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*SOME GLEANINGS FROM ST. PETER'S
HARVEST-FIELD.*

III.

*A CHRISTIAN WOMAN AND A WICKED WOMAN: A
CONTRAST.*

“A meek and quiet spirit.”—1 PETER iii. 4.

“Having eyes full of an adulteress, and that cannot cease from sin.”—
2 PETER ii. 14.

KEBLE speaks of Scripture as the

“Eye of God's word, where'er we turn
Ever upon us.”

and he refers us to a once famous volume of sermons, where the preacher describes this penetrating influence of the Bible as “the eye, like that of a portrait, fixed uniformly upon us, whenever we turn.”¹ Perhaps these powerful lines are especially true of such brief summaries of human character as I have selected for specimens of one characteristic power of St. Peter's Epistles. I have chosen them purposely from the most opposite extremes in the wide range of human character—from the finest portraiture of regenerate womanhood and the lowest depths of unsanctified manhood.

I. The portrait of Christian womanhood is one very dear to English Christians.

“In like manner, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, even if any obey not the word, they may without the word be gained by the behaviour of their wives; beholding your chaste behaviour coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be the outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of jewels of gold, or of putting on apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner aforetime the holy women also, who hoped in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection

¹ Miller's *Bampton Lectures*.

to their own husbands: as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose children ye now are, if ye do well, and are not put in fear by any terror." ¹

The "chaste conversation coupled with fear" seems to signify purity in an atmosphere of fear,² the tremulous grace which is "afraid of the very shadow of wrong." The "beholding" is in the original a remarkable word. It seems to point at "initiation" into a world of goodness before unknown to the husband.³ The selfish rhetorician Libanius, who had some Christian acquaintances, is said to have exclaimed—"what wives those Christians have!" A missionary to China has heard Chinese Christian women say—"until we became Christians, we never really knew that we were women."

The description in the third verse has that rush of accumulated synonyms significantly varied, that threefold stroke, which we have previously mentioned as a characteristic of St. Peter. We have the hair plaited, and as the Romans would say, "built up and turreted"; the clasping round of golden ornaments⁴ and chains for the head, the neck, the wrist, the finger; the putting on effectively of beautiful, well-made, and no doubt expensive clothes. All this more than half contemptuous piling of words well conveys to us the long business of an elaborate toilette, the scented atmosphere of flattery and not altogether innocent frivolity. "In the incorruptible apparel of *the* meek and quiet spirit,"⁵ because meek inwardly in the affections, therefore moving in an atmosphere of quiet, with gentle words, looks and acts. The preciousness of any gem can only be rightly estimated by the connoisseur. Thus the ruby of six carats is said to be worth six thousand pounds,

¹ 1 Pet. iii. 1-7.

² Abp. Leighton: ἐν φόβῳ ἀγνήν (ver. 2). Cf. Phil. ii. 12; Jude 13.

³ ἐποπτεύσαντες.

⁴ Literally, "of putting round of golden jewels."

⁵ τοῦ πραέως καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος (ver. 4).

about fifteen times more than a diamond of the same weight. But "the price of the virtuous woman is far above rubies"¹ in the sight of God, who alone truly estimates the value of hearts. The last verse of our passage teaches us that Christians should possess the qualities of activity in good works, and superiority to half-affected hysterical weakness. The words "whose daughters ye *became*" may point to the fact that among these opulent ladies were Gentile converts, and not exclusively women of Hebrew lineage.²

The saints in all ages have allowed themselves to be sarcastic about dress. Isaiah was so, and St. Paul,³ and St. Peter. Jerome is angrier and fiercer. To Lœta he writes, "Load not your child's hair with gems, nor sprinkle on her young head some of the red fire of hell."⁴

All this was never meant to forbid appropriate womanly dress. A true poet profoundly placed "want of *vanity*" among the signs of degradation. Certainly dress should not be extravagant, either in the *means* lavished upon it, or in the *time* devoted to it, or in the *taste* which it exhibits. Do not people speak of "*loud* dress"? I suppose that by this is meant a discord in shape, a shock in colours, a flashy advertisement, to say—"the wearer is very foolish, but with a kind of folly which is not very innocent."

Here then was St. Peter's ideal of Christian womanhood; and remember that this picture was drawn when Poppæa was the wife of Nero.

One word should be added. It may be true that there is an almost ferociously self-asserting purity, which is different from that quiet whiteness of soul whereof the Apostle

¹ Prov. xxxi. 10.

² Note, (1) Sarah, a princess, called Abraham "her lord," incidentally and naturally, in speaking to herself (Gen. xviii. 12); (2) St. Paul had pointed the Galatians to the type of Sarah (Gal. iv. 22, 31).

³ Isa. iii. 16; 1 Tim. ii. 9.

⁴ "Nec caput gemmis oneres, nec capillum irrufes, et ei aliquod de gehennæ ignibus auspiceris."—S. Hieron ad Lœtam, *De Instit. Filie*.

writes. There may be some ground for complaints of the shrieking sisterhood and of platform women. But there is a shrieking brotherhood, and there are platform men. Nor, again, is every gentle-mannered woman really gentle. Non-chalance is not necessarily meekness. There is a quietness which is the effluence of dulness rather than of sweetness. There is an acrid obstinacy of silence that stabs deeper than any stiletto of language which wit ever pointed.

Still there *are* women who are called upon to minister to Christ in particular works, which man could never do—women who, when speak they must, speak with no professional platform swagger, but with the gentle power of Christian love. A golden line of prophetesses runs through the texture of Scripture—Miriam, Hannah, Deborah, Huldah, the daughters of Philip the Evangelist. Why should we suppose that there are no prophetesses now? They see bleeding wounds; they ask to staunch them. May our daughters thus prophesy, and the Spirit of God be thus poured on His handmaidens.¹ Earth is better and softer for the visions which float in that holy dream-land.

This ideal of womanhood has passed into the heart of Christendom. It has softened and purified art, poetry,² romance. It has done something better. It has blessed humble homes. Think of the women who nurse the sick

¹ Acts ii. 17, 18.

² Many will remember Wordsworth's "Lucy."

"She dwelt among the untrodden ways,
Beside the springs of Dove;
A maiden there were few to praise,
And very few to love.

"A violet by a mossy stone,
Half hidden from the eye;
Fair as a star when only one
Is shining in the sky.

"She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and oh!
The difference to me."

in poor homes; who look after children tenderly, who are "loving and amiable, faithful and obedient to their husbands." They have one reward here,—love. Not always at once. Yet at last, when the poor tried one lies down with a shadow on her face, there comes a softened memory of purity, affection, quietness, self-denial, frugality. The hardest and most material man softens as he thinks of that subtle arithmetic of love which enabled her to make three or four live more cheaply than one could ever manage to do when he was alone. Surely there is in this something that comes from Christ, and perpetuates itself in successive generations—"the ornament of the meek and quiet spirit."

One more suggestion may be made. St. Peter, the Apostle of Christ, was "himself a married man." We are told by a very ancient writer,¹ that, seeing his wife Petronella led to death, the husband in all his anguish was enabled to rejoice, because she was called by God and going home. "And he spake to her by her name, and comforted her, saying, 'my wife, remember the Lord.'" Was this the original of this engaging picture?

II. We now turn to a terribly contrasted picture. "Having eyes full of an *adulteress*."² All who possess eyes at all have them full of something. I have heard one of exquisite æsthetic sensibility, who had seen some of the glorious painted glass at St. Gudule, in Brussels, on a summer day, declare that for days his eyes were "full of those colours, especially the blue." The eye of the woman of "meek and quiet spirit," wherever circumstances may lead her, is full of love. Even so the sensualist's eye is "full of an adulteress," filled full, so that it can hold no more.

This description forms one of the premisses of a tremendous moral syllogism whose conclusion is next given. Every sensual thought, every eye-full of an adulteress, is sin; but

¹ Clem. Alex., *Ap. Eusebius*.

² μεστός μοιχαλίδος.

the sensualist's eye is always full of an adulteress; therefore, he never can be made thoroughly to rest from sin. The eyes are fixed in an evil expression which they can never lose. They give signal to all whom it concerns that they are ever on the watch. That which is choke-full often means in the original, satiated. But such eyes are insatiate and insatiable.

This is one of God's terrible voices of moral judgment, one of those hints which tell us what a man may become. Let us consider that law of human *character* which is the foundation of the law of Divine *punishment*; without which, indeed, the latter cannot be spiritually construed to the spiritual nature.

*Character*¹ then, as the derivation of the word implies, has a tendency to become, and frequently does become, absolutely stereotyped, from a practical point of view. Generally speaking, up to a certain date, a man may issue a second edition of his moral life, revised and corrected, perhaps even entirely recast. Still, a day comes when the second edition, with the "errata" expunged, is not possible any longer. Many of us have known at college or in society, a man in early life remarkable for pleasant manner and exuberant gaiety. Suddenly in the streets, or at a railway station, we are confronted with an abject creature, who, in a tone at once cringing and bitter, addresses us by name, and asks for the loan of half-a-crown, until his remittance arrives. Such as he is, such will he be, until the day when he dies of "delirium tremens," and finds a pauper's grave. Of all the conceptions of fiction, none impresses us so awfully as the scene when Lady Macbeth passes across the stage with a taper. "Hell is murky. . . . What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to

¹ *χαρακτήρ* is, in the first instance, a graving tool; next, the mark engraved, especially figures or letters; hence, distinctive note of language, style, or disposition.

account? What! will these hands ne'er be clean?—No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that; you mar all with this starting. . . . Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand."¹ All the history of her soul is summed up in those five words, "what's done cannot be undone"; all our natural yearning (for there is a tendency in the sight of these tremendous spectacles of irremediable sin and inevitable punishment to drive us into universalism), in five other words spoken by a by-stander—"God, God, forgive us all!" Such persons are in time embodiments of hell, and the idea of eternal condemnation forces itself upon us as a reality. In that grief there is only anguish, but no desire after good. She still maintains firmly the evil will, and the good is in her only as a capacity which cannot be separated from creatures made in God's image. When we see her thus wandering, is it not just as she still must wander through eternity, weeping the tearless weeping of hell, of which we are reminded in the words, "ye mountains fall on us, ye hills cover us"?² So is the text fulfilled "he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still."³ The words of St. Peter upon which we meditate seems to afford us a glimpse into the fissure which is cleft below every human life.

We live in an age when men generally mistake wishes for wants, and the cloudland of plausible speculation for the solidity of fact. It is sought to suppress truth by making it unpopular, and then calling for a division upon it. "What! a finite passing sin, an infinite eternal punishment! The dogma confutes itself by the indignation which it rouses in an unsophisticated mind."

Let it be granted, then, that single sins are passing sins, not interwoven with the whole contexture of a man's

¹ Macbeth, Act v. scene i.

² See one of the greatest passages in modern theology, in Bishop Martensen's *Christian Dogmatics*, § 286.

³ Apoc. xxii. 11.

being. But what if some lives of sin, some habits of evil doing and worse thinking are not transient and temporary, as a matter of fact? The Psalmist expresses with wonderful power that conviction of the spiritual nature, elevated by worship, whereby it feels and knows itself to be immortal.

"I will sing to the Lord in my life.
I will lift up psalms to my God,
While my soul can call itself I."¹

What if the sinner make his eye and his soul so full of sin, that sin can no more pass from him than existence. If the righteous is eternal, his praise must be eternal also; it is inseparable from his existence. If the sinner is eternal, his sin is eternal also.

This is our Lord's teaching about one form, or stage of sin, as restored to us by the Revised Version, "is guilty of an eternal sin."² If the man lives after life, he carries with him not the temporary sin which he may have done alone, but the eternal sin of will and thought which he will do. His punishment is not simply for what he *has done*, but for what he *is*, not for the transitory sin *here*, but for the eternal sin *there*. He is "guilty of eternal sin." The eye once "full of an adulteress" may be filled with dust, but the ineradicable image has been carried to, and abides for ever in, that "inward eye," which is the "bliss" or bane, the heaven or hell of "solitude."

This is a solemn argument for youth when the vapour of imagination and passion are beginning to condense into habit; for that portion of manhood during which habit is becoming of insoluble density. Let us beware of the lust of the eyes. Far from us be the questionable book; the shameful chronicle of the newspaper; the prurient picture; the dangerous stimulant of visible objects: the thought

¹ Psalm civ. 33. 'יָעֲבֹד, lit. "during me." See *Witness to the Psalms*, p. 380 (2nd edition).

² ἐνοχός ἐστιν αἰώνιον ἁμαρτήματος. Mark iii. 29.

which the tender conscience knows should be sternly challenged, before allowing it to pass into the citadel of the soul. Be ours the prayer, "turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken Thou me in Thy way."¹ Nor let *any* who ponders this argument turn from it with a sigh of despair, "for *me* it is too late." If we have enough of will left to desire earnestly a new mind, it is *not* too late. Such can still hear the voice—"him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out."²

May we not well pray: "Lord! let sin, which is the very hell of hell, fade from mine eyes, and let them be filled with Thee who art the very heaven of heaven. Cause them to see the light of Thy glory, and the beauty of Thy face. Be present with me in joy and sorrow, in pleasure and business, at the altar and by the hearth, all day and all night. Where Thou art, Thou art seen. Thou Who art invisible, art seen seen invisibly by that nature which is also invisible in us, a heart purified by the Spirit."³ Where Thou dwellest, the eye is pure and the soul ceases from sin." "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

WILLIAM DERRY AND RAPHOE.

*THE REVISED VERSION OF THE OLD
TESTAMENT.*

THE BOOK OF JOB.—I.

THE Revision has effected changes in the rendering of the Book of Job more numerous and more important perhaps than in any other book. Many of the changes, which are but slight in themselves, and the influence of which would

¹ Ps. cxix. 37.

² John vi. 37.

³ S. Aug., *Epist.*, cxlviii.