

The Home Mission Journal.

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The Dying Saviour to the Dying Thief.

A sermon preached by Rev. A. J. Hughes, Pastor of the Central Square Baptist Church, East Boston, Sabbath morning, April 1st, 1900.

TEXT.—Luke 23:43.—“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”

The crucifixion of the Son of God was the darkest event in human history. It was a dark event because of the character of the Victim. He was “holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners.” It is a dark deed when a prodigal son lifts his hand against an unworthy father and strikes him dead. But it is a deed of a much darker hue when such a boy lifts his hand against an honorable father, and smites him to his death. So the holy character of the Son of God deepens the blackness of the crime of His crucifixion.

The event was dark because of the fury of the wrath of the chief priests and scribes against Him. They thirsted for His blood with a longing that would seem to have been inspired by the very denizens of the pit. The event was dark because of the treachery of Judas. He was an apostle and a professed friend, but proved himself an enemy and a traitor.

The event was dark because of the faithlessness of the other apostles, for at the time when Jesus needed the support of their presence more than at any other time in His life, they forsook Him and fled.

The event was dark because of the pusillanimity of Pilate, for when judges can be intimidated, what hope is there for the triumph of justice in the world?

The event was dark because of the hiding from the eyes of the holy Victim of the light of His Father's face, which broke His heart, and caused Him to rend the heavens with the cry “My God! why hast Thou forsaken me?”

The event was so dark that the sun, shining in the Heavens, could not look upon it, and so he mantled his face in a supernatural gloom.

But this event of unparalleled darkness was penetrated with one ray of light. On either side of the Son of God there were crucified, two malefactors. When the storm of rillery breaks forth against Him they swell its strength with their jeers. But suddenly one of them turns his face in the direction of the holy sufferer by his side, and his rillery ceases. He sees in that face the lines of a superhuman grief, which cause it to be marred more than is possible to any merely human visage. He recognizes in that person divine qualities as fully as Nathanael did when he exclaimed “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.” Instantly he is changed in thought, feeling, character. He is out of sympathy with that jeering crowd; he is in sympathy with the dying Saviour. Then he reproves his fellow in crime, “Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss.” Next he prays to the Son of God, “Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy Kingdom.” The prayer no sooner escapes his lips than the reply goes back from the lips of Jesus, like the sound of mellifluous music, “Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”

Of this radiant fact in connection with the dark event of the Saviour's crucifixion I desire to speak at this time.

1. Let us consider the malefactor.

Being the only man in the entire Bible reported as having been saved at the eleventh hour, he is

worthy of our consideration. One fact stands out prominently with reference to him, viz, he was a bad man. He is spoken of in the narrative as “a malefactor,” which means a man given up to evil doing.

This fact concerning the man set me to wondering about him. I wondered, first, how much the man's ancestry may have been responsible for his being a bad man. Ancestry is responsible for corrupt character. The father of the infamous Nero, speaking one day of his boy, said, that having been borne of himself and Agrippina, he could not help but prove a curse to the state. There was philosophy in the father's remark. Infamy is the entail of a corrupt parenthood. The penitent thief may have been the victim of an iniquitous ancestry. If so, then our judgment of him must be tempered with mercy. Indeed our judgment of all such criminals must be so tempered. Moreover, we must seek by every means in our power, to put down impurity both in our lives and in the state.

Next, I wondered how much company may have been responsible for the thief's having been a bad man. There is an old Spanish proverb which says “Live with the wolves and you'll learn to howl.” The proverb is as true as it is ancient. Company tells on the life. An evangelist gave a striking illustration once while preaching. He said he had been entrusted by his brother, who was a jeweller, with a gold chain to be delivered to the owner. He put it in his vest pocket, and forgot it. At last, after two weeks he found it there safe, but, greatly to his dismay, black and tarnished. He was at a loss to account for it, until he found a bad pencil, along which it had been lying, and instead of the gold imparting its brightness to the lead, it had received from the lead its dullness. So is it that evil companions corrupt character. This man who became penitent on the cross may have consorted with evil companions. If so, then he was one of many who have discovered the folly of such a course. A father whom I once knew had a standing exhortation with which he used to admonish his children. It was, “chase superior associates, or none.” That is good advice to heed. If we associate with unworthy people, unless we do it for the reason that Christ did, which was to bless them, instead of our lifting them up to the attitudes of purity and righteousness, they will drag us down into the quagmires of shame and sin. Let us, then, be careful of our associates.

But, however ancestry, however company may have been responsible for the malefactors having been a bad man, in the last analysis his own choice was responsible for his being what he was. The Eden of innocence was lost in the primal transgression. But the Eden of human possibilities remains. In this garden grow also the tree of life and the tree of death. It is our privilege to pluck and eat of the tree of life, and so be worthy members of society, and fit then for the Kingdom of Heaven. Or it is our privilege to pluck and eat of the tree of death, and so be unworthy members of society, and unfit for the Kingdom of Heaven. We can all be pure and good if we determine that, in the strength of God, we shall be. That is our inalienable right as beings made in the image of God. It was the inalienable right of the converted malefactor also, and for trusting it from him he was himself to blame. But though he was a bad man, the Son of God had mercy on him and saved him, even at the eleventh hour. Thus did He give a practical exhibition of the errand that brought Him here, which was “to seek and to save that which was lost.”

(To be Continued.)

A Little Pilgrim.

DICKIE RHYMER.

One summer's evening, ere the sun went down,
When city men were hastening from the town
To reach their homes—some near at hand, some far—
By snorting trains, by omnibus or car,
To be beyond the reach of city's din—
A tram-car stopped, a little girl got in:
A cheery looking girl, scarce four years old;
Although not shy, her manners were not bold;
But all about one scarce could understand.

She held a little bundle in her hand—
But which did not seem broad and butter hide:
A satin scarf, so natty and so neat,
Was o'er her shoulders thrown. She took her seat,
And laid her bundle underneath her arm,
And smiling prettily, but yet so calm,
She to the porter said, “May I lie here?”
He answered instantly, “O yes, my dear.”
And there she seemed inclined to make her stay,
While once again the tram went on its way.
The tall conductor—over six feet high,
Now scanned the travelers with a business eye;
But in that eye was something kind and mild,
That took the notice of the little child.
A little after, and the man went round,
And soon was heard the old familiar sound,
Of gathering pence, and clipping tickets to—
The tram was full and he had much to do.
“Your fare, my little girl,” at length he said,
She looked a moment, shook her little head,—
“I have no pennies; don't you know?” said she,
“My fare is paid, and Jesus paid for me.”
He looked bewildered—all the people smiled;
“I didn't know; and who is Jesus, child?”
“Why don't you know He once for sinners died,
For little children, and for men beside,
To make us good; and wash us from our sin:
Is this his railway I am travelling in?”
“Don't think it is! I want your fare you know!”
“I told you Jesus paid it long ago:
My mother told me just before she died
That Jesus paid when he was crucified;
That at the cross His railway did begin,
Which took poor sinners from a world of sin;
My mother said his home was grand and fair;
I want to go and see my mother there—
I want to go to heaven, where Jesus lives,
Won't you go too? My mother said he gives
A loving welcome—shall we not be late?
Oh let us go before He shuts the gate;
He bids us little children come to Him.”
The poor conductor's eyes felt rather dim,
He knew not why—he fumbled at his coat,
And felt a substance rising in his throat,
The people listened to the little child,
Some were in tears—the roughest only smiled,
And some one whispered as they looked amazed:
“Out of the mouths of babes the Lord is praised.”
“I am a pilgrim,” said the little thing;
“I'm going to heaven. My mother used to sing
To me of Jesus and His Father's love;
Told me to meet her in His home above,
And so to-day when aunt went out to tea,
And looking out, I could not father see,
I got my bundle—kissed my little kit,
(I am so hungry—won't you have a bit?)
And got my hat, and then I left my home,
A little pilgrim up to heaven to roam:
And then your carriage stopped, and I could see
You looked so kind. I saw you beckon me,
I thought you must belong to Jesus' train,
And are you just going home to heaven again?”
The poor conductor only shook his head;
Tears in his eyes—the power of speech had fled,
Had conscience by her prattle roused his fears,
And struck upon the fountain of his tears,
And made his thoughts in sad confusion whirl;
At last he said, “O now I'd a little girl,
I loved her much; she was my little pet,
And with great fondness I remember yet
How much she loved me. But one day she died.”
“She's gone to heaven,” the little girl replied;
“She gone to Jesus—Jesus paid her fare;
Oh, dear conductor, won't you meet her there?”
The poor conductor now broke fairly down;
He could have borne the harshest look or frown,
But no one laughed; but many sitting by
Beheld the scene with sympathetic eye.
He kissed the child, for she his heart had won,
“I am so sleepy,” said the little one,
“If you will let me, I'll lie here and wait
Until your carriage comes to Jesus' gate;
Be sure you wake me up, and pull my frock,
And at the gate give just one little knock!
And you'll see Jesus there!” The strong man wept.
I could but think as from the car I step,
How oft a little one has found the road,
The narrow pathway to that blest abode;
Through faith in Christ has read its title clear,
While learned men remain in doubt and fear.
A little child! the Lord oft uses such
To break or bend, the stoutest heart to touch,
Then by His Spirit bids the conflict cease,
And once forever enter the peace.
And then along the road the news we bear,
We're going to heaven—that that Jesus paid our fare!