

The Parable of the Demon's Return.

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'Then goeth he, and taketh with him seven other spirits more evil than himself; and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man becometh worse than the first.'—ST. LUKE xi. 26.

THE parable, of which this verse forms the conclusion, is given in almost exactly the same words both by St. Matthew and St. Luke, and in very much the same connexion. Jesus had just been healing a man who was suffering from a calamity of threefold intensity. A demon had taken possession of him, and had deprived him both of speech and of sight.¹ Christ had cast out the evil spirit; and then the freed victim both spake and saw. Both the evangelists tell us that the multitudes who witnessed the miracle were amazed at it. Yet many of them must have heard of demons being driven out from other persons. Not a few of them may have witnessed such cures. For not only had Jesus healed demoniacs before this, but among the Jews themselves there were exorcists who professed to drive out demons, and who at times had some success, as Christ Himself seems to imply by the question which He asks on this very occasion, "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out?" (comp. Acts xix. 13). But this was no ordinary case, and perhaps no Jewish exorcist would have thought that here a cure was possible. The man was dumb, and could make no reply to any one who tried to converse with him. Still worse, he was blind, and could not see the person who wished to cure him. All the ordinary means of gaining influence over the patient with a view to helping him were closed. An exorcist setting to work with methods, which perhaps were analogous to those now used by a mesmeriser or a hypnotist, would not know how to begin. It seemed a hopeless case. And yet Jesus had freed the man from all three of his afflictions, probably by single command to the evil spirit to depart. No wonder that the people all marvelled.

"But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This man doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils" (Matt. xii. 24). To which blasphemous suggestion our Lord replies by pointing out that Satan is not likely to

¹ St. Luke mentions the dumbness, but not the blindness.

ruin his own cause by casting out his own ministers; and by appealing to the fact of their own exorcists' success. If the power to drive out demons can come only from Satan, then they must admit that their own kith and kin are in the habit of employing Satanic agency. The accusation which they have made against Him recoils upon themselves. Satan is strong, makes many souls his prey, and for a while keeps his booty securely. But a Stronger than he comes, deprives him of his spoils, and lets the souls go. So far from Christ having Satan as His ally, He has him as an enemy with whom no terms can be made. And every one must take part in the contest; for neutrality is impossible. To attempt to stand by and merely watch the work of Christ is at once to join the other side. There are the two scales of the balance, and there is nothing but these two. Any weight withdrawn from the one scale of necessity goes into the other. "*He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*" It is out of this declaration—one of the most solemn and far-reaching statements in the whole of the Bible—that the parable before us grows. It illustrates in a very vivid way the impossibility of deserting Satan without joining Christ; the impossibility of keeping aloof from Christ without falling into the power of Satan.

"The unclean spirit, when he is gone out of the man, passeth through waterless places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will turn back unto my house whence I came out."

We need not suppose that Christ is here contrasting the imperfect and uncertain methods of the Jewish exorcists with His own. There is nothing in the wording to suggest this meaning, as if He would imply, "Your sons, when they cast out demons, cannot give more than temporary relief. After a time the demons come back, and the evil is worse than before. But when I cast out demons, they never return; and those who are healed are healed for ever." This interpretation is read into the narrative; it is not found

there. The whole is a parable, with the literal truth of which we need not concern ourselves, any more than with the literal truth of the story about the Wheat and the Tares. The disastrous conclusion is the result, not of the defective powers of those who may have freed the man from the unclean spirit, but of the defective conduct of the man who was thus freed. And the case of a demoniac who is cured, and then allows himself to become repossessed, is made a parable to illustrate the case of a sinner, who repents of his sins, but makes no effort after holiness, and thus falls into far worse sins than those from which he had been freed. Such an one illustrates in a striking way the impossibility of leaving one side without joining the other. He shakes off Satan's yoke, but he does not accept Christ's yoke. He would abhor the unclean spirit, but he does not welcome the Holy Spirit. And he thus falls more hopelessly than before into the power of the evil one.

The unclean spirit, after wandering through the parched and barren wilderness, where such beings are supposed to dwell, fails to find a human soul in which he can dwell and cause further pain and mischief; and consequently is ill at ease: for only where he can inflict harm and loss is he at rest. Then he says, "I will turn back unto my house whence I came out." He still calls the man's soul "*my house*." He knows in what condition the house is likely to be, and therefore speaks of it as a sure possession. And a return to the former abode shows that this expectation is correct. "When he is come he findeth it empty,¹ swept, and garnished." It is *empty*. This, as the main evil and the chief cause of the ruinous end, is placed first. The house is "standing idle." No new tenant has been found for it. It is still "to let." God's Holy Spirit, that "ready, willing guest," has never been invited to take up His abode there. And the house is not only unoccupied; it is "*swept and garnished*." It is ready to attract any tenant, however undesirable. Since the unclean spirit went out, the man's physical and intellectual condition has improved. He is healthier in body and sounder in mind. There is much that a worthy tenant might use for high and noble objects; and there is therefore much for an unworthy tenant to abuse and destroy. And so, as there is no protection against

¹ The *συχλαζοντα*, certainly genuine in St. Matthew, is more doubtful in St. Luke, but is strongly attested.

unworthy tenants, the foul spirit seeks some choice companions to come and share in the work of destruction, and they quickly make the ruin complete. Assuredly "the last state of that man cometh worse than the first."

Have we not here written very plainly the history of many a human soul? A man falls frequently into some grievous sin, which becomes so habitual that he may be said to be in the possession of the evil one. After months or years of misery he gets rid of the plague. He becomes frightened about himself, and makes good resolutions, and obtains strength to keep them. Or some wise friend takes him in hand and pleads with him earnestly; and under his firm and loving guidance the man is able to break off his evil habit and drive away the demon that had possessed him. Or again,—and this is perhaps no very uncommon thing,—the demon goes out of his own accord; as seems to have been the case in the parable. "The unclean spirit when he is *gone* out of the man;" "I will turn back unto my house whence I *came* out." Nothing is said about expulsion. Satan sometimes leaves us alone for a time and ceases to molest us; and we consequently cease to commit the sins to which we had become enslaved. Because we cease to commit them, we fancy that we have conquered them; the truth being that we have had no temptation to sin, and perhaps no opportunity of sinning. We imagine that we have learned to withstand temptation, when all that has happened is that temptation has withdrawn from us for a time, to return with sevenfold vehemence when we are completely off our guard. That is what happens to the man represented in the parable. Either by God's grace and his own good purpose, or simply through the craft of the evil one, he has been able to break off his evil habit and to live a rational and decent life. His self-respect has been recovered, and with it a healthier tone of body and mind. But there is a grievous defect in his condition. He is well satisfied with himself. Instead of being humbled by the long course of sin, from which he is at present free, he is proud of the freedom, which he thinks is a great credit to himself. He has no anxiety about being enslaved a second time; for as he has been strong enough to free himself, he must be strong enough to keep himself free. Consequently there is no earnest seeking for Divine support; no imploring of the Holy Spirit

to come and dwell in the heart from which Satan has for the moment departed. There is a temporary aversion to sin, but there is no yearning after holiness. In short, an attempt is being made to occupy an untenable position ; not that of serving both God and Mammon, but that of renouncing the devil without becoming the bond-servant of Jesus Christ.

Sooner or later the result of such attempts is always the same. Unless we place ourselves constantly under Divine protection, unless we habitually keep our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, we may renounce the devil, but he does not renounce us. He watches his opportunity and comes back again with sevenfold subtlety and violence, and quickly has us more completely in his power than before. He enters in and takes up his *permanent* abode with us (*κατοικεῖ*), and we are in a far worse condition than we were at first. And perhaps it is not our old sin which at once begins again,—*that* might startle us and bring us to better things,—but new forms of sins, less conspicuous perhaps, but just as fatal, beset us.

As the Jews, when they were cured of the worship of idols, took to the worship of the letter of the Law and to covetousness, which is idolatry ; or as a man who has conquered intemperance in drink falls a victim to pride and intemperance in language and conduct.

The experience of thousands has proved that forces which are quite sufficient, even singly, to induce a man to abandon some sinful course, are unable, even when combined, to keep him in the right way. Self-respect, the love of a wife or a child, the influence of a friend, a severe illness,—any one of these may have power to drive out the demon that has possessed him for months or years. But they are powerless to protect him from the renewed and persistent assaults of untiring spiritual foes. It is only when Christ through His Holy Spirit is made a welcome tenant that the liberated soul is secure. Safety from Satan's tyranny can never be won by merely shaking off his bondage. It can be made sure in no other way than by abiding under the sway of Him whose *service* is perfect freedom.

Mr. Halcombe and the Four Gospels.

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So long as the present interest in the history and criticism of the sacred books continues, so long shall we value any novel hypothesis which may explain or reconcile the relation of the Four Gospels, the most important point in such a study. Especially may we be grateful if, with novelty, we get absolute conviction in the proposer, and absolute clearness in the proposal. An idea to strike must be bold and clear, and capable of the briefest statement. These needful qualities are united in Mr. Halcombe's theory, to which an able, judicious, and impartial article of Mr. Gwilliam of Hertford College, Oxford, called attention in the April number of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES. "A method," says the learned critic, "which yields a sensible interpretation of the contents of ancient documents, while treating them as being what they profess to be, is certainly deserving of the most attentive consideration." And this method is no hasty guess or assumption, but the result of labours of twelve years, singularly patient and self-restrained. It

would seem as if Mr. Halcombe were one of those rare characters who can follow out the Baconian advice in all its severity, can throw aside all early conceptions and prejudices, and can begin inquiry on the gravest questions with a mind open to receive the message of minute induction. His work and his method may be styled the *novum organon* of gospel criticism. His long and painful analysis and comparison of the various parts of the story, as told by the several narrators, has led him to the novel and startling result which he now asks to have considered. If he sets forth on his mission with any other equipment besides industry and impartiality, it is perhaps with a profound dissatisfaction with the common excuses and apologies offered by the orthodox for the "fragmentariness" of the Gospels. He is determined to see if their mutual relation cannot be made intelligible and instructive, instead of a constant difficulty. He himself expresses, in a kind of Algebraic formula, his own position, as WORD ; the ordinary view