

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

THE SILENCE OF JESUS.

"But He answered her not a word."
—Matt. iv. 23.

The context suggests that it was for rest and seclusion that "Jesus withdrew into the parts of Tyre and Sidon." His Galilean ministry was at the height of its power and success. The interest in it was spreading with leaps and bounds, and Jerusalem itself, in its sleepy, traditional ease, was deeply stirred by the reports that were coming up every day from the country. A strong deputation was sent down to investigate the matter, but its questions and suspicions and scepticism had been disturbing and exhausting, and there is no doubt that it had a great deal to do with the sudden departure of Jesus from Galilee. He had been overworked, and here was this deputation, with its chilling atmosphere and critical censures, increasing His sense of weariness and worry. In the blaze of such publicity as that in which He was now living there was no corner in Galilee where He could find quiet and solitude, and the time had not come for making Judea the sphere of His ministry; and so He is off towards the shores of the Mediterranean, rather than those of His own inland sea. Nor is He only thinking of Himself; for it is as much in the interests of the disciples as in His own that He starts in this ministerial holiday. Does it not make Him more near and real to us to find that Jesus needed the bodily rest and soul refreshment that change of scene and work gives? He was so intensely human that He had to feed the springs of His life in fellowship with God, and in communion with the sweet, fresh influences of nature. In His public ministry debate and strife, hostility and excitement, were everywhere around Him, and there was no welcome for Him anywhere, and no generous appreciation of His work. In the hot atmosphere of His ministry He needed cooling days and seasons of retirement, for in His case as well as in that of all of us—

"The calm retreat, the silent shade,
With prayer and praise agree;
And seem by Thy sweet bounty made
For them that follow Thee."

It is so important to note that it is in the direction of Tyre and Sidon that Jesus goes for His outing. "These cities were some fifty miles from Nazareth, and less than twenty miles from Caesarea. Very early in the history of civilisation they had been flourishing cities, the centres of a wide-spreading commerce, and the workshops of the Eastern world. The wealth, skill, genius and talent of many countries found their way into their factories, institutions and homes. Midst their splendour and prosperity their citizens cultivated their minds most strenuously; they had their schools of art, philosophy, and science, and they were passionately given to sea-faring life. They were indeed the British sailors and mechanics of a past civilisation, but their religion was of a most debasing kind, for the law ruled in their case, that ruled everywhere also, the greater the prosperity the grosser was religion. Yet it is in the direction of these cities that Jesus goes for change and rest. Is there not a hint here that all they represent will yet be subdued by the power of the Gospel? We can't doubt but that the time is coming when wealth and commerce, art and science, the ships of the sea, and the workshops of the world, will be the great missionary forces of Christianity. Then, indeed, "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever."

It was a painful surprise to the disciples when they felt sure about the route that their blessed Master was taking. There was many a whisper

and exchange of glance, as they loitered behind to consult with each other as to the meaning of this new and startling turn in His movements. He does not explain to them why He is making this journey. It is only on rare occasions that Christ tells them what is His plan, but He keeps His motives to Himself. It is a sign of great weakness when a public teacher has to explain and defend himself in every new development of his work; but Jesus moves on, carrying His great secret in His heart. It is only in after years in new situations, that the disciples begin to see that in every outward movement of His life there was an inner purpose of grace and mercy. It was a great trial to them to proceed on this journey without any explanation, and, alas, it is so true that we all have to make many journeys in life without knowing whither they are leading us.

It is quite clear that Jesus travelled incognito. This is indeed the way that He so often travels among the sons of men. He had taken the necessary precautions that He should not be known. Abruptly He had left those who were waiting on His ministry, and silently He had passed away from their midst without anyone knowing what would be His next locality. When He did enter into a house in Gentile territory, he would have no man know it. He was beautiful to find that it is an obscure and sorrowing woman who first discovers His presence. Does it not happen with us, as of old, when Christ is present with us, "there standeth One among you whom ye know not." We have no right to suppose that this Syrophenician woman was the first to hear of the arrival of this party of strangers, or that anyone had pointed out to her the central figure of the group, but in the sore consciousness of her need she happily recognised him. No doubt many fashionable and distinguished people lived in close neighbourhood to this locality; for the classes then, as now, built their residences far away from the streets and warehouses and wharfs, where the masses sweat and toil and drink, but not the statesmen nor merchants, not the poets nor painters, not the leaders of thought nor of fashion find out who Jesus is, but it is this poor, broken-hearted mother. "Mighty is the force of motherhood."

No other power could have sustained her in this prolonged, Jacob-like wrestling with the Son of God. There was hardly any form of hindrance that did not lie in her way to Jesus. She was not only a Gentile, but a Canaanite—one of that nation over whom the doom of death was still hanging. She had no influential friend to speak for her, and her case was too urgent to wait for a letter of introduction, for Jesus might move off at any moment in some other direction. Now that the great opportunity of her life had come, she felt as if it were slipping away, hence she could use it. Do we not often feel when the gates of opportunity open for us that we know not how to enter them? This distressed mother knew not how to approach Jesus, nor what to say to Him. She could only tell Him of her grief, and it was in sobs and tears that she did it. She thought that her agonizing appeal would have brought her relief, but "Jesus answered her not a word." The heartless interference of the disciples seemed kinder than His silence. Why is He silent? If we can't "pluck the heart out of this mystery," we know that He was silent from very different reasons from those that make us silent in presence of extreme suffering and misery. We are silent because we can do nothing, but He had the resources of the Godhead at His command, and the flexibility of action that can meet any emergency, and yet He does not speak!

"Speech is but broken light upon the depth

Of the unspoken. Even our loved words
Float in the larger meaning of your voice
As something dimmer."
This first lesson out of the book of silence was so hard for this mother to learn, but she learned it so well that in her second lesson, which was one of speech, she quickly picked up the crumbs that fell from the Master's table, and went away home, carrying with her the biggest blessing a mother's heart could receive—her prayer answered and her daughter healed. H.

MACAULAY ON THE CHURCH OF
ROME.

Speaking of the influence of the Church of Rome for the last three centuries Lord Macaulay says: "The wealthiest and most fertile provinces of Europe have, under her rule, been sunk in poverty, in political servitude, and in intellectual torpor, while Protestant countries, once proverbial for sterility and barbarism, have been turned by skill and industry into gardens, and can boast of a long list of heroes and statesmen, philosophers and poets. Whoever, knowing what Italy and Scotland naturally are, and what, four hundred years ago, they actually were, shall now compare the country round Rome with the country round Edinburgh, will be able to form some judgment as to the tendency of Papal domination. The descent of Spain, once the first among the monarchies, to the lowest depths of degradation, the elevation of Holland, in spite of many natural disadvantages, to a position such as no commonwealth so small has ever reached, teach the same lesson. Whoever passes in Germany from a Roman Catholic to a Protestant principality, in Switzerland from a Roman Catholic to a Protestant canton, in Ireland from a Roman Catholic to a Protestant county, finds that he has passed from a lower to a higher grade of civilization. On the other side of the Atlantic the same law prevails. The Protestants of the United States have left far behind them the Roman Catholics of Mexico, Peru and Brazil."

To the same effect Charles Dickens wrote from Switzerland to his friend Forster in 1845. More recently Wm. E. Gladstone has made similar statements, and still more recently Mr. Michael McCarthy, himself a Roman Catholic, in his book entitled *Five Years in Ireland*, has borne the same testimony.

The reporter of a daily paper, describing the seating arrangements in a new church recently opened in a neighboring city, says, "Crowding in this church is almost an impossibility." We fear that young man builded better than he knew. He voiced the feeling prevalent in some churches only too well. Pews are for those who rent them, and the occupants should not be disturbed by "crowding." We incline to the opinion that "crowding" is a good thing in a church. Some churches are dying by inches, just because they never have any "crowding." After all the people are the most important part of a church, and the salvation of their souls is quite as important as the allotment of so many square inches of room to each member of even the principal families. May a kind heaven send us perpetual crowding in all our churches. Some of them need it badly enough, and the fullest can always take a few more. A church that cannot draw, hold and help the people serves no useful purpose. At all events it does not serve the purposes of a Christian church.