

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS**"THY BROTHER!—MY SON!"**

By Austin L. Budge, M. A.

In the Parable of the Prodigal, one's feelings receive a severe shock as soon as the elder son comes into the story. All is satisfying up to that point. But had the Father not been the perfect type he was there might have been serious results from the new circumstances attending his reunited family. Thy Brother! My Son! seemed to be the two terms, which contained argument enough in themselves, for the Father to make in his defence regarding the feast.

Take the words of the elder in order to feel how they sound. It was thrown in the face of the poor penitent that he had indeed sinned against Heaven and against every relative he had upon the earth. The names used were vile and uttered in anger. His attitude was so indignant and unbending that he, although being the nearest in kinship, preferred to remain beyond the circle of those who would countenance and encourage the prodigal's restoration.

It was not the one who had the most reason to complain, that made the heaviest demands on him who sought peace. It was the Father's money that had been spent so shamefully. It was his heart that had known unfilial treatment. Even all his goodness as a Father had not availed to save the home from division and shame. Rightly did the penitent sum up his guilt when he confessed that it had been not so much against his brother, as his Father.

But the bitter drop in the cup is this, that the Father going much further than granting pardon, found the elder son determined to act much less than forgiving. Brotherhood was found to be in that family a weaker consideration than the household goods. But sonship never broke, for neither "death nor life" was able to separate him from his Father.

Today, however, this story of long ago has become a fact in many of our churches. The old drunkard, for example, has come to himself. He sees ruin and love before his soul. "I perish with sin," he exclaims. He has heard in the church many an invitation to return to the fold of Christ. There too, he has witnessed many a sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He is impelled by a hundred feelings to bestir himself while yet there is a time, and he comes a truly penitent man back to the door of the church with no other hope or expectation than that his misery of soul and body might be assuaged.

Because it was mainly his God and Father that he had sinned against, he must of necessity in the first place meet Him. It is an hour of life at its high tension. In the one case it is

joy sweeter than a lost coin or a lost sheep can bring when they are found. A son that was lost has returned. It is meet therefore that God the Father be moved exceedingly. On the other side it is a soul dead in the spiritual world coming to life. Now he is as a new man in a new world. His desire is no longer to look back into that far country of vanity and misery, but to press onward where he is finding all things new. His cry also is not, I perish here with hunger, but I count all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord, and thus his heart is too full for either the extended confession or profession desired.

Thus he enters the church and looks for the back seat or for the gallery as good enough for such prodigals as he. To the Lord's Table he has no heart to seek, willing rather to be a mere retainers in the House of God. True he has left his sins and returned to a moral life, but his rags are still upon him and his eyes can hardly be lifted for shame. His hands are clean as water can make them and so are his feet, but he has no claim on either a ring for his finger or shoes.

But what a surprise! How uncommon in this world! Repentance is a "saving grace." He is saved not only from hell but from slavery. He has neither lost his soul nor his sonship. Behold the robe of Christ's righteousness to cover all his rags! And look, the ring with the family crest is replaced upon his finger, and shoes for his feet, to set him free as a son with every authority and comfort of his birthright! And now for the feast reserved for special guests! Such a series of surprises are never met with elsewhere. He had been a drunkard wasting body, soul and wealth until he is in want for everything. But he has found God different from every other one he has known since his mother died of a broken heart. The settlement comes to be simply this—an honest repentance, an unqualified restoration. The way is clear as directed by God to any place and any privilege in the church. For his Heavenly Father did not call for the best robe, the ring, or the shoes to mock him, but to get him at the banquet where none would do less than rejoice together. So being a drunkard or any other sinner is not an eternal bar to the respect, the eldership, the sacrament or any other privilege in the Christian church to which God points the way after restoration.

Having thus dealt with his Heavenly Father, he must now be reconciled with his elder brother. Plainly in the parable this means his pharisaical brother. He was a good man in a

great many things; one who had never wasted either his body or means on intemperance or any other immorality. He was a man strict in the performance of his religious observances. Yea possibly a Presbyterian of the Presbyterians.

"What does all this mean in the kirk today?" he asks the minister. "Oh a poor drunkard is to be baptized and admitted into the full communion with the church. Huts, man! The like of him allowed in our kirk! It would drive all decent folk away to permit such a thing. There would be more sense in getting a rope to hang him for all the cursing and swearing that we have heard from his drunken mouth these twenty years past. As for me I shall not be one of those who shall allow him to profane the Lord's Table."

"But he is our brother," said the minister. "It is true that he has been intemperate, and has followed all the evils in connection, but then he was dead to spiritual things, but now we have good reason to believe that he is alive again." Come to the Sacrament with us on Sunday for our Heavenly Father has brought forth the "best robe of righteousness," has given him the assuring ring as a testimony of his sonship. Come and let us rejoice together."

But he was angry and would not go in. Yet on Sunday the minister was not the only one who gave this lost one to feel that he was a brother indeed. In our churches very little is said, yet the hearts respond in secret with joy and sympathy. Let it be said also that the "poor soul" who has first dealt with his Heavenly Father, will be hurt but not turned away, by the sneers and reminders of his pharisaical brother. No doubt his words will heal best the more earnestly he prays, and returns good for evil. And this too in justice should be observed that the "elder brother" does not in any general sense represent the spirit of the member of the church. Never before have so many people been moved by the thought that all men are of one blood, and are the offspring of God. It is because our Heavenly Father has called this man—My Son! that so many rise up and deal with him as Our Brother. Let us then make merry over all this and let them hear outside the church our joy!

Donald G. Mitchell, whose stories under the pen name of "Ik Marvel," have been widely read, is living quietly at his home in New Haven, Conn., and will shortly celebrate his 83rd birthday.

The congregation of Lorne Street U. F. church, Campbelltown, (the largest in the denomination in the west of Scotland outside of Glasgow), against which interim interdict has been granted, had farewell services on the 2nd inst.