

were found seated in the boat with netting needles in their hands, "patching," as Luther said, the broken nets.

It is submitted, then, that we may fairly question the common opinion and adopt the more probable sense of *componentes*, *farcientes* or *complicantes*, and imagine the hands in the boat carefully placing in neat folds the net they carried, always in view of the next haul. Any one who knows seaside habits knows the care bestowed by fishermen on this part of their business. And we may perhaps see reason, apart from the ingenious suggestion of the Scholia quoted, for picturing one group of the fishermen, soon to be made fishers of men, as actively engaged in casting their nets, and of the other, carefully arranging in the boat, under the eye of aged wisdom and experience, the instrument which must be kept always ready, as soon as the crisping surface should be broken by flashing fins, to be heaved instantly over the side, and not then only to be got ready, lest, if they were found unprepared, the fishers, whether of fishes or men, should lose a moment of opportunity which might not soon return.

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OPERA FORIS.

MATERIALS FOR THE PREACHER.

X.

JOHN x. 8: *All that came before me are thieves and robbers.*

Some fresh light has been recently thrown upon this extremely difficult word. The difficulty lies partly in the historical reference of the words (to Pharisaic teachers? or false messiahs?), and partly in the fact that even when any such reference can be established, it seems to leave a tinge of harshness in the saying. Two suggestions may be made. One is that the words refer to premature and ex-

ternal efforts made by priests and others to realize the function of a mediator between God and man. The true shepherd comes at the dawn to lead the sheep out to their pasture: at the dawn, not before the dawn. It is a note of the Shepherd's calling that [he comes at the proper moment—as Paul puts it, *when the fulness of the time came*. Nothing about Him partook of the arbitrary, hasty character which attached to those who worked on their own initiative, without waiting for any divine monition. In this light, the words would mean: "As many as have come to the flock, from the beginning, not waiting for the Good Shepherd's time, nor associating themselves with Him, but pressing forwards to rule mankind by the short methods of constraint." ¹

But, while this explains the ἤλθον πρὸ ἐμοῦ, the other phrase, κλέπται καὶ λησταί, suggests that this prematureness was not due to a disinterested miscalculation. One function of Jesus as the true and good Shepherd was to lead believers out of the Jewish fold into the new and wider relations which assured them of His personal care and unselfish love. Thus, especially if, with Mr. H. T. Purchas (in *Johannine Problems and Modern Needs*, pp. 78 f.), we connect chap. x. with chap. ix. (where the blind man is excommunicated by the Jewish authorities and then received by Jesus), we get a fresh and fit interpretation of the words. They mean: "All that came before me, *with the object of drawing people out of the Jewish fold*, are thieves and robbers. This would refer to attempts on the part of Grecian religion and philosophy." Jesus is thus contrasted with all previous

¹ Dr. E. A. Abbott, *Johannine Grammar*, p. 273. An apt historical illustration is to be found in Josephus's account (*Antiq.* xviii. 1, 1) of the revolutionary Judas (Acts v. 37) who started a crusade against the taxation under Quirinius. The historian, who naturally had no love for these zealots, asserts that in the course of the movement "there were very great robberies, and murders of our leading men, done under the pretext of furthering the public welfare, but really in hope of private gain."

“leaders of revolt,” pseudo-messiahs and others, whose influence came to nothing because it was both furtive and self-seeking. Jesus had no doubt been charged by some of the contemporary rabbis with being an unscrupulous sectarian, who was engaged in breaking up the community of God’s people in order to found a new one for private ends. The reply is, that the Christian society is the one legitimate people of God, with Christ as its divinely accredited Head. He is no leader who takes advantage of his dupes, leaving them in the lurch so soon as danger threatens or his own interests are secured.

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A similar thought is expressed in 1 Timothy ii. 5-6 : *For there is one God* (a Mohammedan could go thus far : but the Christian confession is completed by the further testimony), *one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all.* This might serve as a text for a sermon upon the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ. Dr. Theodor Kaftan has just published an address, in the fourth series of the *Biblischen Zeit- und Streitfragen* (1908), which discusses it in this light. All truth, as he points out, is exclusive. If there is one correct method in an inquiry, it is mistaken kindness to talk as though the question of method were still debatable. The man who knows the true road to knowledge in any province, will not amiably let beginners try vain experiments along lines of their own, to the inevitable and sometimes irreparable loss of time and money. He will insist upon attention to the proper method. Dr. Kaftan applies this to the modern attitude towards comparative religion. “Now-a-days, ‘religions’ not religion is the clue : or, to put it otherwise, ‘religion’ not ‘the religion.’ The claim of Christianity to be *the* religion—a claim based on this very fact that there is but *one* mediator between God and man—this claim is

felt by many to be an unjustifiable reflection upon all other religions, and a highly suspicious isolation of the Christian religion." As he proceeds to show, it is in reality neither. One can recognize with perfect sympathy and gratitude the moral and religious aspirations voiced outside Christianity. One can and one must; for Christianity is no partisan religion, nor does it lie outside all historical relations to the other movements of religion among men. But it is exclusive none the less, inasmuch as Jesus Christ for the first time made fellowship between God and man a reality; through the knowledge of God, which he revealed, this fellowship became possible, and through the reign of God, which he incorporated, it is perfected. The pre-eminent and distinctive place of Jesus Christ must be conserved. "To allow him to fall into the background in the religious life of the soul; to let him disappear, as it were, behind God; to seek in this direction the solution of our Christological difficulties—is practically the same as if we were to recognize that the purity and soundness of our bodily condition lay in as anaemic a condition as possible." The *one God* implies *one mediator*.

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