

Our Contributors.

For Dominion Presbyterian.

A Notable Interview.

By ROBERT McCONNELL, OTTAWA.

The interview of our Saviour with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well is one of the most wonderful of the many wonderful stories recorded in the New Testament. Viewed simply as a narrative it cannot fail to attract attention; but we have perhaps read it so often, without taking time to prayerfully study it, that it has become interesting to us simply as a pleasing Bible story. It is the study of the passage in detail that reveals to us its wondrous beauty, its searching doctrine, its marvellous teaching.

The interview of our Saviour with Nicodemus was with a man of character and standing in the highest Jewish circles, evidently anxious to receive light on some of the problems connected with the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth which were causing him serious perplexity. The interview with the woman of Samaria was of a different cast. She was a fallen woman, comparatively ignorant, armed with strong prejudices against the Jews, and not seeking for light until the Saviour's searching presentation of the truth aroused, first, her curiosity and then her interest.

The Saviour was on his way from Jerusalem to Galilee, some eight months after his notable meeting with Nicodemus; and we are told in the tenth verse of the chapter (John iv.) that "he must needs go through Samaria." Why the "must needs?" Some would say off-hand that it was the shortest and most direct route, which probably is correct. Here it may be noted that in going from Jerusalem to Galilee the Jews, and particularly the Pharisees, would make a detour through the valley of the Jordan, so that they might avoid ceremonial defilement which would be involved in their coming into contact with the Samaritans, whose religion was a mixture of Judaism and heathenism, and between whom and the Jews a feud had existed from the time Ezra refused their aid in the building of the second temple. But does not the narrative itself fully explain the "must needs" to go through Samaria? He who came to seek and to save the lost, and who never so much "rejoiced in spirit" as when bestowing blessings upon weary sin-sick souls, had a mission to Samaria. There was a lost sinner to be saved; a wandering sheep to be gathered into the fold; a jewel to be prepared for a setting in the Redeemer's diadem; a light to be kindled in Samaria that would attract and guide many into the Kingdom. And in all this there was to be taught the Jews the lesson that Jesus will gather his elect out of all nations and save sinners from all classes and conditions of suffering humanity.

Where the interview took place was a historic spot—the story of Jacob's well dating back some 1760 years from the time of our Saviour—the Samaritans, as the woman's language clearly indicated, claiming the right to share in its historical associations. The well is situated on the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph in the vicinity of Shechem, as indicated in Genesis 33:19.

Now look at the picture as it is presented in the sacred narrative. Jesus weary with his journey, sat by the well. Though he was the Son of God and equal with the Father, in taking our nature upon Him he subjected Himself to the vicissitudes of human life. He suffered hunger, thirst and weariness; was dependent upon earthly friends for the bare comforts and necessities

of his earthly existence; was exposed to temptation and danger; endured sorrow and pain and sadness, and wept at the ever-present reminders of human mortality he saw all around him—all this that he might be our Elder Brother, with all that the term "brother" implies in its highest and noblest sense. As a well-known hymn beautifully expresses the sentiment:

"In every pang that rends the heart
The man of sorrows had a part;
He sympathizes with our grief,
And to the sufferer sends relief.

And the other side of the picture was the fallen, sinful woman of Samaria who had come out to the well to draw water. Perchance, because of her sin, she was ostracized and tabooed by her own sex in Samaria, while those whose lustful passions had dragged her down from her virgin purity and made her a fallen woman, it may be, still had the *entre* to the best social circles in that city—as too often happens in our day and in the highest circles in this land of Bibles, Sabbaths, and churches. And yet this semi-heathen woman had a clearer conception of the character and mission of the Messiah than many of those who despised the Samaritans. The Jews expected the Messiah to come as a temporal prince and restore the Kingdom to Israel. She thought of the Messiah as coming in the character of a teacher—"I know that Messiah cometh which is called Christ; when he is come he will tell us all things."

Jesus was alone by the well when the woman came to draw water. Her reply to his request for a drink of water was not a refusal—that would have been altogether out of keeping with eastern ideas of hospitality. It was rather an expression of surprise that He, a Jew, should ask such a favor from a Samaritan whom the Jews despised and with whom they would have no dealings. The surprise thus expressed indicated that her curiosity had been aroused, but she little thought she was then talking to the Messiah whose coming was expected by the Samaritans as well as by the Jews.

The Saviour's conciliatory rejoinder and his references to the "living water" he was able to supply to thirsty, sin-sick souls, gained her attention and awakened her interest, but the tone of her request for the living water showed that she had no conception of its spiritual meaning. More light dawned on her when the Saviour revealed to her His knowledge of her sinful life, drawing from her the confession: "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet." The subject was evidently an unwelcome one to her, for she sought to parry the Saviour's thrust and divert attention from her sinful life by raising an issue as to the respective merits of the Samaritan and Jewish places of worship. This in turn afforded the Saviour the opportunity of demonstrating to her that under His Kingdom acceptable worship of Jehovah would not be confined to any time or place, the essential point being that it must be spiritual in its nature. Again she sought escape from the logical conclusions of his presentation of sacred truth by saying: "I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ; when he is come he will tell us all things." Jesus met this by saying: "I that speak unto thee am He." This revelation of himself to the woman as the long-promised Messiah closed the interview. Strange that his first definite avowal of his Messiahship should have been made to this woman of Samaria; and that His first appearance after the resurrection should have been to Mary Magdalen.

It is in the sequel of the interview that the lessons of the narrative are beautifully and

instructively focussed. How striking is the action of the woman. In her new-found joy she forgot her errand to the well, left her water-pot and hastened back to the city to tell her friends and neighbors how she had found the Messiah. The people accepted her testimony, invited Jesus into the city that they might hear the Gospel from Himself, with the result that old Samaria had a genuine revival of religion. How many of those who professed to have found the Saviour during the recent evangelistic services in Ottawa, will have the courage and faithfulness and love to imitate the example set by the Samaritan woman, and go and tell others of the blessedness they have found in making a full surrender of their hearts, and earnest consecration of their lives to "Him who loved them and gave Himself for them?" It is in finding others and leading them to the Saviour that those who have accepted the gift of a free salvation will find one of their chief joys, as many a faithful Christian worker can testify.

And what of Him who spake as never man spake? The disciples came back from the city with food, but to their invitation to partake of it, he replied: "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." Leading a lost sinner out of darkness into light has so filled his heart with joy that he forgot his hunger, thirst and weariness, and in earnest loving words drew the attention of his disciples to the spiritual fields already whitened for the harvest of Christian work.

What an inspiration should this story of the Samaritan woman prove to Christian workers—and every Christian should be a worker in the sphere in which God has placed him or her, no matter how humble that sphere may be. How many earnest Christian workers can testify of the joy that has come to them when privileged to lead even one soul to the Saviour. What must be the joy of those who by God's grace are privileged to "turn many to righteousness!"

"Let none hear you idly saying,
'There is nothing I can do,'
While the souls of men are dying,
And the Master calls for you,
Take the task he gives you gladly,
Let his work your pleasure be;
Answer quickly when he calleth,
'Here am I, send me, send me.'"

The Ethical Record is a bi-monthly published by the Society for Ethical Culture, New York. It deals with a great variety of interesting and important subjects from the ethical point of view. An important feature is the address of the Chinese ambassador, Wu Ting Fang, on "Confucius." A favourable review of the late Principal Caird's book on the Fundamental Ideas of Christianity closes with the following striking passage: "One concluding point: the reading of the book has given rise to the thought of our need of caution lest in our rejection of Christian dogma we reject also the permanently valuable psychological, spiritual insights of the Christian religion. Repentance, atonement, conversion—these terms indicate certain great permanent facts of human nature and experience; and they must be recognized and provided for in our scheme of life, in an ethical no less than in a dogmatic and theological discipline and religion." From this source the admission is well worth noting; it shows that spirit of open-mindedness and fairness which is essential to the truth-seeker.

Arguments are never lacking when they are backed up by self-interest.—A. B. Walkley