Visitor Pulpit.

A SERMON TO YOUNG MEN.

By Rev. R. Glover, Delivered at the Baptist Union Meetings, Liverpool, England.

"Behold a woman of Canaan."—Matt. xv;22.

We have read together this story this morning, and read it often. Many are its lessons and great its inspirations. It is a consolation for the afflicted; a guide in prayer; a vindication of God's dealings of Providence; and a stimulus to faith. Not in any of these aspects, charming and stimulating as they are, do I dwell on it this morning, but on another side of it altogether. We have here the story of the conversion of the first heathen to the Saviour. She is not the only heathen mentioned in the New Testament. On the contrary, many are. Amongst the first to greet the new-born Saviour were heathens, and when he expired upon the cross it was from heathen lips that there rose the first confession, "Truly this is the Son of God." Then there are proselytes from the heathen to Judaism, and finding in Judaism a way to Christianity. But this woman in our text, whom our imagination can easily trace from the limits that are given, we see pass from heathen darkness into the radiance and comfort of the Gospel of Christ; and as the first works of heathendom to Christ—a type of the great harvest of the world—I should like to dwell on the story of this woman to-day. Let me at once come to the great element in the matter, and, first of all, I ask you to observe the woman herself. All we know of her origin is contained in three terms that are applied to her—Canaanite, Syro-Phœnician, and Greek. These three term are used by Matthew and Mark to describe her. The first two are terms describing her race. She belonged to the Phœnicians—that is Lowlanders—for the great Phœnician people had settled themselves on the fertile valleys and the maritime plains of Palestine, and there in their cities had developed in the highest degree a maritime nation. To this Phœnician stock she belonged. It was divided into two great parts, African and Syrian, and she belonged to the latter, who inhabited the narrow strip of land between Canaan and the sea, with too little territory to keep them in food, and, therefore, they had recourse to maritime enterprise—that enterprize which made them the marvel of all the world. The last term, Greek, has, of course, nothing to do with the race, or yet with their language. They did not speak Greek even when Greek was the language of the civilized world; the remotest colonies spoke the dialects given them by the Phœnicians. Paul spoke of the Jew and the Greek—the Jew and the Gentile—those who were filled with the light of the knowledge of God, and those who were sunk in the midst of heathen darkness. Heathen is the meaning of the word Greek. Although there had been movings in the direction of the faith of Israel on the part of the woman, still she had not broken outwardly with the Syrian faith, and had still kept to the Syrian thought; at least had not broken with it. She was one of those who worshipped Baal and Astarte. Glance at the worship, because you cannot understand the heathen without glancing at their worship.

In all ages the heathen have been impressed by the things around them in nature, and in the stars of heaven above them, but the greatest power which impressed their imagination was that which produced life in plants, in animals, in men; and the greatest of the deities—the giver of life—was always, as you can easily understand, represented as a goddess, and she was the great mother goddess of the world and of universal life. In all ages and in all lands that goddess, mother of life, has always attracted to herself more worship, homage, and regard than any other deity. It was so in Egypt, where she was worshipped as Isis. It was so in Asia Minor, where she was worshipped as Cybele. It was so in Greece, where she was worshipped as Demeter. It is so in India, where she is worshipped as Durga. It was so in Tyre and Sidon, where, under the name of Asherah—mistranslated in our Bible by the name of "Groves"—or Astarte, she commanded the reverence of all, and was the joy and pride of the Phœnician people.

We can understand the attraction of a goddess such as this—she hallowed the highest joys of all and the devoutest hearts. What was there that was not her gift? Parent and spouses and children—the fruits of nature—a life within which enabled men to enjoy them. She seemed to open her hand and all were filled with good, and she earned the gratitude of human hearts. There were those who loved her and worshipped her with their best, but at the same time she was equally dear to the vilest of mankind. After all, she was the mother of physical life chiefly, for sensual prompting was held to come from her, and the indulgence of every such prompting was held to be well pleasing in her eyes. And apart from any morality, regardless of any limitation from her, it was held to be a fact that all licentiousness was agreeable to her heart; that she smiled on it, sanctioned it, and was pleased with it. And just as to-day in India the imagination of young missionaries reels before the spectacle of religion becoming the minister of vice, and the very devotion of people tending to their degradation and obliterating all the finer feelings of their nature, so this worship of Astarte in ancient days was not only the consolation but the scandal of mankind—degrading them, so that men, women, the bride before she went with her husband, the matron in the midst of her children, all sorts of impassioned beings did this goddess service by prostituting their persons to her worshippers.

Such was the Syrian creed—the worship of the great mother of life who charmed men to gratitude by her gifts, but who confirmed them in vice by her indifference to virtue. Men did not see the shame of these things. Conscience was corrupt; morality was not exacting. There was festivity; there was the vine; there was the song; there was an outward prosperity. They could plead many arguments in favor of such a worship, and, doubtless, this woman, had she been tasked in the days of prosperity, could have defended her religion. She would have pointed out that it existed long before Abraham had taught the worship of one God; that it had been adopted by the most civilized nations; that it had blessed the Syrian people with prosperity and had placed the Phœnicians, even before the siege of Troy, in the van of civilization. That they were foremost in all the arts of peace—in their astronomy, in their mathematics, in their skill at the loom. They would indicate further that some Hebrew kings—Solomon himself—had adopted her worship, and that for three hundred years, her statue had stood side by side with the Temple of Jerusalem, and even that her religion had led to the Captivity of Babylon. If their morality was not of so high an order as that of the Hebrews, well, what was natural could not be wrong. It was pleasant, and it made them enjoy sunshine above them and sunshine within them. So the women might have argued; and in the days of her prosperity and her gladness she wanted no other deity and no other religion. It was enough for her that the Syrian mother had smiled upon her and given her a child and blessed her with an abundance of peace.

But a change comes over her, and I have to ask you to mark in her case the earnestness of trouble. "Man is born unto sorrow as the sparks fly upward," says Job, but he was not stating the whole truth nor even the partial truth with a tone that is fair to the facts of the case, for man is born to much besides sorrow, and the sorrow to which he is born is not a calamity altogether to be deplored, but as an angel which is always wrestling with man. She did not, however, know that, and when a great sorrow came upon her it seemed as if it was unmitigated. Had the goddess touched her life, she could have borne that; or taken away her fortune, she could have borne that; but to touch her child—the apple of her eye and of whom she could hardly bear the wind to beat, and to touch her with a malady like this—oh! that grieved and broke the noble heart. How much of anguish is summed up in that one sentence, "My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil!"

Some form of palsy or of insanity is indicated, and you can imagine hopes cherished that it would wear off and the child would grow out of it. But hope was disappointed when at last it dawned upon her that the malady was growing with her child's growth and strengthening with her strength, and that there was no prospect of it lightening and leaving her free. It was a great sorrow and she had to bear it. At the same time I ask you to observe that it is from the outside there begin to operate compensating results which take away some of the bitterness. First of all, this sorrow worked out in a greater love. A mother's love is the sweetest of all loves, but a mother's love for an afflicted child is the most marvellous form that even a mother's love ever reaches, such is its depth and delicacy, wealth of resource, and delight of warmness. How exquisite a development of that do you find here when coming to Christ she says, "Have mercy on me, my daughter is vexed?" "Me"—"my daughter"—as though they twain were one and nothing to distinguish the daughter's trouble from the mother, and any mercy that would reach the mother would pass straight through to the child. Not only did sorrow produce a deeper love, but, secondly, the love and the sorrow together brought something higher still, for they are two great characteristics in the development of human nature. A master of religious thought points out the eminence of love and sorrow in the character of Christ, and you know how he describes them. He says: "Love, Divine love, brought the Godhead of Jesus Christ down from the throne, and sorrow, human sorrow, raised the manhood of Christ into fitness to share it." This woman suffered the discipline of love and sorrow, and together they enlarged the heart, fortified the feeling, and awakened the deepest longing, lifted the thoughts to immortality. Somehow, when love and sorrow took possession of her soul, Astarte could no longer fill all her heart, and the glory of the goddess seemed to pall before her eyes. She wanted one who would not crush purity, but create it, for she had begun to feel that purity alone could make life happy, and could give her another world to hope of a prolonging of the fellowship of the child so dear to her. And these circumstances I gather from the fact that she calls Christ by the name, "Son of David."

She began to look across the chasm that divided her from the fold of Israel, and to think wistfully of Israel's God, who, though a God of duty, was a God of mercy, and was all the more worthy of her adoration. Indeed she felt that he clothed men with dignity, and kept them from the vice that degraded them. She was attracted by him who forbade sin, and yet could forgive it, and when she thought that, with the deity Astarte, with vice there was always something associated with a spirit of revenge, and when Muloch was the spouse of Astarte, and when Astarte herself had a shadow of darkness about her of revenge and indifference, did she not begin to dwell with delight on the songs of Zion, which spoke of God as the refuge and strength and present help in time of trouble, the God of the widow, the Father of the fatherless, the Preserver of the stranger, the Binder-up of the broken heart, and that Judaism had not only its glorious idea of a God of duty and of mercy, but further, had its hope of a great Saviour who would be sent to heal the sorrows of man, and to bring salvation? That moved her still further, and when the crowning tidings came to her of one that some thought was the Messiah, who went about doing good, who stimulated the best to higher virtue, and yet consoled the afflicted with words of peace, who wiped away the tears from men's eyes, and healed all manner of sickness and disease amongst the people, there arose in her heart a great presumption in favor of the creed of Judaism, in favor of expecting Divine mercy, in favor of the probability that this Jesus of Nazareth was indeed he, and a wish that he might come her way, and that her sorrow might be relieved and cured by his touch.

So she broods and so she hopes. Others might sneer at the religion of the Jews, and ask, Can any good come out of Judea? others might delicately suggest that where all skill and science had failed it was absurd to expect that any wonder worker could succeed, but she had thoughts of her own.

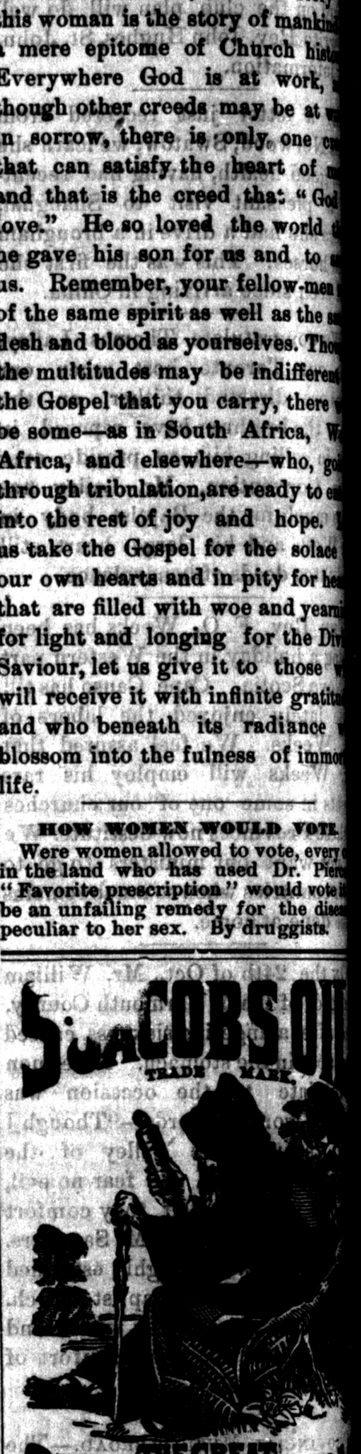
Men of science may say miracles are impossible, but women of sorrow will to the end of time rejoice in believing them most possible and most probable. The afflicted heart ever gravitates to this creed, that there must be somewhere the help of every trouble, relief for every sorrow, and mercy for every sin. She had learnt in the creed of the afflicted heart to think this way: that if she were God she would have pity on the afflicted and use omnipotence to administer to the relief of man. And so she stands, like a field white to the harvest, needing only the sickle to gather her into the garner; unknown to herself a virgin trimming her lamp, and longing to go forth with it lit to him, the Bridegroom of her spirit, should he come. Brethren, we act unworthily to our own moral nature, and act unworthily and want respect to our fellow-men, when we forget these movings of the human soul and how the spirit surrounds them. Sorrow and love are still operating widely throughout the world. They are a sort of law and prophets leading up to Christ. Sorrow is the law assisting men to purify their instincts and quickening their conscience. Love is the prophets telling of God's mysterious love, bidding men expect to find in him the tender compassion and the mercy which leads straight to the incarnation, raises men even from false creeds, and makes them at least ready to admit the light whenever it should shine upon them, and ready to rejoice in mercy whenever it should be bronght within their reach. Such were the arguments of sorrow in the woman's heart, preparing her for the advent of her Saviour. Surely our story brings before us an illustration of the great "dr[illegible]ngs" between the Saviour and the soul that needs it. "The Saviour and the soul that needs it." There is something mysterious here. It is not by accident that great mercy and great sorrow ever meet, and that God's love meets with human sorrow to take away its hurt. It was not by accident that Christ turned up just as Jairus needed him; just where the woman with the issue awaited him; just at the moment when the widow of Nain required his touch. It was by no accident that Jesus made the journey to Tyre and Sidon, but I suppose the Saviour felt within himself a great drawing—some magnetic need pulling upon his heart and claiming the help of his pity and his power. Maybe omniscience read what was going on; maybe like omnipresence as omniscience was kept in obeyance, and it was the human spirit that read the grief and felt the appeal of the great sorrow.

She was a long way off; fifty miles separated her from Him. It was an ordinary road through which the journey would be required to take Him to her. Apparantly in all that journey there and back he cures no other affliction, and approaches the coast for the sole purpose of ministering to the single sufferer. He goes forth over hill and dale glad to get away from Capernaum where Scribes and Pharisees pestered him with their questions, and to be journeying to one that was poor in spirit. He was drawn onward and guided to the coast, and as you see the Saviour drawn by the sufferer, even so you, the sufferer, is drawn by the Saviour. St. Mark was impressed with something mysterious about her going where he was, and though he entered into a house and would have no man know of his coming, yet he could not be hid. No! The prophetic soul knows when her Lord is nigh. Did the angel that told Cornelius his prayers were answered tell her that morning that the day of deliverance was come? What meant the joy in her heart—the sense that this Jesus was sure to come some day and take away her sorrow? What made her so consoled and restful in her spirit and so restless in her body that she could not stay at home but must hie forth? She knew not why; but reaching the street at once she sees him, and if none has proclaimed his coming, and if there is none to say, "This is He," she reads his starry look and recognizes at once in his countenance a light which never flashed from other eyes and never glorified another face. She feels within her that beneath the aspect of life and body there must be a power sufficient for all the purposes that she seeks to have affected, and at once there is presence of mind, because there is presence of heart, and eagerly she casts herself at his feet and names him "Son of David," and asks, "Have mercy on me; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil."

These drawings, brethren, of Jesus and the souls of men, how wonderful are they! Men are drawn to Him not because preachers beguile them—not because one generation misleads another—they are drawn by laws of gravitation, and Kepler's laws hold good of souls as much as they do of planets. Christ simply attracts in the proportion to his means, and it is his means of being, his wealth of love, his power to pity, his infinite wisdom, his spirit of tenderness, that has in all ages, and will in all ages, attract the hearts of men; and the hearts of men attract him. What is the story of christianity but this: that Christ has gone forth to meet the hearts of men, taking his loved disciples—Peter, James, John, Carey, Livingstone, Judson, Williams.

Brethren, let us recognize the force of attraction there is in our Lord and Saviour Let us recognize what he feels whilst the attraction of need and sorrow drew him from heaven to earth, and drew him to the Cross, and still draws him to the woes of man, and that we may not go forth without finding him there to dedicate us aright, to use us, and fill us with the power of the great salvation. Also observe the serene result that is now reached. As I have said, she needs none to name her Lord. She could say, as it were, "Behold in him the glory of the only begotten Son of God," and she falls on her face before him, and, believing him to be God enough to work a miracle, and give her all she needs, she pleads for his mercy. Christ takes for awhile no notice. He is as silent to her as, perhaps, he is to-day to some of you. His disciples have been at school that morning and they learnt some thing they did not learn before, and they—strict Jews—come and pray for this heathen, "Send her away." They meant "Send her away healed, for she crieth after us." Then Christ answered that he was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But the woman did not think that this precluded her from help, and she comes and pleads, "Lord, help me." Then he tells her, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs. It might have been hard for many to brave that, and they might have sunk in despair, but, like Charles Wesley in the hymn "Come in, thou traveller unknown," this woman is confident in her despair, and so she pleads that even the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table. What would be heaven to her would be only a crumb to him. Then Joseph makes himself known and the reverse passing away, Christ praises and crowns and rewards her faith by saying, "Oh woman! great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." How much had been wrought that morning on the woman. The kingdom of God came like a lightning flash from one end of heaven to the other, and, in an instant, it possessed her soul. She had learnt the power and the blessing of faith, and the omnipotence of redeeming love. She was changed, and what a change on the disciples! They were being educated for their missionary work. They had been thinking that Gentiles had no conscience, but now they saw how rich a thing the human heart was, and what God could develop from it. They were ten times as ready as ever they had been before to go into the world and preach the go[illegible] to the heathen; and as [illegible] the woman herself, she came [illegible] ing mercy for herself and [illegible] away taking it to others. [illegible] came, still tainted somewhat [illegible] heathen doctrines, but went away [illegible] first missionary to the heathen, [illegible] well as the first convert to tell [illegible] Christ had done, to gather oth[illegible] and to start that Christian Chu[illegible] that we meet with in the Acts of [illegible] apostles. Some may blame me, p[illegible] haps, for not taking a subject bear[illegible] more directly on the question [illegible] christian missions, but the story [illegible] this woman is the story of mankin[illegible] a mere epitome of Church hist[illegible] Everywhere God is at work, [illegible] though other creeds may be at w[illegible] in sorrow, there is only one c[illegible] that can satisfy the heart of m[illegible] and that is the creed that: "God [illegible] love." He so loved the world t[illegible] he gave his son for us and to [illegible] us. Remember, your fellow-men [illegible] of the same spirit as well as the s[illegible] flesh and blood as yourselves. Tho[illegible] the multitudes may be indifferent [illegible] the Gospel that you carry, there [illegible] be some—as in South Africa, W[illegible] Africa, and elsewhere—who, go[illegible] through tribulation, are ready to e[illegible] into the rest of joy and hope. [illegible] us take the Gospel for the solace [illegible] our own hearts and in pity for he[illegible] that are filled with woe and yearn[illegible] for light and longing for the Div[illegible] Saviour, let us give it to those w[illegible] will receive it with infinite gratit[illegible] and who beneath its radiance [illegible] blossom into the fulness of immor[illegible] life.

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