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THE SICK AND THE PHYSICIAN.

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MATTHEW the publican had just left his office to follow Jesus, and to testify his love for his new Master, he made a feast for him and his disciples in his own house. Many of the publican's old friends, publicans and sinners, came in and partook of the feast. When the company was dispersed, the Scribes and Pharisees, who were ever on the alert to find some cause of complaint against Jesus, and who had watched him when he went into Matthew's house, attacked his disciples with indignant murmurings, saying, "Why do ye eat with publicans and sinners?" They thought, or pretended to think that it was a great crime to eat with such a company. But, while they said nothing to him, Jesus knew full well that it was not the disciples, but himself, who was the object of their hatred and whose conduct had given them offence; he, therefore, undertook to answer the question which the Pharisees had asked. Said he, The whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came to call sinners, and not the righteous, to repentance. Luke 5: 31-32.

In these words the Divine Teacher probably repeated a

proverb which was in common use among the people; and his accusers, doubtless, immediately understood its application. He compared himself to a physician, and the publicans and sinners to the sick. It was surely not necessary for a physician to apologize for being with the sick. It was his duty to be with them—a duty so imperative that he could not neglect it without being guilty of the gravest offence, and acting unworthily of his calling. At the risk of his own life the physician must do all he can to save the life of others. He is not allowed to shrink from any disease, however loathsome, fatal, and contagious. He cannot avoid the pest house or flee from the ravages of the pestilence. With a courage rivaling that of the soldier in the battle field he must walk amid the sick and the dying, the first to heed their cry for help and never leaving them so long as they need his assistance. His sense of duty has sometimes shown itself stronger than the impulses of natural affection, and he has ministered to the relief of that child which a mother had left to die alone. As a physician, then, where could Jesus be but with the sick? His answer must have satisfied even the cavilling Pharisees.

But, he said, "the whole need not a physician." Did he mean, that, in the sense in which he was a physician, any were whole? Such could not have been his meaning. He must have constantly had in mind the sorrowful language of Scripture, *there is none righteous, no, not one*—he must have been painfully sensible of the mournful fact that the earth was but a mighty hospital filled with sick and only sick. His meaning seems to be that there were some sick, whom in his ministry of healing he must regard as well; some sinners whom in his ministry of cleansing he was to regard as righteous; some lost whom in his ministry of redemption he was to regard as saved. The inference was that he had come to others but not to these

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Pharisees. His language calls to mind that of the Fore-runner to the Pharisees who came to his baptism, O generation of vipers, who hath warned *you* to flee from the wrath to come? As the Dispensation of Repentance was not theirs, so now they had no part in the Dispensation of Reconciliation. And this truth which is dimly shadowed forth in the reply of Jesus to his accusers is elsewhere plainly indicated in the teachings of the gospel. There is a blessing pronounced upon the poor in spirit, upon the spiritual mourner, upon the heavy laden and bowed down with the oppressive yoke of sin; upon those, who, conscious of their sinfulness, hunger and thirst after righteousness; but upon the proud, the sinful and secure in their sins there is no blessing—only a curse. The wrath of God abideth on them.

“*The whole*” of whom we are speaking are sick, indeed, but have no idea that they are so. It is very rarely the case that a man is physically sick without knowing it. Some symptoms will almost certainly betray the presence of disease. The pulse will be too full and rapid, or too weak and slow; the eye will be too dim and languid, or too bright and restless; there will be a general weakness, or actual pain will give the man assurance that he is not in health. But it sometimes happens that persons are sick, even unto death when they think themselves either well or in the way of recovery. It is said that what are thought by the patients to be mild cases of yellow fever are usually the most dangerous. The victim feels weak, but not sick; comforts himself and his friends with the idea that he will be out to-morrow, certainly, the next day. But the fell disease, which at first toyed with him because there was no hope of his escape, at length takes hold of him in earnest, and he withers and dies in an hour. It sometimes happens, too, that the sick man, after a long and painful illness, suddenly finds himself free from pain and

imagines that the strength of the disease is broken. Alas, mortification has blunted the sense of feeling and the work of death has already far advanced before death itself has come.

But, if men are rarely mistaken about their bodily health, they are frequently spiritually sick without having any proper apprehension of the fact. That this is so is evident from our own observation. We have known men of wicked and profligate character who claim to do no harm and to discharge all their duties to their fellow men. They are, therefore, as they think, not sinners. We know not which most to admire, the presumption of the claim or the folly of the inference drawn from it. As if any man ever did discharge all his duties to his fellow men; or as if, while there is a God above us, our duties to our fellow men were all our duties! These are probably the men who are spoken of, and condemned by, the Apostle Paul as being ignorant of God's righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness. Or, are they not rather those who are said to be cursed with a strong delusion so that they shall believe a lie? Or, it may be that they are those who are spoken of in God's own energetic language as *past feeling*. How do they resemble persons in whom mortification has taken place, and who are already given over to death! It sounds almost like terrible mockery when, even by implication, such as these are called "the whole that need not a physician;" and, yet, such is the judgment they pronounce upon themselves.

Resembling these, and, perhaps, more to be pitied, are those who are conscious that they are sick, but know nothing of the desperate state of their malady. Have you never heard the wasted consumptive in winter sigh for the mild air and sweet flowers of spring, and talk of them as if they should surely be his?

“Aye, thou art for the grave; thy glances shine
 Too brightly to shine long—another spring
 Shall deck herself for men’s eyes, not for thine—
 Sealed in the sleep that knows no wakening.”

He knew not that his disease was fatal, incurable. So there are persons who know that they are sinners but know not what it is to be sinners. They imagine that their prayers, their fastings, and their alms, can relieve them from the condemnation of sin, or that the prayers of a Christian friend or the rites of a christian church can commend them to the divine favor. If any of these things had been sufficient would God have sent his own Son to heal them? But believing that they are sufficient what hope is there that these poor deluded ones will call for the great physician?

The sick, of whom our Saviour spoke, are those who are truly conscious of their condition. They know that their sickness must terminate fatally unless arrested; and knowing, too, that they cannot arrest it themselves, they are not ashamed to call in a physician. Passing through one of the Richmond hospitals filled with wounded soldiers, at the farther extremity of the long room the writer’s attention was called to a young man whose right arm had been taken off near the shoulder. He had been waiting long for the surgeon to come and dress his wound. His fine face was full of sadness; but hearing footsteps near him, he lifted his head and his eyes brightened with pleasing hope. Addressing his visitor, “Sir,” said he, “are you a doctor? My arm has been amputated some days and it is important that it should be dressed.” The visitor was not a doctor; and the poor man, resuming his attitude of patient sadness, waited all night for a physician. From his very soul he felt that he had need of one. And so, in the spiritual life, there are men who know that they are

sick and powerless, and who inquire anxiously, "Is there no balm in Gilead; no physician there?" These are they who need a physician; and for their sake, and ours, we thank God there is a physician; and such a physician.

1. *He is a kind physician.* If we are sick and send for a physician, we wish to know something of his disposition. We do not wish him to be cross and irritable. Nor do we wish him to be cold and indifferent. We wish him to bear with our complainings, soothe our anxieties, and be careful for our comfort. But, if it is desirable for our earthly physicians to be kind, it is much more important that we should be assured of the kindness of Jesus, our spiritual physician. Our sickness arises from our enmity to him. We have been acting contrary to his wishes and commands all our lives. If we were not convinced of his kindness we should not have the courage to go to him. But we may be perfectly sure of his kindness. His whole ministry was one continued act of kindness. He healed thousands and he was never known to speak one word of harshness or reproof to those who came to him. The man full of leprosy says to him, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. He replies, putting forth his hand and touching him, I will: Be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy was cleansed. He says to a woman who comes to him, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath saved thee. Certainly he must be a kind physician, who, when censure was justly deserved in every case, gave it in vane; but spoke only words of loving compassion.

2. *He is a condescending physician.* Rich and poor alike may come unto him. Once, when he was going up to Jerusalem surrounded by great multitudes, who were hanging with breathless interest upon his words; and were soon to shout to him hosanna in the highest, there was sitting on the way side a blind beggar. As the crowd marched on, this beggar, hearing the noise of the multitude,

asked what it meant. They told him—"Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." He immediately cried out, O Lord, thou son of David, have mercy on me. They rebuked him that he should hold his peace; but he still cried out, O Lord, thou son of David, have mercy on me. When Jesus came up he stopped, called for the beggar, and healed him. He was a poor, sick man, needing a physician and the Physician would not pass him without ministering to his relief. But, to place the matter beyond all dispute, Jesus himself has left upon record the promise, *Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.*

3. *He practices without charge.* It is sad to think how many of our race annually perish because they cannot pay for medical attendance. Physicians too often rush with eager haste to the call of the rich; but turn with indifference away from those who have nothing to pay. But the richest is no more able to reward this physician than the poorest. It is his own boundless love that prompts him to regard either. We may all expect a welcome even though we have to say:

Nothing in my hand I bring:
Simply to thy cross I cling.

OR

"Nothing but sin have I to give,
Nothing but love shall I receive."

4. *He is always accessible.* Some physicians have so large a practice that they can devote but a little time to each patient; and often after they are sent for it is hours before they can come. In some of our hospitals, more than a hundred sick and wounded are under the care of a single Surgeon. Some of them must necessarily wait weary time; and some, perhaps, die before their turn

comes around. But this physician is always near; you
need not wait for him. He is ever waiting for you.

Behold a stranger at the door,
He knocking now, has knocked before;
Has waited long—is waiting still;
You treat no other friend so ill.

O lovely attitude! he stands
With melting heart and bleeding hands.
O matchless kindness! and he shows
That matchless kindness to his foes.

But will he prove a friend indeed?
He will—the very friend you need;
The Friend of sinners—yet, tis he
With garments dyed from calvary. -

Rise, touched with gratitude divine
Turn out his enemy and thine,
The soul-destroying monster, sin,
And let the heavenly stranger in.

Admit him, e'er his anger burns
His feet departed ne'er return.
Admit him, or the hour's at hand
You'll at his door rejectèd stand.

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