

## **Plague of Bad Books** by T DeWitt Talmage

"And the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with enchantments, and brought frogs upon the land of Egypt." Ex. viii, 6,7

There is almost a universal aversion to frogs, and yet with the Egyptians they were honored, they were sacred, and they were objects of worship while alive, and after death they were embalmed, and today their remains may be found among the sepulchers of Thebes.

### **THE ANCIENT PLAGUE OF FROGS**

These creatures, so attractive once to the Egyptians, at divine behest became obnoxious and loathsome, and they went croaking and hopping and leaping into the palace of the king, and into the bread trays and the couches of the people, and even the ovens, which are now uplifted above the earth and on the side of chimneys, but then were small holes in the earth with sunken pottery, were filled with frogs when the housekeepers came to look at them. If a man sat down to eat, a frog alighted on his plate. If he attempted to put on a shoe, it was preoccupied by a frog. If he attempted to put his head upon a pillow, it had been taken possession of by a frog. Frogs high and low and everywhere, loathsome frogs, slimy frogs, besieging frogs, innumerable frogs, great plague of frogs.

What made the matter worse the magicians said there was no miracle in this, and that they could by slight-of-hand produce the same thing, and they seemed to succeed, for by slight-of-hand wonders may be wrought. After Moses had thrown down his staff and by miracle it became a serpent, and then he took hold of it and by miracle it again became a staff, the serpent charmers imitated the same thing, and knowing that there were serpents in Egypt which by a peculiar pressure on the neck would become as rigid as a stick of wood, they seemed to change the serpent into the staff, and then, throwing it down, the staff became the serpent.

So likewise these magicians tried to imitate the plague of frogs, and perhaps by smell of food attracting a great number of them to a certain point, or by shaking them out from a hidden place, the magicians some times seemed to accomplish the same miracle. While these magicians made the plague worse, none of them tried to make it better. " Frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt, and the magicians did so with their enchantment, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt."

### **THE MODERN PLAGUE OF FROGS**

Now that plague of frogs has come back upon the earth. It is abroad today. It is smiting this nation. It comes in the shape of corrupted literature. The frogs

hop into store, the shop, the office, the banking house, and the factory-into the home, into the cellar, into the garret, on the drawing room table, on the shelf of the library. While the lad is reading the bad book the teacher's face is turned the other way, one of these frogs hops upon the page. While the young woman reads the forbidden novelette, after retiring at night, reading by gaslight, one of these frogs leaps upon the page. Indeed they have hopped upon the newsstands of the country, and the mails at the post office shake out in the letter trough hundreds of them. The plague has taken at different times possession of this country. It is one of the most loathsome, one of the most frightful, one of the most ghastly of the ten plagues of our modern cities.

There are a vast number of books and newspapers printed and published which ought never to see the light. They are filled with pestilence that makes the land swelter with a moral epidemic. The greatest blessing that ever came to this nation is that of an elevated literature, and the greatest scourge has been that of unclean literature. This last has its victims in all occupations and departments. It has helped to fill insane asylums and penitentiaries and alehouses and dens of shame. The bodies of this infection lie in the hospitals and in the graves, while their souls are being tossed over into a lost eternity, an avalanche of horror and despair.

The London plague was nothing to it. That counted its victims by thousands, but this modern pest has already shoveled its millions into the charnel house of the morally dead. The longest rail train that ever ran over the Erie or Hudson tracks was neither long enough nor large enough to carry the beastliness and putrefaction, which have been gathered up in bad books and newspapers of this land in the last twenty years. The literature of a nation decides the fate of a nation. Good books, good morals; bad books, bad morals.

I begin with the lowest of all literature, that which does not even pretend to be respectable-from cover to cover a blotch of leprosy. There are many whose entire business it is to dispose of that kind of literature.

They display it before the schoolboy on his way home. They get the catalogs of schools and colleges, take the names and post office addresses, and send their advertisements, and their circulars, and their pamphlets, and their books to every one of them.

## **THE AMOUNT OF BAD LITERATURE**

In the possession of these dealers in bad literature were found nine hundred thousand names and post office addresses, to whom it was thought it might be profitable to send these corrupt things. In the year 1870 there were one hundred and sixty-five establishments engaged in publishing cheap, corrupt literature. From one publishing house there went out twenty different styles of corrupt books. Although over thirty tons of vile literature has been destroyed by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, still there is enough of it left in this country to bring down upon us the thunderbolts of an incensed God.

## **THE LAWS AGAINST BAD BOOKS**

In the year 1868 the evil had become so great in this country that the congress of the United States passed a law, forbidding the transmission of bad literature through the United States mails, but there were large loops in that law through which criminals might crawl out, and the law was a dead failure-that law of 1868. But in 1873 another law was passed by the congress of the United States against the transmission of corrupt literature through the mails-a grand law, a potent law, a Christian law, --and under that law multitudes of these scoundrels have been arrested, their property confiscated, and they themselves thrown into the penitentiaries where they belonged.

## **HOW ARE WE TO WAR AGAINST IT?**

Now, my friends, how are we to war against this corrupt literature, and how are the frogs of this Egyptian plague to be slain? First of all by the prompt and inexorable execution of the law. Let all good postmasters and United States district attorneys, and detectives and reformers concert in their attention to stop this plague. When Sir Rowland Hill spent his life in trying to secure cheap postage not only for England, but for all the world, and to open the blessing of the post office to all honest businesses, and to all messages of charity and kindness and affection, for all healthful intercommunication, he did not mean to make vice easy or to fill the mail or to fill the mailbags of the United States with the scabs of such a leprosy.

It ought not to be in the power of every bad man who can raise a one cent stamp for a circular or a two cent stamp for a letter to blast a man or destroy a home. The postal service of this country must be clean, and we must all understand that the swift retributions of the United States government hover over every violation of the letterbox.

## **ENFORCE THE LAW**

There are thousands of men and women in this country, some for personal gain, some through innate depravity, some through a spirit of revenge, who wishes to use this great avenue of convenience and intelligence for purposes revengeful, salacious and diabolic. Wake up the law. Wake up all its penalties. Let every courtroom on this subject be a Sinai thunderous and aflame. Let the convicted offenders be sent for the full term to Sing Sing or Harrisburg.

I am not talking about what cannot be done. I am talking now about what is being done. A great many of the printing presses that gave themselves entirely to the publication of vile literature have been stopped or have gone into business less obnoxious. What has thrown off, what has kept off the rail trains of this country for some time back nearly all the leprous periodicals? Those of us who

have been on the rail trains have noticed a great change in the last few months and the last year or two. Why have nearly all those vile periodicals been kept off the rail trains for some time back? Who affected it? These societies for the purification of railroad literature gave warning to the publishers, and warning to railroad companies, and warning to conductors, and warning to newsboys, to keep the infernal stuff off the trains.

Many of the cities have successfully prohibited the most of that literature even from going on the newsstands. Terror has seized upon the publishers and the dealers in impure literature, from the fact that over a thousand arrests have been made, and the aggregate time for which the convicted have been sentenced to the prison is over one hundred and ninety years, and from the fact that about two million of their circulars have been destroyed, and the business is not as profitable as it used to be.

### **THE LAW! THE LAW! WHAT IT IS DOING.**

How have so many of the newsstands of our great cities been purified? How has so much of this iniquity been balked? By moral persuasion? Oh, no. You might as well go into a jungle of the East Indies and pat a cobra on the neck, and with profound argument try to persuade it that it is morally wrong to bate and sting and to poison anything. The only answer to your argument would be an uplifted head and a hiss and a sharp, reeking tooth struck into your arteries. The only argument for a cobra is a shotgun, and the only argument for these dealers in impure literature is the clutch of the police and bean soup in a penitentiary. The law! The law! I invoke to consummate the work so grandly begun!

### **ANOTHER WAY**

Another way in which we are to drive back this plague of Egyptian frogs is by filling the minds of our young people with a healthful literature. I do not mean to say that all the books and newspapers in our families ought to be religious books and newspapers, or that every song ought to be sung to the tune of "Old Hundred." I have no sympathy with the attempt to make the young, old. I would rather join in a crusade to keep the young, young. Boyhood and girlhood must not be abbreviated. But there are good books, good histories, good biographies, good works of fiction, good books of all styles with which we are to fill the minds of the young, so that there will be no more room for the useless and the vicious than there is room for chaff in a bushel measure which is already filled with Michigan wheat.

Why are 50 per cent of the criminals in the jails and penitentiaries of the United States today under twenty- one years of age! Many of them under seventeen, under sixteen, under fifteen, under fourteen, under thirteen. Walk along one of the corridors of the Tombs prison in New York and look for yourselves. Bad books, bad newspapers, bewitched them as soon as they got out of

the cradle. Beware of all those stories which end wrong. Beware of all those books which make the road that ends in perdition seem to end in Paradise. Do not glorify the dirk and the pistol. Do not call the desperado brave or the libertine gallant. Teach our young people that if they go down into the swamps and marshes to watch the jack-o-lanterns dance on the decay and rottenness they will catch the malaria and death.

"Oh," says some one, " I am a business man, and I have no time to examine what my children read. I have no time to inspect that come into my household." If your children were threatened by typhoid fever, would you have time to go to the doctor? Would you have time to watch the progress of the disease? Would you have time for the funeral? In the presence of my God I warn you of the fact that your children are threatened with moral and spiritual typhoid, and that unless the thing be stopped it will be to them funeral of body, funeral of mind, funeral of soul. Three funerals in one day.

My word is to this vast multitude of young people: Do not touch, do not borrow, do not buy a corrupt book, or a corrupt picture. A book will decide a man's destiny for good or evil. The book you read yesterday may have decided you for time and eternity, or it may be a book that may come into your possession tomorrow.

### **THE POWER OF A BAD BOOK**

A good book—who can exaggerate its power? Benjamin Franklin said that his reading of Cotton Mather's " Essays to Do Good" in childhood gave him holy aspirations for the rest of his life.

George Law declared that a biography he read in childhood gave him all his subsequent prosperities. A clergyman many years ago, passing to the far west, stopped at a hotel. He saw a woman copying something from Doddridge's " Rise and Progress". It seemed that she had borrowed the book, and there were some things she wanted especially to remember.

The clergyman had in his satchel a copy of Doddridge's " Rise and Progress", and so he made her a present of it. Thirty years passed on. The clergyman came that way, and he asked where the woman was whom he had seen so long ago.

"She lives yonder in that beautiful house."

He went there and said to her. "Do you remember me?"

She said, "No, I do not."

He said. "Do you remember a man gave you Doddridge's " Rise and Progress" thirty years ago?"

"Oh, I remember. That book saved my soul. I loaned the book to all my neighbors, and they read it and they were converted to God, and we had a revival of religion that swept through the whole community. We built a church and called a

pastor. You see that spire yonder, don't you? That church was built as a result of that book you gave me thirty years ago."

Oh, the power of a god book! But, alas! For the influence of a bad book. John Angel James, then whom England never had a holier minister, stood in his pulpit at Birmingham and said: "Twenty-five years ago a lad loaned to me an infamous book. He would loan it only fifteen minutes, and then I had to give it back, but that book has haunted me like a specter ever since. I have agony in my soul, on my knees before God, prayed that he would obliterate from my soul the memory of it, but I shall carry the damage of it until the day of my death." The assassin of Sir William Russell declared that he got the inspiration for his crime by reading what was then a new and popular novel, "Jack Sheppard." Homer's "Iliad" made Alexander the warrior. Alexander said so. The story of Alexander made Julius Caesar and Charles XII both men of blood. Have you in your pocket or in your trunk, or in your desk at business a bad book, a bad picture, a bad pamphlet? In God's name I warn you to destroy it.

### **THE CHRISTIAN PRESS**

Another way in which we shall fight back this corrupt literature and kill the frogs of Egypt is by rolling over them the Christian printing press, which shall give plenty of healthful reading to all adults. All these men and women are reading men and women. What are you reading? Abstain from all those books, which, while they have some good things about them, have also an admixture of evil. You have read books that had two elements in them—the good and the bad.

Which stuck to you? The bad! The heart of most people is like a sieve, which lets the small particles of gold fall through, but keeps the great cinders. Once in a while there is a mind like a loadstone, which, plunged amid steel and brass filings, gathers up the steel and repels the brass. But it is generally the opposite. If you attempt to plunge through a fence of burrs to get one blackberry, you will get more burrs than blackberries. You cannot afford to read a bad book, however good you are. You say, "The influence is insignificant."

I tell you that the scratch of a pin has sometimes produced lockjaw. Alas, if through curiosity, as many do, you pry into an evil book, your curiosity is as dangerous as that of the man who would take a torch into a gunpowder mill merely to see whether it would really blow up or not.

In a menagerie a man put his arm through the bars of a black leopard's cage. The animal's hide looked so sleek and bright and beautiful. He just stroked it once. The monster seized him, and he drew forth a hand torn and mangled and bleeding. Oh, touch not evil even with the faintest stroke! Though it may be glossy and beautiful, touch it not lest you pull forth your soul torn and bleeding under the clutch of the black leopard.

"But," you say, "how can I find out whether a book is good or bad without reading it?" There is always some thing suspicious about a bad book. I never knew an exception-something suspicious in the index or style of illustration. This venomous reptile almost always carries a warning rattle.

The clock strikes midnight. A fair form bends over a romance. The eyes flash fire. The breath is quick and irregular. Occasionally the color dashes to the cheek, and then dies out. The hands tremble as though a guardian spirit were trying to shake the deadly book out of the grasp. Hot tears fall. She laughs with a shrill voice that drops dead at its own sound. The sweat on her brow is the spray dashed up from the river of death. The clock strikes four, and the rosy dawn soon after begins to look through the lattice upon the pale form that looks like a detained specter of the night. Soon in a mad house she will mistake her ringlets for curling serpents, and thrust her white hand through the bars of the prison, and smite her head, rubbing it back as though to push the scalp from the skull, shrieking: "My brain! My brain!" Oh, stand off from that! Why will you go sounding your way amid the reefs and warning buoys, when there is such a vast ocean in which you may voyage, all sail set?

We see so many books we do not understand what a book is. Stand it on end. Measure it-the height of it, the depth of it, the length of it, the breadth of it. You cannot do it. Examine the paper and estimate the progress made from the time of the impressions on clay, and then on to the bark of trees, and from the bark of trees to papyrus, and from papyrus to the hide of wild beasts, and from the hide of wild beasts on down until the miracles of our modern paper manufactories, and then see the paper, white and pure, as an infant's soul, waiting for God's inscription.

A book! Examine the type of it. Examine the printing of it, and see the progress from the time when Solon's laws were written on oak planks, and Hasid's poems were written on tables of lead, and the Sinaitic commands were written on tables of stone, on down to Hoe's perfecting printing press.

A book! It took all the universities of the past, all the martyr fires, all the civilizations, all the battles, all the victories, all the defeats, all the glooms, all the brightness, all the centuries to make it possible. A book! It is the chorus of ages; it is the drawing room in which kings and queens and orators and poets and historians come out to greet you. If I worshipped anything on earth I would worship that. If I burned incense to any idol I would build an altar to that.

Thank God for good books, healthful books, inspiring books, Christian books, books of men, books of women, Book of God. It is with these good books that we are to overcome corrupt literature. Upon the frogs swoop with these eagles. I depend much for the overthrow of iniquitous literature upon the mortality of

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books. Even good books have a hard struggle to live.

Polybius wrote forty books; only five of them left. Thirty books of Tacitus have perished. Twenty books of Pliny have perished. Livy wrote one hundred and forty books; only thirty-five of them remain. Aeschylus wrote one hundred dramas; only seven remain. Euripides wrote over a hundred; only nineteen remain. Varro wrote the biographies of over seven hundred great Romans. All that wealth of biography has perished. If good and valuable books have such a struggle to live, what must be the state of those that are diseased and corrupt and blasted at the very start? They will die as the frogs when the Lord turned back the plague. The work of Christianization will go on until there will be nothing left but good books, and they will take the supremacy of the world. May you and I live to see the illustrious day! Against every bad pamphlet send a good pamphlet; against every unclean picture send an innocent picture; against every scurrilous song send a Christian song; against every bad book send a good book; and then it will be as it was in ancient Toledo, where the Toletum missals were kept by the saints in six churches, and the sacrilegious Roman missals be substituted; and the war came on, and I am glad to say, that the whole matter having been referred to champions, the champion of the Toletum missals with one blow brought down the champion of the Roman missals.

So, it will be in our day. The good literature, the Christian literature, in its championship for God and the truth, will bring down the evil literature in its championship for the devil. I feel tingling to the tips of my fingers and all through the nerves of my body, and all the depth of my soul, the certainty of our triumph. Cheer up, oh, men and women who are toiling for the purification of society! Toil with your faces in the sunlight. "If God be for us, who, who can be against us?"

## **LADY STANHOPE**

Lady Hester Stanhope was the daughter of the third Earl of Stanhope, and after her nearest friends had died she moved to the far east, took possession of a deserted convent, threw up fortresses amid the mountains of Lebanon, opened the castle to the poor, and the wretched, and the sick who would come in. She made her castle a home for the unfortunate. She was a devout Christian woman. She was waiting for the coming of the Lord. She expected that the Lord would descend in person, and she thought upon it until it was too much for her reason. In the magnificent stables of her palace she had two horses groomed and bridled and saddled and caparisoned and all ready for the day in which her Lord should descend, and He on one of them and she on the other should start for Jerusalem, the city of the Great King. It was a fanaticism and a delusion; but there was romance, and there was splendor, and there was thrilling expectation in the dream!

Ah, my friends, we need no earthly palfreys groomed and saddled and bridled and

caparisoned for our Lord when He shall come. The horse is ready in the equerry of heaven, and the imperial rider is ready to mount. " And I saw, and behold a white horse, and He that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him; and he went forth conquering and to conquer. And the armies which were in heaven followed him on white horses, and on his vesture and on his thigh were written, King of kings, and Lord of lords."

Horsemen of heaven, mount! Cavalry of God, ride on! Charge! Charge! Until they shall be hurled back on their haunches-the black horse of famine, and the red horse of carnage, and the pale horse of death.

Jesus forever!