

Family Reading.

THE SYROPHENICIAN WOMAN.

Zion is God's chief joy: yet the whole earth is His loving care. It is a pointed fact, in the economy of grace, that Abraham—our spiritual ancestor, the spiritual ancestor of the whole elect Church—had "the righteousness of faith" before he obtained the covenant-seal of righteousness and of faith: even at that early period, while he was yet uncircumcised, "faith was reckoned, or counted to him for righteousness." i. e., for justification.

But it is a quality of true faith not to be weary or impatient under discipline: it will ever "pray and not faint," entangling the unforgotten supplication of the poor widow, who, after long debarment, at length happily obtained her request.—"Though ignorant of the letter of this holy maxim, the Syrophœnician woman had the spirit of it in her soul: And she who professed not her heart faith in petition in vain. The "children's bread" must not be thrown to "dogs"—animals deemed execrable in the East—terribly severe epithet, and one that would be countenanced from any but inspired lips. Yet—"Truth, Lord!"—is her meek reply—"The Jews are verily God's covenant children, and can best improve the heavenly charities of the Messianic—yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table—"The dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs"—the children are indeed masters, nevertheless the lowest creatures obtain food from God, and so half-enlightened heathen cannot be lower than they—

Our Saviour—during the middle period of his earthly ministry—departing for a brief space from the holy land proper, went to the district of Tyre and Sidon, in their neighborhood, where the inhabitants were heathen. It was denominated Syrophenicia, or the Phenicia included in Syria, and thus distinguished from Lybphenicia, the Lybian Phenician Kingdom of Carthage, conquered by Rome. The early Phenicians had been an extensively colonizing people, so that, by another and wider grouping of the extensive race, they are designated—Maritime—Mediterranean—and Syrian, or Syrophenicia: the latter having been the root or primal strip of this eminently diffusive branch of the human family. They were prominent in arts and in idolatry.

At that period, like-wise, all men who were not Jews were "dogs," a hard saying, yet uttered by Him who was gentle and meek beyond what mere human nature can be. And, therefore, the harder the saying, the more certain that it was truth, not a casual proverb: the harder the saying, the more certain that it was truth, not a casual proverb: the harder the saying, the more certain that it was truth, not a casual proverb: the harder the saying, the more certain that it was truth, not a casual proverb.

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deep and weighty instruction, for the woman, for the twelve, for all believers. The heavenly nutriment for the soul, provided in the house of God, is intended for the "children" of that house primarily and principally, the bounty issuing from God's covenant grace; and hence, as the ordinary rule, divine truth is but feebly known out of the Christian pale, and far from Christian influence. Yet none are debarred a participation, if Providence allow the welcome opportunity. The Church scheme is not one of narrow favoritism, whether capricious or sovereign, but a wide and diffusive plan of mercy, though, like all progressive earthly illumination, it must begin at some one point, from which to enlarge gradually, till it may partake of the benefit. In the meantime, the magnitude of the moral and the heart-healing benefit measures the advantage of the Church estate, and the disadvantage of the want of that light and comfort for the inward man—a disadvantage often of the greatest gloom and torture; yet to both the advantage and the disadvantage, "the Judge of all the earth will do right" in the day of final retribution.

And our little narrative portrays all this two-fold illumination, in a real occurrence, and in the very strongest colors—that of God's supreme goodness to the Church—and that of his sovereign equity to all men, without exception, according to the opportunities allowed them, "according to that they have not." Our Lord's high commendation of the woman's "faith" ranks her with "the [morally new-born] children of God scattered abroad" beyond the limit of the Church, with the "other sheep of his, not of [the covenant] fold"; and her acceptance by the Redeemer as both an earnest and unobscured instance of the Calling of the Gentiles. And yet the best of these "God's children" out of the temple, are not exempted from the untoward epithet resting on the Gentiles at large; and thus resting low to the granting rebuke. The "dogs" are to humble their spirit to a meek acknowledgment of the higher franchise of the "children"—making thus the redemption a blessing. The "children" of the Church must fraternally rejoice, when unrepentant "dogs," aliens of whatever kind, are frankly commended to their imitation, as having "faith" and godliness most lovingly approved by the Judge Himself. Such, in both points, render, to the Mosaic will; and it is not for man, the vessel, to reject or to contemn either branch of the heavenly ordinance. Be the divine ulterior motive for the discrimination what it may—and on that topic we are not to be over-curious—there is a wide difference between being in the Church visible and being out of it: while yet God's regal benignity will never reject those, unavoidably out of the happy fold of Zion, who, according to the best light they can obtain, devoutly cultivate Him and His hallowed will, and His atoning redemption, in their ever earnest and ever obedient hearts.

"MY MOTHER KNOWS BEST." A party of little girls stood talking beneath my window. Some nice plays were on foot; they were going into the woods, and they meant to make unadorned trimmings, and pick berries, and carry luncheons. Oh, it was a fine time they meant to have. "Now," said they to one of the numbers, "Ellen, you run home and ask your mother if you may go." "Tell her we are all going, and you must," Ellen, with her green cape buttoned, skipped across the way, and went into the house opposite. She was gone some time. The little girls kept looking up to the windows very impatiently. At length the door opened, and Ellen came down the steps. She did not seem to be in a hurry to join her companions, and they cried out, "You got leave? You are going, are you?" Ellen shook her head and said that their mother could not let her go. "Oh," cried the children, "it is too bad! Not only is it really unkind in your mother—"Why, I would make her let you go," "Oh, oh," "Why would you do that?" "My mother knows best," was Ellen's answer, and it was a beautiful one. Her lip quivered a very little, for I suppose she wanted to go, and was much disappointed not to get leave; but she did not look angry or pouting, and her voice was very gentle, but very firm, when she said, "My mother knows best."

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