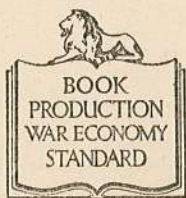


# OUR LORD'S MIRACLES AND PARABLES

BY  
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PART ONE  
OUR LORD'S MIRACLES

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## *Foreword*

WE are living in a sceptical age. Men say they no longer believe in miracles. Not in heathendom is this said, but in Christendom, where the light of the Gospel shines. There is but one more step to take, in this unbelief—the repudiation of God Himself. This step will be taken shortly. MAN will deify himself in the son of perdition—the Antichrist of Scripture (2 Thess. ii. 3-4). When this happens, no more place will be found for God and His Son. Remarkably, when this state of things comes about, men will believe in miracles once more. “Signs and lying wonders” will appear, and be credited. Hell produces its marvels as well as heaven. This was witnessed in Moses’ day, and it will be witnessed again in the day of Antichrist.

Infidelity, religious and otherwise, may carp at the records of our Lord’s miracles, but the miracles were wrought, nevertheless. The fact that at least three of the Gospels were published within a few years of our Lord’s ascension, when falsehoods could easily have been disproved, is sufficient to establish their credibility, even on the most human principles. But when we take into account the august fact (which every reverent soul believes) that the Spirit of God is the Author of the Gospels every query is hushed to rest.

But why were the miracles wrought? The Saviour Himself tells us—“the works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me” (John v. 36; x. 25). They were thus graciously granted as aids to faith in His person and mission. Hence the rebuke to Philip, “Believe Me for the very works’ sake.” Hence, too, the Saviour’s lament in John xv. 24: “If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father.” Because the miracles were aids to faith they were all, with one exception, acts of mercy—acts which should have appealed to the sensibilities of all concerned as showing out the divine heart towards man.

It would be as foolish to over-state the value of miracles as it is to affect contempt for them. Aids to faith must not be confounded with the ground of faith. Faith founded on miracles is of so little worth that the Saviour, when surrounded by believers of this sort, refused to commit Himself unto them (John ii. 23-25). True faith is founded on the Word of God (Rom. x. 17). Simon Magus was attracted by miracles, and proved a fraud; Sergius Paulus desired to hear the Word of God, and so became a true disciple (Acts viii. 13; xiii. 7, 12).

W. W. F.

## *The Leper Cleansed*

HE who believes in a God Almighty and Supreme can have no difficulty in crediting miracles, especially when they are vouched for in God-breathed Scriptures. The objection that miracles are inconsistent with natural laws is beside the mark, seeing that they have nothing to do with natural laws, being instead sovereign interpositions of God altogether apart from, and above, them. No greater miracles can be conceived than the momentous facts on which Christianity rests—the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He who bows in faith to these will necessarily regard all other marvels as small in comparison. He who turns away from the facts of Christ's miraculous incarnation, etc., has no claim whatever to be recognised as a Christian.

Our Lord's miracles were not mere works of power; nor were they simply expressions of love and sympathy toward those who benefited by them: they were truly all this; but they were also intended to teach spiritual truths. The cleansing of the leper is recorded by all the evangelists excepting John. Matthew gives it in the opening verses of his eighth chapter. Guided by the Spirit of God, Matthew disregards historical sequence in his presentation of it, placing the Miracle after the Sermon on the Mount, although it took place some time earlier. His object apparently was to put in strong contrast the low faith of the Jewish sufferer with the high faith of the Gentile centurion described in the verses immediately following.

Leprosy is a type of sin. Those under its terrible power were as unfit for God's earthly dwelling-place as unpurged sinners are for His heavenly abode. The only physician for leprosy was God Himself; the same gracious One can alone meet the need of those polluted by sin. In answer to the leper's appeal our Lord "put forth His hand and touched him." Contact with the



diseased one conveyed no defilement to Him, but it conveyed healing to the sufferer. Beauteous picture of the grace which brought Him from above into man's circumstances; touching sin, so to speak, at every point, yet personally unstained from first to last. The leper's faltering "If Thou wilt, Thou canst" was at once answered by the Saviour's hearty "I will; be thou clean." To His ability and willingness to heal and to bless there is no limit; whatever limitations there be are in the trembling faith of the human heart.

The healed one was then bidden "shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them." A striking testimony indeed, seeing that this was the first Israelitish leper cleansed (so far as Scripture speaks) since the instructions of Lev. xiii., xiv. were given nearly 1,500 years before. The presence of a cleansed leper at the altar with his two birds in his hands testified that God had come into the land, and was meeting men's need apart altogether from priestly ministrations and religious ordinances. A principle this of the greatest possible moment for our souls to-day. Cleansing for the soul is found, not in human doing of any kind, but in the fountain of the Saviour's blood. This, when divinely applied, makes the vilest sinner whiter than snow, a greater moral miracle than the physical wonder wrought upon the Jewish leper.

### *The Centurion's Servant*

DURING our Lord's ministry in Israel only two persons were specially commended by Him for their faith, and they were both Gentiles—the Syrophœnician woman, and the Roman centurion of Matt. viii. 5-13 and Luke vii. 1-10. Religious formalism had so checked the development of faith amongst the chosen people that it was scarcely to be found within their circle.

It was but a slave concerning whom the centurion appealed to the Saviour, but he was, for some reason, precious in his

sight. In contrast with many in Israel, the Roman discerned God in the person of the lowly Carpenter Who was traversing the province. He at once made his supplication to Him, and was answered, "I will come and heal him." He instantly begged the Lord to take no such trouble, urging that it was not even necessary. "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." It was this that excited our Lord's commendation—his confidence in the efficacy of His word when personally absent. We have here a principle that is vital to us at the present hour. Christ is not here, having gone up to the Father's throne. But His Word is with us; in the Scriptures we may at all times hear His living voice. His Word declares the efficacy of His one sacrifice (Heb. x. 12); it proclaims the pardon and justification of all who believe in His name (Acts xiii. 38-39); and it gives to all such the sweet assurance that eternal life is already theirs, and that into judgment they can never come (John v. 24). On His Word we rest; it is our all, seeing that Himself is no longer with us. If His Word could be wrested from our hands, our darkness would be impenetrable.

There are striking differences between the two accounts of this miracle, as given to us by Matthew and Luke. They are due, not to any blundering on the part of the writers, but to the special guidance of the Holy Spirit, Who indicated to each what features should be introduced, and what should be omitted. Thus Matthew, on the one hand, who wrote with Israel specially in view, appends our Lord's solemn warning to that nation that many should come from afar, and be blessed with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, while the sons of the kingdom should be cast out. Such a word was most necessary for a people who were building their hopes on religious associations and privileges, to the neglect of personal faith. Luke, on the other hand, who was himself a Gentile, and wrote for Gentiles, omits the warning to Israel, and introduces instead, what is so instructive to Gentiles, the fact that the centurion in the first instance got the Jewish elders to plead for him with the Saviour. If the warning noted by Matthew was intended to humble Jewish pride, this feature added by Luke should suffice to depress Gentile conceit. Are



we not apt to forget that, as a matter of fact, we owe everything to the Jew? The Scriptures, the Saviour, the first preachers of Christianity, all came to us from the bosom of Israel. Had this been remembered, Abraham's children would not have to complain of centuries of oppression from "Christian" hands.

The slave was healed. Such faith as his master evinced could not be denied. Nor will faith in the Word of the absent Saviour ever fail to receive fullest acknowledgment from God.

### *Peter's Wife's Mother*

THOSE who reverence the Scriptures and believe in their divine inspiration will have no hesitation in believing that a spiritual reason accounts for Matthew's displacement of this incident in his Gospel narrative. For he records it after the cases of the leper and the centurion's servant, while comparison with Mark and Luke makes it certain that it occurred some time anterior to them both.

The dispensational character of Matthew's Gospel is the true explanation of this seeming disorder. The first seventeen verses of his eighth chapter furnish us with a group of incidents that are most interesting when viewed in the light of the dispensational ways of God. Thus the healing of the leper by the touch of Jesus is a picture characteristic of the time of our Lord's personal presence on earth. He was in close contact with Israel from day to day, prepared to bestow every blessing upon the nation, yet meeting with but feeble response in the way of faith. The healing of the centurion's servant by His word spoken at a distance shows what is happening at the present time. He is no longer personally amongst us, but His Word is with us, and multitudes of Gentiles are finding blessing through faith in its wonderful message. The restoration of Peter's wife's mother is a picture beforehand of what He will do when His present

gracious work amongst the nations is concluded. He will turn once more in His goodness to Israel, of which people Peter's mother-in-law was a representative. She lay sick of a great fever when the Lord found her, but one touch of His hand sufficed for her complete recovery. In like manner He will find her nation on the verge of utter ruin in the day when His feet shall stand once more on the Mount of Olives, but His personal presence will be as efficacious for Israel's full deliverance as for the raising up of Peter's wife's mother so long ago. Neither Zionest Congresses nor the favour of European powers will succeed in terminating Israel's centuries of sorrow; that blessed consummation (so absolutely certain, if Scripture is to be believed) is dependent upon the appearing of the Son of Man. When the Redeemer comes to Zion he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob, and all Israel will be saved (Rom. xi. 26).

The apostle's mother-in-law being healed, the day closed with large blessing. Crowds of sufferers of every kind assembled round her door, and found healing and sympathy from the gracious One. Even so will it be at the close of the present age. When the twelve tribes of Israel are restored to their inheritance, and once more enjoy divine favour, universal peace and blessing will prevail. The world groans increasingly under its intolerable burdens, and schemes not a few are ventilated from time to time for the mitigation of them, but all efforts in this direction will be futile until earth's rightful King returns. His order in that day will be as follows: first, Israel blessed; then, all nations by their means. Meanwhile, pardon and salvation are available for individuals, however numerous, who will put their trust in the Saviour's precious blood.

### *The Storm on the Lake*

IF men failed to recognise their Creator when He condescended to tabernacle here in flesh, creation acknowledged His presence



and power. The storm described in Matt. viii. 23-27 took place at the close of the day on which the seven parables of chapter xiii. were delivered. Tired with His day's labour, the Saviour slept, a touching proof of the reality of the humanity which He had assumed. Presently one of Gennesaret's sudden storms burst upon the little boat, to the dismay of the disciples, who, though believers, but feebly realised Who it was that was voyaging with them. Had they considered that He was the Creator of the universe, would they have experienced a moment's alarm? Was it not He Who, ages before, shut up the sea with doors, and made clouds the garments thereof, and Who said, "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?" (Job xxxviii. 8-11). Would, or could, the sea engulf its own Lord and God?

Alas for the poor human heart! Mark, with his customary observance of details, tells us the disciples roughly awoke their Lord, crying, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" It is painful to transcribe the words; how cruelly they must have wounded the tender susceptibilities of the Saviour! "Carest Thou not?" Had He not cared for the children of men, He would have remained in His own glory; the Bethlehem manger, the Galilean boat, and the cross of Calvary would never have been His lot. Yet, so gracious is He, no word of censure escaped His lips for the heartlessness of their speech; He merely said, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Well has it been said, "Never man spake like this Man." But how painful to Him to find such feebleness of faith amongst the special objects of His favour after His experience of the splendid faith of the Gentile centurion!

His voice sufficed for the stilling of the elements. "Peace, be still." Long before His incarnation the Psalmist wrote of Him, "Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, Thou stillest them" (Ps. lxxxix. 9). Not a single attribute of Deity did He lay aside in becoming man. Omnipotence and Omniscience shone forth in Him whenever occasion called for their display. Demons, disease, death, winds and waves all fled before His word. No human mind, however richly taught of God, can unravel the mystery of the union of the divine and

the human natures in His person. Reason finds insoluble difficulties here; faith finds instead material for adoration and praise.

The miracle brought the disciples to His feet in wonder, not unmixed with dread. "What manner of Man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" The answer is simple and plain. He was God manifested in flesh, on His way to death for the eternal blessing of all who believe. But in His humiliation, as now in His glory, He had power to dispel every danger that could befall His people. Storms of various kinds may burst upon us during our passage through this world, but none can destroy us while Jesus lives. Our part is just to confide in Him.

### *The Two Demoniacs*

MAN's subjection to the power of Satan is the fruit of the Fall, and is a terrible reality not to be underrated. On various occasions the Saviour, when here, was confronted by persons possessed with demons. This, while a special affliction in individual cases, is a picture of every unregenerate man's spiritual condition.

The prince of the power of the air regulates the present course of things here, working in all the children of disobedience (Eph. ii. 2). Yielding themselves to His authority, men become his slaves (Rom. vi. 16). One of the most blatant proofs of this awful condition of things is modern Spiritualism.

Matthew tells us of two demoniacs who met our Lord on the eastern side of the Lake of Galilee, as He stepped ashore from His stormy passage (Matt. viii. 28-34). Remarkably, both Mark and Luke speak of one only. This probably is because one case was more desperate than the other, and the second and third Evangelists were led to concentrate their attention upon him; while Matthew who always wrote with Jewish readers before his mind, and who knew the weight two witnesses would have with such (Deut. xvii. 6; xix. 15) was careful to record the



fact that two men were blessed, even though he omits a crowd of other details.

However blind men might be to the personal glory of Jesus, demons always recognised Him as their Lord, and trembled and cringed before Him. Knowing Him to be the dread Judge Who will, at the opening of His reign, consign them and their leader to the abyss (Rev. xx. 1), they implored Him not to dismiss them to that awful region before the time. In answer to their prayer, they were suffered to enter into a herd of swine, with the result that the whole two thousand rushed violently down a steep place into the sea and perished.

The whole countryside turned out at the tidings of what had occurred. They found the once-possessioned men sitting peacefully at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in their right mind. All their devilish ferocity, which had made them the terror of the district, was gone for ever. Yet not gratitude but aversion seized the minds of the people, and they forthwith besought the Saviour to depart out of their coasts. Two men had been delivered from the hold of Satan, but at the cost of two thousand swine! Were two souls worth two thousand swine? In their deplorable blindness, they judged not. If such was to be the result of the presence of the Son of God, they would prefer Satan for their neighbour. Such conduct would be incredible; did we not see men at the present hour sacrificing their own souls for trifles lighter than air. What matters it that the Saviour, by the shedding of His precious blood, has acquired the right to emancipate from Satan's power every soul that longs for deliverance? In the judgment of many, business, wealth, pleasure, are all to be preferred to any blessing He can bestow.

### *The Palsied Man*

THIS miracle of healing was wrought at Capernaum, the city adopted by the Saviour as His home after He gave up Nazareth.



It did not take place after His return from Gadara; this incident, though reserved for the opening verses of Matthew's ninth chapter, occurred immediately after the cleansing of the leper recorded in Matt. viii. 2-5.

Every physical disease healed by the Saviour typifies in one way or another the moral disease of sin. Thus leprosy pictures the sinner in his uncleanness; fever shows him in his restlessness; while palsy is the expressive type of utter helplessness. Rom. v. 6 comes to mind here—"when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Most merciful provision for a palsied race!

Four friends brought the sufferer to Jesus. In their earnestness they refused to be thwarted by the crowds that barred the door, so they let down the couch through the roof at His feet. His first words to the palsied man were not words of healing but of pardon. "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee," Unquestionably the soul is of greater importance than the body. The forgiveness of sins is a mightier boon than the most perfect physical health. Our Lord's words provoked some unuttered criticisms on the part of some of His audience. "This man blasphemeth." Omniscience in Him read their thoughts, and He rebuked them forthwith. "Who can forgive sins but God only?" The query was reasonable. What mortal man has ever had such authority granted to him by God? But He whom the scribes misjudged soon gave ample proof that He was God indeed by bidding the man take up his bed, and go to his house. "That ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins." Every Jewish student of Dan. vii. would know that the Son of man is identical with the Ancient of Days (vv. 9, 13, 22). If He be really the Son of man of prophecy, then is He most truly divine.

His less critical observers went home saying, "We have seen strange things to-day." Had their spiritual vision been undimmed they would have recognised that Ps. ciii. 3—"Who forgiveth all thy iniquities, Who healeth all thy diseases"—had been fulfilled before their eyes, and each tongue would have exclaimed, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." It was men's unbelief in these wonders so often repeated in

favoured Capernaum, which constrained Him to say at a later date, "Thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee" (Matt. xi. 23-24). Privileges unvalued entail severest judgment from God. How far does this principle apply to our favoured land?

### *Jairus' Daughter*

DURING the world's preparatory ages, *i.e.*, the ages that preceded Christ's coming, the divine dealings were especially with the people of Israel. The result of all God's dealings with that nation was to make manifest the true condition of our race. The human heart having been proved to be incorrigibly evil in the most favoured of the families of the earth, it goes without saying that it is irretrievably evil everywhere.

The case of Jairus' daughter (Matt. ix. 18-26) illustrates these principles. Mark and Luke tell us that she was dying when her father first petitioned the Saviour on her behalf, and that he heard of her death from a messenger who was sent after him; Matthew shortens his report of the occurrence by commencing with her death. Her case was thus hopeless as far as man was concerned, even though her parent, as a ruler of the synagogue, was an authorised exponent of the law of Jehovah. The dead maid furnishes us with a picture of Israel dead—spiritually dead—in spite of ages of possession of God's law. It had not imparted life to Israel; it was impossible, therefore, that it could impart righteousness. If it could not supply man's first need, it certainly could not supply his second need. "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law" (Gal. iii. 21). Yet in utter blind-



ness as to their true condition, Israel has unceasingly sought righteousness by means of works of law. Gentiles have no more learned the lesson of human ruin than the chosen people; hence the painful fact that in this Gospel day the majority of persons in Christendom are striving after blessing on the principle of works in one form or another.

Jairus felt deeply the powerlessness of all ecclesiastical and legal machinery in the presence of death, and he therefore made his application to the Son of God. With His usual tenderness, the Saviour said to the distressed parent, "Be not afraid; only believe." Taking with Him Peter, James and John only, He entered into the death-chamber and forthwith overcame death by His quickening word. It sufficed for Him to say, "Damsel, arise," and immediately her spirit returned from the unseen world and became reunited with the body. Blessed earnest of what the same gracious One will accomplish in a spiritual way for her entire nation when He comes again!

Meanwhile, the principle is stamped indelibly on the page of Scripture that man is dead in the eyes of God. It is vain to preach good works and religious ordinances to the dead. Why should we Gentiles foolishly essay to reach blessing by means that have signally failed in the case of Israel? Not law-works but Christ can alone meet man's deep need. Hence His own gracious declaration: "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John iii. 16).

### *The Issue of Blood*

THE woman who touched the Saviour's garment has always been an object of peculiar interest to devout readers of Scripture. Her painful case, and the simplicity of her faith, never fail to arouse our spiritual sympathies. Her case was an interruption of our Lord's mission to raise Jairus' daughter. She is thus a type

of those who are to-day seeking and receiving blessing while our Lord's relations with Israel are suspended. The fact that the woman's case is interwoven with that of Jairus' daughter serves to bring out clearly the parts that both God and man play in the blessing of the soul. The girl, like every unregenerate sinner, was dead; who can quicken the dead but God. The woman exercised her faith; this God looks for in all who would receive His favours. God's part is to quicken; man's part is to believe.

A vast multitude thronged the streets of the little port of Capernaum. They were following Jesus to the ruler's house. He who judged by appearances would have concluded that the whole country was in love with the Son of God. But as it was in Capernaum, so it is now in Christendom—many follow from mere curiosity, many go because others go; but only individuals here and there, like the woman of our story, seek Him because their hearts yearn for that which He alone can supply. The woman was now penniless. During twelve years she had been vainly seeking health at the hands of Jewish physicians. Why did she not earlier make her application to the great Healer of all? She reflects, only too sadly, those in our day who in their quest for salvation try everything and every one rather than the Son of God. Sacraments, teetotalism, benevolence, and a crowd of other remedies, are trusted in by various souls for that which He alone can give. When the woman came to the conclusion that her only hope lay in the Lord Jesus, she formed her resolution accordingly, "If I can touch but His clothes, I shall be whole" (Mark v. 28). Marvellous faith! She had acquired such confidence in Him that she believed one touch of His fringe with its blue ribbon attached (Num. xv. 37-41) would suffice for her complete healing.

The Saviour was aware of what was passing, and to the astonishment of Peter and the others, He turned and inquired, "Who touched Me?" As then, so now, He carefully distinguishes between the thoughtless crowd of religious adherents and the earnest individual seeker after blessing. Calling the woman before Him, and eliciting her frank confession of what had taken place, He dismissed her home with the comforting



assurance, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace" (Luke viii. 48). It is good to have to do with One so gracious as He. The humble seeker after spiritual healing has but to claim an interest in His precious blood, and pardon, salvation, and peace become the heart's portion for ever. "We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved" (Acts xv. 11).

### *The Blind and the Dumb*

THE cases of the two blind men and the dumb demoniac recorded in Matt. ix. 27-34 are found only in the first Gospel. They apparently followed immediately upon the raising of Jairus' daughter. Taken together, these fresh incidents furnish us with a sadly complete picture of man in his natural condition. Toward God man is stone-blind. His eyes are open widely enough to the concerns of this life, its business, pleasures, etc., but to everything spiritual he is one who sees not. What though the goodness of God, the perfections of Christ, the cleansing efficacy of His blood, and the glories of heaven are portrayed before him, he sees nothing in them to attract his blinded eyes. They are the most uninteresting of all the matters that come before him. The natural man is also as dumb as he is blind. The tongue that is so ready of speech when temporal things are being discussed, collapses into utter silence when God and Christ are introduced. Concerning the highest and best of all topics he has absolutely nothing to say. His tongue is tied.

There is but One who can open blind eyes and set at liberty tongues that are dumb. The Gospel is sent to men "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive the forgiveness of sins" (Acts xxvi. 18). When the blind men were brought into the house of our Lord, He asked them, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" They replied, "Yea, Lord." In-



stantly the healing touch was given, and the inestimable boon of sight was granted to them. Men spiritually blind and dumb are equally welcome to the Saviour. One touch of His gracious hand, sought in faith, and everything becomes viewed in a new light; and the delivered soul feels as one introduced into a new world. Henceforward he cried with the ecstatic apostle, "We see Jesus" (Heb. ii. 9). His eyes are enraptured with the glories of His Saviour and Lord; for the excellency of the knowledge of Him he counts everything else but loss. His tongue makes its boast in the Lord; it is continually filled with His praise. He testifies of Him burningly to all. This is surely a spiritual miracle.

We are commenting upon true cases of physical healing. In dealing with them our Lord was fulfilling what was long before predicted of Him in Isaiah xxxv. 5-6. This kind of miracle has ceased for the present, to reappear when the Millennial kingdom is established. But meanwhile the spiritual wonder is being enacted before our eyes every day. The grace of God is revolutionising men's lives continually; the dead are quickened, the blind are made to see, and the dumb are made both to speak and sing. Who but our God, and what but the Gospel, could accomplish such marvels as these?

### *The Withered Hand*

It was the Sabbath day; and, as His custom was, our Lord repaired to the synagogue. Synagogues were not places of worship (there was but one such place in Israel—God's temple in Jerusalem): they were merely buildings in which copies of the Scriptures were kept under the charge of an official, whose duty it was to allow the people to read them and to expound them to one another. The Saviour descried a man in the synagogue with a withered hand. His whole heart of compassion went forth at once toward him. He had but recently been criticised

by the Pharisees for permitting His disciples to relieve their hunger in the cornfield on the Sabbath day; this afflicted man became a fresh ground of objection with them. According to Mark and Luke He put this question to them: "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day, or to do evil?" Matthew adds the query, "What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep?" (Matt. xii. 9-14).

The natural heart loves forms. Religious ordinances appeal powerfully to it. For the due observance of them according to their own thoughts, religionists have ever been ready to contend fiercely, even at the risk of hindering God's work of grace. What cared the Pharisees of our Lord's day that the land was full of misery if only Sabbath forms were carried out punctiliously? Many in this day, inheriting their spirit, would rather souls go unshepherded and perish than that established customs should be touched. Nothing so deceives the heart as religion without heart-conversion to God; nothing so betrays men into the most egregious inconsistency. The men who quibbled about our Lord healing on the Sabbath day saw no wrong in plotting on that day to murder Him. At a later date the priests abstained from crossing Pilate's threshold lest such close contact with a Gentile should defile them and unfit them to eat the Passover; yet it never occurred to their scared consciences that it was infinitely more defiling to shed an innocent man's blood! Oh, religion without God, how dark has been thy record of inconsistency and sin!

The Saviour suffered nothing to hinder the outflow of His goodness. Forms could not bind Him. Accordingly, the afflicted one was bidden to stretch forth his hand, and it was made whole as the other. Many of us suffer from withered hands at this hour. Sin has so paralysed us that we can do nothing for God. No good works can we accomplish, however deeply we may feel the necessity of them. But there is salvation in what Christ has done. His precious atoning sacrifice suffices for all our need. The man who confides in Him is blessed apart altogether from meritorious works of every kind. One result of His blessing is



that the hand, once withered, becomes empowered to do somewhat for Him in the midst of a burdened and suffering creation.

### *The Five Thousand*

A BLOODY deed had just been committed in the land. John the Baptist, the honoured forerunner of the Messiah, had been beheaded. Our Lord, feeling the pressure of the circumstances (for it was the shadow beforehand of His own death in the following year), retired into a desert place privately with the twelve. But He was not suffered to be quiet. Eager multitudes found Him out even in the wilderness. He did not resent it. Though men showed but little consideration to Him, in His perfect grace He was prepared to show the fullest consideration to them. Though Israel had acquiesced in the murder of His herald, He loved Israel still.

His disciples would have dismissed the people but He refused to send the hungry away. As a test of faith, He questioned Philip as to where bread was to be found wherewith to feed so many. He replied that two hundred denarii—a labourer's earnings for about eight months—would only suffice to give each a little. Andrew thereupon remarked that a lad was present with five barley loaves and two small fishes, "but what are they among so many?" (John vi. 5-9). Neither of them realised that they were addressing the Creator of the universe, "Who calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. iv. 17). In their heartlessness they would have driven the needy away; and in their unbelief they would have starved them if they must needs remain. Such is the human heart, even in Christ's true servants!

The Lord Jesus soon showed to all that He was the God who gave the manna (Exod. xvi.), and also the Jehovah of Ps. cxxxii. 15, Who said: "I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread." Accordingly He bade the



multitudes sit down upon the grass in hundreds and in fifties (Mark vi. 40). Order is stamped upon all His ways, whether in creation or in grace. "God is not the author of confusion." But before He performed what was really a stupendous miracle, He gave public thanks for the food He was about to administer (Matt. xiv. 19). Wonderful combination of human dependence and divine omnipotence in One person! In His hands the five loaves sufficed for five thousand men besides women and children, with twelve baskets full of fragments remaining. Little wonder that in an outburst of enthusiasm the people at once desired to make Him king (John vi. 15). A ruler who is a giver would be indeed a boon to long-taxed men.

The Lord refused the kingdom. It will yet be His, but He will accept it at God's hand, not at the hand of man. When the due time arrives He will establish a visible government in Jerusalem and will inaugurate an order of things that will fill the earth with peace and blessing. As in the day of the five thousand, so in the Millennial age, He will associate His own with Himself in the administration of the blessing. Never more will men complain of tyranny and wrong; never again will they know want. The social problems which baffle the keenest intellects of the present hour will find their perfect solution then, but not before. The Cross of Calvary is the basis of future kingdom-glory and blessing, as well as the sure foundation of present pardon and peace for individuals who believe. If the world did but know it, the Redeemer-King is its only hope.

The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded by all four evangelists.

### *Walking on the Sea*

"How can these things be?" is a very natural question when the human mind contemplates the works and ways of God. It is, however, the query of unbelief, not of faith. Whether it be the

collapse of Jericho's walls, Jonah's three days' abode in the fish's belly, our Lord's walking on the sea, or any other wonder—nothing staggers the heart that has learned to trust God and believe His word.

When the Saviour refused to be made king after the feeding of the five thousand, He went up into a mountain to pray, bidding his disciples cross to the other side of the Sea of Gennesaret. It is a picture of what was soon to take place—His going up to God to enter upon His present ministry of intercession, leaving His disciples to face the billows of this stormy world during His absence. The twelve found their passage rough and trying, as followers of a rejected and crucified Lord have ever found life and testimony here. Many a storm has Satan raised in the hope of destroying all witness to the Name he hates. In the fourth watch of the night the Lord went to the disciples walking on the water. Thinking it was an apparition, they cried out in fear, but were soon calmed by His cheery call: "It is I; (or "I am,") be not afraid." He has never failed to draw near to His own in their hours of distress and need. He is the "I am" of Exod. iii. 14. The possibilities involved in such a name forbid the smallest questioning of unbelief. "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (Ps. xlv. 2).

The boat is the emblem of the old system of things in which our Lord left His disciples at His glorification. The Book of Acts shows how tenaciously they clung to the old order, with its earthly sanctuary, its successional priesthood, etc., and how very slow they were in learning that Christianity is essentially a heavenly and spiritual system. Instead of being a graft upon Judaism, Christianity is its total opposite in character and spirit. Judaism, with its gorgeous ritual, appealed to the senses; he who understood Christianity better than any says, "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. v. 7). Satan's aim has always been to corrupt the work of God; hence when the old boat of Judaism was destroyed by Titus he set to work to prepare another boat under Christ's name. Earthly sanctuaries, priests claiming successional rights, etc., soon appeared, to the complete falsification of the testimony of God.



Matthew, Mark and John all tell us of our Lord's walk on the water; Matthew adds another feature (Matt. xiv. 24-33). Peter, when he learned that it was the Lord who was approaching, begged for permission to go to Him. This being granted, he leaped into the sea and went to Jesus. For a moment he faltered as he saw the wind and waves, but a cry from his lips and a touch from the Master's Hand made his feet secure. In like manner the individual believer of to-day who turns his back on Christendom's religious boats in obedience to the call in Heb. xiii. 13, must look to the Lord alone for sustainment in his walk of faith. But the first act of faith, without which nothing else is possible, is the soul's humble obedience to Him for pardon and salvation.

The storm ceased when the Lord and Peter stepped aboard the boat. Similarly the world's raging will be hushed when Christ and His saints show themselves once more in the midst of Israel.

### *The Syrophœnician*

IN Matt. xv. we have two hearts revealed to us—the heart of man and the heart of God. In reply to the Pharisees' criticism of His disciples for eating with unwashed hands, our Lord laid down that a man is not defiled by that which goes into his mouth, but by that which comes out, the words being the expression of what is in the heart. He proceeded to draw an appalling picture of the human heart. According to His judgment, which cannot err, it is a pestilent sink of iniquity.

Turning away from His hypocritical opponents, the Saviour went into the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon. He had but a short time before held up these places as specially hardened (Matt. xi. 21); what could He hope to find there to refresh His distressed spirit? He was soon appealed to by a Canaanitish woman to cast a demon out of her daughter: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously

vexed with a demon." How terribly she erred! As one of a cursed race, of which remnants existed in the land merely because of the dilatoriness of God's people in Joshua's day, what could she claim from David's Son but judgment? At first the Saviour gave her no answer, but being urged by His disciples to dismiss her He said: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of Israel." This was indeed His mission at that time. He "was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Rom. xv. 8). In this character Gentiles could have no claim upon Him whatever. The earnestness of the woman, however, was such that she would take no denial. Accordingly she pressed her suit further, saying: "Lord, help me." She dropped the Jewish title of "Son of David," and craved mercy simply. But she had not gone low enough, so our Lord replied: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." This was indeed a testing word. Yet she did not fire at it and turn away, like Naaman, in a rage. She meekly retorted: "Yea, Lord, for even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table." (See Revised Version.) Her argument was perfect, and it prevailed. Though she was truly but a Gentile, outside the elect family of Israel, she had confidence that such was the goodness of the divine heart that there was blessing in it for even the meanest of His creatures. Certainly He whose eternal home is the Father's bosom would not contradict her in this. His strange bearing was intended to elicit this fine expression of faith from her. The Saviour's stern demeanour covered a heart of tenderness that yearned to bless her the moment she took true ground before Him. He appears to have visited the locality for her sake; for, having healed her daughter with His word, He forthwith returned to the place from whence He came. His eye had discerned the woman's sorrow from afar, though she knew it not.

The secret of blessing is to take a low place at the divine feet. As born of a ruined stock, and individually guilty of sin, we have no claim on God save for judgment. But he who will humbly acknowledge himself ungodly and undone will speedily learn that such is the heart of God towards him that He sacrificed His



Only-Begotten Son for his blessing, and that in virtue of His atoning death, sins and iniquities are remembered no more.

### *The Four Thousand*

THE bold faith of the Syrophœnician woman was truly refreshing to the Spirit of the Saviour, so often distressed by the unbelief of long-favoured Israel. In like manner He finds pleasure to-day in the faith of Gentile believers while Israel continues estranged and scattered. Yet nothing will ever be allowed to alienate Him from the seed of Abraham. He loves them with an everlasting love, and the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. He speedily returned, therefore, from the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon, and busied Himself once more in the midst of Israel.

Needy multitudes gathered around Him (Matt. xv. 29-39). His touch sufficed for the healing of every kind of disease, and delivered ones were constrained to glorify the God of Israel. These things took place on a mountain-side in Galilee. After three days of such occupation the Saviour became concerned for the feeding of the people, far removed as they were from the ordinary sources of supply. He put no testing questions to His disciples, as when the five thousand were before Him, but simply declared His compassion for the people's need, and His intention of supplying it. So forgetful is the human heart in everything where God is concerned, that the disciples, overlooking the previous miracle, expressed their doubt as to finding sufficient bread in the wilderness to feed so great a multitude. This elicited the fact that seven loaves and a few little fishes were available. This handful became mighty in the hand that once destroyed the empire of Pharaoh by means of a humble shepherd's rod.

In simple-hearted dependence upon God (for the Son had become truly human), He offered public thanks for the temporal

mercies that soon supplied the need of the vast throng before Him. Four thousand men were fed on this occasion, besides women and children. At the conclusion of the meal the fragments were gathered up, for with the absolutely perfect One waste could not accompany wealth and benevolence. Seven large baskets full remained, as compared with twelve hand-baskets full after the earlier feast. Scripture numerals are significative of spiritual truths. Seven (twice repeated in this narrative) is the number of perfection; four is the world-number. We thus learn symbolically that when He opens His hand to remedy the woes of men there will be perfection of blessing; and this, not merely for Israel's tribes, but for the whole world. This happy condition of things, however, cannot be until His return from heaven. His appearing in majesty will be the bright opening of a day fraught with peace and blessing such as the world has never yet known.

Meanwhile, from a heart fully charged with grace and goodness, divine mercy flows freely to individuals everywhere who feel their need of these things. Though the groan of the world, as such, cannot be hushed while the Saviour remains seated at the right hand of God, no individual need go unblessed for a single hour. On the perfectly righteous basis of His death and resurrection, every yearning soul may have spiritual healing and pardon, and may find in the exalted Saviour Himself full satisfaction of that heart-hunger which the things of this world can never allay.

### *The Demonic Boy*

It is a terrible fact that this world is under the power of Satan as its prince. The Saviour was reminded of it in a peculiarly painful manner as He descended from the holy mount after His transfiguration. He found a crowd assembled, with scribes among them, and a poor demon-possessed lad wallowing and foaming in their midst. His disciples were there, but through



lack of faith they were impotent in the presence of the enemy's power. Divinely commissioned and endowed though they were (Matt. x. 1), they were unable to meet the emergency.

The Lord learned upon inquiry that the lad had suffered thus from his childhood. A picture, only too correct, of our race, which fell into the hands of Satan in its very infancy, *i.e.*, in the days of the garden of Eden. The poor child was both dumb and deaf (Mark ix. 25), reflecting thus the spiritual condition of every representative of fallen Adam. The unregenerate man has nothing to say for God, and he has no ear for the commandments of God. God is to him as though He were not. The afflicted child was in constant peril of his life. His father said of the unclean spirit within him: "Of-times it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters to destroy him." In like manner every undelivered sinner is in jeopardy, not of temporal disaster merely, but of eternal destruction. Man's chosen leader is truly a cruel deceiver; would that all eyes were open to the fact!

Disappointed in the disciples, who should have been able to make potent use of the Saviour's name, the despairing father turned to the Lord Himself. With no great amount of faith, however. "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us" (Mark ix. 22). What words to address to the Lord of all! He Who created the universe, and all that is therein, could surely overthrow the power of Satan, a mere creature of His hand, albeit the most mighty! Demons always recognised Who and what He was; men, alas, but rarely.

It is the privilege of Christ's heralds now to proclaim not what He is able to do merely, but what He has done. Having bowed His head in death as an atonement for sin, He is righteously able "to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bound" (Luke iv. 18). None need remain under the galling yoke of Satan for a single hour; one simple appeal to the victorious Lord in heaven's glory sets the soul at large for ever. "If Thou canst!" said the Saviour to the parent; "all things are possible to him that believeth" (R.V.). Here we have the secret of blessing and deliverance at all times. It is not human effort, whether

resolutions, prayers, or religiousness, but simple faith in the Son of God. The Gospel was intended to open men's eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance amongst all who are sanctified by faith in Christ (Acts xxvi. 18).

With tears the father exclaimed: "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." At once the blessing came and the child was set free for ever. Each of the Synoptists records this touching incident; Mark, as usual, with greatest fulness of detail.

### *The Tribute Money*

It was quite natural that the Capernaum collector should challenge Peter in regard to his Master's payment of the half-shekel—a tax levied upon all males in Israel for the upkeep of the temple (Matt. xvii. 24-27). In his eyes He was only an itinerant preacher, perhaps a prophet, and therefore liable for the impost as all others. But Peter erred egregiously in answering the inquiry in the affirmative. Only a little while before he had confessed Him as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," and had received the Saviour's benediction for it (Matt. xvi. 16-17); now he acknowledges His liability for a petty tax as though He were a mere son of Jacob. When he entered the house the Lord anticipated what he had to say, showing thus His perfect omniscience. "What thinkest thou, Simon? Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? Of their own sons or of strangers?" To this the blundering apostle returned the only answer that was possible—"of strangers." Jesus saith unto him: "Then are the sons free."

A simple statement, yet how full! Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of Him Who dwelt in the temple. From Him the great Sovereign of the universe never could or would demand anything. But observe the plural—"sons." He put Peter alongside



of Himself as sharing His position and relationship. The grace of this is astounding. Yet Scripture is most explicit in its address to every Christian: "Thou art no longer a servant, but a son. . . . Ye are all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. iii. 26; iv. 7). We owe this to the Saviour's atoning blood, which has put away all our sins, and furnished God with a righteous ground for the display of all His love and grace. The blood of Christ entitles every believer to share His relationship of Son to the Father, and to be with Him in His heavenly glory for ever.

But these wonders are not yet acknowledged by the world. Neither Christ nor Christians are yet recognised in their true position of exaltation as sons to the Father. Consequently the tax must be paid without demur. Neither clamour, nor resistance—passive or otherwise—could proceed from the meek and lowly One. Had the half-shekel been required at census-time as atonement-money (Exod. xxx. 11-16) the case would have presented grave difficulties; but the collection was of a different nature, a mere charge for the maintenance of the temple (2 Chron. xxiv. 6). Mark the tender consideration of our Lord: "Notwithstanding, lest we should stumble them—" He would rather pay any figure, however unjust or objectionable, than endanger the testimony of God by provoking invidious comments from the unregenerate. How little has His example been heeded by Christians when smarting under a sense of wrong!

Small though the amount was—1s. 3d. per head—the Saviour did not possess it. Creation must, therefore, supply it at His command. "Go thou to the sea, cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for Me and thee." Everything and every one—wind, waves, fishes, demons, etc.—discerned Who He was but poor benighted man. Painful thought! The most favoured of all God's creatures, the blindest of all through sin! Yet His infinite grace picks up multitudes of the wretched sons of men and puts them in the company of His own beloved Son, so that He can link them with Himself and say, "Me and thee."

### *Blind Bartimæus*

THE Saviour was journeying to Jerusalem for the last time. In less than a week all the sorrow of earth were over for Him. Death, with its agony and shame, was behind Him, and His body lay in the tomb. But though His sensitive spirit felt the weight of all that was impending, nothing was permitted to stay His beneficent hand. Human misery and need aroused all the tenderness of His heart.

He was just passing out of Jericho, after being a guest at the house of Zacchæus (Luke xix.). The fact that this city had lain under a special curse for ages was no barrier with Him; divine grace in Him rose supreme over everything. Had it not been so, He would never have visited our earth, so long under God's displeasure because of sin. A blind beggar, hearing the tramp of a crowd and inquiring what it meant, learned that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. Mark tells us his name was Bartimæus; Matthew lets us know that he had a companion, this being the third instance in which the first Gospel notes two sufferers where the other Gospels speak only of one.

Bartimæus cried out lustily: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." He received no rebuff from the Saviour for addressing Him by this title. In using it he was as right as the Syrophœnician woman was wrong. As born of the stock of Israel, he was entitled to look for a king of David's line who should open the eyes of the blind, unstop the ears of the deaf, make the lame leap as a hart, and teach the tongue of the dumb to sing (Isa. xxxv. 5-6). Bystanders sought to silence him, but to no purpose. "He cried out the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me" (Mark x. 48). Had he missed this opportunity, he would never have had another, for the Lord never visited Jericho again.

His cry reached the Saviour's ears. Learning that he might approach, the blind man "cast away his garment, sprang up, and came to Jesus" (R.V.). This poor man reads us many lessons.



There is a garment of self-righteousness which multitudes are hugging to-day to their soul's harm. Oh, that they would cast it from them, and as sinners seek the Saviour's feet! (Rom. x. 3). Many among us would also do well to imitate Bartimæus' earnestness in appealing for the blessing, and the alacrity with which he hastened to receive it. One word from Jesus sufficed for his healing: "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole." Not only he, but also those who beheld the miracle, burst forth in praise to God (Luke xviii. 43). The Lord did not bid him be silent about his healing as when He healed two blind men some time before (Matt. ix. 30). He was about to present Himself publicly in Jerusalem as Israel's long-expected King, and it was well that a testimony should be rendered at this juncture to His person and His power. But the clearest testimony avails nothing for men willingly blinded by Satan, hence no crown awaited Him in Jerusalem but a crown of thorns; no throne of glory was in preparation for Him, but instead a cross of shame. But this, in the wonderful ways of God, has secured our salvation from eternal woe.

### *The Accursed Fig-Tree*

EVERY miracle performed by the Son of God when on earth was an act of goodness and mercy, with the single exception of the cursing of the fig-tree. This occurred during His last week of sorrow. His ministry during that week was exercised in Jerusalem, but each evening He went out of the city to lodge in Bethany, preferring the simple reality of Lazarus and his sisters to the dead religious formalism of which Jerusalem was full.

One morning, as He traversed the road between Bethany and the metropolis, feeling hungry, He paused at a wayside fig-tree intending to pluck some fruit. He found leaves in abundance, but of figs there was no sign. The gathering time not having

come, the branches should have been laden (Mark xi. 12, 13). He forthwith pronounced His anathema upon it: "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever." The tree presently withered up from the roots (Matt. xxi. 19).

The whole proceeding was so unique, and its severity so unusual for One so full of grace as the Lord Jesus, that we are arrested by it and constrained to inquire into its significance. Some time before He had likened the Jewish people to a fig-tree planted in a vineyard (Luke xiii. 6). This furnishes us with the key to this remarkable incident. He was Himself Jehovah Who had shown favour and care to Israel for ages, and Who was entitled therefore to look for some return. Alas! Israel's history had been one of sin and rebellion from the beginning. Under every divine test they had produced nothing but thorns and briars. Now He had come from heaven in person to put them to the supreme test of His own presence. This was soon to end in blood. The air was full of conspiracy against Him; and in a few days, as He perfectly well knew, He would be lying dead in the tomb. His cursing of the fig-tree was therefore a symbolic action; for the tree represented Israel under the old covenant, soon to be utterly rejected as hopelessly unfruitful for God. When God does gather fruit from that people, it will be from a new generation under the new covenant of grace in the Millennial kingdom.

The cursing of the fig-tree has a voice for men in Christendom as well as for men in Israel. Israel's history, rightly viewed, is a mirror in which men everywhere may see their own reflection. The Christendom of to-day is as unreal and as unfruitful for God as the Israel of the past. Every thoughtful observer will admit that we are face to face with a profitless mass of hollow religious profession. In no sphere is there so much sham as in the religious sphere. Men commemorate with feasting the birth of the Saviour while spurning His salvation; they build costly temples in His name while refusing Him one inch of space in their hearts; they celebrate with pompous ritual His atoning death while despising it for their souls' need. The Judge of guilty Israel will not for ever spare far guiltier Christendom. In Rom. xi. 16-22 will be found its righteous doom.



Let us away with all unreality and sham. He Who has given His whole heart to us is surely worthy of all that our poor hearts can render in return.

### *The Demon in the Synagogue*

WHEN our Lord first left Nazareth to live at Capernaum He was met with an extraordinary experience in that little port. According to His custom, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, His disciples attending Him. His exposition of the Scriptures was interrupted by a demon-possessed man crying out: "What have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark i. 24). To be confronted in such a place with the power of Satan was surely very remarkable. The Saviour frequently met demoniacs in the outside world, thus being painfully reminded that the world is under Satan as its prince; but that a demon should intrude, as it were, into the very presence of God was extraordinary. The demon knew Him, and did not hesitate to confess Him as the Holy One, a title long before assigned to Him in Psalm lxxxix. 19. But the Lord could no more receive testimony from such a source than Paul later, when publicly witnessed to by a Pythoness in the streets of Philippi (Acts xvi. 16-18). Between Christ and Satan there can be no affinity, but rather the deepest moral antagonism. Accordingly, in the presence of the congregation, the Lord overthrew the power of the enemy, and set his victim free. The people went home marvelling both at the teaching they had heard and the power they had witnessed.

Is there anything to-day answering to the demon in the synagogue? Most assuredly, for history is repeating itself continually. The parable of the mustard-seed comes to mind in this connection. The Lord likened the profession of Christianity to the least of all seeds, which developed to such proportions that

it provided a lodging-place for the birds of the air. Now seeing that in the course of the same exposition He used the birds as symbols of the emissaries of Satan (Matt. xiii. 4, 19, 31-32), what have we here but a forecast of Christian profession losing its original humble character, and becoming a great and showy system, with room beneath its shelter for the very enemies of Christ and the Gospel? How sadly this has been verified must be patent to every thoughtful observer. How comes it that in buildings erected for the preaching of the Word of God men are heard discrediting the Inspiration of the Scriptures, repudiating the possibility of miracles, flouting the Virgin-birth of Christ, speaking disrespectfully of His atoning blood, and spiritualising away the momentous fact of His resurrection? Comes this kind of thing from the Spirit of Truth, or from some other spirit? Let us not deceive ourselves. There is a working of Satan in Christendom to-day as real and as malignant as in Israel of old. The manner of its manifestation has changed, but that is all. In a polished age men are apt to use mild terms for grave offences, and thus obscure their real nature and character. It is infinitely wiser and safer to set things in their true light, however hideous they may appear.

None can put down the power of Satan but Him Who cast out the demon in the synagogue of Capernaum. This He will accomplish effectually when He comes out of heaven in power and majesty. Meanwhile, those who fear God are enjoined to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to expose them (Eph. v. 11).

### *Ephphatha*

MARK tells us that after His special journey into the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon for the healing of the Syrophœnician, the Saviour made a circuit of the Decapolis district. This consisted of ten cities which had been granted special privileges by



the Roman conquerors about a century earlier. There, as everywhere else, He found abundant need for the exercise of His divine power and mercy. A man was brought to Him who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech (Mark vii. 31-37); a humiliating picture of every man's moral and spiritual condition as the fruit of the Fall. God lost man's ear in the garden; ever since that fatal day the disposition of the whole human family has been to listen to anyone rather than to God. Hence the exhortation to the chosen people: "Hear, O Israel" (Deut. vi. 4), and the divine lamentation: "Oh, that My people had hearkened unto Me" (Ps. lxxxi. 13). Hence, too, the appeal to us all: "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb. iii. 7). The tongue of the unregenerate man is as estranged from God as the ear; for none can deny that the most eloquent conversationalist betrays an impediment in his speech as soon as the things of God and Christ are introduced.

The Saviour took the sufferer aside from the crowd. It is good to be alone in the divine presence. The busy hum of the world is not conducive to spiritual reflection. The great destroyer of souls would rather keep men in a continuous whirl of business and pleasure than see them sitting down quietly in meditation before God. But it is in the hush of the divine presence that we learn our sin and guilt, and our deep need of sovereign grace. There, apart from the thoughtless, clamorous crowd, we see things in their true light, and our souls find eternal blessing.

The Saviour touched first the ears of the afflicted one, and then his tongue. This order is significant. In the spiritual realm the ear must be opened to receive divine instruction ere the tongue is able to speak forth God's praise. "We believe, and therefore speak" (2 Cor. iv. 13). "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. x. 17). He who has received by way of the ear the Gospel of Christ into His heart will delight to speak of the marvels of God's grace to all around.

As He touched the man the Lord looked up to heaven, and sighed, saying, "Ephphatha," that is "Be opened." The burden of the world's sin, and the many miseries attendant upon it, oppressed His gracious spirit. He recalled the day when, ages before, He pronounced His whole creative work "very good"

(Gen. i. 31), and He groaned as He considered all the havoc that Satan and man had caused through sin. It was this that brought Him from above. But He had come, not to heal physical diseases only, but to make atonement for sin by His blood, in order that all who believe might be delivered once and for ever from the guilt and thralldom of sin and be reconciled to God in peace and blessing.

The astonished multitudes who beheld the present miracle exclaimed, "He hath done all things well." With what fulness of meaning may this be said when the new heavens and the new earth appear, peopled by countless myriads of the blest, saved from sin, suffering, and death as the fruit of His priceless sacrifice.

### *Men as Trees Walking*

OUR Lord on one occasion performed a miracle in two parts. The scene was Bethsaida; its record is found in Mark viii. 22-26, the other Evangelists being silent as to it. A blind man being brought to Him, the Saviour led him out of the town, and spat upon his eyes; then, putting His hands upon him, He inquired if he saw anything. The man replied: "I see men as trees walking." The Great Healer touched him a second time, after which he looked up and saw all things clearly. He was then dismissed to his home.

The line pursued by our Lord in this instance was very singular, and its lessons are of an unusual kind. The partial sight of this man represented the spiritual condition of the disciples while the Saviour was with them. They but dimly perceived the true character of His gracious mission. They sincerely believed that He was the long-expected Messiah, Who should sit upon David's throne; but that He must needs suffer and be made an offering for sin had no place whatever in their thoughts. They clearly understood that such a chapter as Ps. lxxii., with its kingdom-glories, had reference to Him, but it never dawned upon them



that Isa. liii., with its predictions of suffering and shame, must also find its fulfilment in Him. His post-resurrection conversation on the way to Emmaus cleared away many difficulties for those to whom it was addressed: "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" (Luke xxiv. 26). His visit to Jerusalem later in the same day dissipated the perplexities of others. "He opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them: 'Thus it is written, and thus it behoved the 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'" (Luke xxiv. 45-47). Henceforward these men were mighty witnesses to a crucified Saviour, while looking and waiting for His return from heaven as a glorious King.

Many true-hearted believers to-day are as imperfect in their spiritual vision as the disciples of long ago. So to speak, they "see men as trees walking." Very few things are clear to them. For example, many fear that though they are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus they may ultimately find themselves rejected, failing to understand that there is no condemnation for those whom divine grace has identified with Christ. They are apprehensive that the gift of the Holy Spirit may be withdrawn from them, not perceiving that this priceless bestowal is due to the Saviour's blood, which makes it secure for ever. They imagine that every time the Christian fails he needs a fresh cleansing in the atoning blood, their faith not having grasped that the Christian is judicially clean for ever, needing nothing for daily failures but the water of the Word of God. They are fearful concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus lest they should then be left behind, not having learned that our translation to glory is the fruit of sovereign grace alone, which can never fail. Oh, that all these would go aside once more with the Saviour and get another touch from His blessed hand, as the poor man of Bethsaida. They would then read spiritual things in God's own light, and their joy would be full for ever.

## *The Draught of Fishes*

It was a notable day in the history of Simon Peter when the Saviour requested the loan of his boat on the lake of Gennesaret (Luke v. 1-11). It was not His first acquaintance with Him. Some time before he had been introduced to the Lord by his brother Andrew, and it had resulted in a heart-attachment to Him which was abiding and eternal (John i. 40-42). But, like many another truly converted soul, Simon had much to learn concerning the evil of his own heart, and the remarkable incident upon the lake was an immense blessing to him in this direction.

It happened on this wise. The Saviour was being hard pressed by multitudes eager to hear the Word of God. Being by the lake shore, and observing two boats near by, He asked for the use of one that He might teach the people therefrom. Simon, who was washing his nets with his partners, responded with alacrity, and the preaching was continued under these exceptional conditions. When the speaking was finished, the Lord bade Simon launch out into the deep and let down his net for a draught. Though he had toiled all night in vain he obeyed the injunction, with the result that so great a multitude of fishes was hauled up that the net brake. The second boat was requisitioned, and both were so heavily freighted that they began to sink.

Never had Simon and his companions known such an experience. In Simon's own case, it yielded deep spiritual blessing. It so brought home to him the reality of having to-do with God that all the evil of his heart became naked and bare before him, and he fell at Jesus' knees, saying: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Such was his soul-distress that he was completely oblivious to the dangerous condition of the sinking boat. This was not his conversion. He had been converted at his first meeting with the Saviour; this was simply a deepening of the work of God in his soul. Job had such an experience (xlii. 6); Isaiah also (vi. 5); and Paul. The latter was reduced to



confess: "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. vii. 18). "No confidence in the flesh" was henceforth one of the mottoes of his life (Phil. iii. 3). When a man reaches this point he learns that nothing counts with God but Christ, and his whole confidence becomes centred in Him Who died and rose again. Happy position in which to stand, involving, as it does, complete deliverance from one's old self with all its pretensions and claims.

The poor conscience-stricken fisherman was soon graciously encouraged by the Lord. "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Accordingly Simon and his partners abandoned their boats and nets for ever and followed the Saviour in His mission of love to the souls of men. Singularly, Luke omits all mention of Andrew in his narrative, while he alone tells us of the special work in the conscience of his brother. Catching men by means of the Gospel became the happy occupation of Simon and Andrew, James and John from that moment. An instance of fishing with the net is given in Acts ii., when three thousand converts were safely landed; and an instance of fishing with the hook is recorded in Acts viii., when an individual soul was savingly blessed by a desert road.

### *The Widow's Son at Nain*

It was surely not unreasonable when Paul demanded of King Agrippa: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?" (Acts xxvi. 8). Let it once be admitted that there is a God Who is supreme in the universe, and it is easy to believe in resurrection, however stupendous the miracle may be. He who created man from dust is surely able to call him forth again from the domain of death if it please Him so to do.

But God alone can perform such a marvel. When at different times Elijah, Peter and Paul raised persons from the dead, they

were manifestly wielding power not their own, and the miracles were granted in response to their prayer of faith. But He who was greater than they could arrest a funeral procession with His majestic "I say unto thee, Arise," and death immediately yielded up its prey. Well might the people say that He spake as One having authority, and that never man spake as He.

We have before our minds just now His action at the gate of Nain (Luke vii. 11-17). As He approached the place, accompanied by His disciples and followed by the usual multitude, a dead man was being carried out to burial. He was the only son of a widowed mother. So sorrowful a spectacle could not fail to appeal to the tender heart of the Saviour. All His sympathy went out forthwith to the desolate mourner. But in Him sympathy was ever combined with power. Hence He not only said to the mother, "Weep not"; He also said to her son, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." "And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother."

We recall His claims as recorded in John v. 21-29. He affirmed that as the Father raises up the dead and quickens them, even so the Son quickens whom He will. He further asserted that the Father has committed all judgment unto Him, that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. Quickener of the dead, and Judge! Tremendous claims assuredly, with which none dare trifle. If Jesus of Nazareth be not all this, let us never more breathe His name. He who claims such prerogatives falsely must be branded as the worst and most dangerous of men. But if He is indeed both Quickener and Judge, let us hasten to His feet, and acknowledge His title with reverence and godly fear. He quickens the spiritually dead in this Gospel day by means of the written Word (John v. 24-25), and all who are thus quickened become possessors of eternal life; when the Gospel day is over He will quicken men's bodies also, calling forth those who have done good unto the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment (John v. 28-29). Yet this does not imply that all will be raised simultaneously; Rev. xx. 5-6 makes it perfectly clear that a thousand years will elapse between the resurrection of the blessed and the resurrection of the lost.



The greatest marvel of all is that One possessed of such prerogatives should have stooped to death Himself for the blessing and salvation of men ruined and undone. It becomes us to bow our heads adoringly in the presence of His own declaration: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John iii. 14-15).

### *God or Beelzebub*

"HE was casting out a demon, and it was dumb" (Luke xi. 14). "Blind and dumb," adds Matthew (xii. 22). A most merciful deliverance assuredly, for which every observer should have been profoundly thankful to God. The common people were not altogether unappreciative, for they said: "Is not this the Son of David?" It has frequently happened that the simple ones of the earth have been very true in their perception of the hand of God.

But with the religious leaders it was otherwise. They said: "He casteth out demons by Beelzebub the prince of demons" (Luke xi. 15, R.V.). Matthew says this came from the Pharisees; Mark adds that the scribes were involved in it also (iii. 22). It is a question whether we should condemn the most their spiritual incompetency or their desperate wickedness. If they were really quite unable to distinguish between the hand of God and the hand of Satan they were utterly unfit to be instructors of God's people; if instead they saw God's power and deliberately imputed it to be the operation of hell, because it did not happen to work through official channels, the wickedness of it is almost too awful to contemplate. No evil is worse than religious evil; how much there has been of it let the annals of ecclesiasticism declare.

There have ever been certain recognised channels through which, in men's judgment, divine power and blessing ought to

flow. But it is most certain that the blessing of God has reached multitudes of souls apart from official channels altogether. Like Gideon's fleece, ecclesiasticism has been dry while the refreshing dew of God's Spirit has been experienced all around (Jud. vi. 40). This, instead of producing heart-searching in those thus divinely passed by, has only too often evoked rancour and blasphemy. It is a settled principle with ecclesiasticism that everything outside of itself is unauthorised and abominable.

The compassionate Saviour stooped to reason with His evil critics. He asks them how Satan could possibly cast out Satan, and pointed out that a kingdom divided against itself must needs come to desolation, and that a house divided against itself cannot stand. The true position was this:—Satan as the strong one had long kept his captives in peace; now a Stronger had come, with power to overcome him, and divide the spoils. For this let us praise our God. The Stronger than Satan is manifestly the victorious Son of God. He has met the enemy in his last stronghold—death, and has vanquished him, putting away sin the while; there is not a single child of Adam but may be set free from the thralldom of Satan forthwith by appealing to the Saviour's grace. Sin-distressed souls need not concern themselves with the ways and criticism of contentious religionists; the Saviour is their true resource; let them cast themselves on Him.

To His stern rebuke our Lord added these words: "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad" (Luke xi. 23). He was undoubtedly wielding the power of God in grace and blessing to needy men; those who opposed Him were not gatherers but rather scatterers, of God's "beautiful flock" (Jer. xiii. 20). Let us tremble lest religious prejudice land us in this terrible position to-day. Where the hand of God is clearly seen, where the Spirit of grace is really blessing and comforting souls, let us frankly acknowledge it, and without a reserve in our hearts let us praise and magnify our God.



## *The Bent Woman*

THIS was a Sabbath-day incident, and is recorded by Luke only (xiii. 10-17). Probably on no day in the week was our Lord so closely watched by His adversaries as on the Sabbath, in the hope that they might convict Him of some breach of the law concerning it. How little did they realise, in their unbelief and perverseness, that they were criticising the very One who gave the law from the fiery mount! The sadness of it is heightened by the fact that these were not the ignorant of the land, but the religious leaders of God's chosen people.

The present miracle was performed in a synagogue, most likely in Jerusalem. A woman was there who "was bowed together and could in no wise lift up herself." Expressive picture of every man's spiritual condition through sin—unable to look up into the face of his God, and without strength to remedy his evil plight (Ps. xl. 12; Rom. v. 6). The woman had suffered in her deformity eighteen years. If Scripture numbers are significative, as we believe, eighteen, being the treble of six, is suggestive of the full manifestation of evil. Compare Rev. xiii. 18. She thus becomes the type of the worst of sinners. Her condition appealed at once to the sensitive spirit of the Saviour. He called her to Him, and said: "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

Had there been a spark of spiritual discernment in the ruler of the synagogue, he would have at once called for Ps. ciii. From every tongue present there might well have sounded forth the refrain: "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases." Alas for the ruler! No such sentiments occurred to his spiritually darkened mind. Instead, he blazed forth with indignation, saying to the people: "There are six days in which men ought to work; in them therefore come

and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." This outburst suggests a serious question. When God prescribed the Sabbath for man, forbidding him to work therein, did He thereby intend to bind His own hands, and make it improper for Himself to work on that day, even to perform a deed of mercy? The very suggestion is profanity itself. So good is He, so compassionate in His love, nothing can stay Him in His ministry of grace to poor ruined man. The woman just healed was "a daughter of Abraham," *i.e.*, she was possessed of Abraham's faith. Must faith wait for blessing because it is the Sabbath day? Impossible, seeing that faith, not works or ceremonial observances, is the standing principle of blessing with God. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. . . . Therefore it is of faith, that it might be of grace" (Rom. iv. 5, 16). Grace gives the blessing, and faith receives it. All the work necessary for man's eternal good was wrought by the Son of God, when He died upon the cross of Calvary.

The Saviour did not hesitate to expose the hypocrisy of His heartless critic. He would loose his ox or his ass and lead it to the water on the Sabbath day, yet would deny God the right to relieve a suffering woman. Truly our God has no more malignant or unreasonable antagonists than those who oppose Him in the name of religion.

### *The Dropsical Man*

YET another Sabbath-day incident. The place, not a synagogue, but the dinner-table of one of Israel's chief ecclesiastics, and he a Pharisee. Luke (who alone reports the case) says "they watched Him" (xiv. 1). Nothing more need be stated concerning the attitude of the host and his friends towards their Guest. They were sitting at table with God manifested in flesh, yet so blind were they that they knew it not.



It was an instructive occasion for those who had ears to hear. The lips of Eternal Truth were freely opened. Things were said that day which should have sent every guest to his closet in humiliation before God. The Saviour spoke of the boundless grace of God, and He spoke also of the hopeless evil of the human heart. The presence of a sufferer—a man afflicted with dropsy—furnished Him with His text. He raised the question of the Sabbath himself this time. He demanded of the lawyers and Pharisees about Him: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day or not?" Obtaining no response, he healed the poor fellow and let him go. Knowing that they were bitterly censuring Him in their hearts for His deed of mercy, He proceeded thus: "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a pit and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day?" The challenge was unanswerable. Where their own interests were concerned they would not scruple to act promptly, let the day be ever so sacred.

Man—even religious man—thus stands convicted of being utterly out of harmony with God. His boasted fidelity to religious forms is not the fruit of love to God, but simply gratification of his spiritual pride. What can be conceived more offensive than this? If open transgressors produce "wicked works" (Col. i. 21), religionists produce "dead works" (Heb. ix. 14), and both are equally hateful to Him with Whom we have to do. So morally alienated is man from God that it has to be said to all alike: "Ye must be born anew" (John iii. 7).

The Saviour's exposure of the human heart at the Pharisee's dinner-table is painful to read. First, He rebuked the pride of His fellow-guests, as shown in their eager scramble for the chief seats, then He censured the selfishness of the host in that he had invited only those to his table who would be certain to recompense him again (Luke xiv. 7-14). Pride and selfishness in the presence of the self-sacrificing One who had left heaven's glory for Calvary's cross in His love to perishing sinners! A person venturing the remark, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God," He added the parable of the great supper, the sad moral of which, as regards man, is that though God provide something ever so costly and rare, man has no heart

for it. The scramblers for the best seats in the Pharisee's house wanted no seat at all where God and His grace were found. "I pray thee have me excused" was their uniform reply to His loving invitation. If God would have guests at His feast, such is the animosity of the human heart towards Him, even amongst the religious, that He must needs "compel them to come in." Truly, if man's heart be only evil, the heart of God is only good, and that eternally.

### *The Ten Lepers*

THIS striking incident happened during our Lord's last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. The record of it is preserved in the third Gospel only (Luke xvii. 11-19). Ten lepers met the Saviour at His entrance into a village, and with one accord cried to Him for mercy. The fame of His deeds of power had spread from Dan to Beersheba; hence the readiness with which these victims of disease appealed to Him. Remarkably, one of them was a Samaritan, the rest being Jews. Under ordinary circumstances the nine would have spurned the company of the tenth ("for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans"); but the stress of a common disease had put them all on one level, and they apparently felt it. The greatest leveller of all is sin, of which leprosy is in Scripture the expressive type. High and low, rich and poor, religious and irreligious, are all in the same position before God in this respect; "there is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. iii. 23). What matters it that some owe 50 pence and some 500 if all alike have nothing wherewith to pay? (Luke vii. 41-42).

In answer to the cry of the lepers the Saviour said: "Go, show yourselves unto the priests." Why did He act thus? Why did He not put out His hand and touch them, and so give them instantaneous healing, as with the leper of Luke v. 13? The reason appears to be that He would test them as to their confi-



dence in His word. Their response was perfect. With no change whatever in their condition they turned their steps in the direction of the temple to offer their two birds (Lev. xiv. 1-4), being confident that healing would be experienced on the road, as it really happened. "As they went they were cleansed." Let these poor fellows read us a lesson to-day. Confidence in the divine word (for us the Scriptures) is the deepest need of our time. Higher criticism, and the "opposition of science falsely so-called" are destroying faith in the Word of God. Multitudes are weltering in unbelief, to their deadly peril. Yet blessing for us, as for the ten lepers, is only found in the way of faith; and "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. x. 17).

A remarkable thing happened as soon as the little band became conscious that they were healed. The Samaritan broke away from his companions (who continued their journey towards the temple), and returned to Jesus, falling at His feet, and glorifying God with a loud voice. In his eyes sanctuaries, ceremonies, and priests were the veriest trivialities compared with the Son of God. The nine might occupy themselves with the religious formalities of Jerusalem, but he could only be happy at the Saviour's feet. The Lord commended him for it in the words: "Were there not ten cleansed; but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." If the Lord could so speak in a land where the religious ceremonies of the people were of divine institution, what would He say to-day when the ceremonies in which men pride themselves are derived partly from Judaism and partly from Paganism, all of them in defiance of the teaching of the New Testament epistles? There is nothing so spiritually barren as ceremonial religion; there is nothing that so satisfies and delights the heart as living contact with the person of the Son of God. To Him, not to religious centres, our allegiance is due; for has He not purged our sins by His blood, and does He not live now on our behalf in the glory above? Let others impoverish themselves with mere religion if they will, but let us find our all in Christ Himself.

### *Malchus' Ear*

"THE beloved physician" tells us of a very touching scene in the garden of Gethsemane. It happened on the eve of the Saviour's last woe. The cross was looming before Him with all its anguish and shame. He had just risen from His distressful prayer when a band of armed men approached to apprehend Him. The kiss of the traitor indicated to them the One of Whom they were in search. Yet for such an One there was no peril, save as He chose to yield Himself to the malice of His foes. At the sound of His voice His assailants fell to the ground (John xviii. 1-8); and nothing would have been easier for Him than to walk away, had it pleased Him so to do. But having come from above to offer Himself as an atoning sacrifice He meekly submitted Himself to their will.

But those around Him were not of the same spirit. Peter, with his accustomed fire, drew a sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest. How unlike the Lord are even the noblest of His followers! In Peter, at that moment, we see fleshly activity when his Master was submissive, and an hour or two later when Jesus was confessing before Pontius Pilate the good confession, Peter was denying Him in the presence of the servants with oaths and curses (1 Tim. vi. 13; Luke xxii. 54-62).

Now mark the Saviour's grace. He rebuked His disciple for his unholy zeal, and forthwith touched the ear of the servant and healed him. It is Luke who tells us of this extraordinary display of healing grace, and it is John who records the names of the parties concerned (Luke xxii. 51; John xviii. 10). Truly, there is no limit to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not only during the days of His ministry, but when the clouds were darkening around Him, He was the willing servant of human misery and need. This is most beautifully shown in His kindness to the dying thief, and in His healing of Malchus' ear.

An open antagonist healed and blessed! Can the annals of



human nature show anything like it? Yet it is the very essence of the Gospel that the Saviour should act thus. Hence the words in Col. i. 21: "You who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death." He who penned these words had personally experienced the truth of them. Malchus was hardly so pronounced an antagonist of the Son of God as Saul of Tarsus, "who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." It is no marvel that one who had been so divinely favoured delighted henceforward to proclaim: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. i. 12-15). No one in the universe is so able to melt hard hearts as the Lord Jesus, and to transform the most violent adversaries into humble and devoted disciples. All His ways are ways of matchless grace.

### *Water Made Wine*

It will be noticed that John, in his history of the Saviour, pursues a line altogether different from the other evangelists. The reason of this is that while Matthew, Mark and Luke present the Lord to us in various human characters—as Messiah, Servant, and Son of Man, John sets forth His essential Deity. In the course of his exposition of this marvellous theme, he gives us a set of seven miracles, rightly called in the Revised Version "Signs." Four of them were performed in Galilee and three in Judea.

The first of these signs was wrought in Cana, soon after the Saviour emerged from the retirement of Nazareth, and before His first visit to Jerusalem as a Prophet. He had been invited with His disciples to a wedding feast, His mother being there

also (John ii. 1-11). Unlike His herald, John the Baptist, our Lord was no ascetic (Luke vii. 33-34). He was the most accessible and gracious of men. Marriage is a divine institution; He would signify His respect for it by His presence at its celebration when called. In a world of evil, marriage is an immense moral safeguard for men, and is "honourable in all" (Heb. xiii. 4). "Forbidding to marry" is one of the predicted marks of the apostasy (1 Tim. iv. 3). Amongst the notable first preachers of Christianity Paul seems to have been the only unmarried man. Peter and the other apostles took their wives with them on their missionary journeys (1 Cor. ix. 5).

The wine ran out at Cana. Mary drew the Lord's attention to the fact, evidently prompting Him to perform a miracle. It is noteworthy that He immediately rebuffed her. Only on two occasions do we find Mary intruding herself into the Lord's matters of service, and on each occasion He set her aside. (Compare Matt. xii. 46-50; John ii. 3-4). Intensely devoted to her though He was as son to mother, He would not suffer a merely natural relationship to influence the course of sacred things. All who reverence the Scriptures will see in these records a warning given beforehand against the superstitious blunder, now widely prevalent, of attributing intercessory and mediatorial powers to Mary.

The feast-chamber at Cana was furnished with water-pots, but even they were empty, sadly suggestive of the emptiness of all earthly joy and delight. At the Saviour's word the pots were filled with water, which became instantly transformed into wine of such excellent quality as to draw forth high praise from the master of the feast. "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now." What Christ gives is necessarily superior to anything this world can afford. We are hereby reminded in a typical way of the pure joy with which even earth will be filled in the day of Christ's Kingdom. When He who now sits upon the Father's throne is established upon His own throne in Zion, all earth's woes will be brought to an end. He will fill the whole scene with peace and blessing.



Meanwhile the wine is suggestive of the profound truth that all blessing for men, whether now or in "the world to come" is founded upon redeeming blood. For the Saviour ere He went on high appointed a cup of wine as the abiding memorial of His own most precious blood (Matt. xxvi. 27).

### *The Courtier's Son*

THE Lord was again in Galilee, having returned from Jerusalem through Samaria. During His stay in the metropolis He had expounded the way of life to Nicodemus, and on His journey homeward He had ministered eternal satisfaction and joy to the woman by the well of Sychar. The latter incident was followed by two days of happy labour amongst Samaritans deeply eager to hear His word.

He was once more in Cana. A nobleman, resident in Capernaum, appealed to Him to visit that port and heal his son, who was now at the point of death (John iv. 46-54). The story is interesting in all its parts, for the present and future history of Israel may be read therein. The man was a courtier, or "King's officer" (R.V. margin); *i.e.*, he was, though a Jew, attached to the court of Herod, the alien ruler of the northern districts of Israel. Expressive picture of the false position in which the elect nation has long stood. Having proved false to its unique calling in separation from all other peoples, God has abandoned the nation to the fruit of its ways, with the result that Israel has been for ages subservient to Gentile masters. Like the courtier's son, Israel has fallen under the power of death, so that nationally the people are likened in Ezek. xxxvii. to a valley full of dry bones, no more to live until the day of the Saviour's presence here in power. In answer to His suppliant, the Lord replied: "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe." In Israel generally this was only too true (1 Cor. i. 22), while with Samaritans and Gentiles His word sufficed. With fervour the father

besought Him: "Sir, come down, ere my child die." His faith was far below that of the Roman centurion under similar circumstances. He urged the Saviour not to come, but to speak the healing word where He was, being persuaded that nothing more was required (Matt. viii. 8). The Jewish courtier must be taught his lesson; accordingly he was dismissed with the words: "Go thy way, thy son liveth." He believed the Saviour; for his faith, though feeble, was real. He therefore turned his steps homeward, soon meeting servants who had been sent out from Capernaum with the happy intelligence that his son was well. Upon inquiry he learned that the fever left him at the very hour of the Saviour's utterance in Cana. From that moment his whole household became believers in the Messianic title of Jesus of Nazareth.

Faith in the word of the absent Christ is the great need of the present time. No longer is His voice heard speaking on earth, but He speaks from heaven in the sacred Scriptures. Therein He tells us of the infinite love of God, of the costly sacrifice of Calvary, and of pardon, justification and eternal life, the blessed portion of all who trust in Him. If the divine voice is not to be heard in the Scriptures then is heaven absolutely silent, and we are left to blindly grope our way along towards destruction. He who imagines that the Creator has thus abandoned His creatures, plagues his own heart with unreasonable thoughts concerning Him Who is both infinitely wise and infinitely good.

### *The Pool of Bethesda*

WHAT the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son——" No one need misunderstand these words of the apostle, transcribed from Rom. viii. 3. They declare unequivocally the powerlessness of the law to help ruined man, and the supreme necessity for the mission of the Son of God. These principles are strikingly exemplified in the case



of the infirm man who was healed by the Saviour at the pool of Bethesda (John v.).

The porches of the pool were invariably crowded with sick folk, for it appears that from time to time an angel troubled its waters, which then gave healing to the first person that stepped in. This, while a merciful interposition on the part of God, and beneficial to those possessed of some strength, was manifestly of no avail whatever for persons absolutely helpless. The pool is thus remarkably typical of the law, which promises life and righteousness to those who keep it in all its parts, but which has nothing but condemnation and death for those who fail to keep it (Gal. iii. 10-12). Now, seeing that man is utterly evil in root and branch, and so "without strength" it is manifest that the law can never yield him blessing. Scripture says truly "the law is the strength of sin" and "the law worketh wrath" (1 Cor. xv. 56; Rom. iv. 15).

The Saviour observed a man at Bethesda who had been afflicted thirty-eight years, just the period of Israel's unnecessary wandering in the wilderness as the fruit of putting themselves under law (Deut. ii. 14). Hoping against hope, the poor fellow had long watched the pool, having no thought in his mind that healing could ever come to him by any other means. Sadly like the multitude in Christendom to-day, whose only thought concerning salvation is that it must be obtained by human effort, if it is to be obtained at all. And this after the full revelation of God's grace in Christ!

To the Saviour's inquiry, "Wilt thou be made whole?" the impotent man replied: "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but, while I am coming, another steppeth down before me." A truly extraordinary reply, seeing that the pool was not mentioned in the question. He must now learn that what the pool could never accomplish for such as he, the Son of God could accomplish instantly by His word. At the command of Omnipotence, "Rise, take up thy bed and walk," he arose, took up his bed, and departed to his house. In like manner all the need of the soul is now met by the Saviour's word, apart from works of any kind whatsoever. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word and

believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life" (John v. 24). His atoning death and triumphant resurrection explain how He is able to offer such simple terms to the ruined children of men.

Had heart and conscience been lively in Israel, there would have been national humiliation before God concerning Bethesda's suffering throng. Such was the special character of Israel's calling that suffering and disease would have been unknown amongst them had they continued faithful to Jehovah (Deut. xxviii). But to everything divine the people, and especially their religious leaders, were utterly insensible. Instead of appreciating the Saviour's goodness they persecuted Him for healing on the Sabbath day. Such is religion without God.

### *Blind from Birth*

THE Saviour had just delivered Himself from the malice of His enemies, who took up stones to cast at Him because He declared Himself the "I am." As He passed by, He noticed a man who had been blind from birth (John ix.) The disciples inquired whose sin was responsible for this infliction—the man's, or his parents'? They were as narrowminded as Job's three friends, who regarded suffering as a special mark of divine displeasure, having no other thought as to it. The Saviour pointed out a higher purpose—"that the works of God should be manifest in him." The man's misery furnished occasion for the display of divine power and goodness.

He forthwith proceeded to heal him, adopting on this occasion methods altogether unique. He spat on the ground, made clay of the spittle, put it as ointment upon his eyes, and then bade him wash in the pool of Siloam, "which is by interpretation, 'Sent.'" Healing resulted immediately. But what is there for us in this extraordinary record? The clay symbolises our Lord's



lowly humanity; the water is an emblem of the Holy Spirit (John vii. 37-39). Thus when a man apprehends by the Spirit's aid the momentous fact that the mighty God became human for his salvation, and that He who walked here abased was indeed the 'Sent' One of the Father, his spiritual blindness is dispelled for ever. He forthwith begins to see, and everything becomes viewed in its true light. The Gospel is designed to open men's eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God (Acts xxvi. 18). The Gospel is not a mere system of doctrines, nor is it simply a moral code; it is God's testimony to men concerning His beloved Son—God and man in one person, once the suffering Surety, but now glorified in the highest heaven.

The healed man was soon challenged by his neighbours as to his recovered sight. He could only reply that "a man called Jesus" had thus blessed him. The religious leaders then took up the matter and soon manifested their bitter animus against the gracious Healer. Proofs of His power were not wanting, but they were in no humour to acknowledge His divine mission, let the proofs be ever so many. The parents parried their inquiries, dreading excommunication, the usual resort of prejudiced ecclesiastics when Scripture and reason alike fail them. In their examination of the man himself, the Pharisees affected to honour Moses, and even God also, but both at the expense of the Lord Jesus, Whose dishonour was their undeviating aim. The man's simplicity irritated them. His expression of surprise that so great a wonder should be wrought in the land, and the professed exponents of God's truth unable to decide from whence the power came; and His guileless reason that his Healer must at least be a worshipper of God and a doer of His will galled them beyond endurance. Accordingly they cast him out, saying in their offended pride, "Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?"

They could not have conferred upon the poor fellow a greater boon, little as they intended it. The cast-out sheep was soon found by the Good Shepherd, despised and rejected as himself. When his Deliverer revealed Himself to him as the Son of God he fell at His feet adoringly, saying, "Lord, I believe." Religion

is as hostile to the Son of God now as in the days of His humiliation; but why need we concern ourselves with its moral and spiritual blindness when there is sufficiency in the Saviour outside of it all to satisfy the need of every longing soul?

### *The Raising of Lazarus*

BETHANY was ever a sweet spot to the self-emptying Son of God. It was one of the few places on earth where He was loved, and where His wounded spirit found rest. Lazarus and his sisters constituted a delightful home circle. They loved each other, and they were one in their faith in the despised and rejected Messiah. Sickness invaded their home, for the wisdom of divine love does not always shield its objects from this visitation. Lazarus was laid low, to the deep distress of his devoted sisters (John xi.). The Lord was at that moment in retreat beyond Jordan. There the appeal reached Him: "Lord, behold he whom Thou lovest is sick." The sisters did not definitely ask Him to come to their aid, assuming apparently that the news would bring Him without delay. He could have healed the sick man from a distance by His word (as in the case of the centurion's servant), but He did not do so. Nor did He hasten to Bethany, but remained yet two days where He was. Were we not persuaded that such an One as He could never err, His conduct in this instance would amaze us. He was walking in the light, and saw perfectly the course He should pursue to the glory of God. Presently He announced to His disciples that Lazarus was dead, and that He was glad for their sakes He was not there, adding: "Nevertheless, let us go to him." Their warning that perhaps martyrdom awaited Him in Judea the Lord passed by without concern.

A stupendous miracle was to be performed. He had already restored two dead persons to life—Jairus' daughter, and the son of the widow of Nain. The one was just dead, and the other was



on the way to burial. But Lazarus had been buried four days when the Saviour reached Bethany, and his body was already advanced in corruption. Martha met Him with the remark that if He had been on the spot her brother had not died. When He spoke of resurrection, she replied: "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." She did not realise that she was addressing the Resurrection and the Life, Who has power to raise His own sleeping ones when He pleases, and to stay the march of death upon His living ones so that they will never die at all. With all the light given in the New Testament epistles since Martha's day few in Christendom are at this hour beyond her poor notion of a general resurrection at the last day.

Mary followed her sister to the feet of Jesus. Touched by the scene of grief the Saviour groaned and wept—precious proofs of the reality of His holy humanity. Coming to the tomb, the stone was removed at His word, spite of Martha's remonstrance. A few words of prayer to the Father were followed by the loud summons: "Lazarus, come forth," and soul and body were united once more. Liberty followed: "Loose him, and let him go." Wonderful outshining of the glory of God in Him whom men were about to crucify! Should not this marvel have convinced His adversaries of the futility of their designs against Him?

He is the Quickener of the dead. At the appointed hour He will raise His own for glory with Himself in the Father's house, and at the epoch of the dissolution of all things He will call forth His foes for the resurrection of judgment. Meanwhile He quickens men's souls. Those who heed His voice in the Gospel message pass even now from death unto life, and have the blissful assurance that into judgment they will never come (John v. 24-29). Life and liberty are the present blissful portion of all who believe in the name of the Only-Begotten Son of God.

### *The Post-Resurrection Haul*

THIS was the last miracle wrought by the Saviour before going on high. The cross and the grave were now behind Him. He had been delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification; nothing remained for Him now but to ascend up where He was before. Remarkably, John, the only one of the four evangelists who uses the word "ascend" in connection with our Lord, gives us no account of the ascension itself (John iii. 13; vi. 62; xx. 17). Instead, he furnishes us with a series of three incidents, which seem expressly designed to show the varied results of the Saviour's atoning work as regards this world. We have first, in the Lord's manifestation of Himself to His disciples on the evening of the resurrection, a picture of the Church of God, now being gathered by the Holy Spirit to Christ as its Centre; then we have, in His showing of Himself to doubting Thomas, an earnest of His future revelation of Himself to long-unbelieving Israel; and, finally, in the remarkable draught of fishes, we may see a picture of the great ingathering from all nations in the Millennial age. God's order for blessing is thus, first, the Church; then, Israel; then, the world as such. (Let the reader carefully peruse John xx. 19-xxi. 14.)

The fishing incident happened on this wise. The Lord had appointed His disciples (the men who were soon to evangelise the world) to meet Him in Galilee. On arrival there, instead of waiting for Him, they went fishing at the suggestion of Peter. This was disobedience. Their course is a vivid representation of the present condition of their nation; God's chosen instruments for the world's blessing, yet in obstinate disobedience to the divine will (Rom. x. 21). A whole night of toil yielded no result to the disciples. Even so will Israel one day confess "We have not wrought any deliverance in the earth" (Isa. xxvi. 18). Now it has to be said to them: "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written (Rom. ii. 24).



The Saviour came upon the scene as morning dawned. His presence changed everything for the discouraged fishermen. In reply to His inquiry they dismally acknowledged that they had nothing to eat (a picture of the present barrenness of disobedient Israel); then at His command they lowered the net on the right side of the boat, and forthwith enclosed 153 great fishes. "And for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken." If the sea, which is here described by its Gentile name (Tiberias, after Tiberius Cæsar) represents the nations, as we believe, then we have in this haul a striking picture of the great universal ingathering when Israel is once more in relationship with God (Ps. lxxvii.). This will not be until the Saviour's feet again stand upon the Mount of Olives.

Every devout soul longs to see the world delivered and blessed. It has been the holy aspiration of the pious in all ages to see the earth filled with the knowledge of God. This yearning has its source in God Himself, and He will not disappoint it. Nevertheless, Christianity is not destined to bring about its happy realisation. The world's blessing hinges upon Israel's blessing. When Israel turns to the Lord and resumes her high place as leader and teacher of the nations, universal good will follow speedily. Meanwhile, salvation is available for all—Jews and Gentiles alike—who put their trust in the Saviour Who died for their sins and rose again.

PART TWO  
OUR LORD'S PARABLES

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## Foreword

THE Saviour, in His ministry, spoke so frequently in an illustrative manner that it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a formal parable was intended, or whether He merely used parabolic language. The new wine and new garments, and the lighted candle, for example, while parabolic in character, have been left aside for the purposes of this book.

But some may be surprised at the omission of the Rich Man and Lazarus, and the Sheep and the Goats (Luke xvi.; Matt. xxv.). The former I am not free to regard as a parable, while having no controversy with those who do so regard it. Not only is it not called a parable, but names are introduced, a thing without precedent in Our Lord's parables, so far as I remember. I prefer to look at the Rich Man and Lazarus as actual characters, whose history both in this world and beyond is solemnly traced by the Saviour for the moral profit of men everywhere.

Matt. xxv. 31-46 is commonly regarded as a parable, but, as I judge, mistakenly. The passage describes an important incident in the judgment of the quick at the Lord's appearing. The Gentiles will be challenged as to their treatment of those whom the King calls "My brethren," *i.e.*, the latter-day remnant of Israel. I see nothing parabolic in the passage beyond the words, "he shall separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." With this explanation, I leave the matter to the judgment of my brethren.

The Parables are treated in the order in which they are found in the Gospels.

W. W. F.



## *The Sower*

**T**HIS the first of our Lord's parables, was uttered under very painful circumstances. The Jewish leaders, after much previous evil behaviour, had just gone the length of attributing His power to Beelzebub. Further than this they could not well go in wickedness. Leaders and people were in such a condition of alienation from God that the blessings promised to Israel could not possibly be brought in at that time. From that point the Saviour commenced to use the enigmatical form of speech, which was intelligible enough to the pious minority, while utterly obscure to the profane mass. Like the cloud in Moses' day, which stood between Israel and the Egyptians, the parables were light to the one and darkness to the other.

The Saviour likened Himself to a sower of seed (Matt. xiii. 3-8). This marks a new departure in the ways of God with man. During the earlier ages of the world's history God had been seeking fruit from man (from Israel especially), as He was well entitled to do. But He sought in vain, flesh being incorrigibly evil. Every succeeding dispensation only served to bring this out the more vividly. Man violated his conscience, set at naught the testimony of God's works, trampled under foot His law, and slew the prophets who remonstrated with him concerning his evil. It only remained to murder the Father's well-beloved Son in order to fill the cup of human iniquity to the full. God no longer looks for fruit from man; His present action is to sow the good seed of the Gospel, and so produce His own fruit. This work has been proceeding ever since the Son of God came to earth.

But the human heart is not always responsive to the good seed of God's Word. The Lord shows in His parable that on this account the greater part of that which is sown becomes wasted.

Men hear, but do not profit by what they hear. Four classes of hearers are indicated; the Saviour's own interpretation making the meaning clear beyond dispute. There are first the wayside hearers. Here we have the careless folk, who listen but heed not, their minds being too indifferent to permit of their becoming interested. As the birds catch up seed sown by the wayside, so Satan removes from these even the remembrance of the things to which they have hearkened. The preacher may be admired, but his message passes away. Then there are the rocky-ground hearers. They are perhaps the most disappointing of all. They respond immediately to the Word preached, and so cause much rejoicing to those who seek their good; but having no depth, as soon as difficulties arise, they throw their confession of Christ to the winds. These are the impressionable folk. They readily weep when the Saviour is presented to them; but it is mere sentiment, both conscience and heart being unaffected. The third class are the thorny-ground hearers. Good seed has no chance in a bed of thorns. These are the encumbered folk, and they include both rich and poor. The rich man is too full of his estates and horses and dogs to give deep attention to spiritual concerns, and the poor man is too burdened with the anxieties of life. In both cases, earthly affairs being put first, the soul is lost. The last class are the good-ground hearers. These, having experienced the action of God's harrow in their conscience, have learned their guilt and wretchedness, and have put their whole trust in the Saviour Who died for their sins and rose again. In these only is there permanence, though even amongst the true-hearted ones the fruit varies in measure, some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundredfold.

### *The Wheat and the Tares*

SIX of the seven parables found in Matt. xiii. are divinely described as similitudes of the Kingdom of heaven. The



parable of the Wheat and the Tares is the first of the six, and with it is given the Saviour's interpretation thereof to His disciples. The Kingdom of heaven in its present form covers the whole profession of Christianity, whether true or false. In the coming age it will cover the whole earth, as predicted in Old Testament prophecy. Let us not confound the kingdom of heaven with heaven itself. This is one of the blunders of Popery, and the blunder is most serious in its results. Many are to-day in the Kingdom of heaven who will have no place in heaven; their profession of allegiance to the absent Christ being merely formal and unreal.

The Son of Man has sown good seed in His field. Christianity thus began with a number of persons who were true sons of the Kingdom. Satan soon set to work to corrupt the new testimony. He effected his purpose by introducing false brethren amongst the true. This happened "while men slept," *i.e.*, when Christ's servants became so negligent of their Master's interests, and so dull in their spiritual perception, that they admitted to the outward communion of Christianity men whom they should never have countenanced—unregenerate persons, sons of the wicked one (Jude 4). These are called, not "tares," but "darnel"—a worthless weed very like wheat in its early growth.

When it became manifest that the crop was mixed and spoiled, the servants inquired of the householder if they should gather up the tares. He replied: "Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them." To gather out weeds is to kill them. In like manner the wheatfield of Christendom can only be weeded by putting to death every false professor of Christ's name. This is expressly forbidden, and for the grave reason that true wheat would be in danger of being mistakenly rooted up by erratic servants. Our Lord's prohibition has not been heeded in Christendom. Zealous ecclesiastics, Papist and Protestant, have from time to time sought to eradicate from the earth those whom they have judged as weeds, only to fall into the very blunder deprecated by the Saviour. Some of God's best wheat has been destroyed in the process; many of His truest saints have been burnt at the stake or otherwise martyred. Both

wheat and tares are to grow together until the harvest. This means that they are to live side by side in the world (for "the field is the world"), neither molesting the other. To have fellowship together in the Church is quite another matter. So evil a blend was never contemplated in the parable.

Harvest-time is at the end of the age, at least a thousand years before the end of the world. The Saviour will gather every true believer into His barn at His coming again, and the angels will deal with the residue in unsparing judgment. Christ's heavenly glory, with all its blessedness, is the destiny of every blood-washed confessor; the lake of fire, with all its unutterable woe, is the eternal portion of every empty professor of His name. When the final separation has taken place, the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. From their exalted position of heavenly bliss the redeemed will dispense the blessing of God throughout the coming ages, to the countless myriads who will be placed beneath their sway in the earth below. The final result will demonstrate that God's purposes of grace have not failed, whatever the seeming success of the great adversary during the present time.

### *The Mustard Tree*

THE Saviour next likened the Kingdom of heaven "to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" (Matt. xiii. 31-32). This is ominous, when we remember that the birds, according to the teaching of the parable of the Sower, represent the agents of the devil (vv. 4, 19). The mustard tree is the profession of Christianity, which began in the humblest possible way, but which in time so completely changed its character as to become a great political force in the earth. Here, as else-



where in Scripture, the tree is the symbol of worldly power (Ezek. xvii. 3; Dan. iv. 22).

Christianity is essentially a heavenly system. The Church of God belongs not to the present evil world, but to the scene of glory where Christ dwells. When Christians walked in separation from the course of things here, and with heart-devotedness to their Lord, their testimony was unequivocal, and such as God could bless to the salvation of souls. When the Christian community became influential in the earth, its spiritual usefulness declined, and it became a powerful engine in the hands of Satan. A great and imposing thing in the earth, with all the arts—music, architecture, etc.—pressed into its service, is the very opposite of all that Christ was. The sensuous worship of the cathedral and the abbey is as offensive to God as the simple worship of “the upper room” was His delight.

Let no reader misunderstand. It is not meant that the blessings of Christianity should have been confined within narrow limits. Far from it. The Gospel was intended to be spread abroad; for God loved the world, and Christ gave Himself a ransom for all. But Christian profession should have continued humble and unworldly, seeking nothing in the shape of power and honour where the Saviour only found a cross and a tomb. Instead of this, that which is called “the Church,” whether viewed in its Roman, Anglican, or Nonconformist aspects, has been insatiable in its lust for worldly power. It has frequently been a terror to Governments, and it is at this hour a power in the earth which the civil authorities dare not ignore. This, instead of being matter for congratulation on the part of true Christians, is cause for deepest humiliation before God, that men bearing the Lord’s name should have so blindly become the dupes of Satan in the falsifying of their own calling and testimony.

In the branches of the mustard tree the birds found a congenial home. The Scriptures speak of Christendom in its last phase as “the habitation of demons, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird” (Rev. xviii. 2). This is true in a large measure at the present time. Had Christianity continued humble and unpretentious, its ministry

would never have been sought as a "profession," and it certainly would never have filled its offices with sportsmen, drunkards, and the like. Alas, for the centuries of dishonour to the name of the Holy and the True which have been occasioned by the unclean birds who have found a lodging in the branches, even the topmost branches of the great mustard tree!

### *The Leaven*

OF all our Lord's parables probably none have been so seriously misunderstood as that of the leaven hidden in the meal (Matt. xiii. 33). It is affirmed most confidently by many that this parable shows the whole world converted by the blessed influences of Christianity. Unfortunately for this interpretation, every Scripture passage which deals with the close of the present era speaks not of conversion and blessing, but of apostasy and wickedness as its characteristic features.

Exodus xii. 15 and Lev. ii. 11 will suffice to show how the Saviour's Jewish audience must have understood the simile of leaven. For fifteen centuries they had been under divine command to exclude leaven from their houses during their religious festivals, and they were forbidden to blend it with any of their offerings made by fire. It is thus the emblem of what is evil, and in this way it was frequently used by the Saviour in His teaching. The leaven of the Pharisees, the leaven of the Sadducees, and the leaven of Herod, representing respectively Ritualism, Rationalism, and Worldliness, all came from time to time under His lash.

How then should we read the parable? Something of a corrupt character is shown as subduing everything by which it is surrounded within a certain area. It is Christian doctrine in the vitiated form in which "the Church" has presented it to the world since apostolic energy ceased. Whole nations have become Christianised, hence the familiar word "Christendom,"



Not all the nations of the earth certainly, for Heathenism, Buddhism and Mohammedanism hold sway between them over the greater part of mankind. But what has the Christianising of nations effected? It would be folly to suppose that when historians tell us that such and such nations embraced Christianity long ago that necessarily all the persons composing those nations became savingly converted to God. Nothing of the kind is meant, but simply that, as a result of certain influences that were brought to bear upon them, they were induced to change their religion. But an unfaithful Church, in order to make Christianity palatable to the masses, compromised God's truth most pitifully. Thus, as the heathen had been accustomed for ages to hold carousals at certain seasons of the year in honour of their gods, they were suffered to continue them in the name of Christ. This is the unholy origin of Christmastide, Wakes, etc.

Christianity is essentially a spiritual and heavenly order of things. Therein is the heart of God revealed to men in pardoning grace, blotting out all the trespasses of all who unfeignedly believe in the Saviour's atoning blood. All these are accorded a new standing in divine favour in the risen One who is now in the glory of God. They belong to heaven, not merely as a place of repose when this world can be held no longer, but as a scene where they should even now live by faith. All this, and much more that is of infinite importance and blessedness, has become utterly beclouded by the invention of a sacerdotal system, which substitutes the visible for the invisible, and the priest for Christ. This is the form, alas! in which the world best knows Christianity. It is leaven, corrupt and corrupting until divine forbearance comes to an end, when it will be swept out of the way in unsparing judgment.

### *The Hidden Treasure*

HAVING spoken four parables in the hearing of the multitudes on the seashore, the Saviour retired into the house with His

disciples. He had other matters to communicate which only men born of the Spirit could be expected to understand. In His public utterances He had shown the Kingdom of heaven, *i.e.*, Christian profession in its outward aspect—what any eye could see and any mind comprehend. He had graphically described the rise, development, and doom of Christianity, viewed as an external system. But if He had said no more it might have been inferred that Satan was destined to be completely triumphant over all the work of God. For it is beyond controversy that the parables of the tares, mustard tree, and leaven portend disaster, viewed from a spiritual standpoint.

In the privacy of the house the Lord presented another aspect of things to His disciples, others besides the twelve being included in His audience (Mark iv. 10). Three additional parables were given, the first of these being that of the hidden treasure. "The Kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found it, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth the field" (Matt. xiii. 44). The field is the world, according to the Lord's own interpretation; the treasure represents the saints who are in it. By the saints we mean all who truly believe in the Saviour's name and who have been washed from their sins in His precious blood. He purchased the world for the sake of the hidden treasure, as a man to-day might purchase a quantity of old books for the sake of one volume on which his heart is set. The world is thus Christ's, not only by right of creation, but also by right of purchase. Nothing can hinder it ultimately coming into his possession, with every person therein, however rebellious. The Father has given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him (John xvii. 2). When the age is completed Christ will be seen surrounded by all His own (not one missing), even though the outer framework of Christendom be utterly wrecked. His enemies will then be constrained to bow to Him, in acknowledgment of His title and rights, and will for ever justify the righteous sentence which He will pass upon them for their contumacy and unbelief.

Every believing heart is overwhelmed with wonder and



adoration at the thought of the purchase price. He "selles all that He hath." Our blessing required the surrender of His heavenly glory, the degradation of the Bethlehem manger, and the shame of the cross of Calvary. Sin could only be atoned for by death and blood-shedding. But even from this the Saviour did not shrink, for the joy of being able to surround Himself eternally with happy myriads picked up by sovereign grace out of the ruin of everything below. If His own will experience joy in finding themselves in His heavenly presence, His heart will find deepest joy in having them there.

### *The Pearl*

It is such a common notion that the pearl of great price is the Saviour Himself that it seems almost irreverent to challenge it. Yet the popular interpretation is open to serious objection for two reasons: (1) it would put this parable entirely out of harmony with the teaching of its context; (2) it represents the sinner as sacrificing something—all, indeed—in order to acquire Christ. But Christ cannot be purchased. He is God's unspeakable gift to man, and all the blessings which are the fruit of His atonement—eternal life, etc.—are gifts also. Peter severely denounced the man who thought the gift of God might be purchased with money. Moreover, the sinner is represented in Scripture as having "nothing to pay" (Luke vii. 42). He who cannot meet his just obligations is surely in no position to buy costly pearls. And it should be remembered that it is the Saviour who seeks the sinner, rather than the sinner the Saviour.

The parable runs thus:—"The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matt. xiii. 45-46). As in the case of the hidden treasure the purchaser is Christ. The pearl is the Church, which, in Scripture, is the aggregate of all believing persons from the descent

of the Holy Ghost until the coming of the Saviour into the air (Acts ii.; 1 Thess. iv. 15-18). The hidden treasure may have consisted of hundreds of pieces of gold and silver, and thus suitably represents believers in all ages, who have been, and will yet be, saved out of the wreck of Adam's world by the infinite grace of God. But the pearl represents the saved of the Christian period specifically. The Church holds a very special place in the ways of God. The divine purposes concerning it were retained as a secret in the divine bosom until Paul was raised up as a chosen vessel to communicate them to men (Eph. iii. 3-4). He was in a peculiar sense the minister of the Church, and from him we learn that the Church is Christ's body now, and will be His bride throughout eternity. In these special relationships the saved of the preceding and following ages have no part, though the everlasting home of all God's saints is one—"the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. xii. 22).

The single pearl shows the unity and beauty of the Church as Christ sees and estimates it. The joyful finder of the earlier parable is the toilsome Seeker in the parable before us. To have the pearl for His own He sacrificed His all. He left heaven's glory, and accepted in lieu thereof the lowly circumstances of earth. His earthly throne, as David's Son and Heir, He also surrendered, and accepted instead the cross and the tomb. All this was in order that He might possess Himself of the pearl upon which He had set His heart. As the Spirit elsewhere puts it: "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it" (Eph. v. 25). Surely the affections of all the objects of His favour should be set upon such a Saviour for ever.

### *The Drag-Net*

THIS is the last of the series of parables that were uttered by our Lord on the memorable day of Matt. xiii.: "The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered



of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away" (vv. 47-48). Here we have the final results of the operations of God, man, and Satan during the period called Christianity. As a net cast into the sea, the Gospel has gone forth into all the world, with its touching appeal to men of every nation. It has achieved results which are manifest to the eyes of all. Both good and bad have been gathered in: the good fish representing those who, having humbly acknowledged their guilt and ruin, have been cleansed from their sins by the Saviour's precious blood; the bad being those (alas! how many) who "profess and call themselves Christians," with no love for the Saviour's person, and no living faith in the Gospel. It is vain to urge that we must not judge. How is it possible for the Christian to obey the injunction to "love the brethren" if he cannot distinguish between "the brethren" and all others? (1 John iii. 14). How refuse fellowship to an unbeliever if it is impossible to define such? (2 Cor. vi. 15). Or how avoid false teachers who bring in damnable heresies, if none can tell who are false and who are true? (2 Peter ii. 1). Although mistakes in discernment are only too possible, all those to whom Christ is something more than a mere name are solemnly responsible to distinguish, in godly fear, between those who are good and those who are bad, companying with the one, and eschewing the other.

When the gospel net is full it will be drawn to shore. How soon this will take place is known to none but God, though everything around us is suggestive that the end of the age is drawing near. Then will ensue the great separation, which will sever the ungodly from even the outward communion of the godly for ever. According to the teaching of the parable, the fisherman's duty was to care for the good fish. This is the present responsibility of those who in this day profess to serve the absent Christ. The bad fish the fishermen merely cast out of the net, as not being those for whom they were in search: The judgment of God upon false professors will be meted out, not by human hands, but by angelic power. "So shall it be at the end of the age (not 'world'): the angels shall come forth and

sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matt. xiii. 49-50). Such is the end of Christendom, as described by God Himself; not the whole world subdued to Christ by the operation of religious agencies, but eternal ruin for many who have passed current amongst their fellows as Christians indeed. The Saviour will undoubtedly have His own, though the final discrimination by His unerring hand will reveal an appalling amount of unreality and hypocrisy in the circle of those who, in one way or another, bear His holy name.

### *The Two Servants*

ONE of the ugliest features of fallen human nature—insensibility to divine grace—is exposed in all its hideousness in the parable of the Two Servants (Matt. xviii. 23-35). It happened on this wise. Peter had just inquired of the Lord if seven times would suffice for the forgiveness of an erring brother, and had received the startling reply, "Until seventy times seven." The parable before us was added immediately, and in it the exceeding grace of God and the incorrigible evil of man stand clearly revealed.

The outline of the parable is as follows: A certain King, in taking account of his servants, found one who owed him ten thousand talents—about three millions sterling in English money. The defaulter being penniless, the King ordered himself, and his wife, children and goods to be sold. In his distress the debtor fell at his master's feet, crying: "Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." The King's heart being moved with compassion, the whole vast debt was immediately remitted. Presently the forgiven one met a fellow-servant who owed him a hundred pence—about three pounds in our currency; and instead of extending to him clemency after the pattern of that which had been so recently shown to himself, he seized him by



the throat saying: "Pay me that thou owest." In his utter heartlessness, he gave no heed to the tears of his fellow, but cast him into prison until payment should be made.

This parable may be read both dispensationally and morally. Dispensationally it presents to us the history of the people of Israel. Centuries of law-breaking had made them serious defaulters before the Son of God came into the world, and to all this they added the enormous guilt of shedding His blood. In answer to His gracious prayer, "Father, forgive them," divine favour was shown to the nation after the Holy Ghost came down from heaven. To Israel first the Gospel of divine forgiveness was sent (Acts iii. 26). This, instead of melting their hearts, only served to bring out their utter moral insensibility to God's goodness. Scorning the Gospel for themselves, in their hatred to the Gentiles they put every obstacle in the way of its being preached to them (1 Thess. ii. 16). This has filled their cup of iniquity to the brim. They are now suffering divine chastisement until their term is accomplished, and they have received of Jehovah's hand double for all their sins (Isa. xl. 2).

We must read this parable morally also. Viewed from this standpoint, it appeals loudly to us all. Every man is a defaulter in relation to God. Perfect obedience and love is His due from us, but who among us has ever rendered it? Yet the heart of God yearns over all His bankrupt debtors; and, on the basis of the atoning blood of Jesus, He proclaims full pardon to everyone. Myriads profess to have received His pardon. "I believe in the forgiveness of sins" is the language of multitudes in Christendom daily. But conduct alone proves whether or not the grace of God has really penetrated the soul. Where this is the case, the forgiven one gratefully walks in the spirit of grace towards all, meekly enduring wrong, and sincerely seeking every man's eternal good. Those who content themselves with saying "Lord, Lord," while not doing the things that He says, will find themselves ultimately in the place of the wicked servant of our parable, who was severely denounced by his lord for his hypocrisy and evil and was forthwith delivered to the tormenters. "He shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no

mercy" (James ii. 13). Our God will be satisfied with nothing less than reality in those who have to do with Him.

### *The Labourers in the Vineyard*

THERE is absolutely nothing in this parable about the salvation of the soul. Salvation is altogether the fruit of sovereign grace, bestowed upon the unworthy on the basis of the blood of Jesus, the thought of wages or reward being utterly foreign to it. But every saved one is a servant, responsible in all things to his Lord. It is of this that our parable speaks.

Peter's remark in Matt. xix. 27 called it forth. "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?" In reply he was told that faithful service will in no wise go unrewarded, and that as regards the apostles, special honour is reserved for them in the golden era when the Son of man will sit upon His throne. But perceiving in Peter's remarks a tendency to exalt human doings and sacrifices unduly, the Lord added the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt xx. 1-16).

The penny (or denarius) for which the householder agreed with his first batch of workers was the usual labourer's wage in that day. The agreement was thus equitable to all parties. At pay-time a difficulty arose concerning some whom the master found unemployed at the eleventh hour and sent into the vineyard. In their case no wage was fixed; they were simply told, "Whatsoever is right, ye shall receive." They trusted to the master's goodness—a safe principle where God is concerned. At pay-time these eleventh-hour labourers were recompensed first, and each received a penny. When those who were engaged in the morning came before the steward they supposed they would receive more, and they did not hesitate to complain to the master because no more than a penny was given to them. The master remonstrated with the ringleader thus: "Friend, I do thee no wrong; didst thou not agree with me for a penny?"



Take up that which is thine, and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do as I will with my own? Or is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (R.V.).

The point is the absolute right of the Lord of all to do as He pleases in His own realm—a right which no reverent mind would contest for a moment. Human pettiness, even in true saints, is apt to appraise its own service and to magnify its own labours in the Lord's vineyard. But all such notions are rebuked by the recollection of what each soul owes to its Redeemer. At infinite cost, amidst circumstances of unparalleled grief and shame, He secured our salvation at the cross of Calvary. From the moment that this immense fact is apprehended, devoted service becomes the happy occupation of him who has received so inestimable a blessing. Love is the only true motive; every Scripture statement concerning ultimate reward being given as encouragement merely. When our noblest doings are compared with what Christ has done for us, we feel constrained to put our hand upon our mouth and cast ourselves adoringly at His feet. He will delight to commend and reward even a cup of cold water given for His sake, but far be it from us to utter one word about the best we have done. It is grace alone which has put us into the path of Christ, the same grace sustains us therein, and grace will not fail to crown it munificently when the end is reached.

### *The Two Sons*

No preacher was ever less disposed for controversy than the Son of God, yet none were ever so incisive in their handling of contentious critics as He. And no wonder: being the Searcher of all hearts He knew perfectly the motives which actuated those who assailed Him; and being Himself the truth He knew just what was required to meet every occasion.

During His last week in Jerusalem He was frequently assailed

by the religious leaders of Israel. On one occasion, after He had exposed their spiritual incompetency for the sacred office, He gave utterance to the parable of the Two Sons, wherein is set forth the hopeless case of men who say and do not. "A certain man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not'; but afterwards he repented and went. And he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, Sir'; and went not" (Matt. xxi. 28-32). The rebellious son, who at first refused to do his father's will, represents the publicans and the harlots. Immersed in iniquity, these listened to the stern denunciations of John the Baptist, and bowed their hearts in true contrition before God. When the Saviour's ministry of grace reached their ears they welcomed it, and thus became true heirs of the Kingdom. The son who promised obedience but did not render it represents the priests and Pharisees. These, steeped in religion, and profoundly contemptuous of "publicans and sinners," were in fact the veriest hypocrites. Nothing could be more cutting than the Saviour's words concerning them on another occasion: "All therefore whatsoever they bid you, observe and do; but do not ye after their works; for they say and do not" (Matt. xxiii. 3). For such men, no sentence could be more righteous than this: "Verily, I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you."

This parable should raise the most serious thoughts in men's minds to-day. All around us are those who "profess and call themselves Christians," with leaders and shepherds not a few. From all these God demands reality. Deeds, not words, are His holy requirement. A pious "Lord, Lord," can never deceive Him. True faith in the Saviour's name and in the blood He shed produces holiness, separation from the world, and devotedness to the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Where these things are not seen, profession is the merest sham, which may pass muster with men in the present world, but will be fully exposed in another scene. However startling it may appear, it is nevertheless true that many a religious person will be lost for ever. But it is equally true that multitudes of the earth's



vilest will be found in the blessedness of the Father's house when the gathering moment comes. The very vileness of these latter disposes them to seek the Saviour's face, and to avail themselves of His great salvation. Like the crucified thief who said, "Lord, remember me," their cry of repentance has been heard, and divine forgiveness has been vouchsafed to them full and free. Salvation is altogether of grace, and it is the happy portion of every true believer, wherever found.

### *The Wicked Husbandmen*

THE Saviour was fully aware, during His last visit to Jerusalem, that conspiracy was abroad, and that the leaders of Israel were planning His death. In this striking parable, recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, He exposes their design fully. This so exasperated His enemies that they would have laid violent hands upon Him forthwith, but they feared the people (Matt. xxi. 46).

The parable of the Husbandmen, though directed against the leaders, gives the whole history of Israel from the day that God began to bestow favours upon them. Their beautiful inheritance is likened to a vineyard, containing everything conducive to abundant fruit-bearing. In the East rent is paid, not in money altogether, but partly in kind. But God looked in vain for any return from Israel (Matt. xxi. 33-41). Eight centuries before Christ's coming He complained thus: "What could have been done more to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" (Isa. v. 4). Nothing but the basest ingratitude and sin was ever rendered by Israel for all the favours wherewith God blessed them. Violence and murder were meted out to His messengers: "they beat one, and killed another, and stoned another." Stephen challenged them thus severely: "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?"

(Acts vii. 52). The climax of insult and iniquity was reached when the Son came, and they said among themselves: "This is the Heir; come, let us kill Him, and seize on His inheritance." Within a week these words received their painful fulfilment—the Son of God lay dead in the tomb.

The history of Israel is the history of man everywhere. In their record we see our own hearts reflected. We shall miss all the moral value of the parable if we fail to perceive this. Fallen man is utterly unfruitful for God; and, what is worse, his heart is filled with antagonism to God and His Son. The apostle's words as to this in Rom. viii. 7-8 are very sweeping: "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Nothing avails but a new creation by means of the Spirit and the Word.

In answer to the Lord's demand as to what should be done to the lawless husbandmen, His hearers pronounced their own sentence. "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." They wanted the inheritance for themselves, apart altogether from divine interference and claim; they should have destruction instead. The Stone which the builders rejected was about to become the head of the corner; and the day will arrive when the Stone will descend with crushing violence upon all transgressors, and grind them to powder (Matt. xxi. 42-44). Even the forbearance of God has its limits.

The judgment of unfruitful Israel has already fallen; the judgment of unfaithful Christendom is rapidly approaching. From it there is no escape for any, but through faith in the Saviour's name, and in His precious atoning blood.



### *The Marriage of the King's Son*

THIS parable, unlike that of the Husbandmen, is a similitude of the Kingdom of Heaven. The former parable gives the history of Israel under the law; the latter describes their conduct in the presence of divine grace. In the one, God is represented as presenting claims (as He was entitled to do); in the other, He invites to a feast. Taken together, the two parables show the utter failure of flesh in connection with both law and grace. Such is man that if God asks him for something he will not render it; and if God offers him something he will not accept it.

"A certain King made a marriage for his son" (Matt. xxii. 1-14). The King is God, the son is the Lord Jesus. Remarkably, the bride does not figure in the parable at all; everything is ordered for the pleasure of the son. This is the principle on which God is acting in His present dealings with men. In sending salvation to us, with all its inestimable blessings for eternity, His prime object is to give joy and honour to His beloved Son, in whom all the divine councils are centred. But men have no regard for either God or His Son; hence our parable speaks of two invitations absolutely refused. There were two distinct missions to Israel; one before, and one after, the cross of Calvary. The second was rejected with violence to the messengers; they "entreated them spitefully and slew them." The children of those who killed the Old Testament prophets treated in like manner the New Testament apostles. Peter, John, and Paul experienced their cruelty, while Stephen and James were murdered by them. Our Lord gave a further warning as to all this in Matt. xxiii. 34. Judgment followed, as the parable foretold. The King's armies (in this case the Romans, under Titus) destroyed the murderers and burnt up their city. Compare Luke xxi. 20-24.

But the King's goodness was not quenched by the ingratitude and evil of the first-invited guests. Accordingly the servants were bidden to go into the highways and bring in all they

could find, "both bad and good." Thus the grace of God, so scornfully rejected by Israel, has been extended to the Gentiles. "Whosoever" is now the grand Gospel cry. Divine love to the world is now proclaimed on the basis of the atoning blood of Jesus. But all is not right with these Gentile called ones. "When the King came in to see the guests he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment." A promiscuous gathering collected from the highways was not expected to possess raiment suitable for a royal banqueting house, wedding robes had therefore been provided. The individual upon whom the King's eye rested dared to affront the King by appearing in raiment of his own. He either thought too highly of his own apparel to put it aside, or too lightly of what befitted the presence of the King to suffer himself to don the wedding garment. This man is the representative of a class. In his presumptuous ignoring of the wedding garment he is the prototype of religious men destitute of Christ. All these boast of their own righteousness instead of submitting themselves to the righteousness of God (Rom. x. 3). Unless God in His infinite mercy opens their eyes to their true position, the outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth must be their portion for ever. The King's inspection of those who profess to have accepted His call may be nearer than any of us suppose.

### *The Ten Virgins*

THIS parable describes prophetically the conduct of professing Christians in relation to the hope of the Lord's coming. It is most certain that when the Son of God went up into the Father's house He left behind Him the promise to come again, and gather home to Himself all those for whom He died (John xiv. 3). For the fulfilment of this, all should have looked with fervent desire.

"Then shall the Kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.



And five of them were wise, and five were foolish" (Matt. xxv. 1-13). Christianity is a heavenly order of things. When it really engages a man's heart it sets him entirely outside of the present evil world, with his face towards the glory of God. The fact that his Saviour is no longer here has spoiled the world for the Christian. A stranger below, he waits for Christ's coming from above. It is Satan's unceasing aim to pervert the heavenly character of Christianity; hence the worldly employments with which religious leaders fill the minds of those who follow them—bazaars, concerts, and the like.

The virgins are divinely divided into two companies—the wise and the foolish; the essential difference being that the one had oil in their vessels with their lamps, and the other had not. Oil is the emblem of the Holy Spirit, who is God's great gift to all who believe the Gospel (Eph. i. 13). He who has not God's Spirit is no Christian, whatever his pretensions (Rom. viii. 9). "While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept." The hope of the Lord's coming for His people, which so fired the souls of believers in the apostles' day, became lost when the apostles were no more. Since that time men in Christendom have spoken only of the day of judgment at the end of all things. The "*Te Deum*," with other ancient writings, acknowledges this solemn truth, but of the Saviour's descent into the air to call up His saints not a trace can be found in the literary remains of centuries.

But the midnight cry has gone forth. The nineteenth century witnessed a revival of the hope. From one end of Christendom to the other the cry now resounds: "Behold the Bridegroom; go ye out to meet Him." Under the mighty impulse of the midnight cry multitudes of true believers—"wise virgins" have aroused themselves, and have shaken themselves free of worldly associations, religious or otherwise, and have resumed the original waiting attitude of the Church of God. The foolish virgins are also full of activity, though in a wrong direction. Realizing that something is lacking, they are redoubling their religious zeal in the hope of fitting themselves thereby for the Bridegroom's presence. Sacraments and formalities of every kind are their confidence and stay.

Our parable shows that when the bridegroom came, "they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut." Readiness consists, not in attention to religious formalities, but in unfeigned faith in the Saviour's name, and in His atoning blood. Only those of whom this is true will find themselves on the right side of the door when the critical moment arrives. Those outside appeal in vain: "Lord, Lord, open to us." But one reply is possible: "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not." Both true and nominal Christians, like the wise and foolish virgins are alike in their profession, but the return of the Lord from heaven will make clearly manifest how deep is the moral gulf which really separates the one class from the other.

### *The Talents*

THIS parable has a voice to all who hold the position of servants of Christ during His absence in heaven. He likens Himself to "a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered to them his goods" (Matt. xxv. 14-30). The only true motive for service to Christ is affection for His person. Salvation is by grace alone; it is the purchase of His blood, neither pious deeds nor service of any kind having aught to do with the matter. He who ventures to serve Christ in any capacity apart from the appreciation of His blood, and love to His person, only undertakes that which will bring down judgment upon his head in the great day.

The sovereignty of the Lord is seen in that to one was committed five talents, to another two, and to another one—"to each man according to his several ability." Thus Apollos was not so richly endowed as Paul, but both were equally responsible to do their best with what they had. This principle applies still. Let no true witness for Christ bemoan the smallness of His gifts, "for if there be first the willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not"



(2 Cor. viii. 12). Some of the servants of our parable, having received their talents, forthwith went and traded with them. What need for delay? In like manner, those who in our day have received qualifications from Christ are solemnly responsible to go forth and use them, asking permission from no man. The notion of official ordination has been the bane of Christian ministry for centuries. Romanists, Greeks, Anglicans, and Non-conformists agree in the fiction that ordination of some kind is necessary ere a man handle sacred things. The practical results of this is that many are installed as servants of Christ who have never known His salvation, and who are in consequence dead hindrances to the operation of the Spirit of God, while others of a more spiritual type are discredited as unauthorised and piratical. Scripture nowhere asserts the need of official appointment for preaching the Word of God, still less for "the due administration of the sacraments." Elders and deacons were apostolically ordained, but these officers had nothing directly to do with public ministry. The work of the one was rule and visitation; and of the other, care for widows, etc. When John, in his second epistle, warned the elect lady against heretical teachers, he did not bid her examine their credentials, but to test their teaching. Paul gloried in the fact that he was an apostle, neither of men, nor by men (Gal. i. 1). No man had anything whatever to do with his call to service.

When the lord returned, he called his servants together, and reckoned with them. In like manner will the Lord Jesus, at His coming again, investigate the doings of all who have professed to serve Him during His absence. The man who had received five talents was called first, as the one most responsible. He had gained five talents more, and was rewarded with his master's commendation. The man who had received the two had gained two more. His commendation was word for word the same as that of his more privileged brother. Each had done his best with his master's goods, and each was therefore invited to enter into the joy of his lord. Bliss with Christ is the happy end of all true labour for His name. The man with the single talent was cast into the outer darkness. He represents Christendom's unconverted preachers, whose hearts have never been warmed

by the love of Christ, and who cannot therefore find delight in pleasing Him. Unworthy motives explain their public position, the duties of which they shirk as miserably as the man in our parable. Though such speak with the tongues of men and of angels, it is but as sounding brass in the divine ears. Unless God mercifully lead them to repentance, Balaam's doom must be theirs for ever.

### *The Sleeping Husbandman*

"So is the Kingdom of God as if a man should cast seed on the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come" (Mark iv. 26-29). This parable is peculiar to the Second Evangelist. Its point is the non-intervention of the Lord of the harvest with the outward course of Christianity. He Himself was the beginner of the present testimony to God's grace and goodness, in person during His humiliation, and by means of the Holy Spirit after He ascended on high. The Gospels tell us of His personal labours, Mark concluding with the statement that after His departure the disciples continued the testimony, "the Lord working with them."

He has thus "cast seed on the ground," the results being left to the responsibility of men. The reception which has been accorded to the Gospel seed is fully detailed in the parable of the Sower. The greater part of it has been rendered unproductive through the evil of the human heart. But the Lord does not interfere. He remains quiescent for the present in the glory of God. The apparent indifference of the Lord of the harvest has been a frequent cause of perplexity to the godly. They have witnessed the excellent of the earth cast to the lions by the



heathen, and tortured in the Inquisition, and burned at the stake by the religious chiefs of Christendom, and their anguished hearts have marvelled at the silence of heaven. No angels have appeared for the deliverance of the oppressed, as in the case of imprisoned Peter; and no miracles have been wrought on their behalf as in the day when the three Hebrews were cast into the fiery furnace. "Oh, Lord, how long?" has been the agonised cry of such as have marvelled at the triumph of evil, especially in the religious sphere.

For the present, matters are suffered to take their own course. That no purpose of God is failing of its accomplishment is clear from our parable. Fruit is most certainly being produced for God in the world, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." Whatever the apparent trend of things, the Gospel is, undoubtedly, winning true hearts for the Saviour Who died and rose again. By and bye He will surround Himself in the Father's house with the full fruit of His great Calvary sacrifice.

When harvest-time arrives, His attitude of non-intervention will be abandoned, and He will exert Himself in power. Then "He putteth in the sickle." In that day He will discriminate, as He only can unfailingly, between those who really love His name and those who love Him not. For His own there is prepared a place in the glory above; for all others, whatever their religious profession or ecclesiastical status, there is reserved blackness of darkness for ever.

### *The Two Builders*

BOTH Matthew and Luke give this heart-searching parable at the close of our Lord's sermon on the mount. Multitudes had listened to His teaching with wonder and admiration. His gracious words attracted them, and His authoritative tone (so unlike that of their scribes) commanded at least their respect. In their estimation "Never man spake like this Man."

So far well, but the human heart is deplorably fickle and unreal. This leads men to hear, and even to approve what they hear, while rendering no obedience to the heavenly message. Hence the importance of the parable of the two builders. "Whosoever cometh to Me and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: he is like a man who built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on the rock" (Luke vi. 47-48). The man who hears manifestly stands in a position altogether different from that of him who hears not. The latter is utterly indifferent; the former gives more or less attention to the things which are eternal. But unless his sole foundation is the teaching of the Son of God, he has absolutely nothing that will avail him when the storm of divine judgment arises. "Back to Christ" is the cry to-day. Well, be it so; but what has Christ told us? In John iii. 5 He insists upon every man's need of the new birth; in the same chapter (v. 14) He declares the absolute necessity for His atoning sacrifice; and then proceeds to show (v. 16) that the heart of God has provided what the throne of God demanded. "He so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son." His own lips have told us also that every man's eternal future depends upon his attitude towards Himself. "Back to Christ" if really meant, must lead men to bow at His feet in humble acknowledgment of His person and sacrifice. All who have taken this happy place have laid their foundation on the rock, and for them the impending judgment of God, however terrible, has no alarm.

"But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the storm did beat violently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great" (Luke vi. 49). Thus graphically does the Lord of all describe the collapse of all the hopes of such as have not built upon His words. Heaven is silent to-day; no fiery bolts proceed thence to drive the guilty into eternal woe; but a veritable hurricane of divine wrath will burst forth ere long, which will reveal undisputably where men really stand. Every unreal superstructure will then totter and fall. The fairest moral and religious exterior will not shield from judgment those who have not as lost sinners put their trust in the Saviour and in His



precious blood. As the prophet declared ages ago: "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place" (Isa. xxviii. 17). Happy, eternally happy, is the man who has built on Christ, the Son of God. This foundation will stand, and this alone.

### *The Two Debtors*

THE Saviour was sitting at meat in the house of a Pharisee. His spirit was sorely grieved at the time. He had just had occasion to rebuke the men of His generation for their indifference to both John the Baptist and Himself. The stern asceticism of the forerunner so irritated them that they said he had a demon; and the geniality and graciousness of the Saviour so offended them that they called Him a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners (Luke vii. 31-35).

Something to refresh His heart would have been deeply appreciated at that moment. But He was not to receive it at the hands of His host. He in his deplorable blindness was wholly unconscious who he had at his board that day. His God was there, but he knew it not. Yet he was a religious man—one of the ultra-religious indeed. His Guest was, in his eyes, simply a travelling preacher, to whom it might be well to grant a meal. It had occurred to him that He might possibly be a prophet, but this thought he dismissed as he noted His conduct in his house. So little did he esteem his Guest that he did not even offer Him the usual Eastern courtesies—water for His feet, etc. Truly there is nothing so blinding or benumbing as empty, formal religion.

Presently a woman of the city—a moral derelict from the streets—crept into the dining-hall, hearing that Jesus was there. Her soul was burdened. Sin lay heavily upon her. But she discerned in Jesus the Saviour of sinners. Whether He suited others or not mattered little to her; to one burdened with guilt like

herself He was just the One she needed. None other in the universe could meet her case. She had heard of His grace to sinners, and her heart was attracted. No restraints or Pharisaical proprieties were suffered to stand in her way. She sought Him out, and claimed, not in words but in deeds, a personal interest in His saving grace. To the deep disgust of the host she rained tears upon the Saviour's feet, wiped them with the hair of her head, kissed them fervently, and anointed them with ointment.

The Lord, aware of what was passing in the mind of the Pharisee, turned to him thus: "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed him 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?" (Luke vii. 40-42). To such a parable but one answer was possible, and the application was evident. If each man's record of sin is not equally vile, there is no room for boasting, since "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." It ill becomes one therefore to scorn another. Each would be well advised to seek pardoning grace for himself.

Turning to the woman, the Saviour said: "Thy sins are forgiven." He had come down from heaven for the salvation of such as she, and He was on His way to Calvary to expiate her guilt. Never again could she number herself amongst "miserable sinners"; ever after with gratitude her lips would say, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins, and in the life everlasting. Amen."

### *The Good Samaritan*

THIS touching parable was related by the Saviour as a rebuke to a caviller, who had challenged Him as to what he should do to inherit eternal life (Luke x. 25-37). To an honest inquirer, He would have replied that eternal life is the gift of God to



those who believe on His Son; but to a caviller He could only speak of the law of Sinai. Unabashed and unconvicted (though a professional exponent of the divine law) His questioner then asked: "And who is my neighbour?" This parable was then given, which not only furnished a complete answer to the question, but also shows in a vivid way man's utterly ruined condition as God sees it. No one who understands the parable of the Good Samaritan would ever seek to obtain eternal life by meritorious works of any kind.

The man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and who experienced so disastrous a journey is a representative character; in him every man may see his own portrait, if he will. It is folly to speak of human progress; man's course has been retrograde ever since the catastrophe in Eden. He has fallen into the hands of the hosts of evil, who have stripped him of his once-fair robe of innocence, injuring him mortally in so doing. His condition is hopeless so far as creature aid is concerned.

Two persons passed by as the stricken traveller lay weltering in his blood, the one a priest and the other a Levite; but neither proffered a helping hand. Yet the law taught that even the ass of an enemy was to be succoured if he was seen groaning under his burden (Exod. xxiii. 5). But why did the Saviour select, out of the many classes and ranks of men, the priest and the Levite as those who did nothing for the dying one? Surely to teach us the utter inability of the system which these characters represented to meet the need of ruined man. The priest's business was with religious forms and ceremonies, and the Levite was responsible to instruct the people in the law of God; yet both of these are represented by a divine hand as doing nothing for a man in his hour of deadly peril. What a lesson is here! Yet so little heed has been paid to it that to this hour multitudes in their quest for salvation cast themselves, some upon priests, and some upon moralists, to meet their deep need. The blunder of it is painful to contemplate.

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set

him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him." Thus graphically the Saviour describes His own mission of grace. From heaven's glory He journeyed, going ever downward until Calvary was reached, where He bowed His head in death as an atonement for human guilt. Man being righteously under sentence of death, He must needs suffer and die in order to lift him out of his degradation and ruin. The Jews once called Him a Samaritan in contempt (John viii. 48); in our parable He meekly accepts the title. Yet the scorn of man could not be suffered to dry up the springs of His grace, hence His loving provision of oil and wine, typifying the Spirit's application to the soul of the healing efficacy of His precious blood. In the picture before us we have the man, cured, carried, and cared for in every way. There is yet a higher aspect of saving grace—the sinner brought into the Father's presence, to be for ever a sharer of divine joys. But this is shown to us in the later parable of the prodigal son.

### *The Stronger than the Strong*

It was suggested by some that the power by which the Son of God wrought in this world was the power of Beelzebub. The suggestion was as absurd as it was blasphemous. But it furnished the Saviour with an opportunity of showing the relation of man to Satan as the fruit of the Fall, and His own relation to the enemy as having come from heaven for man's deliverance and blessing. He put it thus: "When the strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when the stronger than he shall come upon him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils" (Luke xi. 21-22). The strong one is Satan; the stronger than he is the Son of God. Satan's "palace" is the world as it is now; "his goods" are the men and women who dwell therein. The position is a terrible one; none the less so because the mass have no realization of it. Man's



revolt from God has not yielded him the independence to which he aspired; it has reduced him to Satanic servitude instead. The Lord Himself on three occasions spoke of the enemy as "prince of this world."

The blind eagerness with which men pursue their lusts and pleasures, some decent and some indecent, is sufficient proof of Satan's dominion over them. Even though no satisfaction is found for money or effort, and though the ultimate issue is manifestly ruinous, men rush heedlessly on. In fact, if they would extricate themselves from the toils of the destroyer, they have no power to do so. Satan has nothing to fear from the struggles of his captives, be they ever so frantic. His hold is firm; his dominion is ancient; and his resources are beyond anything known to the children of men.

But Christ has come. From the Father's heart He came, as the living expression of His compassion for the wretched and lost. Hear Him proclaiming in the synagogue of Nazareth the character of His mission. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me; because He hath anointed Me to preach deliverance to the captives," etc. (Luke iv. 18). Ere deliverance could be, He must meet the strong man and overcome him. In the wilderness He bound him; at the cross He bruised him. By submitting to death for a brief moment, He annulled Satan's power. His resurrection is the glorious proof of His complete triumph over all the might of the enemy. Deliverance is, in consequence, available for all. None need remain a single hour under the dominion of the strong man. The cry of distress will assuredly be heard; pardon and eternal life will be freely bestowed upon all who believe on the Son. The soul is thus set free for ever.

In the same discourse the Saviour gave utterance to the connected parable of the restless spirit (Luke xi. 24-26). It is the case of one from whom the unclean spirit has gone out (not cast out), only to return later with seven-fold power. Dispensationally, this is the history of the nation of Israel, from which the demon of idolatry went out after the Babylonish captivity, with the certainty of returning in its most evil form in the day of the Anti-Christ (Matt. xii. 45). The Christ of God

having been disowned in Zion, "the abomination of desolation" is destined to stand in Israel's holy place (Matt. xxiv. 15). Reformation is insufficient, whether for that nation or for individuals, in this or in any other day. It will not avail to put the soul beyond the reach of the enemy's power. Living faith in the One Who died and rose again can alone effectually meet human need.

### *The Rich Fool*

SOMEONE had just appealed to the Saviour concerning a property dispute. He declined to interfere, the matter being foreign to His mission at that time. He had come from heaven, not to adjust the world's wrongs, but to seek men's souls in love. The crooked will certainly be made straight by His hand, but in another era. For this He must return from His present place on high. But meanwhile He Who never missed an opportunity of dealing with men's consciences concerning things unseen and eternal, used the occasion of the appeal to warn His hearers against absorption with this world's affairs. In order to present this the more forcibly he added the familiar parable of the rich fool (Luke xii. 13-21).

The world has never been without such characters as the Saviour here describes. His omniscient eye had observed the like repeatedly. Men to whom the Creator had been specially kind, into whose lap He has poured blessings in abundance, and who have only used His favours to the utter exclusion of Himself from their thoughts. The rich man of our parable was hampered in regard to his produce. His farm had brought forth plentifully, and his barns were full to overflowing, so that greater store-houses must be erected. The possibility of any hitch arising in connection with his projects never occurred to his mind, so self-confident was he. Accordingly, he addressed himself thus: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." No thought of God, no thought



of eternity, found room in his foolish mind. To him this world was everything, and he confidently expected to hold and enjoy it indefinitely.

He ought to have remembered that for man, unlike the beasts, there is a life beyond this world, and a God to meet, to whom all must render an account. The divine word to him, and to all of his kind, is, "Thou fool." This is God's epithet, not man's. Surely it is not too strong a term to apply to one who absolutely ignores his possession of a never-dying soul. He who thinks of nothing but his few years in this world, in utter forgetfulness of the ages upon ages which lie beyond, is a fool indeed. In Luke xvi. the Saviour draws aside the veil and shows us the torments of one to whom this world had been everything. He did it in mercy, as a warning to men in all succeeding ages.

The question was recently asked concerning a deceased millionaire: "How much did he leave?" The solemn reply was given: "He left it all." So to the fool of our parable God said: "This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall these things be which thou hast provided?" "Whose," indeed! A matter of but small moment to the original possessor when the gates of death have closed upon him. To find then that a supreme blunder has been committed is almost too awful to contemplate. To get one's eyes opened to the reality of things when the borderline is passed can only lead to eternal despair; to face realities now will result in humble saving faith in God and His beloved Son. This is life indeed.

### *The Returning Lord*

THE Saviour frequently spoke to His disciples of His going away and coming again, and indicated to them two things that should characterise them during His absence—watching and working. The watching attitude is described in Luke xii. 35-36 thus: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and

ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately." This attitude was early abandoned by the Church. When the Church became worldly she lost touch of the truth of her Lord's return and settled down to the enjoyment of ease and honour here. Having thus forgotten her heavenly calling, she fell into the blunder that her mission was to improve the world; and in the pursuit of this object she became too blind to perceive that her fancy was not being realised, and that instead the world was corrupting and ruining her.

The Lord in His grace has revived the lost hope in these last days, with the happy result that many to-day are looking with fervour for His coming again. Watching is necessarily the fruit of affection, and this the absent Lord values more than the costliest sacrifices or the most toilsome labours. The highest possible character of reward is set before His watching ones: "He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them" (Luke xii. 37). Every believing heart cherishes the prospect of serving Christ eternally with a perfection of service that is impossible at present; here we have quite another thought—more delightful far—that He will condescend to render service to us. It will be His joy for ever to minister to the happiness of those whom He has redeemed by His blood.

Working has its place no less than watching. Salvation is by grace alone, works having nothing whatever to do with it. Its basis is the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. But the realisation of this incites the soul to hearty labour for His name's sake. Concerning the diligent worker, the Lord has said: "He will make him ruler over all that He hath" (Luke xii. 44). This honour is great—too great, indeed, for the most spiritual mind to grasp at present, but it is altogether a lower character of reward than that which is in store for watchers. To work for Christ is good; to watch for Christ is better.

The Lord proceeded to speak of the evil servant who says in his heart, "My Lord delayeth His coming," and who, in consequence, beats his fellow-servants and carouses with the drunken



(Luke xii. 45). It is the false religious professor who says "Lord, Lord," but has no mind to do what He says. Such the Lord will not only disown but destroy at His coming. In His work of judgment He will discriminate between those who knew His will, and those who knew it not. This is just the difference between the professing Christian and the heathen. Evil is evil, wherever it is found, and must needs be judged; but responsibility is measured according to what men know of God and His Word (Luke xii. 47-48). Upon this equitable principle need we marvel if the heaviest strokes of the divine hand fall upon Great Britain when the hour comes for judgment to begin?

### *The Fig-Tree in the Vineyard*

THE history of Israel is the history of man. The special dealings of God with that nation have served to bring out the incorrigible evil of human nature. Tested in every way, endowed with every conceivable privilege, encompassed by divine care and attention, man is a hopeless failure. He yields no fruit for God. The parable of the fig-tree in the vineyard shows this with all plainness.

The city of Jerusalem had just experienced a painful shock. The Roman governor, Pilate, had butchered a number of Galileans, who had come thither to offer sacrifices. Some reported this to the Lord Jesus, desiring to hear His opinion upon the subject. In His usual way, He used the opportunity to deal a direct blow at the consciences of those who questioned Him. "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke xiii. 1-3). Nothing is easier than to impute exceptional wickedness to those overtaken by calamity, in utter forgetfulness of the fact that man as man—man everywhere—is deserving only of the judgment of God. The Saviour accordingly added a parable, in which it is

shown that the whole nation (not a few Galileans only) was altogether unprofitable to God, and, in consequence, going on to judgment. "A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard: and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he to the dresser of his vineyard, 'Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?' And he answering said unto him, 'Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down'" (Luke xiii. 6-8). Both the vineyard and the vine represent the nation of Israel (Isa. v.; Ps. lxxx.); the fig-tree planted in the vineyard represents the remnant of Judah which returned from the Babylonian captivity. A bright testimony for God should have gone forth from a people so graciously blest; instead, such was their hypocrisy and evil, the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles through them (Rom. ii. 24). The "three years" suggest the various testings by means of the law, the prophets, and Christ (Acts vii. 51-53). By none of these had the people's hearts been reached. God was still without any return from them. One more opportunity—only one—was to be granted in answer to the prayer of the dresser of the vineyard. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, who prayed: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke xxiii. 34). The fresh opportunity was the testimony of the Holy Ghost after Christ's departure to heaven. This resulted in the murder of Stephen, and in the chasing out of Christ's other witnesses (1 Thess. ii. 15). The fig-tree has therefore been cut down: the guilty nation has been expelled from the land by the righteous judgment of God.

Christendom's turn is coming. Nineteen centuries of Gospel light have produced little else than worldliness, pride and blasphemy—all perpetrated under cover of Christ's holy name. Divine forbearance, long exercised, will ere long come to an end. Then the stroke will fall, and Christendom will be the scene of the sorest judgments of God. Let each individual look to himself. What answer does my heart give to the costly sacrifice of Calvary, and the exceeding riches of divine grace pro-



claimed in virtue of it? Not until the heart appreciates Christ and His atoning blood can fruit begin to be produced for God.

### *The Great Supper*

THE Lord of all was dining with one of the rulers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees. Being the Sabbath day, He was watched critically by all who were present at the table. Observing a dropsical man before Him, He healed him, administering at the same time a stern rebuke to those who blamed Him for it in their hearts. He then addressed a remonstrance to His fellow-guests for the self-seeking which had led all of them to choose the best seats at the feast; and this He followed with a word to His host as to showing kindness to the poor and needy rather than to those who were certain to recompense him again. The pride and selfishness which His holy eye thus detected contrasted deplorably with His own profound humility and grace (Luke xiv.).

One of the guests interposing with the remark: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God," the Saviour gave utterance to the parable of the Great Supper, wherein is shown that, however eager men may be for the best seats at feasts provided by their fellows, when God spreads a feast they want no place whatever, but pray to be excused.

The Great Supper is an attractive presentation of the grace of God as revealed in the Gospel. The first invited guests were the religious mass in Israel. To them the Saviour first showed Himself with tenderest overtures of love. "And they all with one consent began to make excuse." The character of the excuses show that the blessings of God may be used to exclude God Himself from the affections. Such possessions as ground and oxen, and above all, a wife, are good gifts from God to men. That these should turn their heart away from, rather than to, God, only proves how evil the human heart is. There is,

moreover, glaring absurdity in the excuses given. Those who had bought property and oxen, having concluded their bargains, could well wait until the next day in order to see and prove what they had purchased. There was nothing in the circumstances to hinder their presence at the supper if their hearts really desired to be there.

Being thus affronted by those he had invited, the master of the house sent his servant into the streets and lanes of the city, with orders to bring in the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind. These represent the moral outcasts of Israel—the publicans and the harlots, concerning whom the Saviour once said to His religious hearers, “they go into the Kingdom of God before you” (Matt. xxi. 31).

But this was not sufficient; accordingly the servant was instructed to “go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.” The servant referred to in this parable is the Holy Spirit of God, Who has graciously made it His business to reach men with the glad tidings of divine goodness and love. The highway and hedge folk are the Gentiles, to whom the Gospel of God is now being proclaimed, Israel having definitely refused it. As Peter put it to his Jewish audience on the day of Pentecost: “The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts ii. 39).

How the Gentile world has treated God's invitation is painfully evident to all. The story of His sacrifice of His Son for men's salvation should subdue every heart to which it is presented. His gracious offer of pardon and justification to all who believe in the Son should evoke the humble gratitude of every one who is privileged to hear of it. But the human heart is everywhere alike, whether in the Gentile or in the Jew. It wants nothing to do with God and His Son. The flimsiest and most contemptible excuses are too readily found, to the present and eternal loss of all who are guilty of such egregious folly.



## *The Lost Sheep*

THE cynical remarks of the religious classes in Israel rendered it necessary for the Saviour to justify His attitude towards the guilty and lost. The three parables of Luke xv. were accordingly given, in which is explained, in a manner calculated to move every true heart, the yearning of the divine Trinity over the erring, and the various parts played by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the blessing of such. In the parable of the lost sheep we have portrayed the work of the Son; in that of the lost piece of silver we have the work of the Spirit; while in the parable of the prodigal son we have graphically described the warmth of affection with which the Father welcomes the wanderer home.

The Lord spoke first of His own work for two reasons. First, because it was with Him men were finding fault at that moment, and second, because His self-sacrifice on behalf of sinners necessarily precedes (and is, indeed, the basis) of the work of the Spirit and of the Father in men's souls. He put this question to His critics: "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" (Luke xv. 4). If they would be so solicitous about a straying animal, why marvel that the Lord of all should yearn over lost men, made in the image and glory of God? To seek and to save such, He was even then upon that wonderful journey which began from the heights of heavenly bliss, and which would only end when the cross of Calvary had been endured. Such grace as this has no charm for religionists; their self-complacency hiding from them their need of it. It may suit the profligate, but pride maintains that it does not suit them. In their own eyes they are the ninety and nine just persons who have no need of repentance. So utterly alienated are they from divine interests and affections that they are unable to understand the joy of the Father and the Son when one sinner is brought home. The fact that the relig-

ious folk were ever the Saviour's bitterest enemies is sufficient to put this painful truth beyond controversy. But the Shepherd rejoices in the fruit of His sufferings and toil. He shoulders His sheep, and carries it home rejoicing. By His mighty power is every saved one kept until the end. No force, either human or infernal, can wrest even the feeblest of His lambs from His care (John x. 27-30). He brings them, not into the fold, but home to Himself. There is no fold in Christianity. "One fold" is a sheer perversion in John x. 16; "one flock" is what the Saviour said. Wycliffe and Coverdale so rendered His words long before the Authorised Version was published; it was departure from truth when "one fold" was adopted in preference. The "fold" savours of the bondage of the law, which men, ignorant, alas, of the grace of God, have revived in Christianity: "the flock" suggests the liberty of divine love, which attracts, and binds, men to a personal Saviour.

The Shepherd's joy is shared by His friends and neighbours, to whom He says: "Rejoice with Me; for I have found My sheep which was lost." Those who are accustomed to intimacy of communion with the Son of God know, to their blessing, what this means. His interests are theirs; His achievements in the way of saving grace furnish them with material for holy triumph and delight. But in what relation did these religionists stand to Him, who, instead of rejoicing in His joy, could only coldly criticise the exercise of His goodness to the needy and lost?

### *The Lost Silver*

SINCE the first of the three parables (of Luke xv.) indisputably refers to the Son, and the third to the Father, it is surely reasonable to look for the Holy Spirit in the parable that intervenes. And indeed it is blessedly true that each Person in the Godhead is equally interested in the blessing of men. Father, Son, and



Holy Ghost work together in holy harmony in the gracious work of salvation.

The Saviour asked: "What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one of them, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and search diligently till she find it?" (v. 8). Here that which is lost is lifeless, in contrast with the first parable, which represents a living thing as going astray (the lost sheep). These are the two points of view from which the epistles to the Romans and Ephesians respectively regard the sinner. Activity in sin is the point in Romans; death—spiritual death—is the point in Ephesians. The painstaking work of the Holy Spirit in seeking the lost is presented in a veiled form in our parable. It is a woman who acts. This suggests the Church of God, the individual members of which are the Spirit's instruments for reaching the souls of men. Many a dark heart needs the light of divine truth to be let into it, that its evil may be exposed, and its deep need of salvation be brought home. The woman's candle expresses this.

Unlike the sheep, which had strayed upon the mountains (Matt. xviii. 12), the piece of silver was lost in the house. The great professing mass called Christendom is likened in 2 Tim. ii. 20 to "a great house" containing a mixed medley of the precious and the vile. Thus it is not only that the profligate and the wicked are lost, but many religious persons also. Perishing souls may be found in both tavern and "place of worship." The lost sheep is the image of the one; the lost coin is the image of the other.

The joy of the woman, when the missing piece was found, is declared by the Saviour Himself to resemble the joy that bursts forth amongst the angels of God when one sinner is brought to repentance. One soul is of sufficient value to engage the interest of all heaven. Who but God knows its worth? A single weeping reprobate furnishes more delight in heaven than a whole host of religious formalists, who wrap themselves around with the garments of their self-righteousness. It is marvellous, moreover, that the angelic host should unselfishly rejoice in the blessing of a being inferior in natural status to themselves, yet raised by sovereign grace to a more exalted position of blessing than the highest of the heavenly hierarchy have ever known or ever will

know. Yet Peter says, concerning our blessings, "which things the angels desire to look into" (1 Pet. i. 12). And Paul lets us know that through the Church is being made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. iii. 10). They study His ways with us, and find profit and blessing thereby.

### *The Prodigal Son*

It is not now the grace that seeks the lost one, but the grace that receives the repentant one to home and blessing. This is the Father's part in the wonderful scheme of salvation. The basis of all blessing for men is the atoning blood. This, however, is not the point in the parables of Luke xv., but rather the principle upon which men are blest, which is sovereign grace.

The Saviour now depicts two sons—one profligate, the other self-righteous (Luke xv. 11-32). These represent the lawless and the religious classes respectively. The younger son, having obtained his portion from his father, forsook him, and wasted his substance in a distant land. In like manner do the mass of men live in utter disregard of Him whose offspring they are, and squander His rich endowments—health, means, and faculties, in the gratification of their carnal lusts. The first man aimed at independence of God, and the love of this has characterised all his progeny since. When the prodigal had "spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land." Thus all around him were destitute like himself, so that no man could relieve the pangs of his fellow. Graphic picture of the godless man's utter inability to assuage the grief and disappointment of his neighbour's heart. In truth they are all needy together, if they would but confess it.

Presently the wanderer descends to the swine-trough. Penniless and hungry, he is thankful to be permitted to tend swine,



and even to share their food. "No man gave unto him." So says the Lord of all. Let infidelity inform us how many hospitals, orphanages, and other refuges of mercy would be dotted about on the face of the earth if Christianity had never shed its gracious influence into the hearts of men.

Feeding swine giving time for reflection, the prodigal's mind turned to the father's house, and its abundant provision. His heart became attracted thither, and he resolved to return and cast himself upon his father's mercy. This reminds us of Rom. ii. 4: "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." But the transgressor made one huge blunder. He purposed to say: "I am not worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." Conscience should have taught him that he had fallen too low for this, for surely the first requisite of a servant is a good character. Let us take the very humblest place before our God. Such is our state by nature that we are absolutely without fitness for any place whatever in the divine presence. But he who gives up all thought of merit, and casts himself unreservedly upon sovereign grace, pleading only the worthiness of Christ and the efficacy of His blood will find himself forthwith brought into the relationship of son to the Father, with rights and privileges such as even elect angels can never know.

This the sinner of our parable proved. The great God is positively represented as running to meet him with kisses. Soon the best robe was upon him, with ring and shoes accompanying. The best robe is Christ, in whom the pardoned sinner stands complete, and with whose perfections he is henceforward covered in the eyes of God. "And they began to be merry." Not a hint as to its cessation. The father's heart finds present and eternal joy in what his love has wrought for the objects of his favour; while these, and all who understand their case, feast and delight themselves in the divine presence for evermore. Truly, it is good to know a Saviour-God.

Our Lord's religious critics could not fail to recognise themselves in the elder son, whose attitude towards the repentant transgressor, and towards the father also, because of his goodness to him, He so strikingly portrayed (Luke xv. 25-32). The

elder son has a natural claim; and religionists in all ages have considered themselves in this position in relation to God—in a greater or less degree. But for this very reason they are rejected, "that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. i. 29). It is surely not without intention that the elder son is invariably represented in Scripture as outside divine blessing. Cain, Ishmael, Esau, and Reuben are a few cases in point. It is the confessedly guilty sinner, who has nothing to plead but what he finds in God Himself, who gets the blessing.

"His elder son was in the field." There was joy within, but he was without. "The field" is the place of labour. The sincere religionist is always a hard worker. He has a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Going about to establish his own righteousness, he does not submit himself to the righteousness of God (Rom. x. 2, 3). Like the elder son, he is "nigh" to the Father's house, but he never gets inside, and the warmth of the Father's heart he never experiences. Occupying himself with legal works and religious ordinances, his life is cold and cheerless; so that, like the elder son, who was puzzled by the sound of music and dancing, his heart is a stranger to the fullness of joy which is found alone in the divine presence (Ps. xvi. 11).

"He was angry, and would not go in: and his father came out, and entreated him." He need not remain without; the door was not closed to him; he was as welcome as the prodigal to all the bliss of the father's house. But the whole difficulty lay there. In his self-parade—"Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment"—he made it manifest that he looked for preferential treatment. In his own eyes he was one of the ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance. In his anger he levels a positive complaint against his father: "thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." Here he tells out his own heart. His nearness to his father had been external only; his toil had proceeded from some other motive than love; his notion of real happiness was to be away from the father and in the company of his friends. Terrible exposure of the religious man's true state of heart in relation to God.



Hear the father tenderly pleading with the self-righteous one: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. But it was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost and is found." As far as this world is concerned, the man who has lived decently and religiously has a distinct advantage over the profligate. Health and fortune remain with him, hence the words, "all that I have is thine." But what is the value of this if pride and self-righteousness are suffered to exclude the soul from the presence of God for ever? Our parable closes with the elder son still outside, angrily objecting to the grace which had been shown to his wayward brother. He is the parent of all those who in this day scorn the idea of being "converted" and "saved," and who will never consent to the wastrels of earth being labelled "the sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling" (1 Cor. i. 2). The very thought of it touches them to the quick.

### *The Unjust Steward*

THIS parable, unlike those immediately preceding it, was addressed to disciples only (Luke xvi. 1-12). An important lesson is contained therein for those who follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

An unfaithful steward is held up to our view—one who was convicted of wasting his master's goods. Receiving notice of discharge, his mind turned upon his future. "I cannot dig," said he; "to beg I am ashamed." He therefore resolved to ingratiate himself with his master's debtors during his brief remaining term of office, with a view to receiving benefits at their hands at a later date. He accordingly called them together, and bade one who owed his master for a hundred measures of oil sit down and write fifty; another who owed for a hundred measures of wheat was told to write eighty. The Saviour's comment upon this has frequently puzzled even devout readers

of Scripture. "The lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely; for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

Let us consider this carefully. First, the one who thus commends is not the Lord Jesus, but the imaginary lord of the parable. Second, the steward was not commended for his honesty, but for his wisdom. A clever rogue necessarily elicits from his observers admiration—of a kind. The point of the parable is that the man acted with his eye upon the future. He used his brief term of stewardship with a view to the years that lay beyond. In doing this he set an example even to true disciples. Hence the words that follow: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

To read these words of our Lord as if they had any reference to men seeking salvation would be disastrous. Salvation is by grace alone, and it is founded upon the Saviour's atoning blood. This cannot be too earnestly or too frequently insisted upon. But those who are saved have serious responsibilities concerning which they must each one give account at the judgment-seat of Christ. Hence each "disciple" should take a leaf out of the book of the unjust steward, and use the brief period of life here with a view to blessing and reward in the life beyond. Perhaps there is nothing concerning which even true Christians fail more deeply than in the matter of money. Riches are called "the mammon of unrighteousness," because they are the fruit of sin. Such conditions as now prevail, one rich and another poor, could have no place in an unfallen world. A grave responsibility therefore rests upon the Christian as to how he disposes of that which he holds, be it little or much. He is indeed a steward; to Another he must render an account. He who spends all upon himself, reserving only his threepenny-piece for God, is living for the present only; he who uses his substance for God in the midst of a needy world is making friends by means of his possessions. There is no thought in Luke xvi. 9 of the objects of our benefactions welcoming us into the habitations above. Reference to the Greek shows that the Lord spoke in the third person—"that ye may be received." The one who



welcomes the self-denying disciple to rest and reward is none other than the living God Himself, who is prepared to abundantly honour in another world those who have surrendered aught in this world for the sake of His name, and under the constraining influence of His mighty grace.

### *The Unjust Judge*

IN a materialistic day such as the present, prayer is at a discount. Sense is more than faith, and the visible is greater than the invisible. But it nevertheless remains true that man is the most helpless creature conceivable apart from the God who made him; and he who ignores this is riding for a fall—rushing forward to destruction.

Even true-hearted souls are frequently tried by divine delay in answering prayer and are tempted to give up the praying attitude in consequence. To all such the parable of the Unjust Judge has an encouraging voice. It was also given to the disciples as a stimulus to pray always and not faint. The parable runs thus: "There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, 'Avenge me of my adversary.' And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me'" (Luke xviii. 2-5).

Dispensationally there is a reference here to "the days of the Son of man." In the previous chapter the Saviour had spoken of the last great crisis, and the painful circumstances in which the godly remnant of Israel will find themselves at that time. The parable of the Unjust Judge follows this immediately, and is connected with it. In the dark days of Antichristian apostasy, when Christendom and Judaism will join hands in the basest iniquity, those who cleave to God will have no resource but

prayer. The book of Psalms gives us prophetically many of the agonising appeals that will then be wrung from their distressed hearts. God will certainly avenge their wrongs, and judge their oppressors in His own time; the question is, will His people wait for Him, and accept no deliverance but that which comes from His hand? This is the force of the Saviour's words, "When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke xviii. 8).

At all times, and under all circumstances, it is good to trust God. Ever since the Fall, it has been the tendency of flesh to plan and provide for itself in utter independence of God. This is the root cause of the misery of which the earth is full. It is the beginning of good things when a man's pride and self-will become broken down, and he turns to God in humble penitence, pleading for salvation the Saviour's worthy name and His atoning blood. Such faith is blessed immediately and for ever. But this step, supremely important though it be, is only an initial one. It is the introduction into a life of faith, every step of which should be marked by simple confidence in God. Let Him delay to answer prayer if it so please Him, still faith perseveres, knowing assuredly that infinite power and love will never suffer a single trusting soul to be overwhelmed. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. xxx. 5).

### *The Pharisee and the Publican*

THIS was a shaft levelled at the self-righteousness, not only of our Lord's day, but of every other day also. Two men are represented as going up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican (Luke xviii. 9-14). If men are real anywhere, surely it is in the presence of God. It is reasonable to suppose that there, if anywhere, men will weigh their words, and speak as their hearts really feel. But what have we here? A



man parading his merits in the Divine presence! "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." Not one word of thanksgiving or adoration for what God is in His gracious attitude towards men; every word was about himself and his own fancied perfections. What a spectacle is here! A man in the presence of the Giver of all good, yet no favour besought; in the presence of the Judge of quick and dead, and the Searcher of all hearts, yet no sin acknowledged. He asks nothing and confesses nothing.

Surely a terrible possibility is suggested to us in this parable. A man's religion may be his ruin. His very strictness of life may land him in perdition. Why? Because the religious man is apt to pride himself in his religiousness, and the moral man in his morality, and so become utterly blinded to the fact of his real sinnership before a holy God. Rom. ix. 30-x. 4 may well be pondered in this connection. The apostle groaned over his religious fellow-countrymen because they were seeking righteousness on the principle of works, whereas righteousness for man is only found through faith in Christ. Paul pursued the same false line himself until stopped in his career by the revelation of the glorified Christ (Phil. iii. 4-9).

The publican took wholly different ground before God. He belonged to that corrupt and hated class who collected the Roman taxes, thus helping forward the oppression of his suffering people. But he was now in the presence of God, and he felt deeply the sacredness of the place and his own unfitness for it. "The publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, 'God be propitious to me the sinner.'" He might well smite upon his breast, for the heart is the spring of all evil. Man since the Fall has been corrupt root and branch. The publican thought not of the Pharisee—whether he was better or worse than himself; his own personal evil overwhelmed him as he sought to measure it in the light of God. "Be propitious to me" (for so the verse should read) was his penitent cry.

The Lord of all declared: "I tell you, this man went down to

his house justified, rather than the other." That is to say, the publican went home justified, and the Pharisee did not. This is the very opposite of all human thoughts. Weighed in human balances, the religious and benevolent Pharisee should have received the blessing, and the corrupt publican should have been driven away. But it is never so with God. This is a clear case of the kind described in Rom. iv. 5-6, of righteousness imputed apart from works. But on what equitable principle is God able to deal thus with the guilty? Let us note it carefully and reverently—it is the blood of Jesus (Rom. iii. 24, 25; v. 9).

### *The Pounds*

THIS parable, while similar in some respects to that of the Talents (Matt. xxv. 14-30), seems nevertheless to be a distinct utterance. The Lord was approaching Jerusalem for the last time, and the hopes of His disciples ran high. Their thought was that now would be established the glorious kingdom of which prophets and psalmists have spoken for ages. The moral necessity of the cross had not yet become clear to them. They did not yet understand that man's sin required the Saviour to accept the cross at His first coming, and to wait for the Kingdom until His second coming. So the parable of the Pounds was given, in which the Lord likens Himself to a nobleman going away to a far country to receive for Himself a Kingdom, and to return, entrusting His servants with responsibilities meanwhile (Luke xix. 11-27).

In the interpretation, the servants are those who "profess and call themselves Christians"; the citizens, who sent the insulting message, "We will not have this man to reign over us," are the Jewish people. At the return of the Lord Jesus, two things will take place; the judgment of His adversaries, and the reward of His servants. In the parable of the Talents, the trusts varied according to ability; in the parable of the Pounds,



each man received alike. Divine sovereignty is the point in the one; human responsibility in the other.

The first man called was able to say, "Lord, Thy pound hath gained ten pounds." Diligence had marked his conduct in relation to his Master's trust. Warmly did his Master commend him as a good servant, saying, "Have thou authority over ten cities." What a Lord is ours! Such a recompense for fidelity in so small a matter. His pound was equivalent to £3, 2s. 6d. in English currency, yet for diligence with this petty sum he was assigned rule over ten cities in the Millennial Kingdom. No Lord is so easily pleased as the Christ of God, and none rewards so amply, devoted service to His name. The second man's account showed five pounds. To him was granted rule over five cities. He whom we serve notices both the quantity and the quality of what is done for him (Luke xix, 15; 1 Cor. iii. 13). Thus Romans xvi. 12 tells us of Tryphena and Tryphosa, who laboured in the Lord, and of the beloved Persis, who laboured "much" in the Lord. In like manner, Neh. iii. tells us of many who helped in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, but distinguishes some as working "earnestly." The "much" and the "earnestly" should be pondered by all who would be well-pleasing to the absent Christ.

There is, alas! a dark side to this parable. One man returned his pound to the Lord wrapped up in a napkin. In order to excuse his utter indifference to the claims of his absent Master, he slandered His character thus: "I feared Thee, because Thou art an austere man: Thou takest up that Thou layedst not down, and reapest that Thou didst not sow." This wicked servant represents Christendom's merely nominal professors, who never dream of using their powers and possessions for Him whose name they bear. All such will find themselves utterly rejected in the great day; their judgment being richly deserved if only for their miserable perversion of the character of Him who is infinitely gracious and good. Has He not shed His blood for the perishing, thereby rendering salvation available for all, apart from works or price: and what does He ask from any but the simple fervent service that naturally flows from appreciation of His marvellous love and grace?

### *The Fig-Tree and all the Trees*

THE fig-tree is the well-known Scripture emblem representing the nation of Israel; "all the trees," in the parable now before us, represent accordingly the various nations which have to do with Israel (Luke xxi. 29-31).

The Lord was giving utterance to His great Olivet prophecy. His sorrowful words about the temple being laid in ruins had drawn forth a series of questions from His surprised disciples. In His reply He spoke not only of the impending desolation by the Romans under Titus (which is the prominent feature in Luke's account), but also of Israel's last bitter sorrow when the Antichrist is in power in Jerusalem. Concerning the latter, reference must be made to Matthew and Mark for full particulars. In all three Gospels it is made abundantly clear that deliverance will be brought in by the appearing of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven.

Our parable runs thus: "Behold the fig-tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand." We are thus entitled to expect signs of life to manifest themselves in Israel and in the nations with which she has special dealings, before the Saviour's coming to earth to inaugurate the visible Kingdom of God. This is suggestive that that great event is near, for it is indisputable that remarkable movements are proceeding amongst the people in question. The Zionest Congresses have revived the national spirit of Israel in a marvellous degree; the past few years have witnessed similar revivals of the national spirit in Greece, Italy, Egypt, and other powers, who have their respective parts to play in the stirring events that will wind up the present age. More extensive developments will yet be witnessed. Edom, Moab, Ammon, etc., long lost to view as nations, are destined to re-assert themselves and fall into position for the last great



tragedy, if Scripture is to be credited. The Eastern Question, so often discussed, is in reality the Israel Question. Its centre is not Constantinople but Jerusalem. This political problem, so long the vexation of statesmen, will not be settled until the Son of man comes forth from heaven and takes the affairs of earth in hand as the only rightful King of Kings and Lord of lords. Then Israel's tribes will be re-established in the land of their fathers, and their foes and His will be put down for ever. The world's summer-time is indeed at hand, but desolating judgment storms must needs spend their force ere it can be brought in.

Meanwhile, believers in the Lord Jesus have an even more glorious expectation. For them the Saviour has promised to descend into the air with a shout, calling them home. In that moment of moments every sleeping believer will be raised from the tomb, and every living believer will be changed, and so be caught up to be for ever with the Lord. The precious atoning blood entitles them to this, who otherwise had no hope and no claim, and no due but eternal woe. The removal of the whole Christian host will doubtless come as a tremendous shock to the world; but this must be ere the world's last fearful tragedy begins.

## APPENDIX

### *The Sheep and the Goats*

OUR Lord's Olivet prophecy, given to the disciples two days before His crucifixion in answer to the inquiries of some, has a very solemn finish in Matthew's Gospel (xxv. 31-46). The Lord describes in simple but graphic terms a sessional judgment which will take place at His return to earth. "When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations (or Gentiles)." He had already definitely told His disciples that the "Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels" (Matt. xvi. 27), and He had promised them that "when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. xix. 28). The judgment of the sheep and the goats is the opening incident in that great administration.

Earlier in the Olivet prophecy the Lord had spoken of His coming in the clouds of heaven with angels attending. He followed this with a parenthetical series of six parables, three with a definite message to the Jewish people, and three with a message to religious professors in Christendom (chap. xxiv. 32; xxv. 30). Then the Lord picked up the thread again and spoke of the tribunal before which shall be gathered all nations.

We must carefully distinguish between this judgment and that of the Great White Throne (Rev. xx. 11-15). The contrasts are important. The one takes place before the Millennial Kingdom begins, the other at its close, when both heaven and earth flee away. The Great White Throne deals with the dead; at the throne of His glory death and resurrection are not mentioned. It is living men who stand before Him into whose hands the Father has committed all judgment (John v. 22).

The notion of a general judgment at the end of time finds no



sanction in Matt. xxv. nor in any other Scripture. The Great White Throne will indeed be set up at the end of time, but only the lost dead will be there, "the first resurrection" (of all the blessed and holy) will be completed a thousand years earlier. The judgment of Matt. xxv. will take place at "the end of the age." Please read "age," not "world" in Matt. xxiv. 3 and elsewhere in the first Gospel.

It is a Man who will sit upon the throne of glory, but mark His perfect discrimination between sheep and goats. That Man is "God manifested in flesh" (1 Tim. iii. 15) who knows the secrets of all hearts. Note the quiet assertion of His dignity in "the Sermon on the Mount": "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord . . . then will I profess unto you, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. vii. 22-23). The Man who moved up and down amongst men so graciously and familiarly is the final Judge of all created beings.

What are we to understand by "all nations?" It is certain that there will be terrific slaughter of armed hosts at the Lord's appearing (Rev. xix. 17-21; Zech. xiv. 3; Isa. lxiii. 1-6; Ezek. xxxviii., xxxix. etc.); this being so, who will remain to be judged at "the throne of His glory"? The populations in general, after all their military forces have been destroyed. One point only appears to be discussed: how have these people treated those whom the King is pleased to call "My brethren?" This passage corresponds to Micah v. 3, not to Rom. viii. 29; *i.e.*, the "brethren" referred to in Matt. xxv. 40 are not Christians but the believing remnant of Israel who will preach the Gospel of the Kingdom "for a witness to all nations" during the last dread crisis (Matt. xxiv. 14). The treatment accorded to these witnesses is the index to the attitude of their hearts towards Him Who sends them forth. "What think ye of Christ?" is ever God's test question. Those who appreciate Him will shelter and feed His messengers; those who hate Him will treat them with contempt. The graciousness of the Lord's words, "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of My brethren ye have done it unto Me" should appeal powerfully to our hearts to-day, and should make us lovers of hospitality to those who for the

sake of His name go forth "taking nothing of the Gentiles" (3 John vii.)

In the blessing promised to the sheep nothing is said about Heaven. Their portion will be the Kingdom prepared for them by the Father *from* the foundation of the world. Our portion is in the Heavens, and was settled for us in the Father's love "*before* the foundation of the world" (Eph. i. 3-4). It is the King who addresses the sheep in Matt. xxv. Christians know the same blessed Person more intimately as Lord and Head. It will be good to be subjects of such a King; it will be better still to be in union with Him as Body and Bride.

The awful future of the ungodly could scarcely be expressed more clearly than in the Scripture before us: "These shall go away into everlasting (eternal) punishment." For both "punishment" and "life" the same word is used; the duration of the one is the duration of the other. Yet eternal fire was not prepared for men, but for the Devil and his angels, but those who while on earth prefer the voice of the Devil to the voice of God must share his doom for ever.

Let us not miss the sequel to the Lord's revelation on the Mount of Olives. "It came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, He said unto His disciples: Ye know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified" (Matt. xxvi. 1-2). With calm dignity He steps down, as it were, from "the throne of His glory" and proceeds to Gethsemane and Golgotha, there to finish the work which the Father had given Him at that time to do. Why was He willing to turn His back upon the glory and majesty described on the Mount of Olives, and accept instead anguish and shame? It was for you, beloved reader, and for me. "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. v. 6). "Hallelujah! What a Saviour!"



### *The Rich Man and Lazarus*

No one could be more competent than the Lord Jesus to draw aside the veil which separates us from the unseen world. He could speak with divine knowledge. At His first coming to earth His mission was to reveal the heart of God, and to speak of what is befitting the divine presence (John iii. 2). But while doing this it was natural that He should present vividly that to which men's sins are hurrying them if they heed not the warning and come to repentance. Accordingly both the intermediate and the eternal state of the impenitent are plainly set forth in the Gospel records.

Some of the most anxious questions of the human mind are answered in the solemn story of the rich man and Lazarus. This story is often spoken of as a parable. Personally, I am not free so to regard it. First, because it is not called a parable; and second, because it was not customary with our Lord to introduce names into His parabolic instruction. It is simpler to regard Luke xvi. 19-31 as a divine sketch of the course and end of two persons whose careers the eye of the Lord had noted.

The contrasts in this story are tremendous: Earth, Hades; luxury, torment; beggary, bliss. The question naturally arises, What was the sin of the rich man which involved him in so fearful a doom? Was he morally one of earth's vilest? Nothing of the kind is stated concerning him. Neither blasphemy, nor adultery, nor any other glaring transgression is laid to his charge. Then what was it that blasted his prospects for eternity? Simply this: he lived entirely for the present, with never a thought of God or his own soul. He was the twin brother, so to speak, of the rich fool of Luke xii. 16-21: a neglecter, rather than a deliberate rejecter (Heb. ii. 3). In connection with God's government of the earth riches were, for the Jew, a mark of divine favour (Ps. cxii. 3); but such is the perverseness of the human heart in making everything of the visible and temporal that it becomes

exceedingly difficult for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God (Mark x. 24-25). The parable of the Great Supper in Luke xiv. was intended to show how things which are perfectly legitimate in themselves, and which indeed are favours from a bountiful God to men, may be used to the utter exclusion of God Himself and to the everlasting ruin of the soul.

The beggar's name was Lazarus; the rich man's name is not recorded. Lazarus means "God is my helper." It is infinitely better to have the knowledge of God than to have all the world's wealth rolled into one's lap. For of all that which stands connected with a man here below nothing can be carried out of the world but his sins, and these he carries with him right up to the Judgment Throne! The beggar's name has been carefully preserved for us, for precious in the sight of the Lord is every child of faith, however lowly his station here; the name of the fool who wasted his life (however exalted his standing) is better blotted out.

Is there a life beyond the grave? Often and anxiously the question is agitated amongst men. The Son of God answers it for us here. The beggar died, and was forthwith, not extinguished nor consigned to centuries of insensibility, but carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The position is described from the Jewish point of view. Conscious blessedness and that in the company of the father of the faithful, is plainly set forth. The rich man also died, and of him it is said, "he was buried." Why is this added in his case? Clearly because the Lord would carefully distinguish between body and soul. The man's body was buried, doubtless with all the pomp and circumstance that suited so wealthy a person; but immediately afterwards we read "in Hell (Hades) he lifted up his eyes, being in torments." Let me repeat, his body was laid in the tomb, but his soul went to Hades. Beyond all just controversy, this is the Saviour's meaning in the passage before us.

Hades is not Gehenna. The latter is the lake of fire, to which the lost are despatched after the judgment of the Great White Throne (the mass being preceded by the Beast and the False Prophet, and Satan); Hades is the term divinely employed to designate the intermediate unclothed state.



Luke xvi. 19-31 then gives us "a picture of a lost soul in Hades awaiting its final sentence on the judgment day."

Let us tread softly here—human words may well be few. The sufferer was experiencing a sense of pain ("I am tormented," v. 24); of loss ("he seeth Abraham," etc., v. 23); and of fear ("I have five brethren," etc., v. 28). Memory also was active (v. 25). He had no expectation of any change of condition. As we listen to the conversation between father Abraham and the lost one, there is no hint on either side of ultimate annihilation and no suggestion of universal restoration. Neither of these dreams, so popular in our day, occurred to the minds of these men thus conversing in the invisible world.

The rich man asked but two things and both were denied him. He craved a drop of water for himself, and also he pleaded for a special mission to his living brethren. Neither request could be granted. When the border-line is passed, praying time is ended for ever.

The five brethren were shut up to the Scriptures. "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them." We are in the same position to-day. No light have we beyond the revelation of God, and in this Satan is determined to destroy the confidence of men around us. The rich man thought that something sensational would appeal to his brethren's consciences. This Abraham repudiated. It is not a little remarkable that the next person our Lord raised from the dead was a man named Lazarus (John ii.). But did this mighty fact strike home to the consciences of the people around Him? Far from it. They only took counsel together to put both Lazarus and the Lord Jesus to death.

I repeat, no light have we beyond the revelation of God in the Scriptures.

