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STUDIES IN TEXTS.

Suggestions for Sermons from Current Literature.

BY THE REV. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

IX. FOUR ELEMENTS IN THE SOCIAL PROBLEM.

Text.—"Which of those three seems to you to have acted like a fellow man?"—Luke x. 36 (Weymouth).

[Book of the Month: "Jesus and Life"¹ = JL. Other refs., Bruce on St. Luke in Expos. Gr. Test. = EGT; Tristram's "Eastern Customs" = TEC. Plummer's "St. Luke" = PL.]

"The brotherhood of man is implicit in the story of the Good Samaritan. My neighbour is related in exactly the same way as I am to the God Who loves us both. Why help a wounded traveller on the road, without inquiring what we have in common" (JL. 176). Because religion not a matter of talk. Voluble religion has no place here. "The Good Samaritan utters only one sentence, and that is not good advice. The wounded traveller lying on the road utters no syllable; yet as the passers-by approach one after the other, he classifies them as unerringly as the botanist sorts his specimens" (JL .71). "Four attitudes to our fellow-men: the robbers create the problem, the priest and the Levite ignore it, the innkeeper treats it professionally, and the Good Samaritan solves it" (JL. 258).

Four questions:—

1. ROBBERS SAY, "WHAT CAN WE GET OUT OF THIS MAN?"

"A neighbour is a person to be exploited. This spirit makes human beings into economic beasts of prey. The robbers beat the traveller as well. Only his belongings wanted; but to get them, had to disable him. 'Went off and left him.' Here 'social problem' in all its pain and ugliness" (JL. 259). The weakest can go to the wall, unless new force intervenes.

2. THE SUPERFICIALLY RELIGIOUS MAN ASKS, "WHAT BUSINESS IS IT OF MINE?"

"The prescription of the priest and the Levite is the simplest; turn their eyes away. We lose the point if we think of them as

¹ By Professor J. F. McFadyen. Pub. by James Clarke & Co. One of the suggestive "Humanism of the Bible" series.

bad men ; still more if we regard them as cruel men. They were conventional men. A half-naked unconscious man, covered with blood, was outside of their routine " (JL. 260). This was the common Jewish doctrine towards outsiders. Tristram quotes Talmud :—" If a Jew sees a Gentile fallen into the sea, let him by no means lift him out thence. It is written, ' Thou shalt not rise up against the blood of thy neighbour,' but this man is not thy neighbour " (TEC. 182). " ' Came and saw ' : and thus the Levite is made to be more heartless than the priest, whom he seems to have been following. The priest saw and passed on ; but the Levite came up to him quite close, saw, and passed on. He was half-unconscious, and they wished to get past without being asked to help " (PL. 287).

" Is it in the very nature of all materializing of worship to concentrate attention on sacrifice rather than on mercy ? " (JL. 261).

" When we have passed him by, the wounded traveller remains. The scene on a lonely road ; no spectators but God. Each showed as he was, without public opinion " (JL. 262).

3. THE INNKEEPER ASKS, " WHAT SHALL I GET IF I HELP HIM ? "

" Even this is an advance on the stage which says : Here is an enemy ; let us kill him " (JL. 181). " The Samaritan is a busy man ; he cannot give up the whole of his time, but calls in the innkeeper. A combination of the amateur and the professional philanthropist. Samaritan renders first aid, supplies the funds, makes arrangements, is the inspiration of the whole story, superintends the professional ; promises to come back again " (JL. 262).

" That the innkeeper is a professional is not intended as a point against him. Like any other workman he is worthy of his wages. Yet, the hero of the story is not the innkeeper. Every one who has any acquaintance with the working of public institutions knows that when the administration of kindness is left to paid agents, there is no certainty that the work is being carried out in the spirit of the Good Samaritan " (JL. 263).

4. THE SAMARITAN ASKS, " WHAT MORE CAN I DO ? "

" To the robbers the traveller was a victim to be exploited ; to the priest and the Levite a nuisance to be evaded ; to the innkeeper he was a business proposition ; to the Samaritan he was a neighbour to be helped " (JL. 263). " We must help them as men, not

as 'cases.' Wounded traveller quite unknown. Samaritan was not out looking for adventures ; bearing his cross and ready for the call " (JL. 265). " The story brings even the lowly beast of burden within the circle of love and service " (JL. 181). The Samaritan helps, pays, promises future oversight.

" Not enough to strike a bargain with the innkeeper. There is need to see that generous purpose is not being frustrated " (JL. 263). " The speech of a man who in turn trusts the host, and has no fear of being overcharged in the bill for the wounded man. *I*, with a slight emphasis which means—you know me " (EGT. 544).

So we see the four and we draw our lessons :—

" All good Samaritans, whatever influences may try to thwart them, have the whole trend of things on their side " (JL. 181). They tend to enlist others in their service. " In the early days, we measure progress by the number of our Good Samaritans " (JL. 209). In the end they will abolish the robbers or convert them to Good Samaritanism, which is Christianity. " As the Kingdom triumphs, the test of its progress is the extent to which we no more need our Good Samaritans " (JL. 209). The story illustrates " the Kingdom's law of gravitation : God in the centre ; all men attracted to God, attracted to each other, by the very law of their being " (JL. 177). This always the law, needed discovering. " Just as the law of gravity had operated for millenia before Newton discovered it, so it was as true under Satan's reign as under God's reign, that every structure based on envy, greed, ambition, malice, hatred, is evanescent " (JL. 181). " The Good Samaritan had some command of money. How he acquired that money is irrelevant to the story. But it is not irrelevant to ask whether in earning or gaining the money he exhibited the same spirit as he exhibited in spending it. Generally speaking, the theory that underlies our present system is that in our business lives we are bound by considerations of honesty, justice, and fair-play ; and only after our income is actually in our pocket can we afford to listen to the claims, supposed to be of a loftier and more or less optional morality, of generosity and kindness. Does the story leave it possible for us to imagine that the Samaritan's goodness deserted him when he donned his office coat ? " (JL. 266-7). " The Christian Church has already worked miracles in creating Good Samaritans ; its next task is to induce men to earn their incomes in the spirit of Christian service " (JL. 268).