

The Quiet Hour.

The Prodigal Son.

S. S. LESSON—Luke 15: 11-24; May 15, 1904.

GOLDEN TEXT—Come, and let us return unto the Lord.—Hosea 6: 1.

BY REV. C. MACKINNON, B.D., SIDNEY, N.S.

A far country, v. 13. It might have been imperial Rome, or gilded Corinth, or Oriental Antioch, to which the Jewish prodigal turned his wayward feet. But whatever may be the alluring object or the particular vice, the pathway of the sinful wanderer leads away from God. Like a ship, leaving the bay breezes of the tropics and the sunlight of its summer seas, and turning its prow ever northward until the days shorten, and the storms grow fiercer, and the icicles cling about the rigging, and an appalling solitude of frost and snow takes the place of genial civilization, is the soul that leaves behind the warmth of God's love, the kindly fellowship of His children, the peaceful security of His wise government, the golden hopes of His promises, and takes his journey to a country where a cruel selfishness congeals the fountain of human kindness, and exhausted self-indulgence leaves life an awful desolation.

A mighty famine, v. 14. Let those witness who have experienced it! The writer of Ecclesiastes says (ch. 2: 10, 11, Rev. Ver.) "Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them: I withheld not my heart from any joy. . . . Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, . . . and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind." Lord Chesterfield, celebrated for all the elegancies of a courtly, and all the accomplishments of a social life, adds: "I am now at the age of sixty years: I have been as wicked as Solomon: I have not been so wise; but this I know, that all is vanity and vexation of spirit." How sad is Byron's well known confession before his life was half spent:

"My days are in the yellow leaf,
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the anguish, and the grief,
Are mine alone."

And poor Burns' sad lament over the inner consequences of vice:

"I waive the quantum of the sin,
The hazard of concealing;
But oh! it hardens 't within
And petrifies the feeling!"

He came to himself, v. 17. Could there be a more beautiful description of what conversion really is? For sin is madness; and like the light of reason dawning at length in the poor maniac's brain, is the knowledge of the Eternal Father's home and of His forgiving love bursting on the sinner's soul. He sees things clearly; what a fool he has been; what a far country he has travelled to; what empty husks he feeds upon. He has true visions of His Father's home, its light and warmth and abundance. He is sane now. Alas, what need that men should come to themselves! How abject is their despair! Yet over every forsaken and friendless one God yearns with tender solicitude, and offers help and protection and a crown of glory, though many know it not.

He arose, v. 20. Mere knowledge by itself is insufficient. The visions the poor prodigal had of his father's table groaning under its overabundance might fill him with vain regrets; they could not feed him. The vision must end in a decision, the knowledge in an act, if it is to save. So he arose and went to his father. Many people, it is to be

feared, may not be saved, because, although well instructed in matters of faith, they simply will not arise and come to God. No man ever honestly called upon the name of the Lord who was not saved. We can never enter the Father's home through the door of our own righteousness or truth or purity, but the door of divine mercy is always open to admit the guiltiest and the most unworthy.

Bring forth the best robe, v. 22. What a welcome! Neither in the wardrobe nor the larder of the old home was there anything too good for the returned prodigal; nor will God spare the riches of His grace and glory on His penitent son. What a parable! Place in one scale all the wisdom of the sages, all the maxims of the philosophers, all the dreams of the poets, and put in the other this parable, and it outweighs them all in beauty, simplicity, love, truth and hope.

Was dead, and is alive again, v. 24. Behind the choice by which we return to God is His gracious power enlightening our minds, changing our affections, renewing our will. But for this we should be helpless as a dead man.

A Communion Address.

BY REV. PRINCIPAL RAINY, D. D.

This ordinance sets before us Christ as our life. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory. It calls upon us to embrace and receive Him as He is offered to us for that great end. Now, I do not know—how could I know?—how it may be with you severally. There may be various conditions of mind and heart at a communion table. It may be there are some of you to whom God has given special reason to be thankful. He has put a song in your heart, and you can think of nothing else. And others have passed through various kinds of adversity; and what the history of sin or grace in human hearts may be—who shall follow it out?

But I dare say that for some of us this question arises:—"How far is this true that the Lord Jesus Christ is for me, my Life that I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me?"

It is a thing I long to know,
Oft it gives me anxious thought,
Do I love the Lord, or no?
Am I His, or am I not?

What place has Christ in my life?—Christ in His Incarnation, Christ in His Redemption, through whom we have forgiveness and peace with God, and power to be sons? Christ in His words: "If a man love Me he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and he will come unto Me." Christ in His Resurrection: "In whom we also are risen to newness of life." Christ in the great end of all His work: it is that we might be without flaw or blemish.

How far does all this reach for me—Christ, who is our life? Ah, well, brethren, I am not going to make rash answers to grave and great questions. These are questions which it is well for us to face, but which we cannot answer without almighty help and almighty guidance, which are not denied us. But, surely, with a Christian it is well when we have Christ as our Life. What makes our life appear doubtful, questionable, torn with inconsistencies, degraded to something trifling and insignificant? What, but the want of Christ in it? And why should there

be a want of Christ in it? Dear brethren, let us at this time feel that we do need Christ. Let our hearts awake to say before God that we cannot do without Him. Let us be disposed to feel that we do mean to have, to receive, to live by the Lord Jesus Christ. And, so feeling, let us take the testimony of this so-often ordinance that our Lord Jesus gives Himself to us, that He gives Himself to those who need Him, to those who ask Him, to those who are in great want of Him. He gives Himself to the young when life seems full, and to grey hairs, and even to hoary age. I will follow Him. "I will not leave thee nor forsake thee."

Yes, brethren, when He puts into our hands the bread and the wine, when He puts into our hands and commits to us these symbols of Himself, be you sure that, whatever is conflicting and faltering with you, there is no faltering in His meaning. He would be received; and more than that, He tells you that He knows the difficulties you have to give yourself to Him. If there are difficulties about Him, He understands the difficulties. He knows how to find His way in human hearts and lives so as to be the fullness and the strength, the comfort and the life of our souls. He knows it, He understands it. That is His business. That is what He has made to be His great and gracious office, and therefore He is our Saviour.

(After the Service of Bread and Wine.)

Before we part I would leave one word with you. Our Lord loved the Church, and gave Himself for it that He might purify it unto Himself, that it might be holy and without blemish before Him. And as this is the end in regard to the Church, so that is His end in regard to every member of the Church. It is our calling, and it is His gift and benefit procured for us to make us true to the character of the Child of God. "As many as receive Him, to them gave He power to become sons of God, even to those who believe on His name." Now, I cannot regard the teaching of our Lord without being impressed with this, that He has divine thoughts as to what true goodness is, what holiness is, what it is to be saved from sin. His whole teaching is full of the deep sense He had of that matter. He is now full of grace to save us, sinful men, sinful women; and ready access, the readiest, He always gives to fulfil in us and for us that great achievement, that purification, that making of us like His Heavenly Father, like Himself. And, absolutely, Christ will not have one follower, one of his people, that is not made partaker of that character, that is not illuminated and glorified with that true goodness. Our Lord will not have to say in the end that He failed with one of those who was to be alive for ever. He will not have it said—He cannot.

Dear brethren, let us feel how this comes home to us. Our Lord has never said that the goodness which is not external, the goodness which we do secretly in the sight of our Heavenly Father, the goodness which hates sin, the goodness which loves right, the goodness which denies self, the goodness which puts on Christ Jesus and makes no provision for the flesh—He has never said that it is to prove an easy matter for people like you and me. He has spoken to us of the straight gate; He has spoken to us of the narrow way; He has spoken to us of the possibility of people building on sand—and those who build on the sand are those who hear Christ's words and do not do them. Nevertheless, He is able to perfect that which concerneth us; He is able to deliver us from all iniquity, and to make success for us when we