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THE CHURCHMAN

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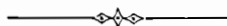
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good one, as it enables us to recognise the quotations from the LXX. in Prov. xxii. 3.

With this text we may close what we hope is neither an unimportant nor an uninteresting part of our inquiry.

R. B. GIRDLESTONE.

(*To be continued.*)



ART. IV.—SAINTS' DAYS IN THE CHURCH'S YEAR. IX. SEPTEMBER. ST. MATTHEW THE PUBLICAN.

A. THE TRUE FOLLOWING OF JESUS CHRIST.

"Follow Me : and he arose and followed Him."—MATT. ix. 9.

THE instruction derived from the incidents of this kind that are described in the Gospels is like the instruction which we draw from the parables.

Such cases as the calling of John and James, Peter and Andrew, from the fishing-nets, by help of which they exercised an honest trade;¹ or the calling of the rich young man to part with his possessions, to "sell all that he had," and then to "follow Christ" in His poverty;² or the calling of St. Matthew here to leave the toll-booth or custom-house (such appears to have been the fact of the case) where he was collecting the tax levied on those who came along the Damascus road by a bridge over the Jordan³—such cases, as a very little reflection will show us, cannot possibly for ourselves, under ordinary circumstances, be literal examples.

These three instances might be taken as representative of the three sections into which the sum-total of the ordinary occupations of men may be divided. We have here the labourer, the capitalist, and the man of business. Now it is manifest that if, in every instance, the labourer were to give up his craft, the capitalist to dispense his property and separate it from himself, the man of business to close his shop, to burn his ledgers, to give up communication with all his correspondents, the great machine of social human life would come to a standstill : and the principles of Christianity would not, by this method, have penetrated the world. The principles of Christianity would, in fact, have very little remaining on which to act at all.

These Gospel incidents, therefore, are intended to be, so far as we are concerned, not so much examples to be imitated, as

¹ Matt. iv. 20.

² *Ibid.*, xix. 21.

³ See below, in the next section for this month.

vivid illustrations of the great religious change which marks the true disciple of Christ. The grand problem which the disciple of Christ is called to solve is this, how to be united to Christ by faith, by love, by devotion, while yet discharging all ordinary duties in a world which is unfriendly to Christ. This problem is very difficult; so difficult, indeed, as to be impossible to man's unassisted powers. It can be solved only by God's grace. But it was very essential that the grave reality of this demand upon us should be set forth very forcibly and very explicitly in Holy Scripture.

And nothing could produce this result more effectually than these incidents which are recorded in the Gospels. We see in them distinctly, as in a picture, this great truth, that Christ is to be held as of more value than anything else, or than all other things put together. *He must be followed*: and to follow Him we must turn our back upon the world. Just as St. Paul represents this giving up of the world and this union with Christ under the image of *death*—"I am crucified unto the world, and the world to me; I am crucified with Christ, and the new life which I now live is by faith in Him"¹—so here the same thing is represented under the form of *separation*. The fishing-nets are to be left upon the shore, that they may be taken up by other hands; the large property is to be brought into the market, and the proceeds given to the poor; the seat at the receipt of custom is to be vacated, and to be occupied by some one else. These are as parables intended to show that the Christian's heart must be alienated from the world, if he is truly to follow Christ.

And now, having plainly before us the general import of this kind of Scripture lesson, let us fix our thoughts on one or two characteristic marks of this following of Christ thus understood. The subject is very great and comprehensive; but three particulars may be singled out for attention. If we truly follow Christ, we must follow Him in *secret communion with God*. The outer life of any man in this world is not the point of main importance. The inner life is of greater moment; and the outer life is bound up with the inner by a necessary connection. Now, in the life of Christ—and never more than when active public duties were requiring attention—we can distinctly trace the habit of close private communion with the Father. This is a fact which becomes more and more evident to the student of the New Testament, in proportion as he studies the New Testament carefully. And this only need be added, that, if such was the customary inner life of Him Who knew no sin, surely we—whose whole being is weakened

¹ Gal. ii. 20; vi. 15.

by sin at every point—cannot follow Christ at all, unless the first condition is fulfilled, of secret communion with God.

Another distinguishing mark of our blessed Lord's life on earth was His *kindly intercourse with those around Him*. There was nothing harsh, nothing morose, nothing formal in His intercourse with men. All was friendly, easy, natural, and gracious. He stopped to listen to the suppliant's story by the wayside. If children were brought to Him, He took them up in His arms. If He was invited to a marriage, He went. He looked at the flowers. He spoke of the weather. He watched the work on the farms. And from these things, in conversation, He drew instruction. And we too, in all this, are called upon to follow Him. It is a difficult following. It is not easy to be thoroughly interested in the concerns of those by whom we are surrounded, in this varied scene of nature and of society, without being absorbed in the love of the world. We need a great example, and that example we have in Christ.

Thirdly, let us bear in mind *His willing self-sacrifice for the sake of others*. Here again His footsteps are before us; and our path of safety and happiness is to follow Him. It need not be said that to this following of Christ there is a limit. In the Great Sacrifice He was and must be alone. But the law of His life, as well as the deep, awful motive of His death, was self-surrender for the sake of others. He gave His thought, He gave His time, He gave His work, He gave His sympathy for others. And our life must be modelled on this pattern, if in death and in eternity we are to be His.

In these remarks it has not been forgotten that in such cases as those of Matthew, and of Peter and Andrew, James and John, there was something more than this religious following in the heart. Christ needed *Apostles*, and those Apostles were under special training through literal personal following of Christ. One meaning of our Lord's life on earth was that He might train the teachers of the world. Their extraordinary following of Christ was a preparation for our ordinary following. We do not think enough of this. But our following, though not literally the same, must be equally real. What we read concerning the Apostles must have a counterpart in our experience, or we cannot be true disciples of Christ.

B. THE PLACE OF THE RECEIPT OF CUSTOM.

"A man named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom."—MATT. ix. 9.

What is the meaning of this phrase? What was the receipt of custom, and where was it? How far are we able to make for ourselves a true picture of the employment of St. Matthew

at the time when our Lord Jesus Christ spoke to him, and he forsook his vocation that he might follow a new vocation under this new Master?

These are interesting questions; for we must wish to know as much as we are permitted to know of the Twelve, who were with Christ in the closest intimacy, who were privately taught by Him, who received from Him a special commission, and whom we see, as we look back through the Christian centuries, standing at the head of the series of all who have borne the Saviour's name. They are likewise important questions. For the choice of these Twelve was not accidental. In each separate case there was a meaning in the choice, though the whole of this meaning may not be evident to us. In four instances, as we remember, Apostles were fishermen.¹ Only in one other case are we told anything of a specific occupation in life. St. Matthew was called "from the receipt of custom;" elsewhere he is termed "a publican." We must put these two points together.

One circumstance to be determined, if it is possible, is the exact moment in the life of Christ with which this calling of St. Matthew is connected. This can be determined with very little difficulty. All the three Evangelists who mention the calling of St. Matthew connect this event with the healing of the paralytic man in the house at Capernaum. St. Matthew says: "As Jesus passed forth *from thence*, he saw a man named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom."² St. Luke says: "*After these things* he went forth and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom." In these two statements, as regards time and place, we can perceive no difference. But St. Mark, after his manner, adds a fresh particular, which tends to give life and reality to the scene. He says: "Jesus went forth again *by the seaside*: and as He passed by He saw Levi, the son of Alphæus, sitting at the receipt of custom."³ "By the seaside"—*i.e.*, at the edge of the lake. And we must carefully take note of what we find in each of the three accounts. Matthew, or Levi, was seated at the receipt of custom. This gives the idea of a stationary, habitual employment at one particular spot. The word "publican," too, denotes that he was in some sense a collector of public dues.

Putting all these things together, we reach a conclusion regarding which there is really very little reason to doubt. To Capernaum boats came across from the opposite side of the lake, with produce for the market, and with persons who for various causes made use of what was practically a ferry. Connected with this traffic was a toll; and Matthew, or Levi,

¹ John xxi. 2 gives the impression that Thomas also was a fisherman.

² Luke v. 29.

³ Mark ii. 14.

the son of Alphæus (for such was his father's name), sat there daily at the toll-gate by the water-side to receive the toll from those who came out of the boat, that they might enter into the town with or without marketable goods.¹

All this was on a small scale ; but it is one characteristic of the Gospel history that it presents to us great principles in connection with the most ordinary life. Still, Matthew is represented to us as comparatively a rich man ; and no doubt we may say, bearing in mind the scale of things with which we here have to do, that his business was lucrative. We feel that this must have been the case, as we read onward in the narrative. All these three Evangelists alike tell us what immediately followed the calling of St. Matthew, just as they had told us what immediately preceded. And thus, again, we obtain part of the correct framework of the event commemorated in the Church during the present month. Matthew gave an entertainment to Jesus and His disciples. One of the Evangelists says that it was a large and sumptuous entertainment. A very mixed company were present ; some of them, whatever their true character might be, having a bad reputation. And it was on this occasion, at this banquet, that two of those proverbial sentences were spoken, the prolific meaning of which has enriched the thought and guided the conduct of generations in the Christian Church. First, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." And secondly, "No man putteth a piece of new cloth on an old garment, else the rent is made worse. Also, no man putteth new wine into old bottles, lest the bottles be burst : but new wine-must be put into new bottles : then both are preserved." Thus we obtain a full view of the circumstances that surrounded the calling of St. Matthew, the miracles that preceded it, and the parable that followed it ; as well as of the place, Capernaum and the lake, and the "receipt of custom" near the boats.

We do not by any means lose our time in thus taking pains to surround this Gospel incident with its true environment. It is the environment given in the sacred volume itself, and it is not given by accident. In this case, too, there are none of those

¹ See the preceding section. Four good reasons can be given for the placing of an important "receipt of custom" at Capernaum. It had reference, first, to the *octroi* of the city ; next, to the dues upon the ferry ; thirdly, to the rates of payment connected with the frontier ; fourthly, to traffic on the great road from Damascus to Ptolemais. See Geikie's "Life of Christ," vol. ii. It is probable that a very large staff of publicans were established at Capernaum ; and it is evident that Matthew was by no means one of the meanest and most degraded of the class.

difficulties in detail which we find in other parts of the evangelic narrative. And now let us single out simply one point from the moral and religious teaching of the occasion. It must strike everyone that the sudden speaking of Jesus Christ to St. Matthew in this way must have excited wonder, and that St. Matthew's sudden obedience—obedience, too, so complete, that he changed his vocation at once—was equally wonderful. But, after all, do not events of the same kind happen to us in our own lives? Does not Christ sometimes suddenly speak to us, so that we are unexpectedly placed under the responsibility of listening or refusing? Do we not sometimes find ourselves all at once in an emergency? and are not such moments full of great consequences for good or for harm? Are we ready to listen to the voice? And when we hear it, shall we have courage to obey? “Jesus speaks, and speaks to *thee*.” The happiness of the soul depends on promptitude in listening and willingness to obey.

J. S. HOWSON.



ART. V.—LADY VERNEY'S “PEASANT PROPERTIES.”

Peasant Properties and other selected Essays. By Lady VERNEY. 2 Vols. Longmans, Green, and Co. 1885.

IT is strange that, while in England the question of peasant properties is coming to the front as the solution of agricultural difficulties, in France it is declared that of all the changes in their financial habits the greatest is the cooling of the public passion for the ownership of land. “The desire of it,” says a French authority, “has hitherto brought about most of our social crises; but the excessive division, which is the inevitable result of our laws of succession, is no longer pursued with the same fury.” Again, it is said that “the succession duties paid to the State by the constant changes of property have become so high as almost to absorb the total value of individual property by the community.” The consequence of the fear of this, and that other investments of money are gradually becoming popular with the peasants, has made land much less valuable than it was.¹ The disease

¹ It has also encouraged the rush upon great cities. The surplus labourer does not emigrate; and in Paris—supposed to be the Eldorado of high wages and constant pleasure—he often sinks to the lowest level of distress.