

Christ's Judgment Respecting Inheritance.

SERMON BY THE LATE REV. F. W. ROBERTSON, BRIGHTON.

"And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him: Man, who made me a judge, or a divider over you? And he said unto them, take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Luke xii. 13-15.

The Son of God was misunderstood and misinterpreted in His day. With this fact we are familiar; but we are not at all familiar with the consideration that it was very natural that He should be so mistaken.

He went about Galilee and Judea proclaiming the downfall of every injustice, the exposure and confutation of every lie. He denounced the lawyers who refused education to the people, in order that they might retain the key of knowledge in their own hands. He reiterated word upon word to the Scribes and Pharisees, who renewed the past, while systematically persecuting every new prophet and every brave man who rose up to vindicate the spirit of the past against the institutions of the past. He spoke parables which bore hard on the man of wealth: that, for instance, of the rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, who fared sumptuously every day, who died, and in hell lifted up his eyes, being in torments—that of the wealthy proprietor who had prospered in the world; who all the while was in the sight of God a fool; who in front of judgment and eternity was found unready.

He stripped the so-called religious party of that day of their respectability, convicted them, to their own astonishment, of hypocrisy, and called them "whited sepulchres." He said God was against them; that Jerusalem's day was come, and that she must fall.

And now consider candidly:—suppose that all this had taken place in this country; that an unknown stranger, with no ordination, with no visible authority, basing his authority upon his truth, and his agreement with the mind of God the Father, had appeared in this England, uttering half the severe things He spoke against the selfishness of wealth, against ecclesiastical authorities, against the clergy, against the popular religious party—suppose that each an one should say that our whole social life is corrupt and false; suppose that, instead of "thou blind Pharisee," the word had been "thou blind Churchman!"

Should we have fallen at the feet of such an one and said, Lo! this is a message from Almighty God, and He who brings it is a Son of God; perhaps what He says Himself, His only Son—God—of God? Or should we not have rather said, This is dangerous teaching, and revolutionary in its tendencies, and He who teaches it is an incendiary—armed, democratical, dangerous fanatic?

That was exactly what they did say of your Redeemer in His day; nor does it seem at all wonderful that they did.

The sober, respectable inhabitants of Jerusalem, very comfortable themselves, and utterly unable to conceive why things should not go on as they had been going on for a hundred years—not smarting from the misery and the moral degradation of the lazars with whom He associated, and under whose burdens his loving spirit groaned—thought it excessively dangerous to risk the subversion of their quiet enjoyment by such outcries. They said, prudent men! "If he is permitted to go on this way, the Romans will come and take away our place and nation." The priests and Pharisees, against whom He had specially spoken, were fiercer still. They felt there was no time to be lost. But still more, His own friends and followers misunderstood Him.

They heard him speak of a Kingdom of justice and righteousness in which every man should receive the due reward of his deeds. They heard Him say that this Kingdom was not far off, but actually among them, hindered only by their sins and dullness from immediate appearance. Men's souls were stirred and agitated. They were ripe for anything, and any spark would have produced explosion. They thought the next call would be to take the matter into their own hands.

Accordingly, on one occasion, St. John and St. James asked permission to call down fire from heaven upon a village of the Samaritans which would not receive their message. On another occasion, on a single figurative mention of a sword, they began to gird themselves for the struggle:—"Lord," said one, "behold here are two swords." Again, as soon as he entered Jerusalem for the last time, the populace heralded His way with shouts, thinking that the long-delayed hour of retribution was come at last. They saw the Conqueror before them who was to vindicate their wrongs. In imagination they already felt their feet upon the necks of their enemies.

And because their hopes were disappointed, and He was not the demagogue they wanted, therefore they turned against Him. Not the Pharisees only, but the people whom He had come to save—the outcast, and the publican, and the slave, and the maid-servant; they whose cause He had so often pleaded, and whose emancipation He had prepared. It was the people who cried, "crucify Him, crucify Him!" This will become intelligible to us, if we can get at the spirit of this passage.

Among those who heard him lay down the laws of the Kingdom of God—justice, fairness, charity—there was one who had been defrauded, as it seems, by his brother of his just share of the patrimony. He thought that the One who stood before him was exactly what he wanted: a redresser of wrong—a champion of the oppressed—a divider and arbitrator between factions—a referee of lawsuits—one who would spend His life in the unerring decision of all misunderstandings. To his astonishment, the Son of Man refused to interfere in his quarrel, or take part in it at all. "Man, who made me a judge or a divider between you?"

We ask attention to two things.

I. The Saviour's refusal to interfere.

II. The source to which he traced the appeal for interference.

I. The Saviour's refusal to interfere.

(1) He implied that it was not His part to interfere.

"Who made me a judge, or a divider?"

It is a common saying that religion has nothing to do with politics, and particularly there is a strong feeling current against all interference with politics by the ministers of religion. This notion rests on a basis which is partly wrong, partly right.

To say that religion has nothing to do with politics is to assert that which is simply false. It were as wise to say that the atmosphere has nothing to do with the principles of architecture. Directly, nothing—indirectly, much. Some kinds of stone are so friable, that though they will last for centuries in a dry climate, they will crumble away in a few years in a damp one. There are some temporalities in which a form of building is indispensable which in another would be unbearable. The shape of doors, windows, apartments, all depend upon the air that is to be admitted or excluded.

Nay, it is for the very sake of procuring a habitable atmosphere within certain limits that architecture exists at all. The atmospheric laws are distinct from the laws of architecture; but there is not an architectural question into which atmospheric considerations do not enter as conditions of the question.

That which the air is to architecture, religion is to politics. It is the vital air of every question. Directly, it determines nothing—indirectly, it contains every problem that can arise. The kingdom's of this world must become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. How, if His Spirit is not to mingle with political and social truths?

Nevertheless, in the popular idea that religion as such must not be mixed with politics, there is a profound truth. Here, for instance, the Saviour will not meddle with the question. He stands aloof, sublime and dignified. It was no part of His to take from the oppressor and give to the oppressed, much less to encourage the oppressed to take from the oppressor himself. It was His part to forbid oppression.

It was a judge's part to decide what oppression was. It was not His office to determine the boundaries of civil right, nor to lay down the rules of the descent of property. Of course there was a spiritual and moral principle involved in this question. But He would not suffer His sublime mission to degenerate into the mere task of deciding casuistry.

He asserted principles of love, unselfishness, order, which would decide all questions; but the questions themselves He would not decide. He would lay down the great political principle, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's;" but He would not determine whether this particular tax was due to Caesar or not.

So, too, He would say, justice, like mercy and truth, is one of the weightier matters of the law; but he would not decide whether in this definite case this or that brother had justice on his side. It was for themselves to determine that, and in that determination lay their responsibility.

And thus religion deals with men, not cases; with hearts, not casuistry.

Christianity determines general principles, out of which, no doubt, the best government would surely spring; but what the best government is it does not determine—whether monarch or a republic, an aristocracy or a democracy.

It lays down a great social law: "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just an equal." But it is not its part to declare how much is just and equal. It has no fixed scale of wages according to which masters must give. That it leaves to each master and each age of society.

It binds up men in a holy brotherhood. But what are the best institutions and surest means for arriving at this brotherhood it has not said. In particular, it has not pronounced whether competition or co-operation will secure it.

And hence it comes to pass that Christianity is the eternal religion, which can never become obsolete. If it set itself to determine the temporary and the local, the justice of this tax, or the exact wrongs of that conventional maxim, it would soon become obsolete; it would be the religion of one century, not of all. As it is, it commits itself to nothing except eternal principles.

It is not sent into this world to establish monarchy, or secure the franchise—to establish socialism, or to frown it into annihilation—but to establish a charity, and a moderation, and a sense of duty, and a love of right which will modify human life according to any circumstances that can possibly arise.

(2.) In this refusal, again, it was implied that His Kingdom was one founded on spiritual disposition, not one of outward law and jurisprudence.

That this lawsuit should have been decided by the brothers themselves, in love, with mutual fairness, would have been much—that it should be determined by authoritative arbitration, was, spiritually speaking, nothing. The right disposition of their hearts, and the right division of their property thence resulting, was Christ's Kingdom. The apportionment of their property by another's division had nothing to do with this Kingdom. Suppose that both were wrong; one oppressive, the other covetous. Then, that the oppressor should become generous, and the covetous liberal, were a great gain. But to take from one selfish brother in order to give to another selfish brother, what spiritual gain would there have been in this? Suppose, again, that the retainer of the inheritance was in the wrong, and that petitioner had justice on his side—that he was a humble, meek man, and his petition only one of right. Well, to take the property from the unjust and give it to Christ's servant, might be, and was the duty of a judge. but it was not Christ's part, nor any gain to the cause of Christ. He does not reward His ser-

vants with inheritances, with lands, houses, gold. The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Christ triumphs by wrongs—seekly borne, even more than by wrongs legally righted. What we call poetical justice is not His Kingdom.

To apply this to the question of the day: The great problem which lies before Europe for solution is, will be this: "Whether the present possessors of the soil have an exclusive right to do what they will with their own, or whether a larger claim may be put by the workman for a share of the profits? Whether Capital has hitherto given to labor its just part, or not? Labor is at present making an appeal, like that of this petitioner, to the Church, to the Bible, to God. "Master, speak unto my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me."

Now in the mere setting of that question to rest, Christianity is not interested. That landlord's should become more liberal, and employers more merciful; that tenants should be more honorable, and workmen more unselfish; that would indeed be a glorious thing—a triumph of Christ's cause; and any arrangement of the inheritance thence resulting would be a real coming of the Kingdom of God. But whether the sale of the country and its capital shall remain the property of the rich, or become more available for the poor, the rich and the poor remaining as selfish before—whether the selfish rich shall be able to keep, or the selfish poor to take, is a matter, religiously speaking, of profound indifference, which of the brothers shall have the inheritance, the monopolist or the covetous? Either—neither—who cares? Fifty years hence what will it matter? But a hundred thousand years hence it will matter whether they settle the question by mutual generosity and forbearance.

I. I remark a third thing, He refused to be the friend of one, because He was the friend of both. He never was the champion of a class, because He was the champion of humanity. We may take for granted that the petitioner was an injured man—one, at all events, who thought him self injured; and Christ had often taught the spirit which would have made his brother right him, but He refused to take his part against his brother, just because he was his brother—Christ's servant, and one of God's family, as well as he, and this was His spirit always. The Pharisees thought to commit Him to a side when they asked Him whether it were lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not. But He would take no side as the Christ; neither the part of the Government against the tax-payers, nor the part of the tax-payers against the Government, now it is a common thing to hear of the rights of man—a glorious and a true saying, but, as commonly used, the expression only means the rights of a section or class of men, and it is very worthy of remark, that in these social quarrels both sides appeal to Christ and to the Bible as the champions of their rights, precisely in the same way in which this man appealed to Him. One class appeals to the Bible, as if it were the arbiter which decrees that the poor shall be humble and the subject submissive; and the other class appeals to the same book triumphantly, as if it were exclusively on their side, its peculiar blessedness consisting in this that it commands the rich to divide the inheritance, and the ruler to impose nothing that is unjust.

In either of these cases Christianity is degraded, and the Bible misused. They are not, as have been made, oh, shame! for centuries, the servile defenders of rank and wealth, nor are the pliant advocates of discontent and rebellion. The Bible takes neither the part of the poor against the rich exclusively, nor that of the rich against the poor; and this because it proclaims a real, deep, true, and not a revolutionary brotherhood.

The brotherhood of which we hear so much is often only a one-sided brotherhood. It demands that the rich shall treat the poor as brothers. It has a right to do so. It is a brave and a just demand; but it forgets that the obligation is mutual; that in spite of his many faults, the rich man is the poor man's brother, and that the poor man is bound to recognize him, and feel for him as a brother.

It requires that every candid allowance shall be made for the vices of the poor classes, in virtue of the circumstances which, so to speak, seem to make such vices inevitable, for their halcyon, their drunkenness, their uncleanness, their in-subordination. Let it enforce that demand; it may and must do it in the name of Christ. He was mercifully and mournfully gentle to those who through terrible temptation and social injustice had sunk, and sunk into misery at least as much as into sin.

But then, let it not be forgotten that some sympathy must be also due on the same score of circumstances to the rich man. Wealth has its temptations, so has power. The vices of the rich are his forgetfulness of responsibility, his indolence, his extravagance, his ignorance of wretchedness. These must be looked upon, not certainly with weak excuses, but with a brother's eye by the poor man, if he will assert a brotherhood. It is not just to attribute all to circumstances in the one case, and nothing in the other. It is not brotherhood to say that the labourer does wrong because he is tempted, and the man of wealth because he is intrinsically bad.

II. The source to which he traced this appeal for division.

Now it is almost certain that the reflection which arose to the lips of Christ is not the one which would have presented itself to us under similar circumstances. We should probably have sneered at the state of the law in which a law-suit could obtain no prompt decision, and injury get no redress; or we should have remarked upon the evils the system of primogeniture, and asked whether it were just that one brother should have all, and the others none; or we might, perhaps, have denounced the injustice of permitting privileged classes at all.

He did nothing of this kind. He did not sneer at the law, nor inveigh against the system, nor denounce the privileged classes. He went deeper; to the very root of the matter. "Take heed and beware of cov-

etousness." It was covetousness which caused the unjust brother to withhold; it was covetousness which made the defrauded brother indignantly complain to a stranger. It is covetousness which is at the bottom of all law-suits, all social grievances, all political factions. So St. James traces the genealogy. "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even from your lusts which reign in your flesh? Covetousness—the covetousness of all; of the oppressed as well as of the oppressor; for the cry "divide" has its root in covetousness just as truly as "I will not." There are no innocent classes; no devils who oppress, and angels who are oppressed. The guilt of a false social state must be equally divided.

We will consider somewhat more deeply this covetousness. In the original the word is a very expressive one. It means the desire of having more—not of having more because there is not enough, but simply a craving after more. More when a man has not enough, more when he has. More, more, ever more. Give, give. Divide, divide.

This craving is not universal. Individuals and whole nations are without it. There are some nations, the condition of whose further civilization is, that the desire of accumulation be increased. They are too indolent or to unambitious to be covetous. Energy is awakened when wants are immediate, pressing, present; but ceases with the gratification.

There are other nations in which the craving is excessive, even to disease. Pre-eminent among these is England. This desire of accumulating is the source of all our greatness, and all our baseness. It is at once our glory and our shame. It is the cause of our commerce, of our navy, of our military triumphs, of our enormous wealth, and our marvellous inventions. And it is the cause of our factions and animosities, of our squalid pauperism, and the worse than heathen degradation of the masses of our population.

That which makes this the more marvellous is, that of all the nations on the earth, none are so incapable of enjoyment as we. God has not given to us that delicate development which He has given to other races. Our sense of harmony is dull and rare, our perception of beauty is not keen.

An English holiday is rude and boisterous; if protracted, it ends in ennui and self-dissatisfaction. We can not enjoy. Work, the law of human nature, is the very need of an English nature. That cold shade of Puritanism which passed over us, sullenly eclipsing all grace and enjoyment, was but the shadow of our own melancholy unenjoying, national character. And yet we go on accumulating as if we could enjoy more by having more. To quit the class in which they are and rise into that above, is the yearly, daily, hourly effort of millions in this land. And this were well if this word "above" implied a reality: if it meant higher intellectually, morally, or even physically. But the truth is, it is only higher fictitiously. The middle classes already have every real enjoyment which the wealthiest can have. The only thing they have not is the ostentation of the means of enjoyment. More would enable them to multiply equipages, houses, books. It could not enable them to enjoy them more.

Thus, then, we have reached the root of the matter. Our national craving is, in the proper meaning of the term, covetousness. Not the desire of enjoying more, but of having more. And if there be a country, a society, a people to whom this warning is specially applicable, that country is England, that society our own, that people are we. "Take heed and beware of covetousness." The true remedy for this covetousness, He then proceeds to give. A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

No observe the distinction between His views and the world's view of humanity. To the question, What is a man worth? the world replies by enumerating what he has. In reply to the same question, the Son of man replies by estimating what he is. Not what he has, but what he is, that through time, and through eternity, is his real and proper life. He declared the presence of the soul. He announced the dignity of the spiritual man; He revealed the being that we are. Not that which is supported by meat and drink, but that whose very life is in truth, integrity, honor, purity "Skin for skin," was the satanic version of this matter; "All that a man hath will he give for his life." "What shall it profit a man," was the Saviour's announcement, "if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" For the oppressed and the defrauded this was the true consolation and compensation—the true consolation. This man had sustained so much loss. Well, how is he consoled? By the thought of retaliation—by the promise of revenge—by the assurance that he shall have what he ought by right to have? Nay, but thus—as it were. Thou hast lost so much, but thyself remains. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

Most assuredly Christianity proclaims laws which will eventually give to each man his rights. I do not deny this. But I say that the hope of these rights is not the message, nor the promise, nor the consolation of Christianity. Rather they consist in the assertion of true life, instead of all other hopes. of the substitution of blessedness which is inward character, for happiness which is outward satisfaction of desire; for the broken hearted, the peace which the world cannot give, for the poor, the life which destitution cannot take away; for the persecuted, the thought that they are the children of their Father which are in Heaven.

A very striking instance of this is found in the consolation offered by St. Paul to slaves. How did he reconcile them to their lot? By promising that Christianity would produce the abolition of the slave trade? No; though this was to be effected by Christianity—but by assuring them that though slaves, they might be truly free—Christ's freedom. "Art thou called, being a slave? Care not for it."

This, too, was the re-compensation offered by Christianity for injuries.

The other brother had the inheritance; and to win the inheritance he had laid upon his soul the guilt of injustice. His advantage was the property. The price he paid for that advantage was a hard heart. The injured brother had no inheritance, but instead he had, or might have had, innocence, and the conscious joy of knowing that he was not the injurer. Herein lay the balance.

Now there is great inconsistency between the complaints and claims that are commonly made on these subjects. There are outcries against the insolence of power and the hard-hearted selfishness of wealth. Only too often these cries have a foundation of justice. Be it remembered that these are precisely the cost at which the advantages, such as they are, are purchased. The price which the man in authority has paid, for power is the temptation to be insolent. He has yielded to the temptation and bought his advantage dear. The price which the rich man pays for his wealth is the temptation to be selfish. They have paid in spirituals for what they have gained in temporals. Now, if you are crying for a share in that wealth, and a participation in that power, you must be content to run the risk of becoming as hard and selfish and overbearing as the man whom you denounce. Blame their sins if you will, or despise their advantages; but do not think that you can covet their advantages, and keep clear of their temptations. God is on the side of the poor, and the persecuted, and the mourners—a light darkness, and a life in death; but the poverty, and the persecution, and the darkness are the condition on which they feel God's presence. They must not expect to have the enjoyment of wealth and the spiritual blessings annexed to poverty at the same time. If you will be rich, you must be content to pay the price of falling into temptation, and a snare, and foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in perdition; and if that price be too high to pay, then you must be content with the quiet valleys of existence, where alone it is well with us: kept out of the inheritance, but having instead, God for your portion—your all-sufficient and everlasting portion—peace, and quietness, and rest with Christ.

Salary of Ministers.

It may be safely said that no profession or even occupation in this country, requiring a like amount of intelligence and acquired knowledge, or exacting an equal expenditure of time and effort, is so ill paid as that of the minister of the gospel. While he is debarr'd by duty, by public opinion and his own conscience from every gainful pursuit outside his profession, and is as absolutely prevented from engaging in efforts for the increase of his income as if a statute made it a criminal offence, he is restricted, in the great majority of instances, to a salary which would be scornfully rejected by men of like abilities in almost any ordinary business calling. And the people who are benefited by his ministrations, to whom he devotes all his time, and talents, and sympathy, take advantage of the fact that he has no choice of occupations as men in every other calling have, but must remain permanently in the one profession to which he has consecrated his life.

If men were magnanimous this could not be so. If they were merely generous, it would be different. If true magnanimity or generous feeling prevailed, men would be everywhere prompt to see not only what is due to the dignity of the ministerial calling and the eminent intellectual and moral force which it requires for its prosecution, but they would recognize its claims upon them by reasons of the peculiar self-abnegation which it demands, and the isolation all other pursuits which it absolutely necessitates. And in response to this noble dedication, self-surrender, and exclusion from all those opportunities which are open to other men, if Christian congregations were magnanimous, or generous, or even just, the hire of their faithful minister would no longer be suffered to remain on the mean and insufficient scale which now rules in so many parts of our land.

There is another consideration. People wrong themselves when they stint the salary of their minister to a scant pittance scarce sufficient for his mere subsistence. Of all professions in the world, that of the minister of the gospel most requires frequent and prolonged intervals of calm withdrawal for contemplation, reflection, and study of the hearts and tempers of himself and other men. If he is insufficiently paid, this is impossible; and his people are the real losers. By just as much as their minister is absorbed in the consideration of the gnawings of his necessities, they are excluded from the benefits of his searchings into the deep things of God and his investigations of the nature and wants of man. It cannot be expected that a minister will be profoundly learned in all the minutie of the diseases which affect the soul of man, or ready with the cures which he may find by a study of the works of the Great Physician if the bulk of his time is diverted from these studies by the carking and grinding cares of his own instant and over-recurring necessities. We are not only mean and ungenerous to our minister, but are "penny wise and pound foolish" toward our families and ourselves if we forget the Divine maxim "The labourer is worthy of his hire." The nobler and more beneficent the labor, the readier should men be to rate and compensate it at its true worth. And certainly there is none nobler or more beneficent than that which is exclusively devoted for life to the service of God and the salvation of souls.—N. Y. Christian Intelligencer.

Augustine being asked what was the first step to heaven, answered, "Humility." "And which is the second step?" "Humility." "And which is the third step?" And again the answer was "Humility."

Guide not the hand of God, nor order the finger of the Almighty unto thy will and pleasure, but sit quiet in the soft showers of His providence.