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**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON**

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON.  
MAY 3.  
THE PRODIGAL SON,  
LESSON: Luke xv., 11-32.  
GOLDEN TEXT: Luke xv., 18.

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight."

THE NARRATIVE.

Our lesson to-day completes the teaching of our Lord for the comfort of publicans and sinners, and for the rebuke of Pharisees and scribes.

We have so long described this story as the parable of the prodigal son that we may never hope to change the title, and perhaps it would be unwise to attempt to do so. We may nevertheless remind ourselves with some profit that the word "prodigal" does not occur in the story; and moreover, that its meaning draws attention first to the father, and then to the sons. It is really the parable of the perfect father. It is an unveiling of the heart of God.

All this is flung up into clear relief by the background. In that background we first see the son, self-centred and without natural affection. No man who had a proper love for his father could have acted as this man did. All that followed was the result of this condition. The waywardness that took him away from his home, the waste of the substance which his father had bestowed upon him, the wickedness of the life in the far country, and the awful want in which his father had bestowed upon the inevitable consequences of his condition of heart. In the background also we see the citizens of the far country, and perhaps the whole story concerning them in their relationship to this young man may be told by saying that they helped the waste

and neglected the want. When he had spent all, and became conscious of the famine, they further degraded him by sending him into their fields to feed swine. This degradation is seen when we remember that our Lord was speaking to the Jews. The picture is that of a young Jew, who had crossed over into Gentile territory. When these men of the far country sent him to feed swine, they did what Gentiles, alas, have too persistently done; they insulted him by compelling him to gain his living through an occupation which was instinctively repulsive to him.

In the foreground of the wonderful picture is the father. If for a moment we are surprised at his consent to give this man the substance for which he demanded it, it is because we forget that in the economy of God's dealings with men, and therefore in the true economy of the dealing of any father with his children, every son must be allowed to work out what is in him. While not stated in so many words, the picture most clearly reveals the father as loving and suffering throughout the whole time of the wandering of his son. At last in the far country came the day when the son remembered his father, and the home, and returned. It is at this point that all the glory and grace of the heart of the father is revealed. He saw the son while yet a great way off, and ran to meet him. He received him without reproach, seeing that his face was now turned back again. He heard and cut short his confession, restoring him in abundance of love and with overflowing bounty, to the privileges of his sonship.

To this picture, so full of beauty, the Lord added words most evidently intended for the rebuke of men out of sympathy with this attitude of God as

THE TEACHING.

The teaching of the parable concerning the Father is, as we have seen, supreme; and as to that, nothing can be added to the picture itself. Suffice it to say that this is Christ's one great word-picture of His Father, and it explains, so far as that is possible to us, all the suffering which He endured, and the resoluteness with which, in spite of all opposition, He gave Himself to those who were most in need.

The teaching as to the sons is of course full of beauty for us. Dean Allford said: "We are all in turn examples of both brothers, having the seeds of both evil courses in our hearts." I remember several years ago hearing Mr. Samuel Chadwick preach a remarkable sermon on this parable, the theme of which was the perfect Son. In that sermon he showed how neither of these sons was perfect, and that the One Who uttered the parable was Himself the true Son of His Father; first in that He never departed from Him, wasted His substance, nor brought discredit on His name; and secondly in that He was in such full sympathy with His Father's heart that He not only welcomed back the wanderer to Himself, but Himself took the journey into the far country, to find him and to bring him home.

It is for us to remember that the mission of Christ was that of bringing many sons to glory, which not only means the restoration of the wanderer, but the fulfilling in him of the perfect ideal of sonship.

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2219-4-30M10.

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Business—Reports of the Provincial Directors, election of Permanent Board; general business.

Dated at Charlottetown, P. E. I. this 27th day of April, 1914.

C. J. STEWART,  
Provincial Secretary.

2231-4-30M21.

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