

IS IT A PARABLE ?

A Mississippi Layman's Little Sermon.

Then said I, Oh Lord God! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables? (Ezekiel xx: 49.)

Such was the simple, but expressive and significant plaint of the Prophet, on receiving one of the Divine messages of reproof, denunciation and warning, with which, while a captive in the "land of the Chaldean," he was charged for delivery to his countrymen.

The disposition that prompted the question which the Prophet attributes to his people is not yet extinct, but perhaps prevails more generally in our own day and among those professing and calling themselves Christians, than among the ancient Israelites in the time of Ezekiel. The tendency to regard the Divine commands, the threats or promises, such of them at least as do not commend themselves to our own reason, or taste, or prejudices, as "parables," is not peculiar to any age or any people, from Naaman the Syrian to the philosophizing critics of our day, who deny the miraculous birth and resurrection of the Lord.

The duties of the Christian life, as tersely and lucidly stated in the Church Catechism, consist of two great classes—duty to God and duty to our neighbor—all indeed being due to God, but those of the former class directly; of the other only mediately and as commanded by Him. Of these two divisions of duty, most of the particulars are admitted as such by all and recognized in theory, if not in practice, as a general obligation. They conform to human reason and the dictates of natural morality, if there is any such thing.

Many of them have the sanctions of human laws, and a few of them are offensive to human pride or human prejudice. The duty of submission to "governors, teachers, spiritual pastors, and masters," is perhaps an exception. It is not practically of general acceptance, and that of lawlessness and reverence to our "betters" is hardly in harmony with the spirit of Young America. But all men are willing to commend and some to practice, truthfulness, honesty, justice, temperance and in general those duties which are not peculiar to Christianity, but recognized by all religions alike—by those of Confucius and Seneca, as well as that of Christ the Lord. Even the two distinctively Christian virtues of charity and chastity have a qualified and partial, recognition in popular estimation. Forgiveness of injuries is approved—unless under provocation to resentment—and purity is deemed obligatory on one half the human race, however disregarded or disesteemed in the other.

But with regard to the first and greater department of Christian ethics—duties directly to God—all that are not derivable from human reason, but depends entirely upon the sanctions of supernatural revelation—all that are comprised in the first four commandments of the Decalogue as enforced and expanded by the precepts of our blessed Lord and His Apostles—of these the parabolic interpretation seems to be popular and fashionable in the rationalistic temper of the day.

How many of us are there who fully appreciate the transcendent import of the Sacraments—who literally realize the wonder wrought in one by

"A few calm words of faith and prayer,
A few bright drops of holy dew?
Or in the other, that

"—in our Communion Feast,
There present in the heart,
As in the hands of th' eternal Priest
Does His true self impart?"

We explain away our misgivings not only the sacraments, but the authority of the Holy Catholic Church—which rests on the same basis with other articles of the creed—the duty of fasting, not from any lower motive of bodily health or economy of expenditure, but simply because it is a duty divinely ordained; the confession of a true faith, the sinfulness of heresy and schism; everything in short for which we cannot give some tangible, material, reason, or which has no practical, definite object of visible utility.

It would be easy to multiply illustrations. I shall specify only one which is typically characteristic of these times; this is the general indifference of or laxity with regard to *public worship*.

Our Divine Lord certainly authorized and prescribed private prayer of the most solitary character—as He recognized and recommended private fasting—but He has attached special promises to the worship of "two or three" gathered together in His name; and one "not the least," of His Apostles seems to regard "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" as a special mark of falling away from the faith. [It is to be noted, too, that when St. Paul wrote this the assembling together of the Hebrew Christians subjected them to obliquy and reproach, if not to more serious persecution—an excuse for non-attendance that cannot now be pleaded.] Yet now-a-days people who profess to be Christians and who presumably are really such to a certain extent—people who lead honest, amiable, virtuous lives, above reproach in all their relations with their fellow men—beginning by occasional disregard of the Church service on the ground of indigestion, fatigue, or necessary business—excuses which may be sound and valid in some cases—eventually fall into habitual neglect and even dislike of them.

How often have we heard men say, "I prefer to read the Prayer Book alone in my own room. It is just as good for me as reading it in Church!" Perhaps they do read it at home—perhaps not—but in either case it is not equivalent to the worship of the Church, "in the voice of praise and thanksgiving among such as keep holy day." The promises made to such worship and the fearful warning against its neglect are *not* parables, but very substantial verities.

NOTE.—The leading idea of the foregoing article was suggested to the writer, many years ago, by a manuscript sermon of the Reverend Frederick F. Peake, who died in Pensacola about November, 1847. I never saw him, and of course did not hear the sermon as preached, but was deeply impressed on reading it. So far as my knowledge goes, it has never been printed, but I can truly testify of its author that "he being dead yet speaketh"—to one heart at least.—W. S. W.

BIBLICAL CRITICISM.

[From *Bishop of Exeter's Congress Address*.]

Biblical criticism, which will be treated of in another hall this afternoon, goes down to the foundations of our faith. I need not say our Church stands where she has ever stood on "the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture," affirming it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written (*quod verbo Dei scripto adversetur*). To her the canonical books of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation are God's Word written. This faith of our fathers is our faith, and God helping us we will hand it down to our children, though it be tried with fire, without the loss of a single grain of gold. But England's Church has never feared Biblical criticism when serious and reverent; and hence we stand on a far higher level

than those who unconvinced are compelled to submit, if not to subscribe, to the recent Encyclical letter from the Vatican. Very much, however, of that which assumes the name of the Higher Criticism is not serious and faithful, but superficial and sceptical—as a learned Canon of Exeter recently said of it, "Two manner of notions are struggling therein; one reverent, believing, and candid; the other rash, heady self-sufficient, and purblind." And when doubt and discredit are thrown upon the words of men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, yea upon the words of Christ Himself, the Church detects the old and subtle voice, "Yea, hath God said?" The reaction against hasty inferences from uncertain discoveries has already set in, and I doubt not will gradually become a solid reformation of thought: for we are learning in Biblical criticism, as in many other things, to refuse the evil and choose the good, and the words are engraven more deeply than ever on our hearts,—In your patience ye shall win your souls. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the Word of our God shall stand for ever.

CLERICAL SALARIES AND THE TIMES.

The following from the *Church Helper* is, unfortunately, applicable to other Dioceses than Western Michigan and Alabama; and for that matter, as pertinent to the neglect of obligations to the Diocese, as to the mistreatment of Parochial affairs.

And the pity of it is, that while the matter is not without remedy,—ought indeed never to have required remedy—nothing is done to help it, and the "shame" is patiently endured!

If the gentlemen composing the Vestries throughout the land, business men most of them, and usually the best men in their respective communities would give to their Parochial finance the same intelligent care which they bestow upon other interests, the remedy would be found; if they infused into this duty some small modicum of the *Agape* which is not unreasonably supposed to be theirs, the shame would be removed forever.

The *Church Helper* says:

The words of the Bishop of Alabama strike us as very opportune and reasonable. We are constantly hearing of salaries being decreased, and more of stipulated salaries being unpaid. The times are hard, and many of our people feel them so. We have no doubt that the Clergy are perfectly willing to share with their people; it would be very selfish if they were not. But it must be remembered how small the salaries in our Diocese are. They barely make the two ends meet. Read what the Bishop says.

PAY YOUR MINISTER.

Think, Christians, that these ministers of God have surrendered all things for Christ. They receive less than these laborers who are now striking for higher wages, and are creating such disturbance in our land. The average salary of a minister of the Gospel is less than the man who shovels coal in the mines who opens the throttle-valve of the engine, and scarcely more than the switch-opener and the fireman on the locomotive. These latter strike if their wages be reduced, but the minister cannot strike; for him there is no redress, for he works for God. Think, Christian. Think how much you spend on self, in selfish enjoyment, in luxuries, and remember you must one day give an account. How will you fare, think you in the day of reckoning, when it shall be found that your retrenchments struck first at the obligations you owe to God, to whom you owe all things.

Pay your minister. He receives now far too little and much less than the most of you. It