

The Bible Student.

CONTINUING

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The ideas of many are confused by the distinction between religion and morality. This confusion is sometimes aggravated by the stress the pulpit lays on the inadequacy of mere morality and its emphasis of the imperviousness of a moralist's self-satisfaction; a stress and emphasis occasionally expressed so incautiously as to be liable to the perversion of being interpreted as implication that morality may be a disadvantage and that, on the whole, it were better and more promising of a religious future to be immoral than to be moral. Of course it ought to be a commonplace that morality is always and everywhere better than immorality; perhaps it is the axiomatic character of this truth that occasions preachers sometimes to be unguarded in the impression they may make.

Religion is always moral, and immorality is always irreligious, wherever found. Obvious as is the truth, yet its statement is not superfluous; there is such a thing as unethical "religion," having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof. There are not wanting instances to prove that one may be very scrupu-

lous in the observance of religious rites and even zealous in religious activities, with every appearance, too, of conscientiousness, and yet be anything but moral in life. A famous chronicler has been recently quoted as saying of a celebrated ecclesiastic "that he was far from truthful and naturally deceitful and covetous, but full of religion!"

But while *real* religion is always moral, morality is not always religious; there is a distinction between the two and one fitly called radical because it lies at the very root, indeed it lies nowhere else; so far as the visible expression is concerned, the difference is not easily discerned, in externalities morality and religion may well appear indistinguishable. The distinction lies beneath the surface and inheres in the motive prompting. No act is religious that is not rightly related to God, and none falls short of religion that is so related. Men distinguish between the sacred and the secular, but to the heart that really enthrones God nothing is secular, and hence we hear St. Paul saying, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Certainly there is nothing intrinsi-

THE PLAIN OF GENNESARET.

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Between Magdala—now known as Mejdel—and Khan Minyeh the Mountains of Galilee recede from the Lake, in an almost semi-circular sweep, leaving a beautiful, crescent-shaped plain. Its extent along the coast is three and a quarter miles; its breadth at the widest part is one and one-eighth miles. The cliffs which border the plain on the south extend almost to the margin of the lake. On the north it is wholly cut off from the lowland strip beyond by a spur or promontory, which runs down to the water. The Arabs call this mountain-girdled tract El Ghuweir, the "Little Ghor." Its identity with the "Land of Genessareth" (Matt. 14: 34; Mark 6: 53) is unquestioned. The limits correspond closely with the measurements given by Josephus and in the wild tangle of tropical undergrowth, grasses and vines, which now covers its desolation one may readily see the proofs of the extraordinary fertility, which once made it the garden spot of Northern Palestine.

The shore-line of the Gennesaret plain is slightly embayed and the beach, which slopes gradually to the water's edge, is thickly strewn with myriads of tiny, pearly-white shells. At some points this silvery strand is "a texture of shells and pebbles so minute as to resemble sand;" at others cart loads of delicately-formed semi-transparent shells could be gathered up. On the landward side of this beautiful pathway by the sea, an almost continuous hedge of oleanders and tropical thorns holds back a confused mass of wild, luxuriant vegetation. There are no fences and no groups of trees to obstruct the vision between the limits of the sea and the mountains; and at several points of view the whole plain and its borderings may be seen at a glance. Three deeply-cleft wadies or ravines break through the encircling barrier of hills on the western side. These are known as The Wadies Hamam, Rubudiyeh and Amud. From each of these the drainage of the adjacent highlands is carried, in perennial streams, across the plain to the lake. The traveler going northward crosses these brooks from the mountains at almost regular intervals of space between Magdala and Khan Minyeh. Their course from the mouths of the

ravines whence they issue, may be readily traced by a rank growth of willows, oleanders and marsh mallows, which line the banks and oftentimes conceal the streams that glide beneath them.

The Wady Amud opens upon this lowland region near Khan Minyeh. It is a long narrow gorge noted for its wild and savage grandeur. The stream which it carries to the plain takes its rise near Jebel Jermuk, the highest peak of the mountains of Naphtali. In some places the cliffs rise precipitously from the edge of the stream to the height of nearly one thousand feet. The upper portion of this ravine is called Wady Leimon.

The brook which flows from the Wady er Rubudiyeh through the centre of the plain is the largest of the mountain streams and its waters are carried by means of artificial canals to the north and south for purposes of irrigation.

The Wady El Hamam opens upon the plain a short distance westward of the site of Magdala. The rugged cliffs which border it on either side rise perpendicularly to the height of more than a thousand feet. A labyrinth of caves, with connecting passages cut into the face of the rock on the south side of the ravine, has been for centuries, in the past, an impregnable stronghold of defense to the oppressed, as well as a favorite hiding place for outlaws and robber bands. The higher tier of caves can only be reached from above by means of ropes. In the time of Herod the Great a large body of outlaws, who had hitherto defied the authority of Rome, were besieged in this stronghold. After a series of desperate struggles they were at length destroyed or driven out by companies of soldiers let down from the dizzy heights above in great chests strongly bound with hoops of iron.

These storied caves became, at a later period, the favorite abodes of anchorites and hermits. At the present time myriads of wild pigeons have their nesting places in the holes and caves of these walls of rock. Hence the name: Wady el Hamam, the Valley of Pigeons or Doves. Hattin, the traditional mount of the Beatitudes, is a conspicuous landmark at the upper end of the valley, and its twin peaks or horns, may be distinctly seen through the open mouth of the gorge from several viewpoints on the lake and plain. The great caravan route from Esdraelon and the South to Damascus follows the line of the old Roman road through Wady Hamam to Khan Minyeh and thence northward

over the hills of Naphtali. This was the direct road from Cana to Capernaum in the Saviour's day, and He must have often journeyed over it during the period of the Galilean ministry.

Between the Hamam and Rubudiyeh valleys a copious fountain known as Ain Mudawarah bursts forth from the foot of the hills and sends a stream of clear, refreshing water across the plain to the lake. A circular basin or reservoir of stone ninety-six feet in diameter encloses the spring. "The water," says Dr. Robinson, "is perhaps two feet deep, beautifully limpid and sweet, bubbling up and flowing out rapidly in a large stream to water the plain below. Numerous small fish were sporting in the basin, which is so thickly surrounded by trees and brushwood that a stranger would be apt to pass by without noticing it." Another notable fountain (Ain et Tin) rises at the southern base of the Khan Minyeh cliff and runs eastward into the lake. It is too near the level of the lake to be utilized for the irrigation of any considerable portion of the plain, but its brief course seaward is marked by luxuriant pasture beds of grass and clover. Dr. Robinson makes special mention of this tract of clover around the fountain and along the shore, and adds that it had a freshness and verdure such as he saw nowhere else in Palestine. "It was a luxury to rest in it." "These pastures of Minyeh," says Burckhardt, "are proverbial for their richness." Near the shore the stream from Ain et Tin widens out into a marsh "skirted with oleanders and choked with wavy tufts of the beautiful, tall papyrus of Egypt."

It has been shown conclusively, as the result of careful explorations, that the abundant water supply, which now runs to waste from the great fountain of Tabighah, three-quarters of a mile north of Khan Minyeh, was formerly conveyed by an aqueduct into the Gennesaret plain. An octagonal reservoir of great strength surrounds this spring-head, which is notable as the largest of its kind in Galilee. The water was formerly raised within this basin, by means of mechanical contrivances, about twenty feet to the level of the aqueduct. "After leaving the reservoir," says Col. Wilson, "the aqueduct can be traced at intervals, following the contour of the ground to the point where it crossed the bed of two water-courses on arches, of which the piers may still be seen; it then turns down toward the lake, and runs along the hillside on the top of a massive retaining wall, of which fifty or sixty

yards remain, and lastly passes round the Khan Minyeh cliff by a remarkable excavation in the solid rock, which has been noticed by all travelers. The elevation of the aqueduct at this point is sufficient to have enabled the water brought by it to irrigate the whole plain, and although we could only trace it for a few yards inland, it was not improbably carried right round the head of the plain: the same causes which have almost obliterated it in the small plain of Tabighah would fully account for its disappearance in Gennesareth."

In the light of this direct evidence, confirmed by the researches of Kitchener (now Major General Kitchener) and Dr. Selah Merrill, it is in the highest degree probable that this is the famous fountain of Capernaum, mentioned by Josephus, which poured its life-giving streams over the beautiful and fertile "land of Gennesar." If this be so, it follows that the gardens and fields which it enriched and beautified, first of all, were in the belt that immediately surrounded Capernaum, the lakeside home of Jesus. In the period of the Romans, Gennesaret was the focus of life and activity of one of the most thickly settled provinces of Palestine. Its towns and villages were thickly clustered on plain and hillside and every foot of the land was skillfully cultivated. With a climate mild as Egypt—fitly described as "a harmonious blending of the seasons"—with a loamy soil of unusual depth and richness, and with an abundant water-supply, which was extended over every portion of its surface, it is no marvel that it was known far and wide as the garden spot of Palestine. "Along the lake of Gennesar"—says the Jewish historian—"extends the district of like name, wondrous in natural beauty. Such is the fertility of the soil that it rejects no plant, and so genial is the climate that it suits every variety; the walnut, which delights in a wintry climate, grows here luxuriantly, together with the palm tree which is nourished by heat, and near to those are figs and olives to which a milder atmosphere has been assigned. One might style this an ambitious effort of nature, doing violence to herself in bringing together plants of discordant habits, and an amiable rivalry of the seasons, each as it were assigning its right to the soil; for it not only possesses the extraordinary virtue of nourishing fruits of opposite climes, but also contains a continual supply of them. Thus it produces those most royal of all, the grape and the fig,

during ten months, without intermission, while the other varieties ripen the year round; for besides being favored by the genial temperature of the air, it is irrigated by a highly fertilizing spring, called Capharnaum by the people of the country." (Bell. Jud. III, 10, 8.)

The contrast between this glowing description and the present condition of the Gennesaret plain is painfully apparent. Between the irregular mounds on its northern border, which cover almost all that remains of the once prosperous and highly favored city of Capernaum, and the cluster of thirty or more mud hovels, which represents the town of Mary Magdalen on its southern edge, there is not a single permanent human habitation. Except an occasional patch of a few rods square cleared of its dense undergrowth for a season's crop, by the fellaheen or a migratory band of Bedouins, the entire plain has reverted to its primitive condition. The hand of the diligent husbandman no longer directs the growth of its meads and slopes and the fruitful garden has become a wilderness. Its almost impenetrable thickets of undergrowth, in which delicate grasses and myriads of richly-tinted flowers struggle with brambles and thorns are suggestive only of an Eden-run-wild. Long ago have the walnut and the fig, the pomegranate and the vine been crowded out by hardy plants of meaner growth; and the solitary palm which marks the ruined site of Magdala appears to be the only survivor of all the orchards and groves which were once its pride and glory.

Amid all these changes and desolations the framework and distinguishing characteristics of this natural amphitheatre yet remain. There is no other place on earth where so much of the divinely-beautiful life of Jesus was seen; where so many of His mighty works were done. Here we may read page after page of "the Fifth Gospel," torn indeed and soiled, but still legible; and there is not an incident or an expression in the story of the Evangelists that does not harmonize with these open pages, as they lie in the clear sunlight between the mountains and the sea.

Most beautifully has the Master woven the several details and peculiarities of this varied landscape into the texture of the series of Parables, which belong to the period of his early ministry. In these pictorial representations of the Kingdom of Grace we have the imagery, the landscape-coloring, and many of the special

features of the Gennesaret of to-day. A case in point is the familiar parable of the sower. Here, as of old, the sower goes forth from village or hamlet near by, to sow. As he scatters the seed over his little patch of prepared ground, the birds of the air, which have their nesting places in the holes and caves of the cliffs above, circle about his head and watch eagerly for the opportunity to catch away the uncovered grains, which fall upon the well-trodden pathway that leads through or alongside his field. In the midst of the "good ground," which if carefully tilled would still bring forth sixty, and, in choice locations, one hundred fold, there is a ledge of rock covered from sight by the rich soil, but it fails after a time to nourish the plants which grow upon it, because it has "no deepness of earth." At another point there is a little clump of encroaching briars and thorns which choke the springing grain and render it unfruitful.

"The image of corn fields generally," says Dean Stanley, "must have been always present to the eye of the multitudes on shore, as well as of the Master and disciples in the boat. 'The earth bringing forth fruit of itself'—'the blade, the ear, the full corn in the ear'—'the reapers coming with their sickles for the harvest,' could never be out of place in the Plain of Gennesaret." Other illustrations of like character, drawn from familiar objects about him on plain or lake or mountain-side, have their counterparts within this limited area. Here in very surety "one great memory lingers," and every spot is hallowed ground. Here where the desert places to which he went betimes for communion and prayer, trench so closely upon the fertile fields; where the sunbeams play upon the surface of the clear blue waters as they ripple along the pearly beach; where every natural feature is pleasing to the eye and only the labor and skill of men are needed to make it again the garden of the Lord was the favored place, we may well believe, where Jesus loved to be; and where he spent the busiest, happiest hours of his earthly life. We can hardly be wrong in saying that it was to this place of hallowed memories also that Jesus came to meet his disciples after his resurrection.

"O Saviour gone to God's right hand,
But the same Saviour still;
Graved on thy heart is this lovely strand,
And every fragrant hill."