

## The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF ST. MATTHEW.

MATT. xvi. 26.

“For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?” (R. V.).

### EXPOSITION.

“*If he shall gain the whole world.*”—One of the false Messianic notions was that the Christ should gain the whole world, *i.e.* the Roman Empire. This was the very temptation presented to our Lord Himself, “the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them.” What is the value of universal dominion, of the whole power of Cæsar, compared with life?—CARR.

“*And forfeit his life.*”—The word here translated “soul” in the Authorised Version (*ψυχή, psyché*) is translated “life” in the preceding verse, and should be so rendered here.—ABBOTT. In Greek the word had a wide range of meaning; it was life in all its extent, from the mere vegetative existence to the highest intellectual life. Christianity has yet further extended the conception, by adding to the word the meaning of the spiritual life of the soul in union with Christ.—CARR. Thus it has the double meaning of “soul” and “life” in the New Testament. But here life in the higher sense is meant, not soul in distinction from body.—SCHAFF AND RIDDLE.

The contrast is not between gaining this world and losing the next; nor exactly between acquiring material and sacrificing spiritual interests; but between gaining that which is external to oneself and losing one’s own character and life in the process. Luke gives it more clearly: “For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world and lose himself, or be cast away?”—ABBOTT.

“*What shall a man give in exchange for his life?*”—“In exchange,” literally, *as a ransom price*. The price which the earthly-minded gives for the world is his “life,” in the highest sense. But after having laid that down as the price, what has he as a *counter price* (that is the exact sense of the Greek word) to buy the life back again?—SCHAFF AND RIDDLE.

The second clause is not a repetition of the first; it enforces the argument by a consideration of the irreparable loss when the life of the soul is lost. When a man’s life has been spent, what can he give as a ransom or price to get its return? All other loss can be repaired; a lost life can never be regained.—ABBOTT.

There is something unspeakably impressive in this method of suggesting the importance of eternal interests, by supposing the very life or soul itself to be lost to the possessor and an effort made to buy it back, and then propounding the question, Where is the equivalent?—ALEXANDER.

Note that the appeal is here made to a reasonable regard to personal advantage, and that in the very act of urging to crucify self. So little did Christ think, as some people do, that the desire to save one’s soul is selfishness.—MACLAREN.

### METHOD OF TREATMENT.

#### THE WORTH OF THE SOUL.

By the late Rev. W. Maturin, D.D.

In the text a case is put for the decision of our own judgment. Two objects are placed before us, and we are called upon to pronounce on their comparative value and choose accordingly. These are the world and the soul. It is assumed that we may have either; it is certain that we cannot have both. Which, then, is the more valuable?

I. The first is “the whole world.” Now, some would be content with a part of the world; if they had its pleasures they would leave its honours to others. It is found, however, that no one ever receives the part he desires, so as to be satisfied with it. So it is no argument to say that no one would ever gain the whole world. It is conceivable; and that he should gain—so as to be content with—even a part of it is no more than conceivable.

Let us conceive, then, that a man gains the whole world. Then

1. He gains unbounded *power*. Men speak of “universal empire”; it is but a sounding name.

The greatest army of the ancient world was checked by a few hundred men; the hosts of a modern spoiler were swept away by the winter snowdrifts. But the power of which we speak would be beyond the wildest dreams of ambition. It would be in sober earnest a universal empire.

2. He commands the whole world's *wealth*. He who in the wantonness of an insane prodigality expended the revenue of an entire province on a single supper, made a display of wealth which might fairly be called exhaustless. Yet it sinks into insignificance when compared with what is suggested here.

3. He gains command of all the *pleasures* this world can yield. All quarters of the globe would minister to his enjoyment. Whatever and whoever in all the earth could serve the pleasures of the senses or of the mind he could summon around him.

He could not enjoy all these things? Certainly not. The story is told of an Egyptian king that, having had the announcement made to him by an oracle that he had only a year to live, he caused the palace and grounds to be lit up every night as if it were day, and so doubled the time he had on earth. But the historian forgets that the Egyptian king had to spend these nights that were turned into day in sleep! No; he cannot enjoy it all. But we may conceive it.

The question then is: What should it profit him if he thus gains the whole world, and loses his own life?

II. This is the other object—the soul or life. At once the question answers itself, and our own souls echo the answer. Not in our hours of utmost levity and carelessness can we smother the consciousness of the priceless value of the soul, or the vastness of the career that is before it. We know that the day will come when all the power, riches, honour, pleasure of the world will have ended for ever; and when that day comes the soul will be still in its prime.

If then we should be losers were we to gain the whole world and lose our own souls, let us take this plain lesson with us. Do not lose it for *less*.

#### THOUGHTS AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

A TRAVELLER who crosses the Alps by night sees only a foot or two before him; and he is as little alive to the extraordinary scene through which he is passing, to the beauties

which encompass, and to the risks which beset his path, as if he were walking quietly along the turnpike-road from London to Cambridge. But as the early dawn breaks upon him, he becomes aware of those mountain pinnacles which tower above him till they hide their snow-capped summits in the very clouds of heaven; he sees the precipice which yawns at his very feet; he becomes conscious of dangers of which he had previously no idea; and he is grateful to the morning light which certainly has discovered to him a vision of unsuspected beauty, and which probably has saved him from an untimely death. And what is the question of our blessed Lord in the text, but the very light of Heaven itself, bringing out into sharp relief the real conditions of our personal existence!—H. P. LIDDON.

WHEN the steamer *London* was lost some years ago on the English coast, among the many sad tales told in connection with the shipwreck, I recollect reading of one, in some respects the saddest of all. When the condition of the ship was hopeless, one of the passengers had gone down to his cabin, which was already under water, and had with some difficulty found his trunk, which he had carried up to the deck. The captain, who was standing by, waiting in silence for the inevitable catastrophe, shook his head as he saw what the poor man had done. He had saved his trunk; his life would be gone in a moment.—W. MATURIN.

WE know the force and majesty of the thoughts of Pascal. The realms of space and the worlds in them are full of grandeur in his philosophy; but there is one thing compared with which all this vast material universe is nothing. "All the bodies, the stars, the firmament, the earth and all its kingdoms, are not worth one soul; for that soul knows both itself and them, and they know nothing."—J. B. MOZLEY.

YOU may be as ignorant and as rude in your life as a Hottentot, and as poor as Lazarus, and yet have gained the world and lost your life. For this is not merely a question of the things which you acquire by your exchange, it is a question of the law under which you put yourself, of the moral quality of the end which you seek.—M. R. VINCENT.

AN aged Christian once asked a young man who was just entering business and laying out his plans for life, "What are you going to do? You are about to settle in business, I understand." "Yes." "And what do you intend then?" "I shall marry." "And what then?" "I hope to make a fortune." "And what then?" "I shall enter public life." "And what then?" "I hope that I may make a family reputation." "And what then?" "Well, I suppose I shall grow old and die." "And what then?" The young man was silent. He had never looked so far ahead.—H. P. LIDDON.

SUPPOSE you should buy a beautiful flask of some precious cordial, with the understanding that there was a secret leak in the flask which you could not find nor stop, and through which the precious liquid was slowly trickling away. Would

you not be deemed a fool? Yet you buy the world with this certainty.—M. R. VINCENT.

DIVES is the very man who can answer the question in our text. Tell us, thou who hast had experience of two worlds, what hast thou profited?—D. MOORE.

“WHAT shall it profit?” He condescends with amazing love to the language of man’s self-interest. He appeals to the business-like instinct of those whose every energy is devoted to gaining a livelihood, or to making a fortune; and I am bold enough to say, that Christ seems to address Himself with pointed emphasis to the peculiar temper and instinct of us—the English people. “What shall it profit?” It is a question which comes home to a race like ourselves, who are described in an unfriendly phrase, yet with sub-

stantial accuracy, as “a nation of shopkeepers.”—H. P. LIDDON.

WHEN Goethe said that “earnestness is life,” his genius discerned one of the watchwords of the opening nineteenth century, even if his heart did not prompt the utterance. We cannot be earnest merely because we admire the quality of earnestness. We can only be earnest if we have a conviction—an object. Now, I can conceive nothing more calculated to make a man thoroughly earnest about religion than daily repetition to himself, daily reflection upon the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in the text. I would venture to advise every single person to ask each morning and each evening for one month this question: “What shall it profit me if I shall gain the whole world, and lose my own soul?”—H. P. LIDDON.

## The International Lessons.

### I.

Acts xiv. 8–22.

#### WORK AMONG THE GENTILES.

1. “Steadfastly beholding him.” The expression is a favourite one with St. Luke when speaking of St. Paul. Does it mean that the apostle had some defect of vision, and had to strain his eyes to see?

2. “In the speech of Lycaonia” (ver. 11), which Paul and Barnabas did not understand. Thus it is clear that the Pentecostal gift did not secure the knowledge of foreign languages.

3. “Which was before their city”—whose temple was at the city gate. Jupiter was their guardian god.

THE lesson before us to-day is full of incident, and so will easily secure the attention of the children. Its divisions are these—

1. *The Cure of the Cripple.*—As there would be very few Jews in Lystra, there could have been no synagogue, and so Paul would take his stand in the most frequented place, and begin to preach the gospel. That was just the place for a cripple beggar to be. As Paul preached, the cripple heard. He heard and he listened. He listened ever more eagerly, till the apostle saw that this Gentile had something of the faith of that other of whom our Lord said, “O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” The first gift was bodily healing; but it was given because of faith, and the same faith no doubt secured the health and life of the spirit. Shall we not think of this cripple as one of the “disciples” who stood round the apostle when the people had stoned him till they thought him dead?

2. *The arrested Sacrifice.*—The cure of the cripple had been instantaneous, and it had been complete. The people could not overlook it, and they had no inclination to do so. They even regarded it as the mighty power of God; for these rude Lycaonians agreed, with the cultured Pharisee, that “no man can do these miracles except God be with him.” And they proceeded to offer sacrifice. But it must not be. Jesus did not refuse Nicodemus’s homage, nor Thomas’s plainer “My Lord and my God.” But Paul and Barnabas do everything in the name of Another. “Why do ye look so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?”

3. *The Sermon.*—St. Luke does not report any of the sermons which the cripple heard. But this was now an unusual occasion, and to some extent an unusual sermon, and he gives a short abstract of it. What are its points? (1) There is one God, and all other “gods” are idols dumb. (2) He is the Maker of all things, and He made them for a witness. “The heavens declare the glory of God,” and we must answer for it if we deny the evidence which they furnish. (3) This witness was “in times past” the clearest of all; but it is not so now.

4. *The Stoning and the Resurrection.*—The people were fickle, and the Jews from Antioch and Iconium were clever and cunning. They persuaded the people, not that the miracle had never been performed,—that was beyond them,—but that it was done by the power of the devil, no doubt. And then these Jews took the leading hand in stoning St. Paul, for stoning was a Jewish mode of punishment. They dragged him out and left him