



THREE TYPICAL TREES.

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THREE TYPICAL TREES.

A REMARKABLE parable was given by Jotham, in days before there was any king in Israel, which gives light on the typical bearing of three trees. We read: "The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? And the trees said

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to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?" (Judges ix. 8-13).

These three trees are often mentioned in scripture, and all refer in the first place to the nation of Israel, so they are symbolical trees.

The olive began with Abraham.
The fig began at Mount Sinai.

The vine began when Israel entered the land of Palestine

THREE TYPICAL TREES.

The Jews were very conscious that as they were descended from Abraham, that the promises belonged to them—they took the ground of being in the olive. John the Baptist said in his preaching, "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matt. iii. 9).

In Jotham's parable the question was, Would either of these three trees reign over all the other trees? But they declined owing to the good place they already held.

The olive replied, "Should I leave my fatness?" The fig tree replied, "Should I forsake my sweetness?"

The vine replied, "Should I leave my wine?"

Fatness is the thought in the olive, sweetness in the fig, and cheer in the vine.

THE OLIVE TREE.

The olive fruit has to be prepared before being used—the berries have to be beaten, then the oil or fatness is obtained.

The olive tree is an evergreen; it never casts its leaves—a suitable figure of how the promises of God appear always fresh and available for faith. God took up man in a special way in Abraham's seed after the flesh, and gave them these privileges. However, they thought but little of them, and the time

came when God broke some of the branches off and shut them out from the privileges which they had enjoyed. When God broke the Jews off, after they had crucified Christ, He called the Gentiles into the place of these privileges, and they came under His rule, and were then called Christians. At the present moment Christendom is in the olive tree. God keeps account of all the privileges He has given and holds men responsible for them.

Of the Jew, while he was in the olive tree, it was asked, "What advantage then hath the Jew? . . . chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. iii. 2). Their chief advantage

was that they had the scriptures, but now, "when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart" (2 Cor. iii. 15), so they have no light, but Christians have the scriptures and the Holy Spirit the teacher.

What are we doing with all these privileges which are found in the olive? If they are not valued, then the branches will be broken off, the privileges will be given to others.

The olive tree is the earliest symbol of blessing; it began with Abraham and will continue through the millennium. Christians stand now in the place of privilege—they have got the scriptures and the spiritual temple. The apostle recounts to the Hebrews their con-

nection with the olive, "They were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come." These were the privileges that were in the olive tree in apostolic days, and some had not profited by them; so they were broken off from connection with earthly privileges because of unbelief.

Then the Gentile is spoken to: "Thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee" (Rom. xi. 20, 21). All this refers to Christendom and the privileges

which belong to it. When the Jewish branches were broken off, it was not a question of eternal judgment, but of losing blessing while in *this world*. Jesus said to the woman of Samaria, Salvation is of the Jews; there was at that time no salvation apart from that nation because they had the oracles of God. Salvation is not of the Jews now; they themselves are outside the privileges, they have been broken off. If a Jew wants the blessings of the gospel he must come to the Christians and receive the truth through them, and when he has believed and has been baptised, he will be saved; but this really makes him a Christian, so he is no more a

Jew. If a heathen should desire to know about salvation, he must come to the Christians; they alone know the way of salvation. If he went to the Jews, he could learn nothing, because they themselves have rejected the Saviour. Christendom is going to be broken off, because it has not continued in God's goodness. All this gives an idea of the privileges that belong to us as Christians while we are in this world; and even though we have not thought much of these things, yet we are all partakers of the benefits. The olive tree is the privilege tree, and is loaded with privileges, and therefore brings in responsibility.

How do we appreciate all the ad-

vantages brought to us in the olive tree? If we do not appreciate them we shall lose them in this world (see Matt. xiii. 12). We are not speaking about the next world, but the one we are now living in. In the olive tree we have no reference to the next world, but of the privileges and advantages we have in being connected with God's testimony on earth. Israel will be grafted in again, as we read, "If they abide not still in unbelief, they shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again" (Rom. xi. 23). It is a very serious word for professing Christians, "Be not highminded, but fear." Do not treat these things lightly; reverence them, because God

has brought us into connection with them.

THE FIG TREE.

The fig tree is different altogether from the olive. The fig said, "Should I forsake my sweetness?" With the fig no preparation is needed. A ripe fig can be picked and eaten because of its sweetness. The fig tree represented man as responsible to answer to culture, as we see in the parable the Lord gave, "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" (Luke xiii. 7). This showed that it was Israel. Jesus had been going about in Israel ministering the truth of God. What

was the result of His three years' service? There was no fruit for God. The question was, What should be done? He said, Let it alone this year also; give it a little more attention. But what was the use of cultivating the barren fig tree? In Mark's Gospel we get the close of the history of the fig tree. We read, Jesus was hungry; He wanted something to eat. How typical! Jehovah was seeking for fruit from the people He had taken such pains with. Jesus had come at the last moment to see whether there was anything suitable for God. Seeing the tree, He came if haply He might find anything thereon, but He found nothing but leaves. The fig tree

sheds its leaves, and in the beginning of the year the fruit appears before the leaves. That showed that man's first responsibility was to God, and then to his fellow-creature. The law said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God—that was, so to speak, *the fruit*—and thy neighbour as thyself—that was *the leaves*. Israel started on terms of responsibility from Mount Sinai. When Israel failed the prophets were sent to remind them of their obligations to bear fruit, and last of all Jesus was sent, and He laboured to produce fruit, and at the last moment He came to see “if haply he might find anything thereon.” But there was nothing but leaves. They had the

leaves of profession before men, but there was no fruit for God. The Jewish nation professed to have the testimony of God; they had God's land—Palestine, God's city—Jerusalem, God's temple, and God's oracles. These were boasted in, but when Jesus came there was no result, no fruit for God. The Lord had said, quoting Isaiah, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." There was the outside profession, but the heart was far from God. Jesus had been three years cultivating the fig tree, but at last He cursed it—"no man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever." Peter

remarked, "The fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away." Man was responsible under the old covenant to bring forth fruit to God, but he failed, so that God will never look on the typical fig again. This is very important. Few Christians know this, so many are trying to cultivate the fig tree. They think by reformation and ritualism they will be acceptable to God, but God will never accept anything from man after the flesh. This is a hard lesson, but Christians never make any progress till they have learned that "they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Jesus set the fig tree aside when He pronounced the curse, "No man eat fruit of thee

hereafter for ever." The fig tree is mentioned in scripture in many interesting connections.

Nathanael went to pray under a fig tree; he was a Jew under law looking to get blessing on the ground of the first covenant (see John i. 48).

Zacchaeus went up a sycamore tree (that is, a wild fig); he thought that he ought to do something to get blessing, but he had to come down before Jesus could bless him (see Luke xix. 4, 5).

God will not bless man on the ground of the flesh, the ground of the old covenant; therefore Jesus was made a curse for us. He took the curse that He pronounced on

the fig tree in order that He might bring in the new covenant.

The Lord did acknowledge that the fig tree was naturally very sweet. A young man said, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" He was looking for blessing on the ground of the covenant made on Mount Sinai. The Lord reminded him of the commandments. The young man replied, "All these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him" (Mark x. 17-22). This young man had great regard for the things of God; he was doing his very best in connection with the *first* covenant, and the Lord recognised the sweetness of it. But when the sweetness

was tested it was very disappointing; he went away grieved. Jesus had proposed to open up heavenly things to him, but he only wanted long life on earth.

There was that which was beautiful in the young man. He had obeyed his parents from his youth, but the moment the flesh was tested it turned out worthless; he went away grieved. Can we wonder that the Lord cursed the fig tree? Nothing produced by the flesh can please God.

THE VINE.

The third tree was the vine. The vine bears the grapes, which have to be trodden and then fermented in order to produce the wine. The

vine is not characterised by the grapes, but by that which is made out of them. "Should I leave my wine which cheereth God and man?" Israel began to be Jehovah's vine in the land of Palestine, but, alas! it brought forth wild grapes. Jesus was the true Vine in contrast to Israel, which never gave God any cheer. Cheer is something that invigorates and gladdens. The Lord said, "I am the true vine" (John xv. 1). He took that place on earth. He did not unfold to the disciples their connection with Him till He had told them about His death; then He said to them, "Now ye are clean." They were cleansed from their connection with the old vine

in order that they might understand what it was to be associated with Christ as the true Vine. When the Lord Jesus was here He was a Man after another order. He was a Man who delighted to do God's will, and took the place of being the true Vine.

Israel as the false vine was judged, and God took away the hedge which had preserved them as a nation and let other nations in, who burned Jerusalem and destroyed everything God had given them, because they did not cheer the heart of God. Directly Jesus was here He truly cheered the heart of God and the heart of man as well.

Trees do not grow in heaven, but

only on earth—the olive, the fig, and the vine all belong to earth.

“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away”; that is from association with Christ on earth—it does not refer to heaven. “Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it.” It is the Christian who walks carefully and bears fruit that the Father purges. Purging means pruning. The vine-dresser cuts off certain growths, so that what is left may be very close to the vine; that is the secret of pruning. So believers get purged to keep them close to Christ. Paul was much purged because he was a most devoted servant; he did not come behind the very chiefest

apostles. The more we are like Christ and desire to cheer the heart of God, the more we shall come under the discipline which cuts off those growths which will have no fruit on them, so that what is left may be very close to the Vine itself. In 2 Corinthians ii. 15 "we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ"; that is what we understand by cheering the heart of God. It was very distinctly taught to the disciples that they could not bear fruit apart from the closest association with Christ. Those who do not continue in the vine are trying to live in connection with the fig tree, but "they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me.” Notice the word “cannot.” If there is any independence of Christ we do not bear fruit, do not cheer the heart of God. “Without me ye can do nothing.”

The saints who have gone to heaven are not in the Vine, but those of us who are down on earth and wish to have proper Christian experience must abide in Christ.

“If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch.” Sometimes persons are in a difficulty about this verse, all because they do not see that abiding in Christ refers to us while we are on the earth. If we

were to die to-night we should not be any more exhorted to abide in Christ, because we should be with Him. All trees are connected with the earth; other lines of truth connect us with heaven. "Men gather them." That just refers to the cuttings of the vine; what is cut off the vine is useless except for burning (see Ezek. xv.). God calls attention to the fact that the vine wood has only one use—that is, to bear fruit. It is not possible to make a peg to hang a vessel on out of the wood of the vine. There is only one purpose for the vine, so there is only one use for the believer in this world—that is, to cheer the heart of God and man.

When a Christian brings forth fruit he does cheer the heart of God and man; but it is God first, for the Father is the husbandman, and then man as a natural consequence, where man is willing to be cheered.

Some may say the subject is a little difficult. It is always a good thing to learn difficult lessons; they are profitable to us. If a lesson is learned the moment we hear it, there is not much in it; but if we have to think about it, and go on our knees and pray about it, there will be profit.

Let us sum up these three trees in a few words.

The OLIVE TREE began with

Abraham. His seed had the privileges on earth for two thousand years; but they made light of them, so God broke them off.

Then the Gentiles were grafted in, and they have had these privileges for nearly a like period; but they too will be broken off. Those who are in danger of being broken off are those who do not make use of the advantages they have.

The olive is the evergreen. From the time of Abraham right through to the millennium it always testifies to privileges to be enjoyed, even though often not valued.

The FIG TREE began at Mount Sinai, and represented man in the flesh placed under law in order to

bring forth fruit for God ; but with all the cultivation, there was never any fruit for God, but, alas ! a good deal of boasting, which leaves without fruit represent.

All the Old Testament writers testified to this sad fact, and the coming of Christ proved it fully, so that on the night before He was crucified He said, "This is the blood of the new covenant" ; thus the old one was set aside by bringing in the new.

The VINE was planted in the land of Palestine (Ps. lxxx. 8), but only brought forth wild grapes ; Christ has superseded Israel and is the true Vine, so God will not take any fruit from man in connection with Adam.

We can only cheer the heart of God as we abide in Christ, in association with the Man out of heaven.

Now the instruction of these three trees refers to the present. Let the believing boys and girls remember that. With all believers the *past* is settled by Christ's finished work, and the *future* too, according to God's counsels, so the only question is our *present* responsibility while down here. As we are going through this world we should learn these lessons.

The lesson of the OLIVE, else we shall trifle with the privileges which God has given us.

The lesson of the FIG, else we

shall try to cultivate human nature for God.

The lesson of the VINE, else we shall not abide in Christ, without whom we can do nothing.

As we see the importance of the *present* moment, the *past* and the *future* will get brighter and clearer, "for the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. iv. 18).



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