

NICODEMUS THE SEEKER.

BY REV. THEODORE L. OUTLER.

There are some characters in the Bible of whom we know but little; yet that little makes us desirous to know much more. One of these is Nicodemus the seeker. He is only mentioned by St. John; which makes us think that he was a personal friend of the cautious man "who came to Jesus by night."

His first appearance is as a secret inquirer. He belonged to that self-righteous sect of Pharisees whose habit it was to make a large display of wares in their windows, while the solid stock of graces within were not worth an inventory. He was better than his companions, for he was not too proud to be a learner. He haughted for knowledge, and may have been deeply troubled with a sense of sin. So he "came to Jesus."

Let us not throw stones at the poor Pharisee. We have all done just as cowardly things as he did, and not come out of them as well after all. Nicodemus obeyed the conviction of his conscience, which sent him to Jesus of Nazareth for light. He got it—a whole flood of it in a few moments. He heard the fullest and profoundest discourse on the new birth, and the love of God in redemption, that ever fell on mortal ears.

2. By-and-by we begin to discover the impression which must have been made at that nocturnal interview. Nicodemus makes his second appearance. It is in advance of his first stage. He is growing. He may not be a Christian, but he is growing in courage and manliness. He has a respect for the persecuted Jesus—nay, a sympathy for Him, and is ready to take His part.

3. I have often wished that he had. For the third and last appearance that he makes upon the sacred page is a very attractive one. It makes us love him, and envy him the sacred privilege which he enjoyed. We wish that he had acted more intrepidly; but the deed of love which he wrought still smells sweet after nineteen centuries of time.

He comes to Jesus at nightfall again. He is in company with Joseph, who is a "disciple of Jesus," and they are seeking for the lifeless body of the Crucified. Nicodemus has a fragrant tribute in his hands—a bundle of myrrh and aloes of an hundred pounds in weight. He comes to embalm the pale cold body, and to help lay it in clean linen with the spices. He assists in bearing the sacred treasure to its resting place in Joseph's garden. Ah! Nicodemus! that subtle tender act of thine—a service neglected even by the chosen twelve—smells more fragrantly than the spices thou broughtest!

Not to him who sets out in the morning with resolution and gallantry, but to him who holds out till the evening of life, does the promise apply, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved."

An English writer thus frees his mind concerning that small coin, the three penny piece:—"It is too small to fetch a furch of bacon; it is too weak to bring home a sack of flour; it is no use to pay half a year's rent; so it is solemnly and sacredly set apart to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

ROMANISM A DISTURBING ELEMENT.

The last remark we have to make is one which constantly presses itself on the historian's mind, but which political leaders and writers in our country seem as if they could not possibly realize or lay to heart. It is forced upon our attention in nearly every page of this volume. It is this: that the Catholics, wherever they are numerous and powerful in a Protestant nation, compel, as it were by a law of their being, that nation to treat them with stern repression and control. The very essence and primary doctrine of the Romish Church involve a docting and unachievable pretensions, which are incompatible with the freedom or equal rights of the rest of the community. The experiment has been tried many times and in many countries, and always with the same result. Even in this age it is still the cry of the strong empire of Germany, of the new kingdom of Italy, of the critically-placed and much menaced State of Belgium. Catholicism, if it be true to itself and to its mission, cannot allow State, mixed or secular, to educate its flocks; cannot permit free voting to a Catholic electorate; cannot tolerate that its votaries should prefer the welfare of their country to the interests of their Church—the good of Ireland to the sway of Rome; cannot allow the congregations of the faithful to think or act for themselves in matters of the greatest importance to human progress; cannot, wherever and whenever the opportunity is afforded it, abstain from claiming, working for, and grasping that supremacy and paramount influence and control which it conscientiously believes to be its inalienable and universal due. By the force of circumstances, by the inexorable logic of its claims, it must be the intestine foe or the disturbing element of every State in which it does not bear sway; and from the position which the Romish Church has always held, and recently avowed with more decision and nakedness than usual, of direct enmity to the chief agencies and achievements of modern civilization and progress, it must now stand out in the estimate of all Protestants, patriots, and thinkers, as the *hostis humani generis* (the enemy of the human race) it has been for so many centuries.—London Quarterly.

THE IRISH CHURCH.

The disestablished Church of Ireland has been taking a survey of the resources left to it after its disendowment, and the result is rather discouraging. The commutations of income have not been so general as was expected. The contributions from England are scanty; the large Protestant proprietors of Ireland have shown little sympathy. So the clergy complain; but it must be remembered that their object, in the first instance, was to secure for the Church an endowment as large, or nearly so, as that which they had lost; and however much they may be disappointed at not realizing such a result, few people outside of their own communion expected that they would realize it. The sum they have acquired will form a moderate and modest endowment for the rest, the pastors must trust to the liberality of their flocks, who will, no doubt, desire to retain in their own hands some guarantee for the sound Protestantism of their pastors. In deed, we suspect the true secret of the stunted liberality in the work of endowment is to be found in the suspicion entertained of the Romeward tendency of some who now fill the high places of the Church. When we see such determined opposition offered to the revision of the Liturgy, and so great an attachment to sacerdotal claims and high Ritualistic services on the part of so many Irish churchmen, we cannot wonder that the laity hold their hands, and waited to see what the end would be—resolved, above all things else, that in the face of the Romish superstition existing in the country, they would not endow a spurious imitation of it.—Evangelical Christendom.

WHY MEN DON'T MARRY.

The reasons "why men don't marry" were fully explained in a lecture given the other day by the Rev. Henry Morgan to the Young Men's Christian Association in New York on this question, interesting alike to Christian young women as to Christian young men. The reasons, according to Mr. Morgan, are eight in number, and are as follows:—1st, because they cannot get the woman they want—they look too high for beauty, talent, and perfection, which are beyond their reach; 2nd, because they are cowards—they dare not "face the music," and quail at the lightning flashes of a fair maiden's eye; 3rd, because they are sceptical—they have no faith in a woman's constancy, and believe her weak and frail, 4th, because they are selfish and stingy, and do not think they can support wives; 5th, because women of genius are not always good housekeepers; the rev. gentleman advised his audience not to marry gentises; 6th, because of man's own extravagance—many young men spend their incomes foolishly, and cannot afford to marry; 7th, because they are afraid of divorce, which is made by the law too easy—five love, Mr. Morgan thinks, is poisoning the system of marriage; and 8th, because of woman's extravagance. It costs as much, the lecturer said, to launch a woman on the sea of life in these times as it would to fit out a small schooner. As to sails, cordage, pennants, and streamers, the difference, he thinks, is in favor of the schooner. As for her outfit, she has to be freighted with bonnets, veils, necklaces, earrings, pms, chains, bracelets, rings, ruffles, bows, bands, buttons, loops, folds, p-pings, plaits, silks, muslins, laces, fans, boots, slippers, parasols, collars, cuffs, nets, elignons, waterfalls, "rats," "mecs," frizzles, puffs, curls, pomers, tournures, and Grecian bend. What a cargo, ejaculated Mr. Morgan, was this for such a small vessel! Few are the underwriters who take the risk in such a craft, and few were the men who would marry this "Dolly Varden walking advertisement!" The lecture was heard with deep emotion by a vast concourse of Christian young men, and those parts of it which referred to woman's failings were greeted with wild applause.

Our Young Folks.

FRESH TABLES.

THE FROG AND THE TOAD.

A frog sat beside a clean pond, admiring his reflection in the water. "Dear me! I had no idea before that I was so handsome," said the frog. "What vice plump cheeks I have, and, oh, what an exquisite complexion!"

Happening to take his eyes off the water for a moment, he saw his neighbor, the toad, also looking at himself in it. Whereupon the frog hopped away chuckling. "That ridiculous old toad!" he said to himself. "Did anybody ever hear of anything more absurd?" Who'd turn conceited next, I wonder!"

THE PUFFY AND THE FOX.

A young dog was carrying home a rabbit which he had caught, when an old fox trotted up and said, "That is too heavy for you to carry by yourself, my young friend; let me help you." So the fox slipped his head under the rabbit's belly, and told the young dog to gallop on as fast as he pleased.

"You may say what you like about the fox," said the young dog to his mother when he got home, "but I am sure he is a very obliging fellow. He helped me home with this, and managed so well that the load seemed to get lighter every minute."

"I have no doubt it did," answered his mother; and when the young dog turned round to look at his prize, he found that his friend had eaten its inside out.

TILLY'S LESSON IN GEOLOGY.

Tilly sat on the old doorstep with her two precious pebbles in her hand. They were smooth, and white, and glistening, and came from the shore of the wonderful ocean that Tilly always dreamed about, but never had seen. The professor himself brought the pebbles to Tilly, and when he leaned out at the window, and saw the little maiden holding them against her round red cheeks, he smiled a little all to himself, and came and sat down by her, while Tilly looked shy and glad, but didn't say a word.

"You like them, do you?" said the professor; "well, I'll tell you a story about them."

"Many, many years ago, Tilly, long before either you or I were born, each one of these little pebbles was a rough piece of stone that had crumbled off some great rock, and it fell into the water somewhere, perhaps it was a great ocean, or maybe only a river, but it lay in some place, where the waves washed over it, and rolled it about, and very slowly these waves wore off the corners and sharp edges, and very slowly the rough stone grew smooth. If you had looked at it one May-day, and not seen it again till the next May-day came, I suppose you would hardly have noticed any change, but it was just a little different; every spring it came out smoother than it was the year before, till, after a great while, all the rough part was gone, and what was left was this beautiful round pebble."

Tilly handled over the two she was holding, while the professor talked, and tried to make believe they looked as he said they used to; but it was hard work to think anything so soft as water could have worn off such hard stone.

"And this is another treasure, I suppose," said the professor, picking up a piece of pudding-stone that peeped from the little ruffled pocket of Tilly's apron; "maybe you think this stone was made so; but it was not. Once upon a time, a little pile of gravel stones lay in a hollow all by themselves. There came a great rain, and washed some sticky mud down and covered them all up; it squeezed itself among the little stones, and filled every crevice; then, when the rain was over, the sun shone on it and baked it hard, and afterward it got covered up under sand, and earth, and stones, and there it lay growing harder all the time, till the mud was a dark brown stone itself, when some one was digging there one day, found this brown stone all full of little stones, that look like the raisins in your grandma's Christmas pudding; and that's why they call it a pudding-stone."

Tilly laid down her pebbles, and examined her queer little bit of pudding-stone, and then laid all three in a straight row on the doorstep. They were precious in her eyes, and she was just making up her mind to put them in her cabinet and label them "gems," as she had seen some precious things in the professor's cabinet labelled. But just then the professor went on.

"Here's this rough old doorstep, Tilly, all the scrubbing and scouring in the world could never make it smooth and white like that one over the way. But do you see these queer marks in it—just such marks as the geese make in the mud along the edge of the gutter, only over and over so much larger? See, here is one, and here is another; regular bird tracks."

"Why, so they are," said Tilly, getting down on her knees and laying her chubby fingers in the marks.

"And once upon a time—you see it's quite like a fairy story—once upon a time this old doorstep wasn't a stone at all, but just mud, stiff, grey mud, and a great bird came staking along, and left his footprints in it. And the sun dried the mud, and there the tracks were; and the sand blew over them and covered them up, and at last the grey mud itself turned into stone. It was a great many years about it; and, in the meantime, the big bird and all its relations had utterly disappeared, so that when at last the men dug up the stone and saw the curious tracks, they could only guess how the bird looked that made them. Just, think, Tilly, the bird that walked over this stone may have died long before Adam was made."

That was a long speech for the stone professor, but Tilly seemed to like it. "I wonder if you will?"—Christian Weekly.

Sabbath School Teacher.

LESSON XXVII.

STUDIES IN MATTHEW.

July 9, 1873.

THE CHILD JESUS.

Matt. ii. 1-10.

COMMIT TO MEMORY vs. 5, 6.

PARALLEL PASSAGES.—Mic. v. 2, 4; John vii. 42. With v. 1, read Sam. xvi. 1; with v. 3, Isa. ix. 6, with vs. 8, 4, Ps. ii. 1, 2, with vs. 5, 6, Ezekiel xxiv. 23; with the rest of the lesson, Ps. lxxix. 10, 15; Isa. lx. 5, 6.

For long connection of David's family with Bethlehem, see Ruth i. 1, and iv. 17-22.

CENTRAL TRUTH.—Christ is "their of all things." Heb. i. 2.

INTERNATIONAL TEXT.—When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. Matt. ii. 10.

Our lesson requires us to study a little the Holy Child; His strange visitors; and His bitter persecutor.

I. THE CHILD JESUS. There was, and is, a little village about six miles south of Jerusalem, called Bethlehemhouse of bread, in the bounds of Judah. Jesse lived, and David was born here. (1 Sam. xvi. 1, 17, 58; and xvii. 12.) There was another town of the same name in Zebulon (Josh. xix. 15). The family in which our Lord was born being in the house and lineage of David (Luke ii. 4, 11) went there to be enrolled, and there Jesus was born, in fulfilment of prophecy as we shall see. It is impossible to think of all these things being arranged so as to support a false claim to the Messiahship—the enrolling, the family going up, the birth, and the prediction seven hundred years before.

This child we know was, as to His humanity, the child of the Virgin Mary; as to His Deity, the Son of the highest. From His birth we date A.D., the year of our Lord, though it is believed an error of four years was made, and that this should be 1877. This was the place, this was the time, of the Incarnation. No sooner is He born, than the world sets itself to fight against Him. The warfare will last till all His enemies be put under His feet.

II. Now we come to THE STRANGE VISITORS.

We have (a) Their question, v. 2. Ever since the return from the captivity (as we saw on Gen. xlix. 10), "Jews" had become a common name for all the descendants of the tribes (Acts x. 29). So the Gentiles called them all. So they called Jesus "King of the Jews," John xviii. 38. Then, as now, the people themselves preferred to be called Israel, and called him, "King of Israel," John i. 49.

Taking for granted that all men would know, and that the event had taken place, they ask, "Where is the one born King of the Jews?" But Jerusalem knew nothing about it. What this was understood to mean we gather from Herod. It was as much as to say, "We do not mean Herod, who is reigning—we know about him; but the rightful, God-appointed King—where is he?" (When the Maccabees took the throne (see 1 Macc.), Messias's rights were reserved, showing the national feeling at that time.)

(b) We have the reason of it. "We have seen his star in the east, and we are come to worship him." Some take this as a comet, some as a meteor, and many high authorities in the matter of stars, the union, to the eye, of two stars, coming in the order of things at this time.

But the likelihood is it was special, out of the ordinary course, near our world, directed for one purpose, because it would thus correspond to the objects here served, including the movement that guided to Bethlehem.

III. THE BITTER FOE OF CHRIST. Herod troubled; though a king, and old, and near his end; and by an infant's birth. "Unhappy lies the head that wears a crown!" and all Jerusalem—not because of any great love for Herod, but from fear of changes, wars, commotions, such as disputes as to a throne, and a tyrant's anger make.

See his arts. He wishes to find out the birthplace, calls the chief priests (there could be several, as the civil power made and unmade), and the scribes, who, occupied with the law, were authorities on the point, and inquired as to the place pointed out in prophecy.

They refer him to the passage, which they render freely, leaving out what did not bear on his question, and making distinct what did. "The old name of Bethlehem was Ephrath. See Gen. xlviii. 10. This shows in the prophecy that it is not the Bethlehem in Zebulon, but in Judah, that is meant, and so they say, 'in the land of Judah' (so we say Springfield, Mass., or Springfield, Illinois). The prophet notices its insignificance, 'though thou be little,' (See Judges vi. 15; and 1 Sam. x. 19.) The Hebrew Scripture bulked together small 'cities with their villages,' not naming Bethlehem, and the Greek translators filled out the list, and put it in Joshua xv. 69, 60.

But its greatness would be from its giving birth to a governor who should rule Israel. This was uttered, and written, and published (v. 6) after David, but long before Christ. The word for rule is the same as "be a shepherd to," suggesting 1 Peter v. 2. "Shepherd of the people" is a constant usage in Homer.

Now the crafty king wishes to find the probable time of the birth of this rival, and he applies to the wise men, v. 7. "Privily," not to raise alarm, and with a bold lie in his mouth, as he sends them on their way with, "Bring me back word, that I too coming may worship him." He meant something far different, v. 16, we may well believe. He tried to make them unconscious spies. So bad men use religion for their own evil ends.

way; the star gave its friendly light, stood over the place, reassuring them, and filling them with joy, v. 10. We leave them with their minds opening to more than they knew at first, to worship and present their gifts, while we try to gather up the lesson.

(1) True science, even imperfect and incomplete, leads to faith. May be differences from partial knowledge; but when both word and works are understood, the testimony will be found to be one. Here it was the word that gave meaning to the star.

(2) How graciously men are taught as they are able to bear it. For the fisherman, Christ walks on the water and sends the miraculous draught of fishes; the sick he speaks to in feeling, and the husbandman and stophers, vine-dressers and traders, by parables, and the students of the stars by a star in the sky.

(3) The coming of the Redeemer terrifies the ungodly. How does the thought of it affect you? Rev. i. 7; Mal. iii. 2. Well might Herod fear for his throne, in his ignorance; for his soul in reality.

(4) The faith of these men deserves notice. Expecting so much at Jerusalem, they find a cruel, deceitful old king reigning; the Jews caring nothing about the affair; at Bethlehem, a poor mother, in most humble circumstances, with an infant only born, not two years old, as they probably expected (see "Herod's from two years old"), and yet they believed, and gave their gifts. Let us be not faithless, but believing, with so many aids to faith as we have.

(5) All the world shall own Christ. Jews, and Gentiles like Melchizedec, Jethro, Ruth, Job, have already. The rest will come in due time.

FARMERS' BOYS.

1. Treat them as partners with you. Give them to understand that they are interested in the success of the farming operations as much as you are yourself.

2. Converse freely with them. Get their opinions and give them yours. If at all prudent make use of their plans, and when you think your own best, explain to them why you do not adopt theirs. Don't keep them altogether in the dark with reference to your plans for the future.

3. Don't require them to stay at home in the evenings all the time. When there is any reciting or entertainment, from which they might receive benefit, be sure to let them go.

4. Provide them with plenty of good books and papers, especially referring to agriculture. Let them be well posted in their own business, farming.

5. Never scold them because they don't do their work or attend to the business of the farm as well as you do. Encourage them.

6. Give them a holiday now and then. They look for it and they need it; and it will be better for you and them to let them have it.

THE WORLD WITHOUT SUNDAY.

Think how the abstraction of the Sabbath would hopelessly enslave the working classes, with whom we are identified! Think of labor thus going on in one monotonous and eternal cycle, limbs forever on the rack, fingers forever straining, the brow forever sweating, the feet forever plodding, the brain forever throbbing, the shoulders forever drooping, the loins forever aching, the restless mind forever scheming!

Think of the beauty it would efface, the merry-heartedness it would extinguish, of the giant strength it would tame, of the resources of nature it would crush, of the sickness it would bring, of the projects it would wreck, of the groans it would extort, of the lives it would immolate, and of the cheerless graves it would prematurely dig! See them toiling and moiling, sweating and fretting, grinding and heaving, weaving and spinning, sewing and gathering, moving and repairing, raising and building, digging and planting, striving and struggling—in the garden and in the field, in the granary and the barn, in the factory and in the mill, in the warehouse and in the shop, on the mountain and in the ditch, on the roadside and in the wood, in the city and in the country, out at sea and on the shore, in the day of brightness and of gloom. What a picture would this world present if we had no Sabbath!

CHARACTER IN THE OPENING AND SHUTTING OF A DOOR.—An ingenious correspondent of the Scientific American has discovered a new gauge for measuring men's characters by the manner in which they open and shut doors. Out of 1,000 persons recorded, 395 opened the door and shut it carefully, when they came in and when they went out, without much noise; 226 they went out in a hurry, and made an attempt to shut it, but did not, and wroly pulled it to when they went out; 302 did not attempt to shut it at all, either on coming in or going out; 96 left it open when they came in, but when ramiuded of the fact, made ample apology, and shut it when they went out; 102 opened it in a great hurry and slammed it violently, but left it open when they went out; 20 came in with "How do you do, sir?" or "Good morning!" or "Good evening, sir!" and all these went through the operation of wiping their feet on the mat, but did not shut the door when they went in or when they came out. We have employed men out of all these classes, and during that time have had an opportunity of judging of their merits. The first class—of 395—were those who knew their trade and commenced and finished their work in a methodical manner; were quiet and had little to say in their working hours, and were well approved by those for whom they did their work. They were punctual to time, and left nothing undone which they were ordered to do. They did not complain about trifles, and in all respects they were reliable men, and were kind and obliging in their general conduct.