

THE  
MERCERSBURG QUARTERLY REVIEW.

OCTOBER, 1855.

---

ART. I.—THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN.

*Matthew 13 : 33.*

THE phrase, “kingdom of heaven,” has several significations in Scripture. At one time, it carries our thoughts to the place where God sits enthroned in visible glory, surrounded by the family of the blessed. At another, it is descriptive of the state and economy of the Church under Christianity, opposed to the Jewish and Mosaic economy. Then again, it denotes the reign of grace by which Christ rules in the hearts of men. I see no reason at all for doubting that as used by our Lord in this parable, it relates to Christianity in its workings with the race. Nor is there even the semblance of evidence in the parable itself to justify the interpretation which Vitringa and others have put upon it, as though it were a representation or foreshadowing of the corruptions which should arise in the Church or the heresies which should vitiate the Gospel. Leaven is often used in the New Testament as a figurative expression for designating an efficient power whether for good or evil. It is used in a bad sense, Luke 12 : 1, where it is made the image of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and Gal. 5 : 9, where it represents the injurious influence of false doctrine, and 1 Cor. 5 : 6, where the corrupting power of bad example is likened to it. It is indeed most frequently used in the Scripture as the symbol of something evil. True it is, also, that under the image of a woman, there seems to be represented more than once in the Word of God, an apostate Church with its ministers.

But then though the substance here mentioned, is generally used in a bad sense, it is not always so, and even if this were not the case, no satisfactory reason can be imagined why it should not be employed to denote what is good. "The great features of the figurative language of Scripture," says Trench, "remain no doubt fixed and unalterable, but it is not thus stereotyped in its minor details, so that one figure needs always to stand for one and the same thing. The devil is "a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," (1 Peter 5: 8;) yet this does not hinder the same title from being applied to Christ, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," (Rev. 5: 5;) only there the subtlety and fierceness of the animal formed the point of comparison, here the nobility and kingliness and conquering strength."

Besides, in the Scriptures the Holy Spirit is frequently referred to in such terms as these: "As a mother comforteth her son, so will I comfort thee." "Under the apple-tree (a name by which Christ was denoted) thy mother brought thee forth; there she brought thee forth that bare thee." "My beloved is the only one of her mother." "Ye must be born again of the Holy Ghost." If farther evidence is necessary to prove the baselessness of the interpretation now under view, we have it in the fact, that "if it could be said that at any time the whole Church was thus penetrated through and through with the leaven of false doctrine, the gates of hell would, indeed, have prevailed against it, and from whence it should ever have become unleavened again, it is difficult to understand."

We conclude, therefore, that the parable relates to the propagation and not to the corruption of Christianity. And we shall aim to show how aptly this propagation, or diffusion, is represented by the comparison which the Saviour makes, as that diffusion has respect to the world at large, and to the individual believer.

As we recollect that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," we have at once before us the small and slight beginning of our holy religion, in the form now contemplated. Christianity was humble in its origin. It had to encounter the

prejudices which attached to it in the minds of the learned and the mighty because of its first promulgation in a land that was conquered and enslaved. Its Founder was of lowly birth, and his life, which was covered with reproach and contempt, was terminated by crucifixion. Its friends and advocates were principally publicans, tax-gatherers, and fishermen, destitute of the ordinary means of influence and power. Its marvellous revelations fell strangely on the popular ear. Its authoritative announcements arrayed against it the pride of those who had been accustomed to mould and direct public sentiment both in things sacred and secular. Its plainness of style and form presented no attraction to those who delighted in nice disquisitions, and rhetorical flourishes, and noisy and gaudy parade. Its holy demands kindled toward it a hatred which increased in violence as the abstract truth became potent by exemplification in those whom it had emancipated from the dominion and pollution of sin. Like its Author, and for the same reason, it was despised and rejected of men. Every thing rose in opposition to it. It had to battle with the prejudices and the passions, and the institutions of the people, and even with the civil arm. But resistance though there was, the leaven spread, and at length made its power widely to be felt. "Its noble philosophy, notwithstanding the feebleness of the instruments employed, settled itself in the conviction of the loftiest intellects, while the voice of mercy which it uttered, the love of Christ which it proclaimed, spread gladness and hope through myriads of despairing men. Its morals checked the progress of social corruption, its benevolence set the captive at liberty, and gave protection to the oppressed. Its manifested immortality controlled one world by the revealed solemnities of another. Paganism fell prostrate before it, like the Dagon of Philistia, and lay broken and mutilated on the very threshold of the temples where it had been adored."

Now, as it was with the heavenly kingdom in its smaller and unpromising commencement in the world, so precisely is it with its incipency in the heart of the believer. It generally begins by a word of truth reaching the conscience. A ray of light finds its way into the darkness of the inner man, and

perhaps some trifling circumstance gives rise to consequences infinitely important. There is often, at such a time, a thrill of life, which a chilly, death-like habit of the affections scarcely perceives, a tendency towards God which is felt, but which is almost borne down by the attractions of earth. As sometimes a spark lies smothered for a while, and after a long interval bursts out, and begins to burn, so with the Holy Spirit, which is the sanctifying power in humanity: the spark may have reached the sinner's heart, but the deceitfulness of worldly cares or pleasures, or the remains of unsubdued sin, so stifle it, that the signs of religion are scarcely visible, till at length some providential event occurs, which fans the spark into a flame. It is a great mistake to imagine that conversions, as far as the agency of the truth is concerned, are generally effected by elaborate reasonings and argumentative demonstrations, either in the pulpit or the volume. I believe that the experience of God's people in every age, if it could be ascertained, would abundantly sustain us in this position. I believe that in such a case it would be found, that in the large majority of instances, it was not a series of propositions logically linked, and eloquently presented, that roused the soul from its slumber, but some single thought, some solitary sentence, whether from the pen or the tongue. Simple sentiments, brief statements, perhaps a few syllables, would be seen to constitute the leaven for three measures of meal.

Not only was this leaven small in quantity, but it was likewise a foreign importation. It was not naturally in the substance to which it was applied, nor derived from it, but taken from elsewhere, to mingle therein. To affirm this of the Gospel, is but to assert what is in the strictest sense true. We grossly disparage its claims, and as glaringly betray our ignorance of its nature, when we undertake to assign it in whole or in part an earthly or human origin. It is the mystery which was hid in God before the foundation of the world. It is the day-spring which hath visited us from on high. Like the natural light to which it is so often compared, it had its source away from us, and above us, and independently of us. This is a point that admits of no dispute. That which man by his

natural power cannot understand when it is revealed, never could have taken its rise with him. It came from the "Father of lights." It "came into the world," as did its pre-existent Author. It descended from the region where all is life, into our earth, where all is decay, that it might infuse vitality into our diseased and shattered humanity. If Socrates, by his philosophy, brought men down from heaven to earth, by drawing their attention from the study and contemplation of the heavenly bodies, to the consideration and end of man, and his duties and relations in this life,—Jesus Christ brings us from earth to heaven, by teaching us a Divine Philosophy, by lodging amongst us a new and living power, to vivify us, and raise us from the seen and temporal, to the spiritual and the everlasting.

Thus, too, is it with the grace which is identified with the Gospel, in its personal operations. It is something alien from us,—something that is introduced into us from without. It is not the unfolding of any powers which already existed in us, but a new production, one, too, having so little affinity for any thing that dwells within us by nature, that when it is received by us, it occasions a ferment or contest that lasts for life; for the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. When this grace is effectually communicated to the soul, there is not, indeed, any new faculty created; but there is the introduction of a new and powerful principle, under the influence of which, all the natural faculties are exerted in a different manner from that in which they were formerly employed. Such a principle, we say, is *communicated* to the soul; for this is the true idea of regeneration. The change which it involves, is not the excitation, or awakening of some gracious principle, which lay hid before in nature under the oppression of ill habits, as corn lay hid under the chaff, but was corn still, not a beating up something that was concealed in nature, not an awakening, as of a man from sleep, but a resurrection, as of a man from nothing. It is not, says Charnock, a stirring up of old principles, and new kindling of them, as a candle put out lately, may be blown in again by the fire remaining in the snuff, and burn upon the old stock; or as the life, which,

retired into the more secret parts of the body, in those creatures that seem dead in winter, is excited and called out to the exterior parts by the spring sun. Indeed there are some sparks of moral virtues in nature, which want blowing up by a good education, the foundation of these is in nature, the exciting them from instruction, the perfection of them from use and exercise. But there is not in man the seed of one grace, but the seeds of all sin: "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing." Some good thing may be in me, but it ariseth not from my flesh, it is not from any seed sown by nature, but it is another principle put into me, which doth seminally contain in it all grace, it is putting a new seed into the soil, and exciting it to grow, an incorruptible seed.

Leaven is of an assimilative nature. It communicates its own property to the meal with which it comes in contact. It does not destroy its identity, but alters its qualities. That Christianity is the one all-renewing power of the world, we have only to glance at the inefficacy of all other expedients for man's moral and spiritual elevation, to be satisfied. What has it availed for this purpose, that Philosophy has had its ages of trial, and Science has erected her thousand temples, and worldly wisdom, from her high academic chair has delivered her myriads of lectures on the beauty of virtue, and the hideousness of vice? I go farther and ask, is the Divine Law itself able to produce that reformation in man which he needs? Let the voices of the past answer these inquiries. Let the condition of the world answer them at the time when Jesus sent forth his disciples with their divine remedy, for abounding depravity—a time when though philosophy was at its height, and reason had achieved her proudest triumphs, and arts were in their maturity, and eloquence was most finished, and poetry most harmonious, yet the principles which were operating were only such as dissocialized and oppressed society, or, if there was benevolence, it was benevolence which delighted in palaces, and temples, and theatres, and aqueducts, the ruins of which now meet the wandering eye of the traveller, instead of alms houses and asylums for age, infancy, and misfortune, and if there was kindness, it was kindness which placed slaves at

the sole mercy of their owners, to be tortured or killed, as their savage tempers required, and if there was religion, it was a bald, barren, heartless system, having no precepts of forgiveness and charity, and leaving revenge and hardness of heart among the very virtues. Let the journalists of the Moravian missions answer them, who tell us that as long as their teachers sought to move the heathen by mere moral reasonings, or even by the terrors of God's holy law, they failed; but when led by continual disappointments, to insist upon the dying love and tenderness of Christ, in many instances the stubborn idolater at once acknowledged the power of the appeal, and became a convert to the gospel. Let the testimony of Brainerd answer them, who, when speaking of his triumphant mission among the Indians, says, that his chief object was to lead them to a view of the "corruption of their hearts," and "at the same time to open to them the glorious and complete remedy provided in Christ for helpless, perishing sinners, offered freely to those who had no goodness of their own to recommend them to the Divine acceptance, and that when these truths were felt at heart, there was no vice unreformed, no external duty neglected: drunkenness, the daily vice, was discarded, and scarcely an instance of it known for months together." Let, too, these inquiries be answered by the total failure of the Jesuit missionaries in China, who are represented as having, through fear of offending the taste of a people much attracted by pomp and splendor, attempted to conceal the ignominious death of Christ, and to display him exclusively in all the dignity and majesty of Divine power.

Yes, the Gospel is the world's grand renovator. "Neither art nor science, nor religion in general, as faith merely in a higher state of being, nor even the divine law itself, is able to produce that reformation in man which is wrought by the leaven of the heavenly kingdom." I need but hint at the mighty and marvellous attestations of its mission, which meet the eye at every point of its beneficent progress. Besides the external conversion of the Roman world, there was also the eradication of the innumerable heathen practices and customs and feelings, which had enwoven and entwined their fibres round the very

heart of society, effected by its power,—the power with which it has ever since gone forward transforming society into the likeness of itself, destroying idolatry, substituting peace and affection for revenge and blood, exchanging the swamp for the rural village, giving sanctity to the dearest ties of nature, throwing its gentle protection over the poor and the oppressed, and leading men to live under the consciousness of a soul to be immortal and a body to be incorruptible, and as members one of another—as constituent parts of a fallen race, which nothing but sin could curse, and nothing but God's blessing can save.

And as it is with Christianity in its general application, in this respect, so likewise is it in that which is particular. Divine grace comes into actual contact with the soul. It is not a thing that lies in the surface of a man, or consists in outward forms, or empty shows, or fruitless talk, but it is something that gets into the heart, and is most intimately inherent there. It is a principle that is conveyed into "the spirit of our minds,"—the centre and source of our being. It is alterative, too, in its efficacy. Chemists tell us that a very minute portion of some things will, to an almost incredible degree, transform the mass into which they are put. So is it with the divine power, which is compared to leaven. It works a change in the subject of it. He is "a new creature," because he has come to be "in Christ." The change he has experienced is so great, that all things which were old, are said to be done away, and all that remains to be made new. The man is a new creature, because he has had a thing of new production put into him. Is he physically changed? No, he has the same body, senses, tongue, eyes and ears. Is he intellectually changed? No, he has not another understanding, memory, imagination, or genius. Is he socially changed? No, he is still a husband, father, master—the same in his relations, condition, business. And yet he is another man, a new man. He is regenerate. He has something of the holy and heavenly nature of divine truth in him. His mental faculties are changed in their use, and sanctified. His physical powers are now sacred to new purposes. He occupies his various relations in life with a new spirit, he is godly in them all. He carries on the same business,



but now he abides with God in his calling. Whether he eats or drinks, or whatever he does, he does all to the glory of God. If he was covetous, now he is liberal, if he was prayerless, now he is devout, if he was not vicious before, now he abhors from disposition what he once only shunned from selfish motives, if he was moral, now his morality is evangelized, and whatsoever he does "in word or deed," he does all in the name of the Lord Jesus. I grant that there is not a perfect uniformity in this change as it is produced in different individuals. In each case the original complexion or constitutional peculiarity remains. The *man* is seen in the *Christian*. Like water, which partakes a little of the nature of the soil over which it runs, his very religion takes a kind of hue from his natural temperament, whether it be phlegmatic, sanguine, choleric, or melancholic. This very fact, however, falls in precisely with the metaphor in hand; for flour remains flour, only it is leavened. It accords also with the aim of Christianity; for whilst it does produce a community of saints, one faith, one love, one hope, the same humility and self-denial in all the members of the Church, it does not propose to produce identity of thought, temper of mind, and inclination, just as it does not propose to produce identity in the forms of life, of government and constitution. "The human heart is the immediate object upon which the power of Christianity works, it enlightens the understanding, purifies and ennobles the feelings, sanctifies the will, the earthly frame gives way to the heavenly, and the man lives no longer for the earth, but even now he lives in and for that life which is in heaven."

The Gospel, like the leaven, is diffusive. The power which it exerts, reaches to the entire man. Without undertaking to determine precisely the meaning of the Apostle's terms in his prayer for the holiness of the Thessalonians, (1 Thess. 5 : 6,) that God would sanctify them wholly, in their spirit, soul and body, whether he intended, as is generally supposed, by the first, the soul as rational, by the second, the soul as sensitive, and by the third, the corporeal body, it is evident from this prayer that grace must be universally diffused through the subject of it. As sin has vitiated and depraved the whole man,

extending itself to all the powers and faculties, the remedy must be cōextensive with the disease, and the restoration with the ruin. The rational soul of the Christian may only be formally the subject of the change that he experiences, yet as sin is by a sort of participation in the sensitive soul, and in the external senses and parts of the body, so must holiness be too. Grace, enthroning *itself* in the heart, must diffuse its energy and vital influence through all the parts and powers of the man, and leaven the whole lump. I now refer, however, to the diffusion of the Gospel from one man to others. As that which is once leavened becomes leaven to the rest, so every individual who has experienced in himself the efficacy of the Gospel, becomes, for the circle in which he moves, a leaven to work still farther. The presence of a pious man in the neighborhood tells in a marked degree upon its character. Many a district has undergone a species of moral renovation, through the introduction within its circles of a God-fearing individual. From such an one, as he lives consistently, there emanates amazing power to check, reprove, and attack, and not unfrequently is that power the agency, which God employs, to win the profligate and the worldly to himself. The influence of Christians, however, is not of a mere negative kind. If their religion is *conservative*, it is also *extensive*. Like the leaven, its natural tendency is to spread itself. This it does in the domestic and social spheres, and especially is this the case in the great missionary enterprise of the Church. What is this enterprise but an irresistible evidence of the tendency of Christianity to diffuse itself? The abettors of the pagan religion never founded missions, and endured trials and sufferings to propagate their system. Neither has infidelity, with all her strong desire to subvert Christianity, made any sacrifices for this purpose, or sought to remove the gloomy superstitions overhanging the nations. But Christianity can point to the tears, and prayers, and gifts, and toils, and voluntary privations, and tombs, of her subjects and votaries. And if I were asked for a warrant for the Church's grand missionary movement, I should feel that I had said enough to satisfy the most sceptical, if I had but repeated the words of heaven's great

Missionary, in which He speaks of the leaven which the woman hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

The kingdom of heaven, as is taught in the figure before us, works silently, gradually, and outwardly. Like leaven, which commences from the centre, but reaches an external development, the Gospel, in its renovating power, though it begins in the invisible spiritual world, ends not there, but brings about, also, a mighty outward and visible change. We learn this from the Acts of the Apostles, and from that interesting portion of Church history which treats of the spread of Christianity. The Gospel was hidden in the mass on which its influence was to be exerted. It was deposited there, accompanied by that unseen power, without which no second causes, not the insidious list of Gibbon itself, nor even the evidence of miracles or prophecy, could have given it currency in a world which hated it for its very truth and excellence, (we mean the power of the Spirit.) and in that mass, a little below the surface of society, it worked mightily. This operation, however, did not long remain latent. It soon showed itself in its happy influence upon the world, and in the astounding changes in faith and practice which it effected. The concealed force which was working, ere long made its elevating power to be felt, in the gentle and gradual, but effective insinuations of itself into the fountains and channels of society. Hence it is, that we find society gradually rising in its moral strength and dignity. According to Tacitus, there were, about thirty years after the crucifixion, a great multitude of Christians in Rome, notwithstanding its distance from the province of Judea. Pliny, who presided over the province of Bythinia in the beginning of the second century, testifies that in that country the Gospel could boast of numerous disciples. And Justin Martyr, about thirty years after Pliny, says: "There is not a nation, either of Greeks or Barbarians, or of any other name, in which prayer and thanksgiving are not offered up to the Father and Maker of all things, in the name of the crucified Jesus."

Now in all this, we have an exact counterpart of the workings of Christianity upon the human soul. Religion in the individual is a hidden activity. Its source and principles are

unintelligible to natural men. The Christian's life is "hid with Christ in God." The manna on which he feeds is hidden manna. The new name in the white stone which he has received, is known to no one but himself. Religion in the individual is also a silent influence. It is, in this respect, much like the sap that is drained in by the root, and secretly and silently ascends up the trunk of the tree, and diffuses itself to every branch, so that we see that it lives, but don't see how. Yet it is the law of this new life to work from the inward to the outward. It evinces its residence by its agency. This is not only real but visible. As it flows from principle, so it is exemplified in practice. The grace which the believer has received, instead of lying within him as a dead, powerless thing, brings him under the dominion of holy habits of mind, and urges him on to active, outward obedience. It spreads in every direction, pervading every relation he sustains, and making him characterized by the work of faith, and the labor of love, and the patience of hope, and the fruit of the Spirit. This progress and development, however, are *gradual*. The Christian, indeed, as far as he is stationary, is censured and condemned by the image before us, but it is equally certain that to derive comfort from it, it is not necessary that we should be everything at once. The effect of leaven in the meal, is not produced at once, but by degrees. So is it throughout the world of nature. There is the babe, the youth, the man; there is the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear; there is the acorn, which grows to the wide-spreading oak, and the dawn, which brightens into the effulgence of noon. And so must we believe it is in the world of grace, unless we would despise all analogy, and offend against the generation of God's children, and overlook what is said of Christians as "renewed day by day," and "going from strength to strength," and being "changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."

As leaven ultimately attains its object, and leavens the whole mass, so shall it be with Christianity, in its issue both universal and particular. "Our Lord," says Luther, "wishes to comfort us with this similitude, and give us to understand,

that, when the Gospel, as a piece of new leaven, has once mixed itself with the human race, which is the dough, it will never cease till the end of the world, but will make its way through the whole mass of those who are to be saved. And, just as it is impossible for the sourness, when it has once mingled itself with the dough, ever again to be separated from it, because it has changed the nature of the dough, so is it impossible for Christians to be ever torn from Christ. For Christ, as a piece of leaven, is so incorporated with them, that they form with him one body, one mass." And where in the whole compass of Revelation, shall we find two truths more plainly exhibited, and more firmly established, and more richly fraught with consolation, than these? The whole mass is to be leavened. The bringing in of the top-stone is secured by the same hand which laid the foundation. Religion will "perfect that which concerneth us." "He which hath begun a good work, will perform it." Is it so that "the righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger?" Is it so that "he has life, and shall have it more abundantly?" Is it so that the path of the just is as the shining light,—the sun, which never made a dawn, without carrying it into full day, and which none can drive back or stop in his course? Then must it be that the Word of life which has been received by the mystery of regeneration into the believer's heart, and claims every region and part of his being, as its own, shall not there cease its effectual working, till it has brought the whole man into obedience to it, so that he shall be altogether a new creation in Christ Jesus. There is no divination or enchantment against him. He is destined to be upon a level with the angels of God, he will be presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

The same issue of triumph awaits Christianity in its bearings upon the race. The difficulties in the way of the universal spread and prevalence of the Gospel may not be denied. We cannot close our eyes to the obstinacy and perverseness of the human heart, to its deep-rooted and bitter malignity against God and everything that is pure and holy, and to the fascinations of caste, and the confusion of tongues, and the power of

systems whose principles are wrought in the very frame-work of society. But what then? The obstacles to be overcome are no greater than those which have already been, and He who hath declared the decree hath omnipotence to execute it.

“Is anything too hard for thee,  
Almighty Lord of all;  
Whose threat’ning looks dry up the sea,  
And make the mountains fall?”

It matters not how much the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing, the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed, the King will not prove to have been set in vain upon the holy hill of Zion. It matters not how much statesmen and philosophers may pour contempt on the expectation; for we are as firmly persuaded as we are of God’s faithfulness and almightiness, that the day shall dawn upon our world, when humanity shall be released from its burdens and when with one grand doxology ascending to Him whose throne is in the heavens, the nations shall acknowledge the empire of Jesus,—

“Bring forth the royal diadem  
And crown Him Lord of all.”

Even as now we see the holy banner of the cross waving on the citadels of Zion, and crowds inhabiting her, so we believe she shall be filled with multitudes of every tribe, and kindred, and tongue, each of whom, and all of whom, will demonstrate the declaration of the faithful and true Witness, that “the kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”

Lancaster, Pa.

A. N.