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The True Fountain and Broken Cisterns.

SERMON PREACHED BY REV. A. J. MOWATT.

In St. Paul's Church, Sabbath morning, Fredericton, Oct. 21st, 1888.

"For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."—JER. II. 13.

An old professor, now in Heaven, in correcting an essay or exercise I had written for him, when a theological student, in which the text in some connection came in, marked it, and appended a brief note to this effect. "A grand text; take it and preach from it." That must have been twenty-five years ago, and up to this time I have never preached from it. Many a time I have turned it over in my mind, and tried to shape it into something for my people, and I have even gone as far as to write an introduction, but that was all I had ever done towards carrying out the old doctor's advice. But the other day, in seeking a text, it came to me, and I thought I would try, if the Lord would be with me, to do what the good old professor so long ago advised me to do, and I am here to-day to preach to you from it.

There is nothing difficult about the text. The lessons it teaches are on the surface and such as any one can see the beauty and force of, and the figure made use of to illustrate and apply them is one that we are all familiar with. Here is a natural spring bubbling up out of a rocky fissure, and it is lovely water, cool, sweet, abundant, refreshing. You cannot tell whence it comes, but there it is all the year round, and what a treasure it is, what a fountain of blessing. While others have to drink their muddy, noxious, fever-producing waters, you and yours have water to drink that is wholesome, healthful, water that seems to come to you from a Divine source.

But as the years go by you grow in wealth and pride, and you get gradually away from the simplicity that once characterized your mode of living. You build a grand mansion, and you are ambitious to have in it all the so-called modern improvements and conveniences. And among other things you resolve to coax your joyous spring with its bright bubbling waters from its native hillside to come and live with you, to come and bubble up in your grand house and play all the year round for your amusement and gratification in your garden. It is too much trouble to go to the hillside where your spring is whenever you want to slake your thirst; so with your gold you will have the spring come to you.

At great expense, therefore, you have an elegant marble cistern constructed in a convenient place in your mansion, and a beautiful ornamental fountain put up in your garden. You have your conduit pipes laid to your spring, and you are sure you will have it. Your workmen with their pickaxes and crowbars begin to dig around it. But just when they think they have it, they find it has somehow eluded them. It fails. Its bubbling ceases. It has gone, but where no one knows. It refuses to be other than what it is. And so it comes to pass that your elegant cistern is a fraud. You go to it for water, but it has none.

Now, thus it is, the prophet teaches here, with God's people. They depart from the simplicity of the truth only to find that they have lost it. "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

In further illustrating and bringing home the lessons here, we have first the parties guilty of the twofold evil complained of. They are God's own people, the last people in the world you would think to be guilty of one evil, much less two. "For my people have committed two evils."

The Lord has, and has always had, a people He calls His. In Jeremiah's day they were the Jews, and they were then, and all through their history indeed, an ungrateful and backsliding people. He had done great things for them as a people. He had done so much indeed that He could do no more, so to speak. "What could have been done more to my vineyard," He asks in the words of Isaiah, "that I have not done in it?" He had exhausted the means at His command to work out for them the good He wanted them to have, and He had failed. He had singled them out from all other peoples, and bestowed upon them special favors, and made them His as no other people were His. He had done this, not because that in themselves they were better than others, superior to others in all that gives a people superiority, and far in advance of others in character and moral and spiritual worth. That was not the case. They were not much of a people when He chose them. They were in many respects the least likely of peoples. Jew has ever been, since

the days of Jacob down, the synonym for trickiness and meanness. And the Lord reminds them of their humble origin, the hole out of which He dug them, and their wretched outcast state as He found them. Had it not been for what He had done for them, they never could have been anything as a people, and they never could have grown to the greatness they attained in the world, nor wielded the influence they wielded among the mighty nations of antiquity. It was His kindness to them that made them great.

Now, it was of this Heaven-favored nation, this people He had redeemed for Himself and made His own, He has to complain as being so evil. Not a word of complaint does He utter here against the heathen nations of antiquity as to how they had behaved towards Him—such nations as Egypt, Babylon, Chaldea, Assyria, Persia. He looked for little else than evil at their hands. But that His own people, the people of whom were such distinguished saints as Abraham, Samuel, David, should behave towards Him as not even the heathen peoples had done towards their gods, which were indeed no gods—it was that that cut Him to the quick. He felt the reproach of it, for it gave the heathen world a chance to sneer. Egypt had not gone back on her gods, and Babylon had not gone back on hers; but the Jewish people had gone back on the Lord God. They had gone to Egypt for their calf-worship, to the Canaanites for Baal and Ashtaroth, and elsewhere for other idolatries. And so He complains with a bitter complaint against His people. "For pass over to the isles of Kittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently; and see if there hath been such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, as ye be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

And, my hearers, we are His people to-day. The churches and peoples of Christendom occupy much the same relation to Jehovah—Jesus in this New Testament age that the Jewish people occupied in the Old Testament age. We are Heaven-favored now as they were then. Indeed we are more Heaven-favored than ever they were. Consider the light we have beaming around us, the privileges we enjoy, the fulness of the blessing it is ours to have poured out upon us. And what are we that we should be thus Heaven-favored? We are not of the stock of Abraham, not of the seed of Israel. We were Gentiles, far from God as a people, dead in trespasses and sins. But His rich grace and mercy have brought us nigh, and now He says of us, "My people." How honored! what a privilege! And what a trust, what a responsibility! How good we should be, and how faithful! How like Him whose we are! How close to Jesus we should walk, and how much of His spirit we should have dwelling in us!

But alas! it may be too truly said of us, of modern churches, of the Heaven-favored peoples of Christendom, as it was said of the Jews in Jeremiah's times: "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

I now proceed, in the second place, to point out some of the ways God's people to-day may fall, and are falling, into this dangerous twofold evil.

And, I think, we are doing it, more than we know perhaps, and more wrong fully and fatally than we realize perhaps, in the way we are living our life from day to day, in such very ordinary and commonplace matters as eating and drinking and dressing. Manners are morals. We glorify God or otherwise in our eating and drinking. We destroy our own souls and the souls of others at our own tables. A luxurious mode of life is fatal to christian living. Who can rise from a modern banquet, full to satiety with highly seasoned luxuries, swollen to discomfort with indulgence, and go and do christian work? The rich man who fared sumptuously every day went to Hell; the ill-fed Lazarus to Heaven.

You may think that is putting it too strongly, unwarrantably so. But there is too much truth in it. How many in this pampered age, this age of progress, wreck their health by what they eat and drink, and by wrecking their health they wreck their usefulness they wreck in a very important sense their happiness both for time and eternity. As we grow in wealth we grow in worldliness. As we gather around us the wherewithals and comforts and conveniences of life, we depart more and more from the simplicity of living, and in so far as we do that, we make it harder and harder to live, and especially harder and harder to live righteously, to live in the fear and favor of God.

You know as well as I do, my hearers, what straits many are in, how they are driven from post to pillar, to live at all, living the style of life they are liv-

ing, keeping abreast of all that fashionable society demands of them. They have to dress so well, live in such style. They have to spread so grand a table. They have to entertain so much. They have to keep up so large and expensive a house, and on one of the principal streets. They have to maintain an army of servants and useless dependents. Oh the ten-thousand etceteras that men of wealth, or who have the name of being men of wealth, must pay for, and they cost so much, and they are of no manner of use to them! On the contrary, they are a real hurt, a drawback, a dead lift to carry or drag. Once they could live and make money on a few hundred dollars a year. They were useful and happy and respected. They owed no man anything but love. They worshipped and feared God, and did what they thought was their duty. But they got up in the world, and now they have drifted away farther and farther from the simplicity of right living, and they are hopelessly in debt, and a day of judgment is coming that will overwhelm them in a sea of troubles, and wreck them forever.

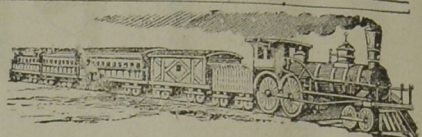
Now, that is one way of falling into this dangerous twofold evil we have condemned here. It was prophesied of the Christ that He would drink of the brook that runneth in the way. I understand that to mean, among other things, that His life would not be a royal luxurious society life such as the kings and great men of the world live; but that, on the contrary, it would be a simple unostentatious country life, a life such as the humblest swain might live. When He was thirty He would stoop down and slake His natural thirst at the babbling brook or the bubbling spring. His drink would be pure fresh water. It would not be the drinks that high living creates, the drinks that a fastidious and perverted taste demands, the drinks that indulgence craves, the drinks that make the blood in the veins boil and madden the brain, the drinks that poison, drug, kill. No. And how foolish as well as wrong-doing God's people are to forsake His fountains of living water, where they might drink free and full healthful draughts, and repair to the world's polluted cisterns, the demijohns, the whiskey-kegs, the beer-barrels, and so on, and spend their money for that which creates instead of quenching thirst. "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

I plead with you, my people, in the name of Him who drank of the brook that runneth in the way, to come back to the simple mode of living, to eat plain nourishing food—not that which feeds the pampered appetite, to drink when you are thirsty pure fresh water—not the wine of indulgence, to wear suitable sensible clothing for comfort—not for show, to be humble and hard-working as the Master was, to spend little on self-indulgence so that you may have all the more to spend on necessary things, and especially in His cause and for His glory, and you will find a new vigor coming to you, a new joy gladdening you, and a new life opening up to you.

Again, it seems to me, God's people today may fall, and are falling, into this twofold evil we have here condemned so strongly, when they turn away from the living fountain of truth as we have it here in God's Word, and go after the rude religious sensationalism and ear-titching isms of our time.

Every now and again something new in the shape of doctrinal teaching or practical religion, some pretentious "Lo here!" or "Lo there!" thrusts itself before the public and claims to do such wonders for the good of fallen men. Some new faith or no-faith that bids fair to revolutionize the world of opinion and make all things new, starts up, and for a time is the rage, and lives out its day. That has been the case throughout all the history of the church, and we are told to be on the look out for them in these latter days, for as the end draws on there are to be more and more of them, and so like the truth are some of them to be, and so much of the truth mixed up with their error, that even the very elect will be taken in and caught by them. But the Wise Master cautions us against them. We are to be slow in following religious novelties. We lack wisdom, if we do. We are not strong in the faith, not grounded in the truth, if we do.

Some of these modern isms have their origin in a revulsion from certain evil tendencies in the churches. Modern Plymouthism is a recoil from the growth of sacerdotalism in the church of England. But itself is, if possible, a more dangerous error, for it would do away with all churches. Then the Salvation Army is the outcome of the failure, or seeming failure, of the churches in the great cities to reach the masses. But it is only a half measure, an invention of men, and, as it is, cannot do the good it seems to seek to do. My hope for it is, that it will give up its nonsense and sensationalism, and take the whole truth. But in the meantime it is exposing itself to the curse that is pronounced upon those who take away from the word of God, for it ignores the sacraments of



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12.00 M.—For Fredericton Junction St. John and points east.
3.15 P. M.—For Fredericton Junction, St. John and points East.

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9.25 A. M.—From Fredericton Junction St. John and all points East.
2.30 P. M.—From Fredericton Junction, Vanceboro, Bangor, Portland, Boston, and points West; St. John St. Andrew's, St. Stephen, Houlton, Woodstock.
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