

minated in the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. The New Testament writings, the Christian Church, and the Christian Individual all flow from this. This, I believe, is matter of simple historical fact, however explained. This dependence and this secondary authority is qualitatively expressed most perfectly in the writings of the New Testament, quantitatively in the Church. To both of these

the individual is inferior. Their scale is incomparably greater than his. But he has his place, and an influence which may rise almost to authority, as he views both New Testament and Church in the light of that which made them, and in its power interprets the one and guides the other with an insight and towards a goal which reveals that he too, like men of old, possesses the mind of Christ.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF ST. LUKE.

LUKE XIV. 18.

And they all with one consent began to make excuse.

1. CHRIST was at a feast in a Pharisee's house. It was a strange place for Him, and His words at the table were also strange. For He first rebuked the guests, and then the host, telling the former to take the lower rooms, and bidding the latter widen his hospitality to those that could not recompense him. It was a sharp saying; and one of the other guests turned the edge of it by laying hold of our Lord's final words, 'Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just,' and saying, no doubt in a pious tone and with a devout shake of the head, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.' It was a very proper thing to say, but there was a ring of conventional, commonplace piety about it which struck unpleasantly on Christ's ear. He answered the speaker with that strange story of the great feast to which nobody would come, as if He had said, 'You pretend to think that it is a blessed thing to eat bread in the Kingdom of God. Why, you will not eat the bread when it is offered to you.'

We all know the parable. A great feast is prepared; invitations, more or less general, are sent out at first; everything is ready; and, behold there is a table and nobody to sit at it. A strange experience for a hospitable man! And so he sends his servants to beat up the unwilling guests; whereupon, one after another, with more or less politeness, they refuse to come.

2. To a certain extent these men had all pledged themselves already to be present at the supper of

their friend. This, you observe, was the second invitation; the reminder sent round when everything was ready. The first invitation had been given some weeks before, and it is quite clear they had all accepted that. And no doubt they accepted it sincerely. They really meant to be present at the supper. If you had asked any of them on the day when they were first invited, they would have told you they were going, certainly. But when the hour came, none of them went. 'They all with one consent began to make excuse.' They had meant to go; they had even pledged themselves so far to be there. But when the time for action and for decision came, not one of them fulfilled the promise.

It is in question whether this double invitation is now, or ever has been, a practice in the East. The weight of authority seems to be on the affirmative side. Dr. Thomson, for instance, the author of *The Land and the Book*, mentions that in the Lebanon his party received an invitation like this, and then on the day of the feast, and towards the hour, a second invitation arrived to intimate that they were to come because all things were now ready. It would even appear that the second invitation is sometimes repeated, and the snobs of the Orientals—because that species seems to flourish there as well as in the West—actually allow the final and more urgent invitation to come before they put themselves in motion, just as, among ourselves, some people think that they add to their own dignity by coming in after the dinner-hour. But whether or not this double invitation has ever been customary on a large scale in the East, it is an undoubted fact in the spiritual sphere. There is a general invitation which comes to all who hear the Gospel. The dawn of every Sabbath brings it; it is repeated in every sermon; it comes to us in the reading of the Bible in public and in private; it is repeated in the lives of Christians, and in the religious institutions by which we are surrounded. And to this invitation all consent, just as all who received the invitation to the great supper accepted it. It is easy to agree that it is a good thing to be a Christian, and all intend

some time or other to become Christians. But then comes the second and particular invitation to become a Christian, and to do so now. Will you now be a Christian? And what is the result? Might it not be too truthfully described in the words of this parable—'and they all with one consent began to make excuse'?'¹

I.

THE REFUSAL.

1. The refusal was *unnatural*. One might have concluded that when the invitation went forth to a feast, and when that invitation was given by a person of a very prominent and exalted position, the mere fact of being invited to such a feast would have been of itself an honour. One would naturally have concluded that everybody would have embraced the opportunity so eagerly that there would have been scarcely any need to send out a messenger to remind people that the supper was ready and that the time was come. One might have expected that there would be quite a demand for invitations, that everybody would be besieging the house and asking the chamberlain, or the secretary, or the great person, whoever he might be, 'Can you give us an invitation to the feast?' Whoever heard of a man in such circumstances making an excuse?

That was a good answer of a guest who was among those invited to a feast given by a king. On his arrival the king, who must have been somewhat new to the rights and privileges of kingship, said, 'Oh, we did not expect to see *you* here. You did not answer our invitation.' 'Sire,' was the reply, 'I understood that the invitation of a king was not to be answered, but obeyed.' Let that be the character of our response to the Divine invitation. Let us reply by coming.²

I hear the low voice call that bids me come,—
Me, even me, with all my grief oppress,
With sins, that burden my unquiet breast,
And in my heart the longing that is dumb,
Yet beats for ever, like a muffled drum,
For all delights whereof I, dispossess,
Pine and repine, and find nor peace nor rest
This side the haven where He bids me come.

He bids me come and lay my sorrows down,
And have my sins washed white by His dear grace;
He smiles—what matter, then, though all men frown?
Naught can assail me, held in His embrace;
And if His welcome home the end may crown,
Shall I not hasten to that heavenly place?³

2. Yet the refusal was *unanimous*—'they all.' That is what makes it so bad. A whole class of

¹ J. Stalker.

² J. S. Maver.

³ Louise Chandler Moulton.

people in high position, set apart for honourable distinction, endowed with the privilege of the great Lord's familiar friendship, had falsified its prerogative, had disdained the confidence reposed in it! All at once began to make excuses. As a united act it became a public affront. And yet each individual of the class had done what he did in ignorance of what the others were doing. For they were all of 'one consent'—not by willing agreement, one would suppose, so much as by unwitting identity of conduct. It is not a concerted plot to dishonour the splendid feast, but each by himself arrives at the conclusion that he at least ought to be let off, whatever the others did. Each is absorbed in some matter of private personal importance—not a fictitious excuse caught up at hazard, but of intense interest to himself.

So each for his own private reason refuses, and what every one does separately, all do collectively; and the result is that, as a body, as a class, they have made the great refusal, they have committed a public wrong.

This finite life thou hast preferred,
In disbelief of God's own Word,
To Heaven and to Infinity:—
Here the probation was for thee
To show thy soul the Earthly mixed
With Heavenly, it must choose betwixt.—

The Earthly Joys lay palpable,—
A taint in each,—distinct as well;
The Heavenly fitted, faint and rare,
Above them,—but as truly were
Taintless, so in their nature best.

Thy choice was Earth! Thou didst attest
'Twas fitter spirit should subserve
The flesh, than flesh refine to nerve
Beneath the spirit's play!

Thou art shut
Out of the heaven of spirit! Glut
Thy sense upon the World! 'tis thine
For ever!—take it!⁴

II.

THE EXCUSE.

1. What is an excuse? One cannot help feeling that it was of set purpose and with care that the particular word here occurring was made use of. 'They all with one consent began to make excuse.' What is an excuse? Something you advance when you have no reason to give. The Greek word made use of here simply means 'to

⁴ Browning.

beg off.' This is exactly the same idea. They began to beg themselves off, saying thus and so, and our Lord criticised everything they said as being an excuse. An excuse is a hypocrisy, in order to escape from some obligation when there is no real reason to be given.

2. All the excuses that are given come to one and the same thing—viz. occupation with present interests, duties, possessions, or affections. There are differences in the excuses which not only are helps to the vividness of the narrative, but also express differences in the speakers. One man is a shade politer than the others. He puts his refusal on the ground of necessity. He 'must,' and so he courteously prays that he may be held excused. The second one is not quite so polite; but still there is a touch of courtesy about him too. He does not pretend necessity as his friend had done, but he simply says, 'I am going'; and that is not quite so courteous as the former, but still he begs to be excused. The last man thinks that he has such an undeniable reason that he may be as brusque as he likes, and so he says, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So, with varying degrees of apparent recognition of the claim of host and feast, the ground of refusal is set forth as possessions in two cases, and as affections in the third; and these so fill the men's hearts and minds that they have no time to attend to the call that summons them to the feast.

3. The excuses were perfectly right in themselves. The reasons which prevented the invited guests from attending the great supper were not vicious. The first had bought a parcel of ground—there was nothing wrong in that. The second had bought five yoke of oxen—there was nothing wrong in that. The third had married a wife—the very best thing he could do. Jesus might easily have constructed this parable so as to represent those who refused as engaged in unlawful and dishonourable pursuits. But He does nothing of the kind. They were all going to do things that were not only lawful, but honourable; and at the right time and in the right place they would have been praiseworthy, and yet they detained them from the great supper just as effectually as if they had been the greatest crimes.

4. The contrariety between these duties and the

acceptance of the offered feast existed only in the imagination of the men who made the excuses. There is no reason why you should not go to the feast, and see after your field. There is no reason why you should not love your wife, and go to the feast. God's summons comes into collision with many wishes, but with no duties or legitimate occupations. The more a man accepts and lives upon the good that Jesus Christ spreads before him, the more fit will he be for all his work, and for all his enjoyments. The field will be better tilled, the bullocks will be better driven, the wife will be more wisely, tenderly, and sacredly loved, if in your hearts Christ is enthroned, and whatsoever you do you do as for Him. It is only the excessive and abusive possession of His gifts and absorption in our duties and relations that turns them into impediments in the path of our Christian life.

5. When these men made excuse, their excuses were accepted by the host. No second messenger came to implore their presence. Did you ever feel the boldness of that touch? I think that none but Jesus would have dared speak so. Any one else who knew the power and the patience of God's mercy would have made the messengers come back and plead. But the point to note is that the messengers never returned. There was the one reminder, kind, courteous, very timely. But the one reminder never was repeated. The Lord was angry, and He did well to be angry. There are insults it would be ignoble to despise. The men may have waited out in the field with the oxen till the evening heaven was ablaze with stars; but the invitation never came again.

Consequences are un pitying. Our deeds carry their terrible consequences, quite apart from any fluctuations that went before—consequences that are hardly ever confined to ourselves. And it is best to fix our minds on that certainty, instead of considering what may be the elements of excuse for us.¹

In his *Memories and Portraits*, R. L. Stevenson draws a picture of a fellow-student who in happier days had been the joy, the pride, the expectation of them all. And he came back—a king discrowned, one who had wrecked hopes, powers, success, health on the pursuit of vanities: came back, bankrupt in body and mind, to a lingering death. Then, in the day of his adversity, there shone out the fire of genuine greatness, in this, that *he made no excuses*. Young men would go to him with their disappointments and their hopes, for counsel, wise and kindly. 'Such was his tenderness for others, such his instinct of fine courtesy and pride,

¹ George Eliot, *Adam Bede*.

that of the impure passion of remorse he never breathed a syllable. Only upon some return of our own thoughts were we reminded who it was to whom we disembosomed: a man by his own fault ruined; shut out of the garden of his gifts; awaiting the deliverer. He had held the inquest, and passed sentence, *Mene, mene,* "Weighed, found wanting," but he did not rail at circumstance; no word of self-accusing passed

his lips. And then something took us by the throat; and to see him there, so gentle, patient, brave and pious, oppressed but not cast down, sorrow was so swallowed up in admiration that we could not dare to pity him.' You feel the nobility of that.¹

¹ G. H. Rendall, *Charterhouse Sermons*, 214.

Recent Oriental Archaeology.

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ONE of the most important books that have appeared for some time past on ancient Babylonian theology is Dr. Langdon's *Babylonian Liturgies* (Geuthner, Paris, 1913). The larger part of the volume is addressed to Assyriologists only, and consists of facsimiles of Sumerian religious texts with transliterations and translations. But this part of the volume is prefaced by a long introduction on early Babylonian liturgiology which will appeal to a much wider circle of readers. A considerable portion of the matter contained in it is new and throws a welcome light on the religious services and ritual of the Babylonians.

'Liturgical services,' says Dr. Langdon, 'originated among the Sumerians' and were accompanied by music. They were simple at the beginning, the chief instruments of music being the lyre, the drum and the tambourine, to which the flute was subsequently added. The official liturgist was called a *kalû*, who was assisted by a professional singer or *nâru*, who, it may be observed, was not necessarily attached to a temple. Indeed, among these professional singers we find confectioners, gardeners, and the like, and many of them were women. Dr. Langdon would identify *nâru*, 'singer,' with *nâru*, Heb. *na'ar*, 'youth,' on the ground that the latter, originally signified one who spoke with the shrill voice of boyhood. Songs to the flute he thinks were used in processions, called *kidudu* in Sumerian, a word which was afterwards adopted by Semitic Babylonian, while hymns to the lyre (or drum), termed *kisub*, were attended by 'bowings, prostrations, and swaying.'

In *kalû* he sees the name of the 'psalmist.' That the word came to represent the psalmist is clear, but I should myself identify its Sumerian prototype with another common word which means

'servant' or 'minister,' the *kalû* being the Levite of the Babylonian sanctuary. He was at all events distinguished from the consecrated priests, whether high-priests (*enu* and *sangu*) or 'prophetic diviners' (*asipu*), just as the Levites were distinguished from the priests of the Jewish temple. Like the Levites they gradually acquired a footing of equality with the priests, and formed liturgical colleges which kept the temple ritual jealously in their own hands.

Dr. Langdon enumerates and examines the various other names given to the temple servants and explains the functions belonging to them. In fact, nothing connected with the Sumerian ritual seems to have escaped his notice, and even the curious interludes in certain litanies in which a single line is ruled off from the preceding and following intercessions receives from him a probable explanation. He compares it very aptly with the comments of the chorus in a Greek play.

As time went on the ritual naturally developed and became more intricate. While odes and lyrics were dropped, older psalms and similar compositions were combined into litanies of considerable length, and wind and string instruments were employed together. The later and more elaborate ritual can be traced back to the age of the dynasty of Isin, and first takes permanent shape in the epoch of Khammurabi. A comparison of its character and development in the Semitic period with the Mosaic ritual cannot fail to be instructive to students of the Old Testament.

That indefatigable worker, Professor Clay, has given us two new volumes during the past winter, *Personal Names from Cuneiform Inscriptions of the Cassite Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912), and *Babylonian Records in the Library of*