

ZACCHEUS.

A SERMON BY THE REV. ARTHUR MURSELL.

"And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zaccheus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who He was, and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zaccheus, make haste, and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That He was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."—St. Luke xix. 1-10.

THE scene of this narrative lies in the suburbs of the ancient city of Jericho. This was at one time a place of importance. It will be remembered that Jericho was the first city captured by the Israelites. The city, after its capture, was laid under a sort of ban by its conquerors, and a curse was decreed upon any who should rebuild it. In spite of this, however, it was rebuilt, and, at the time of the scene which our text describes, it was the royal residence of Herod the king. In this restored city Zaccheus was a resident. Though a man of considerable wealth, he was very unpopular, and was entirely excluded from fellowship with those who were socially of his own station. The cause of his unpopularity is obvious. He was not a *tax-gatherer*, but he was a farmer of taxes, superintending their collection, paying to the Roman Government a certain sum, and making what he could out of the aggregate for himself; and he had succeeded in so managing the speculation as to make a very good thing out of it. He was perfectly just and strictly honourable in his management of his business; but the business itself made him unpopular. Taxation, even among a free people, is a theme the reverse of captivating, but for a subject people to be taxed for the benefit of their conquerors, and made to pay for their servitude, would be doubly galling. Those who were the instruments of such taxation would naturally forfeit the respect of the society in general. For one of their own countrymen to undertake this office would be certain to expose him to nothing short of hatred from the Jews. Hence we find *publicans*, who were tax-gatherers, always classed by the Jews with *sinners*. Whether Zaccheus had laid his account in losing popularity for the sake of emolument, or had not taken it into consideration, we cannot say. But a publican he was, and was hated as such, and as such was classed among the "publicans and sinners." Now, it was not a very politic passport to the goodwill of the people of Jericho to be a friend of a publican and a sinner. Yet it seems from the narrative that Christ was chargeable with this impolicy, for He befriended Zaccheus in a very open and public manner. The wealth of Zaccheus was no safeguard against this unpopularity, but rather, perhaps, an aggravation of it. Generally, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, wealth is the master-key to the high places, and to the uppermost seats at feasts. It is to the man who wears the gold ring on his finger, no matter what base metal he may carry near his heart, that society beckons to come up higher. But Zaccheus was an exception to this rule; great men hated him, and nearly all men spurned him. Nor was Zaccheus indifferent to this scorn. He was sensitive about it, and unrestful under it. But as he sadly pursues the path which the contempt of men who shun him has made a lonely as well as bitter one, there is SOMEONE or SOMETHING upon his track. What we term daily providences are often but the footsteps of God's own Spirit tracking us down, as it were, if haply we may be subdued to Christ. Now, the unrest of Zaccheus caused him to look about for escape; and though he looked without any fixity of purpose, still his looking at all was marked by the eye which followed him. "Shall he leave Jericho, retiring on his earnings, and go and set up as a gentleman elsewhere?" The instinct of Jewish aversion would assuredly pursue him, and the mask would be ruthlessly torn off, and "*publican and sinner*" still scornfully snarled into his ears. It is a hard case, especially as he has always been so scrupulously just and systematically generous. Just as Zaccheus is stumbling on these dark mountains of distress and bitterness, Christ finds him. Wealth has been spoken of in

Scripture as a barrier to the kingdom. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God." "The things which are impossible to man are possible to God." Christ here seizes on and illustrates this possibility. The incidents of Providence are here literally the footprints of the Spirit. If Zaccheus had left Jericho in his bitterness, he might never have been heard of as he was. The fact of his happening to be where he was, is the turning point in his whole biography, and lifts him into the privileged immortality of this sacred history. Christ is on His last journey to Jerusalem, and is passing through Jericho for the last time. Zaccheus hears of his coming. He longs just to see Him. But he is short of stature, and the aching longing of Zaccheus cannot see over the cranial necks of curiosity which are stretched towards the illustrious visitor. We most of us know what it is to want to see something, and have to stand behind six feet of gaping selfishness, which gets on tiptoe and makes a footstool of your feet. But his littleness is his salvation; his dwarfishness is his deliverance. Well was it for Zaccheus that by taking thought he could not add one cubit to his stature. That single cubit which pride might have built into his frame, would have been like the stone in the forehead of the giant which brought him low upon the sword; but the want of that cubit was the sling which made him a conqueror. In the branches of that sycamore he finds cubits better than his own, and from their vantage he beholds the sight he longs for. It was not idle curiosity which drew the common crowd which lifted the publican into that friendly tree, it was that Spirit which was tracking him still. He was impelled by a sense of trouble and of need; a feeling which perhaps he could not define, but a feeling of *seeking*, and perhaps of hope. He would not have spoken, but would have let Christ pass on unarrested, as he hid his little self behind the leaves. But still he came to look and to look *hopefully*, just as the woman went to touch and not to be seen. This climb of Zaccheus into the tree was a weak man feeling his weakness and looking for strength; a poor man in his poverty seek riches; a weary man in his weariness searching for rest. But he not only sees Christ, but Christ sees him; sees the little man whom the crowd overtopped; sees the troubled man who had come in his bewilderment to look; sees the despised man on whom the world heaped its scorn; sees the publican whom respectability classed "with sinners and with harlots. And he sees him, not to spurn him with the rest, not to curry favour with the populace by throwing "publican and sinner" in his teeth; not to ingratiate himself with rabbis by pelting the little man down from the tree with scorn; He sees him to call him by his name, to demand a lodging in his house. "Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide in thy house." Can he believe his ears? Have his senses turned traitors to taunt him? In *my* house; *mine* upon whose threshold Jewry heaps its scorn; after passing whose door society shakes the dust from off its feet. Lodge with me! impossible! Yet there he waits; and His kind eye looks up into the tree, and His finger beckons, and His "make haste!" still rings in the climber's ear. O brethren, I think there are two sorts of people in this place just now. Some have come like the crowd who rushed into the street, to gaze and feast their eyes, and then after an hour's gossip, and, perhaps, of criticism and spleen, forget all about it; some to take the place of Zaccheus in the tree, bringing heavy hearts to be comforted, and seeking real deliverance. This chapel is either a Jericho street, or a sycamore tree, and you are either the *staring* crowd or the *seeking* Zaccheus. Oh, if you began at half-past six with the crowd, finish with Zaccheus; if you began in the street, climb now into the sycamore, and He shall call you down with the same invitation, "Make haste! Come down, for to-night I must abide at thy house." And when He calls (as He is calling now), do as Zaccheus did, make haste, come down, and receive Him joyfully.

Zaccheus may well have been astonished at the invitation. "That He should call me before all my fellow-citizens, whom He must know despise me!" This thought doubtless made the problem all the more wonderful. Perhaps the world may despise you, and with better reason than it did Zaccheus; despise you for a meanness he would have scorned, or a pride he would have loathed to show; for a moral littleness more small than his mean stature. But Christ does not despise you, however much He may despise your sin, and to-night He cries—"Make haste! Come down! for to-day I must abide at thy house." Oh, hear the cry, and fling off the fig-leaves of your shame as Zaccheus flung off the syc-