

AS STORM CLOUDS GATHER

The International Sunday School Lesson for October 31st is "How Down the Corrupt Tree—World's Temperance Sunday—Matt. 7:13-20.

By William T. Ellis.

A distinguished newspaper editor sat on the corner of the table, his leg swinging and his face bent soberly on the floor, while a member of his staff recited the results of a wide and close study or present political and social conditions in the eastern part of the United States. The findings were grave and thought-compelling. When the editor spoke it was to say, "It's a leader the people want, a leader—somebody they can trust and follow to the limit. What can they do without a leader?"

That is putting a finger on the center of things. Our ears are deafened with jangling voices, clashing opinions, confusion of philosophies. There never before were so many speakers and writers telling people what to do in a time which all thoughtful persons perceive to be grave and determinative. Candor compels us to declare, though, that most of these persons do not know what they are talking about. Their trumpets sound in uncertain tones. They themselves need to be taught and led, rather than to teach or to lead. Men want surer, clearer tones before they will listen. The world awaits an authoritative voice, a trusted guide.

Such a One appears in today's Lesson. When Jesus had concluded His discourse upon the principles of the Kingdom of Heaven "the crowds were filled with amazement at His teaching, for He had been teaching them as One who had authority, and not as their scribes taught."

That same Authority is the One available and adequate Leader for our groping, bewildered world. The wise Christ who has outtaught all the sages; the sure Christ of the fear-ful brow; the understanding Christ of the sympathetic heart. The predominant down the ages from His Galilee home and now stands at the crowded cross ways of life, offering Himself as a safe guide for the world's wayward feet.

That the Master Who spoke of old beneath the soft Syrian skies, and by the rippling lake that He loved, is also the present Saviour for the here and now is the first truth to be gotten from this Scripture. As Jesus that bought young knight of song, Joyce Kilmer, who though dead in France still speaks in living tones: "No longer of Him be it said, He hath no place to lay His head. In every land a constant lamp flames by His small and mighty camp."

"There is no strange and distant place That is not gladdened by His face And every nation kneels to hail The Splendor shining through its veil. Cloistered beside the shouting street Silent, He calls me to His feet. And through my lips that uttered sin, The King of Glory enters in."

A Brave Man's Warning. Sentimentalists and mollycoddlers have usurped the leadership of Jesus in His Church. The predominant religious teaching of this day is soft and unreal. It is devoted chiefly to the minor and passive virtues, and the virility and tang of the open-air utterances of the out-of-doors Man who, while seated on the slope of a Galilee hillside, surrounded by a rabble, talked in quiet, colloquial speech the most radical teachings of history. There are too many representatives of the negative qualities of religion who would scarcely speak an uncharitable word about the devil himself. Their preaching is "sweet" and "beautiful"—but as harmless as a small boy's spitballs against the schoolhouse wall.

Not so Jesus. He bluntly faced facts. His was a message of the real. No "Everything and everybody is all right for this Militant. He knew his world, some of them in high and holy places. Jesus was the arch-etic of Things As They Are. His daring assaults upon the entrenched interests of His time was the direct occasion for His crucifixion. Observe the ringing courage and manliness of this fragment of the Sermon on the Mount which is assigned as the present Lesson:

"Beware of the false teachers—men who come to you in sheep's fleeces, but beneath that disguise they are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will easily recognize them. Are grapes gathered from thorns or figs from brambles? Just so every good tree produces good fruit, but a poisonous tree produces bad fruit, nor a poisonous tree good fruit. Every tree which does not yield good fruit is cut down and thrown aside for burning. So by their fruits, at any rate, you will easily recognize them."

"Not every one who says to me, Master, Master, will enter the Kingdom of Heaven; but only those who are obedient to My Father who is in Heaven. Many will say to Me on that day. 'Master, Master, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name expelled demons, and in Thy name performed many mighty works?' And then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you; begone from Me, you doers of wickedness.'"

Prophets For Revenue Only. One reason why so many leaders are halting and hampered is that they are after something for themselves. They want an office or an income. A famous American evangelist has made more than a million dollars by his preaching—and most of it is invested in mortgages on farms, although he does not appear personally in these transactions, especially when mortgages have to be foreclosed. Of course the decline and relative failure of the man as a preacher is explained by the simple fact I have stated. Even the most charitably inclined person knows that no man can properly grow rich by preaching the Gospel; the situation is an anomaly, a contradiction in nature. Profiteering preachers are discredited above all other men. And most ministers of the Gospel are a world removed from that class.

Therefore Jesus warned His hearers against false teachers, who wore sheep's fleeces but were wolves in nature. "Watch your teachers!" was

His cry. Look out for the propagandist and the disseminator. Beware of sinister purposes beneath high professions. Unless a teacher shows both the life and the word, depart from him. The fruit test is the true test. Nobody has any more religion than is revealed in his life.

A business man from the West, long an active Christian layman, was unfolding a plan for a country-wide speaking tour to recall the churches and the people to the primacy of the Gospel remedy for our present industrial, social and political ills. "Every man in the group," he said, "will have to be economically independent. There can be no salaries and no money-raising of any sort. No suspicion of personal profit or self-interest or entanglement may attach to any of us. We must be free men, going forth with our messages because the burden is on our souls."

The day of highly financed "movements" is over. Revivalist reform must proceed without revenue to the agents thereof. At the same conference which I have quoted another man said, "It would be well if the Church were to go bankrupt for a decade; and become as poor as she was in Apostolic days." In other words, we need to strip our Gospel of its accretions and accoutrements, down to the raw red of reality and life. Jesus cleared away centuries of accumulations of ecclesiastical rubbish when He said that simple obedience to God is the one essential of the life of faith.

"Not he that repeath the Name, But he that doeth the will."

Religion is not a vocabulary but an experience. Simple loyalty to the clear will of God is the bed-rock of Christianity.

Doers of the Word are dear to the Master. And all over the world their name is legion. A heartening fact is that so great a multitude of men and women have as their master motive the desire and determination to be true to God.

A majority of the people of this land sincerely want to do whatever Christ would like to have them do. They seek Him for their guide. At His call they will perform any service, undergo any sacrifice. To His leadership they will rally. And when He is given His rightful place, and the man-made fog clears away, the world will follow Him out of the morass in which we stumble at the present time. Christ is the one Champion whom we all accept and whom we are willing to follow to the uttermost. The man, the cause, the party, the movement, that clearly stands for the headship of Jesus can sweep the nation at any time.

When The Storms Come. Almost any leadership, or none, will serve for fair weather and sunny skies. The test comes with the storm. Today the full circle of the horizon is daily and lowering. World conditions are portentous. Nobody but a blind and witless person can view the situation with unconcern. Therefore we need a leader, a world leader, equal to our times. There is but One. Under another figure, Jesus Himself stated the truth at the close of His Inaugural Address. He offered Himself and His teachings as a sure foundation in a time of storm. Doers of His word build the house of their life upon the Rock—"the rock," analogous to the underlying stratum of limestone in Palestine. No storms or swollen torrents can shake it.

To disregard His words, Jesus continued, with His customary plain speech, is to play the fool and to build his house upon sand, to be wrecked in the first storm. Already we are seeing the collapse of many structures of business erected during the orgy of war affluence. Positions and enterprises are disappearing. They were built on sand. But the eternal structure and the personal life built upon Jesus Christ has an unshakable rock foundation.

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