

is only a balance of probabilities. In such cases the inquiry on each point should be carefully kept to its proper subject matter, and the critical question of authorship not influenced by theological considerations, nor the religious question of inspiration by mere literary conclusions; but after each has been fairly examined by its own evidence, an effort must be made to compare their relative degrees of probability, though the result may be that judgment must be suspended and fuller light waited for.

JAS. S. CANDLISH.

### THE PURE WORD IN THE FOUL PLOT.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for man’s wrath worketh not God’s righteousness. Wherefore, clearing off all foulness and rankness of evil, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”—JAMES i. 19–21.

THE synagogue, not the temple, of the Jews was the model on which the primitive Churches were constructed. And in the synagogue the function of teaching was not confined to any one order or caste. Any intelligent and devout man might be called upon, by the ruler of the synagogue, to address an exhortation to the people. And in the primitive Churches any member who had “a gift” might exercise his gift, whether it were native to him or “miraculous,” for the benefit of the congregation. There were teachers who were set apart for the work of the ministry, and no doubt there was an order of service; but this order was very elastic, and lent itself easily to any changes that were deemed beneficial. Teaching was not *limited* to those who were recognised as ministers of the Word. “When ye come together” for worship, says St. Paul to the Corinthians, “every one of you hath a psalm, hath a teaching, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation,” and proceeds to bid them speak in turn, that there may be

no disorder in the Church, and that all things may be done unto edification.

St. James wrote to the Jews of the Dispersion, to men who, though they were Christians, were also Jews; to men, therefore, in whom the habits formed in the synagogue would be familiar and dear. They would feel that they, each one of them, had a right to speak in church; and probably, as men are more apt to think of their rights than of their duties, they did not sufficiently consider that it is worth no man's while to speak unless he has something to say. Probably many of them were too eager to hear their own sweet voices, and too reluctant to listen to other voices than their own. Not improbably, rivalries and contentions grew up among them, the spirit of faction and strife; so that two or three would be speaking at the same time, and the seemingly order of worship was broken with unseemly brawls. All that we know both of the Jews and of the Christians of that time renders it only too likely that there was special need of the exhortation, "*Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.*" Nor are *we* so docile, so meek and teachable, that we can afford to put aside the exhortation as though it had no warning for us.

But the exhortation is introduced by the word "wherefore"—a word which refers us to the previous clause of the letter, or to some phrase in it, for an answer to the question, "*What is it that every man is to be swift to hear?*" It is "the word of truth," as we learn from the previous verse. This word is quick, *i.e.* it is *living* and powerful; and, because it has so great a power of life in it, it is also *life-giving*. It is by this word that we are "begotten," renewed in the spirit of our minds, made alive again from the dead, quickened into a new and higher life. Should we not, then, be eager to hear the word that gave us life, and that can give us "more life and fuller"? If we owe, as

I think we do owe, every access of spiritual energy to a clearer and larger perception of God's will as revealed in His word, should we not very gladly take some pains to enlarge our knowledge of that Word, to acquaint ourselves with those portions of it of which we are still ignorant, and to lay hold with a firmer grasp of the truths we already know?

But if we would be "swift to hear," we must be "slow to speak": so at least St. James implies, and that not without reason. Those whose tongues run fast have but dull ears, and are apt to lose the benefit of even the little to which they listen. If you are talking with a man who is uneasy unless he is speaking himself, he simply lies in wait for any suggestion your words may carry, is for ever breaking in upon you with abrupt utterances which have no true relation to the matter in hand, commenting on what you have said before he comprehends it, flying off at every touch to the very ends of the earth, and wearing out your patience before you have half expressed your thought. He does not want to hear you; you can see that he is not thinking of what you say, even when he is silent, but of what *he* shall say next; he wants you to hear him, although very probably he has nothing worth saying to say. We must all know men—yes, *men*—with whom it is almost impossible to converse. They do not want to be talked *with*, and still less talked *to*; they want to talk. In fine, they are too swift to speak to be swift to hear.

Of this general fact, that he who would be quick to hear must be in no hurry to speak, St. James makes a particular application which may not at once commend itself to our judgment. For as it is the word of truth that he would have us eager to hear, so also, I suppose, it is the same word that he would have us slow to utter.

"But is it not our duty to speak the truth by which we ourselves have been renewed?"

Well, yes, if we are strong enough and wise enough to speak it wisely, and without injury to ourselves or to others. But a man may speak, and yet not be swift or eager to speak. And a wise man will be very sure that he knows before he speaks, and so knows his theme as to be able to teach others. The men to whom St. James wrote were not very wise. A whole new world of truth had been opened to them by the Gospel of Christ; they had to revise and to readjust all their former conceptions of truth and duty. When the same wonderful revelation broke on St. Paul, he, being a wise and even a learned man, retired into Arabia for three years, that he might meditate on it, and see for himself how the Law and the Gospel might be reconciled, how the old truth was carried to perfection in the new. And if other converts to the faith had been equally wise, if they had long pondered the truth as it is in Jesus in their hearts before they proclaimed it with their lips, every one of them would not have been quite so ready with his psalm, or his teaching, or his tongue, or his interpretation. The crude and false doctrines of the early Church—its Judaism, for example, and its Gnosticism—would not have clouded its mind or have split the “one body” into many fragments.

But some one may be saying: “Surely this is a warning for *ministers*, not for us who are laymen. It is *they* who now speak in church; we sit quiet enough.”

Yes, it *is* a warning for ministers; but it is a warning which you need to lay to heart no less than they, and perhaps even more than they. Because some of you, who have long been thoughtful disciples of Christ, are a great deal too slow to speak, you demand that *they* should speak a great deal more and oftener than is good either for them or for you.

But it does not follow that, because you are slow, and too slow, to speak, that you are swift, or so swift as you

should be, to hear. Nor does it follow that, because you utter no audible words in church, that you therefore say nothing. You may sit composed in an attitude of decent or devout attention while the minister of the Church tries to open up some word of truth, and yet all the while you may be saying in your hearts, "How am I to meet that bill?" or "For whom shall I vote? and how will the election go?" or, "I wonder whether I shall meet So-and-so after service?" or, "I wonder how the servants, or the baby, are getting on at home?" or even, "When will the man have done, and let us get away to dinner?" Your lips may frame no words, and yet you may sit talking and commenting in your hearts, criticising what is said, or applying it to your neighbours rather than to yourselves, and so show yourselves slow to hear the word of truth.

So far it is easy to trace the meaning and connexion of St. James's words. But when he goes on to add, "slow to *wrath*," we naturally ask if quick speech is in any way connected with quick anger. And we have hardly asked the question before we see the answer to it. Hasty speech is a sign of a hasty spirit. And in a synagogue, or a church, in which many men are anxious to air their gifts, rivalries and controversies are sure to ensue. One will be angry because his neighbour, no wiser than himself, presumes to teach him, and will soon detect error in the words to which he so impatiently listens. And the hearts of men soon grow hot within them when once these controversies have arisen. It has often been said, indeed, that no controversies are so bitter, or are conducted in language so personal and offensive, as religious controversies. *That* may fairly be doubted. Those who are familiar with the language that has passed between rival scholars in their disputes over the various readings and interpretations of classical texts, or even between rival men

of science, will hesitate before they admit that language more offensive, or a spirit more bitter, can be found anywhere. But it must be confessed that nowhere is bitterness and personality so unseemly as it is in *religious* controversy; and that here, quite as often as elsewhere, those who have been quick to speak have also been quick to wrath.

From this angry discussion of disputed points, which so often springs from our undue haste to speak, St. James dissuades us by an argument as kindly as it is cogent. He tacitly concedes that what we are really concerned for is "the righteousness of God," that what we aim at in our disputes and controversies is that God's righteous will may be taught and done. And this is really a very large and generous concession. For though, when we engage in them, we may care more that truth should prevail than that we should achieve a logical victory, yet who does not know how soon our self-love is enlisted in the service, and we come to care far more for our own triumph than for that of the truth, and to secure that triumph may even sacrifice the very principles for which we profess to contend?

It is very generous and kindly of St. James, then, to admit simply that what we really care for is the righteousness of God. And surely he is speaking plain good sense when he warns us that "*man's wrath worketh not God's righteousness,*" that our anger can in no way contribute to the formation or the cultivation of a righteous character, whether in ourselves or in our neighbours. Anger is itself unrighteous; and how can unrighteousness contribute to righteousness? Love is the very essence and crown of righteousness, for to be right with God and man is to love God with all our heart and our neighbour as ourself; and how can wrath promote love? Anger alienates, wrath excites resentment; and however true the principles for

which we contend may be, if we contend for them in a hot and angry spirit, we may only gain our victory to lose our brother: and that is but a poor barter at the best. But we *may* do even worse than that. While contending for the righteousness of God, we may become unrighteous by giving way to wrath, and cause our brother to lose his righteousness by provoking *him* to wrath. We do become unloving, and therefore unrighteous, when we contend with one another, even for a good cause, in these evil heats of passion.

Such heats of passion in no way contribute to the culture of the soul. They are bad husbandry. They breed only a foul and rank growth which quickly over-runs and impoverishes the soil, and amid which no "herb of grace," no plant of righteousness, will thrive. If we are wise husbandmen, if we aim at that perfection of character which the Apostle holds to be our chief good, we shall clear the soil of these evil growths; we shall cut them down and burn them up, and so make room for the implantation of that word of truth which brings forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

This is the last thought of St. James, or the last with which we have now to deal. As he conceives the case, our heart is like a garden plot, or rather, an orchard plot, in which, if there be some good and fruitful trees, there is a rank undergrowth of weeds and briers. If the whole plot is to become fruitful, nay, if the good plants are not to be choked by the quicker growths of evil, we must root these up, clear the entire soil of them. Instead of hastily and angrily contending for the truth we have received, or boasting how much more and better fruit our little plot yields than that of any of our neighbours, we should rather pluck up the weeds and briers which have taken root in it, and receive with meekness any new truths which may break out upon us from the Word.

Do any ask: "But what does the parable mean? Put it into plain prose."

It means that, if we are wise and seek to please God, we shall cherish a meek and gentle spirit, instead of an angry spirit, quick to take and give offence. It means that, instead of seating ourselves in the chair of authority, and "dealing damnation round" the Church, we shall sit at the feet of Christ, and learn of Him who was meek and lowly of heart. It means that, instead of thrusting ourselves into forms of service for which we are not qualified, we shall be happy to fill well a lowly place. It means that, in lieu of rushing in where angels fear to tread, and being quick and sudden of quarrel with those who differ from our conclusions, we shall be eager to learn of any who can teach us, and give credit to as many as differ from us for a sincerity and a love of truth equal to our own.

S. Cox.

### *CANDIDATES FOR DISCIPLESHIP.*

(LUKE IX. 57-62.)

THE circumstance which called out these sudden protestations of discipleship was simple enough. Wearied with His forenoon of miracle-working, followed by an afternoon of loud speaking from the boat to the crowds on shore in an atmosphere close and thundery, portending the storm that followed, our Lord proposed to cross over to the wild eastern shore of the lake, and so for a time get quiet from the pressure of the busy western shore. It was the collection of parables regarding the kingdom of heaven, which Matthew has grouped in his thirteenth chapter, which our Lord had uttered during the afternoon. He then went for a little into the house, and it was when He came out in the