

Enfer. Carter, N° 19



SIN AND THE JUDGMENT.

A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Ottawa, on the Third Sunday in Lent, 1875, by the Rev. J. May, M.A., and published by request.

“And the King shall answer and say unto them : Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have doae it unto me.” “Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.” *S. Matt. xxv. 40 and 45.*

What a blessing has Christianity proved to the world ! When the day-star from on High visited us, darkness brooded over the sons of men. Moral corruption reigned supreme ; few knew their right hand from their left. The blemishes which disfigure the face of Christendom to-day are beauty itself, when compared with the loathsome impurities of the nations when the Saviour appeared among men. An Apostle tells us that it was “a shame even to speak” of the things which men did in secret. Happily such dark deeds are not now common. The tone of morality has been raised. The earth is dotted with Temples. The great cities have their hospitals for the destitute, the sick, the disabled, the incurable ; institutions unknown, I suppose, before the Christian era. These are the glories of Christianity, even as it exists amongst us. Truly the “wilderness and the solitary place” have been gladdened by the voice of Christ : and yet, even the brightest centres of Gospel light are still dashed with darkness. Say what you will, the religion we *practice* (I speak of the mass of Christians) *as we practice it, falls very, very far short of the religion of Christ.* It is not a true transcript of the religion of the first days. Its conspicuous defect is the frightful absence of the all-important element of the Cross,—self-denial. It is a Sunday religion. A religion of *hearing* rather than *doing*. It is a religion of frames, and feelings, and fancies ; a religion of dogma and controversy ; of party, and faction, and shibboleths. I do not say that these are its only characteristics ; but they occupy a sadly prominent place in it. Who now, when smitten on one cheek turns the other ? Who sells all he has and gives to the poor ? Who turns not away from him that would borrow, unless the security be unimpeachable ? Where now is the simplicity of the early days ? Where, that whole-hearted devotion, that burning zeal, that unsparing self-sacrifice ? Where that community of goods which prevailed when, for the first time, human hearts took fire

under the burning words of the Apostles?* It is true, we have churches without number, and sects not a few. We have sermons *ad nauseam*; bibles elegantly bound; unexceptionable prayer books; choice music; comfortable pews; fashionable congregations. We have all the outward trappings,—all the “pomp and circumstance of a most glorious religion;” but—where is the religion itself? Far be it from me to aver that there is *no* true piety left amongst us. Thank God, Christianity is not utterly dead; it *cannot* die. From its very slumbers it sheds a benign influence on even those who would fain shake off its blessed yoke; but, the Christianity which now passes current is not the pure gold of the New Testament. Doubtless God has still left His *hidden ones*; men and women who secretly live His life, and feel His love, and say little about it;—thousands who have not “bowed the knee to Baal,”—their “light so shining before men” that their Father in heaven is glorified. But, tens of thousands who are far from thinking so, seem to be going down blindly to sure destruction, if the words of the text have any meaning at all. Somehow or other it does seem to me, that, in our times, mere soundness of *creed* has been substituted for soundness of *heart and life*. Now, I am the last to depreciate the importance of a true belief. It is difficult to build up a true life on the basis of a false creed. To the Church at least, taken as a whole, orthodoxy is indispensable,—a matter of life or death. I question whether, to the *individual member*, its importance may not be over-rated. How often do we see ignorant Christians live the life of Godliness; whilst the most immaculate and critical orthodoxy goes hand and hand with depravity of heart and life! There will be millions of poor ignorant people in heaven, who prayed their prayers, and did their duty, and knew little or nothing of dogma, and much of that little tainted with error. No, my brethren, creeds and catechisms, however valuable, will not save us. Good sermons will not save us. An orthodox belief will not save us. You might know the Bible by heart, only to be tortured with its words in a future world of woe. It is not the light we have, but the love; not what we *know* simply, but what we *do*, that will tell in the judgment: Not simply what we do, but also what we *fail to do*: “Inasmuch as ye did it *not*.”

I have long thought also that the current estimate of the damnable qualities of the various sins of men is erroneous in the extreme. I am fully alive to the fact, that public opinion is a fearful power; but so it

* I am no advocate of Communism, or of prodigal liberality, or indiscriminate charity. I simply call attention to the precepts of Christ, and the spirit and practice of the first Christians.

was when it issued in that tragic Death on Calvary. And, perhaps in nothing is the wide divergence of the *Vox Populi* from the *Vox Dei* more clearly visible than in matters of religion. It is a remarkable fact that, in general, those sins with which our dear Lord dealt most tenderly and forgivingly, are now branded as the most dangerous and damnable; whilst the sins which called forth His severest condemnation, are lightly passed over. For instance, the sin of *drunkenness* is, perhaps, in the popular estimation, the very chief of sins. Now, is it the chief sin? Will drunkenness exclude from heaven a whit more certainly than any one of scores of vices which are more respectable, but also more diabolical. Drunkenness is a detestable vice. It is a low, degrading sin. Its track is strewn with desolation and woe. No habitual drunkard can be a *good* Christian, nor yet a first-class citizen, husband, father, or friend. But, I am not afraid to say that he may be, and frequently is, a far better Christian on the whole, than thousands of sober men who pass for such. Place the most besotted drunkard side by side with the pious, but unfeeling, selfish, hard-natured, close-fisted man, who wrings the very heart's blood out of widow and orphan; or beside the sober—alas! oft-times too sober—merchant, whose measures are short, whose prices are long, whose intentions are to compound with his creditors to-morrow, having to-day wrung the uttermost farthing out of his own debtors,—and such Christians are neither few nor far between,—and tell me, which of these two stands the best chance of mercy on the Great Day of Account? Both are wrong; but there is a mighty difference in the guilt. The one is weak and sinful; the other is wicked. The one gives way through frailty; the other cultivates deliberate iniquity. Scripture makes a distinction between *sins* and *iniquities*. To be drunk is a sin; to defraud, or oppress, is iniquity. It is a sin to commit adultery or fornication; it is wickedness of the blackest color to deliberately devise the destruction of woman's virtue. It is a sin to swear or use profane language; it is wickedness of the most accursed kind to slander character, and with lies to demolish a stainless reputation. It is a sin to break the Sabbath; it is wickedness to break your word. To some pious minds a rubber of whist, or a dance, is a crowning enormity, forever unfitting one for heaven; to the same minds, perchance, a little dexterous double-dealing is a venial offence, if indeed offence it be at all. My friends, it is high time that the sins and iniquities of men were catalogued afresh, and their true values marked opposite to each. Would not some of the "first be last, and the last first?" Surely those sins which more immediately appertain to mere *human* nature, and spring out of this mortal flesh, would not stand at the head of the list; whilst those which show men's kindred with devils, and breathe of hell, should get a modest place at the bottom!

Surely, in the eyes of our good Creator, mere human frailty will be as nothing when weighed in the Balances of Judgment beside cold-hearted villainy! The Pulpit is to blame for the very erroneous notions which prevail on this subject. It harps on *sin*, and daintily touches iniquity. It is a safe and popular thing to denounce the poor outcasts of society,—the reeling drunkard, the impious Sabbath-breaker, the hopeless Magdalen. It is not quite so safe, and much less popular to deal honestly, and on its merits, with that respectable wickedness which sits in a cushioned pew laden with costly and fashionable raiment. Hence, malice, and envy, and selfishness, and cruelty, and oppression, and fraud, and lying, and slander, and uncharitableness, and neglect of the poor,—wickednesses too soul-destructive, ever to find a place in the same catalogue with profane language, Sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, and the like, receive but a comparatively small share of Pulpit denunciation. I am not here to apologise for any sin whatsoever. God forbid. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” Sin is sin; and all sin is odious in the sight of God. But facts are also facts; and truth is truth; and nothing was ever gained by a distortion of what is true. I read that “We have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our *infirmities* ;” but I nowhere read that He feels for men in their cold-blooded villainies.

To the miserable Magdalen He showed His compassion and His mercy, when, in the bitterness of Her sorrow, she “washed His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.” To another poor fallen creature, whom your modern *Christian* society would have spurned as an all-polluted thing, the great-hearted Saviour said, “Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more.” But what was the style of His language to those who “devoured widows houses,” and “for a pretence” made “long prayers?” How terrible His denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy and double-dealing. How sternly did He lash, and expel from the Temple, those money-making miscreants who had made His sanctuary a den of thieves! But then, He was a MAN, a perfect *Man*. Over the sinful frailties of mere *human* nature His great Heart bled; but, from His lips fell no maudlin sentiment. He called sin, sin: but He made a distinction between one sin and another. Can you show me one word of His that would indicate the faintest disposition to sympathise with men in those iniquities whereby they injure, not themselves so much as others? Were He here to-day, what, think you would He say of sins that are as common as the air we breathe, fraud and vilification,—the petty larcenies of trade, and the petty larcenies of gossip? What was the sin that gave occasion to a sentence of His that might well have caused the solid earth to tremble

beneath men's feet, when He said that there is a sin which is unpardonable? What, I ask, called forth this most awful of all His declarations? Was it wine, Sabbath-breaking, the dance, or even murder? Was it not a sin more characteristic perhaps of some of the pious ungodly of our times than of the very Infidels and heretics? I mean slander,—uncharitable misrepresentation. They said that the Devil helped him to work His miracles! His mission was, to raise the fallen; to seek and to save the lost, With such he sympathized. For these He felt. But, for the deliberately wicked,—shall I say that he sympathises with such? That same Heart beats for us yet. To-day is he looking down on you and me in pity and in mercy. Bye and bye we shall meet Him face to face. “And before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.” Do you ever think of this? How will it be with you when you are subpoenaed to that awful Bar of Judgment? There you will stand as you are,—your character fixed for ever. You will bring with you a book which shall then be “opened,”—not a Bible, nor a Prayer Book, nor a “confession of faith,”—but that book which you are now slowly writing, its pages glittering with the record of almsdeeds and golden virtues, or blurred with selfishness and sin,—the Book of your own Judgment! *This* is the Judge's Record of evidence. And how will it be with you, despite your piety, your morality, your prayers, your zeal, if, in that book is found not a single deed of charity, not a kindly word spoken to the suffering brethren of Jesus, the Judge? For, depend upon it, you will be questioned about the *poor*. Not so much about your Church, or your prayers, or your faith, or your hope, or your pious words,—but ABOUT THE POOR! *about your life-long treatment of the poor!* What a thrill of horror will shoot through the veins of millions of pious people when they hear that question, and see its significance for the first time! “I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God,”—all in new garments of flesh. The Chambers of Hades, and the dust of the earth, and the caves of the sea, shall give up their dead. “There shall be the little children, and meek confessors, and spotless virgins, and all the old-soldier saints of God; the noble army of martyrs; the glorious company of the apostles; the goodly fellowship of the prophets,—there, to be judged, and to see and hear *what you had done for the poor brethren of Christ*; the poor destitute of Ottawa City, who, during this long cold winter have shivered and famished, longing for the crumbs that fall from the table of affluence. There, too, shall be “the old antagonists and persecutors of the faithful;” all who laughed a life-long laugh at Christ; the hardened sinners of all ages; the “Nimrods and Lucifers of the world;” those who split asunder the nations; and those at whose coming

hell was moved, and stirred up her dead,—waiting to read your doom in what you *had done or not done for Christ's poor*;—each one standing in his lot, hoping or trembling; the Trumpet roaring; the heavens rushing away affrighted; the earth in flames; kings and peasants huddled and ~~crouching~~ together before “the Carpenter” of Nazareth,—each hearkening in amazement to the then terrible words of the text” “Inasmuch as ye *did* it unto one of the least of these;” “Inasmuch as ye *did* it not.”

“And they shall look on him whom they have pierced,”—pierced, through His poor. *Thus* have men pierced Him. Thus, through the weary ages have they prolonged His Passion. They have stripped Him of His royal robes, and scourged Him with hypocrisy; buffeted Him with feigned words; hung Him up upon the tree of their false knowledge, mangled and bleeding, crucified and slain!” They have smitten Him in persecuting His saints. Above all,—far above and beyond all,—have they pierced Him in despising, neglecting, persecuting His *poor*; and for this, pre-eminently, shall they be judged; by this, above all else, shall their final lot be determined.

Yes, my brethren; whilst we know that the other sins of men will not be lightly passed over in the Judgment, it is a most noticeable fact,—a fact to which the Pulpit has not given due prominence,—a fact which the great mass of Christians seem to have never reflected on,—a fact which you *must* consider, and act out in your life, or perish,—that the Judge Himself, on the one occasion when he paints the scenes of the Judgment, mentions *one* sin, and only one, as if this implied and involved every other,—as forming the basis of the final Judgment,—and that sin,—simple *neglect of his poor*! “Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it not to ME.”

If, then, this righteous Judgment be, as it shall be, the final infallible test of our Christianity; if it be the crucible in which shall be tried the real sterling value of the religious life,—then *where* is our Christianity, what the value of such religion as too many of us possess? Is it not as a drop in the bucket? For, what care we for the poor, in comparison with our love for self? We spend thousands of dollars annually on superfluous attire, dinners, balls, equipages, shows, follies, vanities of every description; but—*who cares for the poor?* A few. And yet we fondly think ourselves Christians on the sure road to heaven! We imagine that a little sighing and sobbing, and luke-warm prayers, and fashionable Church-going, and confidence in death, will satisfy Him who

forsook all for poor sinners ; who demands sacrifice, and looks for something tangible and substantial at our hands.

Try your religion by this simple test. Begin to help God's poor, and then your heaven will begin. The cup of "cold water given to a disciple *in the name of a disciple*" shall not lose its reward. The pleasure of relieving the destitute is a foretaste of heaven. For, heaven begins on earth. Hell, too, has set one foot on this world. Dream less of golden pavements, and gates of pearl, and shining battlements, and monotonous songs, and white-robed choirs ; for these are mere figures of speech ; and think more of HIM who is in heaven, and whose Presence *is* heaven. Set less value on frames and feelings ; and more on principles of conduct, and kindness to the poor. For, after all, you will never see a shining city fenced round with walls of precious stone. Your feet will never press a pavement of gold in this world or any other. You will *not* be a singer in a choir that can sing forever without weariness. There are *no* golden harps in heaven, nor yet crowns of gold for those who have conquered. No ; but there is something infinitely better than all these. There is *ONE* there who loves you beyond all earthly love ; and perchance you know how sweet, how strong this human love can be, when the whole heart is swallowed up in another. For, what are golden floors, and pearly gates, and walls of jasper, and light unfading,—what are they but figures, mere figures of that life eternal, that bliss unmixed with sorrow which those shall have forevermore who shall stand in the Presence of *Jesus*, and grasp His Hand, and see His Wounds by which they were healed, and hear His Blessed Voice, and gaze on His all-loving face, and wonder at His Love, which passeth knowledge ? You know that on earth no outward circumstances, however favourable ; no human distinction, however great ; no domestic peace, however perfect ; no wealth however boundless ; no round of pleasure, however fascinating, can make you happy, as can the felt attachment of *one* loving, all-devoted heart. In heaven it is the same. The *place* will not make you happy. The *company* will not be your bliss. The *glory* and the *beauty* will be as nothing to your soul, compared with the loved Presence of *ONE*,—*ONE* only,—your own dear Lord, by whose love in your heart you now *love His Poor* : *ONE* who at this moment is praying for you,—who if "fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely ;" and who, if you, from love to Him have been *good to His Poor*, for His own dear sake,—and perchance not otherwise—will meet you at the doors of Glory, and give you the Hand of a Great loving Brother, and say : "Come, thou blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for thee, from the foundation of the world. For, I was

an hungred, and you gave me meat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was in prison, and you came unto me. And, doubtless, to many a so-called pious, but selfish uncharitable christian, He will say: "Depart, thou cursed!" "Inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me," "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

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