

PARABLES OF JESUS

by Coghian

Coghian's study of the parables of Jesus, examining the stories Christ told to illustrate the truths of the Kingdom of God, with attention to their original context and enduring application.

38 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 0.2 Preface
2. 0.3 Introduction
3. 1.00 Parables recorded in Three Gospels
4. 1.01 The Lighted Lamp
5. 1.02 New Cloth On Old Garment
6. 1.03 New Wine in Old Wineskins
7. 1.04 The Sower
8. 1.05 The Grain of Mustard-Seed
9. 1.06 The Wicked Husbandmen
10. 1.07 Parable of the Fig-Tree
11. 2.00 Parables recorded in Two Gospels
12. 2.01 Building of House On Rock or Sand
13. 2.02 The Leaven
14. 2.03 The Lost Sheep
15. 2.04 The Talents the Pounds
16. 3.00 Parables recorded in One Gospel only
17. 3.01 The Darnel Sown Among the Wheat
18. 3.02 The Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price
19. 3.03 The Dragnet
20. 3.04 The Unmerciful Servant
21. 3.05 The Labourers in the Vineyard
22. 3.06 The Two Sons
23. 3.07 The Marriage of the King's Son
24. 3.08 The Ten Virgins
25. 3.09 The Seed Growing of Itself
26. 3.10 The Two Debtors
27. 3.11 The Good Samaritan
28. 3.12 The Importunate Friend
29. 3.13 The Foolish Rich Man
30. 3.14 The Barren Fig-Tree
31. 3.15 The Great Supper
32. 3.16 Building of Tower King Going to War
33. 3.17 The Lost Piece of Money
34. 3.18 The Prodigal Son
35. 3.19 The Unjust Steward
36. 3.20 The Rich Man and Lazarus
37. 3.21 The Unjust Judge
38. 3.22 The Pharisee and the Publican

0.2 Preface

PREFACE THE Parables convey the teaching of Jesus in an intuitive and practical form. They contain nothing that is merely theoretical or speculative, no subtle disquisitions on matters that have no bearing on life or conduct. In them the essential unchanging duties of man are so presented as to be within the comprehension of the simple and unlearned. They were originally spoken, not written; and they were addressed to people for the most part rough and uneducated. Jesus spoke not only to His contemporaries, but for all time, and so we may believe that He looked out beyond those who gathered about Him on the hillside, or who listened expectantly to Him on the shores of the Lake of Gennesaret, or who formed a narrower circle of hearers like those who sat at table with Him in the house of Simon the Pharisee, to others distant in time and place whom He also wished His words to reach. Still, it is most natural to believe that the needs and capacity of His immediate hearers decided for Him at once the form and the matter of the Parables.

It is well to be clear on this point, because on it depends to a large extent the question of their interpretation. When a teacher makes choice of the spoken word as his channel of instruction without any prospect of its being soon reduced to writing, and when in addition he uses a figurative narrative for the purpose of conveying a single lesson to an audience whose minds have not been trained if, in deed, any training could achieve such an object to penetrate what is figurative and perceive beneath it, not only in the gross, but also in particulars, the lesson which it is intended to convey such a speaker must be more or less of an impressionist whose chief aim it is to produce an effect as a whole; while for his purpose details have no significance except in as far as they can contribute to this end, and so receive no such prominence

PREFACE vii as would enable them to attract to themselves overmuch attention, to the prejudice of the general effect which he has in view. The teaching of the Parables embraces the whole duty of man. The value of the individual human soul in itself, and its relations towards its Creator, are taught; but the great fact that man is a social being is equally emphasized. The neighbour is nowhere represented as an evil, even if a necessary evil, against whom the Christian who would be perfect must be on his guard, and with whom the less he has to do, the better. It is no wonder that love of the neighbour should occupy that important place in the Parables which we see it hold elsewhere in the teaching of Jesus. In Him as man the love of God for man received its supreme expression; and we may say with all reverence that this expression was conditioned by and dependent on the estimate which He had formed of man, an estimate equally removed from the exaggerations of those who on the one hand would deify human nature, and of those who viii PREFACE on the other would regard it as wholly depraved, or, if they did not choose to go so far, had formed so unfavourable an opinion of it as would make them cease to feel, if they were only consistent, any affection for it or any interest in its welfare. While His ideal of the ethical and spiritual heights to which man could attain was of the loftiest, His recognition of the weakness of human nature led Him to make allowance for the frailties of sinners who came across His path; and His severest denunciations were reserved for those who, deceived by a false belief in their

own moral and religious superiority, instead of sympathy, felt only contempt for their erring fellow-men. Nor was His charity confined to relieving the spiritual needs of those who appealed to Him.

Whatever might be the cause that evoked it, "the still, sad music of humanity" sounded evermore in His ears and met with a warm and effective response. In this little work I have endeavoured in simple language to bring home to the reader the lessons which the Parables teach, lessons

PREFACE ix as necessary to-day as they were nearly 1900 years ago, while attempting, within of course obvious limits, to treat the subject scientifically. I am convinced that works of the kind should appeal equally to the intelligence and to what, for want of a better name, I may term the devotional faculty within us. It would be an evil day when the terms "intellectual" and "spiritual" were regarded as in a certain sense opposed. And yet there seems to exist in some quarters a tacit acceptance of the principle that a religious writer whose chief aim it is to influence in a practical manner the life and conduct of his readers should address himself less to their intelligence than to their feelings. Surely this principle receives no support from Scripture or the Fathers or the great Scholastics. The writings of St. Paul exhibit in a certain degree the characteristics of all these; and yet, while heart speaks to heart in almost every line, the appeal to the intelligence is equally forcible.

I regret that I have not been able to treat the important problem of the transmission

PREFACE of the Parables. I could not have done so without touching on the Synoptic question, and I have not had time to revise my studies on this subject in the light which recent decisions of the Biblical Commission have thrown upon it.

Many of the Parables have for their theme the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven; others have a relation to it more or less direct. Accordingly, no treatment of the Parables would be complete in which this important subject was passed over.

Besides, it is essentially connected with the larger eschatological problem which has assumed so great a place in recent Protestant theological thought. Referring to the difficulty created by certain sayings of Our Lord which would seem to indicate that He regarded His Return as imminent, an Anglican of the younger school not long ago wrote, "It is here, surely, that the storm-centre of theological speculation resides at the present moment," adding that "it is probable enough

PREFACE that this, and not the controversy about miracle, will be for the next generation the great intellectual difficulty of the Christian religion." Whether this forecast is correct time alone will tell. It would seem, however, that Catholic writers have hardly given the subject the attention which it deserves. The fact that here they feel no difficulty themselves ought not to make them deaf to the call of others who in their perplexity search eagerly for a solution of those difficulties which disquiet them, and to whom help from any quarter would be welcome. In the Introduction I have endeavoured to meet the more usual objections: how imperfectly and inadequately I have done so, I am only too conscious. The reader of this book will not find the Parables arranged in a logical order. I have first given those Parables which are reproduced by all three Synoptic Evangelists, then those which appear both in St. Matthew and St. Luke, and finally those which are found in one Gospel only. These last I have given in xii PREFACE the order in which they occur in the Gospels.

I might have taken, as many writers have done, a much larger number of parables, but I have not thought it necessary to do so.

Those which I have omitted are for the most part in the nature of similitudes or comparisons. It is rather strange that, as far as I know and I have endeavoured to verify the statement by consulting the apparently full bibliographies in foreign works no English Catholic writer has attempted a systematic presentation of the Parables. In English, Trench's book is the classical work on the subject. In some respects it is undeniably a fine work; and yet I have been able to derive singularly little help from it. Before reading Hilcher's remark that it does not betray the faintest trace of a critical spirit, I had already felt the same conclusion forced upon myself.

I would strongly recommend all who make use of this work to read for themselves in the New Testament the particular parable which they may wish to study, and, when it is recorded by more than one Evangelist, to

PREFACE xiii compare carefully the different versions. The references from one passage to another in our ordinary Catholic Bibles, though regret tably meagre, will, if diligently used, be a great help towards finding out the genuine sense of Scripture. It is a pity that many who have a deep personal devotion towards Our Lord should habitually prefer to listen to Him, not as directly addressing them, but through some medium, just as if one should prefer the portrait to the living person him self. They cannot excuse themselves on the ground that the knowledge which He imparts is too high for them, and that they are not able to attain unto it: 1 we have already seen to what a humble class of hearers He usually spoke. More than ever at the present day we should draw directly from their source that light and strength and comfort of which we all experience so much need.

PHILIP COGHLAN, C.P ST. JOSEPH'S RETREAT, HIGHQATE HILL, N.

1 Psalms 139:6.

0.3 Introduction

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

INTRODUCTION

I. THE Hebrew word for parable, *mashal*, the root idea of which is that of resemblance, has an application extensive enough to include figurative language of every kind. We find it more than once in Ezechiel (xvii. 2, 24:3) in the ordinary sense of parable. It also stands as the equivalent of aphorism, gnome (e.g, Proverbs 1:1, Proverbs 1:6, Proverbs 1:10:1; Ecclesiastes 12:9; Job 13:12); and thence by a natural transition it acquires the sense of proverb (e.g, Ezech. 18:2 /.). Finally, on account of the laws of parallelism of Hebrew poetry, each verse of which consists of two or more members in which much the same idea is repeated in a different form and which members must in consequence have a mutual resemblance, various classes of poetry are designated by

1 2 THE PARABLES OF JESUS the term “ parable.” It is applied to the poetic prophecy of Balaam (Numbers 23:7, Numbers 23:18); to the didactic speech of Job (xxvii. 1, 29:1). The magnificent ode, partly paeon, partly elegy (Isaiah 14:3 - Isaiah 14:20) bears the same title. In the New Testament, the term “ parable “(Greek *parabole*, a placing beside or opposite, comparison) is likewise used in different senses.

Sometimes it stands for type or symbol (e.g, Hebrews 9:9); but it is most extensively used to denote a real or fictitious history related more or less in detail, and intended as the vehicle of some moral or religious truth. Sometimes, instead of a history, a similitude in the form of a simple natural phenomenon (e.g, the budding of the fig-tree, Matthew 24:32); or some image from everyday life (e.g, the man allotting to his servants their various duties before he sets out for another country, Mark 13:34) serves the same purpose and receives the name of parable.

We have seen that parables in the ordinary New Testament signification of the term already existed several centuries before Christ. These, however, are few in comparison with the parables derived from rabbinic THE PARABLES OF JESUS 3 sources which are still extant, and which furnish much help toward the understanding of Our Lord’s parables. Some of them are the work of His contemporaries; others belong to later periods. The parable differs from the fable in this respect, that, while in the former the speakers and actors are usually human, in the latter they are as a rule irrational or even sometimes inanimate beings represented as endowed with reason and the faculty of speech. In the Bible we have a specimen of the fable in that of the Trees (Judges 9:8 ff.). A distinction more important for the interpretation of the parables of Jesus is that between the parable in the strict sense of the term, and allegory. The term “parable” often includes the parable proper and the allegory; but we should frequently fail to understand Our Lord’s real meaning if we mistook for an allegory what He intended either as a parable, or and this is often the case as something partaking of the nature of both. In parable and in allegory alike, and, indeed, in all figurative language used for an ethical or spiritual purpose, two ele- 4 THE PARABLES OF JESUS

merits are found: one figurative, the other real the former being the narrative, phenomenon, or other object of actual or possible observation, the latter, the moral or religious truth which it illustrates. Some hold that the difference between parable and allegory consists in this, that the allegory needs interpretation, while the parable at least, once the situation envisaged is known is self-explanatory. We are obliged to reject this view for the simple reason that it does not stand the test of practical application, and, besides, it seems to constitute something external to parable and allegory the ground of the intrinsic distinction between them.

Broadly stated, the difference between them consists in this, that, whereas in the parable only one point in the figurative half is formally relevant, in the allegory all the leading points have their counterpart in the corresponding real half. We shall return later to the subject.

II.

While the parabolic method of teaching was not confined to the Hebrews, their adoption of it was quite in conformity with the THE PARABLES OF JESUS 5 national mentality, or, to speak, perhaps, more correctly, with the stage of intellectual development which they had reached. The Hebrew-mind as such finds in philosophy nothing alien to it. This is sufficiently proved by the success with which medieval Jews studied the Greek philosophers, notably Aristotle; and in more recent times men like Baruch Spinoza and Moses Mendelssohn, grandfather of the celebrated composer, and styled the Jewish Socrates, have demonstrated that the Hebrew intellect is capable of original thinking in the domain of philosophy. In ancient times, however, the outlook of the Jews on life was not so much reflective as intuitive and eminently practical.

They thought and spoke in the concrete; they did not trouble themselves about questions which had no direct bearing on life or action. This was especially true of the Jews in earlier Old Testament times. Still, when a people has arrived at a certain stage of intellectual development, it is only to be expected that they should be moved to search for a solution of some at least of the difficult problems which force themselves on the C THE PARABLES OF JESUS attention of men who are more thoughtful than the ordinary run of their contemporaries. We see, however, from the Old Testament that, when a Jew took a problem of this kind in hand, he treated it in a characteristic manner. An example will make this plain. In earlier times the pious Hebrew rested content with the conviction that here below the good received in temporal prosperity the reward of their virtuous deeds, while, on the other hand, trouble and adversity were sure sooner or later to overtake the wicked on this side of the tomb; or, in case they themselves were fortunate enough to escape, it was believed, on account of the prevalent idea of the solidarity of the family, that retribution would fall upon their descendants. In course of time experience showed that as a rule earthly prosperity and adversity were not dealt out to men according to their merits; and, besides, it was felt that punishment to be just and real must light upon the guilty man himself, not upon his children or children's children. To this conviction Job feelingly gives expression: "God, ye say, reserveth his (the sinner's) calamity for his children. Let THE PARABLES OF JESUS 7

Him requite himself that he may feel it, let his own eyes see his destruction, and let him drink of the wrath of the Almighty. For what concern hath he for his house after him, when the number of his months is accomplished?"] Hence it was that men began to look for a solution that would reconcile the seeming injustice of the temporal lot of many with the wisdom and justice of God. This is the problem of the Book of Job, and we see how it is treated in a manner as little abstract

and as concrete as possible. The simple view of life sufficient for preceding generations, and which still found defenders in Job's friends, is shown to be false. The wisdom which is essential for man to know, and which suffices him, is eminently practical, it consists in the fear of God and the avoidance of evil. 2 The problem proposed is not solved; but in effect the conclusion arrived at, and given virtually though not stated formally, is that man must acquiesce in his lot as ordered by One whose power and wisdom are set forth in magnificent language. In Ecclesiastes a problem of a different order, Wherein 1 Job 21:19 ft. 2 Job xxviiH. 28| 8 THE PARABLES OF JESUS does true wisdom consist? is handled in a similar manner. The time had not yet come when knowledge would be largely based on the careful, prolonged, and co-ordinated observation and investigation of phenomena; but the ancient Hebrews resembled the modern scientist in this, that their knowledge was less the result of deductive processes than of experience. in.

It is no wonder, then, that in Our Lord's time the parable was a popular means of religious instruction amongst His country men. It presented in a vivid manner the lessons it was intended to convey. It made no fatiguing demands on the mind; the truth of which it was the medium was set before the hearer in such a manner that he could readily grasp its meaning; and as the figurative half of the parable was represented to him under the form of sensible images, what he thus learned was easily remembered.

It was only natural that Jesus should speak in parables. Just as His manners and customs were those of His country, so between His mode of speaking and teaching and that THE PARABLES OF JESUS 9 of the rabbins of His day there was a striking agreement in point of form, great as was the difference between them in point of matter.

Though His doctrine was to hold good for all time, it was cast in a Jewish mould. His manner of teaching was in harmony with His mother-tongue, which allowed, or rather demanded, a freer mode of expression than the Greek; and we look in vain for anything in His utterances which would compel us to regard them as possessing any kinship with those of the ancient philosophers. Just as, if we had a faithful portrait of Him, we should find that His features were of the Syrian type of those times, even so His speech and action reflected those affinities in the intellectual order which attached Him to His fellowcountrymen.

IV. The Synoptic Evangelists give another reason why Jesus taught the people in parables. When the disciples had heard the parable of the Sower, they came and asked Him: "Why speakest Thou in parables unto them?" He answered: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to them 10 THE PARABLES OF JESUS that are without all things are done in parables, that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand, lest they should be converted and forgiven." 1 The answer refers to Isaiah 6:9.; indeed, St. Matthew states that Our Lord regarded the situation as a fulfilment of this prophecy. The whole incident is related differently by the three Synoptists, but there is substantial agreement between them. The words of Jesus undoubtedly create difficulties. Why was it that in addressing the people He deliberately adopted a style of speaking that was unintelligible to them? Was this action of His the punishment of some sin or infidelity of theirs; or was it merely a part of Providence, of the scheme of Pre destination and Reprobation, affecting the individual or the nation or humanity at large, involving only the denial of a grace which was not their due? No Catholic can accept the solution of many critics namely, that the words in question as well as the

subsequent interpretation of the parable did not originate with Jesus, but simply reflect the mind of the 1 Matthew 13:10 ff.; Mark iv. 11/; Luke 8:9/. THE PARABLES OF JESUS II

Church at a later date. The solution of the problem is not to be sought for exclusively in the passages referred to. As in so many other points, an obscure passage in Holy Scripture receives light from other passages where the meaning is clearer. Further, statements cast in form, which if met with in authors of the present day would have to be taken strictly as so intended, need not be accepted in the same light when made by Biblical writers or speakers.

All Our Lord's teaching was connected with the Kingdom of Heaven: its primary and immediate aim was to prepare men's minds for its coming. He spoke fully and freely of this preparation and of the need of it; but of the nature of the Kingdom itself He spoke sparingly and with reserve, and only as people could hear it. This appears evident, not only from the absence of any clear statement on the subject in the Gospels, but also from the wellascertained fact that even to the last the disciples themselves laboured under a complete misconception of the nature of the Kingdom. We may not draw a sharp line between His public teaching and the instruction which He imparted in private to His disciples, as if the former was exoteric and the latter esoteric; we cannot, however, ignore the fact that, when it was a question of the knowledge of the "mysteries of the kingdom of God,"¹ He spoke with less reserve to His disciples, without, at the same time, wholly lifting the veil which temporarily obscured the subject. On the whole we may regard His teaching as clear or obscure according to the nature of the subject which he treated.

He practised a prudent economy in accommodating His teaching to the capacity and receptiveness of His hearers; and at the same time He charitably lessened their responsibility in proportion to the difficulty of understanding Him which naturally, though not necessarily, resulted from that particular medium of instruction which He employed. We see the immense difficulty which the Apostles themselves had in assimilating His teaching as to the real nature of His mission and of the Kingdom which He preached men who had

¹ The word "mystery" here is not to be taken in the sense of something incomprehensible, but rather in the usual New Testament sense of something hidden, a secret. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 13
been admitted to close and constant companionship with Him: how hopeless, then, it would have been to expect that the people at large would exhibit an intelligence and a spiritual receptiveness which the Apostles themselves were so far from showing! It would be unbecoming of us to think that Our Lord in His parables simply propounded to the people a series of enigmas on which they might unsuccessfully exercise their ingenuity. Such a notion would be inconsistent with His character of Shepherd and Saviour of the perishing sheep of the house of Israel as exhibited to us throughout the New Testament. His immediate task was to produce a moral and religious change in the hearts of His people, and thus prepare them to acknowledge Him as the Messiah and to accept His teaching as coming from God. When it was a question of effecting this transformation, His teaching was sufficiently clear; and if His hearers remained unmoved, this was due to the want of a good will on their part rather than to any uncertainty as to what their duty really was. Their failure to accept His teaching in practice where its meaning was obvious rendered them 14 THE PARABLES OF JESUS unworthy of enlightenment on points which were obscure, and in this way "blindness befell Israel."¹ This blindness, or rather "hardening," though not intended directly in the Divine purpose, served the useful end of the vocation of the Gentiles,

and in this way it may be regarded as a part of the scheme of Providence. v. In point of form, the parables of Jesus exhibit certain peculiarities which they have in common with those of the Rabbins. We notice in them an absence of that severity of form and exactness of expression which stamp in a greater or less degree the Greek and Roman classics and other works written under their influence. The parable of the Marriage Feast (Matthew 22:2 - Matthew 22:14), for instance, is introduced with the words: "The Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a king who made a marriage feast for his son." Here, in the comparison of the Kingdom of Heaven to a king, we remark a construction foreign to our manner of expression, the resemblance really

Romans 11:25. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 15 existing between the Kingdom of Heaven and the marriage feast, not between the Kingdom of Heaven and the king who gives the feast. In the same parable we also remark the preference given to the oratio directa: "Say to them that are invited, Behold I have prepared my dinner," etc.; "Friend, how earnest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?"

"the wedding is ready"; "bind his feet and hands," etc. Here we are not told indirectly what the king said: his very words are given. A characteristic of a different nature consists in a certain brevity, or rather scantiness, of language, words being omitted that are apparently necessary for the explanation of the meaning of the parable. In this same parable, and the remark holds good of many others, while the figurative half is given in considerable detail, with the circumstances of the action helpful to its realization, the real half i.e, the spiritual lesson illustrated by the figurative element is barely indicated, the full interpretation of the parable being left to the hearer or reader. Jesus avoids the abstract, and uses to the full a wealth of concrete individual representations and sensible images quite in harmony with contemporary Jewish habits of thought and expression.

Even we ourselves, whose psychology is so different from that of the Jews at the beginning of our era, continue to be affected by the individualization in question, which, in addition, contributes much to our retaining in memory the lessons thus impressed upon us.

Connected with this is a certain fondness for numbers where the history did not seem to call for any numbers in particular e.g, the ten virgins, of whom five were foolish and five wise, the three bushels of meal, the three loaves, etc. We also find a parallelism e.g.

"Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?" a Sometimes a further instance of this parallelism is given in pairs of parables conveying the same lesson. Of this kind are the parables of the Garment and the Wine skins, the Mustard-seed and the Leaven. We find examples, too, of a process very common in the rabbinical writings, that called a *minori ad majus*, where the consequent clause of a conditional sentence is introduced with words equivalent to our "how much more?" Thus, 1 Matthew 7:16; Luke 6:44. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 17 when endeavouring to inspire His hearers with confidence in the love of their Heavenly Father He instances the love and care with which a human father provides for his children's wants, and from this deduces the inference: "If ye then, though evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke 11:13). Cf. Matt. x.

25, etc. We are familiar with the same process in the Epistles of St. Paul e.g, Romans 11:12, Romans 11:24; Philemon 1:16.

If in point of form the parables of Jesus closely resemble those of the Rabbins, they differ widely from them in point of matter. The latter have for themes, often though not exclusively, subjects of national or merely temporary interest e.g, unimportant scholastic questions, exegetical problems treated in a fantastic manner, or trivial ceremonial points. What a difference, for instance, exists between the parables of the King's Throne and Footstool and the Building of the Royal Palace on the one hand, each of them advanced in favour of an opposing view of the relative priority of the creation of heaven and earth

2 18 THE PARABLES OF JESUS respectively, and any one of the parables of Jesus on the other. We have chosen these parables for instances as dating from the time of Jesus. The school of Shammai held that the heavens were first created and then the earth, and this they attempted to prove by a parable. They likened the matter to a king who made himself a throne, and subsequently a footstool, and they appealed to Isa. lxvi. 1, "Heaven is My throne, and the earth My foot stool," in support of their view. The school of Hillel held a contrary opinion. They likened the matter to a king who was building a palace, and who naturally built first the lower part of the edifice and then the upper; and in confirmation of this opinion they cited Genesis 2:4: "on the day that Jahweh Elohim made earth and heaven." On the other hand, the central theme of the parables of Jesus is the Kingdom of God, as, indeed, it is of all His teaching.

Many of them open with the words: "The Kingdom of Heaven is likened," etc, and even where we find no such introduction, the lesson conveyed has a more or less direct reference to the Kingdom and to the dispositions of soul which fitness for it presupposes. There is no THE PARABLES OF JESUS 19 parable of His which has not a permanent interest: they all teach religious or ethical truths whose significance is equally valid for every age and every country. The duty of forgiveness, the love of the Heavenly Father for erring and repentant souls, the efficacy of persevering prayer, the necessity of the robe of grace, the duty of making the best use of the gifts entrusted to us, the obligation of watching and of being always ready, charity the test of acceptableness, the duty of thankfulness for pardon received- such are some of the weighty subjects with which Our Lord's parables deal.

It is a characteristic indication of the incredulous spirit of the age that in recent years the parables of Jesus have been used for a novel purpose, that of demonstrating His historical existence. And the validity of this demonstration depends not only on the fact that all the parables breathe the spirit of one Personality, but also on the employment in them of precisely those images and figures which what we knew of Him besides would lead us to expect images and figures far removed from the life of court, and camp, and taken from the everyday life of the lowly.

20 THE PARABLES OF JESUS

We meet with the husbandman scattering the seed in the fields, the fisherman dragging his nets to land and sorting what he has taken, the labourer returning from the field and serving his master's table before attending to his own wants. We see the ploughman behind his animals, his eyes steadily fixed on the ploughshare as it turns up the soil before him. The shepherd seeks diligently the sheep that has gone astray, or, when evening comes, separates the sheep from the goats,

which all day long have grazed or browsed together in the fields or on the hills. The trees budding in the spring and giving promise of the approaching summer furnish a reminder of the signs that shall precede the coming of the Son of Man, the flowers of the field which bloom so bravely to-day, and to-morrow are cast as fuel into the oven, and are thus more shortlived still than man, inspire us with confidence in Our Heavenly Father Who clothes them, frail and evanescent as they are, with a beauty which excels the glory of Solomon himself. Everywhere we meet the same humble images, the same local colouring; and even when kings and THE PARABLES OF JESUS 21 courts are mentioned, they are spoken of in terms that betray no close personal acquaintance with them. Beyond all this, varied as the images are, we find everywhere a unity in variety, the same outlook, the same spirit and purpose animating the whole; and if sometimes in the figurative half the figures are local or temporary, the spiritual truths which they illustrate belong to no one age or nation, but have a value which is not affected or circumscribed by the limits of time or space.

VI.

If we abstract from the matter of Our Lord's parables, and leave out of consideration such of them as are mere similitudes, they may be divided into three classes: The parable pure and simple; the allegory; and mixed parables which partake of the nature of both. 1 We have

1 This division is scarcely adequate. There is a group of four narratives, all found in St. Luke's Gospel the Good Samaritan (x. 30-35); the Foolish Rich Man (xii. 16-21), the Rich Man and Lazarus (xvi. 19-31); the Pharisee and the Publican (xviii. 9-14) each of which conveys immediately and directly a moral or religious lesson by means of an example, any figurative element they may contain being merely accidental or subsidiary.

22 THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Already given definitions of the pure parable and the allegory, and stated the difference between them. It is of vital importance for the correct interpretation of any parable in particular to know to what class it belongs, and to this each parable in itself will give the clue. As regards the general question of interpretation, two mistaken courses are to be avoided. On the one hand, we must not pedantically insist on treating all the parables of Jesus as pure parables; and, on the other, we must not allow our imagination to run riot in seeking and finding (at least in our own belief) spiritual meanings in subordinate points where in reality they do not exist. Those who deny that any of the parables of Jesus are allegories are confronted with the allegorical explanation of the parable of the Sower which we owe to Our Lord Himself, and to evade the difficulty they have no option but to deny the genuineness of the interpretation, and to regard it as the reflection of the mind

Though, strictly speaking, they do not belong to any of the above classes, they are styled parables, two of them, indeed, the history of the Foolish Rich Man and that of the Pharisee and the Publican, by the Evangelist himself.

\ THE PARABLES OF JESUS 23 of His followers at a later period. The unjustifiable and arbitrary nature of such a view is patent on the face of it, and its falsity is rendered still more evident by an examination of the rabbinical parables of the time of Jesus, many of which are in the nature of allegories. On the other hand, we must guard against an allegorical interpretation of those parables which do not admit of it.

Such a course, by making the signification of the details of the parable uncertain, would tend to empty it of its meaning. A single example will make this plain. In the parable of the Ten Virgins, the figurative half is given in considerable detail, while the real half which it illustrates is expressed in a single sentence: " Watch ye, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour." And yet we cannot regard it as a pure parable free from all element of allegory. It is, how ever, one thing to allow this, and another to take it as intended by Jesus as an allegory pure and simple. It has, indeed, been often treated as such by men whose genius compels us to pay homage to their authority; but the history of its interpretation shows how widely 24 THE PARABLES OF JESUS they have differed among themselves as to what precisely the details stand for, and how hopeless in consequence it would be for us to look for any assured certainty on the points in question. The general lesson, the need of watchfulness, a need based on our ignorance of the day and hour of Our Lord's Coming, is, however, obvious and simple, and sufficient for all practical purposes. A further consideration will tend, at least for some, to confirm what has been said. Commentators of undoubted learning, orthodoxy, and critical acumen, have regarded as identical parables which at first sight would seem different e.g, the parable of the Talents (Matt. xxv.

14-30) and that of the Pounds (Luke xix.

12-27). The lesson which both parables teach is in the main the same; but the variations in point of detail between them are numerous. Obviously, therefore, whoever accepts their identity must likewise acknowledge that the points of detail where they differ should not be so interpreted as if they had a particular significance.

It might be objected that, if we rejected the allegorical interpretation (of course, only THE PARABLES OF JESUS 25 where it was not based on solid grounds), the exposition of some of the parables would necessarily be dry and uninteresting, and that the allegorical method of interpretation had at least the merit of imparting a certain vividness and force to the exposition. To this we may answer that, even though we should explain the parables without going beyond the bounds that a sane exegesis prescribes, there is sufficient room for the legitimate play of fancy and imagination in presenting at least the figurative half in such a manner as would impress the modern mind without at the same time violating the canons of good taste. This is a point of no small importance: it may be said that in proportion to our vivid realization of the figurative half will be the strength of the appeal which the spiritual lesson derived from it makes to our intelligence.

VII.

We have seen how the parables of Jesus are largely concerned with the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven, and with the dispositions required in those who are to have a share in it. The English word " king- 26 THE PARABLES OF JESUS dom " would naturally suggest to most people a geographical notion or idea of locality, inasmuch as the notion which we attach to the word is primarily a geographical one. When we speak of the United Kingdom, we mean certain islands in the West of Europe; and by the term Kingdom of Spain we designate the territory over which the King of Spain rules. And the use of the term " Kingdom of Heaven " instead of " Kingdom of God " tends to confirm the misapprehension, since the word " Heaven " suggests an idea of locality. Both terms, however, are identical.

We learn from some of the later books of the Old Testament, from several passages in the New, and from the rabbinical writings, that the Jews very often substituted the word "heaven" or some other word for the Divine Name, and that out of reverence for the Deity. We all remember the words addressed by the Prodigal Son to his father: "Father, I have sinned against heaven," -that is, against God" and before thee." 1 Jesus Himself, when adjured by Caiaphas, foretold that the high-priest would yet see Him "sitting at 1 Luke 15:18, Luke 15:21.

Till: PARABLES OF JESUS 27 the right hand of the power "that is, of God; and in the Epistle to the Hebrews He is said to have sat down "on the right hand of the Majesty on high. 1 - The Greek word Basileia, rendered "Kingdom," primarily signifies sovereignty; its concrete sense is derivative. The Jewish contemporaries of Jesus were quite familiar with the term Kingdom of God, a term which had its origin in Old Testament times.

Israel differed from other nations in this respect, that whatever form its government might assume, God Himself, at least through out the entire period over which the activity of the prophets extended, was its King in a special and visible manner. We here take the term "prophets" in a wide sense. They were His ambassadors to His people, who were in a very special sense His subjects, they spoke in His name. They rebuked them when unfaithful, and conveyed to them the Divine warnings; they showed them how the wrath of God might be appeased; and in difficult political emergencies they pointed out to them what course they should take. i Mark 14:62:2 Hebrews 1:3.

28 THE PARABLES OF JESUS At the time their mission was by no means invariably successful, and yet it never wholly failed of its effect. Even though their contemporaries often turned a deaf ear to warning, threat, and promise alike, the descendants of these contemporaries revered their memory, and in many cases preserved their writings, which they regarded as inspired by God Himself. The history of Israel was a chequered one: sometimes it seemed as if God had utterly forsaken them, as if they were a people over whom He had never borne rule. 1 And yet when the fortunes of His people were at their lowest ebb, in the consciousness of many Jahweh was still King, His Kingdom was an everlasting kingdom, His promises were sure. In this way the term "Kingdom of God," with the idea which it represented, continued to exist till New Testament times. A term of the kind, in volving as it does a certain vagueness, is liable in the course of centuries to have its meaning modified, and this was the fate of the term "Kingdom of God."

According to St. Matthew, the Baptist 1 Isa. lxiii. 19. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 29 himself announced to the people that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. 1 When John had been cast into prison, Jesus entered on His public ministry in Galilee, and the burden of His preaching may be summed up in the words: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe the Gospel." 2 This, too, was the message which He commissioned His Apostles to deliver. It was not only in the early stages of His ministry that He gave the chief place in His teaching to the Kingdom of God, and to this Kingdom as at hand: it retained even to the end the same prominent position in His Gospel.

We look in vain to Our Lord's words for any definition of the term, or for any description of it that would be equivalent to a definition. He contented Himself with the statement that it was near at hand, and with exhorting His hearers to prepare for its approach; but the nature of the Kingdom lay shrouded in a certain obscurity which He did not feel called on to dispel. To His hearers the term

presented no difficulty. For them the inau- 1 Mutt. iii. J. 2 Mark 1:14 f.

30 THE PARABLES OF JESUS guration of the Kingdom meant the liberation of their country from the yoke of Rome, the restoration of the sovereignty to Israel, the spiritual regeneration of the people, the return of the Diaspora to the Holy Land, and the resurrection of their dead. They believed that the Kingdom would be ushered in by a catastrophe which would destroy their enemies such a judgment the prophets had foretold 1 and they further looked for the fulfilment in a more or less literal manner of the predictions which proclaimed the future greatness and happiness of the chosen people, in a golden age, on the sacred soil hallowed to them by a thousand memories, and secured to them and to their children by a covenant which might not be disannulled. We may suppose that in the conception of the Kingdom as a whole, with all its implications, the material or the spiritual element preponderated according to the mind of the individual.

Such being the popular idea of the Kingdom, it was only natural that it should be eagerly desired. We find the Pharisees asking Jesus when the Kingdom of God should come, 2 and 1 Joel 3:1 ff., Agg. 2:21 /. 2 Luke 17:20 THE PARABLES OF JESUS 31 on His last journey to Jerusalem His hearers were of the opinion that the Kingdom of God would immediately appear. 1 The Apostles shared the popular notions of the nature of the Kingdom and of its imminence: they hoped that Jesus was the destined Saviour of Israel. His crucifixion indeed shattered their dreams; but when they beheld Him risen, the hopes that had been wrecked by His ignominious death sprang into life once more. The last recorded words which they addressed to Him took the form of that question on the answer to which so much for them depended, 14 Lord, dost Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 2 The sequel falsified their expectations; and we, the heirs of the experience of so many centuries, must interpret otherwise the burden of Our Lord's teaching, the Kingdom of God.

It is an old objection that in the Gospels Jesus is represented as speaking in a manner that would lend a certain colour to the popular belief. He promised the Apostles that in the new birth, when the Son of Man should sit upon the throne of His glory, they also 1 Luke 19:11:2 Acts y G 32 THE PARABLES OF JESUS should sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 1 And, again, He told them: "Verily, I say unto you, there is no one who hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for My sake and for the Gospel's sake, who shall not receive a hundredfold now at this time; houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions: and in the world to come life everlasting." 2 When sending His Apostles to preach, He assured them: " Verily, I say unto you, ye shall not finish the cities of Israel till the Son of Man come." 3 At another time He told His disciples that some were standing there who should not taste death till they saw the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom. 4 A few days before His death, after describing the events which should accompany the consummation of the world, He added: " Verily, I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass away till all these things take place." 5 And after His resur rection, in answer to Peter's inquiry as to 1 Matthew 19:28:2 Mark 10:29 /. Mark 10:3Matthew 10:23.

4 Matthew 16:28:5 Matthew 24:34. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 33 what was reserved for John, He used words whch Peter might pardonably interpret of His speedy return: " If I will have him to remain until I come, what is it to thee1

Whatever difficulties these and similar sayings of Jesus may create, there can be no doubt that a serious examination of His utterances leads forcibly to the conclusion that He intended the Kingdom in a wholly spiritual sense, and that His language, rightly understood, does not oblige us to construe it as pointing to His speedy return. The Old Testament prophecies concerning the Kingdom of God had this in common with many other prophecies namely, that they were not destined to be fulfilled according to the letter and as understood by those to whom they were immediately addressed. The history of revelation shows that God has always acted like a wise and loving father who practises a prudent economy in communicating information to his children. He revealed Himself and His will to His people, not all at once, but, so to speak, by instalments, adapting not

1 Johnxxi.22.

3 34 THE PARABLES OF JESUS merely the matter, but also the manner, of His revelation, to the stage of spiritual development which they had reached. 1 Many of the prophecies concerning the future of Israel would lead one to believe that the coming Kingdom would be a temporal one and such a view would contain this element of truth, that the Kingdom was to be inaugurated here on earth by the Messiah, the personage whom the Jews conceived as exercising dominion in it. Jesus in His teaching used the terms with which His hearers were familiar, but He gave to what was earthly or temporal in their intuitions a spiritual meaning. The Jews as heirs of the promises of the Kingdom had a prior right to the invitation to enter it; and it was only when they had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life that the Apostles felt themselves constrained to turn to the Gentiles. 2 The narrow circle of the Apostles and their first followers developed into the Christian Church, the members of which began here below a life in the Spirit, a life which was to receive its consummation and its crown in the world to come. The Kingdom, then, is not 1 Hebrews 1:1,? Acts 13:46. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 85 exclusively a kingdom existent here on earth or in the life to come, but one which, begun here, is perfected and eternized for the individual in the hereafter. To our minds the existence of the individual is divided into two periods, with a well-marked line between them: the period of our earthly existence, and that of our life beyond the grave. To the mind of Jesus, which in one act took in heaven and earth, no sharp line seemed to separate these periods of our existence; and this fact will help to clear the confusion which results from the apparently varying meanings which the term " Kingdom of God " assumes according as it refers to this present life or to that which is to come.

If, then, we examine the various passages in the Gospels where the term Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven occurs, we shall see that no one formula can adequately express the concept that underlies it. At one time the term has an ethical sense, at another an eschatological; now it implies a reference to this present life, now to the life to come.

Still, in spite of the varying senses which the term is used to express, it is plain that the 36 THE PARABLES OF JESUS ethico-religious sense is the really essential sense which is inseparable from it." Had Jesus, as His followers believed, meant to set up a temporal kingdom, with Jerusalem as its seat, the destruction of the Roman domination would have been a necessary preliminary or consequence. Yet Jesus nowhere shows any hostility to Caesar. He had but one enemy to face, one opponent to encounter, and that was Satan. Satan was at once the foe of God and of man; Jesus taught His disciples to pray for deliverance from him; 1 and He already

saw the overthrow of his power. 2 Indeed, in more than one saying of His, Satan is spoken of as the enemy. If, then, Satan was the enemy of Jesus, and if men were His enemies only in as far as knowingly or otherwise they took part with Satan, it follows necessarily that, as Satan was a spiritual foe, the Kingdom, the establishment and spread of which constituted the object of His mission, must have been a kingdom of the spiritual order.

It is further objected that the conception

1 Matthew 6:13.

2 Luke 10:18; John 12:31, John 16:11. r THE PARABLES OF JESUS 37 of the Kingdom as other-worldly arose in course of time from the non-fulfilment of the dreams of those who looked for the establishment of a temporal kingdom. Specious arguments have been adduced in support of this contention, but the view itself is refuted by the general tenor of Our Lord's words concerning the Kingdom, and in particular by the conditions for participation in it that He laid down, and by the dispositions which He required of those who were to be members of it. The longest discourse of Jesus found in the Synoptic Gospels is the version of the Sermon on the Mount contained in St. Matthew which extends through three entire chapters.

It contains scarcely a single passage which with any tolerable degree of plausibility can be made to refer to a temporal kingdom. The Beatitudes with which it begins sum up the demands which Jesus made on those who might choose to follow Him, and these demands poverty in spirit, meekness, patience, purity of heart are exclusively of an ethical or spiritual nature. If this is so, and we need not labour the point, the Kingdom itself must be of an ethical and spiritual nature: the 38 THE PARABLES OF JESUS inference is obviously valid. Besides, as in the teaching of Jesus, the alternative to sharing in the Kingdom is, not exclusion from earthly felicity, but condemnation to ever lasting woe, 1 the antithesis to the Kingdom reveals to us the nature of the Kingdom itself. That to the mind of Jesus a considerable space of time would elapse before His Second Coming is evident from the parables. There things are represented as going on in a slow and leisurely manner until the end of the world. Elsewhere we find His words in direct opposition to the popular idea that the Kingdom would be ushered in by a catastrophe visible to all. On the contrary, it would not come in such a way as would attract universal attention: though men were not aware of it, it had already begun. 2 The parables represent its growth as corresponding to the manner of its inauguration. Its further progress would be along the lines of a gradual and apparently natural evolution; and the hearts of men, not Palestine or Jerusalem, would be its primary and congenial seat. For this development time was a necessary condition.

1 Matthew 25:41:2 Luke 17:20 /. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 39

Whether there was question of the growth of the seed in the individual soul, or of the action of the word represented as leaven upon masses of people, or of the development of the tiny mustard-seed into a tree, the various processes progressed by almost insensible gradations, without any noticeable interruption or any sudden transformation effected in their respective subjects. A little reflection will show us that time is of the essence of the law of growth. In the case of the Kingdom there was besides an extrinsic reason why the Second Coming should be delayed namely, the necessity of allowing time for the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles. 1 With all this, the various indications contained in the parables that the Parousia was not so near at hand as

the disciples imagined are in perfect harmony. In the parable of the Virgins we find the bridegroom tarrying; 2 the owner of the talents which he has entrusted to his servants to trade with returns only after a long time; 3 the case is supposed that the servant left in charge may think that he can safely neglect his duty in view of his master's 1 Mark 13:10:2 Matthew 25:5:3 Matthew 25:19.

40 THE PARABLES OF JESUS prolonged absence. 1 Finally, to one who views things sub specie ceternitatis, as Jesus did, a thousand years appear but as one day (2 Peter 3:8). The objection that Jesus believed that His triumphant return would not be long delayed has been mainly, though not exclusively, based upon certain passages in the great eschatological discourse recorded Matt, xxiv.; Mark xiii.; Luke xxi. Critics of the Liberal school must feel that these passages afford no support to the objection, since to their mind they are not genuine utterances of Jesus, with the character of which, they allege, they are quite out of keeping. They look upon the discourse as composite; and they hold that in it is embedded what they term the small or synoptic apocalypse which contains the passages in question. In their view this apocalypse circulated in the form of a fly-leaf before it was inserted in the Gospels, and they appeal in proof of their contention to the words: "let him that readeth understand" words which would be inappropriate in a spoken discourse, and would be in place only in a written 1 Matthew 24:48. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 41 document. 1 They allege that the vagueness of the language in this document, which is found in its most primitive form in St. Matthew, points to a date earlier than that which they assign for the appearance of the earliest of the Gospels (St. Mark) in its present shape, the greater precision of the language in Luke showing a dependence on the incipient fulfilment of the prediction (ver. 20) which enabled that Evangelist to write in the light of contemporaneous events. Catholics, of course, are not at liberty to get rid of the objection by adopting this view, which is incompatible with the dogma of inspiration, since it contradicts the statements of the Evangelists, which ascribe the entire discourse to Jesus. In it He treats of two subjects, the Destruction of the Temple and His Second Coming. Whether He spoke the entire discourse on one occasion, as the narrative implies, or whether we have here a combination of two distinct speeches, each with its own subject, is difficult to discover. The fact that St. Luke has elsewhere

1 These words, however, can, to say the least, be just as naturally understood to refer to the passage cited from Daniel as to an independent separate document.

42 THE PARABLES OF JESUS

(chap, xvii.) a separate eschatological speech of Jesus which is in partial agreement with St. Matthew's version would favour the view that Jesus delivered two discourses, at different times, which the Evangelists fused into one.

It is, however, far from conclusive. We have a Lucan parallel (chap, xxi.) to Matt. xxiv. and Mark xiii, not only for the Destruction of the Temple, but also for the Second Coming; and the ideas and language in the section in chapter xvii. give no ground for believing that it was detached from the source or sources used by the Evangelist for the longer discourse in chapter xxi, and placed in its proper historical setting, as a recent commentator seems to think, especially as there is nothing to indicate with any approach to clearness the time or place of its delivery. We are there forethrown back on taking the discourse in Matt. xxiv. and parallels as we find it. In it, as we have said, Jesus deals with two events, distant in time yet internally connected.

Like the ancient prophets, He did not fully reveal the subjects of which He spoke: He allowed them to remain enshrouded in partial obscurity. Hence we are not always able to THE PARABLES OF JESUS 43 discern with perfect clearness whether he speaks of the one event or of the other. His object was a practical one: not to gratify an idle curiosity, but to prepare men's minds for what was to happen, and this preparation would remain essentially the same whether in His teaching there was question of His visible Coming or of His invisible virtual Advent in those historical occurrences which would reveal His Father's plan. Just as some of the predictions of the Old Testament prophets have been fulfilled in a sense beyond what it was in the power of their contemporaries even to divine, so in the work of Jesus, though still unfinished, we behold a realization of His ideals which His hearers could not possibly have expected. We may therefore say that it is only the fulfilment of His predictions that can enable men to grasp their full meaning.

Besides, as a rule, men can only judge of things by the standards and circumstances of their own times; and when prophecy and fulfilment are separated by a long interval, as the world does not stand still meanwhile, but is in a continual state of evolution, a new factor is thereby introduced which affects and 44 THE PARABLES OF JESUS modifies the entire situation. The future indeed lay unfolded even to the human gaze of Jesus, but He spoke in language conformable to the habits of thought and intellectual outlook of those who heard Him.

We think it well to sum up briefly what we have said on the subject of this section.

1. The near approach of the Kingdom of God was the burden of the preaching of Jesus.
2. He used the old term with which His hearers were familiar, but He gave it a new meaning.
3. He did not at the outset of His public ministry correct the error of His hearers in continuing to understand the old term in its popular sense. He preferred to disabuse their minds gradually and in a manner more or less indirect of the illusions to which they so tenaciously clung.
4. For this purpose He used the parables, in which whatever is obscure receives light from the Sermon on the Mount, especially from the Beatitudes with which it opens.
5. The Kingdom would have the note of universality. Not physical descent from Abraham, nor the scrupulous fulfilment of the THE PARABLES OF JESUS 45 requirements of the Law, but poverty of spirit, purity in heart, and a hunger and thirst after holiness of life, were the essential conditions for entrance into it.
6. Though Jesus nowhere defines His idea of the Kingdom, particular discourses of His as well as the general trend of His teaching leave no doubt that He understood it in a sense essentially spiritual and ethical.
7. The Kingdom would have a double phase: the present here on earth, preparatory and imperfect; the final in Heaven, when it will appear in all its purity and perfection.

Later on the study of particular parables will show how the Kingdom has an inherent power both of organic growth and of expansion in time and space, and how it will contain unclean elements owing to the agency of the devil and its own efforts towards the extension of its membership.

1.00 Parables recorded in Three Gospels

PARABLES RECORDED IN THREE GOSPELS

1.01 The Lighted Lamp

I. THE LIGHTED LAMP.

Matthew 5:14 - Matthew 5:16; Mark 4:21; Luke 8:16, Luke 11:33. THIS parable is given in its fullest form in St. Matthew: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that lieth upon a mountain cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under a bushel, but on the lamp-stand, and it shineth to all that are in the house." The sense of sight is the noblest of all the senses, inasmuch as it approaches more nearly to what is immaterial and spiritual than any of the others. For its exercise, however, light is a necessary condition. A world that lay in spiritual darkness received the promise of illumination when the Light, the true Light that enlighteneth every man, came into it (John 1:9). Jesus was in Himself the Light 46 THE PARABLES OF JESUS 47

(John 8:12): His disciples, many of whom had once been darkness, were light in Him (Ephesians 5:7). Just as the moon and the planets shine with a reflected light, so the disciples shone by the light which He communicated to them. In the parable He taught them that they must impart to others the light which they themselves had received. A lamp is lighted for the purpose of giving light, and a lighted lamp is in its proper place when it is set on a lamp-stand. To put it under a bushel or under a bed would frustrate this purpose. The bushel was a dry measure common among the Jews, equivalent to about two English gallons; and the bed here is not a simple rug or carpet which one could easily take up and carry off (Matthew 9:6 /.), but a raised bed on feet, thus resembling those in use amongst us. In St. Mark, and in its first occurrence in St. Luke, this parable follows that of the Sower, and from this we may infer that the light of the lamp typifies the doctrine communicated by Christ to His disciples, not for themselves merely, but for the sake of others to whom they were bound to preach it.

48 THE PARABLES OF JESUS

If they neglected to perform this duty, their conduct would be like that of a man who lit a lamp, and then covered it so that it might give no light. In St. Matthew the context is different. The parable is preceded by the comparison of the disciples to salt; and it is followed by the words: "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Who is in heaven." The express mention of good works does not exclude the preaching of the disciples; the term "light," therefore, would include all word and example that might enlighten and edify the neighbour. In St. Matthew, then, the term "light" seems to have a wider signification than in the other Synoptists in the passages referred to. In its second occurrence in St. Luke, the parable has no very obvious connection with what goes before; nor is it clear what precisely the spiritual signification of the word "lamp" is. The general lesson that may be drawn from the parable is this, that whatever gifts we have received may and should be used for the edification of our neighbour. An analogous idea is found in Shakespeare: THE PARABLES OF JESUS 49

* Heaven doth with us as we with torches do, Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues Did not go forth of us, twere all alike As if we had them not." 1

We need not make a vain show of our virtues: if with singleness of purpose we do good and avoid evil, and consistently endeavour to fulfil our duties in whatever station we may be placed, our lives, independently of any intention of our own, will silently exercise a persuasive influence for good on those of others.

TAGS: [Parables]

1.02 New Cloth On Old Garment

II. NEW CLOTH ON OLD GARMENT NEW WINE IN OLD WINESKINS.

Matthew 9:10 /.; Mark 2:21 /.; Luke 5:36 - Luke 5:39.

These parables were spoken by Jesus to illustrate His answer to the question concerning the non-observance of fasting by His disciples. The disciples of John and those of the Pharisees happened to be fasting at a time when they saw Jesus and His disciples eating and drinking. They accordingly asked Him: " Why do we fast [St. Luke adds, and 1 " Measure for Measure," Act I, Scene 1, 50 THE PARABLES OF JESUS make supplications], while Thy disciples fast not?" They do not expressly include Himself in the question, and in His reply He makes no attempt to justify His own personal conduct. He points out to them that it would be unreasonable to expect that the companions of the bridegroom should fast during the marriage festivities, while the bridegroom was still with them; but that a time would come when He would be taken away, and then they would fast. His hearers were well aware that the term " bridegroom "was a standing designation of the Messiah, and they must have so understood it. He then proceeded to point out how men do not patch an old garment with a piece of undressed cloth (St. Luke: a piece rent from a new garment), nor pour new wine into old skins.

If they did so, the result would be that the piece of unprepared cloth would shrink as soon as it was wetted, and the old garment, incapable by reason of age and wear of resisting the strain, would in consequence be rent; while the new wine would burst the old skins. On the contrary, old garments are patched with pieces of old cloth, and new wine is put into THE PARABLES OF JESUS 51 new skins. Skins of various animals, especially goatskins, were and still are used in the East to hold wine, water, and other fluids, both for preservation and transport. They were particularly well adapted for the latter purpose, as they could be more easily carried by beasts of burden than receptacles of wood or clay. The skins were sewn up and coated with pitch at the seams on the inside.

Both parables teach the same lesson, the impossibility of uniting in agreement the incongruous, the new and the old. There is here no tautology: in the first parable it is a question of a whole and a part; in the second, of the container and the contained. At all times fasting has been a very popular institution in the East. The Pentateuch prescribes only one fast-day, the Day of Atonement, which is still devoutly observed by all Jews who make any profession of religion. As time went on, new fasts were added, besides which voluntary fasts were common. Jesus had, indeed, sanctioned fasting by His own example, but He did not think it necessary to enjoin any particular fast on His followers.

It would be an incongruity if they fasted while 52 THE PARABLES OF JESUS

He was still in their midst, and He foresaw that after His death, even independently of any precept of His, fasting would be observed by them. The separation of Church and Synagogue was a gradual process; and till it was definitely achieved the disciples observed the Jewish fasts. 1 At a

later date distinctively Christian fasts were introduced. The parables in question have, however, more than a temporary significance. The attitude of Jesus towards fasting differed in principle from that of the Jews. With Him it took a secondary, inferior place: the love of God and the love of the neighbour, with all their implications, were what essentially mattered; while the Jews regarded mere external observances as standing on the same plane with those virtues which are at all times indispensable. The Pharisee (Luke 18:12) could think of no positive good works more worthy to boast of than his regular voluntary fasts and his faithfulness in paying tithes. An attempt to improve the old by grafting on it a piece of the new, or by infusing into it a part of the new spirit, would be alike destructive of the old and prejudicial 1 Acts 27:9. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 53 to the new. Time and patience were needed, the older system was already doomed; but Jesus did not wish to hasten its end before the system of which He was the Founder had been sufficiently presented to men in a formal and authoritative manner for their acceptance.

TAGS: [Parables]

1.03 New Wine in Old Wineskins

See previous chapter

1.04 The Sower

IV. THE SOWER.

Matthew 13:1 - Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:1 - Mark 4:9; Luke 8:4 - Luke 8:8. Explanation: Matthew 13:18 - Matthew 13:23; Mark 4:13 - Mark 4:20; Luke 8:11 - Luke 8:15.

All three Synoptists give this parable with unimportant variations in the details. In St. Matthew it is the first of a group of seven, four of which he alone records. We must not infer from his placing them together that they were all spoken on the same day: it is only an instance of the Evangelist's love for sacred numbers, among which the number seven seems to have held the foremost place. Of the seven, only two, the parables of the Sower and the Mustard-seed, are common to the three Synoptists; a third, that of the Leaven, is related by St. Matthew and St. Luke; while the other four, the Darnel among the Wheat, 54 THE PARABLES OF JESUS the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Dragnet, are peculiar to St. Matthew. This Evangelist is justified in grouping them all together, as they have a common subject, the Kingdom of God. The first gives the relations towards it of various classes of men who have received the good tidings, the second has for subject the attempt of the devil against it, typified by the enemy sowing darnel among the wheat; in the third, that of the Mustard-seed, its apparently insignificant beginnings are contrasted with its subsequent wonderful extension; the parable of the Leaven teaches its penetrative and transformative energy; the lesson of the fifth and sixth is the value of the Kingdom and the wisdom of sacrificing all things for the sake of obtaining it; and the seventh and last, the parable of the Dragnet, describes the membership of the Kingdom as consisting of good and bad inextricably mingled together, a condition of things that will last till the end of the world, when a final severance between them shall take place. The first four were spoken to the people by the seashore; the three last were addressed to the disciples in the house to I- THE PARABLES OF JESUS 55 which He had withdrawn from the multitudes. In the teaching of which they are the vehicle we notice a distinct advance on that of the Sermon on the Mount; but this by no means implies a greater docility or receptiveness on the part of His hearers outside the small band of His professed adherents. On a certain day Jesus went out of the house at Capernaum in which He had been staying, and made His way to the shores of the Lake of Gennesaret. Great multitudes followed Him and, wishing to address them, He entered into a boat, which He used as a pulpit, while His hearers stood on the shore. From the boat He spoke to them the parable of the Sower. The sower went out to sow seed; and as he did so, some of it fell by the wayside, where it was trodden down, though not so deeply as to be safe from the fowls of the air, which came and ate it up. Other seed fell on stony ground where there was but little soil. In due time it put forth roots; but for want of sufficient earth in which they might develop fully, and of moisture whence they might draw nutriment, the little plant under the action of the scorching heat of the sun soon withered away.

56 THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Again, other seed fell among thorns, which grew up together with it and stifled it, so that it bore no fruit. In Palestine thorns and similar plants are a much more formidable difficulty in the way of the

agriculturist than with us. In the Old Testament there is a large number of words to denote these plants, though only few of them allow of identification with any fair degree of certainty. Finally, some fell upon good ground, and produced an increase in varying degrees of abundance thirtyfold or sixtyfold or a hundredfold. To anyone acquainted with the fertility of Palestine, and especially of Galilee, such an increase will not seem exaggerated. Jesus adds to the parable the words: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

We are at no loss for the genuine meaning of this parable, as we have the authentic interpretation which Jesus Himself gave it when alone with His disciples, and from which we learn that He intended it in the nature of an allegory. The varying fortunes of the seed typify the varying fortunes of the word when sown in the hearts of men. It falls on the hearts of some; but before they have time THE PARABLES OF JESUS 57 to understand it or believe, the Evil One, represented by the birds, comes and snatches it away. On others the word makes some impression: they even receive it with joy, and for a time endeavour to frame their lives according to its dictates; but when affliction and persecution for the word befall them, they have no greater power of resistance than has the tender plant when the burning rays of the noonday sun beat full upon it. Others, who are spared the fiery ordeal of persecution, have within their own breasts enemies more subtle and quite as dangerous. Just as the thorns among which the good seed was sown grew up with it and rendered it unfruitful by depriving it of that light and nourishment which were needful for its full development, so the cares and anxieties of this world, and the seductive power of riches and pleasures, stifle the word in the souls of those who lack the necessary steadfastness and spirit of self-sacrifice. Finally, there are those who in a good and honest heart receive the word and bring forth fruit in patience, some thirtyfold, others sixtyfold, others a hundredfold.

One needs no very great powers of imagination to picture to oneself the impression which the parable made on those who heard it. 58 THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Even if a certain vagueness attached to their conception of the Kingdom of God, it possessed for them a distinct form and substance, inasmuch as it could be expressed in terms of objects of intuition. It is true that they understood the words of Jesus only very imperfectly, but, for all that, they grasped their meaning sufficiently to perceive that in them there was no question of a temporal kingdom or of any privileges that belonged exclusively to the Jews. Henceforth they must have felt, in case they accepted His teaching, mere carnal descent from Abraham would be unavailing without those moral and religious dispositions on which the new Teacher, like the prophets of old, laid so much stress. It was only natural that they should find it hard to shake themselves free of their old prepossessions, and calmly and resolutely face the novel view of things presented to them. Contrary to current notions, the Kingdom which He proclaimed was before all things a spiritual Kingdom; and the religion which He propounded was severely individualistic, though in His words nothing could be found to favour egotism or countenance the idea that it could be anything else than institutional, an idea, besides, quite foreign to the mind of His Jewish contemporaries. The individualism of Christianity need not make us forget its social aspects; and the ideal state of things prevails when neither the interior life on one side nor activity on behalf of the neighbour on the other is so exercised as to be detrimental to the other.

TAGS: [Parables]

1.05 The Grain of Mustard-Seed

V. THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD-SEED.

Matthew 13:31 /.; Mark 4:30 - Mark 4:32; Luke 13:18 /. In St. Matthew this parable follows that of the Darnel among the Wheat, and, as in St. Luke, precedes that of the Leaven. In St. Mark it comes after the parable of the Seed Growing of Itself. St. Mark introduces it with the words: "How shall we liken the kingdom of God, or in what parable shall we set it forth?" St. Luke begins with the formula: " Unto what is the kingdom of God like, or to what shall we liken it?" In St.

60 THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Matthew we find no introduction. The parables of the Rabbins present numerous instances of similar variations. Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a grain of mustard-seed which a man took and sowed in his field or garden. Though the smallest of seeds, in course of time it outgrew all the other vege tables, and developed into a tree, so that the birds of the air came and nested in its branches. A grain of mustard-seed was in proverbial use among the Jews to denote anything very small.

It may be said to have been the smallest seed usually sown in Palestine, though scientific botany knows of seeds still more minute. The plant is common about Gennesaret, and it sometimes attains a height of 10 or 12 feet. The point of comparison is obvious. Just as the tiny mustard-seed becomes a tree large enough for the birds to build in its branches, so the Kingdom of Heaven, apparently insignificant in its beginnings, would grow almost imperceptibly, and spread far and wide till it attained an extension beyond all hope, and wholly out of proportion with its humble origin. The whole process of the rise and growth of the Kingdom is gradual and scarcely noticeable, and is quite incompatible with any Divine intervention of a sudden and catastrophic nature. It thus conveys a truth similar to that taught us in the parable of the Sower, with the difference that in the former there is question of the corporate life of the Church, in the latter of the individual soul. Our parable is a prophecy: on its marvellous fulfilment there is no need to enlarge.

TAGS: [Parables]

1.06 The Wicked Husbandmen

VI. THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN.

Matthew 21:33 - Matthew 21:46; Mark 12:1 - Mark 12:12; Luke 20:9 - Luke 20:19. This parable was spoken by Jesus in the Temple a few days before His death. It sets forth in a dramatic manner a summary of God's dealings with Israel from of old, and the ingratitude of the chosen people. In a few days they would fill up the measure of their guilt by putting to death the last envoy whom God had sent them, His own well-beloved Son. The parable is based upon that of the Vine yard (Isaiah 5:1 ff.) though there is considerable difference between them. In the latter it is the vineyard itself that is at fault, inas much as it failed to respond to the care bestowed upon it, and, instead of producing choice fruit, produced only wildings: in our parable it is the husbandmen who incur condemnation. The reason of the difference is obvious. In the Old Testament parable it is the people at large who are arraigned and menaced; while Jesus had primarily in view the religious rulers of the people. A certain man planted a vineyard, fenced it in, digged a winepress in it, and set up a watch-tower. He let it out to husbandmen, on the condition that he should receive a certain proportion of the fruits; and he then withdrew to another country where he made a long stay. When the vintage season was come, he sent his servants to receive the share of the produce for which he had stipulated; but the husbandmen, instead of fulfilling their pact, laid violent hands upon them, slew some of them, and sent the rest empty away. The three Evangelists reproduce the parable with differences in the details; but these variations do not affect the spiritual sense.

According to St. Matthew, two groups of servants, the second more numerous than the first, were sent, some of whom were beaten, others stoned, and others slain. According to St. Mark, three servants were sent, one by one, of whom the first two were maltreated, the third was killed; then several servants were sent, whether one by one or in a group does not appear the former is more probable of whom some were beaten, others slain. St. Luke narrates that three servants were sent in succession, all of whom, though ill-treated, escaped with their lives. Our object in bringing these divergences into relief is to show how unwise it is to attempt to press minor points so as to give them greater significance than they really possess, or, in other words, to allegorize excessively. Had the three Evangelists agreed as to every detail, then we should have thought ourselves justified, or even perhaps obliged, to identify the several messengers or groups of messengers with particular legates or groups of legates sent by God. The variations, however, are against this: and the lesson which they thus teach us need not be restricted in its application to any one parable. The patience of the lord of the vineyard is not yet exhausted. Those whom he had sent were only servants, for whom he could expect that the husbandmen would have but scant respect. He has a beloved son; he will send him: surely they will reverence him at least. The son is sent, but the very sight of him suggests the thought: "This is the heir: come, let us kill him, and the heritage will be ours." They carry out their design, they seize him, cast him out of the vineyard, and put him to death. They have accomplished their purpose, and the retribution, though it may tarry, is certain. The three

Synoptists represent Jesus as putting the question: "What will the lord of the vineyard do (to those husbandmen)?" According to St. Matthew, His hearers give the answer: "He will bring those miserable men to a miserable end, and he will let out the vineyard to other husbandmen who will render him the fruits in their seasons." In St. Mark and St. Luke, Jesus Himself gives the answer one similar to the above whereupon, according to St. Luke, the hearers utter a fervent "God for bid!" In confirmation of His prophecy, Jesus appeals to a passage in the Psalms 118:22): "The stone which the builders THE PARABLES OF JESUS 65 rejected is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord's doing: it is wonderful in our eyes." According to St. Matthew, He adds, "Therefore I say unto you: the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation that bringeth forth the fruits thereof "(i.e, of the Kingdom). A menace couched in different terms is given in St. Luke: "Whoso ever shall fall on that stone shall be broken to pieces, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." The high-priests, Scribes, and Pharisees, were aware that the parable was directed against them; and it was only the fear of the people that kept them from laying hands upon Him. A brief explanation of the parable will suffice. God is the Lord of the vineyard, which itself typifies Israel. He fenced it round: this mystic fence which separated it from the wilderness of heathendom served the double purpose of a bulwark and of a line of demarcation. The winepress and the tower represent in a general way the measures which He took for the furtherance of the welfare of His people; while the husbandmen are the priests, Scribes, and Pharisees, the successors 66 THE PARABLES OF JESUS of Moses, to whom God entrusted His spiritual vineyard. He then withdrew i.e, no longer made His presence felt in so sensible and striking a manner as He had done on Sinai. From time to time He sent them His messengers the prophets, whom He commissioned to collect the fruits; but these when they escaped with their lives were not only sent empty-handed away, but subjected to out rage and ignominy. The sad history closed with the murder of the Baptist, the greatest of the prophets. And now God's beloved Son Himself appears on an embassy to them.

They wilfully shut their eyes to His credentials, and, far from submitting themselves to the Divine will as revealed to them by Jesus, they are planning the overthrow of the theocracy by substituting their own uncontrolled and unhampered rule for it. As the surest means of effecting their purpose, they are plotting the murder of the Son; but their triumph in His death will be of short duration: their crime will entail the definite rejection of Israel.

Rationalistic critics bring forward this parable as the classical example of the trans- THE PARABLES OF JESUS 67 formation by the Evangelists into an allegory of what, as spoken by Jesus, was a pure parable. Such a view is based on the erroneous notion that a parable with an allegorical element could not have emanated from Jesus. Such a notion cannot be sustained, for Jesus the matter, not the form of the parable, was of primary importance; and besides, those who uphold such a pedantic opinion are confronted with the fact that many of the rabbinical parables are allegories, or at least contain a mixture of the allegorical. This parable is neither a pure parable nor an allegory: it is of a mixed character; and so we must be on our guard against pressing the details too far: the very divergences of the Evangelists, as we have seen, are sufficient to warn us against it.

TAGS: [Parables]

1.07 Parable of the Fig-Tree

VII. PARABLE OF THE FIG-TREE.

Matthew 24:32/.; Mark 13:28/.; Luke 21:29 - Luke 21:31.

Jesus added this parable by way of warning to His prophecy concerning the signs that would precede His Second Coming. Just as 68 THE PARABLES OF JESUS the tender shoots and budding foliage of the fig-tree show that summer is nigh, so the signs in question, when they would appear, should be regarded as heralding the speedy Advent of the Son of Man. The text of the two first Evangelists is almost identical; that of St. Luke shows some divergences from both. He speaks not only of the fig-tree, but of " all the trees "; and he substitutes " know ye that the kingdom of God is at hand " for " know ye that he is nigh even at the doors." The commonest trees in Palestine were the figtree and the olive-tree; but as the latter is an evergreen, the former only was suitable for the purpose of the parable. The leaves of the fig-tree first appear about the middle of March, and the summer begins in April. The parable needs no explanation: Jesus Himself has given us the application.

Unlike our forefathers in the faith at more than one period in the history of the Church, we do not live in daily expectation of the Second Coming, nor have we any temptation to identify contemporary events, no matter how strange or unusual, with the signs that are to precede it. Still, for us, too, there is THE PARABLES OF JESUS 69 need of watchfulness. For each one of us death may come at any time, even when no premonitions appear to warn us of its approach; and the judgment which must follow it is for the individual decisive of his eternal destiny.

TAGS: [Parables]

2.00 Parables recorded in Two Gospels

PARABLES RECORDED IN TWOGOSPELS

2.01 Building of House On Rock or Sand

I. BUILDING OF HOUSE ON ROCK OR SAND.

Matthew 7:24 - Matthew 7:27; Luke 6:47 - Luke 6:49. THIS parable forms the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus had just taught that discipleship may, the working of miracles, prophesying, casting out devils, and the like would be unavailing without obedience; and He now set forth under striking figures the steadfastness of the man whose faith was not a sterile faith, but fruitful in good works, and the eventual ruin of the believer whose life and conduct did not correspond with his belief. He likens the man who hears His word, and fulfils it, to a prudent man who built his house upon a rock. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat against that house, but it fell not: its foundations on the 70 THE PARABLES OF JESUS 71 solid rock were too secure. On the other hand, He compared the man who heard His word, and performed it not, to a foolish man who built his house upon the sand, with the result that, when it was assailed by the same adverse forces, it fell, and the ruin thereof was great. Thus St. Matthew. St. Luke reproduces the parable somewhat differently.

He emphasizes the diligence of the wise builder in preparing the foundations; according to him, the foolish builder builds, not on sand, but on the earth without a foundation; and he makes no mention of the rain or the winds only of the flood. The wind and rain storms, with the resultant inundations, represent the trials and temptations to which the disciples of Jesus would be exposed, especially in the bitter days that were immediately to precede His Second Coming.

Then only those whose will towards good had been strengthened by the faithful and long-continued fulfilment of His words would have the steadfastness to endure; while those who contented themselves with a mere profession of belief would be unable to weather the storm, and, like the house without firm 72 THE PARABLES OF JESUS foundations, would involve themselves in great and irretrievable ruin. The parable is strongly reminiscent of the passage Ezekiel 13:10 - Ezekiel 13:14, where the lying promises held out to the people are compared to untempered mortar daubed upon a wall. The wall itself is a figure of the last vain, desperate efforts at defence made by the people. The prophet declares that all such attempts are useless: mighty storms of wind and rain and huge hailstones will beat against the wall; the mortar with which it is plastered will not so bind it together as to enable it to resist their assaults; it will fall to the ground, and its very foundations will be laid bare. The parable also closely resembles a rabbinical parable in which one who is at once a diligent student of the Law and a doer of good deeds is compared to a man who built of loam bricks on a solid foundation of stone. Though much water came and beat against the structure, it remained immovable. On the contrary, he who studies the Law, but neglects to perform good deeds, resembles the man who builds of stone on a foundation of loam bricks: when even a little water comes, it overthrows the 78 THE PARABLES OF JESUS building. The author to whom it is ascribed, Elisha ben Abuja, lived in the second century of our era, but there is no sufficient evidence to show that he was dependent on our parable. The lesson which this parable teaches us, like the lessons to be drawn from most of the parables, is not restricted in its

application to any time or to any class of persons. Knowledge and obedience are the two indispensable conditions for perseverance, and perseverance itself is the condition for salvation. With Jesus, those alone were blessed who heard the word of God and kept it. - Q - TAGS: [Parables]

2.02 The Leaven

II. THE LEAVEN Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20 JT This parable in both Evangelists immediately follows that of the Grain of Mustardseed. The Kingdom of Heaven (in St. Luke the Kingdom of God) is likened to leaven which a woman hid in three measures of meal till the whole mass was leavened. Leaven was prepared from the lees of wine; or a piece of dough made of flour and water was let rest 74 THE PARABLES OF JESUS till fermentation set in of itself. The measure in question ("saton") was equivalent to about three English gallons. The word "leaven," when used figuratively in the New Testament, is usually employed in a bad sense. For instance, Jesus warns His disciples against the leaven of the Scribes and Pharisees 1 i.e, against their teaching; and St. Paul, with an allusion to the Jewish ritual prescription of cleansing houses from leaven in preparation for celebrating the Passover, exhorts the Corinthians to purge out the old leaven 2 i.e, whatever effects of their former paganism or of their native corruption remained within them to defile the living abode of God. This parable is evidently designed to teach the same lesson as that of the Grain of Mustardseed which precedes it namely, the wonderful development of the Church from apparently small beginnings. This view is confirmed by the mention of the exact quantity of dough to be leavened: three measures a large quantity to be leavened at one time. The leaven would thus stand for the teaching of Jesus, or for the disciples, who are elsewhere 1 Matthew 16:6; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1;

2 1 Corinthians 5:7. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 75 styled "the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth"; and the dough would represent the world as to be subjected to the process a slow and gradual one, it is true, and even in our own days by no means yet completed. This is not to be wondered at. The homely figure used by Jesus is indeed striking and appropriate; but, as in the other parables, the resemblance between the spiritual and the figurative halves is not complete. The fermentation of the mass of dough was a purely chemical process to which the dough itself could offer no resistance; but where there is question of leavening the minds of men with the leaven of a teaching so antagonistic in many respects to our natural instincts, the process is delayed or frustrated of its effects either in whole or in part by the opposition which it meets from the action of men. And yet, when Jesus spoke this parable, which of His hearers could have hoped that His teaching, delivered in an obscure corner of Palestine far removed from the famous seats of secular learning, would ever have leavened the world as it in fact has done? As time went on, this teaching was carried 76 THE PARABLES OF JESUS to lands farther and farther distant from the cradle of our faith; and it still continues to exercise its salutary influence upon all who come within its sphere of action. Our souls have been affected by it; and God expects of us that, just as we have received this leaven from others, so we in turn should communicate it to others by word and example. This is a task well within the power of us all, whatever our calling or station or condition in life may be.

TAGS: [Parables]

2.03 The Lost Sheep

III. THE LOST SHEEP.

Matthew 18:12; Luke 15:4 - Luke 15:6. This parable appears in a different context in St. Matthew and St. Luke. According to St. Matthew, Jesus, in answer to the question of His disciples, "Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" took a little child, and set him in their midst, and said: "Unless ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." He thus indicated the simplicity and humility which were necessary conditions THE PARABLES OF JESUS 77 for attaining, not merely a high place, but any place at all, in the Kingdom. Then, after warning His hearers against the sin of scandal, and teaching them to be ready to suffer any evil rather than be eternally lost, He proceeds to dissuade them from despising one of those little ones, on the ground that their angels always behold the face of His Father in heaven a plain proof of the dignity and value of these little ones in the sight of God. He thereupon propounds the parable, "What think ye? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine upon the mountains, and go in search of the straying one? And if so be he find it, verily I say to you that he rejoiceth more over it than over the ninety-nine that went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones perish." Here it is evident that the expression "little one" takes a different meaning in the parable from that which it had in the passages preceding, and stands, not for a child in years, but for one of those helpless ones who have gone astray; though, indeed, nothing opposes our identi- 78 THE PARABLES OF JESUS fying both, and referring the words of Jesus to the same individual at different stages in his career. In St. Luke the occasion of the parable is different. All the publicans and sinners were drawing near to Him to hear Him. The Pharisees and the Scribes murmured at this, saying: "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." Jesus, wishing to disabuse their minds of their false notions, thereupon spoke the parable. "What man of you that hath a hundred sheep and happeneth to have lost one of them, doth he not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go in search of the lost one, until he find it? And if he find it, he will lay it upon his shoulders rejoicing; and having entered his house, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying to them: "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost. I say unto you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety-nine just that have no need of repentance." We see how St. Luke reproduces the parable at greater length than the First Evangelist. In St. Matthew we miss the various touches that render the THE PARABLES OF JESUS 79 representation more vivid. The good shep herd does not lay the sheep upon his shoulders, nor does he call together his friends and neighbours to share his joy at the recovery of his lost sheep; and for the positive statement in St. Luke, "there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety-nine just that have no need of repentance," we have only the negative one: "it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones perish." The mountains in the First Gospel, and the wilderness in the Third, signify pasture-land as distinguished from land inhabited and cultivated. The burden of the preaching of Jesus, as that of John s, may be summed up in His words: "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of God is

at hand.” 1 A turning-point in the history of Israel was imminent; it behoved men to be prepared to meet the crisis. And the call to repentance was all the more urgent, as the existing generation was so ill-prepared to face the day which would test every man as it were by fire, revealing in his character the fine gold or the dross as the case might be.

1 Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15.

80 THE PARABLES OF JESUS For Jesus 1 and for John 2:1-25 as later for St. Peter, 3 it was a faithless and perverse generation. The moral depravity that prevailed was by no means universal: at all times, so then, God was not without faithful servants, but the generation as such could justly be characterized as the brood or offspring of vipers. The Jewish contemporaries of Jesus might be divided into three classes: those who were at once sinners and conscious of their guilt; those who, like the Scribes and Phari sees, were full of vices which rendered them hateful to God, though they themselves fondly imagined that they were paragons of virtue; and, finally, a comparatively small number of faithful souls who, like Zacharias and Eliza beth and Simeon and Anna, a generation earlier, kept themselves unspotted from the corruption by which they were surrounded.

It was to the first class namely, those who were sick and were aware of their sickness that the Divine Physician especially came; it was the straying sheep who knew well enough, that they had wandered far from the 1 Matthew 17:11; Mark 9:19

2 Luke 3:7.

3 Acts 2:40. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 81 fold that the Good Shepherd so lovingly sought. It was to those poor sinners whom the Scribes and Pharisees so haughtily despised, and from whom they contemptuously turned away and stood aloof, that Jesus preached; and not content with this, He went farther, and braved the prejudices of His enemies by receiving them and sitting at table with them. 1 Publicans and sinners though they might be, they were still the

1 The publicans, or tax-gatherers, were a class held in the greatest disrepute among the Jews. This arose partly from the fact that they were the representatives of a foreign heathen power, partly from their rapacity and oppressive and vexatious practices. Those who, like Matthew, sat at the receipt of custom incurred special obloquy. Their illegal exactions and the ruthless way in which they insisted on examining every package of merchandise introduced into a town, thus necessitating the unloading and reloading of the beasts of burden, and the unpacking and repacking of the goods, caused them to be detested by all who had to submit to such an embarrassing process. Their money-chest was held in particular abhorrence: no alms might be taken out of it, nor might its contents be used for the purposes of exchange, while they themselves were regarded as excluded from the religious fellowship of Israel, and under a disability of appearing as witnesses in the national courts. No wonder, then, that we find them classed with harlots and sinners, with highwaymen and murderers.

6 82 THE PARABLES OF JESUS children of their Heavenly Father; He still retained the ownership of them and His dominion over them, and their alienation from the fold could not be a matter of indifference to Him. In the mind of the Pharisee, there was joy before God when those who provoked Him perished from the world, while Jesus taught that there was “joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety -nine just that have no need of repentance.” It is precisely the personal note in the parable that touches us and appeals most strongly to us.

TAGS: [Parables]

2.04 The Talents the Pounds

IV. THE TALENTS THE POUNDS.

Matthew 25:14 - Matthew 25:30; Luke 19:12 - Luke 19:27. The Moral Law of the New Testament is not something new: it is but the Moral Law of the Old Testament spiritualized and perfected. The Moral Code of the Pentateuch is summed up in the Ten Commandments: the two great commandments which have for object the twofold love of God and of the neighbour may be regarded as an abridgment THE PARABLES OF JESUS 83 of the New Testament Code of Morals. And it is significant that, while the former is mostly negative in form, the latter is purely positive. Of the Ten Commandments only two are formally positive: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" and "Honour thy father and thy mother"; and, indeed, the authentic interpretation or amplification appended to the ⁵Third Commandment, showing that in the main it must be understood in a negative sense, leaves only the Fourth to be taken as prescribing something formally positive. The lesson which may be drawn from the contrast between the two sets of laws in question is further emphasized in the parable of the Talents. The parable begins with the words, "For as a man going on a journey," etc, without any definite statement following as to what the image resembles. The omission can with out difficulty be mentally supplied; and it would seem that the construction is due to the influence of the introductory formula of the preceding parable still felt here: "Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened" (to ten virgins). ⁵ ^ The principal personage in the 84 THE PARABLES OF JESUS parable is leaving home on a journey; but before setting out he calls together his servants. He contemplates a long absence, and, having a large sum of money at his disposal, he is naturally unwilling that it should lie unused during the interval between his departure and return. He therefore distributes it among them: to one he gives five talents, to another two, to another one. The unequal distribution is not the result of caprice or favouritism: he is guided solely by his knowledge of their varying ability. A talent may be estimated as worth 240 of our money. The sums in question may seem large to be entrusted to servants; but when we remember that these servants were slaves, and so liable to severe punishment for any dereliction of duty, the proceeding need cause us no surprise.

We are not told that their lord gave them any express instructions as to what they should do with the money, but the sequel shows that they were expected to trade with it, and not merely have it in safe-keeping. Two at least of the three understood the mind of their lord. Scarcely had he departed, when the two servants who had received the five and THE PARABLES OF JESUS 85 two talents respectively began to trade with them; and they performed their task with so much enterprise, diligence, and skill, that in course of time each of them had doubled the capital entrusted to him. It was not so with the servant who had received the one talent. Of too timorous a nature to venture it in trade, and not sufficiently alive to his master's interests to take even the slight trouble of investing it with the bankers, he went off instead and hid it in the earth. After a long absence the master returns and makes a reckoning with his servants. The two who had laboured faithfully approach him with joy and confidence, and present both the capital and the profit accruing from it in each case double the amount originally received. To each of them he addresses

words of commendation: "Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things: I will set thee over many things, enter thou into the joy of thy lord." Then the servant who had received one talent came, and said: "Lord, I knew that thou art a hard man: thou reapest where thou didst not sow, and gatherest where thou didst not 86 THE PARABLES OF JESUS winnow; and so through fear I went and hid thy talent in the earth: behold, thou hast thine own." These words may be regarded as an admission of guilt. He might perhaps, with some show of probability, have pleaded ignorance of his master's wish that he should trade with the money: instead, he acknowledges, at least by implication, that he was aware of this, inasmuch as he confesses his knowledge of his master's hard and exacting disposition. His lord replied: "Wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not winnow.

Thou oughtest therefore to have committed my money to the bankers, and when I came I should have received back mine own with interest." He then pronounces the punishment: "Take ye away, therefore, the talent from him, and give it to him that hath ten talents. For to every one that hath it shall be given, and he shall abound; but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away. And the unprofitable servant cast ye out into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." The question presents itself whether this THE PARABLES OF JESUS 87 parable was intended for the Apostles alone or for the followers of Jesus in general. The answer depends on the solution of the further question, whether it is identical with that of the Pounds (Luke 19:12 - Luke 19:27) or not. This problem is a rather difficult one; because, though there are differences between the two parables, they have a strong mutualresemblance. In St. Luke we find precise indications as to what gave occasion for the parable which he narrates, and as to the time and place of its delivery. It follows the episode of the conversion of Zacchaeus, and St. Luke introduces it with the statement that Jesus spoke it because He was nigh to Jerusalem, and because His followers thought that the Kingdom of God was about to appear forthwith. The parable in St. Matthew seems to have been addressed to a narrower circle of disciples on the Mount of Olives, and to have been spoken at the same time as the great eschatological discourse (chap, xxiv.) These differences, however, are by no means decisive against the identity of the parables. If the indications as to occasion, time, and place, in St. Matthew, were as precise as those in St.

88 THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Luke, the aspect of the case would be different; but as we need have no difficulty in accepting the view that St. Matthew inserted his parable out of the chronological order, in a context treating of subjects which had more or less affinity with it, the problem still remains an open one for any evidential value which the discrepancies in question possess. Besides, it seems improbable that Jesus would have repeated practically the same parable after so short an interval to disciples who must have been among His hearers on the previous occasion. Nor can we regard the internal differences as of sufficient importance to oblige us to decide against the identity of the parables. Some of them namely, the quality of the principal personage, the object of his journey, the rebellion and its punishment, the nature of the rewards granted to the faithful servants are all details found only in St. Luke, which may be looked upon in the light of additions, and which might well have been omitted, since they seem to have no particular significance for the main lesson of the parable, to which, moreover, some of them are only loosely attached. In St. Luke the THE

PARABLES OF JESUS 89 nobleman gives a pound (Greek mna, equal to about 4 sterling) to each of his ten servants, with the commission (wanting in St. Matthew) to trade with it till he came. Of these, two employ the sum committed to them with such success that, at the reckoning, they are able to make respectively a tenfold and a fivefold return. The conduct of a third closely corresponds with that of the slothful servant in St. Matthew. As for the other seven, no further mention of them is made. To our mind, the differences can be viewed as divergences inseparable from oral transmission by which means the parable was handed down before it was reduced to writing; and they are not of such a nature as would lead us to conclude that they necessarily outweigh the very striking resemblances between the parables and the identity of the lesson which they both convey. The conclusion at which we have arrived namely, that both parables are identical, and that St. Luke's statement is decisive for the time and place of its delivery furnishes ground for believing that it was spoken to a wider audience than the little band of the 90 THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Apostles. The talents or pounds, then, are not to be understood exclusively in the restricted sense of the ministerial office committed to the Apostles, together with those gifts and graces which the right fulfilment of the office demanded, though these seem primarily intended; but in the wider sense of all graces given to the individual members of the Church without distinction. Christ, Who distributed His graces to His followers before His ascension into heaven, is typified by the lord who divided his money among his servants before leaving home. His return and the reckoning which he made represent the Second Advent and the ensuing judgment. Mere negative goodness will not insure a favourable sentence: a life of usefulness in the Master's service, in which His gifts are put to good account, is likewise indispensable. In conclusion we have to offer some observations on the variations in the Lucan version of the parable. The Evangelist seems to have had in mind the journey of Archelaus to Rome, where he received from the Emperor Augustus the dignity of Ethnarch, with a conditional promise of the title of King, in THE PARABLES OF JESUS 91 spite of the embassy sent by the Jews to oppose his appointment as ruler. The nobleman now become king rewards his servants by appointing one over ten cities, another over five. In addition, as in St. Matthew, they are allowed to retain, though there is no express statement to that effect, the capital originally entrusted to them, with the increase resulting from their industrious employment of it. The fate of the disloyal subjects, typifying that of the unbelieving Jews, recalls Matthew 22:7. That St. Luke had the simpler version of St. Matthew before him appears from his retention of some particulars in it which do not agree with his own version; for instance, though he mentions ten servants, only three present themselves at the reckoning, as in St. Matthew, and we find the king addressing those who stood by: "Take ye away the pound from him, and give it to him that hath ten pounds "(Matt.: " ten talents ")", though in reality the servant in question has already not ten, but eleven pounds i.e, the original pound and the ten pounds profit. St. Luke thus disagrees with himself to agree with St. Matthew.

TAGS: [Parables]

3.00 Parables recorded in One Gospel only

PARABLES RECORDED IN ONE GOSPEL ONLY.

3.01 The Darnel Sown Among the Wheat

I. THE DARNEL SOWN AMONG THE WHEAT.

Matthew 13:24 - Matthew 13:30. Explanation: Matthew 13:36 - Matthew 13:43. THIS parable follows the interpretation of the parable of the Sower, with which it partly coincides. Our Lord likens the Kingdom of Heaven to a man who sowed good seed in his field. He had a vigilant enemy, who, while men slept, either at night or during the hottest part of the day, came and oversowed darnel among the wheat. In due time the good grain sprouted and produced first the blade and then the ripening ears. A similar process took place in the case of the darnel. At first both plants were undistinguishable: it was only when the fruit appeared that each could be recognized for what it really was. The servants of the goodman of the house are 92 THE PARABLES OF JESUS 93 gravely concerned at seeing the crop in danger of being spoilt, and they are at the same time perplexed as to how the darnel could have found its way among the wheat, considering that only good seed had been sown. They look to their master for a solution of the difficulty, and he ascribes the presence of the darnel to the agency of an enemy. The practical question as to what has to be done now suggests itself to them, and they ask their master if he would have them go and gather up the darnel. He answers in the negative, on the ground that it would not be feasible to do so without at the same time uprooting the wheat. He will rather allow both to grow together till the harvest, and then he will bid his reapers gather first the darnel and bind it in bundles to be burnt, and then gather the wheat into his barn. The English word "cockle" is not the correct rendering of the term zizania used by the Evangelist. The latter word signifies darnel, a plant which resembles wheat till the fruit sufficiently develops to allow of its recognition by the colour of the grains, which are black. These were formerly supposed to 94 THE PARABLES OF JESUS be poisonous, but now it is known that they are in themselves harmless, and that they are deleterious only when affected by ergot, which is often the case. The plant does not seem to be found wild in England. The word "cockle" employed in the common English Catholic version really denotes the corncockle, a plant which bears no resemblance to wheat. The word, however, has long been used in English in a metaphorical sense, and, indeed, its use seems to have been proverbial. This may be inferred from the passage in Shakespeare ("Coriolanus," III. i.): "In soothing them, we nourish against our senate The cockle of rebellion, insolence, sedition, Which we ourselves have ploughed for, sowed, and scattered." Cf. "sow'd cockle reap'd no corn" ("Love's Labour's Lost," IV. iii.)-

We are not dependent on the commentators for the interpretation of the parable at least on broad lines. When Jesus had dismissed the multitudes and entered the house, the disciples came and asked Him to explain it to them. The explanation, which He gave, plainly showed that He wished it to be understood as an allegory; though He did not so press the process of allegorizing as to extend it to every detail. The modern critics who refuse to regard any of the parables of Jesus as allegories look upon the interpretation attributed to Him by the writer of the Gospel as both in matter and form the work of the author himself. As we have already said, such a view is sufficiently refuted by the fact that many of the rabbinical parables contain an

unmistakably allegorical element. In Our Lord's explanation, the sower of the good seed is the Son of Man Himself; the field is the world. He thus sufficiently indicates that His activity is not to be limited by the narrow bounds of Palestine; it will rather have the whole world as its sphere. The good seed represents the children of the Kingdom, the darnel the children of the Evil One; while the enemy who sows it is the devil himself. He chooses the time for his nefarious work when men are asleep, and so are off their guard. This circumstance seems to be added for the purpose of bringing into prominence the secrecy of his proceeding, and we need not view it as containing an implied rebuke to the 96 THE PARABLES OF JESUS pastors of the Church for their want of vigilance. Men must needs sleep; and scandals are bound to come let pastors be ever so faithful and watchful. In the figurative half of the parable there is an essential difference between the darnel and the wheat, whereas in the real half the children of the Kingdom and those of the Evil One have a common nature: the difference between them is only moral and religious, and therefore merely accidental. Who, then, are the children of the Evil One? Elsewhere (John 8:44) we find Jesus styling His active adversaries among the Jews the children of the devil, "Ye are of your father the devil; and the desires of your father it is your will to do."

Ely mas the magician is styled by St. Paul "son of the devil," inasmuch as he had with stood him, and sought to turn away the proconsul Sergius Paulus from the faith (Acts 13:8 - Acts 13:10). St. 1 John 3:10 - 1 John 3:121 John 3:10 - 1 John 3:12) states the broad ground of distinction between the children of God and the children of the devil in the following words: "Herein are manifest the children of God and the children of the devil. Whoew- doth not work righteousness THE PARABLES OF JESUS 97 is not of God, nor he who loveth not his brother." This implies that such men are of the devil, and that those who pursue an opposite course are the children of God. The Apostle then goes on to mention the murderer Cain as of the devil. Heretics and schismatics are indeed to be numbered among the children of the Evil One; but there is no sufficient reason to restrict the title to them, as has often been done. Still it may be said that those are in a particular manner envisaged who are the cause of sin to others (ver. 41).

These are the children of the devil, not only because they copy the disobedience and law lessness of their father, but also because they help him in his work of destroying souls, and consciously or unconsciously follow as he leads. God could destroy them if He pleased as soon as ever they show themselves in their true colours, but He forbears till the great harvest comes at the end of the world. Then just as at the harvest here on earth the darnel is bound together in bundles and cast into the fire to burn, so it will fare with the enemies of God. He will send His reapers the angels, who will gather together out of His Kingdom 98 THE PARABLES OF JESUS all scandals 1 and all those who work iniquity, and will cast them into the furnace of fire where there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. On the other hand, the just will appear bright as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

TAGS: [Parables]

3.02 The Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price

II. THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

Matthew 13:44 - Matthew 13:46. In this twofold parable Jesus sets forth the surpassing value of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the sacrifice which those who desire it above all things are ready to make. He likens the Kingdom of Heaven to a man who found a treasure hidden in a field. He carefully concealed it where he found it; and in his joy he went and sold all that he had and purchased the field in question. According to Jewish

1 The word "scandal" in Biblical language has quite a different meaning from what it has in ordinary speech.

It originally signified a trap set for an enemy, a stumblingblock, and it thus came to stand for anything which caused men to stumble or fall in a moral sense, or, in other words, for anything that was the cause or occasion of sin. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 91) law such a transaction would be quite allowable; and the buyer of the field would acquire a title to the treasure which it contained.

Again, He likens the Kingdom of Heaven to a merchant seeking fine pearls. Finding one of great price, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. It has been thought that in this twofold parable Jesus wished to draw a distinction between those who light accidentally upon the Kingdom and those who deliberately and of set purpose seek it. This is scarcely probable; and it seems better to take both parts of the parable as intended to convey under slightly varying forms the same spiritual truth. It may be remarked that the comparison of the Kingdom of Heaven to the man who found the treasure and to the merchant seeking fine pearls rather than to the treasure itself and to the pearl of great price respectively, though an inexactitude when judged by our literary methods, is quite in accordance with the style of the Rabbins. In the early days of Christianity the acceptance of the Kingdom often involved the renunciation of all things, even of life itself.

100 THE PARABLES OF JESUS The sacrifice was demanded not merely of those who aspired to a life higher in its ideals and aims than the life of the ordinary Christian, but also of all those who would either receive the message of the Gospel or remain faithful to it once they had accepted it. House and home, father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters the surrender of all these in the present, and of all earthly hopes for the future such was the sacrifice which men were often called upon to make, and which they did not deem excessive in view of the spiritual treasure which they thus acquired. The parable refutes the material conception of the Kingdom prevalent among the Jewish contemporaries of Christ. The Kingdom does not appear in pomp and circumstance, nor as something which in the worldly sense enriches those who enter it; on the contrary, its spiritual nature is indicated by the fact that membership in it may involve the loss of material goods. Its citizens as such enjoy no share in an earthly kingdom; their citizenship is in heaven¹ where their King reigns, and whence they expect that He will come in

1 Php 3:20. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 101 glory to assert His sovereignty over all man kind, and to sit on His throne as Judge of the living and of the dead. In our days, men as a rule are not called upon to make this absolute renunciation of all they possess for the sake of the Kingdom. It will suffice if we make a mental sacrifice in the sense of being willing to part with all things should God require it of us. Occasions may arise to test the sincerity of our dispositions, when we may feel ourselves confronted with the necessity of making the choice between suffering temporal loss or of parting with our spiritual treasure. Happy shall we then be if our choice demonstrates that we realize the transcendent importance of the spiritual and eternal as compared with what is merely material and temporal.

TAGS: [Parables]

3.03 The Dragnet

III. The Dragnet.

Matthew 13:47 - Matthew 13:50. This parable completes the group of seven in Matt. xiii. In it Jesus likens the Kingdom of Heaven to a dragnet cast into the sea which 102 THE PARABLES OF JESUS enclosed fishes of all kinds. When it was full, the fishers drew it upon the beach, and then sat down and gathered the good together into vessels, while they cast the decaying fish away.

He then explained the parable: " So shall it be at the end of the world. The angels shall go forth and shall separate the bad from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."

It was fitting that the sevenfold cycle of parables which began with the sowing of the Seed, the initiation of the Kingdom in the minds of individuals, should end in one which reproduced the last scene of all in the history of God's dealings with mankind. The parable conveys much the same lessons as that of the Cockle or Darnel among the Wheat which it partly overlaps. It must have appealed forcibly to those of the Apostles who had been fishermen, inasmuch as the figurative half of the parable was taken from their trade; and it also reminded them of their new vocation as fishers of men. It likewise prepared the disciples betimes to acquiesce later on in the truth which their future experience would THE PARABLES OF JESUS 103 reveal to them namely, that the Society which their Master was about to inaugurate would not be a society consisting exclusively of the perfect, and that inclusion in it would not imply the acceptableness before God of those so included. To be descended according to the flesh from Abraham, or to have received with joy the message of the Gospel, would not avail those who showed by their unworthy lives that they had no spiritual kinship with the great Father of Israel, and that in act they belied their professions. In this parable, unlike the parable of the Cockle, the question of the origin of evil is not touched on. It is taken for granted that the Church militant, though heavenly in its origin, would not realize in the full sense the ideal sketched by St. Paul of the Church as " a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing," but " holy and without blemish." 1 The human element in it would always be a fruitful source of sin and disorder; and the just would have to bear with this as inevitable, supporting themselves with the Blessed Vision of the 1 Ephesians 5:27.

104 THE PARABLES OF JESUS Church triumphant, in which the Apostle's words would receive their full and perfect fulfilment.

TAGS: [Parables]

3.04 The Unmerciful Servant

IV. THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT.

Matthew 18:23 - Matthew 18:34. The question put by Peter: " Lord, how often shall my brother offend against me, and I forgive him: unto seven times?" gave occasion to Jesus to speak this parable. It was a common opinion among the Jews that a man was bound to forgive his neighbour three times, not oftener, and this opinion was based on the analogy of the Divine action as set forth in Amos 2:6: "For three transgressions of Israel, yea, for four, I will not turn it away " that is, the punishment or the sentence decreeing it. In this passage, how ever, it is a question, not of the forgiveness of man by man, but of the forgiveness of man by God. Jesus answered him: " I do not say to thee unto seven times, but unto seventy times seven times." If we translate " seventy and seven times," the sense of the answer is not affected, inasmuch as both expressions indicate THE PARABLES OF JESUS 105 the duty of forgiving an unlimited number of times. To make His meaning plain, and to place in a clear light the true relation of man as a debtor towards God, He narrated the parable. The Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a king who began to make a reckoning with his servants. As he did so, a certain servant was brought before him who owed him ten thousand talents, a sum which has been computed to represent more than two millions sterling. The hopeless servant having no means with which to pay this enormous debt, his master ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made of the proceeds. The servant, seeing absolute ruin staring himself and his family in the face, is driven by sheer desperation to appeal to the clemency of the king, while he makes a promise which in his cooler moments he would have felt it impossible to keep. He falls down before his sovereign, and in accents of touching supplication he invokes his mercy: " Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." His prayer was granted even beyond what he asked: his lord was so touched with compassion for his distress 106 THE PARABLES OF JESUS that, far from contenting himself with giving him time to pay, he forgave him instead the entire debt. We can imagine how effusive the servant was in his gratitude towards his lord, and in his protestations of loyalty and attachment in return for such unmerited and unexpected indulgence. Scarcely had he gone forth from the royal presence, when he met a fellow-servant who owed him a trifling debt, a hundred denars only the six hundred thousandth part of the sum which had been just remitted him. One would have expected that, with a heart dilated with joy, he would have welcomed the opportunity of imitating his master's generosity, and gladly forgiven his debtor. No, on the contrary, he takes him by the throat and sternly demands of him the payment of the debt. The words and the fierce action which accompanied them struck terror into the heart of the unfortunate man.

He fell down at his creditor's feet and besought him: " Have patience with me, and I will pay thee." His prayer is in vain: the merciless servant steels his heart against the distress of his companion; and, spurning a petition couched in language almost identical with THE PARABLES OF JESUS 107 that which he himself so shortly before had addressed to their common master, he went and cast him into prison, there to languish-till he should have paid what he owed. His fellow-servants who had seen the whole transaction were full of grief and indignation at it. They came and gave a

full account of it to their lord. His former pity is now turned into anger, and so, summoning the unmerciful servant into his presence, he upbraids him with his heartless behaviour. "Thou wicked servant," he cries out, "I forgave thee that debt because thou besoughtest me. Was it not, then, thy duty to have pity on thy fellowservant even as I had pity on thee?" Then in his just anger he delivered him over to the torturers until he should have paid all he owed.

Jesus Himself points out the application of the parable with the words: "So also shall my Heavenly Father do unto you unless ye forgive each one his brother from his heart." No reader of the parable can fail to be impressed by the force and eloquence with which Our Lord teaches the great lesson of forgiveness, and one feels that no explanation of it is needed to show the absolute necessity 108 THE PARABLES OF JESUS we are under of forgiving others if we would be forgiven ourselves. The lesson inculcated is that of the petition of the Lord's Prayer; "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us," put into concrete form. And the parable further teaches us that so enormous is the debt which each of us owes to God, that of our own resources we come infinitely short of satisfying the Divine justice. These are the two important truths which it is intended to convey. It is obvious that many details in the narrative have no exact counterpart in the real half of the parable. Such is the reckoning which the king made with his servants, and which has no parallel in the real half, inasmuch as we are precluded from identifying it with the Particular or the General Judgment by the fact that even after it had taken place there still remained a possibility of pardon and of sinning anew. Such, too, is the account of the servants acquainting the king with the harsh action of the servant whose debt had just been remitted. And we must regard the king's withdrawal of forgiveness in the same light, since God does not repent of His gifts. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 109 These and similar details have, however, their own use in imparting force and vividness to the story.

There is, perhaps, no consideration which has so much power to lead us to forgive others as the remembrance of our own indebtedness to God. United and equalized as men are by their common nature, when one offends another, the gravity of the act, in as far as it is an offence against man, pales into insignificance in comparison with the gravity of a sin as it is an offence against God. And then the knowledge of our own sinfulness and imperfection ought to render us lenient to the shortcomings of others. How inconsistent it is of us to hope that God will take a merciful view of our sins and failings, while we regard those of our neighbour without compassion, and with perhaps a proud consciousness of our own superiority to him! The duty of forgiveness is an essential part of the precept of charity, and its importance may be inferred from the various means which Jesus made use of to bring it home to us namely, precept and threat and promise, parable and example.

110 THE PARABLES OF JESUS TAGS: [Parables]

3.05 The Labourers in the Vineyard

V. The Labourers in the Vineyard.

Matthew 20:1 - Matthew 20:16. In this parable Jesus likens the Kingdom of Heaven to a householder who went out early in the morning to the market-place to hire labourers to work in his vineyard. He found there the labourers whom he sought, and, having agreed with them for a denar each as their day's wages, he sent them into his vineyard. A denar, or, as it is commonly rendered, a penny, the usual daily wage (Tob. 5:14, LXX.), was about equal to ninepence of our money, though its purchasing power was considerably greater. He went out again about the third hour (9 a.m.), and saw others standing idle in the market-place.

He said to them: "Go ye also into the vine yard, and I will give you what is fair." They, too, went into the vineyard. He went out again at the sixth hour (noon), and at the ninth hour (3 p.m.), and hired other labourers. Again about the eleventh hour (5 p.m.) he went out, and found others standing, to whom he said: "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" THE PARABLES OF JESUS 111

They answered: "Because no one hath hired us." He said to them: "Go ye also into the vineyard." When evening was come (about 6 p.m.), he said to his steward: "Call the labourers and pay them the wages, beginning with the last even to the first." Those who had come at the eleventh hour, and had there foreworked but one hour, received a penny each. Last of all came those who had been first hired. Their expectations had been heightened by the sight of the master's liberality to those who had laboured only one hour, and they felt sure that he would not be content with merely giving them the hire agreed on. When, therefore, they received every man a penny, they were disappointed, and began to complain: "These last laboured only one hour, yet thou hast put us both on the same level, though we have borne the weight of the day and the scorching heat." In answer he said to one of them: "Friend, I do thee no wrong. Didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take what is thine, and go thy way. It is my will to give unto this last even as to thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? Or is thy 112 THE PARABLES OF JESUS eye envious because I am good?" "So," adds Jesus, "shall the last be first, and the first last." This parable is preceded by the words of Jesus: "Many shall be last that are first; and first that are last" (xix. 30). It ends, as we have seen, with similar words in a different order. Yet both passages have not the same signification. In the former passage there is question, as the context shows, of some who fail to receive the reward, and of others who obtain it; while in the latter first and last are placed on an equal footing, and receive the same essential remuneration. When, therefore, the parable begins with the words, "For the kingdom of heaven is like," etc, it is not thereby meant that it is an explanation of the preceding statement. The parable itself shows that the thought in 19:30 is carried farther in what follows, with the result we have seen namely, that, though both passages have an external resemblance, the thoughts that underlie them respectively are different. In the case of many of the parables the meaning is sufficiently obvious; here it is THE PARABLES OF JESUS 113 otherwise. Commentators have differed widely as to the genuine meaning of the parable; and this great divergence of views is due to the fact that ideas have been read into it

which it does not really contain. For instance, some commentators of great weight have regarded the equality of reward as based on the equality of merit or service, inasmuch as those who laboured but one hour achieved as much by their superior industry as those who laboured eleven hours. There is a rabbinic parable dating from about three centuries after Christ which conveys this lesson and which bears a striking resemblance to our parable, but in the latter there is nothing whatever, not even the slightest hint, which could give any colour to such an interpretation. The concluding section of chapter xix. and the greater part of chapter xx. are devoted to the instruction of the Apostles. They had, according to St. Peter's declaration, severed themselves from all material and humanities, home, family, friends, and possessions; but the sublime call which they had received, and the sacrifice which they had made, only 114 THE PARABLES OF JESUS rendered it the more necessary that they should be thoroughly grounded in humility.

How necessary a lesson to this effect was, the ambitious request of the wife of Zebedee, which was prompted by her sons James and John, is sufficient to show us. Accordingly, we may take the parables as primarily though not exclusively intended for the Apostles. Their Master would teach them by means of it that priority in point of time of calling ought not to be a reason why anyone should be puffed up; just as later He would tell them that priority of place in His Kingdom only involved increased service. All the labourers in the parable obeyed the call and wrought; and all without exception obtained a reward essentially the same, eternal blessedness. The parable might also at a later period serve as a lesson for the Jewish converts to the faith.

Though they were the first to be called, they were not thereby entitled to boast themselves against those who were called subsequently from among the heathen. The parable may be interpreted on broad lines as follows: The owner of the vineyard represents God; the vineyard itself, His THE PARABLES OF JESUS 115

Kingdom. The labourers signify those who are called to work in it whether in quality of His ministers or otherwise. The different hours help to bring into prominence the chief lesson of the parable namely, the varying length of the time of service spent by individuals or groups of individuals in the Kingdom as opposed to the essential equality of remuneration. The penny stands for the eternal reward; and by the evening, when the labourers received their hire, is to be understood the Day of Judgment. Thus far we may go in the interpretation of the parable without justly incurring the charge of unduly allegorizing. The parable contains what in a writer of the present day would be termed inexactitudes, but these are quite in conformity with Jewish modes of expression. For example, in the introductory formula the Kingdom of Heaven is likened to the householder. It is obvious that in reality the resemblance exists between the narrative as a whole which follows, and the spiritual truth which it serves to illustrate. The householder alone is expressly stated to resemble the Kingdom, either because he is the principal personage in the parable 116 THE PARABLES OF JESUS or, more probably, because it begins with him.

Again, it seems implied that the owner of the vineyard hired at each successive visit to the market-place all the labourers whom he found there; and yet we find him upbraiding those whom he found at the eleventh hour with standing there idle all the day. Then, if we interpret the evening as the Day of Judgment, as we surely must, we are confronted with the difficulty that those who had been first hired broke out into murmurs, and were in consequence rebuked by the householder; whereas, in fact, murmuring at the Day of Judgment on the part of the elect would be

out of the question. All these apparent inexactitudes teach us the useful lesson that we must content ourselves with the genuine meaning of the parable, and not seek in every detail of the narrative a spiritual signification which it does not really contain.

TAGS: [Parables]

3.06 The Two Sons

VI. THE TWO SONS.

Matthew 21:28 - Matthew 21:32. The leaders of the Jews brought upon them selves the rebuke contained in this parable. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 117 When Jesus had entered the Temple, and was teaching there, they came to Him, and refer ring to His words and actions of the last few days, they asked Him: "By what authority doest thou these things? and who hath given thee this authority?" Instead of returning a direct reply to their question, He answered, I, too, will ask you one word, which if ye tell me, I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven or from men?" This was a plain, straightforward question, and it called for a plain answer. Those to whom it was addressed saw at once that they could not answer it without prejudice to them selves. If they said, " from heaven," the retort was obvious: " Why, then, did ye not believe him?" while fear of the people, who regarded John as a prophet, held them back from asserting the human origin of his baptism.

Accordingly, they preferred to forgo an answer to their own question to risking an answer to that of Jesus, and they were thus obliged, though reluctantly, to confess their ignorance of the matter. Jesus then rejoined, " Neither do I tell you by what authority I do 118 THE PARABLES OF JESUS these things." Not content, however, with putting them to silence, He would lead them on by means of a parable to pronounce their own condemnation. He therefore went on, " What think ye? A certain man had two sons, and he came to the first, and said, Song of Solomon 1:1-17 go work to-day in the vineyard. He answered: I will not; but afterwards he changed his mind and went." The father, apparently unaware of this change of purpose, " came to the second, and gave him the same command. He answered: Yes, sir; but he went not. Which of the two did the will of his father?" The Jewish leaders could give only one reply to this question, " The first." They had virtually judged themselves, and now Jesus will point the moral of the parable as follows: " Verily I say unto you, the publicans and the harlots go before you into the kingdom of heaven. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publi-

1 The Greek word rendered " son " really means " child," and is here a term of affection. The father of the Prodigal so addresses his elder son, and Abraham the rich man in Hades. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 119 cans and the harlots believed him. Nay, even when ye saw that they believed him, ye remained obstinate in your unbelief." The son who refused to work and afterwards repented of his disobedience, was a figure of the publicans and harlots, who at first refused obedience to the Law of God, and afterwards repented; while the son who professed obedience without practising it fitly represented the high-priests, Scribes, and elders, who, though foremost in their professions of strict obedience to even the minutest demands of the Law, came short of the despised publicans and harlots in their fulfilment of it, once these latter had heard and obeyed the call to repentance. The parable, though called forth by a certain set of circumstances, has no merely local or temporary significance. As long as humanity endures, both classes, the proud, self-righteous leaders of the Jewish people on the one hand, and the publicans and sinners, whose

consciousness of guilt urged them on to seek relief, on the other, will always have their representatives. Those who belong to the latter class are in no danger of deceiving themselves or 120 THE PARABLES OF JESUS others: the disorders of their lives effectually prevent this; while those of the former class, through ignorance of their maladies, feel no desire of a cure. Their very freedom from the grosser forms of sin, and the esteem which others testify for them, lull them into a feeling of false security, and stifle any suspicions or misgivings concerning themselves that may arise in their minds. The Scriptures, which the learned among the Jews boasted of knowing so thoroughly, could have taught them the lesson which they so much needed, distrust of themselves; and well for them would it have been if they had made their own the sentiments of the Psalmist which dictated that prayer which we, too, ought to have often on our lips: " Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be with me any way which leadeth to sorrow: and lead me in the way everlasting"

(Psalms 138:23/.). THE PARABLES OF JESUS 121 TAGS: [Parables]

3.07 The Marriage of the King's Son

VII. THE MARRIAGE OF THE KING'S SON.

Matthew 22:2 - Matthew 22:14. This parable has certain traits in common with that of the Ten Virgins, but it bears a more striking resemblance to the parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14:16 - Luke 14:24). Indeed, both parables have been identified in the sense that both are variants of a parable spoken at one and the same time by Jesus; and the following reasons are alleged in favour of this view: First, each of them appears in only one Gospel; then, they have many features in common; and, lastly, the lessons which they respectively teach are substantially the same. This opinion must be regarded as inadmissible. The Lucan parable was spoken by Jesus as He sat at table in the house of a private person, and this circumstance itself seems to have suggested the parable. On the other hand, the parable in St. Matthew was spoken in the Temple: the context of the narrative leaves us in no doubt on that head. In St. Matthew there is question of a marriage feast which a king made for his son; in St. Luke a man not further qualified gives an ordinary banquet. In this latter Evangelist, those bidden to the dinner simply turn a cold shoulder to the message of invitation; we miss the outrageous treatment of the messengers, and the subsequent punishment inflicted on the guilty by the king. Finally, the episode of the guest who had not a wedding garment finds no place in St. Luke. Those who hold the identity of both parables deny that the alleged difference of place where they were respectively delivered is conclusive against them, since the Evangelists made no difficulty about inserting parables or incidents in a context which appeared to suit them, even if thereby occasion was given for a natural misunderstanding. As for the differences between the parables which we have enumerated, the objection is met by the critics with the allegation that St. Luke has preserved the parable in a form more closely resembling the original, and that the deviations from it in St. Matthew may be explained on the ground that this Evangelist submitted it to a process of allegorization in the light of events (e.g., the destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70) which had happened in the interval between the death of Jesus and the composition of his Gospel.

We have no choice but to reject this opinion stated in its absolute form; but we are inclined to admit the identity of the parables in a modified sense. It is possible nay, probable that Jesus spoke some at least of His parables on more than one occasion, and that in thus repeating them He introduced variations according as the occasion demanded it.

If here we apply this hypothesis, the stronger and more pointed language used by Jesus in St. Matthew may be accounted for by the growing hostility of the Jewish leaders, who were fully determined to bring matters to a head. The occasion called for plain speaking; and Jesus wished His words to leave them in no doubt that He spoke of them. In St. Luke the occasion on which the parable was spoken was a social one; and though even in the house where He was at meat the vigilant and unfriendly eyes of the Pharisees were fixed on Him, He gracefully and tactfully refrained from using the plain and forcible language which the open opposition and

PARABLES OF JESUS enmity of His adversaries compelled Him to employ at a later date. In the parable the Kingdom of Heaven is represented as a king who made a marriage feast for his son, to which he invited many. In due time he sent out his messengers to summon those who had been invited, but they would not come. He thereupon sent forth other servants with a more pressing invitation, " Behold, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come ye to the marriage feast." They turned a deaf ear to the invitation and went their way, one to his farm, and another to his merchandise; while the others laid hold of the servants, treated them shamefully, and put them to death. The king hearing of this was angry: he sent his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burnt their city. He then said to his servants: " The marriage indeed is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Go ye, therefore, to the cross-roads, and as many as ye find call to the marriage feast." Those servants accordingly went forth to the ways, and gathered together all they found, both bad and good, and the wedding- THE PARABLES OF JESUS 125 ding was filled with guests. Then the king went in to behold the guests, and he saw there a man not clothed with a wedding garment.

He said to him: " Friend, how earnest thou in hither without a wedding garment?" But he was silent. Then said the king to the waiters: " Bind his feet and hands, and cast him into the darkness without: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." The king who made a marriage feast for his son is God Himself; the son is Christ; the marriage feast represents the espousals of Christ with His Church which were to take place after His resurrection (Revelation 21:2, Revelation 21:9; John 3:29; Ephesians 5:27). God invited the Jews to the feast by His prophets, especially by the last and greatest of them, John the Baptist. This we infer from the statement that, when the king sent out his servants for the first time, it was to those who had been already invited. The servants are the Apostles whom the Jews ill-treated, and some of whom (e.g, James the son of Zebedee, and James styled the brother of the Lord) they put to death. The city which was destroyed is Jerusalem. The guests gathered in promiscuously- 126 THE PARABLES OF JESUS ously from the highways are the Gentiles; the wedding garment represents the virtues of the Christian life. Towards the end the scene seems to change suddenly; we find our selves no longer in the banqueting-hall, but in presence of the great assembly of the Last Day. The hapless man who has not on the wedding garment is first bound hand and foot, by which his powerlessness to resist is typified; and he is then cast out into the darkness that is, into hell where there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. The Greek word translated " dinner " signifies rather breakfast or luncheon, and corresponds to the Continental *dejeuner*.

Before the parable ends, however, it is no longer day, but night: the guest who has not on the wedding garment is cast out into the darkness. The critics generally regard verses 6 and 7 as not a genuine utterance of Jesus, but as originating with the Evangelist himself.

It is, in their view, a *vaticinium ex eventu* that is, a prophecy posterior to the event which it professes to foretell and dependent on it. They base their view on the structure of verse 6, where they see an inexactitude THE PARABLES OF JESUS 127 observable also in the English versions. In the preceding verse the recipients of the final invitation simply make light of it, and with no formal or implied exception go about their ordinary business; whereas in verse 6 there are still others who proceed farther. They also object the want of connection between the verses in question and the context, and they point out that in what follows it is implied that the city is still standing. To all this it has been answered that the literary methods of the Evangelist were very

unlike those of our own times; that the destruction of the city is anticipated in the narrative; and that we must relegate it to a period later than the holding of the feast. As to the latter part of the reply, which does not seem to us very convincing, we should think it better to renounce any attempt at establishing exact historical sequence in a narrative which is essentially figurative. A parable is a series of images, not unconnected, indeed, but between which we are not always justified in looking for that chronological sequence or order of cause and effect which we constantly presuppose in the domain of the real and 128 THE PARABLES OF JESUS actual. It is scarcely necessary to add that from the fact that only one out of so many guests was found without a wedding garment no inference can be drawn as to Our Lord's teaching on the question of the relative numbers of the reprobate and the elect.

TAGS: [Parables]

3.08 The Ten Virgins

VIII. THE TEN VIRGINS.

Matthew 25:1 - Matthew 25:13. In that portion of St. Matthew's Gospel which immediately precedes this parable, we find Jesus inculcating on His disciples the need of watchfulness and of preparedness for His Second Coming. He exacts of them those qualities of vigilance, fidelity, and prudence, which characterize the faithful steward; and He sets forth in lively language the dreadful punishment that awaits those who in their lord's absence abuse the office of trust confided to them by ill-treating their fellow-servants and by leading a riotous life. Thereupon three parables follow: the Ten Virgins, the Talents, and the parable of the Sheep and Goats. In the first of these the duty of THE PARABLES OF JESUS 129 vigilance is the chief lesson, the second teaches the need of diligence, while in the third we learn in what the primary and essential duty of the Christian consists. The public career of Jesus as a teacher was now at an end. He had confined His ministry to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; but He had failed to make an impression of an enduring nature on the great mass of the people; and as for their rulers, He had only succeeded in rousing their bitter enmity and active, unwearying opposition. What teaching He had still to communicate He reserved for the inner circle of His followers, who after all, with one solitary exception, had continued faithful to Him in His temptations, 1 and who, though in the impending trial their faith might be clouded and their trust interrupted for a brief season, had never ceased to love Him, and who in a future of which as yet they had no conception would make atonement for their passing weakness. " Then," said Jesus, referring to the Parousia, " the Kingdom of Heaven will be likened to ten virgins who, having taken their

1 Luke 22:28.

130 THE PARABLES OF JESUS lamps, went out to meet the bridegroom." 1 It is to be noted that neither in this nor in the preceding parable is there any mention of the bride, since the virgins in the one and the guests in the other, representing as they do the Church, occupy the place of that person age. Some interpreters think that the virgins went forth from their own houses, and met by previous arrangement at some house on the way, where, owing to the bridegroom's delay, they nodded and fell asleep. Others are of opinion that it was from the bride's house that they set out; while others, again, take the view that they met at the house of the bride, but did not actually go out to meet the bridegroom till the cry at midnight was heard.

If this last opinion is correct, verse 1 would have to be regarded as simply the heading of the parable, and thus outside the narrative. A little reflection will show that none of these views is free from difficulties, but any choice that we may make between them will scarcely affect the lesson of the parable. In Jewish weddings as a rule, though not invariably, the bridegroom, accompanied by his groomsmen 1 The Vulgate has in addition " and the bride." THE PARABLES OF JESUS 131 and friends, proceeded to the house of the bride, whom with her attendant maidens and friends he thence led to his own residence.

Here the bridegroom comes from a distance and proceeds to the house of the bride, on the way to which he is met by the procession. This accords with the real half of the parable as distinguished from the figurative. The lamps were vessels filled with oil or naphtha and furnished with wicks. They were not carried in the hand, but attached to long poles and borne aloft. The wise virgins took with them a supply of oil in vessels; while the foolish virgins neglected to make this provision. The expected advent of the bridegroom filled them with a pleasurable excitement; but as hour after hour passed by, and no sign of his coming appeared, they began to nod and finally fell fast asleep. At midnight the cry was raised, by whom, it would be useless to inquire: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him." All the virgins started up and trimmed their lamps. Now, apparently for the first time, the foolish virgins perceive the consequences of their lack of foresight. They, too, adjust and light the 132 THE PARABLES OF JESUS wicks of their lamps, but, for want of sufficient oil, the lamps emit only a feeble light, the flame flickers and threatens to go out. In their need they appeal to their provident companions: "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are going out." The wise virgins feel obliged to refuse, for the reason that they fear that their supply would not be enough for all. Instead, they advise them to go to where oil is sold and buy some for themselves. Accordingly, at that late hour of the night they trudge off in quest of oil, and in their absence the bridegroom appears, and, accompanied by the wise virgins, proceeds to the house where the marriage feast is to be celebrated. The foolish virgins, having obtained what they sought, hasten back, and find that the procession is already on its way to the house of the feast. They hurry thither, only to see the door shut on their arrival. This does not cause them much uneasiness: they have only to knock and demand admittance, and it will be granted. What, then, is their consternation to find that their cries and prayers are all in vain! The character of the bridegroom has suddenly changed to that of judge, and in THE PARABLES OF JESUS 133 stern tones he answers their entreaties, "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not." Our Lord indicates the lesson of the parable in the words that round it off: "Watch ye, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour."

There is, perhaps, no parable in the interpretation of which men have given a freer rein to their imaginations than this. Excesses of this kind weaken the force of the parable, because, when the varying opinions as to the meaning of details spring merely from individual fantasy, they naturally produce uncertainty; and, at the same time, overmuch attention to what at most is only of subordinate importance tends to take off the mind from the lessons which the parable as a whole conveys. Accordingly, we shall refrain from pressing the details of this parable beyond what they are obviously intended to represent. The object of the parable was to impress on the disciples the paramount duty of vigilance in view of the uncertainty of the precise time of the Parousia. Jesus had, indeed, specified various signs that would precede that event;

134 THE PARABLES OF JESUS but, as these signs were to be spread over a more or less lengthened period, they would furnish no sufficient indication as to the day or hour when it would take place. Hence their only safety lay in watchfulness, if they would not be found unprepared. The ten virgins represent the faithful at large. It is the opinion of some that the number ten was chosen because the Jewish ritual law prescribed that the presence of at least that number of persons at certain ceremonies was obligatory if the ceremonies in question were to take place at all. This opinion is very doubtful: only five out of the ten were actually present at the feast. The bridegroom is, of course, Christ Himself. He is represented as coming at the end of the world to fetch home His bride, those members of the Church militant here on earth found worthy of so great an honour.

The wise virgins, who alone actually met the bridegroom, stand for the elect, who, according to the teaching of St. Paul, would be caught up into the air to meet Christ at His coming, and be for ever with Him. 1 By the foolish virgins we are to under- 1 1 Thessalonians 4:17. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 135 stand reprobate Christians, those who have faith without works. The lamps may be regarded as a type of faith; the oil stands for the Christian virtues. The bridegroom's delay in coming has been taken as intended to indicate that the Parousia was more distant than was generally believed; and some rationalistic writers argue from this that the circumstance of the delay is based, not on a genuine utterance of Jesus, but on the Evangelist's experience. It is obvious that such an argument presupposes the lack of any foreknowledge on the part of Jesus which would transcend mere human sagacity. Besides, the circumstance in question may have been used simply as furnishing a reason for the slumber of the virgins, a necessary feature in the parable, and to heighten the suddenness of the coming of the bridegroom when he actually does appear. The drowsiness and slumber signify that state of spiritual lethargy which worldly cares and anxieties produce in the soul, and in which believers would find themselves the more deeply immersed the longer the Second Advent was delayed. The shutting of the door signifies the exclusion of the 136 THE PARABLES OF JESUS reprobate from the happiness of the Kingdom where Christ and His saints rejoice in glory. The Heavenly Bridegroom from within tells the foolish virgins that He knows them not. The knowledge of them which He disclaims is a knowledge which involves an element of approval. The idea of knowing in this sense is found in the last verse of the first Psalm, "Jahweh knoweth the way of the just; but the way of transgressors endeth in destruction."

TAGS: [Parables]

3.09 The Seed Growing of Itself

IX. THE SEED GROWING OF ITSELF.

Mark 4:26 - Mark 4:29.

If the Evangelist has inserted this parable in its proper setting, it would have been spoken from the boat close to the shore of the Lake of Gennesaret on the same occasion as the parable of the Sower. It is peculiar to St. Mark, but it has some points in common with the parable of the Cockle found in the same context in St. Matthew. The lesson, however, of our parable is different. Jesus takes a familiar figure from agricultural life, and, while giving it a spiritual signification, He THE PARABLES OF JESUS 137 leaves His hearers to draw for themselves the precise lesson which He wished it to convey.

He compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a man who cast seed upon the earth, and gave himself no further trouble for its growth and increase. Alike while he slept as in his waking hours the seed sprouted and grew by some mysterious process unknown to him. He simply sowed the grain; the earth did the rest of itself. It brought forth first the blade, then the ear, and last of all the perfect corn in the ear. When the fruit was ripe, he put in the sickle, for now the harvest was come.

Short and apparently simple as this parable is, commentators have differed widely as to its meaning. Some have regarded it as an allegory; others, as a parable pure and simple; others, again, as partaking of the nature of both. Further, authorities do not agree as to whether the whole process described is to be understood, as in the case of the parable of the Sower, of the individual soul or of the Kingdom of God at large. The first three verses (26-28) form a pure parable: the spiritual truth which is here brought into relief is one, the automatic 138 THE PARABLES OF JESUS development of the seed. In verse 29 a new idea appears, the reaping of the ripened corn at harvest. Still it remains doubtful whether we ought to regard this latter verse as containing an allegorical element. Throughout the parable the figurative process as drawn from Nature is in a certain sense one and continuous, and there seems no sufficient reason for denying that the spiritual process which it represents also possesses a unity of its own. The question, then, as to whether the parable, taken as a whole, ought to be viewed as a pure parable or not is unimportant.

Even though it was granted that, in the verse in question, there appears a new point quite distinct from the point in what precedes, its character as a genuine utterance of Jesus remains unaffected. Those critics who, in their justifiable opposition to the excessive allegorization of Our Lord's parables, go to the other extreme, and insist that any allegorical element which they contain cannot have proceeded from Him, must, before they can prove their contention, reckon with the rabbinical parables which exhibit the same characteristic. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 139 The parable is not to be understood of the sowing of the word in the individual soul and of its growth there until, when it has attained full maturity, the sickle of death is put in, and the ripened grain is garnered in the heavenly storehouse. On the contrary, in the parable, which is virtually a prophecy, there is question of the development of the Kingdom of God in this world. Jesus preached it; and

then apparently, through no action of His, but by its own inherent power, it would develop and produce fruit. The process would seem a mysterious incomprehensible one, but its existence could not be questioned; its matured result would be evident to all. The parable seems in a special manner intended to strengthen the minds of the disciples of Jesus against the time when they would no longer have Him visibly present in their midst. Despite His absence, the Kingdom which He was inaugurating would go on, not only growing in point of extension, but also developing as an organism, until it reached that perfection which its Author had designed.

We, too, may draw motives of hope and encouragement from the parable. The end 140 THE PARABLES OF JESUS is not yet, and the process begun by Jesus still proceeds, and in the way foreshadowed by Him. All created things are in a state of unceasing flux and change sometimes, according to our notions, progressing, some times declining; and though, being in the world, the Kingdom does not remain unaffected by the intellectual, political, and social revolutions of successive ages, its growth and development are not essentially conditioned by these, but rather by that native power implanted in it by its Author Himself.

This, then, even in times of calamity, should be the ground of our unshaken confidence in the permanence and indestructibility of His work.

TAGS: [Parables]

3.10 The Two Debtors

IX. THE TWO DEBTORS.

Luke 7:36 - Luke 7:50.

Jesus accepted an invitation from one Simon a Pharisee to eat with him. While He reclined at table in the house of His host, a certain woman of evil reputation in the city, knowing that He was there, entered bearing an alabaster flask of ointment. She approached

Jesus, and, standing behind at His feet weeping, she bent low and began to wet His feet with her tears. She then wiped them with the hair of her head, and having kissed them lovingly, she anointed them with the ointment. The host looked on astonished, and though his lips were silent, his mind was busy. This man," he thought, " cannot be a prophet. If he were, he would know who and what manner of woman this is who toucheth him, that she is a sinner." Jesus answered the unspoken thought: " Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee." Simon replied: "Master, say on."

Jesus proceeded: " A certain moneylender had two debtors, one of whom owed him 500 denars, the other 50; and as they were unable to pay, he forgave them both their debt.

Which, then, of them will love him most?"

" He, I suppose," answered Simon, " to whom he forgave most." Jesus said: " Rightly hast thou judged." Then, turning towards the woman, He went on addressing Simon, " Seest thou this woman? I came into thy house; thou gavest Me no water for my feet; but she wetted My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. Thou gavest Me 142 THE PARABLES OF JESUS no kiss; but she, ever since she came in, hath not ceased to kiss My feet. Thou didst not anoint My head with oil; but she hath anointed My feet with ointment. Wherefore, I say to thee, her sins, many though they be, have been forgiven her, for she loved much; but he to whom little is forgiven loveth but little."

He then said to the woman: " Thy sins are forgiven." Those who were at table with Him, hearing this, began to say within them selves: " Who is this that even forgiveth sins?"

Jesus, disregarding their thoughts, said to the woman: " Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace." This history follows the account of the embassy of John to Jesus, and of the discourse which the latter made to His disciples after the departure of the messengers, in which He referred to the charges brought against Him of being a glutton, a winebibber, and a friend of publicans and sinners. Appropriately enough, the Evangelist then relates the incident illustrative of the attitude of Jesus towards sinners. The other three Evangelists narrate a similar incident; and the question arises whether all four histories refer to the same THE PARABLES OF JESUS 143 event or not. All four have certain features in common; but that of St. Luke at first sight gives one the impression that it relates a different event; though in one point, the anointing of the feet of Jesus, it agrees with St. John's narrative against the others. St. Luke inserts his in a context which belongs to an early period in Our Lord's public ministry; and he seems to lay the scene in the town of Nairn.

According to St. John, the incident took place at Bethania, six days before the Passover; St. Matthew and St. Mark likewise place the scene at Bethania; but it is probable that they have inserted the incident, not in the chronological order, but in the logical, the reference by Jesus to His approaching death furnishing some explanation of the projected betrayal. As to St. Luke, apart from the position of the narrative in his Gospel, a point which is by no means decisive, the indications of time and place which he gives are so vague that, if the theory of the identity of the anointings is shown to be probable on other grounds, no argument to the contrary can be fairly drawn from them.

All three Synoptists agree in giving Simon as 144 THE PARABLES OF JESUS the name of the host; St. John alone, of the Evangelists, leaves him unnamed. St. Matthew and St. Mark speak only of the anointing of Our Lord's head; St. Luke and St. John relate only the anointing of His feet.

According to St. Luke, the woman first wetted His feet with her tears, then wiped them with her hair, and finally anointed them; while John simply states that she anointed the feet of Jesus, and then wiped them with her hair. In all four Gospels we find Jesus defending the woman; but in St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. John, the charge is one of wanton extravagance, and is brought against her by the disciples; while, as we have seen, in St. Luke, her defence by Jesus is occasioned by the unspoken contempt felt for her by His host on account of her infamous life. Still, the differences in question nowhere amount to a formal contradiction; and we find nothing in them which would compel us to regard St. Luke's narrative as an account of a separate event of which the other Evangelists knew or at least related nothing. The differences which the various histories present may well be regarded as particulars which supplement THE PARABLES OF JESUS 145 so much of the narrative as is common to all.

Another reason which tells strongly in favour of the view that the four Evangelists had one and the same event in mind may be drawn from the silence of St. Luke as to any anointing during the last days of Jesus. As for the further argument adduced in favour of this opinion namely, that the anointing was of too unique a character for us to admit with any show of probability that it was repeated in somewhat similar circumstances we cannot think that it is conclusive. To do so would be to measure the probability of things so remote in time and place by present-day standards which cannot possibly be applicable to them. There is, however, one strong point which, to our mind, tends to discredit this view. The first three Evangelists give us no clue as to who the woman was; St. John alone reveals her name: Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. We naturally shrink from identifying the contemplative Mary, against whose reputation no word is breathed in the Gospels, with the woman of evil life. The characters of both, even as briefly sketched by St. Luke and St. John, are, if we except

10 146 THE PARABLES OF JESUS the devotion to Jesus which they have in common, diametrically opposed. If, then, we sum up the evidence for and against the identification of the event related by St. Luke with that related by the other Evangelists, we feel forced to the conclusion that the cumulative weight of the arguments on either side as opposed to the other does not so preponderate as to compel us to accept one view or the other with any high degree of certainty.

It would seem that the Pharisees, with all their faults, did not neglect to practise hospitality, since we find Our Lord on two other occasions in St. Luke's Gospel (xi. 37, 14:1) at table in their houses.

They may, indeed, have invited Him to a meal in the hope that in the freedom of social intercourse He would be less on His guard than when formally exercising the office of teacher, and that in consequence He would say or do something that might serve as ground for an accusation against Him. In earlier times the Hebrews took their meals sitting, but in the New Testament period a reclining attitude was common. People reclined on cushions, each capable of accommodating three or sometimes THE PARABLES OF JESUS 147 five persons. These supported themselves on their left arm, with the head turned towards the table, while the feet were extended backwards. This will account for the approach of the woman to Jesus from behind. The anointing of the body or a part of it was quite common in the East, especially at banquets. Ointment or oil when sweet-smelling helped to counteract the unpleasant effects of the exhalations which the body gave off, and anointing, if habitually persevered in, tended to keep the skin smooth and supple.

Women often carried flasks of perfume depending in front from their necks. Alaba ster was a favourite material for these flasks, as it was thought to be best adapted for preserving the fragrance of the perfume undiminished. Apart from the quality of the person who performed the anointing in question, the incident in itself was nothing out of the common. The two debtors, one of whom owed 500 denars, the other 50, represent respectively the sinful woman and Simon. We are all of us more or less guilty before God, and if her guilt was greater than that of Simon, a man, 148 THE PARABLES OF JESUS doubtless, of what is called correct life, her love surpassed his. Jesus on entering the house of the Pharisee met with a cold recep tion; only those tokens of reverence were shown Him which might well have been paid to any passing guest. In strange contrast to this was the fervent devotion of the sinful woman, now thoroughly aroused to repentance.

Forgetful of that reserve which the Jewish woman was supposed to observe, and heedless of the looks of contempt and abhorrence with which Simon and his fellow-Pharisees might view her, she entered the dining-room. In that assembly there was only one whom she sought Jesus, ever pitiful towards sinners, to Whom no erring mortal was an outcast.

Yet it was not merely the knowledge that He was merciful that drew her to Him: He alone, she felt, could heal her moral malady and restore her to that state of happy innocence from which in an evil hour she had fallen.

She approached Him unseen, and, standing behind an < bending low, she bedewed His feet with tears of shame and sorrow, and wiped them with those tresses in which she had held her lovers captive; she then kissed THE PARABLES OF JESUS 149 them repeatedly and anointed them with the precious ointment which she had brought with her. Jesus, Who saw that all these outward demonstrations came from a broken and humbled heart, lovingly accepted them. In the parable in which He undertook her defence, setting out from the principle which it illustrates, that the greater the debt the greater ought to be the love of him who is forgiven, towards the creditor who remits it, He finds implied in the actions which bespeak her love and which put to shame the indifference of the Pharisee a greater guilt than his; and then (verse 47) He attributes her forgiveness to her love in the words: "Her sins, many though they be, have been forgiven, for she loved much." li the parable love is the effect of pardon; in the history which enshrines it it is the cause: the reciprocal action of love and forgiveness is at once the theme and the practical lesson of the whole section.

We have no means of knowing whether Simon took the lesson to heart. The other guests at table, and probably Simon with them, were scandalized that Jesus should pronounce the absolution of the penitent, thus claiming for 150 THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Himself the right to forgive sins; while they on their part arrogated to themselves the power to condemn. Jesus, without waiting to set them right, dismissed the happy penitent with the consoling words: "Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace."

TAGS: [Parables]

3.11 The Good Samaritan

XI. THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

Luke 10:30 Luke 10:7.

Apparently while Jesus was still in Galilee, a certain Scribe put Him the question, Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He answered: "What is written in the Law? how readest thou?" The Scribe replied: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself." Jesus, satisfied with his answer, said to him: "Thou hast answered rightly: this do, and thou shalt live." His questioner, however, was not content with knowledge which he already possessed, and in addition he wished to justify himself.

He therefore addressed to Jesus the further THE PARABLES OF JESUS 151 question: "And who is my neighbour?" Our Lord, instead of answering directly, related the following parable illustrative of the question: A certain man on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho fell among robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and departed leaving him half dead. First a priest who chanced to be making the same journey, and then a Levite, saw him, but, instead of helping him in his need, they unfeelingly passed by on the other side. A certain Samaritan, however, who was travelling that way, showed himself more humane. He had no sooner descried the poor sufferer lying there by the wayside than he was moved to compassion by his wretched plight. He drew near to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on them wine and oil. He then set him on his own beast, and walked beside him till he brought him to an inn or caravansary, where he tended him with charitable care. On the morrow, as he was about to resume his journey, he took out two denars and gave them to the keeper of the inn, with an injunction to attend to the wounded man, at the same time promising that he would pay him for any further outlay 152 THE PARABLES OF JESUS which he might find it necessary to make. This was the parable, and now Jesus asks His questioner: "Which of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" He replied: "He that showed mercy to him." He had given the correct answer, and Jesus had now simply to bid him act in accordance with it when occasion should serve. "Go," He said, "and do thou in like manner."

Possibly the circumstance that the Scribe stood up may denote that the incident took place in a synagogue. We need not assume that the question was prompted by an evil motive: the Scribe may have been genuinely anxious to know by what means he could ensure to himself a share in eternal life. The formula "How readest thou?" was in common use in the Jewish schools of that period; and the words of Jesus implied that the knowledge which His questioner sought was already in his own possession. The Scribe's answer, embodying the two great commandments of the Law, was composed of two Old Testament passages, one in a slightly amplified form from Deuteronomy (vi. 5), in which the love of God THE PARABLES OF JESUS 153 was enjoined upon Israel; the other from Leviticus (xix. 18), inculcating the love of the neighbour. The former passage was one with which every Jew was familiar, as it formed part of the Sh ma, or Confession of Faith.

The further question of the Scribe which gave occasion for the parable was a reasonable one. The commandment in Leviticus was plain and free from ambiguity; but the term “ neighbour “ was not employed there in so extended a sense as when used by Jesus; the Scribe, casuist as he was, may well have had some suspicion that the obligation had a wider application than the narrow particularism of Jewry gave it; and his doubt on the point would serve as a justification for putting a question the answer to which seemed already known to him. Or, to base a supposition on 16:15, he may have wished to justify himself like the ruler (xviii. 21) by alleging his fulfilment of the Law as interpreted by Jesus.

Jericho was situated about seventeen miles to the north-east of Jerusalem, and the road thither for the most part lay through a desert which in Our Lord’s time was infested by robbers. The wayfarer in the parable seems 154 THE PARABLES OF JESUS to have been travelling alone, and thus he fell an easy prey into their hands. We may assume with certainty that Jesus wished to represent him as a Jew; and yet the priest, who, one would expect, should have exemplified in his own person the higher teaching of the Law, at least towards one bound to him by the double tie of race and religion, felt no compassion for him, and passed on. A Levite, a member of an order which, though shorn of some of its former privileges, still took an important part in the Temple services, was guilty of the like heartless conduct. Help came from an unexpected quarter, from a Samaritan who was passing that way. The Samaritans, who took their name from Samaria, where they dwelt, were descended from a mixed people composed of the remnant of the Israelites left behind in their land when the greater part of the inhabitants were deported to Assyria, and of the heathen colonists who took the place of the latter, the heathen element being largely preponderant. At first this people worshipped their national gods; but, in consequence of a plague of lions which Jahweh sent among them in punish- THE PARABLES OF JESUS 155 ment of their neglect of His worship on His own land, one of the deported priests familiar with the Israelite ritual was by command of the King of Assyria himself fetched back from exile, and by this means the cultus of Jahweh was restored at the traditional sanctuary of Bethel. Of course this does not imply that rulers and people regarded Jahweh as the sole sovereign Governor of the Universe; at most they paid Him special veneration as the god of the land which they had occupied (4 Kings xvii.)- Later, though the worship of the heathen gods was discontinued and Jahweh reigned alone, the hostility which the Samaritans showed to the Jews in the trying times which succeeded the return of the latter from exile, and at a subsequent date the erection on Mount Gerizim of a rival temple to that of Jerusalem, provoked an intensely bitter feeling on the part of the Jews towards their northern neighbours, a feeling which the Samaritans heartily reciprocated. Ben Sira (3rd cent. B.C.) coupled in his abhorrence “ the foolish people who dwell at Sichem “ with the Edomites and Philistines; 1 and we find the 1 Ecclus. 1:27 /.

156 THE PARABLES OF JESUS Jews accusing Our Lord in one breath of being a Samaritan and having a devil (John 8:48).

It was only natural, then, that both peoples avoided not only all religious but also all civil and social intercourse with each other (John 4:9). We may suppose the Samaritan in our parable to have shared the feelings of enmity with which his countrymen regarded the Jews. The claims of humanity, however, prevailed over sentiments of national and religious bigotry. Alien as he was alike in race and in religion, his heart was touched at the sight of such distress, and he resolved to alleviate it. Though a stranger to the teachings of the Gospel, he did all that the most delicate

Christian charity could have suggested, and both in the judgment of Jesus and in that of the Scribe his conduct entitled him to be regarded as the neighbour of him who fell among the robbers. The Scribe might have answered the question of Jesus at the end of the parable by simply saying “The Samaritan”; the circumlocution which he employed may have been caused by an unwillingness to pronounce the hated name, and thus state in a manner unnecessarily harsh THE PARABLES OF JESUS 157 and direct a conclusion at variance with the principles and practice of Judaism, to which nevertheless the logic of the parable compelled him. As regarded the substance of his reply, he had once more answered rightly: he had partly solved his own question; and Jesus in the words with which the narrative closes made the action of the Samaritan a standard of conduct for all time. The four verses 25-28 bear a strong resemblance to the section Matthew 22:34 - Matthew 22:40; Mark 12:28 - Mark 12:34, which has for subject the question concerning the great commandment, and to which St. Luke has no parallel, unless with the critics we regard these verses as such. Besides the general resemblance which they bear to the section just mentioned, other points which taken as a whole the episode in St. Luke suggests tend to favour their identification. In the parallel section it is Jesus, not the questioner, who couples the two great commandments; and it is alleged that St. Luke made the change for the purpose of facilitating the introduction of the parable. It is further objected that the parable does not really answer the question of the Scribe who 158 THE PARABLES OF JESUS demanded who his neighbour was, taking the term in the sense of the object to whom love should be shown, whereas in the answer the term appears as the subject who should exercise it. These objections are by no means insurmountable, and need not oblige us to regard the setting of the parable as unhistorical and as due to the editorial work of the Evangelist desirous of inserting it in a suitable framework. We freely grant that an answer in which the two great commandments are coupled would be more natural in the mouth of Jesus than in that of a Jewish doctor; but, then, we are confronted with a passage in Philo, the Jewish contemporary of Jesus, in which the whole duty of man is summed up as a twofold duty, inasmuch as it has a twofold object his relations towards God and his relations towards men. We do not attach any importance to the fact that another Scribe (Mark 12:33) likewise joins both commandments, for the reason that he only echoes approvingly the words of Jesus. As regards the second objection, it must be borne in mind that the Scribe did not ask for a definition of the term “neighbour”: he wished THE PARABLES OF JESUS 159 merely to know for practical purposes who his neighbour was; and it would be quite characteristic of Jesus, Who inculcated charity, even charity towards enemies, so strongly, that in His reply the term should be used in an active rather than in a passive sense.

TAGS: [Parables]

3.12 The Importunate Friend

XII. THE IMPORTUNATE FRIEND.

Luke 11:5 - Luke 11:8. This parable follows immediately the Lord's Prayer, which Jesus dictated to His disciples in compliance with their request that He would teach them how to pray even as John taught his disciples. An occurrence of ordinary life is made to convey in a striking and forcible manner an important religious truth. A man is represented as going to a friend's house at midnight to borrow three loaves, a friend of his on a journey having just arrived at a time when, unfortunately, he had no provisions to set before him. The neighbour to whom he has addressed himself in his need takes it ill that he should be disturbed at that unseasonable hour. He begs his friend to desist from troubling him, and explains that the door is locked, that both himself and his children are in bed, and that he cannot rise and give him what he wants.

Jesus then points out that, where friendship fails, importunity will succeed. The petitioner has only to continue asking, without letting himself be silenced by the remonstrances of his friend; and the latter, merely to be rid of his importunity, will rise and give him all he needs. Our Lord did not directly point out the lesson of the parable: its meaning was so plain that His hearers could do this for themselves; but He virtually did so in the words which He subjoined: "And I say unto you: ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." The lesson is the same as that of the parable of the Unjust Judge and the Importunate Widow namely, the efficacy of persevering prayer. We must not let ourselves be discouraged by an apparent refusal, we must continue praying without losing confidence, and not give over till we receive what we desire. Our knowledge of God will increase our trust in Him above any trust that we can put in men, not merely because He is almighty, but also because He is all-merciful and all-good. Though it may be in the power of our friends here on earth to aid us, yet such is the selfishness of our nature, and such, too, sometimes is the complexity of the motives which prompt or hinder human action, that we often have misgivings as to whether in any given case, where we are concerned, they will allow themselves to be influenced exclusively by considerations of friendship or some other high unselfish motive. While, in the face of experience to the contrary, it would be cynical to deny that our nature is capable of soaring to lofty moral heights, we need not wonder that to the mind of Jesus the suppliant in the parable had more to expect from the selfishness of his neighbour than from any influence which in character of friend he could bring to bear upon him. On the other hand, when we address our petitions to God, we need have no fear or misgiving to mar our confidence in being heard. He is our Maker and our God, our Father, and our Shepherd, and just as if these names were not enough to inspire us

with feelings of complete and tenderest confidence in Him, He has in addition pledged Himself in the most solemn manner to hear and grant our petitions. When, therefore, we pray as we ought, and as He himself has taught us, we should believe with an unwavering faith that He will hear us, provided only that what we ask is of a nature to promote

our higher interests.

TAGS: [Parables]

3.13 The Foolish Rich Man

XIII. THE FOOLISH RICH MAN.

Luke 12:16 - Luke 12:21. This parable follows the narration of an incident which throws light on the attitude of Jesus towards temporal affairs. Evidently while He was teaching, a certain man approached Him with the petition: "Bid my brother divide the inheritance with me." The answer of Jesus was a refusal on the ground that He had not been appointed a judge or divider over men. He thereupon addressed to those present a warning against covetousness: "Take heed, and be on your guard against all covetousness; for a man's life doth not consist in the abundance of his goods;" and to illustrate and enforce His meaning He then spoke the following parable, A certain rich man felt embarrassed by the wealth of the crops which his fields had yielded.

He said, communing with himself: "What shall I do, seeing that I have no place into which I may gather my fruits?" A thought strikes him: "This will I do. I will pull down my barns, and I will build greater, and into them will I gather the produce of my fields; and I will say to my soul: Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink, and be merry." But God said to him: "Thou fool! this very night is thy soul required of thee, and whose shall be the things which thou hast prepared?" "So," adds Jesus, "is he who layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."

There was nothing essentially wrong in the request of the unknown man to Jesus; we have nothing to prove that he claimed more than what was his due. Still, Our Lord justly refused it: it was untimely, and, besides, it proceeded from a complete misconception of His mission, which any direct interference in temporal affairs could only prejudice. The refusal is conveyed in language very similar to that with which the Israelite who oppressed his fellow-countryman declined the interposition of Moses in their quarrel (Exodus 2:14).

Jesus took occasion from the incident to warn His hearers against indulging the vice of avarice, which is so often the root of litigation. The soliloquy of the rich man reminds us of the passage in Ecclesiasticus: "There is a man who waxeth rich by his wariness and pinching; and this is the reward of which he hath part, when he saith: I may take my rest and eat of my good things, even then he knoweth not what time shall yet pass by ere he shall leave all he hath to others, and die" (xi. 18). The idea that the soul is, as it were, lent, and that it will be demanded back one day, is also found in Wisdom 15:8. The language of verse 20 conveys the impression that the rich man's life came to an end the very night that followed the formation of his plans, rather than that he was spared to carry them out, and only summoned hence when they were completed. The words, "the things which thou hast prepared," on which those who hold THE PARABLES OF JESUS 165 the latter view rely, can just as naturally be understood of the produce of his fields alone, and need not be taken as including in their meaning provisions made for its storage. The parable is one of the four all peculiar to St. Luke, which in reality are not figurative histories, but examples or illustrations. Jesus might have exhorted His hearers in a direct manner to refrain from setting their

affections on riches, or trusting in them or being over anxious about them, on the ground that we have at most but a life interest in them, which death might terminate at any moment. It is obvious, however, that He achieved His purpose better by choosing an example, and setting it before His audience in a moving manner as the means of bringing home to their minds the truth which He wished to impress upon them. By the words with which He concludes He did not, of course, intend to intimate that all those who imitated the heartless and selfish conduct of the rich man would like him be suddenly cut off when they least expected it: the complaints of Job and the Psalmist testify to the contrary. Still, they would resemble him in this, that whether 166 THE PARABLES OF JESUS they died in youth or in old age, their end, like his, would be untimely. On the other hand, death cannot impoverish those who are rich or generous towards God that is, those who by means of alms-deeds done for His sake have transferred their riches from earth to heaven, where they await them on their coming (xii. 33).

TAGS: [Parables]

3.14 The Barren Fig-Tree

XIV. THE BARREN FIG-TREE.

Luke 13:6 - Luke 13:9.

While Jesus was still in Galilee, some of those who were with Him told Him of the Galilseans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 1 There was an inveterate error prevalent among the Jews which so connected guilt with adversity that from the misfortune of any individual conclusions, it was thought, might be safely drawn as to his guilt, and when, as in the case of the man born blind, it was impossible to regard calamity as the punishment of the sufferer's personal sin, then it was taken for granted that it was the 1 Luke^{xiii}. 1 ff. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 167 penalty of his parents transgressions. We find the disciples of Jesus holding this opinion.

They seem to have had no doubt that the blindness from birth of the man healed by Jesus was due either to his own sin or to that of his parents; they merely wanted to know with which of the two parties the responsibility lay. 1 Jesus, wishing to disabuse the minds of those about Him of this error, told them that the Galilaeans in question were not the greatest sinners among the Galilaeans, nor those eighteen who had been killed by the fall of the tower in Siloam more guilty than the other inhabitants of Jerusalem. 2 "Nay,"

He said, "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." He would not accept as valid any inference drawn from suffering or calamity as to the guilt of the sufferers; but in these words He taught that guilt would necessarily entail punishment. The nation

1 John ix.

2 There is no record elsewhere of the slaughter of the Galilaeans by Pilate, nor of the fall of the tower in Siloam, a locality in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, to the south east. This need cause no surprise: events of the kind at such a time would have been too unimportant for the historian to notice.

168 THE PARABLES OF JESUS was steadily filling up the measure of its sins, and it was only the man who repented, and thus dissociated himself from the incredulity and obduracy of his fellows, that would escape sharing in the common retribution which was slowly but surely approaching. He then spoke a parable in which the nation likewise is envisaged. A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard. He came seeking fruit on it, and found none. In his disappointment he said to the vine-dresser: "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none: cut it down, there fore: why cumbereth it the ground?" The vine-dresser answered: "Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig about it and dung it.

Then, if it bear fruit, well and good; but if not, thou shalt cut it down." In the Old Testament Israel is represented under the figure of a vine; in our parable the fig-tree stands for the Jewish people. Osee compares Israel in its origin to grapes and to the first-ripe of the fig-tree; 1 and Jeremiah (xxiv. 2-10) speaks of the Jews led captive to Babylon under the figure of a basket of good 1 Osee

9:10. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 169 figs; while the rulers and people who had remained at home together with those who had taken refuge in Egypt, are typified by a basket of bad figs, too bad to be eaten. The period “ three years “ designates the patience of God with His faithless and irresponsible people. There may be here a reference to the fact that the fig-tree bears fruit in the third year; but we can hardly believe that Jesus intended to represent the proprietor as coming to look for fruit in the two first years, when he could have had no expectation of finding any, especially as his manner of acting was typical of the Divine action. The fig-tree cumbered the ground, not only by uselessly taking up space, but also by drawing to itself the vital forces of the soil, which might have been left for some more profitable tree. Just as St. Paul represents the reprobate Jews as branches broken off the cultivated olive-tree, and the Gentiles as wild-olive branches grafted on in their place, so here the sentence of destruction would, if executed, have for effect the displacing of the doomed tree by another which would bring forth fruit in its season. The sentence against it, however, is not 170 THE PARABLES OF JESUS carried out as threatened; the labourer interposes on its behalf, pleading for delay, and promising to use meanwhile all possible means to render it fruitful; and the silence of the owner implies that he yielded to his representations. In like manner Jesus pleaded for His people: ungrateful as they had shown themselves, He asked for a respite till He should have exhausted every means in His efforts to heal their spiritual sterility. His prayer was granted: the execution of the sentence was deferred. The barren fig-tree fitly represented the Jewish people with their leaders. God had of old revealed Himself in a special manner to Israel, and He had kept the knowledge of Himself alive in their midst by a succession of envoys destined to preserve the mono theistic tradition among them, to save them from the crime of substituting other gods for Him or associating them with Him in worship, and to impress upon them the truth, which to us is axiomatic, that worship without conduct cannot please God. How often the prophets failed in their endeavours for the spiritual regeneration and moral uplifting of the people, THE PARABLES OF JESUS 171 we learn from the Old Testament; and the Gospels tell us of the opposition of the rulers to Jesus, and of His want of any permanent success among the people at large. To speak of their final rejection of Our Lord, and of the ruin which it brought upon them, would be to carry the history beyond the point where the parable leaves it.

TAGS: [Parables]

3.15 The Great Supper

XV. THE GREAT SUPPER.

Luke 14:16 - Luke 14:24. This parable probably belongs to the time when Jesus was journeying from Galilee to Jericho. While at table, on a Sabbath, in the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees, He said to His host: "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, do not invite thy friends, nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsfolk, nor thy rich neighbours, lest haply they invite thee in their turn, and thou thus receive a recompense. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed, because they have nothing to give thee in return; for thou shalt be 172 THE PARABLES OF JESUS recompensed in the resurrection of the just."

One of His fellow-guests, hearing Him speak these things, said to Him: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Jesus then spoke the parable. A certain man made a great supper, and invited many; and he sent his servant at supper-time to say to them that were invited: "Come, for all things are now ready." Thereupon they all began with one accord to make excuse for not accepting the invitation: one, because he had bought a field and must needs go out to see it; another, because he had bought five yoke of oxen and was about to go to make trial of them; a third said: "I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come." The servant returned to his master and informed him of his ill success, whereat his master, being angry, bade him go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame. The servant obeyed, and then came and told his master that there was still room. The latter in consequence commanded him to go out to the highways and hedges, and compel those whom he would find to come in, so that his house might be filled, THE PARABLES OF JESUS 173 adding that not one of those who had been invited should taste of his supper. When treating of the parable of the Marriage of the King's Son (Matthew 22:2 - Matthew 22:14), we spoke of the strong resemblance which it bears to the one under consideration, of the points of difference between them, and of their relation to each other. There is no need to go over the same ground again. The exclamation of the guest, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" which gave occasion for the parable, showed plainly the materialistic ideas of the Kingdom which the Jews had formed. Jesus, wishing to correct the erroneous belief of those who sat at table with Him, that it was the peculiar and exclusive privilege of the Jews to share in the Kingdom, spoke the parable which illustrates the truth which He had already formulated in the words, "Many shall come from east and west, and shall lie down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven; but the children of the Kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness." The man who made the supper represents God; the supper itself stands for the Kingdom of God. By His 174 THE PARABLES OF JESUS prophets, whose line ended with the Baptist, He had called the leaders and other representative men of the Jews to the Kingdom before its actual appearance; and when all things were ready, and the Kingdom was about to be proclaimed, He sent His servant to summon them to come. In St. Matthew we find a plurality of servants, while here there is only one, whom we take to represent Our Lord: in the Old Testament the Messiah is often styled the Servant of Jahweh. The various pleas on which those who had been invited excuse themselves from

coming reveal their lack of spirituality, and their enslavement to the things of earth and of sense. Not one of them accepts the invitation, and this agrees literally with the Gospel history, where we look in vain for a single one of the leaders of the people taking his stand definitely and boldly on the side of Jesus. The men of power and influence having declined the call, the servant is despatched to bring in from the streets and lanes the poor and the physically defective, by whom we are to understand the common people. These do not appear in numbers sufficient to fill the hospitable house, THE PARABLES OF JESUS 175 and so the servant is once more sent out, this time to the highways and hedges, where the poorest of the people take refuge, with a command to compel those whom he would find to come in. The heathen are here represented; for though Our Lord did not call them personally to the Kingdom, He did so after His death by the agency of His Apostles. The word "compel" is not to be so pressed as to imply that violence should be brought to bear upon men to cause them to believe. No one can believe on compulsion: faith must be a free act. The word signifies "persuade strongly" or perhaps "summon." We can picture to ourselves those poor vagabonds and outcasts unwilling to appear in their misery in such a house and on such an occasion. The parable closes with the sentence of final and definite rejection pronounced against those who were the first to be called to the Supper, "I say unto you that not one of those men that were called shall taste of my supper."

Though the servant alone is addressed, the plural is used, an indication that in the mind of the Evangelist the reality here displaces the figure for which it stands. The fulfil- 176 THE PARABLES OF JESUS merit of the prophecy, for such the sentence virtually is, is seen in the definite rejection of the Jews as a people or nation, and the call of the Gentiles to take their place.

TAGS: [Parables]

3.16 Building of Tower King Going to War

XVI. BUILDING OF TOWER KING GOING TO WAR.

Luke 14:28 - Luke 14:33.

Jesus was still on His journey, accompanied, as St. Luke tells us, by great crowds. Knowing that out of such numbers only few were qualified by unwavering steadfastness of purpose to be His disciples in the stormy days ahead, He turned to those who followed Him, and said: "If any man come after Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." To this solemn declaration He added a twofold parable. "Which of you," He said, "desiring to build a tower, doth not first sit down and count the cost, whether he have enough to complete it? Lest haply, when he hath laid THE PARABLES OF JESUS 177 a foundation, and is not able to finish, all that see begin to mock him, saying: "This man began to build, and could not finish." Or what king, going to war with another king, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still afar off, he sendeth an embassy to ask for terms of peace.

So, therefore, every one of you that renounceth not all that he possesseth cannot be My disciple." In the words which form a setting for these parables, Jesus laid down as an indispensable condition of discipleship the absolute renunciation of all that a man has. As a further condition, he must be ready to part with life itself, even though death should appear in its most frightful guise, death by crucifixion.

It was well, then, that a man should pause before contracting obligations involving the sacrifice of all things, and should first consider the cost, lest, having enrolled himself among the disciples of Jesus, he should afterwards repent, and thus make himself an object of scorn to those who were not idealists enough

12 178 THE PARABLES OF JESUS even to make the attempt which he had made. This is the lesson which both parables convey, though less formally and directly than as an inference which Jesus left it to ourselves to draw. It has been pointed out that there is a stylistic inexactitude in the parables, inasmuch as in them something positive is required, whereas the renunciation demanded is negative. We have already allowed that we can only inferentially draw from the parables the lesson which they were intended to teach; still, it is true that, although renunciation in itself may be something formally negative, it involves nevertheless a positive and almost continuous act. The teaching of Jesus which we have been considering had in view the circumstances of the period. Times have changed, and there is no longer reason to apprehend any such consequences from following Jesus as those with which His disciples who were His contemporaries had to reckon. Still, those who aim at following Him perfectly must be prepared for sacrifices and renunciation. Even the worldly-wise, whose hopes and fears and desires are all

bound up within the narrow THE PARABLES OF JESUS 179 limits of this world and this life, must practise continual self-denial, if they would enjoy that well-being and happiness at which alone they aim.

44 Thou must refrain I thou must refrain!

Such is the everlasting strain, The one uninterrupted song, Which hoarsely sounds the whole day long In every mortal's troubled ear."

These are the sentiments which perhaps the most perfect representative of the worldlywise in the higher and nobler sense of the term puts into the mouth of the chief personage in his great masterpiece, sentiments which his own long and varied experience had taught him. How much more, then, are those called upon to practice self-denial and renunciation who look upon this life as a time of probation, and for whom it possesses no real value but as such!

TAGS: [Parables]

3.17 The Lost Piece of Money

XVII. THE LOST PIECE OF MONEY.

Luke 15:8 - Luke 15:10. This parable was spoken on the same occasion as that of the Lost Sheep (see p. 76). A woman whose fortune consisted of ten 180 THE PARABLES OF JESUS drachmas (each worth about a franc of modern money) loses one of them. Insignificant as the loss is in itself, it is not so to her. She is convinced that the coin must be still in the house, but in what particular part of it she knows not. In Palestine the houses of the poor have either very small windows or none at all, in consequence of which their interior is obscure. She therefore lights a lamp, and sweeps the house, and searches diligently until she finds it. And when she has found it, her joy is too great to be kept to herself, and so she calls together her female friends and neighbours, and invites them to share in her joy at finding the coin which she had lost. " Even so," adds Jesus, " there shall be joy before the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Jesus closes this parable and that of the Lost Sheep with similar words, in which He confines Himself to indicating one point in their teaching namely, the joy felt in heaven at the repentance of even one sinner. This point, however, by no means exhausts the teaching of these parables. The great lesson which they convey, though they do not formally THE PARABLES OF JESUS 181 state it, is the value of the soul. The joy which we feel at finding something which we had lost is an index to our sense of its value; the greater our joy at its recovery, the greater, also, is the value which we set upon it; and no one would experience any joy from the recovery of an object lost, if it was worthless in his eyes. The joy, therefore, of the blessed spirits who stand before the throne of God in heaven, over one sinner who repents, is at once an evidence of their sense of the value of the soul, and at the same time a sufficient justification of the efforts made by Jesus to save those souls which had gone astray. The Pharisees looked down haughtily and disdainfully upon publicans and sinners. It was nothing to them that men made after the image and likeness of God were ready to perish; like Cain, they disclaimed all responsibility for their brethren if, indeed, they would deign to regard such men as their brethren; and they viewed with an evil eye the condescension of Jesus towards the objects of their contempt and abhorrence. On the contrary, the love of Our Lord for sinners was based on His knowledge of the 182 THE PARABLES OF JESUS worth of the individual soul, a knowledge shared by the angels in heaven, who rejoice as often as a sinner turns from the error of his way.

TAGS: [Parables]

3.18 The Prodigal Son

XVIII. THE PRODIGAL SON.

Luke 15:11 - Luke 15:32. The words " and He said " form the only connecting link between this parable and the preceding. It has been called the " pearl of the parables," and it is, perhaps, the most beautiful of them all because it sets forth in the clearest light and in the most affecting manner the depths of the Divine love and compassion for sinners who repent. It is the last of a trilogy, of which each member exhibits strong affinities with the others, and the subject in the main continues the same.

We feel, however, that there is here no repetition, so fresh and new is the mode of treatment. On the contrary, there is a distinct advance on both of those which precede it. Unlike the lost sheep, the prodigal son goes astray deliberately and of set purpose, and is thus responsible for his departure from THE PARABLES OF JESUS 188 his father's house, and for all his subsequent aberrations, and yet his father welcomes him back with a passionate joy which as far surpasses in its intensity the joy of the man who recovers his lost sheep, or that of the woman who finds the missing coin, as a father's love surpasses the attachment which men have to mere material possessions. The lesson of the parable is obvious. If an earthly father receives back with tenderness and joy a son who has shown himself unworthy of his love, and has brought disgrace upon him, how much more will Our Heavenly Father forgive us our sins provided only that we return to Him by a sincere repentance! If we view the parable as a whole, the impression which it makes upon us is not lacking in distinctness.

It is only when we begin to examine the narrative point by point, and insist on seeking in each one of the points for a definite spiritual meaning, and expect that perfect consistency which in a figurative history is not required, that we find ourselves in difficulties, and also in danger of losing sight of that delightful spontaneity of thought and depth of feeling which lend the parable its peculiar charm.

184 THE PARABLES OF JESUS In other words, there is no room here for allegorization. The parable falls into two parts: verses 11 to 24 treat of the sin, return, and reception of the prodigal by his father; while the conduct of the elder brother is the subject of verses 25 to 32. A certain man had two sons, the younger of whom, apparently feeling life at home monotonous and dull, asked his father to give him that share of the inheritance which of right belonged to him; and the father, though under no obligation to part with his property during his lifetime, complied with his request.

According to Jewish law, the eldest son had a right to the land and to a double portion of other kinds of property; in this case, therefore, the portion that would legally fall to the younger son would be a third of his father's movable goods. The language used implies that the father actually divided his possessions there and then between his two sons; but the complaint of the elder towards the end of the narrative shows that he did not avail himself of the division so to enter into possession of his share as to feel himself at liberty to dispose of it according to his pleasure. The

young THE PARABLES OF JESUS 185 man, elated at being in possession of so much wealth, loses no time in gathering together all that he has received, and betakes himself with it to a far country, where, free from the restraint which his father's presence would impose upon him, he yields himself up to the enjoyment of a licentious life. A commentator, who sees a reference in 19:12 to the visit of Archelaus to Rome, thinks that the far country may be Italy; but it is quite improbable that Jesus had any definite place in view. His new life is an expensive one: parasites and harlots help him to consume the property which he had brought with him, and he finds himself reduced to poverty. To make matters worse, the country of his choice is visited by famine, and the hapless man begins to feel the pinch of hunger. Without resources, and ignorant of any trade by which he might procure even a scanty livelihood, he is compelled to attach himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sends him into his fields to feed swine, an occupation for which no particular skill was needed. We must remember that Jesus was speaking to Jews, to whom the occupation in question meant the lowest depth of degrada- 186 THE PARABLES OF JESUS tion. Even by this abasement he can hardly obtain food enough to keep soul and body together, and he would fain have filled his belly with the pods of the carob-tree with which the swine were fed. From this latter statement we may infer that the food supplied him was either quite insufficient in quantity, or inferior in quality to that which was given to the swine. It was a saying among the Jews that Israel could be brought to repentance only when reduced to the necessity of feeding on the produce of the carob-tree. In the fields, with no companion but the unclean animals, he has leisure enough to realize to the full his sad condition. The contrast between his former happiness in his father's house and his present misery forces itself upon him and intensifies his wretchedness. He feels " the sharpest pang of all, the remembrance in present misery of a former happy time." A further contrast takes shape in his thoughts: "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, while I here perish with hunger." He takes a sudden resolution: " I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him: " Father, I THE PARABLES OF JESUS 187 have sinned against heaven and before thee, I am no longer worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." He will address him as father, not for the purpose of basing a claim on the relation which the term contained, but as the unpremeditated expression of his filial love newly awakened.

He had sinned against God by his evil life, and against his father by squandering his substance. Many thoughts, doubtless, occurred to him to dissuade him from keeping his resolution: he would have to appear in rags before his former friends and acquaintances; he would be obliged to meet the reproachful gaze of his father, and, what was worse, the contemptuous stare of his correct brother. These thoughts were bitter, but his sense of his present misery is so keen that it prevails over all other considerations. He is now thoroughly chastened and humbled; he has taken his resolution and he will keep it, he rises and returns home. How short the time seems since he trod the same ground-in all the buoyancy of youth, in quest of pleasure! and now, disillusionized and repentant, he seeks the home which he had so 188 THE PARABLES OF JESUS foolishly quitted. Meanwhile his father had not forgotten his absent son; it would seem as if he had divined what the end would be, and was keeping a look-out for the return of his lost child. He now descries him in the distance: unlike, indeed, his former self, but his rags and misery appeal more strongly to the father's heart than a proud bearing and sumptuous apparel could have done. He runs forward to meet his child; he falls upon his neck and kisses him repeatedly; while the son sobs into his ear that confession of guilt from a heart overcharged with shame and sorrow: "Father, I have sinned

against heaven and before thee: I am no longer worthy to be called thy son.” He had intended to add: “make me as one of thy hired servants;” but, as he feels himself held tightly in his father’s embrace, he will go no farther; he knows that he is forgiven, and that no more words are needed. His father heeds not the acknowledgment of guilt; for answer he calls to his servants: “ Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet; and bring forth the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat THE PARABLES OF JESUS 189 and make merry: for this my son was dead, and is come to life again; he was lost, and is found.” Had the parable been only a parallel to 15:4-6 and 8 /, it could have ended here. An objection which could have no place in the two preceding members of the trilogy, however, arises and requires to be met. The behaviour of the father in pardoning with such facility his son’s licentious life is reprehensible, inasmuch as by equalizing the virtuous and the vicious it puts a premium on sin. The elder son, who had been merely mentioned before, now appears upon the scene, and affords his father the necessary opportunity of justifying himself. All this time he had been in the field busy, it would seem, with some useful task and as he draws near to the house, and hears the sound of music and dancing from within, he calls one of the servants and inquires what it all meant. The unexpected answer, “ thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound,” fills him with anger. When he saw his brother depart bearing with him his full share of the 190 THE PARABLES OF JESUS paternal property, he believed that he was rid of him for ever, and he had no fear that he would one day return to be his rival in his father’s affections, or, what concerned him more, a channel for diverting his bounty from himself. No wonder, then, that he will not enter the banqueting-hall or take any share in the festivities. His father comes out and begins to expostulate with him, but to all his entreaties he has but the one reproachful answer: “ Behold, so many years do I serve thee, and I have never transgressed a commandment of thine, and thou hast never given me a kid that I might make merry with my friends; but as soon as this thy son is come who hath devoured his living with harlots, thou didst kill for him the fatted calf.” The speaker does not represent the Jews as distinguished from the Gentiles, nor the Pharisees among the Jews, nor is he a monster of selfishness: he is simply a type of the average man. The characteristic touches indicate this: he will not call the erring one his brother, but prefers to bring into prominence the relation of the latter to their father; and he betrays the fact that, like the ordinary THE PARABLES OF JESUS 191 man, he feels more keenly the poverty to which his brother’s evil courses have reduced him than the moral turpitude which they involve. His callousness, too, and utter lack of fraternal affection serve to place in a stronger light the storm of passionate joy with which his father has welcomed the prodigal home. He has accused the former of partiality and injustice, but the charge is undeserved; the exquisite delicacy and tact of the father’s answer is its sufficient refutation. He had already shown his love towards his younger son, and his words now reveal that he loves the elder no less. “ Child,” he says, “ thou art always with me “ note that “thou” is here emphatic “and all I have is thine, but it was fitting that we should make merry and rejoice: for this thy brother was dead, and is come to life again; he was lost, and is found.” We are not told whether the elder son yielded to the entreaties of his father, or whether the prodigal persevered in the new life so favourably begun; the words “it was fitting that we should make merry and rejoice “form the climax of the parable: like the two preceding ones, it ends upon a note of joy.

192 THE PARABLES OF JESUS TAGS: [Parables]

3.19 The Unjust Steward

XIX. THE UNJUST STEWARD.

Luke 16:1 - Luke 16:9. The words with which this parable is introduced, "and He also said to His disciples," imply that it was not spoken on the same occasion as the parables in the preceding chapter. By the term "disciples" here we cannot understand the narrower circle of the followers of Jesus who had renounced all things for His sake, since the injunction, "make to yourselves friends with the mammon of iniquity," would be out of place if addressed to men who had nothing with which they might give alms. The lesson of the parable is that riches are rightly and profitably used when they are devoted to succouring the needs of the poor. To illustrate this truth, Jesus took an incident from ordinary life; and as this incident does not admit of being treated as an allegory beyond what is indicated in verse 9, He regarded the moral aspect of the course adopted by the chief actor in it as a matter of indifference for the purpose He had in view. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 193 A certain man had a steward, and this man was accused to him that he was wasting his goods. The context shows that the steward was not a slave, but a freeman charged with the supervision and administration of his master's estate. His lord called him, and said to him: "What is this that I hear of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou canst be steward no longer." We are not told whether the master examined the charge and satisfied himself as to its truth; the introduction of such particulars would have been irrelevant. He has, however, made up his mind, and the reckoning which the steward is called on to give is the final one that he must render before quitting his office.

He is thunderstruck at the accusation, and makes no attempt to defend himself. When alone again, like the experienced and practical man that he* is, his first thought is to cast about for some means of subsistence in the altered position in which he will soon find himself. He was not one of those men who are careful to enrich themselves at the expense of their employers; his administration at the worst was only wasteful and extravagant, not

13 194 THE PARABLES OF JESUS systematically corrupt. Seeing himself now destitute of resources with which to face the future, and every way to an honest living barred against him, he communes with himself, "What shall I do, since my lord taketh away from me the stewardship? I am unable to dig, to beg I am ashamed." His strength is unequal to the strain which hard manual labour would involve, and he shrinks from becoming a common mendicant. He doubtless feels with Ben Sira (xl. 28 1) that it would be better to be dead than a beggar. A thought now strikes him: "I know what I will do, that when I am put out of the stewardship they may receive me into their houses."

What follows will show whom he has in mind.

He is not yet actually removed from his office, though the step has been definitely resolved on; and he will now employ to the best advantage the short time that remains to him before he is turned adrift. He thereupon called each one of his lord's debtors apart, it must be understood and he said

to the first: "How much owest thou my lord?" He answered, "A hundred barrels of oil." The steward said: "Take thy bond, and sit down quickly I LXX. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 195 and write fifty." He hands back the bond or acknowledgment of the debt which he had received from the debtor, and he bids him alter it, either by changing on the old bond the amount of the value received, or, lest any alterations or erasures might look suspicious, by writing out a new one. As a rule, the debtor himself wrote out the acknowledgment of the debt. To another he said: "How much dost thou owe?" He replied: "A hundred quarters of wheat." "Take thy bond," said the steward, "and write eighty." The Hebrew liquid measure the bath, which we have rendered by "barrel," contained about six and a half gallons, and the dry measure cor, translated "quarter," about eight bushels. The steward, though he has the bonds in his hand, is represented as inquiring the amount of each one's indebtedness, simply for the purpose of informing the reader, so that he may understand what follows. There were, of course, more than two debtors: the two who are introduced serve as specimens. The steward had formed a very poor opinion of their honesty, and so he had no misgiving about their willingness to fall in with his plans.

196 THE PARABLES OF JESUS

These, indeed, came eventually to the knowledge of his master, and this served the purpose of the parable by eliciting from the latter a commendation of his servant's prudence; but we are not told that the information came from the debtors. Anyhow, his master praised him, for which the reason is assigned that the sons of this world are wiser among themselves, in their mutual relations, than the sons of the light. Jesus recommends, not the action of the steward for our imitation, but the wisdom which inspired it: that the action deserved censure appears from His praise of the sons of the light. By "this world" or "this age" the pre-Messianic age is to be understood, a period of sin, and moral and spiritual darkness, and misery. With the men of this age "the sons of the light," those who have received the spiritual illumination of the Gospel (John 12:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:5; Ephesians 5:8), are contrasted. The former are wiser among themselves than the latter; like the unjust steward, they know the character of one another, and in consequence how far they may reckon on receiving help for their schemes and plans. The sons of the light THE PARABLES OF JESUS 197 would not have fallen in with the steward's proposal; much less would they have been guilty of such conduct among themselves.

They have, however, a wisdom of their own, the characteristics of which are enumerated in James 3:17. Still, they can learn a lesson from the unjust steward; and it will be well with them if in the domain of their own life they show the same prudence, determination, and energy, in the pursuit of good as he did in the pursuit of evil. Jesus concludes with the exhortation: "Make to yourselves friends with the mammon of iniquity, that when it shall fail they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles." The friends are the poor who in their lifetime were the recipients of the alms. Just as the debtors befriended by the steward were able to show him hospitality, so the poor here are represented as already in the eternal tabernacles, where they will welcome those who have been their benefactors in a former life. Mammon is an Aramaic word, with cognate words in Hebrew and Punic, and signifies riches. Here the idea of riches is qualified by the notion of iniquity or injustice, not in the restrictive sense, as if 198 THE PARABLES OF JESUS there were other riches which did not deserve to be thus qualified, and with which we were not bound to procure ourselves friends. The notion of iniquity attaches to riches in general, inasmuch as in their acquisition or possession or employment some element of a sinful nature is usually found. Riches would fail

either at the moment of the Parousia or at the hour of death; and according as we have one or the other term in mind, the eternal tabernacles are those of the Messianic Kingdom or those in heaven respectively.

TAGS: [Parables]

3.20 The Rich Man and Lazarus

XX. THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

Luke 16:19 - Luke 16:31. The main object of this parable is to show the fate of those who do not spend their wealth as is taught and enjoined in the parable of the Unjust Steward, but, on the contrary, expend it on a life of luxury and splendour without any thought of the needs and sufferings of the poor. The parable is virtually an answer to the old problem so often propounded, how are the prosperity of the wicked and the THE PARABLES OF JESUS 199 sufferings of the righteous to be reconciled with the Divine government of the world? The problem for the first time is here definitely and authoritatively solved. The present life is too short to allow of its containing within its own sphere the full and complete realization of what Divine Providence intends in the case of each individual: for this we must await another in which forces will come into play, which seem to be inactive now, and in which the scheme of Providence will receive its adequate expression. The parable has been regarded by critics as the most pronounced of the so-called Ebionitic sections, in which riches as such are condemned, and poverty as such is praised and commended. We are not told, indeed, that the rich man had any vices in particular beyond his hardness of heart towards the poor, which was bred of his own immunity from those miseries which they had to endure; and not a word is said of the virtues of Lazarus; but this is plainly an insufficient foundation on which to base the view in question. Elsewhere in a context devoid of any Ebionitic colouring (Matt. xxv. 41-45) Jesus distinctly teaches that the neglect 200 THE PARABLES OF JESUS of works of charity towards the poor and afflicted is cause enough for condemnation, and even though the virtues of Lazarus receive no formal mention, the narrative implies them. The parable instructs by means of an example, whether the history relates to real events or not is immaterial for the purpose which Jesus had in view. It naturally falls into two parts which have respectively this life and the life beyond the grave for their theatres of action.

Some regard the first part as a history of real events, while they take the second as merely figurative; but the parable in itself gives no ground for a division in this sense. That one of the characters, Lazarus, should be named is indeed remarkable, since it is the only instance in the parables where any of the personages is mentioned by name. Some of those who hold that we have here a history of events which actually occurred assign, as reason for the absence of any mention of the rich man's name, the unwillingness of Jesus to injure the reputation of the surviving members of his family by exposing the damnation of one of their kinsmen; but surely the mention of the beggar's name, coupled with THE PARABLES OF JESUS 201 the statement that he lay at the gate of a certain rich man, would have sufficiently revealed the identity of the latter that is, in case Jesus spoke of contemporary events.

We have no difficulty in accepting the opinion that the beggar received a name merely for convenience sake in view of the exigencies of verse 24. Since the third century in some Latin texts the rich man is named Finaeus=

Phineas. Phineas (Numbers 25:7) was the son of Eleazar (=Lazarus), and possibly this connection suggested the name. The history shows that riches are not only a hindrance to the attainment of everlasting blessedness, but that they have a tendency so to harden the heart that all sympathy with the poor vanishes, and no advice or exhortation produces any effect, while the poor man, though here despised, may be confident of being received into the bosom of Abraham.

There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and who led a life of luxury and splendour. He wore outer garments of wool coloured with the famous purple dye extracted from the shell-fish murex; and his inner garments were of the 202 THE PARABLES OF JESUS material called byssus fine linen, or perhaps cotton. In this way he secured the twofold object, display and comfort. There was also a poor beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at the rich man's gate, full of sores and desiring to be filled with what fell from his table. Whether this desire was actually gratified or not we do not know; the words in the Vulgate, "and no man did give him," seem to be an addition after the analogy of 15:16; but the context favours the negative view. The name Lazarus is the same as Eleazar, and signifies "God has helped" or "God help." To heighten his misery, the street dogs, the scavengers of Eastern towns, used to come and lick his sores, while he saw himself powerless to ward off the unwelcome attentions of these unclean animals. Death, however, reversed the conditions of the two men. The beggar died, and was carried away by angels into Abraham's bosom. Abraham was the father of the faithful, and the term "Abraham's bosom" was equivalent to Paradise (xxiii. 43). The rich man also died and was buried, and we next find him in Hades. The Greek word Hades has the same meaning THE PARABLES OF JESUS 203 as the Hebrew Sheol, the place of the dead in general, without necessarily including any idea of happiness or unhappiness. Here, however, the context shows that hell (Ge henna), the place of torments, is intended.

Both Abraham's bosom and hell were regarded as subterranean and situated side by side, so that their respective occupants could see each other and converse together as here represented. Jesus wished before all things to be understood, and since, in the popular belief, as afterwards in the opinion of some of the Fathers, a certain material or corporeal form attached to souls separated from their natural earthly bodies, His language here presented no difficulty to His hearers. The rich man, now in torments, lifts up his eyes, and sees Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. That he should have lifted up his eyes has been held to prove that the place where the souls of the just abode was on a higher plane than hell; but it is far more probable that we have here an instance of the well-known Hebrew mode of speaking (Job 2:12; Luke 6:20; John 6:5). The sight of Abraham and Lazarus excites in him some hope, and 204 THE PARABLES OF JESUS his torments wring from him that piteous cry, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I suffer pain in this flame." These words suggest a pathetic contrast between the cooling springs and streams of water in Paradise and the tormenting flames in hell. The answer of Abraham, though friendly, leaves no ground for hope: "Child, remember that thou receivedst thy good things in thy lifetime, and Lazarus in like manner evil things, but he now is comforted here, while thou sufferest pain.

And, besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who would pass from hence to you may not be able, nor those from thence cross over to us." His prayer is rejected; Abraham shows at once its unfairness and the impossibility of granting it. It would seem that a certain measure of good and evil is meted out to individuals. The rich man had received his

share of good things during his earthly life, and now the time is come for him to receive his portion of evil. With Lazarus these conditions have appeared in the inverse order. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 205 In the temporal life good things and evil things receive their limitation from time; but, in the life beyond the grave, as no temporal restriction exists there any longer, so also the limitations which spring from it must of necessity cease. In addition, the chasm or gulf fixed between their respective abodes effectually stops all such intercourse between them as the granting of the prayer would involve. The dialogue implies that the old relations of father and son remain unbroken, and it is worthy of notice that Abraham will not add to the anguish of his unfortunate descendant by ascribing his present misery to his past misdeeds: instead, he attributes the altered fortunes of the rich man and Lazarus respectively to causes beyond their own control. Still, we cannot infer from this that in the mind of Abraham both men were on the same spiritual and moral level; on the contrary, in his replies to the further entreaties of the rich man, the guilt of the latter is taken for granted, though here, too, the words of the patriarch show infinite delicacy and tact. The poor suppliant, disappointed in his expectation of some relief, were it ever so 206 THE PARABLES OF JESUS trifling, from his own misery, now bethinks himself of his brethren who are still alive, and who await a fate similar to his own. He once more speaks to Abraham: " I pray thee then, father, that thou wouldst send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also should come to this place of torture." His personal sufferings are not conceived of as rendering him void of natural affection towards those who are bound to him by ties of blood; rather, his own experience of the torments of hell gives him a keener sense of the danger which his brethren are running, and of which they themselves have no apprehension. It would be different if the spectre of Lazarus presented itself before them, unfolded to their terrified souls the harrowing tale of their brother's miserable state, and threatened them with the same doom unless they repented. This extraordinary course does not commend itself to Abraham, who calmly answers: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." They have within their reach a sufficient means of escape from sharing their brother's lot: they have THE PARABLES OF JESUS 207

Moses and the prophets, whose writings reveal to them the will of God, and threaten transgressors of His Law with the consequences of His anger. The answer does not reassure the poor condemned man. He remembers how he had the same means of escape from wrath which his brethren now have, and how little it availed him. He is convinced that their condemnation to the same misery as his own is inevitable, and this conviction urges him to press his suit in spite of the refusal which he has already received. He therefore says: " Nay, Father Abraham, but if one from the dead come to them, they will repent." The patriarch now puts an end to the colloquy with the stern words: " If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they allow themselves to be persuaded, even though one should arise from the dead." The narrative presses home the injunction appended to the parable of the Unjust Steward. Had the rich man during life made Lazarus his friend, by helping him in his poverty, the beggar, who is represented as dying before him, would have received him after death into the eternal tabernacles. He neglected this 208 THE PARABLES OF JESUS means of ensuring his happiness in the life beyond the grave, and this neglect involved him in consequences from which, as the narrative teaches, he could find no means of escape. The thought of the changed estate of Lazarus in Paradise is a source of comfort for the poor and afflicted; and it also tends to preserve them from yielding to the temptation of envying their more fortunate fellow-mortals.

TAGS: [Parables]

3.21 The Unjust Judge

XXI. THE UNJUST JUDGE.

Luke 18:1 - Luke 18:8;

It is unusual that the lesson which a parable teaches should, as here, be prefixed to it by way of introduction. The lesson, "that we ought always to pray, and not to faint," is not here taught as of universal application in all times, places, and circumstances, as in the case of the parable 11:5ff. Both its position after an eschatological discourse and internal indications (verse 7/.) show that the Parousia is envisaged as imminent. A time of great trial is coming when the faith and patience of the disciples will be put to a severe test, THE PARABLES OF JESUS 209 and it is only those who persevere in prayer that will be able to stand it. The prayer of which there is question here is not a state of habitual, virtually uninterrupted prayer, nor a prayerful spirit, but the actual prayer of petition in the ordinary sense of the term. The preceding discourse was spoken to the disciples; and even apart from this circumstance, the character of the parable itself would oblige us to conclude that it also was addressed to them.

There was in a certain city a judge who, with perfect consciousness of the fact, neither feared God nor regarded man. There was also in the same city a widow who came to him repeatedly, asking him to do her justice in a lawsuit which she had in hand. In the Old Testament, kindness to widows, especially on the part of those concerned with the administration of justice, is strongly inculcated.

Jahweh himself is styled "the Advocate of widows" (Ps. lxxvii. 6); and we find Isaias in his address to the rulers of Jerusalem, in which he urges on the work of reformation in the city, attaching special importance to the duty of pleading the cause of thi; class of

14 210 THE PARABLES OF JESUS women. 1 Widows, as bereft of their natural protectors, could easily become the prey of designing and unscrupulous men, especially in Palestine, where venality lingers still. No formal charge of corruption is brought here against the judge; but he will not give himself the trouble to set in motion the simple machinery of justice for the purpose of doing his petitioner right. Judges are appointed to administer strict, impartial justice; and as the judge in question, though with no corrupt intention, neglected this duty, to the detriment of the widow's interests, he is rightly qualified with the epithet "unjust." Thus matters went on for a time, each new entreaty meeting with a fresh refusal, until at last the widow, who began to despair of success, became so importunate in her appeals that the judge, who only wanted to be left in peace, decided to grant it. He said within himself: "Even though I fear not God nor regard man, yet, because this widow is troublesome to me, I will avenge her, lest she should at length come and claw me." The last words have a certain ironical flavour: it does not appear that he * C. 1:17. THE PARABLES OF JESUS 211 was actually afraid of personal violence.

Jesus Himself draws the moral of this short history: "Hear ye what the unjust judge saith. And think ye that God will not avenge His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will tarry in their

regard? I tell you that He will speedily avenge them.” The elect are those who remain faithful and vigilant in the last days of great tribulation which will precede the Parousia, and which God will mercifully shorten, else no flesh would be saved (Matthew 24:21 f.; cf. Revelation 6:10, Revelation 19:2).

If the unjust judge granted the widow’s prayer, merely to be rid of her importunity, how much more will God, Who is not only just, but faithful to His promises, hear the prayer of His elect who cry to Him, not at intervals of days or weeks, but day and night without ceasing! The words of Jesus contain a promise of deliverance which will support the sinking courage of the disciples in those evil days; and they also indicate the condition namely, continual prayer on which the fulfilment of the promise depends. The prayer of the elect, which finds many parallels in the Psalms, is not opposed to the precept 212 THE PARABLES OF JESUS of fraternal charity, inasmuch as it is prompted by the desire that the outraged honour of God should be vindicated, and that His servants should be recompensed for their fidelity, by their reception into His Kingdom. Jesus may be slow in coming, but this delay in relation to eternity is but short (2 Corinthians 4:17). In His concluding words, “ Yet will the Son of Man at his coming find faith on the earth?” to which a negative answer is expected, Our Lord intimates what the state of the world will be at that time. The passage agrees with the statements of the eschatological discourses as to the condition of humanity at the Parousia (xvii. 26-30; Matthew 24:12, Matthew 25:5Matthew 25:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 2 Peter 3:3).

TAGS: [Parables]

3.22 The Pharisee and the Publican

XXII. THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

Luke 18:9 - Luke 18:14.

It is not quite certain to whom this parable was addressed. The preceding discourses (xvii. 22 to 18:8) were addressed to the disciples, and it is very probable that this parable was spoken to them also. Even if we THE PARABLES OF JESUS 213 translate, " and He also spoke this parable unto some," instead of " with reference to some," no valid objection against this view can arise, inasmuch as an overweening opinion of one's moral or religious excellence was by no means a monopoly of the Pharisees. The parable has special reference to the Parousia.

Jesus had already warned His disciples against the spiritual pride that might arise from the contemplation of their works (xvii. 7-10), had enjoined on them the duty of gratitude to God for His benefits (xvii. 18), had in the discourses which referred to future times inculcated the necessity of vigilance; and in this parable He sought to impress upon them the importance of humility. The parable teaches the value of humility in general, and its necessity as a quality of prayer; but it is doubtful which of these two lessons Jesus had chiefly in view. The words which form a heading to the parable, and the gnomic saying with which it ends, " for whosoever exalteth himself shall be humbled, but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted," refer more naturally to the former. The Evangelist introduces the parable by 214 THE PARABLES OF JESUS telling us that Jesus spoke it with reference to some who trusted in themselves that they were just, and utterly despised others. If this rendering is correct, it does not follow that any of the class of persons whom He had in mind were present. If, however, we translate the passage, " and He also spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves," etc, a sense which it can well bear, some of those who belonged to the category in question, not necessarily Pharisees, must have been immediately addressed. Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one of whom was a Pharisee, the other a publican. The Temple was on a hill; hence they are described as going up to pray, and going down after they had prayed. The Pharisees were a school or party among the Jews whose distinctive tenets were opposed to those of the Sadducees. Of their origin little is known. The name signifies " separated " i.e, from the common people, " the people of the land," as they were contemptuously called by their superior knowledge of the Law and by their piety.

They believed in a future existence in which the virtuous would be rewarded and the THK PARABLES OF JESUS wicked punished; but they did not, for all that, disdain the good things of the present life. They accepted not only the written Law, but also a large mass of traditions, which, though in great part of comparatively recent date, they regarded as of equal authority with the written Law itself. They made special profession of observing with extreme strictness the Law, particularly in ritual and ceremonial points, as interpreted and safe guarded by the traditions; and in this way they acquired great influence with the people.

They were characterized by hypocrisy, for which they were often denounced by Jesus, and by contempt of “ the rest of men “(verse 11) that is, those who did not belong to their party. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself: “ O God, I thank Thee that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or also as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I get.” Standing was the usual posture for prayer, and has here no special significance. The prayer of the Pharisee was a monologue in which he expressed his perfect satisfaction with himself.

216 THE PARABLES OF JESUS

He first sets forth his holiness in the negative sense, in as far as it consists in innocence of those sins which others commit, and he then proceeds to mention his positive good works. The bi-weekly fast to which he alludes was observed on Thursday, on which day Moses was said to have ascended the summit of Sinai, and on Monday, the day on which he was supposed to have come down. Fasting usually consisted in total abstinence from food from one evening to the next. The custom of tithing, or offering to a divinity the tenth part of the produce of the soil, or of spoils taken in war, or of what one earned or acquired, was not exclusively Israelitish. The custom was of obligation among the Jews, and the Pharisees were painfully punctilious in giving the tenth part of even such insignificant herbs as mint, rue, anise, and cummin (Matt, 23:23; Luke 11:42). It is to be remarked that the Pharisee boasts of giving tithes of all that he gets. He mentions only his fasting and his faithful payment of tithes, while silent as to voluntary works of charity or mercy; from which it is a fair inference that he regarded the former as works of paramount importance. The humble contrition of the publican is the antithesis of the proud self-sufficiency of the Pharisee. Standing afar off, he would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote his breast, saying: “ God, be merciful to me a sinner.” The Jews lifted up their hands and eyes to heaven when they prayed, a custom retained in the early Church.

He is so overwhelmed by the consciousness of his unworthiness that he will not lift up even his eyes to heaven, much less his hands. From the fact that in the original the word translated “ sinner “ has the article, it has been inferred by some that the prayer contains a comparison between the speaker and other men, just, as it has been put, “ as if he were the only sinner in the world.” But the truth is that he was not concerned about other men, and that he thought only of his own sinfulness and need of pardon, his sense of which inspired his brief and touching prayer. Jesus tells us that his petition was granted: “I say unto you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” It is not implied that both men were justified that is, absolved from sin and restored to grace. According to the Hebrew manner of speaking, the term of comparison easily assumed a negative force, as is the case here. The concluding words express the point of the parable: pride brings low, while humility exalts.

Printed in England. BY THE SAME AUTHOR THE PASSION AND

DEATH OF JESUS THIS is a concise exposition of the history of the Passion and a harmony of the Gospel narratives. It is the product of careful study of the Scripture text and of the best commentators on the Sacred Scriptures both ancient and modern. The Author is careful to solve difficulties, and succeeds in reconciling divergent readings and opinions. This book will help many to realize to the full what Christ's Passion and Death means for them.

BT 375.C645 1918 SMC Coghlan, Philip, The parables of Jesus 47230690 TAGS: [Parables]

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net