

AN ALLEGORY: THINGS SUPPOSED TO ILLUSTRATE THINGS THAT ARE.

SOME forty years ago, there was a serious outbreak of smallpox, and some scholars came from an infected house to a large school. Those who had the care of the children refused to examine whether there was smallpox in the house from which these children came, maintaining that if the smallpox was not in *their school*, they had nothing to do with its being in other houses, or in other places. The result was that a good many children left this school, and many parents refused to let their children go there. Finally, after forty years, this school decided to hold this principle, that it did not matter if children came from a house where most decided cases of smallpox were known to exist: if the children who came were themselves free from this severe disease, they should be received.

And strange to say, those who had left this school, and adopted the contrary principle, that is, who felt it would be utterly unsafe for the health of the school, to allow any scholars to come from infected houses, or to go to them, these were greatly blamed by the others, and great bitterness was shewn towards all connected in any way with the school that desired to do their utmost to preserve their scholars and school from smallpox. And what is still more strange, many doctors also greatly blamed this great care, and thought it very foolish and narrow-minded to

refuse to go to that school. Indeed, those who sought to exclude smallpox were quite despised and slandered for forty years.

Not long ago a person could hardly believe it possible, so he wrote a letter to one of the principal persons at this smallpox open school, and to his surprise he received a distinct answer in the affirmative. Yes, it was quite true, their principle of admission at the open school was, that if a scholar came from a place where he believed the smallpox was unmistakably, providing this person was free from the disorder, even if as a day scholar he continued to actually live in the house where the smallpox was, still he should be admitted. Well, the exclusive school have been very sorry, and felt they could not mix with the open school: and *for this alone* they have had to suffer long and great reproach.

At a time like the present, when smallpox is raging, to which of these schools would you prefer sending your child? Is there anything very dreadful in seeking to preserve a school from the danger of smallpox? The exclusive school have not an unkind feeling towards those who carry on the open school. It is only this smallpox infection they feel they must by all means avoid. Are they not bound to do so, if they care for the children?

To many this allegory will be perfectly plain without one word of explanation. Some will say it is not true. Surely every Christian will say that deadly false doctrine, against the Person of Christ, is as serious and dangerous to the soul as smallpox is to the body. If this be allowed, then is not our allegory an exact picture of what has

taken place for the last forty years? A deadly doctrine against Christ broke out like an epidemic. So serious was this, that one of the chief leaders at Bethesda, Bristol, said if it were as Mr. Newton taught, Christ would have needed a Saviour! or words to that effect, and which was assuredly true. Bethesda refused to judge this false doctrine, refused to honestly separate from those who held it, or came from where it was held and taught, and greatly blamed those who did seek in every way to refuse all fellowship with it. We do not need here to repeat what thousands of Christians felt, and do still feel, to be shocking blasphemies against Christ. I never met a Christian yet who did not so judge when it was put before him.

I wish, however, to keep to this one point. Is my smallpox allegory a fair representation of the case? Many with Bethesda will say, Far from it. Many will say, "Bethesda has judged its past mistakes: has judged the evil doctrine of Mr. Newton, and is as clear of it as you are, and would no more receive from where it was held than you would. Never would we receive from an assembly where known false doctrine is held." Many are deceived; dear sincere souls believe it is so. The Lord is my witness, I love them in the bowels of Jesus Christ. Oh how I have longed that it was true, and longed until I almost thought it was true, that they would not have fellowship with any coming from and being in fellowship where false doctrine was held. If this were true, why should they remain separate?

And here I would just remark, it is utterly untrue that those they call exclusive, have bitter feelings against those who take the open ground.

We love all the Lord's people amongst them; and we say, if you repent of your past actions, and *now* desire to exclude all connected, or in fellowship with false doctrine, then why are you not with us, seeking to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?

Is it true then, that Bethesda really does now receive from those in fellowship where those minister who teach errors? Certainly not, many will say. C. L., a Christian young man in London, being much perplexed as to this question, wrote to Bristol to inquire at the fountain head. He received the following:—

*New Orphan Houses, Ashley Down,
Bristol: 19th Dec. 1883.*

DEAR SIR,

In reply to your enquiry, the ground on which we receive to the Lord's table is soundness in the faith, and consistency of life of the *individual* believer. We should not refuse to receive one whom we had reason to believe was personally sound in the faith and consistent in life *merely* because he, or she, was in fellowship with a body of Christians who would allow Mr. Newton to minister among them; just on the same principle that we should not refuse a person *equally sound* in faith and consistent in life simply because he, or she, came from a body of Christians amongst whom the late Mr. J. N. Darby had ministered, though on account of much more *recent* unsound teachings of the *latter*, we might well feel *à priori* greater hesitation.

I am, faithfully yours,
Signed. JAMES WRIGHT.

Now, passing by the false accusations against that honoured servant of the Lord Jesus, J. N. Darby, suppose it were true that he also, as well as Mr. Newton, taught unsound doctrine against the blessed Lord, what then are the avowed principles of Bethesda to this very day? Are

they not exactly the same as the supposed school that admits its scholars, if free themselves from smallpox, though they come and go to houses infected? Is not this utter heartlessness as to Christ? Should we speak of a man consistent in life because he pretends he is free from Unitarianism, and yet is in fellowship with them? This question is raised again in Christendom. J. N. Darby is with the Lord. Another has spoken out—I give one line, and such a line.

“To pursue union at the expense of truth is treason to the Lord.”—C. H. S. (“Sword and Trowel,” p. 558.) These are weighty words, and we thank God that the writer has taken some action in accordance with them. Not so the defender of the open school. The editor of “The Christian,” speaking of Mr. Spurgeon, remarks, “He has taken action which we deeply regret.” (Nov. 18, 1887, p. 13.) To the editor it is perfectly dreadful, because it would justify Mr. Darby in withdrawing from those who held or favoured abominable, unsound doctrine. He says, “It is difficult to distinguish between excommunicating the Baptist Union, and excommunicating the churches represented in it. Nor is it very easy to discern the difference between this line of action and that of the followers of Mr. Darby in excluding from fellowship George Müller and the Bethesda meeting, &c. The argument practically is that all who are faithful and true to Christ ought also to withdraw. What would follow? That the field would be left in the hands of those whose light is darkness. . . . Mr. Spurgeon has made his statements, which we believe in the main to be true . . . and he has taken action which we deeply regret.”

Thus he deeply regrets Mr. Spurgeon's action. Yes, this is sadly true. The leaders of this open school, open to unsound doctrine, deeply regret that J. N. D. withdrew from it, and deeply regret that Mr. Spurgeon should do the same thing! It would be difficult to conceive more utter indifference to Christ.

That association with evil is not only allowed, but advocated, may be seen in a letter by Mr. Groves, re-published in "The Christian" (Sept. 23, 1887), in which the writer says, "I would INFINITELY RATHER BEAR *with all their evils* than SEPARATE FROM THEIR GOOD." Can words be plainer?

Is it not even worse than the school open to smallpox infection? *For if the bad doctrine is inside*, to withdraw from it, is to take action which is deeply regretted. It is well known that the partisans of false doctrine were in Bethesda, when we were compelled by their refusing to judge it, to withdraw from it. Yes, that is what we felt then, and still feel before the Lord. With this defender of Bethesda it is no question of Christ, but of men, be it Mr. Newton, or Mr. Darby, Mr. Spurgeon or Dr. Angus, and other doctors. May the Lord open the eyes of many sincere but deceived Christians.

To talk of Mr. Darby or Mr. Spurgeon excommunicating such men as George Müller, or Dr. Angus and others, is merely to throw dust in people's eyes. They do no such thing: but in faithfulness to Christ purge themselves from all who identify themselves with false doctrine concerning Christ.

The scripture is clear as to the path of a Christian in these circumstances. 2 Timothy con-

templates a state of corruption so sad, that the faithful Christian can no longer purge out the leaven of evil. "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his. AND LET EVERY ONE THAT NAMETH THE NAME OF CHRIST DEPART FROM INIQUITY. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." Not that he will be alone, or seek isolation, but will seek to be in holiness, "with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

Then read the inspired description of the professing church at this hour (chap.iii.1-5), "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." God says, "FROM SUCH TURN AWAY."

Read 2 John, "Whosoever transgresseth [or goeth beyond] and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. . . . If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed."

Are we to say, "Oh it will not do to obey these scriptures; think of what would follow if you did"? No, faith does not reason thus. Surely the reader will see the difference between arrogantly excommunicating others, and simply obeying the word of God. There must be an undivided heart for Christ, that would follow Him at all cost. "Cost," did I say? There can be no joy greater than pleasing Him. Yet true it must be at the cost of everything, to follow Christ, and obey from the heart His word. If Mr. Spurgeon

is with God, and his eye only on the glory of Christ, he will go through this hour of testing; and if he is not, he will break down. Nothing will do but uncompromising decision for Christ, and dependence on the Holy Ghost.

Surely every true lover of Christ will be deeply thankful for the action of Mr. Spurgeon. Faithfulness to Christ is not bitterness against those that are His. Can any one see bitterness in either Mr. Darby or Mr. Spurgeon in refusing fellowship with the abettors of soul-destroying false doctrine? No, but Christ was more to them than union with those who would destroy the gospel. One is gone to his rest. His most private letters are now published which he wrote during the severe trial, when the storm of persecution burst upon him, for withdrawing from false practice and false doctrine. Read them, and see whether he breathed the spirit of rancour, or tender love even to those who so deeply erred.

Our prayer is that now the same spirit of holy tender love may continue to mark all our steps, and the steps of Mr. Spurgeon, if the same storm of persecution breaks upon him.

It was that very sentiment that guided my steps forty years ago, "To pursue union at the expense of truth is treason to the Lord Jesus." And forty years' experience has confirmed me in its truth. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." (2 John 10, 11.) C. S.

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