

law. A venerable scroll is brought out. It is one of the holy books. It is handed to the person rising to receive it, and who is the reader? Immediately he attracts every eye. What a serious while compassionate face he has! How kingly his air, and yet how brotherly! His voice is impressive while tender, and yet full of sympathy, making you think of rich bell notes with soft, deep cadences.

Everybody leans forward to see. All listen eagerly, while those who hear with difficulty are making trumpets of their hands and holding them up to their ears.

The old-time scroll is opened.

It is the Book of Isaiah, who on the distant, shadowy hilltops of prophecy saw Messiah's bright day.

The strange reader in his commanding yet sympathetic way begins:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me!"

What beautiful pictures he makes as he proceeds:

"Because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor."

What pictures come before you!

You see a great crowd of people who may not often come to the synagogue—homeless tramps, slaves, poor fishermen, lepers—and they listen to one bringing the Gospel free as the water from Nazareth's springs.

"He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted."

You see some mother bowing over her dead son, and lo, he comes who raises from the dead.

"To preach deliverance to the captives."

You see people in the bondage of a physical trial, insane folks in fetters, or in the servitude of a bad habit or a superstition, and lo, the breaker of chains draws nigh!

"And recovering of sight to the blind."

At the word of a great miracle-worker the veil of darkness falls away from those eyes long covered.

"To set at liberty them that are bruised."

What relief is given to those bruised through sickness or poverty, bruised through a false, hard conception of duty to God.

"To preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

O see the trumpets lifted and hear them proclaiming the year of jubilee!

When this gracious reader has finished, when, amid the kindling faces all about him, he begins his comments, he says, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Why, you wonder, who is this?

People in the synagogue, too, are thinking. They turn to one another. They nod. You listen, and they whisper, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

What, Jesus who lived here once? "Joseph's son?"

You look at him and you see something else.

You think of a wonderful Jordan scene where Jesus is baptized in the restless river.

You see John's lifted eyes of wonder.

The Holy Spirit like a dove is descending.

God's solemn voice is heard in blessing.

"Joseph's son?"

It is the Son of God in Nazareth's synagogue today.

Orientalisms of the Lesson.

The synagogue had no altar, nor was any sacrifice offered in it; yet it had an order which suggested that of the temple. In both there was a chest at the far end containing the sacred law; the lid of the one as well as the other was called "the mercy seat;" and a veil hung before it. Here were "the chief seats" which the rich and the Pharisees loved to occupy. In the middle was a raised platform on which several persons could stand, with a pulpit for the Scripture reader. There was another chest for the sacred rolls of the prophets. There was a college of elders, one of whom was chief; he ruled the synagogue. Jesus stood up to read, and sat down to teach or preach. There was a chair near the pulpit, and to sit down in that chair was to assume the functions of preacher; the chapter was read standing. There was handed to him the roll of Isaiah by the deacon (chazan), whose duty was to keep these sacred writings and act as a sort of janitor or superintendent to get everything else in order for the service. He also acted as schoolmaster. There were always ten "men of leisure," whose duty it was to be on hand to make a congregation and take up the collection for the poor. Without ten persons present it was not a congregation.

There were two readings: one from the Pentateuch, the second from the prophets. The Pentateuch was commonly written on one long roll. Isaiah was probably in a roll by itself, as the other prophet volumes.

The chapter read is the lesson in the modern ritual appointed to be read on the Day of Atonement. In the calendar of modern Jews, Deuteronomy and Isaiah run parallel. Any reputable person of sufficient culture might be asked by the deacon to read the Scripture lesson; even strangers might officiate (verse 18). Isaiah's description of the "acceptable year of the Lord" was grounded on the ever present rhetoric of the year of jubilee, of liberty to slaves, release for debtors, and restoration of encumbered or forfeited estates. There could scarcely be named a period of history when such a message would be more acceptable. Slaves were unprotected; males and females were exposed to nameless cruelties compared with which death by being thrown to wild beasts would be mercy; the sick and old were turned out to perish; the poor which huddled in the crowded