

SUNDAY  
SCHOOL

## The Quiet Hour

YOUNG  
PEOPLE

## THREE STAGES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

By Professor James Stalker, D.D.

In this chapter there are, besides the Parable of the Sower, three pairs of parables, setting forth respectively the rise, the progress, and the perfection of Christianity. The arrangement of the material by the author of this Gospel does not seem to have proceeded on this principle; yet it will assist the exposition to take them in the order indicated.

**THE COMMENCEMENT.**—The parables dealing with the origin of the Christian life are the Treasure hid in the Field and the Pearl of Great Price; and they depict it as a discovery and a surprise, as well as a supreme good and a priceless possession. No notice is taken of the moral question, whether the man who found the treasure ought to have revealed the fact to the owner, or of the circumstance that, in certain states, treasure trove is the property of the government; the single point on which the emphasis falls is the sudden transition from poverty to riches, with the joy thereon ensuing. In the same way, the pearl-seeker has reached the supreme moment of life and, without hesitation, gives up everything to enjoy it. Such is the Gospel; in other aspects it may be a yoke or a martyrdom, but its genius is not known at all unless it is an overwhelming happiness. Still, there is a difference between the two parables; in the one the finder comes upon the treasure when he is seeking for no such thing, whereas in the other the finder has long been a seeker of things rare and fine before finding the rarest and finest of all. So among those who have not yet found the secret of Christianity; some are wholly occupied with the ordinary tasks and pleasures of the world, thinking nothing of the soul or eternity, but others have already reached a higher level, being bent on ideal ends such as art, literature, philosophy; such a pursuit may be a schoolmaster leading the aspiring soul to Christ.

**THE PROGRESS.**—The Parables of the Leaven and the Mustard-seed set forth the progress of Christianity; for it is a progressive thing; wherever it truly exists it must grow and expand. This is a test, but it is also a great encouragement. The illustration taken from the leaven may be a recollection from the tender years of Jesus. It was His own mother that he saw taking three measures of meal, wetting the mass, hiding the leaven in it, then covering it with a cloth, and laying it away overnight, for a baking in the morning. As he lay in bed, he heard the little explosions caused by the fermentation going on; and his keen imagination followed the process, as, like a living thing, the leaven took possession of grain after grain of the meal, till the whole was leavened. In the other parable it looks at first as if he had missed an opportunity; for he might have compared the kingdom to some great and far-spreading tree, like our oak or the cedar on his own native hills. But something in the mustard plant fascinated him; and evidently this was the smallness of its beginning. The seed is no bigger than a pin's head, yet there is such vitality in it that, though only a shrub, it is able to attain to the dimensions of a tree.

Both parables depict progress, yet each specially sets forth a certain kind of progress—the one inward, the other outward. The three measures of meal may stand for the three parts of human nature—body, soul, and spirit—or for thoughts, words, and actions; and the progress of the leaven indicates how the spirit of Christ must take possession of the whole inner man. But there is also an outward progress, denoted by the growth of the plant. While Christianity is a hidden life,

it is at the same time a life which cannot be hid, but must make itself visible in profession, testimony, and good works. It is in the concurrence and the balance of these two kinds of progress—the inward and the outward—that the perfection of Christian character consists. This law of a twofold progress applies, however, not only to the individual but also to Christianity as a public movement. All are familiar with the thought that Christianity is destined to be the religion of the whole world; and we see it actually spreading to all sections of the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japheth. But few are equally familiar with the thought that it is destined to permeate with its spirit and influence every section of life wherever it has been accepted. This, however, is the more important of the two; because any nation whose trade and commerce, politics and literature, art and science were thoroughly Christianized would be irresistible as a missionary instrument.

**THE CONSUMMATION.**—This is set forth in the Parables of the Tares and of the Net. These teach an almost identical lesson, and, as this has been fully expounded already, it will hardly be necessary to add anything. The dragnet, moving with comprehensive sweep through the water, is a vivid image of the network of natural laws within the scope of which we come the moment we are born. At first the pressure is hardly felt; the sea is wide; and we think our movements are guided solely by our own free-will. By-and-by, however, the net touches us now and then—that is, illness reminds us that we are mortal. At last the net closes round us; there is a brief struggle; and all is over. This is pagan wisdom. The Christian truth is, at this point there opens a new era, which will never end; and its first act will be the separation, so painful for the wicked but for the righteous how blessed!

ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND.

## A PRAYER.

Almighty God, we thank Thee for the beauty of these days of the renewed promise of seed time and harvest as we see the opening blossoms on every hand and the growing grain on field and farm. We pray Thee that there may be no failure of harvest when the autumn days shall come. Grant that the labor of the husbandmen may be blessed with abundant store. May men remember that all the earth returns for labor is the gift of God who has appointed the times and seasons for the sowing and the ripening and the reaping of the products of the soil. May we never forget to bless and praise Thee for the manifold mercies in nature. For all things in heaven and earth are Thine, and we are "the people of Thy pasture and the sheep of Thine hand." Hear us as our hearts cry out for Thee the living and eternal God, and grant us Thy salvation, for Christ's sake. Amen.

—All the strength and all the arts of men are measured by, and founded upon, their reverence for the passion and their guardianship for the purity of love.—Carlyle.

—It's good to have money, and the things that money can buy; but it's good, too, to check up once in a while, and make sure you haven't lost the things that money can't buy.—Lorimer.

—If there be that within us which for very shame we would not reveal on earth, we may well tremble lest it cannot be hidden in the spiritual realm toward which our rapid steps are tending; lest it there be known and read of all, without our ability to conceal it; lest it place us in just that attitude before and among our fellow-spirits which we would not for worlds hold with our fellow-men here.—Andrew Peabody.

## THE LOWLINESS OF JESUS.

By Rev. W. J. Luther Selber.

There is no aspect of our Lord's life so pathetic as his profound loneliness. As we read the gospels we feel sure that Christ was the most solitary man who ever lived. His life's story tells us that "there were none to praise and very few to love." His nearest kindred strayed away from him, and even among his chosen disciples there was absolutely none who understood his greatness or appreciated the spirit in which he worked. We often hear about the solitude in which great men of genius must live and work. It is a truth which makes the lives of the many small men a thing more to be desired than the lives of the few great. The "little hills rising together for joy" on every side, but high above their smiling companionship the Alpine peak towers aloft and though it is visited nightly by troops of stars yet it is lonely way up yonder midst the silence and the snow. Talk of the solitude of a pure nature in the midst of evil surroundings, as Lot in Sodom, or of uncomprehended aims and unshared thoughts; was there ever any one who experienced these things more than Christ? His perfect purity must have been hurt by the sins of men more than any other. His loving heart, yearning for the solace of an answering heart must have felt the pangs of unrequited love most keenly. His spirit, to which the unseen things of his Father's house were the only realities, must have felt itself separated from those men whose portion was in this present world, by a gulf wider than ever separated two hearts that shared together human life. The more pure and lofty a nature, the keener its sensitiveness, the more exquisite its joys, the sharper its pains and the greater the aching void of loneliness.

The very purpose which Christ had in selecting his disciples was that "they might be with him." Christ took his three foremost disciples with him onto the Mount of Transfiguration and into the Garden of Gethsemane. Surely it was not simply that they might be "eyewitnesses of His Majesty" and agony, but that he might feel a real gladness and strength both amidst the mystery of glory and the power of darkness. We read that Christ was alone but twice in all his life, both times for prayers. And the duldest ear can hear the note of pain in the prophecy, "The time cometh when ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone;" while every heart can catch the pathos of the plea "Tarry ye here and watch with me." Even in the supreme hour of his suffering he stretches out his hands into the darkness, if perchance he might be strengthened by a touch of human flesh and blood. But, alas, for poor, weak, human love, he gropes for it in vain. The loneliness of Jesus is a part of the passion of his life. forming as it does a substantial part of the great prophetic picture, "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none."

—With a clear sky, a bright sun, and a gentle breeze, you will have friends in plenty; but let fortune frown, and the firmament be overcast, and then your friends will prove like the strings of the lute, of which you will tighten ten before you find one that will bear the stretch and keep the pitch.—Gotthold.

—Enjoy the blessings of this day, if God sends them, and the evils of it bear patiently and sweetly; for this day is only ours; we are dead to yesterday, and we are not born to the morrow. He, therefore, that enjoys the present, if it be good, enjoys as much as is possible, and if only that day's trouble leans upon him, it is singular and finite.—Jeremy Taylor.