

## THE REAL SLAVERY.

The first requisite to seeing the force of this passage is a clear understanding as to the persons to whom Jesus spoke. To a hasty reader they appear to be described in contradictory terms, being spoken of first as "Jews," a term always connoting in John earthly conceptions of Messiah, and antagonism therefore to Jesus. Then they are spoken of as believers. But immediately after, Jesus holds out the prospect of their becoming his true disciples at some future time, which implies that they were not so then. And in a verse or two our Lord roundly tells them that they were "of their father the devil," that they "believe him not," and that they "are not of God." But John has been very exact in his designation of these people, and his precision is retained in the Revised Version.

All is clear when we note that the apostle is drawing a contrast between the class mentioned in verse 30 and that to whom he turns in verse 31. He marks the contrast by calling the latter, not the former, "Jews," and still more strongly by using a different construction of the verb "believe" in the two cases. In verse 30 the "many," who were rightly affected by Jesus, "believed on him," which is a very different thing from the bare "believed him" attributed to "those Jews." The one class leaned all their weight on him, and however imperfect their "theology," their trust was genuine and utter. The others simply exercised credence as to Jesus' Messiahship, but their belief had not penetrated deep enough to affect either their love or their spiritual state, and they continued to be "Jews" all the same. The type of "disciples" presented by them is not extinct among us. A "disciple truly" is not a man who "believes" the Christian creed, but one who "believes on," that is, who trusts in, the Christian's personal Saviour.

But Jesus' way of dealing with these Jews is full of instruction. He does not repel their imperfect belief, but gently tries to develop it. He does not "quench the dimly-burning wick," but seeks to tend it into a clear flame. Such incomplete apprehension of him can only be changed into the saving trust which will really knit them to him by abiding in his word. Patient continuance in that "word," the whole revelation of himself regarded as a unity, will gradually issue in a true faith. An astronomer so fixes his telescope that it moves with the motion of the heavens and keeps the star that he is studying always in the field of vision. So must we do with Jesus if we would be his "disciples truly." We must "summer and winter" with him if we are ever to have real intimacy, such as sub-

sists between friend and friend. For "the truth" is not an abstract system of propositions, but is embodied in his living person, and to know it is not merely to understand a theory or system of doctrine, but to be acquainted with him as one is with a friend.

Jesus crowns his promises here with the great word: "The truth shall make you free," which is repeated with a most illuminative variation in verse 36.

The great promise sounded as insult to the hearers. Its depth of meaning will be best considered presently, in the light of Jesus' fuller indignant repelling of the implication that they were not free. How violent and ignoring of disagreeable truth it was to boast that they had never been in bondage to any man is plain. What about Pharaoh? or Nebuchadnezzar? or Pilate? But were they doing anything else than we all do, when we shut our eyes to the plain truths of our condition! How many of us will never think of our real state or of the certainty of death, and are only irritated by the promises of a gospel which insists on forcing facts on our reluctant attention!

The petulant answer of the Jews boasted of two things, their pure blood and their imagined liberty, and Jesus at once closes with these and tears them to tatters. He takes them in reverse order, and substitutes for the false notion of liberty the profound conception of true freedom, and for that of mere physical descent that of true sonship. The Jews thought of both as dependent on external facts. To them freedom meant a political condition of outward independence, and sonship meant kindred in flesh. But freedom is not being exempt from outward control but depends on inward condition, as all great thinkers have always taught.

Yet Jesus goes beyond most of them, in that he regards it as dependent on moral condition. The sinner is a slave, and the only real slave. The true bondage is when the will is prevented from willing as it ought. To obey God is freedom, and the only real freedom. What a glimpse into a dark, doleful region is that given in Christ's words! And how awfully true they are, if we think of how men are made impotent to abandon sins that they hate, of how they are "tied and bound by the chains of their sins," how a fetter, at first slender as a spider's web, comes to thicken and tighten till it throttles. We all know the tyranny of sin. Would that we might all listen to the promise of emancipation.

In verse 35 our Lord passes to deal with the general idea of slavery and sonship. He is speaking of the two classes, and drops the special reference to the slavery of sin for the moment. A slave does not remain permanently in his owner's house, but a son does. There is probably a reference to the boast that in-

alienable privileges were theirs in virtue of their descent. But they were slaves, and, therefore, had no permanent footing in "the house." A wide truth is here implied: that if we are the slaves of sin, we have no guarantee of permanence in our possession of any creaturely good, or of life itself.

"A son abideth ever." That saying has two applications. One is to us as sons of God, whereby we are made happy and permanent denizens of the Father's house, and the blessed assurance of perpetuity glorifies all joys, and tells us that neither life nor death "shall be able to separate us from the love of God." The other application is to Christ as the Son. He is ever in the Father's house, and because of that Sonship and the perpetual fellowship with the Father which it involves, he, and only he, can make us "free indeed."

We are all, or have been, the slaves of sin; we are thereby cursed with transiency and "there is none abiding." No one into whose soul the iron of that bondage has entered can free either himself or others. Our Emancipator must be one who is in fullest, uninterrupted communion with the Father, and comes, armed with His power, to break every yoke and bring liberty to the captives—S. S. Times.

## Y. P. S. C. E. TOPIC.

For March 12, 1905.

## Christ the Great Physician

Luke 4: 16-19; 5: 27-32; 1 Pet. 2: 24

Christ's claim to be the Great Physician rests upon solid ground. There are many testimonies to His skill. He has won numberless trophies from the grasp of disease.

Christ is the Healer of the body. While on earth He wrought many notable cures. Some of these, such as birth blindness and leprosy, lay beyond the reach of human skill. Other diseases, which might have yielded to long treatment, fled at His word. He still continues this work of bodily healing. For, while we rightly employ medical skill and use proper remedies, the success of these means depends upon the divine blessing.

But greater than the healing of the body is the healing of the soul. And this, too, the Great Physician achieves.

When the body is sick, some organ is not doing its work properly and in harmony with the rest. There is derangement and disorder. So in the sin-sick soul its powers and faculties are not acting aright. The conscience is not quick and not true enough in its decisions about right and wrong. The will is inclined to choose evil and not good. The desire goes out to things that are low and unworthy. But Christ enlightens the conscience, renews the will, purifies the desires, and makes the man a new creature, 2 Cor. 5: 17.

Knox church, St. Mary's, Ont., was destroyed by fire Sunday 12th inst. Loss \$20,000. Insurance, \$8,000.

S. S. Lesson March 12.—The Slavery of Sin; Luke 8: 31-40.

Golden Text: Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.—John 8:34.