



SUNDAY READING

THE JEW AND THE MERCHANT.

A Sermon that Takes the Form of a Story of Dramatic Interest.

From a paper, on "Early Christian Romances," as has already been said, in favour of images, poor, degenerate compositions. The only exception is that of "Abraham the Jew and the Merchant Theodore," printed by Combesius from a MS. in the National Library at Paris. Another copy exists in the library at Turin. It is a curious composition, properly not a novel, but a sermon, preached on Orthodox Sunday in the church of St. Sophia, at Constantinople, in the tenth century. It may be said that it is not a novel, but a sermon, because it actually was delivered before a congregation in a church; but it might be added that according to every received idea of what a sermon is, or ever was, that is not a sermon but a story, and a story of some length, worked out dramatically. It is supposed to be founded on facts, but, like most historical romances, it treats historical facts with easy liberty. The story is shortly this.

In the reign of Heraclius there lived in Byzantium a merchant named Theodore, a good man and a just, who met with shipwreck and ruin, and then went begging of his friends a loan for freightage a new vessel. The friends in the usual way how him out, shut the door in his face, or drive him from their houses. As a last resource he goes to a worthy Jew named Abraham, and asks him to advance the money. The Jew consents to do so on condition that the merchant can get someone to stand surety for him for the repayment of the loan should Theodore die. The merchant again goes to his friends, and is again refused with coldness or insult. He passes in despair through the copper-market before the Imperial Palace when his eye is arrested by the great Christ set up by Constantine over the portico, glittering in the morning sun. In a moment of inspiration the rejected man spreads his arms to the Christ and entreats Him to stand surety for him. Then he brings the Jew to the market-place and points him out after some hesitation and a gentle protest, the Jew, who trusts the honour of Theodore, but has no confidence in the image, agrees to give him the money. The merchant is again wrecked, and loses all. A beautiful description follows of the poor fellow's shame and distress, of the kindness of the Jew, who seeks him out, comforts him, and promises to lend him the same sum of money again. The character of the Jew is admirably drawn—a mixture of generous trust and yet of cautious meanness, very true to life. He bargains that should Theodore remain away during the winter, he should send him home, by a safe hand, half his profits. This the merchant promises to do. Then Theodore sails for Spain, passes the pillars of Hercules, comes to Britain, and lades his vessel with tin, after having sold well the merchandise he had brought from Constantinople.

He returns to the Mediterranean and winters either in Spain or Sicily. His promise troubles him. He has the money but finds no one to whom he can confide it, as all the ships have sailed before the equinoctial storms burst over the sea. Then full of faith, resolved to keep his word, he places in a stout box some money, and a letter—J. Theodore, humbly address my master Abraham, who, with God, is my benefactor and creditor. I would have thee know, Master Abraham, that we all, by the mercy of God, are in good health. God has verily prospered us well, and brought our merchandises to a good market. And now, see! I send thee fifty pounds of gold which I commit to the care of my surety, and he will convey the money safely to thy hands. Receive it from me, and do not forget us. Farewell.

Then, having fastened up the box and pitched it well, he flings it into the sea. The story passes to Abraham walking by the waters of the Sea of Marmora with his old steward, conversing on his prospects; the old Jew sits on the shingle, and washes his feet, when he notices something dancing on the wavelets, draws it out, and discovers the box with the gold and letter from the faithful Theodore.

On the return of the merchant next spring, Abraham, to prove the faith of the Christian, denies having received the gold. The wavering of the merchant's mind is well described. He cannot believe his warty has not delivered the box, and yet he cannot doubt his creditor. Then, in perplexity, he bids the Jew come with him to the copper-market, and take an oath before the brazen Christ on the tetrastyle. The final scene is very beautifully told. Theodore, with outspread hands, pours forth a noble prayer, and the Jew, struck to the heart by the glorious faith that shines forth in the humble merchant, falls prostrate, weeping, and asks to believe with his friend in Christ the great Surety.

Pulpit and Press.

The press is the fourth estate, and some people claim for it that it is the rival and superior of the pulpit, says an English preacher. The claim is unnecessary and irrelevant. Their true relation is that of allies; comrades in a common service, fighting the common foes of man, and quickening the common life of the nation. Envy is as unseemly between them as between husband and wife. But this at least is certain, that there has been no such accession of strength to the pulpit of the world as there has been to the press during the last few years. It has become missionary. It leads crusades. It is a ministry.

It preaches with a prophet's fire, and warns with a prophet's conviction. It has a soul. It throbs with pity, and champions the cause of the feeble and the weak. Still an echo of the talk of the market and the street and the club, it is more frequently than of old a voice calling to duty and urging to consecration. Like all of us it has defects as well as excellencies; but the distinct advance made towards the ideal of a true journalistic ministry is enough to inspire every patriot with gratitude.

THE VENERABLE BEDE.

His Great Work as an Instructor and Translator of Scripture.

The earliest translation of the New Testament into Anglo-Saxon was accomplished in the eighth century by the Venerable Bede, whom Burke styled the Father of English learning. Bede was born in Jarrow, and lived, laboured, and died in the monastery there. He was the most famous scholar of his age, and was familiar with Greek and Hebrew—rare accomplishments in those times. He had a school of six hundred monks at Jarrow, and strangers from all parts flocked thither for instruction. His industry was prodigious. One can hardly imagine how, among the toils of the school-master and the exacting duties of the monk, he found time to compose forty-five works on a great variety of subjects, that made his name famous in the West. In his "Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation," he was at once the founder of Medieval history, and the first English historian. He was a man of devout piety and blameless life. He declined all offers of preferment. His love of study was all-absorbing, though he took great interest in public affairs. He died at the age of 63, and worked with unabated devotion to the end. As his scholars noticed his increasing feebleness, they burst into tears in the near prospect of losing him; but he would not allow any relaxation in study. They never read without weeping. He would say to his scholars:—"Learn with what speed you may; I know not how long I may last." His last hour was spent in dictating the translation of St. John's Gospel. On the morning of the day he died, the scribe said:—"There is still a chapter wanting, and it is hard for thee to question thyself any longer." Though he had had a sleepless night, the learned saint replied:—"It is easily done; take thy pen and write quickly." Amid tears and farewells the day wore on to eventide. "There is yet one sentence unwritten, dear master," said the youthful scribe. "Write it quickly," bade the dying man. "It is finished now," said the scribe at last. "You speak truth," faintly responded the veteran translator; "all is finished now." Placed upon the pavement of his cell, his head supported in a scholar's arms, his face turned towards the spot where he had been wont to pray, the venerable Bede chanted the solemn litany—"Glory to God," and as his voice reached the close of the song, his spirit quietly passed away.

The Seed of the Church.

In Archdeacon Farrar's "Darkness and Dawn" he describes how the Emperor Nero's garden was lit by living torches, and thus tells how the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church:

The numerous and flourishing Church of Rome was all but destroyed; yet on that night the seed of her mighty power in the development of Christianity was sown afresh. Watered by the blood of the martyrs, that seed sprang into more vigorous life, and, rushing onwards, spread forth arms laden with the rings of a thousand summers, under whose shadows and complicated glooms find cool impleached twilights, the hopes and fears of generations found their refuge—yea! and shall find it evermore, unless it be severed from the root, and blighted into barrenness, and the axe be uplifted and the doom go forth: "Never shall fruit grow upon thee more!" And the obelisk which witnessed that night of abomination, and which is dedicated "To Unknown Martyrs," still towers into the clear air, and on it is inscribed:—

"Christus Regnat:
Fugite partes adversæ."
And over the ground with its groves and gardens where they perished—those nameless heroes, those nameless demi-gods—rose the vast cathedral to the honour of the Christ for whom they died; and round the dome, is written in huge golden letters the name of the apostle who fell first before the wild beast's wrath:—"I say unto thee, Thou art Peter, and on this rock will I build My Church."

The Best Comes Out of Distress.

The people of Verona, when they saw Dante in the streets, used to say, "See, there is the man that was in hell!" Ah yes! he had been in hell—in hell enough, in long severe sorrow and struggle, as the like of him is pretty sure to have been. Commiseration that come out divine are not accomplished otherwise. Thought, true labour of any kind, highest virtue itself, is it not the daughter of pain? Born as out of the black whirlwind; true effort, in fact, as of a captive struggling to free himself; that is thought. In all ways we are to become perfect through suffering—Carlyle.

Practical Christianity.

The Bishop of Manchester (Dr. Moorhouse) was walking to the church of a little town to preach on a Sunday morning. A number of cattle had been driven into the place on the previous day, and at night the drovers had been drinking, so that when morning came they were all sound asleep, and the animals wandered about neglected. The Bishop came upon the thirsty cattle gathered around an empty trough, and he immediately took off his coat and pumped away for half-an-hour until the thirst of the poor creatures had been relieved.

The weekly prayer meeting is not a common custom among the English congregationists.

NEWS AND NOTABILLIA.

The number of Jews in the world is less than seven millions.

While San Francisco has a population of 300,000, its churches will seat only 55,000 people.

Twenty Christian Endeavour societies have been formed in Japan within three weeks after the arrival there of President Clark.

In one of the Roman catholic churches in Chicago congregational singing of hymns in the language of the people have been introduced.

Rev. Mr. Buckley, of Penrith, having no funds wherewith to get his chapel painted, is doing the work with his own hands. He has artistic tastes.

Messrs. Moody and Sankey have received in the shape of royalties on the well-known book of hymns, which they brought out some years ago, over £220,000.

Mrs. A. E. W. Robertson of Indian Territory recently completed the translation of the New Testament from the original Greek into the Muscogee or Creek language.

Rev. J. Travers Lewis, Bishop of Ontario, metropolitan bishop of the church of England in Canada, is a native of county Cork, Ireland, and 68 years of age. His election to the bishopric of Ontario took place in 1861.

The man engaged to oil the weathercock-spindle on Salisbury Cathedral, at the height of 400ft., goes up by ladders to within 30ft., and then crawls on the outside to the top. This dizzy point is the highest of any structure in Europe after St. Peter's, at Rome, which exceeds it by only 37ft.

Twelve years ago the first society of Christian Endeavour was born. There is scarcely a land on the globe that has not such societies, and scarcely a language of a civilized nation into which the constitution has not been translated. There are now 1,400,000 members in over twenty-three thousand societies.

In the late church congress at Folkestone, England, one of the clergymen said that the clergy could only fully understand the wants of the working classes by living among them, living as they did, eating the same food, and surrounded by the same influences, and thus acquiring real sympathy and compassion for them.

A Kaffir maiden, a member of the native African choir which visited England, was asked what things she most desired for her country. She replied, "Let us be treated at home as here, not as cattle, but as human beings; second, let us have schools where we could be taught your useful arts; third, let us have free education; fourth, let us have the drink. These we ask from the English. Oh! do not say us nay."

Probably Dr. Farrar, Archdeacon of Westminster, receives the smallest stipend of any archdeacon in the world. His official income in that capacity is only £3 a year. Though Dr. Farrar has a right to wear gaiters, he always declines to do them. The Archdeacons of London and Middlesex never on any account take their walks abroad without being arrayed in these emblems of ecclesiastical dignity.

There are now four Jewish-American papers which favor the innovation of holding synagogue services on Sunday. Upon this subject the Jewish Tidings says: "The other Jewish journals will soon fall into line, for they certainly cannot long oppose the inevitable. The sentiment of the majority of the Jews of America is unquestionably in favor of the introduction of Sunday services, and come they must."

The 1892 census of Methodist China missions is as follows: Missionaries, 80; assistants, 46; native preachers ordained, 71; unordained, 137; native teachers, 133; native helpers, 64; members, 4,942; probationers, 3,879; theological students, 116; pupils, 4,005; Sunday school scholars, 5,784; adult baptisms, 1,289; infant baptisms, 421; collections for self-support, \$2,461; other purposes, \$3,592.

A petition signed by several bishops and a great body of the clergy of the church of England has been presented to the Archbishop of Canterbury calling attention to the increasing financial difficulties in the rural clergy. It has been computed "that there are now 3,600 benefices under £150 per annum, and 400 under £50." While the incomes of the clergy decrease their enforced expenditure increases; the value of tithe and glebe land goes down and taxes on the land go up.

A good story is told of Dean Stanley, which testifies to this good man's simplicity. "I never in my life," he told his wife, after a sermon in Westminster Abbey, "so touched the congregation. They were entranced. Every eye was upon me from the first word to the last." "No wonder," said Lady Augusta, "your gloves were inside your hat; and when you took it off, they remained on the top of your head all through the sermon." The dean was remarkable for a very scanty use of action in preaching.

A young bright girl was sent to the household of Dr. Mozley of Oxford, where help was needed. She brought with her a pretty fair recommendation, but it bore the words in Greek: "Be very careful. She comes of a bad lot." Yet she turned out very well. Her brother, too, needed a helping hand, and a good turn was done for him. Some years afterwards Dr. Mozley went to see a church in the course of erection, and who should the architect be but the brother of the girl he had taken into his service; yet they both "came of a bad lot."

Dr. Paton recently addressed the Evangelical Alliance at Boston on the subject of "Rum in the South Seas." He said that the Christian natives voluntarily gave up their native drinks, pipes and tobacco, and have nothing to do with the liquors brought to the islands by the traders. The traders in great numbers come to the islands with liquors, and murders and suicides are the consequence. A slave trade is also springing up which has already taken 90,000 people from one group alone. The natives plead with the English to annex their islands, but England will not for fear of war with France. Great Britain, France and Germany are ready to forbid their traders to supply the natives with liquors and firearms, but the United States refuses to join in such arrangements and so prevents it.

Messages of Help For the Week.

SUNDAY—Psalm 100. 4. "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. Verse 5. For the Lord is good; his mercy endureth to all generations."

MONDAY—Proverbs 8. 17. "I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me."

TUESDAY—Micah 6. "O man . . . what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

WEDNESDAY—Galatians 5. 14. "All the law is fulfilled in one word, even this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. V. 15. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed of one another. V. 16. This I say then, walk in the spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh."

THURSDAY—Gal. 17. "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh . . . so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. V. 18. But if ye be led of the spirit, ye are not under the law."

FRIDAY—Romans 6. 14. "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. V. 15. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. V. 16. Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey: whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness."

SATURDAY—John 5. 13. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life."

Be Cordial.

"Men's behaviour," observes Bacon, "should be—like their dress—not too straight, but free for exercise or motion." There can be no genial fellowship between affable, courteous people and stiff-backed formalists; while the intercourse of the latter with one another is necessarily dull and dreary to the last degree. They can no more enjoy society in their strait-jackets of cold reserve than a wretch in the stocks could enjoy the hilarity of the crowd around him. Whoever desires to make friends should be cordial and conciliatory.

Repentance and Confession.

Father, I scarcely dare to pray,
So clear I see, now it is done,
That I have wasted half my day,
And left my work but just begun:
So clear I see that things I thought
Were right or harmless were a sin:
So clear I see that I have sought,
Unconscious, selfish aims to win:
So clear I see that I have hurt
The souls I might have helped to save;
That I have sinned against my heart,
Deaf to the calls thy leaders gave.
In outskirts of thy kingdom vast,
Father, the blindest spot give me;
Set me the lowliest task thou hast,
Let me repentant, work for thee.

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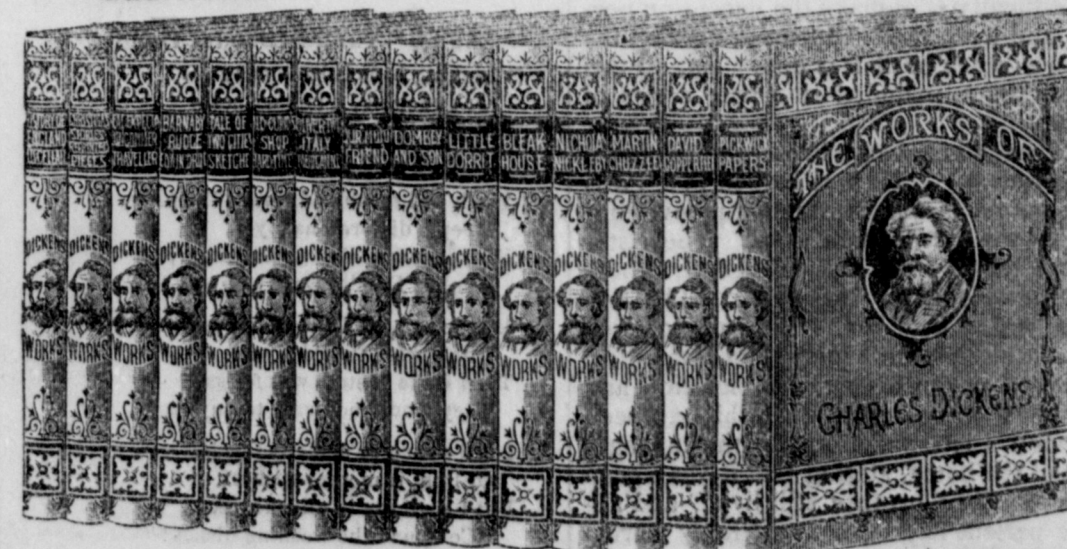
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