

SUNDAY
SCHOOL

The Quiet Hour

YOUNG
PEOPLE

THE ART OF HEARING.

By Professor James Stalker, D.D.

As this is the first recorded parable of our Lord, it is sometimes taken for granted that it was the first he ever uttered. But this would be a rash inference. It is supposed by some that during the first period of his ministry our Lord spoke no parables, but that he began to make use of them at a certain point and for a certain purpose. This, however, is too mechanical. Parables flowed from him because he was a poet; they were the natural form which the truth assumed in such a mind. On this occasion the materials may have come to him in the simplest manner. As he sat in the boat, he may have seen, over the heads of the crowd, an actual sower at work in a field that overlooked the lake. As such a one sowed, some of the seeds out of his basket might fall on the footpath separating one field from another—this is "the wayside." Others might fall on a rock jutting out above the soil, or rather on the soil round this object, where the earth would be scanty—this is, "the stony ground." Others might fall in an unstubbled corner, where the not very energetic Oriental farmer had not thoroughly rooted out the under-growths—this was "the thorny ground." And some would fall on ground well grubbed and well plowed—this was "the good ground." No doubt, however, Matthew is right in placing this parable at some distance from the commencement of the ministry of our Lord, because it embodies the experience not of a beginner in the art of preaching but of one who has found out by trial in how many ways the word may come to nothing. Still, in a sense, this is the first of the parables, because it informs us how all the rest are to be read or listened to.

THOSE WHO HEARING HEAR NOT.—There are those whose bodily presence is in church when the word of God is preached, but whose minds are absent; and these resemble the seed on the wayside, which never had a chance of growing because it did not penetrate the soil but lay on the surface where a bird might pick it up or a passing foot destroy it. Dr. Guthrie tells of a dying farmer who said: "I have never listened to a single sermon." "What!" exclaimed some one, "you are raving; you have heard thousands of them." "Yes," he replied, "I have heard thousands, but I have never listened to one; for, regularly, when the text was given out, I began to review the business of the bygone week or to forecast that of the week to come." As a sower in the field is followed by birds, searching with eager eye for anything they can pick up, so, whenever the Word is preached, there is hovering above the congregation an invisible flock of fancies and distractions, to draw away the attention; and behind these, Jesus teaches, there is a sinister power; Satan is on the watch lest hearers should believe and be saved.

THOSE WHO HEAR BUT SOON FORGET.—It is not "stony" ground; for such ground may yield a good crop, but "rocky" ground, with the rock only a little way beneath the surface. And this stands for persons of sanguine temperament but no depth of character, who are easily attracted by novelty or stirred by enthusiasm, but the fuel of whose nature is soon burnt out. There were many such in Christ's own ministry, who began to follow him, but soon turned back; and there are such in every revival of religion.

THOSE WHO FORGET, THOUGH NOT SO SOON.—Were the three parables of life in the mind of Jesus when he was describing the unsatisfactory kinds of soil? Childhood has a certain resemblance to the wayside; for

children lose a great deal of what they hear because they do not understand. Youth is obviously like the rocky ground, being responsive but changeable. Then, manhood is like the seed among the thorns; for it is in manhood that the cares and riches and pleasures of life assert themselves, often stifling the religion which has seemed to flourish in childhood and youth. It is remarkable that our Lord attributes the choking of the Word to opposite causes—namely, the care of the world, which besets those at one end, and the deceitfulness of riches, which besets those at the other end of the social scale. Yet this is a life; for poverty and riches alike may be fatal to that peace which forms the atmosphere in which religion flourishes.

THOSE WHO HEAR WITH PROFIT.—In one of the Gospels the good ground is said to represent those who receive the word "in an honest and good heart;" and this has puzzled some readers, who have questioned how a human heart can be honest and good before the word of God has changed it. But there is a conscience in man, though fallen; and there is a work of the Holy Spirit in the unregenerate. The point made by Matthew is that the good hearers "understand." Their own intelligence is aroused; and the more keenly this works the greater is the profit. There are hearers who enrich what they hear because they add to it the wealth of their own mental resources. Still, even those who hear with profit do not all hear with equal profit. Among genuine Christians there are differences, some being what may be called minimum-Christians, others average-Christians, and a few maximum-Christians. Of none of these, however, does Jesus speak here with disparagement; he praises them all; though his words are well fitted to excite in those who may be attaining only to thirtyfold an ambition to covet earnestly the best gifts.

Aberdeen, Scotland.

STAINS.

The three ghosts on the lonesome road
Spake each to one another,
"Whence came that stain about your mouth

No lifted hand may cover?"
"From eating of forbidden fruit,
Brother, my brother."

The three ghosts on the sunless road
Spake each to one another,
"Whence came that red burn on your foot
No dust or ash may cover?"
"I stamped a neighbor's heart-flame out,
Brother, my brother."

The three ghosts on the windless road
Spake each to one another.
"Whence came that blood upon your hand
No other hand may cover?"
"From breaking of a woman's heart,
Brother, my brother."

"Yet on the earth clean men we walked,
Glutton and Thief and Lover;
White flesh and fair it hid our stains
That no man might discover."
"Naked the soul goes up to God,
Brother, my brother."

"A Christian, being only a traveler through the world, must expect a traveler's fare—bad roads, sometimes bad weather, and bad accommodation; but since his journey is short, and his home is in heaven, all his actions, sufferings, prayers and conversation, turn that way."—Bogatsky.

WITNESSING.

The great work of the church individually and collectively is that of witnessing. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord." "Ye shall be witnesses unto me" is the comprehensive work for all men of all the ages given as a part of the final words of our Lord in His ascension command. The word witness occurs perhaps a hundred times in the Scriptures, and means telling out what we know. Anybody can do that. All excuse, therefore is shut out. Knowing about God and telling out what we know is witnessing. So every man can do that which is the appointed means of saving the dying and conquering the world for Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is dependent upon the witnessing of Him to the perishing.

That against which the gates of hell shall not prevail is testimony. What Peter witnessed of Christ is that upon which the church is built. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." This is the foundation upon which the church is reared. Naught but this can stand unmoved before the malice and rage of devils and men. It is the denial of Christ as the Divine Son of God that is giving in some quarters of the world such great power. In New York Presbyterian students from Union Theological Seminary, in New York, upon examination recently for licensure, denied the miraculous birth and miraculous resurrection of Christ. Yet they were admitted to the ministry. No wonder we see the "gates of hell" prevailing in that latitude. Why commission men to preach who go out to the field with nothing to preach about. There is no other Saviour of the dying but the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of man.—Presbyterian Standard.

A GOSPEL THAT GROWS.

Religion might have been revealed complete, fixed, final. The Bible might have been packed full of rigid legislation forestalling every human contingency. The Son sent to make known the Father might have put forth a symposium of systematic theology or an encyclopedia of canon law.

But such is not the Bible we have. Its rigid commandments are but ten. Its Supreme Authority preaches not a science, but a life—a life that grows. He does not exhaust truth; He tells learners that many things are left unspoken, and promises them a spirit to guide their further excursions into truth. That is to say, God has given to the world a religion whose great over-riding landmarks are plain, sure and immovable; whose Master will suffer no obedient soul to be lost from the mighty goal of the eternal fact. But as the follower presses forward, pursuing that Master in faith, and watching His great sentinel marks, many things are to be learned along the way.

There is nothing to learn which contradicts or obscures the landmarks the traveler saw at the outset. But much appears to make the Leader's purposes clearer, his insight into the affairs and nature of men more marvellous, and the opportunities of serving with Him for the weal of the world more thrilling. So none of us must go along that path with eyes blinded.—The Interior.

The University of Calcutta is said to be the largest educational corporation in the world. It examine more than ten thousand students annually.

The greatest trust between man and man is the trust of giving counsel.—Bacon.