



SERMON.

THE RICH AND THE POOR.
BY REV. DR. GEORGE E. VAN DE WATER.

"Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbor."—Proverbs, xix., 4.

The world has not changed much since Solomon's day. New worlds have been discovered. Old ones have been more explored. People have come more together. Civilization has greatly advanced. But after all, things remain in principle very much the same as they were at the beginning. The one thing which convinces us of the unity of the race, and makes reasonable to us a single providential dealing with the race through all the ages, is that in all essential features we are today the same as were our forefathers in the centuries now gone.

As well for maxims with Americans in the nineteenth century as they did for Israelites nearly three thousands years ago.

Wealth Maketh Many Friends.

There is nothing upon earth so powerful as money. Material possessions are the lever which moves all things in the world. It is a force before which everything bows. Without it it is hardly possible to have contentment. Other things, great in themselves, cannot seem to take the place of wealth. Even well-deserved honor is impotent without it. Wealth is a tremendous earthly power. The man who has it ought to feel it, and to realize that he needs a good deal of grace to know how rightly to use it. In the Bible, both in Old Testament and New, strongest in the New, as if the danger were greater in this dispensation—I find no class of men said to be in greater danger than the "rich men." The reasons for this special designation of rich men as a class for whom "working out salvation" is a task at once perilous and difficult, are manifold. Wealth is such a mighty power, that one possessing it feels not as other men do, his dependence. He comes to day of himself, as the Israelites in their day of prosperity said of themselves, "My hand and the might of my power hath gotten me this wealth," and so to forget the Lord God.

More Omnipotent than His Fellow.

A man with wealth possessed in many respects he is, it is not omnipotent, at least, in comparison with his fellow-men of less means, endowed with a degree of omnipotence. One who never wants soon comes to feel a superiority over men who do occasionally feel the pinch of deprivation. When a man feels he can command respect—the voice, the vote, the influence of most everybody he meets—it is not much to be wondered at that he is spoiled. Being more easily spoiled than other men his salvation is more difficult. This accounts for everything the gospel has to say about rich men. The gospel nowhere denounces them nor their riches. There is no man more honorable in God's sight than the rich man, who, having more talents than his brethren, feeling the sacred responsibility of his holy trust, ministers it for God's glory and man's benefit. It is divinely ordained that "Wealth maketh many friends." The pleasures of this life are not without their burdens of care. He who lives at all in the fear of God, if he be rich, must have many anxious hours of thought and worry about the sore evils under the sun which the wise man tells us is "riches kept by the owners thereof to their hurt." We have said rich men have power. It is true without an exception, but this is true also, not every rich man has comfort. If he is a man of no conscience, he is at least annoyed greatly by the many appeals made upon his conscience. If a man of conscience, he is greatly worried how among them all to discriminate so as to use God's trust.

A Good Example.

The man who died, not many years ago, whose wealth was so fabulously great that mathematical computation of it partakes of the nature of hyperbole, of which it is said by those who have perused it, that if Adam had lived until now, and each year laid by \$10,000, he would not to-day have had one-fourth of the sum left by the New York Ceresus—is to be praised for this, that, having more power than any individual in the world, he never used it to any one's hurt.

When we find a rich man of this kind we ought to stop long enough to thank God for his existence. If he is a man of no conscience, how much he did is true. That he was a modest, unassuming, domestic man, that he did not corrupt the society of which he was an honored member, that he used his enormous wealth to build up business, not to crush it, is an encomium he deserves from us all.

But, in speaking of wealth, we are very apt to make the mistake of supposing that only very rich men are wealthy. Every year we raise the standard, so that men who were very rich a hundred years ago now with the same amount of wealth are only well to do and tolerably comfortable. The Bible estimate of wealth is rather different from this. It seems to account that man wealthy who, free from debt, has anything left after making provision for actual necessities of life. In this sense many of us who are all too ready to count ourselves among the poor are really in God's sight considered wealthy, and held accountable for the wise administration of a sacred trust. We are among those, I consider, upon whom rests the solemn and binding obligation of assisting those poor of whom our blessed Lord has said: "Ye shall have them with you always."

No Money, No Friends, Say Some.

When one gets really poor he is pretty much left by his brethren. They may not mean to shun him, but they let him pretty severely alone. I was shocked recently to read in a newspaper of a father who, previous to committing suicide, wrote these lines to his son: "Avoid your father's

vices, which are many. Emulate his virtues, which are few. Do not be penurious but be saving, for without your purse you'll have no friends." This is a dying man's estimate of the power of wealth. Almost every day I hear living men's estimate of its power. From the lips of those who have been unfortunate and are just beginning to feel poverty's pinch almost invariably comes the plaint, "Since I've lost my money I seem to have lost my friends." Much of this result I am constrained to say is due to their pride, in not making known their condition until it is desperate, or to their too hasty conclusion that so it is, but with all my explanations I am also constrained to say Solomon is right. "Wealth maketh many friends, but the poor is separated from his neighbor." This we say is the natural condition, the carnal consequence. It is not what should be, but what is.

Make the Crooked Things Straight.

To cure or to remedy this earthly state of things God sent His Son, gave His gospel, founded His church, and is keeping you and me here on earth for a time. This separation of a man from his neighbor because of the man's poverty is one of the "crooked things." He has put us here and the gospel here to make straight. This is why "the poor shall always be with us." They are the material we Christians are to work upon. To these we are to let our light shine. When these cease to be with us our work is done, the judgment is set and heaven is begun. It is the office of Christianity to make men as brethren. It is the devilish work of earth to separate men, and by nothing is this work so promoted as by the inequality of earthly possessions. We see its baneful operation within the church as without it. The devil has been shrewd enough to make Christians adopt his principles, and even in the house of God mark as honorable the man with goodly apparel, the ring on his finger, and as something at least less than honorable the man who is poor, and whose apparel threadbare, and whose ring is the mark of the grime of honest toil. It is so—we may as well face it. In the church today for the most part "Wealth maketh many friends, but the poor is separated from his neighbor."

Churches Should Not Follow After the Rich.

We are all of us more or less influenced by this carnal, selfish, worldly principle, and in every department of life it is true "wealth maketh many friends, but the poor is separated from his neighbor." It is a reproach to us, that except where parishes are endowed they move up town with the money, and the souls of the poor in the down-town districts of our cities are left to destruction. I heard a layman say this last week, "That church will find it difficult to get a rector." "Why?" I said. "Because," he answered, "though there are more people living about there than ever, as a class they are tenement house people; the rich have moved away." Once in a generation, when a minister rises to exalt the worldliness of his order, by voluntary submission to poverty, chastity and obedience to ecclesiastical rule, those for whom wealth hath made many friends, instead of letting the good brother alone, which is all he asks, set upon him as if the very stability of our religion depended upon keeping it away from the poor.

I would first emphasize the fact that the poor are here by Divine intention. We are to regard them as plagues or pests. We are not to help them, to get rid of them. We are not to regard them as of value to us, and they are of great value to us. The poor help to save our souls. If it were not for them our hearts would long ago have become hard as rocks. One evidence Jesus gave of His Messiahship was "the poor have the glad tidings preached to them." Preaching "glad tidings" to the poor has ever since been a distinctive feature of Christian work. This is one of the many ways we Epiphany Christ to a wicked world. Then next I would impress upon your earnest consideration the thought that the object of our helping the poor is chiefly to treat them as brethren.

The Personal Element in Charity.

We are not to relieve them only, but help them. Christians cannot dispense charity at arm's length. The good Samaritan bound up the wounds, pouring oil upon them, and set the poor fellow on the ass and started him on his way to the inn before he said a word about money. That ought to teach us the great importance of the personal element in our charities. We are to minister to the poor because they are brethren, not supplicants. Teaching them thus to love their brethren, they come to love their God.

There is many a Christian man, I believe, who would be infinitely more holy and catch glimpses of spiritual joy which now he knows nothing about, were he personally to engage in some charitable work—go himself and visit the poor, and by his word and counsel as well as by his hard dollars, the poorest part of him, help a brother to realize that the office of religion is to counteract the worldly influence which makes a "poor man separated from his neighbor."

Help Them to Help Themselves.

And lastly, I would insist that giving to the poor is not enough to fulfil our Christian duty toward them. Giving is the easiest way to get rid of the poor, but Christ does not design us to be rid of the poor. A wise discrimination in the administration of charities is the day's great need. Helping the poor to help themselves is the most Christlike thing you can do for them. Keeping money away from them is often more charitable than giving to them. Peter conferred a wonderful blessing upon the impotent brother at the gate of the temple, though he gave him no alms. "Silver and gold I have none," he said to the one who solicited only money; "such as I have give I thee," and he gave him, then and there, something better than money—health and strength to go and get money. Restoration rather than amelioration should be our aim in dispensing charities, or if amelioration, this in order to restoration. Except in cases of aged and infirm pensioners upon the

communion alms, I should say, from not a limited experience in parochial charities, that "giving money" has not done the good that personal influence and help of another kind have done. I regard more as charity, in its Christian sense, training young girls to sew, having social meetings and amusements for the mothers and the workwomen, distributing clothing and providing employment, visiting the sick and seeing that justice is done the oppressed, than any dispensing of money merely as such.

Don't Give Indiscriminately.

Where money is given, it should be after personal investigation, then, as remedial, not final. What lastly we need to remind you of in this connection is this: That our religion is not ended when we build churches and attend them, or church charity foundations and support them, or hear about the poor elsewhere, and give to them. The world is to be bettered and saved by individuals helping individuals. I know a family in this church supported by the two women members of a household for a big firm of this city for three cents a dozen. What they need is not money nearly half so much as sympathy of Christian friends, fellow-communicants, who will bestir themselves to procure for these work which will be decently remunerative to provide a suitable support. I have myself thought for some time that even our charity institutions begun in love, and continued in love, are not accomplishing what they ought, because they too much divorce the personal element in charity. How much better would it be, were it possible to interest some of the little ones of say half a dozen families in our parish and have them provide for the support of a single orphan; and, rather than have our aged pensioners receive systematically each month so much money from the general purse, how much better could we do it to have our own parochial aged home where members of our household could individually minister to them in their last and feeble days.

Machinery is Religion.

Machinery is a good thing. It saves time, energy, and is a conservation of force. But machinery after all is a blind working of blind energies, in which no personal element enters. Machinery in religious life is to be avoided. It is of use only as it helps to concentrate energy. Beyond this it is, *per se*, more hurtful than beneficial. I should consider, were I to stand in the parish hall every afternoon next week, and give to every poor man calling a dollar, I should be committing a personal crime. Such indiscriminate giving would foster vice rather than encourage virtue. And I consider when you, to get rid of a beggar, when knowing nothing of his condition or himself, give him money, you are taking the chance of doing that man, and others, may be dependent upon him a very great injury. The personal work of laboring among souls is the only work of charity which Christ takes any account of. The best thing you can do for a poor man is to make him your brother. The world separates him from his neighbor. Christ makes him and his neighbor. The Bible does not say give money to him that asketh, but Tobit says: "Never turn thy face from any poor man, and then the face of the Lord shall never be turned away from thee." In the eyes of God we are all paupers, and all as one. Only in the sight of the world (which in a short time shall vanish away), "wealth maketh many friends, but the poor is separated from his neighbor." The truth is: "Of one blood God hath made all the nations that dwell on the face of the earth."

Customs Relating to Death.

Many of the curious practices associated with the dead are quite as singular as those referring to the marriage state.

One of the least known is a usage called "Sin-eating," which was carried on by a class of people who followed this profession systematically. Among the Lansdowne MSS., in the British Museum, are statements in Aubrey's handwriting to this purport:—"In the county of Hereford was an old custom at funerals to hire poor people who were to take upon them the sins of the deceased. When the corpse was brought out and laid on the bier a loaf of bread, a bowl of beer, and 6d in money was given to the sin-eater, in consideration whereof he took upon himself all the sins of the defunct, and freed him or her from walking after they were dead." Aubrey adds this custom was used to this day (A. D. 1686) in North Wales.

Among the simple fashions of early times was that of carrying garlands before the bodies of unmarried girls, and then hanging them up in the church as a memento of the departed one. Probably the wreaths and other floral offerings which are now sent without limit upon the death of anyone, old or young, is the survival of this sentiment.

Burial in some form or other is the most common manner of disposing of the dead, but in Thibet the corpse is cut to pieces and thrown into the lakes to feed the fishes, or exposed on hill-tops to eagles and other birds of prey; or, as on the Himalayan slopes the people of Sikim burn the body and scatter the dust upon the ground, not collecting it, as is usual in other cremating countries.

Hebrews Abolish the Sunday Service.

Though few persons, perhaps, are aware of the fact, the majority of Jewish congregations in New York have abolished the Sunday service. Rabbi Kaufman Kohler, of the Temple Beth-El, one of the largest and most influential Jewish congregations in the city, said recently: "We have dispensed with our Sunday services, only holding a school for the children on that day. We have not done any fun or show in the change. It has been done quietly and generally. We find it more agreeable, more productive of good; to hold our Friday evening meetings at 8 o'clock, and to observe Saturday as the Sabbath."

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