

THE EXPOSITOR.



THE HUNDRED-FOLD.

ST. MARK X. 29, 30.

A SERMON: BY THE LATE BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S.

THIS saying of our Lord is also reported by St. Matthew, but more briefly, and with a remarkable variation: "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." The words recorded by St. Matthew seem more simple and more easily intelligible than those which we read in St. Mark. They set before us the contrast between the good things of this world and those of the world to come. It is in the next life, in a future state, that those who have given up all that they most valued on earth, all the materials and conditions of their present happiness, are to receive their reward, in what the Apostle calls "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." This was the ground of the direction which our Lord gave to the young man who inquired of him the way to eternal life: "Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven."

This indeed was never understood by the Church as an absolute precept, binding everywhere and at all times upon all Christians. It was only regarded as what was called "a counsel of perfection," something without which it was barely possible to gain admission into the kingdom of heaven, and only to the lowest place in it. That which was to be left or given up was not an insurmountable obstacle in the way of salvation, but it was held greatly to retard the progress of those who walked therein. It was one of the *weights* which the Apostle exhorts the Hebrews to lay aside, that they might "run with patience the race that was set before them." It is that to which he refers under a different image when he says, "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life." Like the runner in the race, the soldier, if he be too heavily loaded, may sink to the ground before he has reached the end of his march. And the danger was not merely that of failure and loss, but involved far more fearful consequences. When Abraham, in the parable, reminds the unhappy, once rich, man: "Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented" — it might easily appear as if the comfort and the torment were the result, not so much of difference of character as of difference of condition in this life, between the two. Demas made a like fatal choice, and left behind him a like awful warning, when he forsook St. Paul, and so at the same time renounced all the blessings of the Gospel of Christ, "having loved this present world."

So far, then, though there may be room for difference of opinion as to the practical application of the doctrine, there is nothing obscure or difficult to understand in the statement itself. A sacrifice more or less painful is required, and an ample compensation is promised. This is an idea with which we are made familiar by every day's experience. This sacrifice of the present to the future is the condition of success in all the affairs of life. None of the great prizes of society which are open to competition can be won without labour and self-denial; and it is easy and natural to transfer this maxim from the secular to the spiritual order of things. It proved, indeed, only too easy and too natural, and thus became the occasion of pernicious error. But St. Mark, in the words of our text, presents an entirely different view of the subject. The recompense to be earned is not to be reserved for a future state, either for the glory of the heavenly kingdom or for a millennium on earth, but shall be received by every one who entitles himself to it "now in this time;" *now*, that is, immediately, at once; "in *this* time," before the advent of a new dispensation. The prospect of the future, indeed, is not shut out; it exceeds all that eye hath seen, or ear heard, or that it hath entered into the heart of man to desire or conceive. But it is not the whole; it is something superadded to the present recompense of reward; "a hundredfold now in this time," "and in the world to come eternal life."

But it cannot be denied that with this addition the words sound very strangely, and we have to consider, first, their meaning, and, then, their truth.

Heathen adversaries of the Gospel affected to understand them literally, as containing a promise that the very self-same things which were left or given up were to be restored with a hundred-fold increase, like seed committed to the ground; much in the same way that "the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning." And perceiving that such a multiplication, though conceivable with regard to such things as lands and houses, was impossible when applied to persons, such as fathers and mothers, many treated the whole as an absurd extravagance. Their prejudices did not permit them to observe that there was nothing ridiculous in the case but their own misinterpretation, and that their objection only proved that they had grossly mistaken our Lord's meaning. We can see clearly enough that the literal sense is inconsistent with the evidence of facts, with the first principles of Christ's religion, and with the whole context.

In the primitive Church, while it was still a small society, many followed our Lord's counsel of perfection. For a time, indeed, it became a general rule that "as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold and laid them down at the apostles' feet;" and Barnabas is specially named among those who did so. He, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. It is true we have no reason to believe that this was done with a view to any future advantage, or from any personal motive; for the immediate object was that "distribution might be made unto every man according as he had need." But this could not prevent it from falling

within the scope of Christ's promise. It was not the less a compliance with his will, a sacrifice made to Him, in his cause. Yet we know that neither Barnabas, nor any of those who so left or gave up their possessions for Christ's sake, received any earthly reward. He and they only exchanged plenty for poverty, ease and comfort for toil and hardship, safety for danger, in many cases a peaceful life for a violent and cruel death. This was so notorious that St. Paul could say, speaking from a worldly point of view, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

And then, again, if such had been indeed our Lord's teaching on this occasion, it would have been directly at variance with the whole tenor of his Gospel and the first principles of his religion. There would then have been no reason why the young inquirer should have gone away grieved because he had great possessions. He would have found comfort in the thought that if he parted with them for a time, it would be only to receive them again with superabundant increase. This was a prospect which would have offered the strongest attraction to the covetous, the ambitious, the worldly-minded, to all who were most utterly strangers to the life and character of Christ, to those of whom St. Paul could not speak without weeping, while he describes them as "enemies of the cross of Christ," who "*mind*," that is, set their affections on, "earthly things." We might be very sure even without any minute examination of our Lord's language that, whatever else was his meaning, it would not be this: that He could not have in-

tended to represent his religion as a kind of commercial speculation, grounded on a balance of profit and loss. He who bade his disciples "beware of covetousness," could not have designed to inflame the lust of gain by holding it out as the supreme object of desire and as the fittest reward for those who devoted themselves to his service.

Nor can it truly be said that there is not enough in the whole passage, taken by itself, to guard an attentive and unprejudiced hearer or reader against such a mistake. The promise has a condition attached to it, which, according to the literal interpretation, is either unintelligible or deprives it of all its value. The good things promised are to be accompanied "*with persecutions.*" But who could imagine that those who are persecuted for their profession of religion will at the same time be enriched by it? And if this was possible, who would covet a benefit which was to be embittered by all the evils which make life wretched? We just now heard St. Paul's language, and we know what was his experience: how little encouraging to any who looked for the enjoyment of worldly happiness in a time of persecution!

But still it may be said, and it has been argued by some, that this is a distinction without a difference: that with regard to the principle of men's conduct, that which determines the real quality of their actions, it matters nothing whether the reward which they are led to expect is to be paid on this or on the other side the grave: that in both cases alike they do but receive the wages of the hireling, and in all that they do to earn it are governed by motives of

selfish interest, which, however they may disguise it from themselves, they have in common with the vilest of men. Here is a point which it is very important to understand aright; for the question touches the foundations of all religion and morality. We must bear in mind the terms of our Lord's promise. It was not made simply to those who should leave the things which were dearest to them upon earth, but on the farther condition that they should do so for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. And so we observe that, for the attainment of this promise, a disposition was required as different as possible from that with which men enter upon a dry calculation of profit and loss, weighing the present against the future in things of the same kind. Here that which is to be left belongs to a totally different order of things from that which is to be gained. On the one side is an object of desire; on the other side is an object of love.

Let us take an example or two to illustrate the difference between these two things. Demas forsook St. Paul, having, as the Apostle says, "loved this present world." But what kind of love was that? Does any one suppose that he loved it for its own sake, or any farther than he was able to turn it to account for his own benefit? And therefore the proper name for his affection was not *love*, but *covetousness*. Then mark the contrast between Demas and the Apostle whom he forsook. Of himself St. Paul could say: "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of

all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ." That was St. Paul's *covetousness*. That was the summit of his ambition. To him Christ was all in all. In Him he found enough to satisfy all the desires of his heart. But will any one say that he and Demas were at bottom equally selfish, only that as their inclinations differed, the one highly prizing that which the other made light of, their selfishness shewed itself in different ways? But this is just the test, and the only sure test, of every one's character. If you want to know what a man is, you must learn what are his inclinations, what are the things his mind is set upon, in a word, what he loves. The best man is he who loves the best things most, not he who—if that were possible—cares nothing about any, to whom therefore none can yield pleasure. The strongest love is the least selfish. The stronger it is, the more is self absorbed, buried, lost, in the beloved object. And this is a state of the highest happiness to all who are capable of tasting its sweetness. But whether they are or not is just that which will determine the place they are to occupy—on the right hand or the left, at the day of Judgment. I have reminded you of St. Paul. But the most perfect example of self-denial is that of Jesus Himself; and its fullest display that which He made when, "for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame." And remember that the thing which was set before Him, and which He kept so steadily in view that neither the pain nor the shame of the cross could for a moment ruffle the serenity of his soul, this "joy" was not the glory which He had

with the Father before the world was, and which He laid aside to take upon Him the form of a servant. It was the joy of his finished work, of perfect obedience to his Father's will for us men and for our salvation. Was that a selfish joy? Let us be assured that the more we partake of it the more will that mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus; and that to be utterly strangers to it must shut us out from his kingdom and glory.

But there still remain some points which need to be explained before this text can be fully understood or rightly applied.

Many, taking the word "left" in a very narrow literal sense, think that the declaration only concerns the least numerous class of mankind, the possessors of houses and lands; and these again persuade themselves that it relates to times so long past, and to a state of things so different from that in which we live, that it no longer admits of any practical application. It may help to guard us from dangerous mistakes, and prevent us from treating this part of our Lord's teaching as a dead letter, if we observe that, strange as it may sound, there is a sense in which it is a most certain truth that a man may leave that which he keeps and keep that which he leaves. And there can be no doubt that this is the sense in which our Lord meant to be understood. For it is clear that He is speaking, not of a mere outward act, but of the disposition from which it proceeds. To leave all would be of no avail, even though it were outwardly to follow Christ, if it was done, not from true love to Him, but for the sake of the temporal advantages which He was expected to

dispense by those who, as was probably the case with Judas, believed that He came to set up an earthly kingdom. On the other hand, a man may in the same sense be properly said to *leave* that which he keeps in his own hands, if he no longer treats it as his own, but holds it as a trust, which he administers as God's steward for the good of his brethren. This truth was overlooked by many excellent persons, who felt their earthly possessions an encumbrance to their spiritual progress, and therefore believed that it was their duty to cast them away, forgetting that the burden was one which had been laid upon them by the providence of their heavenly Father, who was also able to supply them with strength sufficient to bear it; one therefore which they could not shift from themselves without presumption and unfaithfulness. And so let none imagine that there is less room for the practical application of this truth now than when it was first uttered. There may be nothing in our circumstances to require, or to justify, the abandonment of the station in which God has placed us, with whatever cares and perils may belong to it; but there will be never-ceasing occasions to shew the bent of our mind and will, whether the things to which we cling are such as weigh us down to earth or such as lift us heavenward. Few have an opportunity of making what appear to men great sacrifices, and that very rarely. But all are constantly called upon to make what to men seem small ones, but which in the sight of God may be very great, and all the greater because either entirely overlooked by men or attracting little of their admiration and applause.

Every day, and in all conditions of life, the question is continually arising: "Is this gain, this pleasure, this pursuit, this engagement, this recreation, conformable to the mind and law of Christ? And if not, are we ready to leave it, to put it from us, for his sake?" Then, you have Christ's word for it, you shall receive a hundred-fold.

But a hundred-fold of what? Not, as we have seen, of the things themselves, either now or at any future time; but a hundred-fold of that which gives them all their value, and without which they are utterly worthless; and that is the comfort and satisfaction which they yield. But this depends not on anything they are in themselves, but on the possessor's capacity of enjoying them. They are like a shred of paper, which may represent an immense sum of money, but is not worth picking up from the ground unless there be some one forthcoming to make good the promise it contains. What is the value of a rich inheritance when it falls in to a man on his death-bed? How gladly would he resign the whole for a medicine which would ease his pain or cheer him with the faintest hope of recovery! And we must remember that the question we have to decide is not simply whether we shall leave these things for Christ and his Gospel, but also whether we shall leave Christ and his Gospel for them. Whenever they are purchased at that price, they entirely change their character. They not only cease to yield any solid joy, but they become sources of unending bitterness.

And so we may see in what sense we are called upon to *leave*, not only things, but persons, who are

the objects of our tenderest natural affections: not only houses and lands, but brethren and sisters, father and mother, wife and children. It is not that we are to sever, if we could, the ties which bind us to them, and which are knit by God himself. It is not that we are to estrange ourselves from them, or to love them less dearly than before. But it is that we are to exchange a lower for a higher kind of love; an instinct which we share with some of the lower creatures for the affection of a reasonable soul, which will be growing ever purer and stronger as we learn more and more to view them in the light of our common relation to Christ, not only as fellow-passengers on our earthly pilgrimage, but as fellow-heirs of a blessed immortality.

Yes, my brethren, only let Christ take up his rightful place, that is the foremost, in our hearts, and all things will fall into their proper order. Then we shall be ready to join in the Psalmist's prayer: "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness." Then we shall sympathize with his experience when he says, "The law of thy mouth is dearer unto me than thousands of gold and silver." Then we shall enter into the fulness of his meaning when he declares of the Lord's judgments or commandments, that "in keeping of them there is"—mark, not *for* keeping them, but *in* keeping of them, and not there *shall* be, but there *is*, now, in this time—"great reward." And so when He, who in the hour of his sharpest anguish looked down upon his mother with unutterable love, said, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and

his own life also, he cannot be my disciple," we shall not complain of that as a hard saying, to be interpreted as an injunction of unnatural hatred, any more than as an exhortation to suicide; but as a gracious warning, in every time of trial, when we are drawn different ways by conflicting motives, to choose that good part which shall not be taken away from us.

THE BOOK OF RUTH.

IV.—IN THE THRESHING-FLOOR.

Chapter iii. verses 1-18.

IT is somewhat difficult to handle the main incident of this Chapter. Not that there is any, even the faintest, touch of impurity in the Story itself. If, as we read it, we think of Ruth as guilty of an immodest boldness, or of Boaz as in any way lacking in manly honour and virtue, that can only be because we judge these ancient worthies by the standard of modern conventions, or because we ourselves are wanting in true delicacy and refinement. If we would do them justice, it is above all things requisite that we should carry our thoughts back through more than thirty centuries, and bear in mind the patriarchal simplicity of the manners and customs of that antique world in which they lived. An age in which the wealthy owner of a large and fertile estate would himself winnow barley, and sleep among the heaps of winnowed corn in an open threshing-floor, is, obviously, an age as different from this as it is remote from it. And Ruth, in creeping softly