

SPECIAL  
ARTICLES

## Our Contributors

BOOK  
REVIEWS

## MATTHEW THE PUBLICAN.

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When we say that Matthew the Publican became a Christian and an apostle, we excite no surprise. And yet Matthew's countrymen could not contemplate his call without amazement—unspeakable, such as we should feel if a ticket-of-leave man were called to the foremost pulpit of our church, or if an inmate of Newgate were created Archbishop of Canterbury. We cannot conceive the moral and social abyss from which Matthew was drawn until we have formed a clear conception of the office which he held.

The publicans were capitalists to whom, singly or in joint-stock companies, the Roman Senate let the collecting of customs, and who undertook to pay a fixed sum into the treasury. The treasury was the publicum, and he who thus paid into it was called publicanus, from which our word publican is derived. But those capitalists neither visited the provinces nor collected the customs in person. They sat in the bureau at home, as the directors of the East India Company sat in London while their servants fleeced the Hindus and created empire. It was the agents, the underlings of these men, who constituted the publicans of Palestine. These latter were the collectors of customs, who examined each bale of goods, assessed the value, wrote out a ticket, and enforced payment.

No Jew with the faintest spark of patriotism, or even self-respect, would accept the office. The custom-house was obliged to draw its clerks and officials from the outlaws and renegades of society. The tax which the publicans collected was the Roman iron that

## Pierced the Jewish Soul.

But what the publicans found odious they left loathsome. They lay in wait to over-reach; they charged traders with smuggling that they might extort hush-money; they ground the face of the nation that had excommunicated them. Drawn from the dregs of society; separated from all humanizing influences as if they were a colony of lepers; entrenched in their lair of sullen defiance; regarded by their countrymen as traitors, apostates, and tools of the oppressor; shunned as the wolves and bears of society—there was for them no path leading upward from their sink of degradation. Over the door of the custom-house might have been inscribed—

All hope abandon ye who enter here!

Classed by the Rabbis with thieves and murderers, the publicans could neither sit in judgment nor give evidence. Their contribution was spurred from the alms-box of the synagogue and the treasury of the temple. The scorn and byword of a nation, "scribes and people hated them as priests and peasants in Ireland have hated a Roman Catholic who took service in collecting tithes or evicting tenants."

It was to the second detested class—the agents and underlings of the capitalists—that Matthew belonged. Upon the custom-house where he sat beat the burning resentment of the people. From that custom-house he might look toward men, as the sick in quarantine look through the port-holes of their ship to the green slopes of the forbidden shore. He might wistfully gaze on his fellow-men, as the leper in his isolated lair gazed on the distant forms of health and mirth. The religion of his country could not descend to his level, and he, with the millstone of opprobrium around his neck, could not ascend to its austere eminence. Every door in Israel was closed against him.

How fearless, then, was Christ's action, when, pausing before the custom-house in Capernaum, He said to the despised collector: "Follow Me." In descending to the floor of the pit where Matthew lay, He trampled under foot the strongest prejudice, the fiercest patriotism of His countrymen. He arrayed against Himself synagogue and temple, priest and scribe, zealot and patriot.

To speak to such a man, to forget his past, to open for his life a door of hope, to receive him as a learner, to admit him into the sacred enclosure of friendship, was amazing beyond expression. What order of school must this be that enrolls such disciples? What kingdom is this which

## Opens its Gates to the Outlaw

and the apostate? But to call Matthew to permanent fellowship, to appoint him a pillar in the house of God, to make him a light-bearer for all ages—this surely cannot be. Christ's answer to this smouldering rage was, "Follow Me."

And Matthew responded as the note comes forth when the key is pressed. He left all, rose up, and followed Him. How can we account for his preparedness? Had he met and known Christ before? Or did the summer of grace first dawn on him that day?

Here Matthew first emerges into clear light, but his spiritual history dates further back. The call was not from death to life. It was from the discipleship to the suffering and the glory of the apostolic office. When the trumpet of John broke the slumbers of his country, calling the nation into the desert, a rough, rugged company—distinct, even in that hour of excitement, from the people as oil from water—came to the young prophet's side: "There came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto Him, 'Master, what shall we do?'" Even these detested vultures of the toll-house, whose repentance the Rabbis regarded impossible, had desisted the bush burning in the wilderness, and had come out to see.

We can hardly doubt that Matthew and Zacchaus were in this motley company. When the custom-house closed, the collectors would steal forth to see if there was any baptism of repentance for them. Excluded from synagogue and temple, they might be accepted by this highland prophet. They saw John trample upon prejudice and distinction. His baptism reduced the entire nation to the same dark level of guilt. The publicans were baptized, they were admitted into the porch of repentance and hope. For these outcasts, John had no stern word. He knew that the yearnings which led them to the desert were sincere. "What shall we do?" they inquired; and he said unto them: "Exact no more than that which is appointed you." They returned to their homes with John's words ringing in their ears. They returned as penitents to reform the custom-house.

Matthew's city was Capernaum, near to the city of Andrew and Peter. His office these two disciples might have passed every day. He was near the glowing centre of the new life and the new aspirations. Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven had come into Capernaum. Galilee was breaking forth into the long-promised spring. Cana had had its marriage feast and its vintage of miracle. Peter's home had been the scene of healing wonder. The centurion's servant had experienced the Divine Physician's power. None of these miracles could have been unknown to Matthew. Miracle and wonder were abroad on the Galilean air

Matthew may have seen people healed, may have been present when life and virtue went forth from the Saviour. He may have sat on the grass to hear the Sermon on the Mount. What the fig-tree had been to Nathaniel, the custom-house was to Matthew. There, Messianic longings took shape; there, the publican's soul passed

## From Despair to Hope.

from exile to the Kingdom of God. Often as the Divine Man passed through Capernaum with five or six disciples, Matthew's heart must have yearned for a fellowship so blessed. But the men who had hitherto been summoned by Christ were from the fresher ways of life, and, although in humble lot, no partition-wall shut them out from the commonwealth of Israel. On the other hand, the publican was a social outcast, and it must have seemed to him as likely that he should wear imperial purple as that he should occupy a place among the disciples of the Messiah. When Jesus called him, the call awakened surprise, but carried no compulsion. It was the word of emancipation and permission. "Shall I, a publican, follow Thee? Shall I, who am shunned and scorned by religion itself, follow Thee?" "Follow Me," says Jesus; and, like a ship gliding from the stocks into the deep, without hitch or strain, the publican enters the visible Kingdom of God.

The Redeemer's call enabled Matthew to break away from his past. Uplifting him from his excommunication, it assured his orphan soul that one human heart loved him—one voice welcomed, while all others repelled. He was called by the Holy One—called to company with the Saviour from sin; translated from flesh to spirit, from old to new.

Matthew's change of experience and fortune is one of the most remarkable in human history. In the morning a scorned Roman official, in the evening a member of the company of the Apostles. The heavenly call drew Matthew within the circle of great acts. The way between Tiberias and the Cross contains more great deeds than all the rest of the world's history. Following Christ meant living in a world where the new creation was in process.

Passing from the receipt of custom to the side of the Saviour, Matthew entered the sphere of the greatest truths inherited by man. We account those students fortunate who have a renowned master, who could look into the face of Socrates, Luther, or Arnold. Of all men those are most to be envied who listen to the words of a great prophet or of some profound or burning mind. Matthew heard the words on which faith has fed for nineteen centuries. He saw the abiding manna fall fresh from heaven. He learned the meaning of sin and life, of love and God. The follower of Christ was brought into contact with the freshest, strongest, holiest life. The air around was quick with Divine contagion—a zone of green pastures and quiet waters.

Matthew had been known as Levi. Mark and Luke recognize him by that name alone. But that name he blots out with tears. To him it is the name of the dead. The new man Matthew buries the only man Levi. Only those who have been much forgiven can

## Interpret the Great Forgiver.

It was a publican redeemed who first saw the infinite room for sinners in the heart of Jesus Christ. It was Matthew who first with glorious daring assumed the universality of the Redeemer's sympathy and power, who first saw the ap-