery—at Marathon, in the charge at Gettysburg, in the assault at Cold Harbor. But those men were soldiers, with leaders in whom they had confidence, with training and the power of discipline.

"The men who stood on that deck, in the presence of disaster, exhibited a power of self-restraint, exhibited it so quietly, too, that it can not be explained on any ground of mere evolution.

"Certainly, it was not a case of the survival of the fittest. There were men lost that the city and the country needed, and there are widows surviving who speak no language that you or I can understand, and who will inevitably become public charges.

"They did not ask why, nor if any helpless, poor creature were worth saving. The maxims of commerce were forgotten. There was no question of buying cheap and selling dear. They sold themselves for naught; they gave their lives away. Such a sacrifice can not be justified on any economic ground.

"But the Son of Man came into a world that was lost. And so the men on the *Titanic* sacrificed themselves for the women and children. The women did not ask for the

sacrifice, but it was made. Those women who go about shrieking for their 'rights' want something very different."

To Cardinal Gibbons, preaching in St. Stephen's Church in Washington, the heroism displayed was of a secondary value:

"While I admire the shining examples of heroism that make this shipwreck forever memorable in human annals, I admire still more the numerous evidences of religious confidence, resignation, and prayer that we meet in the narratives of the unhappy survivors. I feel confident that the unparalleled sorrow that now rests like a cloud on two continents will revive in many hearts a latent sense of divine power and wisdom and goodness, of God's rights in his own world, and of our human obligations to so conduct the social order that the existence and honor of God shall be respected. This is the corner-stone of all justice, and the neglect of it is the chief reason of our modern social and economic unrest."

Dr. Charles H. Parkhurst of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church, New York, makes a severe arraignment of modern life. The *Titanic* disaster, he declares, "is the terrific and ghastly illustration of what things come to when men throw God out at the door and take a golden calf in at the window." "All this sorrow, this horrible slaughter, this parting of loved ones, tragic rending of families . . . was totally without reason." As the press reports him he continued:

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“Different temperaments have, of course, seized upon different aspects of this unparalleled tragedy. Each of you has your own line of contemplation. I am going to tell you mine, and I am going to cut as close to the line of truth and to the nerve of the sensitive heart as I know how; for if this event is treated as it ought to be, it is going to produce some searchings of heart that will modify to a degree the attitude of the general mind toward certain vital questions of individual and public life.

“The picture which presents itself before my eyes is that of the glassy, glaring eyes of the victims, staring meaninglessly at the gilded furnishings of this sunken palace of the sea; dead helplessness wrapt in priceless luxury; jewels valued in seven figures becoming the strange playthings of the queer creatures that sport in the dark depths. Everything for existence, nothing for life. Grand men, charming women, beautiful babies, all becoming horrible in the midst of the glittering splendor of a \$10,000,000 casket!

“And there was no need of it. It is just so much sacrifice laid upon the accursed altar of the dollar. The boat had no business to be running in that lane. They knew that the ice was there. They dared it. They would dare it now were it not for the public. It is cheaper to run by the short route. There is more money in it for the stockholders. The multimillionaires want more money. They want as much as they can get of it. The coal is now saved. It is starting a little mine at the bottom of the ocean between Sable Island and Cape Race.

“It is a lesson all around to the effect that commercialism, when pushed beyond a certain pace, breaks down and results in stringency and poverty; and that action, when crowded, produces reaction that wipes out the results of action.

“Yes, we pity them, for unless their hearts are clean gone and burnt to a crisp, these days are to them days of remorse, of gnawing of the soul. Their guilt is not momentary. It is driven home with a gold hammer, which will beat them into sensibility. Had Providence held back the tragedy the moral lesson only would have been delayed.

“The two sore spots which really run into one another and which constitute the disease that is gnawing into our civilization are love of money and passion for luxury. Those two combined are what sunk the *Titanic* and sent 1,500 souls prematurely to their final account.”

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