

THE PARABOLIC VINEYARD WASTED.

– ISAIAH 5. – NOV. 24. –

Golden Text: "Woe unto them who are mighty to drink wine."

APPARENTLY our Lord had in mind the parable of the vineyard presented in the first seven verses of this chapter, in the parable which he gave, recorded in Matt. 21:33-44. In both parables the vineyard represents the Jewish polity, and the vines represent the people, especially such as were in influence and power – the leaders.

Both parables show a lack of the proper influence of the truth which had been granted them, upon the hearts of the Jewish people. The Lord's favor and the knowledge of his goodness as it had reached them, had not brought forth pleasant fruit, but that which was acrid and bitter – had not brought forth love, but selfishness, and self-indulgence. This is set forth in verse 7. Having given Israel his law, instructing them through it respecting right and wrong in their dealings with each other, the Lord had reason to expect "judgment," that is, justice; but he beheld oppression. He beheld that those who had the greatest knowledge of righteousness were still exercised by a spirit of selfishness to the extent that they took advantage of their more ignorant brethren. The Lord says that when he looked for righteousness, peace, and prosperity, behold a cry arose to him from the oppressed – from those who under the social order of things failed to get their reasonable and legitimate share of the bounties which the Lord had freely granted.

An intimation respecting the method of this oppression is given in verse 8, in the words, "Woe unto them that join house to house, and lay field to field, till there be no place [for the poor to

occupy], that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!" The description represents a condition of things very similar to that which we are told now obtains in Great Britain, and indeed throughout Europe, where large estates are held by private owners, and thus withdrawn from the use and occupancy of the people in general. Landlordism seems also to be included in the thought – adding house to house. The Lord in another place declares respecting the future, "They shall no more build and another inhabit, no more plant and another eat the fruit thereof;" which may be understood to signify that in the future time of the Lord's Kingdom, houses will be built for the owners' occupancy – and not to be rented.

It will be observed that we do not consider this lesson to be a "temperance lesson" in the ordinary sense of that term, – but a rebuke of the Lord against intemperance of every form – intemperate selfishness, etc. Moreover, although the parable and general lesson connected with it was addressed originally to the Jews, it appears to us, like many other Scriptures, to have a deep signification and meaning in respect to the Gospel Church, spiritual Israel, as well as for natural Israel. Indeed, as we have heretofore seen, natural Israel was in all its affairs, and the messages sent to it, a type of spiritual Israel, and hence all the things written and done toward and respecting the typical nation, should be understood as having a higher and deeper application to the anti-typical nominal spiritual Israel – "Babylon" – of to-day.

At no time probably has there been a greater disposition than at the present to add field to field, and house to house – to amass wealth, and to control the land and machinery, and all sources of wealth and **[R2904 : page 349]** power. The Lord says that woe is coming upon this class, and this announcement is in fullest accord with the various declarations of the Scriptures which point out that the great "day of vengeance" is near at hand; and that it will be a time of severe trouble upon the whole world, but especially upon

the rich. The Lord's warning is that surely many houses shall be desolate, and that even great and fine residences shall be without occupants. (Vs. 9.) The thought apparently is that the time of trouble of which we read that "they shall cast their gold and silver into the streets, but it shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's anger," will be especially against the great who live in earthly palaces, and who for safety's sake will desert these or be destroyed during the period of anarchy. – Ezek. 7:19.

This spirit of acquisitiveness which lies at the foundation of all the trouble is to be found in every land, but nowhere more than in so-called "Christendom," and Christendom alone is evidently referred to in the prophecy, except as it may also have applied to fleshly Israel in the harvest time of the Jewish age, in which similar "wrath to the uttermost" in anarchy came upon that typical people. The fact is that large plantations and farms are managed by employees instead of each person planting and reaping on his own account: it is intimated that by and by this will lead to serious results. When the present social fabric breaks up, and there is "no hire for man nor hire for beast," and "no peace to him that goeth out, nor to him that cometh in," because every man's hand is against his neighbor, – then the large farms and plantations will be at a serious disadvantage, and the yield will be correspondingly diminished.

Verses 11,12-22, mention wine and strong drink. We concede that literal wine and intoxicating liquors in general are a dreadful bane to Christendom; we concede that many who occupy influential positions, as well as a mighty host of the common people, are greatly injured by intoxicating liquors. We urge and warn all of the Lord's people against this evil, insidious, and contaminating influence. However, we are not certain that the Lord here refers exclusively to literal intoxicating liquors. It is true, at least, that there is another kind of intoxication that is very prevalent at the present time: it is scripturally termed the wine of

Babylon: it produces an intoxication along religious lines, and hinders people from discerning and comprehending the divine Word, character and plan. It is the wine of Churchianity, which confuses those who use it, and beclouds their minds in this respect to the true Christianity. It addles their judgment and brings the people into captivity to false doctrines and false teachers, "because they have no knowledge," – verse 13.

Concerning this symbolic wine and intoxication, the Lord declares that Babylon has "made all the nations [inhabitants of the earth] drunken" with the wine of her incontinency and unfaithfulness to Him. (Rev. 17:2; 18:3.) The stimulating power is not the spirit of a sound mind, but the delusion of a false doctrine; as the Prophet declares, they are "drunken," but not with wine. – Isa. 29:9-13.

Instruments of joy and praise they do indeed employ, often spending much money upon grand pipe organs wherewith they would praise the Lord, even in the delirium of their false conception of his character and plan; as it is written, "but they regard not the word of the Lord, neither the operation of his hands." They are not looking to see what the Lord is doing, nor inquiring to know concerning the mighty work which he is about to accomplish in the setting up of his Kingdom; and hence to them the overthrow of Babylon and the confusion and anarchy incidental to the establishment of the Kingdom will be as the same Prophet declares, God's "strange act," "strange work." – Isa. 28:21.

"Because the people have no knowledge," they are consumed with thirst at the present time. The wine of false doctrine has produced erroneous views of various questions, and with the incidental bemuddled condition of the mind there comes at the present time a thirst for more knowledge, and for explanations and for consistency which their teachers cannot satisfy. The people in

general have lost their taste [R2905 : page 349] and appreciation for the water of life, the *truth*; and false teachers warn them against it as poison. The wine of false doctrines now being manufactured at all the Theological Seminaries is the wine of evolution and higher criticism, which does not satisfy the thirst, but increases the confusion of mind, and makes null every attempt to appreciate and comprehend the divine plan, as set forth in God's Word. Even Babylon's notables are dissatisfied, famished. – See Amos 8:11.

Verses 14-17 show the end of the matter. The grave figuratively opens her mouth to swallow these up; and in the time of trouble, unquestionably, large numbers will perish literally from the earth. But sheol, the grave, will specially enlarge, in that it will take into it more than human beings: it will take into it the great octopus system of Babylon, with its many heads and many arms, financial, political, social, religious, etc. In that day of trouble, all classes will be humbled together, and the Lord and his righteousness will be exalted in the sight of mankind.

Verses 18-23 take us back again to point out the peculiarities of some who are prominent in the evil of this time, and who will bring special woes upon themselves. These are not those who are beset by temptations and yield through weaknesses resulting from the fall; but such as greedily take hold of sin and in-equity, through their vanity and self conceit. They deceive themselves into supposing that they are hastening the Lord's work, and that they are acting under the counsel of the Lord in their various sectarian enterprises; but the fact is that they are not in the condition of mind to appreciate the Lord's counsel, being drunken with false doctrine. Hence it is that they call evil good, and good evil, and put darkness for light, and light for darkness, and bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, and are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight, mighty in respect to their own wine of false doctrine.

What could better compare with this matter of calling evil good, and good evil, than is general when the word *gospel* is used. The meaning of *gospel* is "good tidings;" but that which Babylon calls *gospel* is most awfully bad tidings – the announcement that nearly all the world of mankind (all except a little [R2905 : page 350] flock) are to go to eternal torment. And when the real good tidings is announced, we find these same persons drunken with the wine of false doctrine, rabid in their denunciation, calling it "nocturnal hallucinations." Do they not indeed put light for darkness, and darkness for light? Do they not indeed label "poison" the true message of the divine plan, and label "gospel," that which is the most awful and bitter dose that human intellect could be asked to accept with joy? Indeed, as a Presbyterian minister expressed it – "You must not attempt to masticate our doctrines, for if you do you can never swallow them; they are in this respect like a Brandreth pill." And yet this bitter dose, of which reason would forbid the swallowing, is misnamed sweet, heavenly truth.

But do the ministers of Babylon show any disposition to justify the wicked for reward, or to take away the righteousness of the righteous from him? Yes, frequently; for instance, not long ago a brother in the West, who had accepted the true gospel, the true light, the sweet story of divine love, wisdom, and power, died. The Lutheran minister called upon the family (formerly attendants and members of his church), and without even waiting to be invited to preach the funeral discourse, said that, of course, he would be prohibited from preaching the funeral sermon, as it would be contrary to the rules of the church. The Brother had always been a consistent Lutheran, and after receiving the truth gave good evidence of his profession of being sanctified thereby, – yet in this way, and by derogatory statements, this minister of the gospel of eternal torment attempted to take away his righteousness from him. Indeed many Christian people have found to their surprise that, after leaving the nominal church, the

special pillars of the same are ready to say all manner of evil against them falsely – or, at least, to imply evil. The same Lutheran minister a little later on was invited to preach at the funeral of a notoriously unregenerate man, and he accepted the invitation with alacrity, and, of course, in his discourse tried to justify the wicked, the reward probably being the influence upon the family, and in favor of the denomination.

Verses 24-30, describe the great time of trouble now impending, in which, the Lord's great army shall overthrow Babylon and plow deeply with sorrow and tribulation the hearts of mankind, and make the world ready for the new dispensation, the Millennial Kingdom. See "*The Day of Vengeance*" – *Millennial Dawn*, Vol. IV.
