



SUNDAY READING

MORNING SERVICE.

MORNING.

That is this day Thou hast blessed us, and given us part in Thy work on the earth. That the darkness covering the earth calls Thy weary ones to rest in Thee. That Thy care is over all Thy children, Thy compassion with all sufferers, and Thy fatherly pity and longing toward all sinners.

That in Jesus Christ we have beheld the glory of Thy goodness and love, and know Thee to be the Everlasting Father and Saviour of men. Amen.

A Prayer

O God, the true light of faithful souls, the help of those that flee unto Thee, the hope of those who cry unto Thee, cleanse us from our sins and from every thought displeasing to Thy goodness, that with a pure heart and a clear soul, with calm trust and perfect love, we may worship Thee as we seek to remember and realize Thy love in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

HYMN.

Christ Whose glory fills the skies,
Christ the true and only light,
Son of righteousness, arise,
Triumph o'er the shades of night,
Day-spring from on high, be near,
Day-star in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn
Unaccompanied by Thee,
Joyous is the day's return
Till Thy mercy's beams I see,
Till Thy inward light impart,
Glad my eyes and warm my heart.

Reading the Holy Scriptures.

Truth, not eloquence, is to be sought for in Holy Scripture. Each part of the scripture is to be read with the same spirit wherewith it was written. We should rather search after profit in the scriptures, than after subtle arguments. We ought to read plain and devout books as willingly as those high and profound. Let not the authority of the writer be a stumbling-block, whether he be of great or small learning; but let the love of pure truth draw thee to read. Enquire not who spoke this or that, but mark what is spoken. Men pass away, but the truth of the Lord remaineth forever. God speaks unto us in sundry ways without respect of persons. Our own curiosity often hindereth us in reading of the scriptures, where we will examine and discuss that which we should rather pass over without more ado. If thou desire to profit, read with humility, simplicity, and faithfulness; nor ever desire the repute of learning. Enquire willingly, and hear with silence the words of the holy men. Let not the parables of the elders displease thee, for they are not given without cause.

SERMON.

Parables.

BY REV. CANON H. SCOTT, HOLLAND, PREACHED IN ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL, LONDON, ENG.

"And the disciples came, and said unto Him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables; because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."—Matthew, xiii: 10, 13.

All of us are drawn towards Jesus in the character of the homely and simple teacher, of Him who spake to the multitudes as none other ever spake; and there is no occasion on which this presentation of Him is more attractive and more welcome, than when he went out of His house and took His seat in the boat by the sea shore, while the whole crowd gathered together on the shore, and "He opened His mouth and spake unto them in parables, saying, Behold a sower went forth to sow." How easily we seem to mingle with the throng; how quickly from our very childhood we have felt the beauty of the scene; how familiar it is, how human, how sympathetic! Here is no barrier of stiff theological formula to fence us off; no dogmas uplifted to warn us that trespassers will be prosecuted. We simply gather in the open air by the sea shore with the mixed crowd. There and we come and go as we will: there we sit, and we are glad enough to be there, so long as the tones of that voice are in our ears, glad enough and satisfied if only He will go on telling us story after story of the kingdom of heaven, stories so characteristic of Him and His ways, so simple, so vivid, so incomparable: of the sower who went forth sowing, of the tares sown amid the wheat, of the reapers that gathered into the barns, of the mustard seed which grew from a tiny seed to be a tree in which birds make their nests, of the hidden leaven working in the three measures of meal. Such stories as these pass straight from heart to heart, for, indeed, they have in them the significance that belongs to all daily duties and labor, which has continued from seed time to harvest since the world began. All such acts, in all lands, under all skies, have a dignity and pathos about them which appeal to our common humanity. We can feel it as we lean over a gate perhaps in some kindly holiday and gaze on the old work, while man wins his daily food from the soil or the sea—the sower sowing the seed, or the reaper gathering in the corn, or the fisherman drawing his net to shore. So it was when life was young: so it will be to the end, and as we look we can forget the troubles present. Here before our eyes is the enduring toil which knows no change, the toil that underlies all the shifting centuries: here it still is just as of old, if only we could be contented to drop all our differences and surrender ourselves once again to the simple industries of simple men. How calm, how deep, the peace here as we lean and look at the sower who goes out to sow, at the reaper who binds the wheat into sheaves?

To some such feeling our Lord appeals in the parables as He turns our thoughts back to all that is most plain and primitive and natural in the daily life of human toil. Just because these stories lay hold with such direct force upon the immemorial and elementary simplicities of our common existence, therefore it is that they carry with them such a universal appeal. They, too, suffer no change any more than the scenes which they embody. Other things may be difficult to transport from their original surroundings, and to adapt to novel circumstances: but all men sow and reap, and fish and beg and buy and sell, and store in barns, and give feasts, and hire laborers, and marry and are given in marriage, and all receive, and therefore, are ready to enjoy the charm of our Lord's parables. This is one side of the picture.

Teaching By Stages.

But then, just as we are settling down to this easy and pleasant view of things, just as we think how well it might have been if theology had been but content to present us this beautiful vision of Jesus and His preaching, as He sat in the boat and spake in parables; lo, it is no crabbled theologian of later days, but the gracious teacher Himself who arrests us with a sudden word; our dream is roughly scattered by the words of my text as they reveal what is passing in His mind. He, it would seem, is not at all content to sit in a boat and tell parables; it is not for that that He is come on earth; He has other and deeper aims; He is pursuing a severer toil; some awful secret is being held in reserve, and only because so few can bear it and even listen to speaking in parables, we learn, are not the full and adequate vehicle of the truth. No, they are but tentative experiments on those who are without—on those who are, as yet, unfit, untested, untrained. Parables are so to speak, forced upon the Lord. They are His only method of dealing with this loose mob that is following Him. He cannot venture to confide in them, his full mind, for it would but confuse and repel them. So long as it was His disciples He could address them openly, as in the sermon on the Mount, with plain strong directions. So it had been apparently, at the first, but that now that His fame had spread—now that a mixed multitude was swarming around Him—He is driven to protect His doctrine from degradation, misunderstanding, confusion. We may remember some of the strong words of warning spoken by Himself on the Mount as to the peril of giving that which is holy unto dogs. In those words He recognized the responsibility of the teacher for his hearers. It is not enough that he has in his hands pearls to give; he must see to it also that he disturbs them aright to those that will profit by them.

So the parables express the guarded caution with which the revelation of the Father must be made. It is not enough that God should reveal His love for fallen man; but lower than that, He must do it in a way of condescension to all the gradations of darkness into which men have fallen. Here is the irony of the terrible passage quoted by Our Lord from Isaiah in answer to the wondering question of the disciples why he should speak in parables. Why in parables? Because so many, though they willingly listen, are in such a state that, hearing they hear not, and seeing they see not; it is because "their hearts are waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes are closed lest at any time, seeing with their eyes, and hearing with their ears, they should understand with their hearts, and should be converted and I should heal them." "Lest they should be converted and I should heal them." That is the dreadful thing that would happen: that is the dreadful thing that they are bent on postponing. If it were not for the obstructions they have themselves interposed, the whole work might be done and over; there would be no need for the weariness and the pain of God's infinite patience as He lingers long, knocking at the door that will not open, planning, contriving, scheming, how even yet He may force an entry past bolt and bar; no need for all that, no need for care and forethought in the ministry of the truth if men had been ready to hear the truth; if their hearts had been alert it would all have been achieved at a stroke, the world have been won. But our Lord seems to say, "Men seemed determined to put God to greater pain than ever, they have determined not to yield; they have stopped their ears; they have made themselves unready, repugnant and hostile, lest they should be converted there and then, and should find themselves healed. That is the irony of love picturing the postponement of the good it brings and since the facts are so, since men have determined that the process of their salvation shall be slow and difficult and gradual, therefore Christ has conformed to their ways; He has qualified the blinding light, He has shadowed it down to the dusk in which men abide, He has divided his teaching into stages, so as to protect these obstinate hearts against their own prejudices. He has fallen back on these parables. The parable is just the teaching that is convenient for those who hear and yet hear not, who see and yet see not. Something they hear—a picturesque tale, a lively image—this is attractive, there is no one who will not give it some entry. Even those who most vehemently repudiate the most emphatic message, even those who might in indignation take up the stones to kill Him if they heard the full claim, will stand and listen to these parables, and if they listen and are pleased to walk away without further question no irremediable harm will be done, only they will be much as they were before, only they will postpone the day of possibility, they will not have been brought up near enough to the fire to be scorched by it, they will have been saved

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the uppermost disaster. But, on the other hand, if there are any there who have ears to hear and eyes to see, then the parable will work its perfect work upon them, they will never be satisfied by its mere beauty, they will feel the prickings of a Diviner secret, the parables will quicken and animate them into a more eager expectation; something in them will provoke them, they will be restless until they have gone further, they will press in with the other disciples into the house with the Master, they will insist on being told what it means—

"Declare unto us the parable, who is the sower that scattered the seed? What are the tares? What is this harvest when the bundles will be burned?" And it is these persistent, clamoring questioners to whom it is given to know the mysteries of heaven. These will ask and knock, and asking will receive, and knocking it will be opened unto them. To those who have the energy to seek, to them more will be given. Blessed will be their eyes, for they will see that which kings and prophets before them desire to see; blessed will be their ears, for they will hear that which their own souls have long hungered after through weary times of silence. Blessed are they to whom it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

The Hedge of the Truth.

Now, there is the change from the first conception of the parable. We had fancied by listening here we had got rid of all the difficult barriers that hedge round the truth, and lo! it is these parables themselves that are the hedge. They hedge off the unready; they encompass the mount that burns with fire lest any living thing should rashly come too near and perish; and far from being intended to satisfy us by their pleasant teaching, and save us the trouble of harder problems their primary purpose is to compel us to be dissatisfied with their simplicity, to force us to break through this graceful screen that holds so much concealed behind, to insist upon entering within the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. The parables are a sieve through which our Lord passes all who come to Him. If we do as so many are inclined to do, if we remain on the level of the parable and say "That is enough for me: let the revelation of Christ stop there: let me listen to these simple moral stories, and not be bothered with more difficult and precise inquiries," then the parable has failed to fulfil its office unto us; it has only served to mark us off as unfit for more, as those who hearing do not hear. This only it has done for us, it has spared us the risk of a deadlier sin, the risk of some violent repudiation of the truth; it has deferred the day of deadly decision. But God grant that we may not so hang back in this impotent indolence; God grant that we may not miss His good purpose as we, too, listen with the crowd on the sea shore. We will not stop our ears to the questions that assail us; we will keep asking ourselves "Who is He that so it is that He is so quietly assumed of this awful message of deliverance? How does He know so exactly the mind of the Father, and claim to represent it with such assurance? Why does He stand out so separate, so supreme? And what is this kingdom about which He speaks so confidently? And why is he alone aware of its nature and its laws? This kingdom—where is its gate by which we may enter? When did it begin, and how and where? Who is the Lord, and how can He be found? Every word that this strange teacher preaches rouses up in those who think these importunate agitations. They cannot listen and not want to know more; they cannot go so far and not desire to go further. To accept Christ with His claims and His wonders and not to be driven to ask who he is, that is the one impossibility for all honest seekers. No, at all costs they will press around that house where He is, enter inside with him, as we feel sure there is more to be known. Look at his face as he closes the preaching and passes through the door of His home. How that face yearns to tell us something yet. What secret is he holding back? What is the mystery of His presence? Who art thou Lord? Who art Thou? Who is He? that is the one demand that grows stronger and more intense with all those who have ears at all to listen to the preaching of Christ. We must ask it, and, once asked, the question must be faced and answered. It may conceal itself for a long time even in some parable, but at last it will make itself felt of all.

Let us think of our own case. We have drawn near, perhaps, without any clear motive: we find ourselves within the sound of His voice: it may be habit that brought us to church: we have always gone to service: we have grown up that way, and see no reason to change: the habit is enduring, and it is pleasant, and Sunday after Sunday we sit with the throng and listen, and like those on the seashore at Galilee we are gratified, soothed and contented as the word of the Lord is uttered: we listen and admire, we know that great things are being spoken of, much is told us in service or in sermons, and it all sounds high and wonderful; we should like to be in that kingdom, and are glad to hear of it; we grow familiar with its language, with the pictures of its doings; we almost seem to be concerned with it, and we enter into interests which are evidently so vivid and so glorious. So this habit is to us just what the parable was to them of old. It is good, for it has brought us near to Jesus; but does it never occur to us to ask very seriously, "What do all these strong words mean exactly to me? This kingdom, these blessings of God, this wonderful work about which they talk—can I give it any actual and precise meaning? Can I say really what it comes to? Can I speak about this kingdom and its king, and yet leave it all so hazy and vague? Who is He, the King, and what does He do for me? Can I put into words? What does He pledge me to? What demands does He make on my life? This Sower, has He

verily sown His seed in me, and with what issue? And if I can hardly tell for myself whether he has or not, will He Himself tell me if I follow Him into the house? Do those questions start in us? In some dim way do we not recognize the necessity of taking a step further than we have yet made into the knowledge of our own souls, into the knowledge of our Lord and Master?

The Hour of Conversion.

Some, no doubt, there are who begin their religious life with this direct question: "Who art Thou, Lord?" They have never perhaps thought of Christ until He has met them face to face with the irresistible alternative, "Believe, and thou shalt be saved." If so, then that has been their hour of judgment and conversion—sharp, abrupt, decisive. But to most of us religious life has begun in parables. We have hung about Christ's footsteps for a long time, either through habit, or because of some attraction, because of the musical service, because of the beauty of the church. All this may have gone before the imperative question has fastened upon us, "Do I know?" "Do I believe?" "Am I converted?" The question may not have been put, but it is there hiding its time. Jesus is not yet satisfied: He is waiting behind the parable to be known, to be pursued, to be found out. Into the house He wants us to go for Him: He is longing for us to beseech Him with an anxious insistent cry, "Declare unto me this parable: let this gospel news be no longer as words that float dreamily in my ears, as the sound of a pleasant tale, or music of him that playeth well on an instrument: no, declare it unto me: let it tell on my life, my heart, my acts. Who are Thou Lord? And what is it Thou wilt have me to do." And that should be always the test of our religious condition: day by day, year by year, we should be growing less contented with anything short of this direct personal contact with the Lord Jesus Christ. No vague language about the church should content us; no, for Christ himself is the church, the church is His kingdom, and therefore we must get at Him, not enjoy some reflection of Him, not repeat phrases that others use about Him, these are our help to the preparations, but through all this we must be pushing forward until the Christ Himself is disclosed to us; Christ the living source, Thou, our blended worship; Christ, the living presence, interceding at our altars; Christ, the master of our souls and the Lord of our desires. Though these will involve difficult questions and harder problems still, we have got to press on to this one conclusion, drawing ever nearer, by God's grace, to the day when He will no more speak unto us in parables, but will Himself show us plainly the Father—that day when we shall believe not on another's report, but for ourselves, that He is indeed come forth from God; that day when the living Christ shall put out His hand upon us, and His fingers shall close about our souls, and we shall hear Him say, "Thou art Mine, and I am thine; to thee it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven."

HYMN.

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens, Lord with me abide;
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help to the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

A Prayer.

That Thou wilt remember for good the household of faith throughout the world; all who are united with us in the communion of the same spirit, by which we are disciples of Jesus Christ, and children of God. Amen.

A Collect.

O God, our Guardian by night, our Guide by day, Thou hast led us forth from darkness into the light of life, and it is Thy day. May it be a holy time, and passed in Thy nearer presence, and in the love of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

HYMN.

Sweet saviour! bless us!
Night has come,
Through night and darkness near us be:
Good angels watch about our home,
And we are one day nearer Thee!
Through life's long day and death's dark night,
O gentle Jesus be our light.

Benediction.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with us all evermore. Amen.

FRAGMENTS OF THOUGHT.

None shall be saved by Christ but those who work out their own salvation. We cannot do without God, and He will not do without us.—Henry.

All the precepts of the divine law are linked together. Negligence in one single point may lead to the destruction of all.—Chrysostom.

A more glorious victory cannot be gained over another man than this, than when the injury began on his part, the kindness began on ours.—Tillotson.

One must not only cultivate one's friends, but cultivate one's friendships, preserving them with care, looking after them so to speak, and watering them from day to day.—Jobert.

It imparts an abundant sweetness to any mercy to see it growing out of the root of a promise. The good things of the saints are not dispensed out of the basket of common providences, but out of the ark of the covenant.—M. Henry.

Some people say that we should always look on the bright side of things. It that means that we are to look only on the bright side, we question its wisdom. Better look on both sides, rejoice in all the brightness we can see, and then go to work and brighten up the dark side all we can.

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