

*Verse 50. Thy faith hath saved thee.*—To hold a correct dogmatic definition of “saving faith” has been—I suppose is still—considered the most important criterion of a standing or a falling Church. Yet I defy anybody to put into dogmatic shape this woman’s “saving faith.” It put itself into shape, but it was the shape of feeling and of action; of love which braved all to express itself in outward acts of reverence and affection; of sorrow which found more joy in bitter weeping than ever in laughter and in song; of personal devotion which recked nothing of any one else’s opinion, if only it might gain one kind word from Him. Whoever they be whose faith makes them thus to feel and thus to act towards the Blessed One, they need not fear but that theirs is “saving faith.”

RAYNER WINTERBOTHAM.

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THE RICH YOUNG RULER.

ST. MATTHEW XIX. 21.

*To the Editor of the Expositor.*

SOME time since I chanced to attend a Service of which, as I picked up at it a new expository idea—to me at least it was quite new—it has struck me that both you and your readers might like to have a brief report. While sauntering through one of our large provincial towns, with an evening on my hands, I came on a gate opening into a garden in which there stood a large room lit up (apparently) for worship. Seeing two poor but respectable looking old men turn in at the gate, I asked them whether service was going on, and whether it was open to the public. “Yes,” they said, and would I go in; I should be quite welcome. Accordingly I followed them into a well-furnished room, in which some thirty or forty persons were assembled, most of whom were evidently of a higher social class than the two old men who conducted me. There was a look of intelligence about this small congregation, and an air of quiet devotion, which gave promise of a pleasant hour. My conductors were obviously quite at home—more

than one kind face smiled recognition and welcome at them as they passed up the room. They seated themselves in the centre, right in front of the Preacher's desk, having first found me a comfortable seat behind them, and supplied me with a Bible and the hymn-book in use. In a few moments the Preacher came in—a man of about forty, with nothing remarkable in his appearance except that he was somewhat carelessly and unclerically attired. But when he rose to speak it was not difficult to infer, from the tones of his voice, the play of his features, and his whole bearing, that he had not read either books or men wholly in vain. The omen I had drawn from the aspect of the congregation was fulfilled. We *had* a pleasant, and in some ways an impressive, hour. The Preacher read for lesson the eighteenth Chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke, and followed the lesson with a simple and earnest prayer, so spiritual and so catholic in its tone, that I doubt whether even "our incomparable Liturgy" would have moved me more. Then we sang a hymn, as we had also done at the opening of the service, accompanied, to my great delight, by the crisp tones of a good Broadwood piano, instead of by the usual drone of a harmonium. And then the Preacher rose and delivered a sermon, the substance of which I will try to convey. He took for his text St. Mathew xix. 21, and spoke extemporaneously for about half an hour, maintaining a conversational tone for the most part, but now and then rising into more impassioned moods of speech. And this, as nearly as I can recall it, was what he said.

I took this text at our last week-evening Service, meaning quite honestly to make it my theme; but, like many before me, I was drawn away from my theme by the singular attractions of the Young Ruler whom Jesus loved. Ever since this story was written men have been charmed, fascinated, by it: they have been drawn to this amiable Young Man by the beauty of his character, by its yet brighter promise. They have felt, as probably *we* have felt, that had he been true to himself, had he followed the better impulses of his nature, had he left "all" to follow Christ, he might have shone the bright particular star of the apostolic company, blending the ardour of a St. Paul with the deep and tranquil tenderness of a St. John.

But not only are men drawn to him by the loveliness and the promise of his character ; they are also attracted by the uncertainty which hangs over his fate. From the beginning the question has been asked, " Was this man whom Jesus loved saved by his love ? or was he lost, after all, and in that love's despite ? " And from the beginning this question has been differently answered, according to the different temperaments of those who have taken it upon themselves to reply to it. Those who are of a hard and austere temper have said, " He was lost," dwelling unduly on the fact that " he *went away*." Others, of a gentler nature, dwelling unduly perhaps on the fact that " he went away *sorrowful*," have said, " He was surely saved." But these answers have little value. Different, opposed as they are, they are vitiated by a common fault : they spring from natural impulse, from personal bias ; they are not based on arguments fairly drawn from the facts of the sacred narrative.

Now I tried to supply this lack of evidence last week, by reminding you of the Conversation which fell out between our Lord and his disciples as the Young Ruler left the Presence he had so eagerly sought. In that Conversation we found three sayings, each of which at least lends itself to the gentler alternative of this Young Man's fate. Our Lord said, first : " How hard is it for the rich, for those who trust in riches, how almost impossible for them, to enter into the kingdom of God ! " and then, " If impossible with men, it is not impossible with God, since all things are possible to Him : " and then, " Many first shall be last ; and many last, first. "

First, lest his disciples should judge the Young Man harshly, He began to make excuse for him who had made no excuse for himself—reminding them how much he had to leave, how hard it was for a young man, softly and tenderly reared, to abandon leisure, books, and the ample comforts of an opulent home, for a life of utter penury, self-mortification, and dependence.

Then, for his own consolation—for if the Young Ruler was sorry to go away, we may be very sure that the Lord Jesus was still more sorry to see him go—He falls back on the thought that, if this noble choice, this losing exchange, this gainful loss, be hard to impossibility with men, it is very possible that God may lead or drive them to it. *He* may take away what the Young Ruler cannot give up, and so compel him, by deep need and misery, into the kingdom he could not enter of his own choice.

And then, when He found that even the apostles were *trusting* in riches though they had them not, believing it to be easier for rich than for poor men to be saved, boasting of what they themselves had “left,” asking what they were to have therefor, and looking for visible and temporal rewards; when they carried themselves as though they had lost much and gained little by following Him, the Lord Jesus warned them: “You indeed stand first in my kingdom now; but, if you cherish this vulgar and covetous temper, you may only too easily put yourselves last; and this Young Ruler, for whom you care so little and I so much, though he now stand last, yet, if he cherish the pure aspiring temper which brought him to me, may and will come to stand among the first.”

These were the arguments I adduced in behalf of a favourable verdict on this Young Man. They are all drawn from the narrative itself. They still seem to me sufficiently strong to carry with ease the conclusion we imposed upon them. But there is an argument in favour of that verdict which I did not give you last week, and that for the best reason in the world—I had not got it to give. Only this evening, as I walked here, intending to speak to you on another theme, I have made one of those slight discoveries which at times, even more than matters of weightier import, feelingly persuade every sensible man what a fool he is; how apt to overlook obvious facts, even when they stare him full in the face and he is anxiously looking for them; how prone to travel in ancient time-worn ruts of thought, and to tread in the steps of those who have gone before him, without once asking whether there is no more simple and direct path to the goal.

Now as the Preacher thus took himself to task a smile of sympathy and amusement ran through the Congregation, and I could see that most of them settled into an attitude of still more earnest attention. I fancy they knew their man, and felt that something specially good was coming. Unmoved apparently by this little stir of interest, the Preacher went on:—

If any of you care to share that wholesome conviction with me—and it will be creditable to you if you do, since it is one to which only *sensible* persons are open; if you care to feel anew how foolish and blind we are even when we are most sincerely trying to see, you may easily do it. You have only to answer one or two quite simple questions. I do not doubt you have often read this story, read it in each of the three Evangelists who record it, and

read it with the question in your minds, "Was this Young Man saved or was he lost?" Well, to what conclusion have you come, and on what grounds? How does your mind stand affected toward him now? Do you think *that* a natural and reasonable question to ask about him? Do you think it ever should have been raised? Or have you discovered any fact, *in the narrative itself*, which conclusively settles that question, and makes you ashamed of ever having mooted it? If you have not, you need no further proof that you have never seen this Young Man truly and accurately; that you, too, have been foolish and blind even when you were most sincerely trying to see. For there *is* a fact in the inspired narrative itself, and a fact which it requires no learning and no critical acumen to discover, which, as I believe you will acknowledge, settles that question conclusively, and ought to have saved us from ever puzzling our brains over it.

Here the Preacher paused, and all the people began to turn over the leaves of their Bibles, which they evidently knew how to handle, and to search for this recondite yet obvious fact.

If you would see what it is, fix your attention on this point. The Young Ruler asked *two* questions of Christ, not one only; and my text is an answer to the *second* question, not the first. Blending the reports of the three Evangelists, the story runs thus. A young man—amiable, learned, pure—came to Jesus, asking, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied: "You know the commandments; *keep* them: *they* are the way to life." The Young Man, modest yet sincere, is able to say that he *has* kept them. And it is at this point of the

story we are told that "Jesus, looking on him, loved him." Loved him for what? For his purity, for his obedience, for his discontent with a mere observance of carnal commandments, for the moral sweetness and wholesomeness of his nature. Christ's love for him was a virtual acknowledgment of, as it was an instinctive response to, the fact, that the Ruler was, and long had been, in that state of free spiritual obedience to the will of God, and therefore in that faith in the Divine Righteousness and Love which, then as now, was the highway of salvation.

But, now, the Young Man has a second question to ask. He is not content with merely saving his soul alive; he wants to be "perfect and entire, lacking nothing:" he wants to stand before God without spot, or blemish, or any such thing. And he asks, "What lack I yet?" And to *this* question our Lord replies: "*If thou wilt be perfect, sell all thou hast; leave all you love; take up the cross, and come, follow me.*" The question, you perceive, *is not one of salvation at all, but one of perfection.* The Young Man does not ask, "How may I escape hell?" or even, "How may I get into heaven?" but, "How may I become heavenly while I am here upon the earth?" The question of salvation has been settled already; the question now is simply, *How shall a young man, who has been saved, become perfect in righteousness?* And, therefore, we need entertain no doubt of this Young Man's fate. If we raise the question, Was he saved? was he lost? we simply prove that we are of those who have eyes but see not, ears but do not understand.

Here there was a general sigh of relief, and an audible murmur of satisfaction filled the room. I confess I joined in it; for, led on by

the earnestness of the speaker, I had got to be deeply interested in that Young Man's fate : and in the sentences I have italicized the Preacher had given me a new and suggestive idea.

To be saved is one thing, my friends ; to become perfect is another, and a very different thing. If none but the perfect were to be saved, what chance would there be for *us* ?

"Isn't *that* good?" said one of the two old men who sat before me, quite audibly. "*Ah*," replied the other, twisting his wrinkled and weatherbeaten face into a queer smile of satisfaction, and throwing a whole world of meaning into that single exclamation.

And, for aught that I can see, we need have no more doubt of this pure and gentle Young Man's salvation than of our own : and certainly we need have no doubt of *that*, if at least we care to be saved ; for if we care to be saved, how much more must the good God care to save us ?

And here, as the Preacher asked that simple pathetic question with much animation and earnestness, the very simplicity of it seemed to carry it deep into the hearts of the old men before me. They looked at each other with tears in their eyes, their hard stiff features working with pleasurable and affectionate emotion, too moved even to speak to each other, though each seemed to enjoy the thought the more because he felt that the other was enjoying it too.

Much more might be said about this fair and noble-spirited young man, and many more arguments adduced, if they were not unnecessary and impertinent, for the good hope we entertain for him. But I really must not take this text a second time, and say nothing on the theme it places before us. For that theme is a very momentous one, both in speculation and in practice. *What is the way of perfection ?* Is it to sell all we have, to leave all we love, to adopt a celibate and ascetic life, to abandon the duties, affections, charities of the home, to devote ourselves to a



course of hardship, penury, self-mortification, self-renunciation, and self-sacrifice? When our Lord says, "*If thou wilt be perfect, give all you have to the poor, take up the cross, and follow me,*" is He laying down the *sole* rule of perfection? Does He give the ideal, or the only true ideal, or even the purest and loftiest ideal, of human life? Many of the greatest saints the world has seen, many of the most fervent and successful preachers of righteousness, have both answered that question in the affirmative and acted on their answer to it. Many good men and women cleave to that ideal, and live by it, to this day. And much as we may deplore the errors, speculative and practical, commonly associated with that ideal, are we quite sure that the ideal itself is an erroneous one? In the more tender and devout moods of the soul, have *we* never thought, never said within ourselves, "If I were wise enough and strong enough to leave, to relinquish, all I most love, to give up all thought of worldly gain and domestic happiness, to devote my whole time, energies, affections, to the service of God and man, my life would be far more pure, and lofty, and perfect than it is. I should be a better man, nearer God, nearer heaven."

If *we* have not known, or have not cherished, this impulse, there are myriads of meditative and tender souls around us to whom it constantly recurs, and who reproach themselves keenly if they do not yield to it. So that the question, you see, is of grave practical importance. We are bound to consider it, bound to ask, "Is *this* the true ideal of life, or is it only an adaptation of that ideal to the special needs and capacities of this man or that?" And before we

assume it to be the sole, or even a complete, ideal, we should remember that our Lord did not demand of every man, nor indeed of most, what He demanded of the Young Ruler; nor did He Himself act on the rule which many of his followers have found in these words. Lazarus of Bethany was a well-to-do, if not a wealthy, man. Yet Jesus did not bid him abandon his pleasant home, his loving sisters, his ancestral fields, to embrace a life of constant hardship and poverty. And though our Lord Himself was poor, so poor that at times He had not where to lay his head, He was not ascetic. He was to be found at tables where there was pleasant company and sumptuous fare. He would even eat and drink with sinners—and many sinners are more pleasant people, at least to dine with, than some saints. Nay, He would even eat and drink with Pharisees, although even as He ate their bread and drank their wine they were plotting against Him, or looked with contempt and suspicion on his grace to sinners, doubting whether He were not a sinner Himself. Men never mistook Him for a monk or a hermit, but they did call Him “Glutton” and “Winebibber.” There is a clear and obvious contrast between the ideal embodied in John the Baptist and that incarnated in *the man* Christ Jesus. And the Man is our example, not the Hermit.

We must not take my text, then, as setting forth the sole, or even a complete, ideal of human life. The true ideal is to be found only in Jesus Christ the Righteous. We must rather take it as setting forth a modification, a limitation of that ideal suited to the conditions, capacities, aspirations of the Young Ruler.

Whether or not it be suited to us must be determined by us, and by the Spirit of God in us. But, for the most part, we are not called to *seek* hardships, to impose sacrifices on ourselves, to choose for ourselves a difficult and perilous path and to insist on taking it. Any man who really endeavours to lead a righteous life will *find* quite as many hardships in his path as he can well endure, and quite as many sacrifices will be demanded of him as he is able to make. We need not wilfully add to our burdens. We need not shrink from any relief, from any innocent mirth, from any pure affection, from any lawful gain, from any domestic charity or pleasure. But while we take all these, and rejoice in them all, let us bear well in mind that, if Christ does not call us to abandon the world, He does call on us so to detach ourselves from the spirit of the world as that we hold all gain and pleasure subordinate to our convictions of duty, to the obedience and ministry of truth and righteousness. We need not go in quest of hardships and sacrifices; but, if we pursue truth and righteousness and charity as our supreme ends, sacrifice and hardship will not be long in finding us out. The Christian life offers no easy career. Heaven is very high; how can we reach it but by hard climbing? We *must* take up the cross, if we would wear the crown. If we would be *perfect*, we must part with much that we have, leave much that we love, forego much that would be pleasant, not to flesh and blood alone, but also to mind and heart. You need not actually sell all that you have perhaps, but you cannot buy the truth for nothing. You need not "go into the wilderness," but at times you will know what it is to feel

solitary and alone, and even to sigh for a lodge in some vast wilderness. "Locusts and wild honey" need not be your only fare ; but, if you try to be perfect, you will at least know the taste of the bread of affliction, and your tears will sometimes be your only drink. Even so be it, Lord Jesus, if so we may be made partakers of thy righteousness and love !

This is but a poor and brief report of the somewhat remarkable discourse which it was my good hap to hear, though I wrote down all that I could recall of it immediately the Service was over. There was much in it which I could not attempt to report without running too great a risk of spoiling it. And notably two little pictures which the Preacher drew of the Young Ruler before, and after, his interview with Christ. In the first, he pourtrayed the Young Man as giving a dinner to some of his old fellow-students in his refined and luxurious home, surrounded by the books, manuscripts, works of art, musical instruments of divers sorts, &c., with which he occupied and beguiled his hours. He set the young men talking ; and when his companions complimented him on his manifold and great possessions, he described the Ruler as protesting that all these were as nothing to him, that he would willingly give them all up, if only he could thus secure the wisdom and excellence, the perfection, to which he aspired. And, in the second, the Young Man was still more forcibly described as returning, after he had been put to the test and had failed, to the same luxurious apartment, abashed, cut to the very heart, by the discovery of how much all these possessions, of which he had spoken so lightly, were to him, how dependent he was on them, how much of his "goodness" sprang from temperament, from affluent circumstances and happy conditions, and the absence of temptation ; as discovering, moreover, how all the sweetness had gone out of his life and its conditions now that he knew himself as he was, till his "possessions" grew to be intolerable to him, and he was driven by shame and regret and self-contempt to the very life of service and self-abnegation which had seemed impossible to him when Christ had invited him to it. As he depicted these two scenes, the Preacher seemed to have them before his eyes, and to be describing only what he saw. I regret that I can give nothing but these broken and imperfect hints of what I felt at the time to be the most impressive and beautiful part of the discourse.

CARPUS.

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