

THE TEN PIECES OF SILVER.

LUKE xv. 8-10.

IN the three Parables recorded in this Chapter there is so evidently a progress and ascent of thought, they mount so naturally to a climax in their revelation of the redeeming love of God, that if at any point we fail to make that progress out, if we encounter anything in them which wears the aspect of an anticlimax, we are checked, disappointed, perplexed. And yet in the second of these Parables there is at one point an apparent retrocession, where all else implies a forward and upward movement of thought. Every one can see how immense an interval there is between the one sheep lost out of a hundred, and the one son out of two, and that the younger—and in the Bible commonly the dearer—of the two. But where is the connecting link? How should the lost piece of money be dearer to the careful housewife than the lost sheep to the faithful shepherd, who knows and cares for every one of his flock and calleth them each by his name? One out of ten marks a great advance upon one out of a hundred indeed; but would it not be less to lose even ten silver coins than a single sheep—less in value, less in love?

The answer to that question, the solution of the difficulty, is to be found in an Eastern custom, the application of which to the Parable before us all commentators on it have, so far as I know, overlooked. The women of Bethlehem, and of other parts of the Holy Land, still wear a row of coins sewn upon their headdress, and pendant over their brows. And the number of the coins is very commonly *ten*, as I, in common with other travellers, have ascertained by counting. The custom reaches back far beyond the Christian era. In all probability, therefore, it was not simply a piece of silver which was lost out of her purse by the

woman of our Parable, but one of the ten precious coins which formed her most cherished ornament; and this would be a loss even more vividly felt than that of the shepherd when one out of his flock of a hundred went astray.

So that immense as is the advance from both the care of the Shepherd for his sheep, and of the pride of the Woman in the burnished coins which gleamed upon her forehead, to the yearning and pitiful love of the Father for his prodigal and selfbanished son, we can nevertheless find a link between the first and last terms of the climax, and trace an advance even between the grief of the Shepherd over his stray sheep, and that of the Woman over her lost coin. A piece of money in her purse might easily be stolen or spent; but a coin from the headdress could not be so much as touched by any stranger, nor even taken from its wearer by her husband unless she cut it off of her own accord and placed it in his hands. It was safe, sacred, dear. It was a strictly personal possession, and might very well be a heirloom—like “the silvers” of the Swiss women—hallowed by many fond and gracious memories.

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BRIEF NOTICES.

OF making many *commentaries* there is no end,” saith the Preacher, saith every preacher just now, although only from ten to twenty years ago they were so scarce, and, as a rule, of little worth. The fact is, and it is one which calls for recognition, that the publishers are trading on the revived interest in the study of Holy Writ, and striving to turn an honest penny out of it; they are producing *Commentaries* on the New Testament, or the Old Testament, or the whole Bible, just as they are rivalling one another with “Lives of Christ,” mainly as a business speculation, to “meet a want” as they say. *Commentaries* made to