

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWSTHE SAVIOUR'S MISSION AMONG
MEN.

(By Rev. W. C. Hope.)

"And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."—Matthew IX, 10-13.

You know that the publicans were taxgatherers in the service of the Roman Government. The Jews were justly proud of their nation and its glorious past. They could not endure the thought of being subject to another Power, and, strange as it may seem, they even tried to persuade themselves that they were an independent people. Remembering this, we can understand how unwelcome a visitor the taxgatherer was, not simply because he wanted their money, but because the payment of it testified to their bondage. When the man who demanded the tax was a Jew, as he generally was, they thought he was a traitor to his country. They said if he had patriotism in his nature, he would scorn to earn his living in such an unworthy manner.

The more important among these publicans farmed the taxes; they undertook to return so much money for a given district, and then made as much as they could of it. Nearly all of them were rapacious and dishonest. Considering all the circumstances, it is not surprising that they were a well-hated and detested class.

There were others, men and women who had given themselves up to careless, dissolute ways, who were associated with the publicans in the minds of the Pharisees, and so we frequently have the conjunction of terms, Publicans and Sinners.

Let us assume that these people were really worse than other folk. If so there were two opposite ways in which the better men might treat them. They might try to make these poor sinners feel that although they were deeply stained by sin, yet they belonged to God, and therefore they were the brothers and sisters of the Scribes and Pharisees. Thus the better people might endeavor to awaken nobler feelings in them, and lead them to turn away from their sins. But this was possible only through loving sympathy.

A directly opposite course was also open. The Pharisees might be careful to have no voluntary dealings with these Publicans and Sinners, they might scrupulously avoid meeting them in social or religious life, be careful that they never sat down to meat in their company and even their garments did not touch by chance as they passed in the streets. This was the course adopted by the Pharisees. I have no doubt that if we could have talked with them about it, they would have said, These men deserve the treatment they are receiving. That might be quite true. Still the punishment was a very cruel one. Not because it pained the outcasts, for they probably cared little about it, and pain is not always a measure of cruelty. But cruel because it tended to their destruction. If you know a man who is worse than anybody else in St. Columb, and you make him feel that

he is an outcast whom you scorn, you are making it well-nigh impossible for that man ever to be saved. That is what the Pharisees did in relation to the Publicans and Sinners.

Now, the spirit of Jesus and his mission among men were in perfect harmony with the spirit and work of God as revealed in the Old Testament. The Jews made a mistake in thinking it was not so.

Their prophets had taught them that their great business in life was to glorify God. That was a truth of profound importance. It was the possession of this truth which distinctly characterized our Puritan Forefathers; and it made them strong, grand, heroic men. Now, the Jews had learned that truth intellectually, but in applying it they failed. They supposed that if they offered their sacrifices, and went through all their religious observance, God would be satisfied. It did not occur to them that glorifying God had anything to do with their treatment of Publicans and Sinners.

Jesus said, in effect, You Pharisees have made a great mistake; my Father is not the monster of selfishness that you imagine him to be! Go back to your own books, which he has given you, and tell me what that means: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." If your hearts are hard and unmerciful towards your fellows, he will not have your sacrifices; they will be an abomination to him. You are astonished at my eating with Publicans and Sinners, but my action is in absolute harmony with the dealings of God in the prophetic days. That was an important fact. But has it anything to do with us? Yes, it teaches us that God never changes. In the days of the Prophets God was seeking in great mercy to do good to men and to save them; and when Jesus came it was not to show any new quality in God, but to declare in a new way, more distinctly and fully, the old truth, which had been spoken by the prophets in earlier days. And our God is still the same. I daresay you think sometimes: God must have loved men very much when Jesus died for them. Yes, he did—far more than we have yet understood, even by the aid of the Cross. But he loves us just the same today. In the prophetic times, in the days of our Saviour's sacrifice and in our own time, God loves us just the same. Indeed, we should not be here now but for the fact that his mercy is still as in the olden time. He would never have put it into the hearts of any of us to hold these Mission Services if he were not longing to save the unsaved. Think of it—God wants to save you. You may be indifferent about your salvation, but he is not!

I want—you to notice that Jesus came to save men who were regarded as worthless. The Pharisee looked at the Publicans and Sinners and said, These people are of no use to us; they do not enrich us either in social or religious life. They are a miserable, worthless lot. Better that we were rid of them. They are not worth a thought. And so they cast out these men and women as refuse. Now, Jesus looked at the same persons, and he said, They are worth thinking about; they are worth loving; worth dying for. What a wonderful contrast in these two estimates! What was the cause of it? This was one element in that cause. The Pharisee looked at these people superficially, and in the light of the present. Jesus saw that in their deeper nature,

beneath all their sinfulness, there was the capacity for a noble life. He saw them in the light of a possible future, and knew that every one of them, by his help, might at last stand before God a glorious man, a pure and gracious woman. And this vision inspired him. Do you wonder that seeing this, he died for them? I do not. Oh! that we could see as Christ sees. Then we should seek more earnestly to save men, and we should place a truer value upon ourselves. A man or a woman saved, and complete in the likeness of Christ and of the Father! Is not that a glorious creation? That is his vision for you, my friends. That is the salvation which he would accomplish to you, "The glory which shall be revealed in us."

In coming to men, even the Son of God could not save them unless they saw and acknowledged their need. The Pharisees came to his disciples, and said in genuine amazement, "Why eateth your Master with Publicans and Sinners?" He claims to be at least a prophet sent from God, and here we find him in the company of such people as these! Jesus answered, in effect, You Pharisees cannot understand me. It is not surprising for I have not come to such as you. You say that you are righteous and whole. I have come only to those who are sinners and sick. These Pharisees had built for themselves a platform of religious conceit; they had surrounded themselves with an impassable barrier of selfrighteousness, and the Saviour could not come to them. As we read his words we seem to hear him saying, You men that are up there on your little platform of religious pride, well-satisfied with yourselves, I have not come to you. My mission is only to these poor folk down here who know that they are sinners. Ah! how foolish those Pharisees were. They put themselves out of the Saviour's reach. There could be no salvation for them unless they came down to the place where sinners gathered about the Saviour, confessing their sins.

My friend that is our way of Salvation. The Lord, who died for us, cannot save us unless we perceive that we are sinners, and come to him in penitence and faith, confessing our sins.

But all who are associated with our congregations are supposed to be very familiar with that truth. You say, Of course we know that we are all sinners. Do you mean that? What! you know that you are a sinner, that you are unpardoned, that the guilt of sin and the wrath of God are upon you, and yet you intend to go out of this sanctuary tonight unrepentant, unsaved. If you realized your state as a sinner before God, surely you would not dare to leave this place without first seeking pardon.

But, you say, we have not the opportunity that men had in the Saviour's day. If he were here now it would be very different; but it is eighteen hundred years since he was here among men, saw his face or heard his voice. Is that so? Oh! no. How long is it since a sinner heard him speak gracious words of pardon? Eighteen hundred year? No, indeed. I know that in a church not three miles from here, a few days ago, there came a sinner with the burden of guilt upon him, but he met the Saviour and went out with the peace of pardon in his heart. How long it is since Jesus came to men? Why he is here now. We cannot see him with the bodily eye, but he is here as truly as we are. He is as really present as your friend who sits next to you in the pew.