

SUNDAY
SCHOOL

The Quiet Hour

YOUNG
PEOPLEBETWEEN SUNSHINE AND DARK-
NESS.

BY PROFESSOR JAMES STALKER, D.D.

In the earthly life of Our Lord there occurred, first a period of sunshine and then a period of darkness. Our present section lies between the two; but it is more in the shadow than the sunshine. Near its commencement is the doubt of the Baptist; and he was not, even at that stage, the only doubter. The violent death of the Forerunner appears to have exercised an influence on the career of Jesus, the exact nature of which is not very clear but the effect of which was his withdrawal from the scenes of his earlier triumphs. When the messengers of the Baptist had left the presence of Jesus, the sense of how badly both John and Himself had been treated so pressed on the spirit of Jesus that He broke out into bitter complaints against His generation. In the same tone He began now to lament the unbelief of the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they had not repented; and in Galilee, in which His ministry had begun with so much jubilation and promise, His cause, it was evident, had missed its aim. From time to time still, indeed, His works of healing were so numerous and extraordinary that a general recognition of His Messiahship seemed on the point of bursting from the lips of the simple and unsophisticated; but the Pharisees and the rulers always at hand with such suggestions as that He was casting out devils through the prince of the devils. In some respects the Feeding of the Five Thousand marked a culminating point, exciting so much wonder and pleasure that the multitude, John tells us, tried to take Him by force and make Him a King. But by this very zeal Jesus was convinced that they were not ripe for being the organs of His purposes; and He thereupon delivered a discourse the effect of which was that "from that time many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him."

What was the cause of this opposition? There were many reasons for it. His humble origin gave offence: He had been only a village carpenter's son, and He had followed the same trade Himself. Then he "had never learned"; He had not gone through the curriculum of any college or received the stamp of any earthly authority. His position in society and the course of His life differed utterly from all the Jews expected in the Messiah; and it stung them with resentment to see their great national hope thus dragged in the dust. Yet, though so meek and lowly, He claimed great things for Himself; as when, for example, He forgave sins. While, however, thus cherishing overweening ideas about Himself, He took depreciatory views of themselves. The character of those among them who had most reputation for piety was evidently the reverse of venerable in His eyes, and He turned their religious practices into ridicule. Their religion was one of self-righteousness. It was by works of their own they were seeking God's favor; and, the more they multiplied works which they supposed to be pleasing to God, the more merit did they believe to be laid up for them in Heaven. Such a religion is sure to err in two directions; it is unsympathetic toward men, while intent only on pleasing God, and it multiplies trivial and external ceremonies, to the neglect of the weightier matters of the law. Of both of these features the most outstanding illustration was provided in the Pharisaic observance of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was regarded not as a gift of God for man's benefit, but as a demand of God, who was supposed to be the more pleased the more of rigor and self-sacrifice entered into the tribute thus rendered to Himself; while

those who imposed these restrictions thought not of the intolerable burden they were imposing on the young and the hardworking. There were other causes of the opposition to Jesus—such, for example, as the choice of Matthew the publican, to be one of His apostles—and already, at the point we have reached, it had become evident that, unless something remarkable happened to turn sentiment in an opposite direction, the chosen people was going to reject its own Messiah and frustrate the glorious purposes for which it had been trained by Jehovah all the days of old.

Meantime Jesus went on pouring forth the words of grace and truth, even the opposition of His enemies often evoking immortal sayings, as we see in the Parable of the Sower. At this period His mind appears specially to have overflowed with the imagery, borrowed from His experience of life during His ministry, as well as accumulated from the harvest of a quiet eye before His ministry began, by which His addresses were adorned. Of this we have striking evidence in the parables of the thirteenth chapter of this Gospel; and there also He recommends this mode of imparting truth to all teachers coming after Him, in the saying (v. 50), "Therefore every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." "Things old" are those that are well-known and familiar; "things new" are those that are unknown and still to be revealed. In the parables of Jesus these were so combined that the objects of nature and the incidents of common life were made stepping-stones by which to rise to the truths and mysteries which he had come to reveal. This is the art of all true teaching—from the familiar to the unfamiliar, through the well-known to that which has still to be apprehended. Each parable of this chapter commences with the words, "the Kingdom of Heaven is like"; and the "Kingdom of Heaven" or "the Kingdom of God" was Christ's own name for His doctrine as a whole. Some think it should always have remained the name for it. But substitutes took its place even in the New Testament; and the most natural substitute in our day would be "Christianity." "The Kingdom of Heaven" sometimes means Heaven itself; or it may mean Heaven on earth, the purpose of Christianity being to make earth like Heaven. It is best explained by the words which follow and expound the petition, "Thy Kingdom come," in the Lord's Prayer—namely, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven"; it is a comprehensive term for all the blessings which accompany the doing of God's will.

ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND.

A PRAYER.

We thank Thee, O King of kings, that Thou hast called us to do Thy business on earth. This is our realm to make it thine. Give us Thy Spirit more fully that Thy business may always be first in our lives and Thy glory the coveted glory of our ambition. Impress upon us the glowing fact that the King's business requires haste and integrity. By working in us and through us help us to win back this beautiful world from the Prince of Darkness and to restore its kingdoms to Jesus Christ. In His name. Amen. Philadelphia Westminster.

—Gethsemane and Calvary bind the hearts of men to Christ more than the sunny days of popularity about the Sea of Galilee. They who are to conquer the hearts of men must suffer much. As *Rothé* puts it, "men are God's commoners, but suffers his nobles".—*Alfred Tennyson*.

WALKING WITH GOD.

BY C. H. WETHERBE.

Of Enoch, the Bible says, that he walked with God. The same idea is applied to other believers, as given in Bible history. The expression is a figurative one, and yet it is one which has reference to real life and practice.

Let it be observed that there is no place in the Bible where it is stated that unconverted people walk with God. There is a marked significance in this fact. It opposes the theory that all people are the children of God; for, if it were true that all persons were God's children, then it would necessarily follow that all of them walk with God in a spiritual sense. It would mean that there is a spiritual harmony between God and all people, whatever their moral condition might be. The idea is absurd, and is therefore untrue.

No one can walk with God unless he be in spiritual harmony with Him. There must be a vital agreement. There is such an agreement between the true believers and God. The agreement is not absolutely perfect, on the part of the believer, because he is necessarily imperfect; yet there is a vital oneness between God and the saved believers. There is a hearty companionship between the two. There is a sacred fellowship between them. There is a holy relationship with each other.

Rev. Dr. A. T. Pierson, the eminent Bible scholar, says: "To walk with God suggests that every step is taken in His companionship, and in fellowship and harmony with Him; that, as we come to each new encounter with temptation or trial, duty or danger, responsibility or opportunity, He is our companion and counsellor, so that we need take no step alone, or in any way depart from His way. It makes all life a partnership with God."

Why should the Christian be lonesome with such a God? Why need the believer be the victim of harrowing fears, while realizing that he is all the time walking with God? O, what a very great honor it is!

GOODNESS AND SEVERITY.

Jesus is judge as well as Saviour, and there is in the gospel severity for impenitent sin as well as tenderness for penitent sinners. "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not." These are strong words, and our age is very inclined to overlook and ignore all such in the New Testament. There is a prevalent babyishness in the religious thought of to-day which will have nothing but sweetmeats. And it has resulted, as such always does, in unwholesome conditions and a peevish fretfulness with all else. It is time men considered that God, in both nature and revelation, is seen to be capable of severity as well as gentleness. He would not be a moral God if he were otherwise. Our God is a God of love toward the good, and a consuming fire toward all wickedness and sin. Jesus was the most loving of men, and it ill becomes any modern sentimentalists to try to conceive a tenderer tenderness or a more loving love than his; but he was also at times the severest of all teachers in his denunciations. Who among those who have spoken to mankind have so bitterly denounced the whitened sepulchers of Pharisaic hypocrisy? Who has spoken more sternly of covetousness? Who has rebuked so sharply priestly corruption and all "moral frauds"? He is merciful, far too merciful to allow obdurate sin to go unexposed and unpunished in the universe.—*Churchman*.