

This pagan Syncretism was on the one side a preparation for Christianity, and on the other a formidable opponent. It is therefore important to know what it was if we are to grasp clearly the historical settings of that wonderful time when our faith was young. Nor is such a knowledge merely the gratification of an intellectual curiosity. It has a practical side for Christianity at home and on the mission field—at home, for our modern theosophy is largely a revival, adapted to modern tastes, of that old pagan Syncretism; and abroad, for so many missionaries are at work among Oriental peoples where these early beliefs have still a dominant power.

This knowledge can only be had by learning what can be known about those cults whose ideas and cultus rites were most largely spread. A distinguished French scholar, M. Cumont, has recently given us a learned and exhaustive treatise on the widely spread Mithraism, which is perhaps the most important. Now Mr. Hepding has published his long expected study on the Attis cult,

which was also very widely spread. We still need, in spite of much writing on the subject, exhaustive monographs on the Isis and Serapis cults, and on others besides.

Mr. Hepding has done his work very thoroughly. He has collected and arranged in chronological order—and this order is very valuable and indeed indispensable when we consider the changes which time and the approximation to other cults produced—all the information which ancient literature from Herodotus to Gregory of Tours gives us upon the Attis cult. He has also collected the evidence from inscriptions. He has a careful chapter on the various names given to Attis. He traces the changes in the Attis myth, and describes the Attis cult. And he has a suggestive chapter on the relations of the cult to the Mysteries and to the Taurobolia. Altogether the book is a very helpful contribution to our knowledge of what underlay that pagan Syncretism which confronted Christianity from the first to perhaps the fifth century.

Glasgow.

T. M. LINDSAY.

The Unjust Steward.

BY THE REV. GEORGE MURRAY, B.D., SAUCHIE MANSE, ALLOA.

THERE is a fine boldness about the earthly story here. Pietistic weaklings fly morbidly from what they call the 'world,' and ritualism gets disastrously divorced from daily life; but robust religion rejoices to see every sphere of human interest interpenetrated by its power. Jesus not only does not flee the world, but turns it to account in a way at which some are astonished. He holds up as ensample the wisdom of a knave, albeit a wisdom we are to apply to better purpose, and in higher things. Those who marvel at this, forget that Jesus had the preacher's instinct of startling his hearers into wholesome thought on things divine. His deepest sayings run to paradox. He could have taken a more respectable figure from society: one showing the prudence and decision held up in the picture as a model for translation to the kingdom's high affairs. But the thing is far more rousing and far more piquant as it stands, and therefore far more potent in the practical realm of edification—which was the end and object of it all. The fact that

commentators through the long ages have puzzled over peculiar aspects of the case, is tribute to its power. And rest seems in sight for them at last, through the acute suggestion of a critic, that the moral about using riches to subserve eternal interests—surely a too calculating kind of piety—is in reality a secondary application, an adventitious lesson. It was some one's later thought to read 'everlasting habitations,' in the allegorizing spirit, as the somewhat mechanical interpretation of the phrase about the steward's reception by the debtors 'into their houses.' What our Lord commends in the parable is resolution and resource, qualities strikingly exhibited in mundane affairs. The grandest possible results before God would follow if these things were actively employed in the great kingdom. But, unfortunately, 'the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.'

'There was a certain rich man which had a steward.' The two figures move quickly on the stage: the one a wealthy owner, living apparently

at a distance from his possessions, and the other his man-of-business or local agent, a person gifted with energy and shrewdness, although unprincipled in the moral sphere. As factor he abused flagrantly the confidence of his master. Personal extravagance seems the key to his character: a free and genial man to those beneath him, and just as falsely kind to himself, all at the expense of his lord's revenue. 'The same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.' And evidently on being confronted with his employer, he stands convicted; for when the question comes, 'How is it that I hear this of thee?' he remains silent, and the silence is construed as acknowledgment of guilt. Forthwith the sentence of deprivation follows, 'Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.' Now he is menaced by misery, and the critical point in his career has come. Poverty, for the moment, seems the only prospect of the near future. With him recklessness had become a confirmed habit, and he has laid up nothing. 'What shall I do?' he asks desperately, on realizing that ruin has him in the wind; 'for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed.' Though he could stoop to knavery, he could not unbend to be the honest day-labourer. His hands were morally, not physically, soiled. There is a touch of pathos in the literal force of his confession, 'I have not strength.' As to the other business-opening, how could one of his lordly carriage put on the mendicants' whine? Though he had been far from upright, enough of pride remained to keep him from going down to that—'to beg I am ashamed.' But if not a man of muscle, he was a man of brain; and in the dire dilemma his characteristic sagacity comes out. A clever scheme suggests itself, and as the bright idea strikes him, he exclaims, 'I have it—I am resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.' Every trade tends to develop tricks, especially tricks which cannot be challenged at law, although sufficiently shady in themselves, and clearly impeachable at the heavenly bar of righteousness. The steward has been ordered, as the giving up of his stewardship, to prepare an inventory of accounts, and arrange in general for handing over affairs. Why not throw a sop to some, while yet his master's money is at his tender mercy? Their favour for the future should be propitiated. The vulgar form

of theft would have been to pick up odd coin and decamp. But our steward had a dainty touch. He is going in for a business which has 'good-will.' The safest bank for him, he perceives, will be some grateful friends. The doings of a steward, it must be remembered, are in their nature arbitrary, and in fixing values there was a margin on which his judgment could come and go. His conduct might be essentially theft, but within certain limits he was technically free of prosecution. Any great man's underling, dealing with people lower down than himself, may fix prices poorer than the market average, and there is nobody to say him, Nay. Our steward was an adept in this art. He summoned every one of his lord's debtors to count and reckon with him for the last time. Merchants they were, we can imagine, who got supplies of goods on credit, bills being allowed to stand against them till sales could be effected; or they were simply tenants who paid their rents in kind, the keeper of an olive-yard, for instance, paying the superior a percentage of oil in the year.

To the first debtor who approached, he said, 'How much owest thou unto my lord?' 'An hundred measures of oil.' 'Take thy bill,' said the steward, 'and sit down quickly, and write fifty.' In that 'quickly' we seem to see the promptness of the man; if not also a suspicion of nervous haste. There might be just a little tremble of the hand, as the voucher passed for alteration of the figures. In the same way a reduction was marked down on the bill of another, a dealer in grain. 'Write fourscore,' he said this time to the debtor of a hundred measures. The proportion varies. He knows his men, and knows their price: supplying perhaps another indication of the great acuteness of this hero.

But the knavery of even the cleverest knaves is apt to be discovered, and somehow the fame of the smartness of the steward got abroad. It came to his master's ears; affording a parting proof, as it were, of the ability which secured him the office at the first. Clearly, the tactics were unscrupulous, and yet they compelled admiration of a kind. The master was a man of the world himself, and he had enough of humour to note his servant's wit. This was not the earliest or strongest feeling he had upon the subject, but it was there. 'The lord (the landlord) commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely.' It is only the skill

we admire in a forger or thief, but it was certainly skill. And skill, we saw, not so open to counter-attack, as that of the common forger and thief. There was something like genius in the cool daring of the steward, who thus declined to be caught. Though times were pressing, and opportunity was small, he tided his fortunes through a great crisis. He had been quick to see, smart to plan, prompt to carry out. Lay aside for the moment the high question of morals—the postulates of honesty and common honour—and remember you are dealing with a story of the world, coloured by the ways of the world, and you can appreciate at once this master's large-eyed commendation of the man. He was a long-headed fellow, who extricated himself very deftly from his difficulty—he was a man of resolution and resource.

Would that in religious matters, Christ means, these same qualities were as conspicuous. Would that the children of light rivalled in this respect the children of darkness. But, as a rule, it is not so. People do not put their mind and heart and purpose into things spiritual as much as into things temporal. They will chase a fox, or speed the search for fortune, with a zeal which they never show in pursuit of a lost soul, or the advocacy of a mission cause. Their earthly ideal being what it is, they are thorough in bringing all their acts into harmony therewith. Not so in the plane of religion. There is slackness, and that want of intelligent interest which aggravates slackness. In this, as in other matters, knowledge makes for appreciation, and the kindling of enthusiasm to the white heat. If the Church becomes more an agent of enlightenment, and deeper discernment of the Scriptures be diffused, great will be the gain. For a popular war, men give freely of their best in sacrifice; but for the far greater conflict with heathenism in society at home and abroad, there is nothing like the same willingness to spend and be spent. Be the reasons, however, what they may, the fact remains, that where the eternal and invisible and less obvious is concerned, we are far less marked by persevering earnestness, and wise devotion to passing opportunities, than in the fleeting things of time and sense. Look at the man of business, bent on amassing money, and gaining all that in earthly moods ambition craves. How his whole soul is in the matter. Week in, week out, he strives and strains; he rises early and works late. What

long toil, what short holiday. How he saves and saves, and schemes and plans, and plans again, and succeeds visibly to a wonderful extent. But compare with this men's action, or want of action, regarding the riches of the soul, the graces of the Christian heart, the state of spiritual being more to be desired than gold. How faint, comparatively speaking, are even conscious followers of Jesus in devotion to a nobler cause. Faith often is enfeebled, and hope is depressed, and love waxes selfish and cold. What failure in the time of crises; what want of steadfast resolution; what poverty of performance as against blatant profession. The keen, clear, commercial head knows always what it would be at. Such a man drives straight to the point. See how he flies low, because it is the shorter arc. The underlings of his office are familiar with the strident call, 'It must be done.' He acts, while the religious man dreams. The parallel of this business spirit we may well envy for the varied offices of the Church. Rousing would be its effect, not to say drastic the change. At terms of searching light and bracing breeze removals might be frequent, and fondly cherished articles cheap. We hear everywhere the cry for training—intellectual, physical, technical. All the sciences and all the arts must advance. And that is well. But what about the schooling of the passions, the education of the soul? Parliament is pledged to the advancement of the secular; but on the vital question of ethics it inclines to be content with the remark, 'We won't meddle with that.' The Lord's Day we acknowledge as our day of rest, but pray do not expect us to be as zealous for the things of heaven as we were on other matters through the week. Saturday afternoon we were so keen on sport, our money losses were forgotten. But Sunday morning, with its call to worship with our fellows—well, its rather showery, and somehow we have got a headache. The body is not allowed to suffer; nothing is too dainty for love or money to procure. But the soul—ah me, it may be on half rations for days and months together, or live like prodigals on husks, and famish in the far land. How true, how deep-cutting, the moral of this story, the commendation of the Master: 'The children of this world are *in their generation* wiser than the children of light.'

Learn a lesson from the astute steward. Show timely resolution in a better cause. He was wise but unfaithful; let us be wise and faithful.

Seizing every opportunity while it availeth, turn time, talents, every good gift from above, to the advancement of God's kingdom among men. Be the kindly, gracious brother to every one within your range. That is the Christian's way of changing the hundred to the fifty and the fourscore. How unbusinesslike to waste life. The best investment, the one that creates the atmosphere of goodwill all around, is in deeds of charity and mercy. Listen to the beautiful saying of the old prophet :

'Loose the bands of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke. Deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the poor that are cast out to thy house ; when thou seest the naked, cover him ; and hide not thyself from thine own flesh. Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily : and thy righteousness shall go before thee ; the glory of the Lord shall be thy re-reward.'

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

ACTS X. 34-35.

'And Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons : but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to Him' (R.V.).

EXPOSITION.

'And Peter opened his mouth, and said.'—ἀνοίξας τὸ στόμα, used only to introduce some weighty utterance (cf. Mt 5² before the Sermon on the Mount, Ac 8³⁵, Job 3¹, Dn 10¹⁶).—PAGE.

'Of a truth I perceive.'—I perceive. καταλαμβάνομαι, to take hold of, to lay hold of so as to make one's own, to obtain complete possession of a spiritual truth gained by personal experience.—PELOUBET.

'That God is no respecter of persons.'—An inference from God's having heard the prayers of a Gentile, deemed him worthy of the light of the gospel, and sent an angel to direct him to it.—COOK.

'Respecter of persons.'—προσωπολήμπτης. This phrase indicates paying regard to the external circumstances or accidental qualities of a man as opposed to his intrinsic character. To show special favour to a Jew, merely because he was a Jew, would be πρόσωπον λαμβάνειν.—PAGE.

THE same thing is repeatedly denied of God in Scripture (Dt 10¹⁷, 2 S 14¹⁴, 2 Ch 19⁷, 1 P 1¹⁷).—ALEXANDER.

'But in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness.'—Feareth Him is our duty towards God ; worketh righteousness, our duty towards our neighbour.—COOK.

It is obvious that this doctrine deals with the mysterious operations of divine grace ; in particular, with 'works before justification.' In the sixteenth century, led away by reaction against exaggerated merit attached to good works, with minds dominated by the idea of justification by faith, extreme reformers denied the possibility of any righteousness before justification. But it will be profitable to notice what is plainly revealed to us by this history of Cornelius. It is

clear that he was already working righteousness and acceptable to God before he had consciously 'believed in Christ.' But he was not therefore without the inspiration of the spirit of Christ. But though acceptable to God, his righteousness was still imperfect. For it did not spring from the highest motive, namely, conscious faith in Christ, of whose work of redemption he was ignorant.—RACKHAM.

'Is acceptable to Him.'—The Greek word (δεκτός) signifies not only *acceptabilis*, but *acceptus*.—PAGE.

THE SERMON.

The First European Christian.

By the Rev. R. F. Horton, M.A., D.D.

Our Lord says of Himself, 'I am not come but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' After the Ascension we find that the disciples had not grasped the fact that the time was now come for widening the Kingdom. They made the discovery in the story of the first Gentile Christian.

1. *The Praying Heathen.*—Cornelius probably was connected with the Gens Cornelia, one of the oldest of Roman families. He was also a soldier, and had been for some time stationed at Cæsarea. There, without doubt, he had been impressed with the superiority of the Jewish religion, and, being a sincere man, he prayed to the God of the Jews. One day Cornelius was keeping the stated hour of prayer, three o'clock in the afternoon. For he, being a man who prayed constantly, knew how fruitful were stated times of prayer. While he prayed the angel came to him and told him that his prayer was accepted, sending him to Joppa, to Peter, who would tell him everything he wished to know. This incident occurred not only for the