

hands crime and sin are largely the outcome of ignorance and environment; but in our Western countries, where society is more highly organized, sin is also more highly organized. The evil-doer brings to his work a higher and more intelligent motive. His evil deeds are premeditated and planned. His motives are intensely selfish; he is numb to the feelings of others; his ear is deafened to their cry of distress; his eyes are blinded to their woeeful condition of want; his conscience is stilled. He would not be deterred by the unscrupulous methods in seeking his own interests, is largely responsible for the sufferings of the poor. There is in him an utter insensibility toward the feelings of others, and an utter unconcern for their sufferings. He is not moved by the cry while others grow lean. He becomes rich while others become poor. His ill-gotten gains rightly belong to others. In his concern for the needy who has felt the trampling of his hoof he is as heartless as a "spalpeen broker" who would not be moved by the cry of the poor who are both worthy and needy, and then roasts his wages.

Beware of the 'confidence man!' He may play his game so cleverly that he decamps with your money while he pretends to befriend you. Yes, beware of him; but a thousand times more beware of the man who stands ready to take your living and to take your character. Beware of him, for he sometimes does his low work under the protection of the law. Beware of him, for he comes in the semblance of a friend, and makes larger promises than as appeal to the instincts of only a friend. Beware of him, for he is the ravenous wolf in a sheep's clothing. By his smoothness of tongue, and his dissimulating interest in one's welfare, he would deceive the very elect.

No "high diver" is as much to be feared as the agent of the White Slave traffic. Thousands of girls have unwarily fallen a prey to his wiles. They have lost, not their money, but what is of supreme value, their souls. Many are the cunning schemes and low devices which he employs to catch the unwary, and his victims are not alone confined to the homeless and the friendless.

The only cure for the ills of society is found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Society must be made over again, and made over on the principles of God's Kingdom. But this can be done only as the human heart is made over again. When society is thus made over again there will be no shame for men and women in their own, but every man his brother's good. When men put first things first the god of gold will be dethroned. The task of the church is a task beset with tremendous difficulties, but through faith in her omnipotent God she is bound to succeed. In the meantime we can do our share in relieving suffering and making a better human society by a full application of the principles of Christian living to our individual lives.

*A log will not burn alone!*

The flame grows less, the hearth is  
dark,

Low sings the sap in crooning tone;  
The room grows chill, and cold, and stark.

One's heart holds back, as if to hark  
For ghostly sobs and eerie moan—

A log will not burn alone.

*A life will not glow alone*

The smile seems sad, the senses start,  
The will lies useless, limp and prone;  
Unchallenged and uncheered the heart,  
And one by one the stars depart  
From all life's sky, to darkness grown—  
A life is death alone!

SHOW THIS PAPER TO YOUR FRIENDS.

## The Parable of the Two Sons

TOPIC FOR FEBRUARY CONSECRATION MEETING.

Matt. 21: 28-32

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**R**EAD the context of this parable in order to get its correct setting. Jesus had been going about doing good for a long time. The Pharisees, and priests, who were the religious monopolists of the time, were at first indifferent to his growing popularity and power; then critical, then hostile, and hateful. For he was not always openly critical of these. As a class they were expert in the art of opportunism. They wanted to be popular and any action of theirs that would run counter to popular sentiment or public opinion was studiously avoided. However, when they had a chance to annoy Jesus without involving popular disapproval, they were quick to act. Their pent-up inner rage burst forth in this parable. They would not always shelter themselves where possible under some legal authority or well-established precedent.

One day as Jesus was teaching in the temple and men were hanging breathlessly on the gracious words that fell from His lips, these professional critics and censors of public acts came around, and asked Him by what "authority" He was doing these things. Jesus answered by asking them a question concerning John the Baptist. Now the Pharisees and priests had acknowledged John the Baptist as a prophet, and they knew that the people held him as such. John the Baptist, it will be remembered, had pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. This was the chief work of his ministry. The priests were snared, but did not want to acknowledge the plain evidence was against them. There had been messengers of God and had derived his authority from heaven, so Jesus would have the same authority on the testimony of John. But the crafty priests—the professed leaders of religion, mark you—resorted to falsehood and said, "We do not know." And so Jesus told the Baptist not his "authority."

These men had been trying to find weak places in the "armour" of Jesus and failed; now He turns His hand upon them, and in these great parables exposes their innermost iniquities and their faithlessness to the trust reposed on them as leaders of the people. This may be looked upon as a kind of warfare, but we must bear in mind that there was a very different kind of warfare going on—between the ruling motives of the two parties. The priests were "inspired" by selfish, sectarian hate; Jesus by heavenly love. The Pharisees and Sadducees in the hollowed parables expose severely the selfish motives of the Pharisees; and, along with this we should note the twenty-second and twenty-third chapters of Matthew in full. But let us turn to the twenty-fourth chapter, where whose heart was "emptied of all, but love." No one loved the Pharisees and Scribes more than Jesus. No one loved David better than Nathan. The proof of the truth of the love of Jesus is candid, as well as kind.

For the background of our parable study we should review the history and character of the scribes, priests and Pharisees of that day. Most any life of Christ—Farrar's, Gelkie's, Sanday's, Stalker's—may be examined for a sketch of the typical religious leader of the time. The righteousness which had been taught by God's prophets of old had been a righteousness of the heart, of personal character. Let us refer to Psalm 51, or Isa. 58, to verify this. Inner holiness changes the outer life invariably. As time passed on there grew up a class of religious leaders in Israel who man-

ified the outward expression of signs of religion more than the inner life. Peculiarities of dress, food, motions, and so forth were substituted for love to God and love to man. The religion was set up for external observances, fastings, prayers, tithes, washings, sacrifices,—all of which might be practised and the heart be full of evils and selfishness. The religion of Jesus was "peculiar," but it was not due to holiness in the heart. As a class they were self-righteous, proud, censorious, unsympathetic, hypocritical, insincere. The religion of Jesus was the forerunner of "religious" leaders? It is the inevitable outcome of professionalism in religion, that is, the making of religion conform to the acceptance of arbitrary standards. Stakgold calls "Life of Christ," says: "It is a well-known principle in history, that whenever the ceremonial is elevated to the level of dogma, the moral, the latter will soon be lost sight of."

But such people are wiser than seven men that can render a reason, and the task of convincing them of their need of repentance was one that anyone with less wisdom and insight than Jesus, would have shrunk from. The chance of success was so remote, and the possibility of evoking only their wrath so likely we marvel at the courage of the One essaying to undertake it. He well knew that they would stop at nothing in an effort to revenge themselves and destroy Him for telling the truth.

Now to take up the parable in particular. We have as usual with Jesus, a study in real life. It is not two systems of theology He is contrasting, not "Christianity" and Judaism, or Christianity and heathenism; but two lives. Men may be better or worse than what they profess to believe. "Be not deceived," quoth St. John, "he that doeth righteousness is righteous." "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father." "Faith without works is dead." The good Samaritan may have had a poor kind of creed, to appearances, but he was all right in his conduct and put the professional holy Jew to utter shame. The professional Jew should have been in God greater than Jesus had seen among his own people. It is what men do that tells.

Jesus very aptly and forcibly personified this formal, mechanical, professional type of religion in the parable of our study: "A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, I have here a vineyard, and I have need of laborers. Here was a great privilege, offering and an opportunity for a life of service and for the discharge of an obligation for a father's love. We are surprised to find this son rejecting this offer point blank. The answer, we surmise, is typical of the attitude of many of our young men. They may make excuses of all varieties, but after all, it means, *"I will not."* "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." But we read on and the situation is changed. It is hard for men to fight against the love calls of God. Hard for men to refuse to do their duty to God, and we read that "afterward, he repented and went." This too is typical, typical, we submit, of all who enter the Kingdom of God. For have we not all at some time or other said, "I will not" to God? But under the influence of what might be called the lives' repent of them are the world's Pharisees, whether ancient or modern.