

For Dominion Presbyterian.

Queen Vashti.

BY GEO. W. ARMSTRONG.

In ancient story it is told,
A fact though many centuries old,
Truth, strange as any fiction;
Ahasuerus was the Persian king,
Right regal, as the poets sing,
Unused to contradiction.

His consort was a noble queen,
Of dignified and stately mien.
As e'er wore diadem;
She scorned to heed the king's behest,
And spurned immodesty's request
Before assembled men.

The king in wrath uncrowned his queen,
Divorced, and sent her forth, I ween,
From Shushan's princely halls;
Divorced, but not disgraced that day,
Queen Vashti held more queenly sway—
True virtue never falls!

Queen Vashti, glory and renown,
Virtue and honor are the crown,
Sweet modesty and grace;
For though thy crown of worldly state
Be lost, as ancient lovels relate,
None can thy deeds deface.

Thy royal conduct as a star,
Brighter than constellations are,
Thy deeds of good repute;
A lustre bright and fair and clear,
In contrast with the darkened sphere,
Proud Ahasuerus' court.

Right noble queen of royal blood
In history's page Vashti the good,
Imperial in thy fall;
Better to fall in virtue's name,
Than wear a crown enshrined in shame,
Such honours but entral.

Side Lights on the Bible.

BY FRANCIS E. CLARK, D.D.

How Christ Answers Our Questions.

From Matthew's very interesting account of the way in which our Lord replied to the shrewd Sadducees and Pharisees who tried to entrap him in their legal disputes, concerning the seven times married woman, and concerning the greatest commandment of the law, we learn many things about our Lord's dealings with all men. To be sure, it is only one class of men whom we here meet, men who are cavilling and questioning, not as sincere inquirers, but with the idea of tripping him up in his speech. Nevertheless, we learn from this interview how he treats all men. In the first place he patiently hears their questions. Even when he knows that these questions are paltry matters of casuistry, asked with a sinister intent, he does not turn away in scornful disdain or cold indifference, but gives a fair answer even to an unfair question.

Indeed, he sees in the question a great deal more than the questioner himself. "Which is the great commandment in the law?" asked the theological quibbler, and he expects a quibbling answer. From almost any Pharisee he would have received it, an answer based on fine-spun argument and absurd deduction from uncertain premises, but in this question our Lord saw a query that was well worth answering. He saw the opportunity of laying down a principle which should stand for all time; he saw the longing of the world's heart for the greatest and most expansive truth; not only the great commandment of the law, but the great precept of right living, and so, instead of answering the petty lawyer's pettifoggish question in a pettifoggish way, as was

expected of him, he sweeps aside the little questions of the precedence of this or that law, or the relative importance of a particular kind of Sabbath observance, or a special method of washing the hands, and goes to the very heart of all truth in his demand of supreme love to God, and a love for others that is no less than our love for ourselves. Thus always is communion with our Lord broadening and inspiring. No one can go to him with a serious question without having the question interpreted by his infinite mind, and the answer given is to a far larger question than the disciple at first intended. If this is true of the hostile critic, of the caviller, of the enemy, how much more is it true to the humble believer! His questionings are always given the largest interpretation. His desires are filled with a fuller spiritual meaning than he dreams, his requests are granted, not exactly as he makes them, but in a tenfold measure. He asks for daily bread, and is given the Bread of life. He asks for ease and comfort, and is given, not earthly ease and comfort, but the source and spring of all comfort and joy.

He asks that the cup of sorrow may be taken away, and, though it is still pressed to his lips, he finds at last the sorrow transmuted into joy, and Marah becomes Naomi. Our Lord is never content with answers or questions according to our own narrow expectations, or with supplying our wants according to our own small desires.

Again, the wisdom of Christ is seen in the way He silenced the Pharisee. We would call it shrewdness if there were not connected with that word a certain unpleasant sinister meaning; but we can say that his answer reveals the very highest reaches of intellect. They show his alert, quick, eager mind. He at once turns their weapon against themselves. They presented to him the sharp point of a legal precedent on which they thought he would at once impale himself. He deftly turned end about, so that the point is presented to them, and the handle is in his own grasp. He had no time for premeditation; the questions apparently came upon him unawares, but his divine stores of wisdom were always ready; his clarified vision saw the truth as a flash of lightning reveals the mountain's outline in a murky night. Surely to such a one we may go for wisdom as well as for sympathy, for illumination of the intellect as for comfort of the heart. He will give to every humble soul that lacks wisdom, and he will give liberally and without upbraiding.

It is most interesting to note, too, that our Lord bases his questions and answers upon authority. He goes back to the Scriptures, he quotes the first commandment from Deuteronomy and the second from Leviticus, and when he would prove to them that the Messiah is the Son of God he quotes from David. Though he himself is the seat of all authority, he does not disdain to quote the written words.

There are some to-day who have become wiser than Christ in this respect. His constant practice is a rebuke to those who would dishonor even the comparatively dim revelation of the Old Testament.

Once more, Jesus, in silencing the

Pharisees, puts emphasis upon the grandest and greatest thing in the world; not wisdom or might, not shrewdness or skill, not learning or a miraculous gift, but love. Love to God and love to the neighbor; love with heart and soul and mind; love that engages the whole heart and the whole "life"—as "soul" might well be translated—and the whole mind. The emotions, the vital principle, the reason, the conscience, the appetites and passions, the intellectual powers and activities all must be used in the love of the Lord our God. No part of our physical, mental or spiritual equipment can be left out. He is supreme and demands the whole of every man.

And our neighbor, too, must have his share of this supreme bestowment of love. We must care for him no less than we care for ourselves. "This command," some one has remarked, "goes farther than the Golden Rule, though one interprets the other. That affords a measure of conduct. This calls for that love which can alone inspire right conduct."

From this noble command Paul evidently obtained his inspiration to write his wonderful paean in praise of love—the love that suffereth long and is kind, the love that envieth not, that vaunteth not itself, that is not puffed up, the love that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, the love that never fails. This is the love to God and our fellow-men which constitutes the sun of all the commands.

We see very clearly how these precepts swept away the small cavillings of the Jews, how they settled their questions of casuistry and routed them in their citadel of conceit and self-sufficiency; but do we see as plainly how this supreme and wonderful answer does the same for us? Here is the answer to all our petty questions, Shall I do this or shall I do that? How shall I keep the Sabbath? How much time shall I give to Bible reading and to prayer? What proportion of my time should be given to business and to study, and how much to my devotion? Shall I dance and play cards and go to the theatre? Can I smoke, and drink wine? We all have our questions of casuistry, and our Lord answers them all in this one supreme, eternal command: Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind. Think as much of thy neighbor as thou dost of thyself, and all these questions will take care of themselves. You will be able to answer every one of them in the light of God's love, for on these two commandments hang not only all the law and the prophets, but the solution of our deepest problems and all the conduct of our daily life.

A Mother's Kiss.

A girl in New York confessed to a magistrate the other day: "My mother never told me that she loved me; she never kissed me, so far as I can remember." An exchange aptly and forcefully says, "Hear that, ye mothers, and go home and kiss every one of your children, even if it wakes them from their sleep. Why a mother's kiss is one of the sweetest means of grace God has given to this world!"