

THE THREE BIDDERS.

(An incident in the life of Rowland Hill.)

Just listen for a moment, kind friends,
 And a story I'll unfold—
 A marvellous tale of a wonderful sale
 Of a noble lady of old ;
 How hand and heart in an auction mart
 Her soul and her body she sold.

'Twas in the king's highway so broad,
 A century ago,
 That a preacher stood of noble blood,
 Telling the poor and low
 Of a Saviour's love and a home above
 And a peace that all might know.

A crowded throng drew eagerly near,
 And they wept at the wondrous love
 That could wash away their vilest sins
 And give them a home above ;
 When lo ! through the crowd a lady proud
 Her gilded chariot drove.

" Make room ! make room ! " cried the haughty
 groom,

" You obstruct the king's highway ;
 My lady is late, and their majesties wait ;
 Give way there, good people, give way ! "
 But the preacher heard and his soul was stirred,
 And he cried to the rider, " Nay."

His eye like the lightning flashes out,
 His voice like a trumpet rings ;

“ Your grand fête-days, your fashions and ways,
 Are all but perishing things ;
 'T is the king's highway, but I hold it to-day
 In the name of the King of kings.”

Then he cried, as he gazed on the lady fair,
 And marked her soft eye fall,
 “ Now here in His name a sale I proclaim,
 And bids for this fair lady call.
 Who will purchase the whole—her body and soul,
 Her coronet, jewels, and all ?

“ Three earnest bidders already I see,
 The world steps up as the first :
 ‘ My treasures and pleasers, my honours I give,
 For which all my votaries thirst :
 She'll be happy and gay through life's bright day,
 With a quiet grave at the worst.’

“ Next out speaks the devil and boldly bids :
 ‘ The kingdoms of earth are mine ;
 Fair lady, thy name with an envied fame
 On their brightest tablets shall shine ;
 Only give me thy soul, and I'll give thee the whole,
 Their glory and wealth to be thine.’

“ And what wilt Thou give, O sinners' true Friend,
 Thou Man of Sorrows unknown ?
 Then gently He said, ‘ My blood have I shed
 To purchase her for Mine own ;
 To conquer the grave and her soul to save
 I trod the wine-press alone.

“ ‘ I will give her My cross of sufferings here,
 My cup of sorrow to share ;
 Then with glory and love in My home above
 For ever to dwell with Me there ;

She shall walk in light in a robe of white
And a radiant crown shall wear.'

"Thou hast heard the terms, my lady fair,
That each has offered for thee ;
Which wilt thou choose and which wilt thou lose,
This life or the life to be ?
The figure is mine, but the choice is thine.
Dear lady, which of the three ?"

Nearer and nearer the preacher's stand
The gilded chariot stole,
And each head was bowed as over the crowd
The gospel accents roll ;
And every word which the lady heard
Burned in her very soul.

"Pardon, good people," she kindly said,
As she rose from her cushioned seat ;
As the crowd made way, you might almost say
You could hear her pulse's beat :
And each head was bare as the lady fair
Knelt down at the preacher's feet.

She took from her hand the jewels rare,
The coronet from her brow,
"Lord Jesus," she said as she bowed her head,
"The highest bidder art Thou ;
Thou hast died for my sake and I gratefully take
Thy offer—and take it now.

"I know the pleasures and treasures of earth
At the best but weary and cloy ;
And the tempter is bold, but his honours and gold
Prove ever a fatal decoy ;
I long for Thy rest—Thy bid is the best :
O Lord, I accept it with joy !

“ I turn from the pride and ambitions of earth,
 I welcome Thy cross now so dear ;
 My mission shall be to win souls for Thee
 While life shall be spared to me here ;
 My hope ever found with Thee to be crowned
 When Thou shalt in glory appear.”

“ Amen ! ” said the preacher with reverent grace
 And the people all wept aloud.
 Years have rolled on, and all have gone
 Who around that altar bowed ;
 Lady and throng have been swept along
 On the wind like a morning cloud.

But soon, oh, how soon, the glory and gloom
 Of the world shall pass away,
 And Jesus shall come and take His own home
 To be there with Himself always ;
 Wilt thou, reader, be there, His bright glory to
 share,
 Throughout eternity's day ?



WHAT IS THE WORLD, AND WHAT IS ITS END ?

A SERIOUS QUESTION FOR THOSE WHO ARE OF IT.

This is the question I would now look at, according to the light Scripture affords us. Nor am I going to forget that the world we live in has taken a Christian form.

And first—What is the world ? Men are apt to think that this world is as God made it, and that all things continue as they were at the creation, only that man has made great progress in prosperity and

civilization. Now, in material comforts, none will deny it, though the men of a past age would hardly think our refinements comforts ; and, while passions subsist, the difference is not so great as is supposed. Men have telegraphs, railroads, Armstrong guns and iron-clads, but I hardly know in what respect they are the happier for it. It is a question if they have not excited the passions more than they have satisfied them. Children are not more obedient, families not more united, servants not more honest and respectful, masters not kinder, nor wives more faithful. Morally speaking, I do not see what the world has gained. It thinks better of itself, and vaunts its powers ; I do not know that this is any advance. Christianity, as light come into the world, has made a difference. Men do not do in the light what they do in the dark. But if we look beneath the surface, even that is not much. But the world is in no sense as God made it. He overrules all, has patience with it ; but He never made it as it is. He made Paradise, and the world has grown up as it is through man's departure from God. It has been destroyed once since, because of its wickedness. It is conscious at this moment that things cannot go on long as they are ; that we are in a crisis of the world's history which must result in some great disruption. Some will tell us that democracy is the evil and it must be put down ; others, that it alone can save the world. But all feel things cannot go on as they are.

I do not participate in men's judgments in this respect ; but these fears, even if they magnify the apprehensions of men on one side or the other, are the fruit of the restless working of some principle which man cannot control, and hence his fears ; they are the confession of the instability of the order on which he relies ; and they presage, and in in the world's history have ever presaged, some violent disruption, because they were the expression of the consciousness of the force of what is breaking all up—that passions are stronger than what controlled them. The bonds of society are too tight or too weak. Power is not in them, but in the force that is working underneath them. Some would slacken them to give vent to the power at work ; some would tighten them, hoping to break or repress it ; some hope, and many more fear ; and none know what is to come. "After us, the Deluge," has become the proverbial expression of this in men's mouths—the exaggerated expression of self-importance, but the accepted utterance of general fears. The Christian knows that God overrules all things, and he does not fear in this way, but for that reason he is more calm and clear-sighted, less interested in the maintenance of particular forms, and hence more interested in judging the effect of principles on them. And, if indeed taught of God in this, guided by His word in the knowledge of what the result will be, yet a large number of Christians, however, add to the delusion, because, even among them, man's

capacity for doing good is worshipped. Yet even these are getting uneasy at the influence Popery has acquired and is acquiring.

What is, then, the world? It is a vast system, grown up after man had departed from God, of which Satan is actually, though not by right of course, the god and the prince. Man was driven out of the place in which God had set him in innocence and peace. He gave up God for his lusts, under the influence of Satan, who thus got power over him. His way *back* to the tree of life was barred by divine power. He has indeed built a city, where God had made him a vagabond, and adorned it by the hands of artificers in brass and iron, and sought to make it agreeable by those who handle the harp and organ (Gen. iv.). But he is without God in it. Left without law, the world became so bad that God had to destroy mankind, save eight persons, by the Deluge. Under law, man plunged into idolatry, from which no prophetic warnings could ultimately deliver him. God sent His son: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. v.); but man would have none of Him; He was cast out of the vineyard and slain. The world is a system sprung up from man's disobedience and departure from God in its origin, and which has turned God out of it as far as it could when He came into it in mercy. Hence the Lord says of it as a system, "*Now* is the judgment of this world" (John xii.).

This is its state of sin. But it is also a system in which men have been proved in every way, to see whether they could be recalled or recovered from this state, by promises, by law, by prophets, yea by God's own Son. Especially among the Jews was this process carried on, as represented under the figure of a vineyard, where the owner sought fruit, but no fruit was to be had. The servants, and even the only-begotten Son, were killed. And when we look now at the principles and motives of the world, are they other than "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"? Do not pleasure, gain, vanity, ambition, govern men? I do not speak of exceptions, but of what characterizes the world. When we speak of men "rising in the world," "getting on in the world," is it not ambition and gain which are in question? Is there much difference in what Cain did in his city, and what men are now doing in theirs? If a Chinese, who had heard a missionary speak of Christ and Christianity, came to London to see what it was, would he find the mass of men, the world, governed by other motives than what governed the masses in Nankin, or Peking, or Canton? Would they not be seeking gain, as he would have done there; or pleasure, as they do there; or power and honour, as they do there? What is the world in its motives? A system in which men seek "honour one of another, and not the honour that cometh from God only" (John v. 44). In a word, the world having rejected the Son of God

when He was here in it, the Father set Him at His right hand—fruit of that solemn appeal of the Blessed One, “O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent Me” (John xvii.). Then comes the sentence: “All that is *in* the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not *of the Father*, but is *of the world*” (1 John ii.).

But it will be said, Yes, but now Christianity has come in. That applies to the heathen world. I answer, “The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power” (1 Cor. iv). The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are not found only among heathens; if comparison is to be made—now much more among Christians. But it is important to take up Christianity as a system, because, not only does faith recognize it as the truth and true revelation of God in Christ, but it has in sum formed the world in its present condition. If I go to inquire what the world is, I cannot turn to heathens or Mohammedans. I must look to Christendom. This is what characterizes the state of the world. Now I have already spoken of the motives none can deny which govern men in it—as pleasure, gain, ambition, vanity. They may pursue these things, preserving a good reputation before men; it is only another snare to make Pharisees of them, or without conscience. But they pursue this, and a man is morally what he pursues. He is covetous, if it be gain; ambi-

tious, if it be power ; a man of pleasure, if it be pleasure ; and so on. But we must look at Christendom itself. At the beginning, the exhibition of the grace and power of Christ's operation by the Holy Ghost in raising men above human motives, and uniting them in the enjoyment of heavenly things with one heart, and so displaying a care for each other which the world does not know, and a deadness to the world which is the opposite of the very principle of its existence—pure in walk and unselfish in its ways, the church forced itself on the attention of a hostile yet admiring world. Now, and for centuries, the seat of anxious and tortuous ambition, of crimes and deceit of every kind, haughty power over others, and worldly luxury and evil, characterize what pre-eminently calls itself the church. The name of its most active supports has passed, in common parlance, into the name of cunning, falsehood, and want of conscience. The world has been driven into infidelity by what calls itself the church.

Take the Greek church. Where does ignorance reign pre-eminently? There where its clergy sways. Where all seems fair as regards profession, infidelity reigns universally in the active-minded population of the Romanist system. As to Protestantism, every one knows, because there all is open, how it is sunk into infidelity. Christianity only adds this additional feature to the world's history, that the worst corruption has come in—the corruption of what is best. The

Reformation was caused mainly because the iniquity of the church was intolerable. This was predicted by the apostles ; so that it confirms, instead of shaking, the faith of him who believes and reads the Scriptures ; but it teaches that reference to Christendom does not do away the proof of Satan being the prince and god of this world. He has proved it more than ever, by making that which was brought in as a witness of God to be the seat of the power of his own corruption. Taking in Christendom as a whole, what do we see? Mohammedanism has overrun the eastern part and Popery the western. The north of Europe has been delivered from the latter ; and what is its state? Overrun with infidelity and Popish tendencies. I do not mean to deny that the Spirit of God is active, and that good is done in the midst of all this. I believe it, and thank God for it. But that is not the world, but a distinct power which works in the midst of it. In influencing the world and its government, Popery has made more progress the last thirty years than the power of truth. We may deplore it, but it cannot be denied. The world is far more guilty by having Christianity in its midst. But it has not ceased to be the world.

Remember, reader, that it was in connection with the death of Christ that the devil received the title of "prince of this world" (John xiv. 30), and as to his religious influence, is called "the god of this world" (2 Cor. iv. 4), who blinds the minds

of them who believe not. God did not call the devil the prince of this world till He had fully proved and tested it. But when it followed Satan wholly, in rejecting His Son (the few who owned Him adding confirmation to it by their fear), then the name is given to him. When God's throne was at Jerusalem it was impossible; but, when the true ruler of it was rejected, then it was plain that Satan was its prince. The intrigues for power when the empire became Christian proved, not the exclusion of Satan from the throne of the world, but his acquired dominion over what was called the church. No doubt the cross gave his power its death-blow in the sight of God and of faith, but not in the world. There it was his victory; and the Christ was called up to sit at the right hand of God, till His enemies were made His footstool (Ps. cx.). Then men stumbled on the Stone. When It falls in judgment, It will grind them to powder (Matt. xxi.).

Now, though Satan's worst reign is his religious one (see 2 Cor. xi. 3, 13-15), far the worst, even when the blasphemous beast is raging (Rev. xiii.), as any one may see in reading the character of the second beast, yet he reigns anywhere only by the corrupt motives of man's heart. We may add, indeed, the fears of a bad conscience to his means of power. He leads men astray by their lusts, and then gives them his religion to quiet their consciences, which he cannot cleanse. He makes religiousness (characterized by certain forms

which strike the imagination, and a diligent activity in what flesh can perform) minister to the power of those who rule for him, and excites the passions of men to contend for their religion, as for something in which their own interests and honour are concerned ; thus making religion the activity of the flesh to sustain, superstitiously or through interest, a system, and capable of any wickedness to sustain it, so that wickedness becomes religious wickedness, and the conscience even thinks it is doing God's service, while Satan's craft directs all this to his own ends. Still, outside all this direct system of Satan's religious power, he governs the world—the Christian world, as all the rest, and more than the rest—by men's ordinary lusts. But the eager pursuit of gain is more ardent than ever, leading to less scruple in acquiring it ; and pleasure holds its sway over men, in defiance of Christ, as it did when there was no such motive to restrain them ; war rages as it ever did ; conquest and oppression range over a wider sphere than of old, while the nominal power of Christianity, with all men's boastings, has receded to smaller limits than in the seventh century, when it ruled over known Africa, filled Asia, and was almost the established religion of China.

Such is the world which is attached to its own objects, grandeur, power, pleasure, gain, *not to Christ* ; and thus is enslaved to him who governs the world by these motives. The external system

of Christianity, instead of delivering souls from them, is the seat of the highest exercise of these worldly principles ; and where it is not the sphere of the concentrated influence of them, it is sunk into philosophy and unbelief.

What, then, is its end? Judgment, speedy judgment ! Of the day and the hour, no man knows ; it comes as a thief in the night (Matt. xxiv. 36-39 ; 1 Thes. v., etc.). The world will not get really better (2 Tim. iii. 13). The thoughts men have of its doing so are one of the worst expressions of its evil confidence in man, man's development, man's energies. Man is to be made better. Nay, Christianity, say some now, is only a phase of man's history ; and now we are to have a better. What is it to come from ? What are its motives ?

Commerce, we are told, civilizes. Education enlarges and improves the mind. Commerce does take away grossness and violence ; but gain is its motive. Its earnest pursuit tends to destroy higher motives, and to make a moral estimate of value sink into money and selfishness. It has nowhere elevated the tone of society, but the contrary. It has not stopped wars ; it has caused many. Commercial nations have, in general, been the least scrupulous, and the most grasping. Excuses may be formed ; but none but a commercial people would make war to sell opium.

What has education done ? It enlarges the mind. Be it so ; of course it does. Does it change the motives which govern the heart ? In no way. Men

are more educated than they were ; but what is the change ? Is the influence of superstition really diminished ? In no wise. On the contrary, the infidelity produced by dependence on man's mind has forced men, who are not personally established in divine truth, back into superstition, to find repose and a resting-place. One of the worst signs of the present day, and which is observable everywhere, is that deliverance from superstition and error is not now by means of positive truth ; but that liberty of mind, sometimes called liberalism, which is bound by no truth, and knows no truth, but doubts all truth, is simply destructive. Go anywhere and everywhere, to India or England, Italy or Russia, or America, deliverance from superstition is not by truth, but by disbelief of all known truth. The blessed truth of the gospel is a drop of water in the ocean of mind and error. And even Christians reckon, not on the Spirit and word of God, but on progress, to dispel darkness. It is building up Popery and mere church authority, without the soul knowing truth for itself, for those who dread with reason the wanton pretensions of the impudence of the human mind ; which, satisfied as to its own claim to judge, has no real taste for, or interest whatever in, truth itself. On the other hand, the utter absence of truth in church pretensions, and its claim independent of godly fruits, drive even honest minds, not divinely taught and guided, into the wanton pretensions of that mind which has no truth at all.

The manifest conflict of the day is between superstition and the mere pretensions of man's mind (i. e., infidelity as to all positive truth, or standard of truth, or acquired truth). Neither superstition nor infidelity knows any truth; nor have they any respect for it. One recognizes authority; the other is the rejection of it. One is the church, so called; the other, free thought. Faith in the truth is known to neither. Every intelligent person knows that this is a true description of what is going on: rest in authority; or the mind of man is to find out truth. Where it is, no one knows; the business of man's mind being to disprove any existing claim to it. One of them is no better than the other: church authority, the most hostile to God and His people, as the judgment of Babylon shows all the blood of saints is found in her (Rev. xviii. 24); but the other, a rising up of man against God, which will end in his destruction.

It is as needful, in referring to the state of the world, to refer to its religious aspect, as to the lower and more material motives which govern it. I do not doubt for a moment (God forbid I should) that the Spirit of God acts for the blessing of some in the midst of all this scene, but it does not affect the state of the world. It is one of the striking phenomena of the liberal or infidel party, that where it is free (that is, where it is not itself oppressed by Popery), it prefers Popery to truth. Truth is divine, and it cannot be borne. Popery is human, and liberality will be liberal to it, not

to truth. So governments, when too rudely pressed by it, pander to Popery, because it is a strong and unscrupulous political power. Truth does not concern them. If it presses on their party, it annoys them. All this has an evident tendency—the giving power to superstition as long as governments hold their own, but when human will grows too strong, a breaking up of all that, and the destruction of the whole system. A well-known specimen of this has been seen in the French revolution of 1789.

If we turn to America, to what (to many) would be the most attractive part of the new world, what do we see? Large profession and religious activity, but the churches the great promoters of the dreadful conflict now going on;* Christians more worldly than the world; money supreme in influence; and the world, save as partially prohibited by law, overrun with drunkenness, pre-eminent in profane swearing, and demoralized by the corruptions which follow the absence of family habits. Intelligence, activity, energy, education reign there. None of the supposed hindrances of the old world exist there. No one can have been there and not have seen in that immense country the amazing development of human energy; but, morally, what is the spectacle it affords?

The world, then, has been evil from its origin, for the horrors of idolatry cannot be denied.

* Written during the war in United States, in 1862.

Christianity, then, has been corrupted by man, and has not reformed the world—is actually the seat of its greatest corruption, Commerce, a partial civilizer of men, absorbs them with the lowest of motives—money, and is wholly indifferent to truth and moral elevation ; for it, a good man is a man with capital. Education, which also frees from what is gross, has not, with all its pretensions, changed the motives, ameliorated the morals of men, nor even freed from the bonds of superstition, save as it has set aside all positive truth, and every standard of it ; and thus, while wounding infidelity on the one side, riveted the chains of superstition on the other.

I appeal to facts. Is not Popery or Puseyism on the one hand, and infidelity on the other, what stamps the activity of England at the present moment ? It is not otherwise elsewhere. Will God be the idle spectator—whatever His patience with men, and how blessed soever the testimony of His grace—will He be the idle spectator without end of the enslaving power of superstition, and the rebellious rejection of truth by the pretended lovers of truth who cast down all foundations ? He may, He does testify, as long as souls can be won and delivered. But is He to allow the power of evil forever ? He will not. He will allow it to fill up the cup of falsehood and wickedness. He declares that “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse ;” but they are filling up the cup of wrath for themselves. He is patient till no more can be

done. "The iniquity of the Amorites," He says, "is not yet full;" but then He will remove the evil and bless the earth.

My object is not here to enter into any detail of prophecy; it has been amply done elsewhere. But as the course of the world's history points to judgment, the removal of the power of evil by power as the only remedy, so that the end of this scene is judgment, is as clearly stated in Scripture as possible. I do not mean the judgment of the dead and the secrets of their hearts before the great white throne, but the judgment of this visible world. God hath appointed a day in which He will judge this habitable world (such is the force of the word *oikoumenē*) in righteousness, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Jesus from the dead (Acts xvii. 31). Man has multiplied transgression, and will continue to do so till judgment comes. But the central sin of the world, that by which its true character has been stamped, is the rejection and death of Christ. But whom the world rejected, Him has God raised from the dead, and to Him all judgment is committed (John v. 22). Every knee shall bow to Him (Phil. ii. 9-11); and the more boldly they have rejected and opposed Him, the more terrible will be their judgment. But all man's pride, and vanity, and pretensions must come down (Is. ii. 10-22; xxiv. 19-23; xxvi. 21; Zeph. iii. 8).

As to the corrupt and idolatrous system, read

what is said, in reference to it, in Revelation xvi. 19 ; xvii. 1-6 ; xviii. 21-24.

As to the haughty power and rebellion of man, read Revelation xvi. 13,14 ; xix. 11-21. Figures these are, no doubt, but figures whose meaning is plain enough. Read also Dan. ii. 34, 35 ; vii. 9-11. (In verse 9, "cast down" should be "placed" or "set.")

Such, then, is the end of the world as it now is. The Christianity which it professes will have increased the severity of its judgment, and moreover judgment will begin there as 1 Peter iv. 17 shows us. They that have known their Master's will, and not done it, will be beaten with many stripes (Luke xii. 47). Can we say that Christendom, as it now subsists, is the least like the heavenly state in which we see the disciples in the New Testament (Acts ii.-iv.)? True, we find there that they soon declined, and that evil came in. But the record that tells us this, tells us it would wax worse and worse, and ripen for the judgment which surely awaits it.

Dear reader, are you the Lord's? If not—*Flee from the wrath to come to Him* "who gave Himself for our sins, that He might *deliver us FROM THIS PRESENT EVIL WORLD*, according to the will of God," having "once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might *bring us TO GOD*" (Gal. i. 4 ; 1 Peter iii. 18).