

market place, and go home for their meals, often develops qualities which are neither admirable nor exemplary. They love play as opposed to all earnest work, and in their play they manifest whim, caprice, peevishness. They are changeable in their humour; easily provoked; fastidious and hard to please; playing at a marriage now and at a funeral then, but finding no enjoyment in either at the time.

The men of Christ's own time, and especially the religious people of the day—the bearded and phylactered Pharisees, who were the boastful leaders in all piety—were like children. He and John were greatly in earnest about the truths of the Kingdom. They spoke of eternal things to the souls of men; with strong crying they called the dead to life; they strove with holy might and main to promote the interests of piety in the earth: while the Pharisees were merely playing at religion, making it a thing of garments, and beards, and toy sacrifices, and toy charities, and toy prayers—all the time smiling complacently on themselves and their works. But the unpleasing childlikeness went further. They not merely played at religion, but they quarrelled while at play. They were changeable in their temper, capricious in their humour, peevish, and hard to please. One set wanted to play at marriages when the other set wanted to play at funerals, and things were always getting out of joint. John and Christ were utterly unlike in spirit, in ways of life and methods of work; if one is unpopular, surely the other will be a favourite? They represent extremes, but one must please! No; both are unpopular. John the Baptist came a very storm, thundering in upon the dull and fatal repose of the Church; a man of mind and heart and soul crying to the mind and heart and soul of men to awake to a sense of right and God and eternal judgment; with most awful earnestness he preached on the need for penitence, and pointed to the heavens gathered black with threatened woes. But the small-souled critics who had hurried down to Jordan at the tidings of the new preacher said: This is extreme; he is a monomaniac; he is possessed; he has only one fixed idea in his head; he hath a devil, and is mad, come away. The Baptist mourned to them, wailed and wept over the dead virtues of a nation, but they would not lament. They said: This is not religion; the tune of the Church is set to a gayer measure than that; life has joy in it; the Church is the home of gladness, come away, that fellow for ever crying, Repent, repent, is mad.

Then Jesus came out of Nazareth—bright as a spring morning, lovely as a thought of God—but a man, intensely a man, one of the people; not an ascetic, but conforming to the ordinary habits of society; eating and drinking wine at a marriage just like the other feasters; accepting an invitation to a dinner-party on a Sabbath afternoon; dressing like the ordinary mortals of village and city. His look upon the lily, and the bird, and the corn in the fields, and the water that gleamed in a well, and the blue depths of heaven, caused joy to break from his eyes and his lips in unmeasured streams. And again the long-faced Pharisees were shocked. They said, Surely this man is of hard heart, for he seems to forget the sadness that is in human life, the sins and misery and death that are all around; an earnest man, a real teacher inspired of God, could never sit down and feast while men are dying. See what drunkenness there is around, and yet *he* drinks wine; behold a wine-bibber as bad as the rest. Men are gluttons, and he eats like them; behold a glutton. Look at his chosen companions, they are not the great saints of the day, they are not respectable Pharisees, they are not even members of the Church; he is rather the friend of publicans and sinners. He is not a prophet, he is a sinner, he is the emissary of Beelzebub.

Yes, friends, it may sound very strangely in your ears, and it may rudely tear some loved illusions from our eyes, but it is none the less true that, while John the Baptist was charged with madness, with being beside himself, Jesus Christ was publicly charged with drunkenness and gluttony. And this not by sneering Sadducees who gloried in all the shame of the Church, not by the hard-hearted unbelievers of the day, but by prominent members of the Church. John stood outside of society; had no mind for their ordinary life; had no sympathy with their light-hearted manners; his criticism was condemnation—and they called him mad. Jesus Christ was one of the people; ate like them; drank like them; dressed like them; companied with them—and they said, "Behold a winebibber and a glutton, a friend of publicans and sinners."

But Jesus Christ turned from the tribunal of childish men to that higher, that highest, true Wisdom. "And yet," He exclaimed, "wisdom was justified of her children." They were working in different ways, they were employing different methods; but they were sent by one God, they were animated by one spirit, they were looking for one result. John was not a reed shaken by the wind, nor a seeker of ease in kings' palaces, but a prophet,—aye, and more than a prophet. Jesus Christ was not a profligate, but man's true brother, man's lofty exemplar, man's way to truth, man's redeemer, man's sacrifice, the Son of God, with power to save unto the uttermost. The small-soul'd Pharisees, with their dry moralities and perverted visions, misjudged both; but the eternal wisdom of God was justified, was vindicated in the lives they lived and the works they did.

I want to use the teaching of this parable for criticism and instruction. The first point of interest is found in the people themselves, who had set up as judges of John and Christ, and whom Christ likened to discontented children

playing in the market place. Remember that the Church had become a mere formality,—a body without a soul, a letter without the infinite inner sacredness of the spirit of truth. The divine teaching which had come by prophet and priest had crystallised into hard and dry creeds for the regulation of personal demeanour; the system had become mere rusted machinery—the fire that once burned at the centre had long ago died out. Great pressure was brought to bear upon the Church from without, for great changes were being forced upon all institutions. But the Jews clung to their traditions, and maintained the old forms of things, in the vain imagining that they were clinging to the old life which once moved so strongly in the heart of their fathers. And as it always happens with a people enslaved by the conventional as to creeds and forms of life, they were an unintellectual people. The strict Pharisee was as ignorant as he was narrow. With but few exceptions Phariseism was separated from the intellectual life of the age. Letters, music, and philosophy were confined to Greece; Rome was developing the science of politics, but the Jews were content to stand still, and desired only to be let alone. Such men could no more understand a John or a Jesus than an Indian could comprehend an angel, or an ape could understand a Darwin. They wanted a great man, and rushed to hear John, and then to hear Jesus; but, then, they had formed their ideal, and he must answer to that, or be no great man at all to them. They wanted a great work done in the midst of them, and for them; but, then, they had decided what the work was, and how it should be done. They took no counsel of Heaven—only of their own understanding; they sought no higher wisdom than the feeble light of their own knowledge. A sound came from the desert—the voice of an original man calling on men to repent; they went down to see, and returned disappointed, saying: "A reed shaken with the wind," a madman shouting for an hour. Tidings came of a teacher from Nazareth. They saw a genial man—a man of joy and sorrow, of sympathy most tender—a man blessing children, and eating and drinking in a common way, and they said "*He is not the man*; he is a profligate." John mourned unto them, but they said he was mad, and would not lament. Christ piped to them, but they called Him hard names and would not dance,—a poor, peevish, small-soul'd people, whose miserable humours changed like the wind, and whom nothing could satisfy and nothing could please.

That is past and gone; but it is marvellous how history repeats itself, and how the mill of time grinds the old down to bring it forth again as new, preserving the spirit. There are people in all our churches answering exactly to this old world-picture of the children in the market place. Their religion consists in devotion to forms and creeds. Because they are theological, they think they are pious. They can only reason within certain defined limits; they allow themselves no freedom and so deny it to others; they are capricious and peevish as children—nothing will please or hold them for long together—the smallest departure from the conventional is a violent outrage to be resented at all costs; and like those old Jews they are always looking for some new man to come and work a change—for they are not satisfied even with the old traditional—but the man must work in their way, and the change must be after their mind, or he is no prophet and hero to them—a reed in the wind, or—a profligate. Some are like that by the very nature of them. They are shallow pools only, and every passing breeze stirs them to the bottom—there are no great silent deeps in them which remain calm when the surface is troubled—they have no reserves of affections which they can use when faith is shaken and constancy is tested—they are soon hot and soon cold, but never caught and held for long by a great sentiment or a great idea. And it is a fact that such men are easily brought into the Church for they are easily impressed—they do not enter by the reason but by the impulse of shallow emotions. And they never think their way out of it, or think their way through it; they simply say, "does this or that please me?" and according to their capricious temper do they love or dislike. Let a man come and beg them to mourn—let him tell them of sins and misery, of the judgments of God on earth and hell hereafter; they say, this is too lugubrious, too dismal; we want some bright colours woven into life; we want some singing and dancing—don't turn life into a funeral. But let some man come and tell them of God's mercy and love—of the joys which are sown in man's lot as flowers are sown in the garden—of the hope which shines clear from the Fatherhood of God into the great hereafter—and they say, 'Ah! but we want to hear the doctrine of original sin, and predestination, and eternal torment!' Let a man come who practices all the hardness of the ascetic—let him dress ecclesiastically, and look ecclesiastically, and talk after the manner of the old Fathers, and they say, 'Oh yes; he is good, but so unsympathetic; he doesn't understand us at all.' Let him be the other extreme—let him live a man's life amongst men—speaking his earnest strong word as he best knows how—but assuming no ecclesiastical airs, and they say he is—well, they have a variety of names for him. I know those people—some of them—great ill-tempered boys; they find nothing to please them—at home nothing is right, and they grumble—in the church everything is wrong, and they grumble there—children in the streets pipe to them, and they'll ask for a funeral—mourn to them, and they'll ask for cheerful music. They are themselves the standard of thought, the directors of work, and whatever is not tame, is not half-and-halfness, whatever is not mediocre is wrong—a thing to be condemned. Now, as in the