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MISQUOTED TEXTS OF SCRIPTURE.—No. IV.

BY THE EDITOR.

“The eleventh hour.” Matt. xx. 6, 7.

The parable to which these words belong seems to be intended by the Great Teacher as a warning to the Jews, (and to the disciples of Christ in all ages of the church,) against the spirit which He foresaw would ultimately lead to their rejection as a nation, “their proud appreciation of themselves, and of their own work; their displeasure at seeing the Gentiles, aliens so long, put on the same footing, and admitted to equal privileges with themselves in the Kingdom of God.” The earlier hours—the third, sixth, and ninth, are generally understood as representing the earlier ages of the Jewish church, perhaps their times of awakening, and reconsecration to the service of God, and “the eleventh hour” the time of our Lord’s ministry, during which “publicans and harlots” were pressing into this Kingdom, and Gentiles were flocking to Him to embrace the message of mercy which the Jews were rejecting.

Wrenched altogether from its connexion, however, the parable has been made to teach the Divine compassion and readiness to save even in the dying hour. These “eleventh hour” entrants are supposed to represent death-bed conversions, or at least rare and remarkable cases of salvation among the aged and almost hopeless hearers of the Gospel.

The readiness and ability of Christ to save, however, and to save “*even to the uttermost*,” while a very precious truth, and one that must ever be held aloft by the christian teacher, is not the truth taught here. The Lord indeed is “full of compassion, and gracious.” He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” He has set no limit to the offer of His grace, as to the measure of our guilt, or the time of our acceptance of His mercy, for

“While the lamp holds out to burn
The vilest sinner may return.”

“He that believeth shall be saved.” Blessed be God for a clear revelation of that! But that is not the truth taught here. The “hours” of the parable are not the epoch’s of a man’s life, but of the church’s history. And even if they were, “the eleventh hour” is not the *dying* hour, for that were the *twelfth* hour—“the even”—at which our Lord says nothing of hiring fresh labourers, but only of reckoning with them. The men hired at “the eleventh hour” *laboured at least one hour*, and “received every man a penny,” which is conclusive against the false interpretation we have been referring to. There is one case recorded in holy Scripture of salvation in the dying hour, --that of the penitent thief—*one case*, as has been well remarked, that no one may despair, and *only one* that no one may presume. May none of our readers ever know the bitterness of remorse for a wasted and impenitent life!