

## The Quiet Hour

For Dominion Presbyterian.

### The Vine and the Branches.\*

In the Old Testament the parable of the vine plays a great part. Perhaps it was first fully developed in Isaiah's beautiful song (chap. v.), and applied in various forms by poets (Psalm lxxx.) and prophets (Ezekiel xv.). Thus it is a symbol of the relationship between God and the chosen nation, and our Lord (Matthew xxi., 33) uses it in a similar sense. Here, however, while there is still a suggestion of the Church, as the body of Christ, the stress is laid more upon the relation of the individual believer and the living Saviour. God the Father is still the husbandman, but a new element is distinctly introduced; the Christ is the vine and the believers are branches, receiving from Him the sap and strength which alone can produce a noble life. So that we have two subjects, or two sides of one subject; the central theme, the living relationship between the Lord and true disciples, and the divine care over human souls represented by the husbandman's pruning of the branches for the sake of greater fruitfulness. Let us learn from this parable to give our Lord His own supreme central place. The Church should be respected, and conduct must be regarded, but our living union with Jesus is first and most important. It is this that makes us members of the true Church and gives us power to live the real Christian life. Where the Church is made supreme, or religion reduced to morality "touched with emotion," the Christ is in danger of being dethroned, and the mystic life of the believer weakened or destroyed. You may say this is a poetic allegory; true, it is so, because it is an endeavor to suggest deep truths which cannot be stated in clear, cold terms, truths which are too great for any small words. Though we cannot fully explain or express its meaning, we may find some words that set forth various aspects of the sublime truth. The purpose of such teaching is to deepen purity and strengthen our spiritual life. Note the last words of the lesson, in which the Teacher Himself sets forth clearly the purpose of this and all the highest truth, illustrating the words of His own prayer, "Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth." Compare this with Paul's

statement (II. Cor., i., 24), where he uses the word "joy" evidently to mean the Christian life in the deepest and fullest sense. Surely the Saviour's joy is His own high life of Sonship, which is to be reproduced in those who love and trust Him. "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be fulfilled."

Jesus Christ, the source of life and joy to His people. As from the vine there flows into the branches the blessing of beauty and fruitfulness, so from the Saviour who gave Himself for us there comes the life, His own life, which He gives to us. This mystic union, because it is so real and spiritual, cannot be expressed. Paul tries to do so when he says: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," and we may say it implies a living trust on the part of the disciple and the bestowal of a living spirit on the part of our Lord. Union with Him is the cause of our spiritual life, abiding in Him the condition of fruitfulness. Discipline is very difficult in the Church, but there is a divine discipline, there is a constant judgment; names and professions are always brought to the test. God cares for the vine; He takes away the dead, useless branches, and those that are fruitful He cleanses, that they may bear more fruit. In this there is the glory of God and the good of man. The Christ counts those clean who have heard the living Word, though their life may be only in the germ. This word He speaks clearly and then returns to the allegory: "Already ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you; abide in me and I in you." This blending of two lives, the Christ abiding in us that we may abide in Him, this is a great mystery, but it is spoken concerning Christ and the Church. It is absolutely necessary; otherwise we are cast out of the true communion, and the little life in us withers away. Surely that is a sad fate from which we would earnestly pray to be delivered. On the other side is power. Away from Christ weakness; in Him power. Power to plead and prevail with God. This cannot mean to ask and have what we want in a shallow sense. Prayer must always be a sacrifice. Every prayer must be offered in the spirit of submission; there must always come from the depth of the most earnest soul the cry, "Father, not my will, but Thine be done." Those that are in Christ will be in sympathy with His redeeming pur-

poses; they will seek the things which lie along the line of the great onward march of the Kingdom; their prayer will be, "Thy Kingdom come."

The honor of God is manifested in the fruitfulness of Christ's disciples; a true Christian life is the best apology for Christianity, the best proof of the reality of faith, the best testimony to the presence and power of that living Spirit who makes all things new.

This abiding in Jesus is a dwelling in the atmosphere of love and manifesting the spirit of obedience (John xiv., 22, 23). The relationship between the disciple and the Lord is meant to be a small symbol of that divine communion which exists in its perfect purity and fulness between the Father and the Son. As the Father loved Him, so He loves us; as He obeyed the Father, so should we obey Him. He kept the Father's commandments. His meat and drink was to do the Father's will; He was able to say at the last, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do," and He promises to faithful souls strength to live according to their capacity a similar life. In this we have the secret of patient submission, hopeful toil, and final victory.

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### Great Thoughts.

By Professor John Moore.

"We live in deeds not years,  
In thoughts not breaths,  
In feelings not in figures on a dial;  
We should count time by heart-throbs;  
He lives most who thinks most,  
Feels the noblest, acts the best."  
—Festus.

The human mind was made to think  
And not in lethargy to sink,  
To rise above all earthly things,  
Borne as upon celestial wings.

Great thoughts not bound by space and time  
Expand to every land and clime,  
Not seen or weighed and measured,  
Yet in the active mind are treasured.

In nature wonderous works appear  
A mystery yet ever clear;  
When on the sky we gaze at night  
We read the thoughts which show God's might.

Great thoughts the riches of the soul,  
That ever point the heavenly goal,  
And help us in the blessed way,  
Which leads to an eternal day.

To have such treasures here below,  
'Tis heaven's will to thus bestow  
On all who are disposed to seek  
And have a heart that's true and meek.

In the inspired Word we see  
Great truths which truly make us free,  
Thoughts that are forever giving  
Light to make this life worth living.

"I was preaching with the passion of youth, on the subject of sin, and, on my way home with an old farmer, he said, 'Sin, sin, I wish we had another name for that, because the word has become so common that the thing no longer pierces our conscience!' That stuck to me, and has warned me to avoid theological terms, and to make use of words more fresh and modern."—Rev. James Staker, D.D.

\*International Sunday School Lesson for May 7th. John xv., I. Golden Text.—"I am the Vine, ye are the Branches.