

bit of glass to analyze a ray. As ever of old it shines, rejoicing as a strong man to run a race. And so will Religion. Many old theories about it have been exploded—many false notions dispelled—but Religion has not changed, and will not change. You need not wait to see what Science is going to do. It will do Religion no harm, it will do it nothing but good. It will not pluck a single gem from its diadem; it will not cause its throne to shake; it will not abate a jot of its glory or its power. There are mysteries which will remain mysteries—which Science will never explain and never explain away—but there are also great tangible truths which he who will may grasp and hold—facts and principles, and these will not change though heaven and earth should pass away.

Others again profess to find a reason for not becoming Christians in the nature of our churches or the character of some member or members of the Church. They say, "what do your Christians more than others? We have made bargains with them, sold them goods, taken their notes, and found them no better than other men. They will drive as close a bargain, clutch at any advantage, exact usury, prevaricate and over-reach as much as the veriest worldling in the market. They care nothing for each other's peace or honour, would ruin a man to carry a crotchet through, or gratify a prejudice." And I acknowledge that there is force in that. When I speak to men, and they tell me of the inconsistency of members, I allow that they have a strong point. When they point to the narrowness of the churches, the grim and ghastly rules set up in many of them, and say, see what various hindrances we meet in coming to the mercy-seat." I greatly sympathise with them. But if you will think a moment you will see that the reason is a very foolish and a very shallow one. If men had to join this or that church in order to find Christ, had to observe certain rules and subscribe certain creeds before they could be accepted of God, the reason would be strong, but that is not so. You are invited to Christ, to peace, to God. Not by the way of a church, but by the way of the cross, by the way of a living faith. The Church may be helpful to you though the members are not perfect; it will give you opportunity for work; it will give you scope for doing good—but it is Christ *first*. If a starving man were invited to a meal, do you think he would stop to enquire who would sit at table with him; whether his right hand neighbour would put his knife to his mouth, or his left hand neighbour take a bone in his fingers? No—he would go at once, take the first chair he could find, and be so occupied at first with eating that he would only know that others were eating too, and then would be so filled with gratitude to the host that he would pour out his thanks, nor find a moment to spare for grumbling. Our churches are not perfect. The best of them have very many things they would be better without, and there are many things they might have, but will not take from earth or heaven. Our church members are not perfect; the best of us lack many things; we have failings; we sin and suffer. If members of churches were perfect what would you do with them? How would they be able to live and act out in social life—out in commercial life? What would they do for a living? It is easy enough to walk perfectly within the walls of a convent or monastery—but perfect men and women must be men and women doing the daily, holy work of life, buying and selling, keeping house, and helping to keep going the vast machinery of our national life. I do not desire to find excuse for the evident measures and narrowness of church members. I know how little their practices agree together often—but I *do* want to say that the lives of Christians are no real excuses for men who hold aloof from religion. We do not preach church members, but Christianity—Christ. *He* is perfect. Christ is before the Church; religion is before creeds. Though I am glad to see men joining the Church, I do not preach for that. I am not over-anxious about the length of the Church roll, but I am anxious that men should join themselves to the life of God by faith in Christ, that they should go to the feast and eat and live for ever.

But there are real and substantial reasons why men do not become Christians, and Christ, the great revealer of God to man and man to himself, tells us in this parable what they are. One said—"I have bought a piece of ground, and must needs go and see it." Another—"I have bought a yoke of oxen, and go to prove them." Another—"I have married a wife."

There is the great idea which none here will deny, that Religion is a feast—food for mind and heart—meat and drink that build up for eternity, but between the soul and that stand three great practical hindrances—these: possession, business, pleasure. Christ preaching to His age, to the people there in Judea, said—The Kingdom of God is at hand, but ye will not enter in; you are hindered, effectually prevented—some because of your wealth, some because of your enjoyments. You see how readily the parable may be adopted by us to-day. The times have not changed much, at least the spirit of them is the same. Just look. "I have bought a piece of ground," that is possession, and he is the very ideal of a modern prosperous man. He is one of those men who began low down with a strong and steady determination to rise—began in poverty with the fixed purpose of getting rich. Things have gone well with him. He has watched the market, and whether prices went up or down he profited thereby. He seems to have been born under a lucky planet. He began poor and now is rich. He is cautious and never loses greatly; far-seeing, and lays out his plans with masterly skill; administrative, and executes

admirably. His life for a score of years has been what, in the streets, they call "a splendid success." He buys a big house, furnished with the best of leather and the best of silk, rows of well-bound books that will never be used, many servants that *will* be used. He said often in the old days of hard work and care, "If I can only succeed a little, and put some money by for a rainy day, I will turn Christian and seek to save my soul, and do some good to men." The success has come and the rainy day has not; it is all sunshine; a perpetual summer. The cry of the master rings through the great house; goes piercing its way through closed doors and heavy curtains—"Come to the feast, for all things are now ready," and what is the answer—"I pray thee have me excused; I am rich; well clothed; well housed; well fed; I have a feast of my own, and my friends are all here; I must enjoy it now that I have got it; I must listen awhile to flattery; it is very sweet. It is delightful to hear them say, 'what a splendid house; what a successful man.'" And so the possession stands between him and Christ, him and God, him and heaven. It is a sad thing, but true, that men for the most part allow their hills of silver and gold to divide them from Christ. The Hebrews turned their backs upon the bleak hills of Canaan; grew rich amid the fat lands of Goshen, and straightaway forgot the God of Abraham. David in loneliness and exile hungered and thirsted after God. David prosperous, sunning himself on the leads of his palace hungered and thirsted for the one ewe lamb of a brave and faithful servant. It is the case with men now. Men grow prosperous, and forget the poor; forget the widows and the orphans; the heart that once bled with pity, and thrilled with an eager desire to help, has grown hard and cold as his heaps of gold. The young man went away from Christ because he had possessions, and many do that now; prosperity had hardened the heart; darkened in the mind; given a twist to the moral nature, and he prefers his own carnal feast to the feast which Christ has prepared for the soul.

But it need not be; it ought not to be. Christ never scoffed at riches. He sat down with the rich at *their* feast; He bade them come to *His* feast; He *loved* the young man of great possessions. Wealth is no barrier; prosperity is no reason on God's side. Many a rich man has gone to the feast, and proved himself a saint and a hero in his Master's cause. There are hosts of men—I know a few of them—whom prosperity has never injured; their gratitude has gone on greatening with their success, and their charity has enlarged with every increase of means. The "charities that soothe and heal and bless, are scattered at their feet like flowers." Their heads are circled round with "the primeval virtues that shine as stars," for in their prosperity they have kept the faith; by the grace of God they have possessed their wealth, and never bowed the knee to unworthy mammon.

The second made excuse on the score of *business*: "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them." Christ spoke to his time, and suited His words to the circumstances of the people. Were He to come to Montreal He would convey the same lesson in other forms. Like this, perhaps: "I have taken a shop and started a business. I have embarked all my capital in it. It is a risk, but by industry and a little skill I hope to succeed. So you must hold me excused from all other matters now. I shall have to forget that I am a citizen—that I am a man immortal. If I attend church it will be for decency's sake, and you must not expect me to attend much to psalm or sermon. This business takes up all my time and thought. I must work hard to get credit and customers. I must succeed. The ledger must be my Bible; buying and selling my highest work; making money my highest aim. I know I ought to begin to live for eternity and God, but—but I am going to be too busy for a time, I pray you have me excused." That is one of the saddest things I see in life,—a man devoting himself body and soul, mind and heart to business. No time to think of manhood and its great destiny; no time for moral culture; no time for the tending and nourishing of the virtues and graces—time for nothing but business. I believe in industry. I believe that the daily work of life should be well and faithfully done; it is the performance of a high religious duty,—a very sacramental offering to God when a man is at the toil which has been allotted to his hands or his brain. Religion never opposes itself to even enthusiasm in industry; on the contrary, the more religious a man is, in the highest and best sense, the more earnest he is in the performance of what we call secular duty. The man who devotes all his time and thought and energy is not the most successful man. He may command a speedy prosperity, but he will soon wear out. You will find that those who do most for their own soul and for their fellow men and for their God are the men who do most in the world. They can attend the market, and the meetings for prayer in the church; they are busy in gaining, and active in giving. I believe that no man is better able to work greatly in the world than he who works greatly in the cause of religion. The reason is obvious. If you chain the faculties to one narrow round, and drive them in a circle like a horse is driven, round and round, round and round, you soon grow to be mere machines, with half the native force of manhood gone. A man must give scope and play to his moral and spiritual nature if he is going to be strong. When the spirit breathes the life-giving air of heaven, then all the nature feels the stimulus and strength. No man can be strong and healthy spiritually if he neglects the physical. A bilious attack will often darken all the heaven, nor leave a rift