

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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THE TRUE LINEAGE.

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## A Sermon

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*In the year 1861.*

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“And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.”—Luke xi. 27, 28.

Was this a loving-hearted woman who had been moved by the dear Saviour's discourse? Many, doubtless, had listened to the same gracious words; some of them with wrath, and others with stern complacency; but it may be that her soul began to swell with holy wonder at the marvellous things which proceeded out of his mouth, and her soul felt such an affection for the man from whom so much of grace proceeded that she cried, “Blessed is the womb that bare thee!” Was it so? Perhaps it was an ignorant but passionate love breaking through all restraint. Sometimes, among our Primitive Methodist friends, we hear the same kind of thing; they are so-carried away by the power of the truth which has just been stated that they cannot refrain from crying out, “Glory!” or “Hallelujah!” Throughout all Wales, this custom, which I am far from condemning, prevails the whole sermon through, often very much to the comfort of the speaker, enlivening him, and cheering him on, and making him rise to greater flights than otherwise he might have taken. Perhaps we may look at this interruption of the affectionate woman in that light.

Possibly, however, there was bold, blank ignorance rather than intense affection. Hers may have been a sort of vacant wonder at what she had heard; and, involuntarily, she betrayed it with her tongue. So have I noticed, sometimes, when I have been preaching the Word among our Primitive Methodist friends, that they have not always put the “Glory!” in at the right place, or the observation with which they have favoured us has been as inappropriate as it well could be. Though I have been glad, at times, to hear some emotional response when it seemed to come from true sensibility, and was compatible with common sense, I

have not been quite so gratified when ignorance has been the prompter. Perhaps it was so with this woman. Such, at least, is the opinion of many sound expositors, and Jesus does not appear to commend her at all. She was a poor ignorant soul, who perhaps had never listened to any preaching before, and certainly had never listened to such preaching as that of Jesus Christ, and so she cried out, in a sort of stupid wonder, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked."

Anyhow, whichever it might be, this woman was but a specimen of very many in her own age, and a representative of many millions in successive ages. She turned her admiration, you perceive, from the person of Christ to the person of his mother. There was some sort of tendency of this kind on other occasions in Christ's life, and he rebuked it, as he did here; for, you will observe, though he says nothing disrespectful of his mother, yet he does at once put the extinguisher upon everything like blessing her as though she were so highly favoured above all other believers in himself. On the occasion of the marriage in Cana of Galilee, Jesus answered his mother—I will not say roughly,—that was not possible to him,—but somewhat sternly, when he said, "Woman, what have I to do with t'ee? mine hour is not yet come." He purposely discouraged what he must have perceived was the natural tendency of people's minds to reverence his mother unduly; and it does seem marvellous, to any thinking man, that after such words as these of my text, Mariolatry should have prevailed in the Church of Rome to so frightful an extent as it has done, and as it still does. Why, for every prayer offered to Jesus Christ, I believe there are fifty, at the present moment, offered to the Virgin Mary. At all events, in the Romanist's rosary, there are nine beads for the "Hail Mary" to every one for "Our Father."

Observe, that she is to be held in profound respect, she is "blessed among women;" there should never come from the lips of any Christian a single word of disrespect to her; she was highly favoured, she was a sort of second Eve, as Eve brought forth sin, this woman, this second Eve, brought forth the Lord who is our salvation. She does stand in a very high position; but, still, in no respect is she to be an object of worship; by no means is she to be lifted up and extolled as though she were immaculately conceived, and afterwards lived without sin, and were taken up, as the Papists declare, by a marvellous assumption into heaven,—an assumption, indeed, on their part, and nothing better than an assumption, without any foundation whatever in fact. No, brethren, the Virgin Mary was a sinner, saved by grace, as you and I are. That Saviour, whom she brought forth, was a Saviour to her as much as to us. She had to be washed from sin, both original and contracted, in the precious blood of her own Child, "the Son of the Highest;" neither could she have entered heaven unless he had pronounced her absolution, and she had been, as we are, "accepted in the Beloved." Yet I do not wonder that there was a tendency to exalt her unduly; however, I do marvel much that, after Christ has spoken so plainly and so expressly, men should

have had the impudence, and the devil should have had the audacity, to delude millions of professing Christians into a worship of her, who is to be revered, but never to be adored.

If you look at the text, you will see that there is something very beautiful about it. This woman pronounced a benediction upon the Virgin Mary; Christ lifts that off, and puts it on all his people. She said, "Blessed is the woman who brought thee forth." "Yea," said Jesus, "she is blessed; but (in the very same sense,) they are blessed who hear the Word of God, and keep it." Thus, my brethren, whatever blessings pertain to Mary, pertain to you, and pertain to me, if we hear the Word of God, and keep it; whatever we may suppose to have been the mercies comprehended in her being so highly favoured a person, those very same mercies are yours and mine, if, hearing the Word of God, we truly keep it.

I. It is supposed, and very naturally, by many, that it would have been a delightful thing to have been the mother of our Lord, BECAUSE, THEN, WE SHOULD HAVE HAD THE HONOUR OF THE CLOSEST ASSOCIATION WITH HIM.

To have seen that infant in his cradle, and nursed him upon one's knees, to have marked the ripening years of the Holy Child, to have observed his gracious words, his holy piety, his complete obedience to his parents, to have remained with him the thirty years which, doubtless, Joseph and Mary spent with their honoured, glorious Son, must have been no small boon. The same spirit, you know, comes out in Mrs. Luke's pretty hymn, such a favourite with our dear children, which we all of us love to sing,—

"I think, when I read that sweet story of old,  
When Jesus was here among men,  
How he called little children as lambs to his fold;  
I should like to have been with them then.

"I wish that his hands had been placed on my head,  
That his arms had been thrown around me;  
And that I might have seen his kind look when he said,  
'Let the little ones come unto me.'

Yes, many a mother might feel that, to be kissed with those little lips, to have had her neck surrounded by those blessed arms, to have had her eyes looked into with the love-flashing eyes of such a Child as that, would have been a boon to be craved for every day. Well, so it looks, beloved; and yet, if we come to think rightly of it, the illusion is quickly dispelled. It was a high privilege to be associated with Christ; but, unless spiritually sanctified, it was a solemn responsibility sinking the soul deeper in guilt, rather than raising it higher in sanctification. Let me venture to remind you of one, who had the very closest intimacy with Christ in the days of his public ministry; he was so trusted by the Saviour that he kept the little treasury in which Christ put, when there were any, the excessive gifts of charity; he was the treasurer of the little company, you know him,—Judas. He had been with Jesus almost everywhere; he had been his familiar friend and acquaintance, and when he dipped the bread with him in the sop, it was but an

indication of the close association which had been preserved between the Divine Master and a vile creature who was utterly unworthy of such a privilege. There was never such another "son of perdition" as Judas, the friend and acquaintance of Christ. Never has any other man sunk so low in the depths of divine wrath, with so huge a mill-stone about his neck, as this man with whom Christ took such sweet counsel, and went to the house of God in company. The same sun ripens the corn and the poppies. This man was ripened in guilt by the same external process that ripened others in holiness.

It is not, then, after all, so great a boon, looked at as a natural blessing. But, whatever the boon may be, it is open to every Christian spiritually. Beloved you may have an acquaintance with Christ, if you are his people, quite as near, and far more enduring than any acquaintance which his mother could have gained by merely dandling him on her knees, or supplying his wants from her breast. To-day, you may talk with Jesus; ye heirs of heaven, your Divine Elder Brother's company is free to you; you have but to go to him, and he will bring you into his banqueting-house, and his banner over you shall be love. Still is his left hand under the head of his saints, and his right hand doth embrace them. There are dearer things than even the infant Christ could give to his mother; there are kisses of his lips more sweet, more spiritual, than any which Mary received. You have but to long for them, and to pine after them; and, when you get them, you have but to prize them, and you shall have them every day. I trust, beloved, some of us need not cry with the spouse in the Song, "O that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! when I should find thee without, I would kiss thee;" for we can say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his. . . . Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples; for I am sick of love." I say, then, that all the honour of associating with Christ may be had, at the present moment, by his people; the sweetest of fellowship can be enjoyed by us, in the highest and purest sense, so that the blessing which Mary had is ours, and we may say, with Christ, "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it."

II. Again, it is naturally supposed, by some, that it must have been a sweet thing to be the mother of our Lord, BECAUSE, THEN, WE SHOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER ACQUAINTED WITH HIM, AND HAVE KNOWN MORE OF HIS HEART.

If he had any secrets, surely he would confide them to his mother. There must have oozed out, in his private life, some things which men did not see in public. Perhaps there may have been something which he could not very well unveil to the gaze of the million, which would be perceived by Joseph and by his admiring mother. She was behind the scenes; she had the benefit of looking into his very heart in a way in which we cannot do it. Well, there may be something in that; but I do not think there is much. I do not know that Mary knew more than others; what she did know, she did well to lay up in her heart; but she does not appear, from anything we read in the Gospels, to have been a better-instructed believer than any other of Christ's disciples; and we

have no indication of her having made any extraordinary advances in the spiritual instruction which her Son had given.

But certain is it that, whatever Mary may have found out, you and I may find out now,—not naturally, but spiritually. Do you wonder that I should say so? Here is a text to prove it: “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant.” I remember also the Master’s words where he said, “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” Nay, so blessedly does this Divine Revealer of secrets tell us what is in his heart that he keepeth back nothing which is profitable to us, and can say to us as he said to his disciples, “If it were not so, I would have told you.” Christ keeps nothing back from his chosen. Between the heart of a true saint and Christ there are no secrets; we pour our hearts into his heart, and he pours back his heart into ours. Doth he not, this day, manifest himself unto us as he doth not unto the world? You know that he does; and therefore you will not ignorantly cry out, as this woman did, “Blessed is the womb that bare thee;” but you will intelligently bless God that, having heard the Word, and kept it, you have, first of all, as true a communion with the Saviour as the Virgin had, and you have, in the second place, as true an acquaintance with the secrets of his heart as she can be supposed to have obtained.

III. Further, perhaps a more common remark is this, “I wish that I had been Christ’s mother, that I MIGHT HAVE NURSED HIM, AND SUPPLIED HIS NEEDS, watched him in his weakness, put him to his rest, and heard the first lisplings when he began to speak. Oh, it would have been something to have said, when I was in heaven, that I had nursed the One who is now exalted far above all principalities and powers, that I listened to the cry of his infancy, and relieved his needs.”

Well, that would be something; but let me say to you that you may have it, beloved,—every child of God should have it. Christ is on earth still,—not as to his bodily person, but as to his mystical person; and you may still nurse that mystical person. We, ministers of God, are we not nursing fathers unto the Church of God? And you, each of you, in your sphere, as you teach the ignorant, guide the wandering, and comfort those that are bowed down, are hearing the plaintive cry of a suffering Saviour, and you are, with the breasts of your consolation, supplying the wants of his yet infant Church. Perhaps it is better, and nobler far, to have the honour of nursing Christ’s mystical body than it was to care for his corporeal frame, because there is a much wider range here. It was but a little cup he needed, it was but a morsel and a drop the Saviour wanted sometimes; but now his great body, stretched as it is from Japan to America,—his great body, found as it is in every part of this world,—his great body, found in yonder sick ones, in yonder poverty-stricken ones, requires vastly more, and therefore of your substance you may give more, yea,

your whole strength you may offer up, that you may feed him, and supply his spiritual wants. Whatever honour, then, the Virgin had in this respect, Christ's pure virgins may still have if they will wait upon his Church, and minister to it of their heart's substance.

"Jesus, poorest of the poor!  
Man of sorrows! Child of grief!  
Happy they whose bounteous store  
Minister'd to thy relief.

"Jesus, though thy head is crown'd,  
Crown'd with loftiest majesty,  
In thy members thou art found,  
Plunged in deepest poverty.

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"They who feed thy sick and faint  
For THYSELF a banquet find;  
They who clothe the naked saint  
Round THY loins the raiment bind."

IV. It may be very possible that some others have looked at it in another way. They have said, "Blessed is the womb that bare him, and the paps that gave him suck; for had it been our lot to be his mother, then we believe HE WOULD HAVE BEEN READY TO HEAR OUR CRY, for a son cannot surely resist the prayer of his own mother; and when a mother says, 'My son, help me, I am sinful; I believe in thee, help me;' when she cries out to him whom she had conceived, 'Help me, blot out my sins,' why surely Jesus would heed, with ready ear, and say, 'Mother, thy sins are forgiven thee.'"

But, beloved, this is only our fancy, for Christ is just as ready to save any sinner in this place as he was to save his mother, for it is his greatest delight to see a sinner, with tears in his eyes, crying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." If I had power to pardon you, I think you know how cheerfully I would do it. Oh, could I break your hearts, and bind them up again, God knoweth that I would not let this night pass without doing it; and do you think that my Lord and Master is less loving than I am? You feel, if he were here to-night, and you were his mother, that he would be sure to hear your cry, and answer you; but Jesus Christ said, on one occasion, as he looked upon the crowd gathered together, when someone said to him, "Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee;"—what did he say? "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" and then he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, "Behold my mother, and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." And you, if you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall not stand second to his mother, nay, shall I not say it? you shall even have the preference. Christ was preaching, and they said, "Here is thy mother." Did he

stop to attend to his mother first? Nay, but first he would feed his disciples, first he would teach them; and so, sinner, thou shalt not be second to the mother of the Saviour. Do but cry to him now. Oh, that the Holy Spirit might show thee thy lost state, reveal to thee thy need, and put a penitent cry into thy mouth; for, when thou canst cry, "Jesus, pity me, and save me," thou mayest cry to him with the greatest confidence, for—

"He is able, he is willing,  
Doubt no more."

You need not seek to move his heart with many cries; for his heart is moved already. He loves the sons of men; his delights are with them. You cannot do him a greater service than by letting him save you. Submit yourself, with all your emptiness, to the fulness of his unspeakable compassion. Is there not a thought here that might woo some,—I am holding it now like a loadstone,—is there no metal here that will be attracted by it? The love of Christ to his people, to poor sinners who seek him, is as great as any love he ever had to his mother, and even greater; you may come with boldness to him, though you never sought his face before.

V. Again, methinks some have thought that, if they had been his mother, THEY COULD HAVE COME TO HIM WITH GREATER EASE.

"It is so easy to speak to one whom we know. We are not at all afraid to tell out our wants to one who has been so near to us as Christ was to his mother." Yet I would have you remember that Christ, as the Son of God, was not the Son of Mary; Christ, the Divine Saviour, was no nearer to Mary than he is to us. Christ was merely the man Christ that was conceived in her womb, or that sucked at her breasts; and, therefore, in his divine person, he towers as much above her as he does above us. And then, though he was born of the substance of his mother, yet was he of our substance too, for he is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh,—a man, such as we are. If he were an angel, being of a different kind, we might be afraid to come to him; but he is a man, he has a man's emotions, a man's heart, a man's compassion, a man's love, and we need not be afraid to come to him. What though he was not born of us, yet is he of us; though we are not his mother, yet are we his brothers. So let us come boldly to him. Sinner, thou hast as much right to come as ever Mary had. She had none except what grace gave her; thou hast the same. Did Christ ever cast away one sinner who came to him? Nay, did he ever reject one that ever was brought to him? There was a woman taken in adultery, and she did not come willingly, but they brought her to him, thinking, "Surely, Christ will condemn her." What was the result? After driving all her adversaries away, he said to her, "Go, and sin no more." And so will he say to thee if thy doubts and tremblings and fears should bring thee to him. When he casts one soul away, then let other souls be afraid to come to him; but while my blessed Master stands with open arms, and takes the foulest, and vilest, and poorest to

minister unto his love, I pray you stand not back through shame or fear. As much as if you were his mother, and he your Child, come to him, for he invites you to come, saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." With tearful eyes, he entreats you to come to him; and if you will not, he doth but relieve his heart by crying, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

VI. Perhaps, if you will think this over, you will see much more that is beautiful. Sure I am, there is no topic more consolatory than that which my text contains. THE VERY BLESSING WHICH BELONGED TO THE VIRGIN MOTHER OF JESUS BELONGS TO EVERY SOUL THAT HEARS GOD'S WORD, AND KEEPS IT.

Now you hear it. Do you hear it with your inside ears, with the ears of your heart; and when you hear it, do you keep it in your memory? Do you keep it in your faith? Do you try to keep it in your obedience? And are you daily testifying to its truth? If so, all these blessings are yours; and let me say to any trembling, awakened, convicted sinner, all these blessings may be yours if you hear the Word of God, and keep it to-night. Here are one or two words of God that I want you to keep: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Will you not come and reason with God, and talk this matter over? You have heard the Word, I pray you to keep it; that is, to obey it. Here is another message from the Word: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." You have heard that, keep it; believe that, although you are a sinner, he came to save you; rest in it, trust in it. Here is one more, and I pray you, as you hear it, keep it: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." You have heard it; now keep it. To believe is to trust; trust Christ now; I pray God to constrain you to do it before you pass those doors. Fall flat on your face upon Christ's promise; as for your own righteousness, away with it to the dogs! No prayer, no tears, no vows, no sighs, of yours can do anything in the matter. Trust Jesus Christ wholly now; then, if you have heard that Word, and shall thus keep it, go your way, and let Satan say what he will, and let the flesh make what noise it pleases, Christ has blessed you, and you are blessed; he has said to you, sinners as you are, "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it." When you and I get to heaven, may we find it to be so! May we glory there, and sing as loud a song as even Mary did, when she said, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden;"—for all generations may call that one blessed who has sought and found the Saviour. O beloved, even in heaven, that song of Mary shall make a sweet song for us all. May we begin to sing it here, and Christ shall have the praise. Amen.