

The Quiet Hour.

Parable of the Ten Virgins.*

Ten virgins which took their lamps, v. 1. This may well remind Christian people of their privileges. Those virgins were invited to the marriage, torches were given them, and they had opportunity both of serving the bridegroom and sharing in his joy. So, to the whole Christian world, the invitation has been given to wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, and when He comes to share his joy and do Him service. If we miss that service and that joy, we shall have only our own wilful folly to blame.

Five of them were wise, and five were foolish, v. 2. To a looker on, all the virgins must have looked very much alike in appearance and conduct. Yet five were wise, and five were foolish; five obtained an entrance into the marriage feast and five were shut out. And amongst those who make the same profession of Christ, a human eye may mark little difference. Only God, whose eye is all-seeing, discerns. But He discerns unerringly, He cannot be deceived.

That they were foolish . . . took no oil . . . but the wise took oil, vs. 3, 4. This is the difference between wisdom and folly. Folly lacks consideration, regards nothing beyond the moment, whilst wisdom looks to the future and provides for contingencies. Such wisdom and folly are exemplified in the religious life of men. I am invited to enter the Christian life. I am to light a torch which is not to be extinguished in a few moments, but which is to be kept burning to the Master comes. In faith and love and obedience, I am to endure to the end. When Jesus comes He is to find in me one who will help to adorn His triumph, a trophy of His grace, one who has been redeemed from sin and changed from a guilty rebel into a loving and loyal subject of the King. I am to contribute to His satisfaction when He sees of the travail of His soul. I must then ask myself if I have that in me which will secure this endurance, this perseverance, and which will enable me to add lustre to His coming. It is evident that no outward connection with the church, no superficial wave of religious emotion will suffice. There must be the work of God's spirit in my heart, leading me to a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ, to sincere faith and willing obedience. This is to have oil in the vessel with the lamp.

They all slumbered and slept v. 5. There is a necessary attention to the ordinary affairs of life which no Christian can avoid and which is not wrong. The bridegroom may come whilst one is sleeping, in this sense, and yet one may be ready for Him. In other words, sudden death may overtake one at his daily work; and if his heart be right with God, he will go to heaven as surely as if he had been stricken on his knees at prayer.

Give us of your oil, v. 8. There are many who would accept a substitute for personal religion if it could be found. Hence arose the teaching that people of saintly life have laid up a surplus of merit which may now be dispensed by the church as from a treasury and those who desire can purchase

*S. S. lesson Feb. 3, 1901, Matt. 25:13. Golden Text: Matt. 25:13. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

of this merit for their own benefit. This was one of the great errors against which the Protestant Reformers had to contend. There are, doubtless many today who live easy-going lives in reference to religion, who, when startled by the approach of death, would be glad to take advantage of such an arrangement and beg or purchase from others a religious standing which they have not taken the trouble to secure for themselves. Sometimes the minister is sent for at the last to visit a home where his presence has not hitherto been welcome, as if he could change in a moment the course of a career which for years has been deliberately turned away from Christ. The parable shows, like a dazzling flashlight, the sad folly of such false refuge of careless and deluded souls.

Go ye rather to them that sell, v. 9. Good advice; but when it was spoken it was almost too late to take advantage of it. The chances are against being able to buy at midnight. "The only way to secure ourselves against being found wrong at the last is to get right at the first." In "the acceptable time" (Isa. 49:8) let men "come and buy without money and without price." (Isa. 55:1.)

They that were ready went in, v. 10. They went in because they were ready. The others were excluded because they were not ready. They come back after their fruitless search for oil at midnight and pray that their unreadiness may be excused and that they may be admitted notwithstanding. But that cannot be. Heaven is a place of holiness. It is a place where Christ's servants do Him service. The life which leads to faith and holiness must be awakened by God's spirit in our hearts. We must learn to love Christ's service now. Then we shall be ready for His coming and for His service hereafter.

Good Will To Men.

Of all things beautiful and good
The kindest is brotherhood;
For it will bring again to earth
Her long-lost poesy and mirth;
And 'till it comes, these men are slaves
And travel downward to the dust of graves
Clear the way, then, clear the way;
Blind creeds and kings have had their day:
Break the dead branches from the path;
Our hope is in the aftermath.
To this event the ages ran;
Make way for brotherhood, make way
for man.

—Edwin Markham.

Do you know the origin of excuses? You will find it away back in Eden. When Adam had sinned, he tried to excuse himself. "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me the tree, and I did eat." He tried to lay the blame on God, Eve tried to lay it on the serpent; and down to the present time, men and women, with one consent, begin to make excuse.—D. L. Moody.

God never places us in any position in which we cannot grow. We may fancy we are so impeded by fretting petty cares that we are gaining nothing; but when we are not sending any branches upward, we may be sending roots downward. Perhaps in the time of our humiliation, when everything seems a failure, we are making the best kind of progress.—Elizabeth Prentiss.

Joy in Heaven.

REV. JOSEPH HAMILTON.

I never realized so vividly as I did some time ago what joy there must be in heaven when one sinner is rescued and brought home. I was a passenger in a steamer on the Pacific ocean when she lost her rudder in a heavy sea. Without a rudder what could we do but drift wherever the wind and tide might carry us? And we did drift for three days and nights, happily without being wrecked, but without any possibility of reaching the golden gate of San Francisco to which we were bound. The steam tugs, however, were looking for us all the time, for it was known that we were disabled, and liable to be lost. On a bright Sunday morning one of these tugs bore down upon us like an angel of mercy, and towed us safely into the harbor. But what surprised me much was the dense throng of people assembled on the piers. What are the people there for? They were to hear if possible some news of our ship that was so long overdue. It was known that she was disabled and might be lost. So the attitude and anxiety of the people brought them down to the docks in thousands, and there they waited with strained and eager expectation for news of the missing steamer and when the news came that the ship was found, and was being towed into the harbor, the crowds waited to give her a welcome home. I shall never forget that welcome that greeted us as we arrived safely at the pier. There were tears and shouts of joy. I was made involuntarily to think of the rapture there must be in heaven when one erring sinner is brought home. These deeper feelings of our nature are seldom touched, but there is a bond of friendship and of tenderness in us all far deeper than we know. That great company that gave us welcome for the most part were strangers to us, but one touch of nature made us all kin, and all hearts bounded with joy, or melted into tenderness, as we safely came ashore. I can imagine, then, something of the rapture, the welcome, the hope of those who are safe on the other shore when one other soul is rescued and received home. Till we reach that other shore ourselves we shall never know how much meaning there is in the statement that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

The joy that you seemed to surrender is multiplied ten-fold when you begin to seek not yourself, but other men.—Philips Brooks.

You can never drive out the uncleanness of evil thoughts, except by pouring in the clean wholesomeness of the thoughts of Christ.—Robert Speer.

The January number of the Missionary Review of the world is well worthy of the Twentieth Century. It opens with a clear-cut, forceful article by Dr. Arthur T. Pierson the Editor-in-Chief, on "The Missionary Outlook for the New Century." This is followed by an illustrated article on the "Persecuted Chinese Christians," by Dr. Hunter Corbett, of Chefoo, China. Rev. Henry Richards, of the Kongo Mission, contributes a third paper on the Romance of Missions in Africa in his story of "Paul, the Apostle of Banza Manteke." The Review promises valuable contributions for the coming year in the way of timely and inspiring articles from the best missionary writers of our day. Published monthly by Funk & Wagnalls Co., 30 Lafayette Place, New York. \$2.50 a year.