

MAN'S SELFISHNESS AND GOD'S LOVE.

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IN the gospel of Luke, God and man are heard asking precisely the same question. Let us briefly consider both.

In the twelfth chapter we are introduced to a rich farmer. God is seen providentially crowning all this man's former prosperity with the bestowal of a harvest so richly plentiful that he has actually no barn-room for the overflowing abundance. He looks round his waving fields, he carefully gauges the capacity of his existing storehouses, and then asks the significant question, "*What shall I do?*" The answer that follows shows only too well what his heart is set upon. Four times in a few brief sentences he says, "I WILL"; but it is all in connection with his own easy-going, self-indulgent purposes. No less than ten times in ten

short lines he uses the significant words "I" and "my." As for God, He is not in all his thoughts. He is completely shut out. It is self, self, only self, from beginning to end of the story—"my barns," "my fruits," "my goods." His own selfish will must reign supreme and God be nowhere.

Now it should be remembered that every farmer in Israel was only a *tenant* farmer. Every Jew would understand this. He held his land under divinely appointed conditions. The land was God's ; and before *any* of these tenants came into actual occupation He had made a very distinct statement about it, and by the hand of His servant Moses had written it down for their more certain understanding. See Lev. xxv. 23, "*The land shall not be sold for ever : FOR THE LAND IS MINE.*" Instead of owning this, the rich farmer before us is seen shutting God out entirely, until his discharge at a moment's notice proved only too

surely that he was only a very dependent tenant after all ; for with the discharge comes the question, "*Then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?*"

But now for the refreshing contrast. In the parable of "the vineyard" (Luke xx.) God is distinctly presented to us as the owner of the vineyard. As such He naturally asks for that portion of the fruit which, by right, was due to Him. Instead of receiving fruit, however, we see that His servants only get wounds and bruises ; and it is in view of this shameful treatment that the vital question on God's part comes in. At this point we hear Him asking, "*What shall I do ?*"

We have seen *man* asking this question, and we have heard his answer—This will I do, I will gratify myself and shut God out. And will God in turn shut man out ? O Thou insulted God, what will *Thy* answer be ?—"*I will send My beloved Son.*"
Matchless grace !

If He had said, I will sweep these ungrateful wretches out of earthly existence: they are a foul blot on My fair creation, a standing dishonour to My holy Name, and I will, in consuming judgment, put an end for ever to the entire race—who could have charged Him with unrighteousness in doing it?

But instead of this, "*I will send My beloved Son*" is His wondrous answer. Instead of setting man aside for ever, He will send His beloved Son in human form, as His final appeal for fruit from man.

Who does not know the result, how that the finality of God's appeal only brought man more fully to light in the full stature of his wickedness and selfishness? "*Let us kill him,*" they said, "that the inheritance may be *ours.*" Angels might have said, Surely this will be the seal of man's eternal doom! But no. Even this would not be allowed to baffle the purposes of grace. God would use this very act of wickedness as the

means of putting away man's sin and securing man for the joys of His own eternal presence. How wonderful ! Read one or two of the closing verses of this very gospel—chapter xxiv. 46, 47. " Thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day : and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem.*" Tell the very worst, that I am prepared to forgive and bless him. What a God !

" And couldst Thou be delighted
With creatures such as we,
Who, when we saw Thee, slighted
And nailed Thee to a tree ?
Unfathomable wonder,
And mystery divine,
The voice once hushed by hatred
Says, Sinner, I am thine."

How wondrous, then, the contrast between man's plans and God's purposes.

Man says, All that I have got I will carefully secure for myself, and shutting God out, will enjoy my " much goods " for many years.

God says, I will give all that I have to secure man's deliverance, and then introduce him to My own unalloyed pleasures. These he shall enjoy, not for "many years," but for ETERNITY.

Reader, have you become acquainted with God? If not, be persuaded to be so at once.

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A TALE OF GRACE.

“AND Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty: and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose

that he to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged " (Luke vii. 40-43).

He has put Simon the Pharisee and this sinful woman of the city into the same parable (for He would fain bind them up in the same bundle of blessing), and now proceeds, personally and pointedly, to apply it. How touchingly He shows that the freest pardon is available for *both* ! One of the two, this sinner at His feet, had received it already ; and oh, what a chance for Simon too, had he wished for it ! "*When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.*" What a blessed climax ! Surely such heavenly light was well calculated to open the eyes of even a Pharisee, and make him exclaim, Lord, I too have nothing to pay ; yet I have despised Thy condescending grace. I doubly need Thy pardon !

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