THE MESSAGE OF THE PARABLES

by Joseph F. Mcfadyen

McFadyen's comprehensive study of Jesus's parables including the Sower, the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, the Talents, and many others, analyzing Christ's teaching methods and the spiritual truths communicated through these stories.

36 Chapters

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To MY BROTHER, JOHN EDGAR

’There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother, And there is a brother that sticketh closer than a friend.

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PREFACE THE Bruce Lectureship, the object of which is to foster a love of New Testament study, was founded in memory of Professor A. B. Bruce, of the Free Church College, Glasgow, whose exegetical work on the New Testament, especially on the Gospels, has been an inspiration to many, far beyond the bounds of his class-room, of his Church, or of his country. One of the bestknown works of Professor Bruce is ’ The Parabolic Teaching of Christ.” The author chose as the subject of his Bruce Lectures ’ The Teaching Methods of Jesus with Special Reference to the Parable.” The lectures as delivered have now been revised, and enlarged by the addition of an exposition of the individual parables. The author tenders grateful thanks to the editors of The Speaker’s ’Bible for permission to use, in abbreviated form, his contribution on “ The Prodigal Son,” and to the editors of The Expository Times for permission to use, in abbreviated form, his contribution on; The Unjust Steward’ in the number for September, 1926; also to his wife for help in correcting the proofsheets.

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Kilmacolm, Renfrewshire.

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Literature

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CHAPTER I THE TEACHING METHODS OF JESUS THE parables of Jesus are among God's best gifts to men; yet men have treated them as perversely as they have treated so many other precious gifts of God. For long periods these pictorial sermonettes of Tesus have been to the Church little better than insoluble riddles. It has almost seemed as if the Church had been bent on fulfilling the purpose of parable teaching ascribed to Jesus in Mark's Gospel: " that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand." The parables of Jesus are only part of his teaching, and the parabolic method is only one of his teaching methods. There has been a very great deal of misunderstanding of the teaching of Jesus through failure to appreciate the pedagogic methods he adopted. It is curious that until quite lately comparatively little attention seems to have been given to this most interesting and important subject. So far as the writer knows, the first systematic attempt to study, on a scale of any magnitude, the teaching of Jesus from the teacher's point of view was Jesus the Master Teacher by H. H. Home, a book to which this chapter is deeply indebted. As a teacher, Jesus had certain handicaps, or what in others would have been handicaps. He suffered from all the prejudice that a Galilean upbringing would arouse in the minds at least of the dwellers in the capital; not the least part of this being due, if modern experience is any guide, to his provincial accent. Apparently he had no professional training. He wrote nothing, nor is there any certainty that during his ministry notes were taken either of his formal teaching or of his table talk.

Yet, meagre as the records are in point of bulk, there is no reason to doubt that they include everything that is essential, and little reason to hope or fear that any new discoveries that may be made will vitally change in any respect our conception of the Gospel of Jesus. The effectiveness of Jesus' teaching methods is witnessed by this, that after nineteen hundred years, after it has seemed again and again as if the influence of the Gospel of Jesus were languishing to the point of collapse, not only are there more professing Christians in the world to-day than ever before, but never has there been an effort, so wide-spread and so determined, to understand the message of Jesus. In the non-Christian world never has the name of Jesus been more deeply reverenced. The popular apologetic of Hinduism, for example, largely takes the form of an attempt to show that there is no essential difference between Hinduism and Christianity; and in India increasingly it is the Christian standard by which all character is judged and all progress tested.

We are accustomed to think of Jesus as instinctively lighting on the most fitting methods of teaching. This is part of our inheritance from a traditional theology which, with exaggerated reverence, surrounded him with a halo of impenetrable mystery. But a close study of the records reveals him as such a master of pedagogy that it is surely more natural to think of him as carefully pondering the subject in the long and silent years of preparation,

If Jesus had certain handicaps as a teacher, he also had certain natural advantages. As the eldest son in a large family, he had a thorough knowledge of children and of young men and women before he began his work as a teacher. The marvellous simplicity of his language was learned in

daily conversation with his younger brothers and sisters, in which simplicity was the necessary condition of being understood. The use he makes of metaphors from the family, his thought of God as Father, of those who do God's will as a great brotherhood and sisterhood, were no doubt the flower of a happy home life. His genius for story-telling would find plenty of scope in the family circle; and his unfailing championship of women, springing from the chivalry of his own nature, had been his daily practice in his relations with his mother and his sisters, before it was revealed in his public ministry and became the great humanising influence it is to-day.

Further, he had long experience of village life. For the work of Jesus it was essential that he should know human nature, in its depth as well as in its breadth, know it in its nooks and crannies as well as in its open spaces. In villages men know each other with an intimacy which is hardly possible in the crowded, self-centred life of the town. The town-dweller has acquaintance with men; the villager knows men.

One of his great assets as a teacher was that he obviously loved teaching. There are those who teach because they cannot help teaching, because it is essential to their happiness that all around them should share whatever knowledge they possess, whatever accomplishments they have acquired. Watch a crowd of bathers in the sea on a summer dav. There are those who have no thought but to get as much enjoyment as possible out of their exercise and to exhibit their aquatic prowess; but here and there is one who looks round to see if there is any unfortunate who cannot swim and who gives up his own pleasure till the beginner can share it. Is not this just one form of unselfishness? In every aspect of his life Jesus was the Giver, not least in this, that he imparted richly of his knowledge. There is a certain type of person in whom the sight of a crowd rouses no feeling but contempt and the desire to say smart things at their expense. When Jesus saw the multitude, he wanted to shepherd and to teach them. If at any time he shrank from contact with the crowd, it was only that later he might reach them more effectively.

We do not always fully realise the extent to which modern pedagogical science follows the teaching methods practised by Jesus. His use of the Old Testament, for example of the passages from Deuteronomy that he quotes at the Temptation, is a lesson in the proper use of memorising, in the distinction between learning by rote and learning by heart. (Deu 8:3; Deu 6:16; Deu 6:13.) New Testament writers are frequently satisfied if the words of a quotation are relevant: in our Lord's quotations the sense is also relevant.

Jesus insisted as much as any modern teacher on the importance of each person learning to think for himself or herself. " He that hath ears to hear, let him hear: ' that is what ears were meant for. Most of us use our ears, not to listen to what we do hear, but to hear what we expect to hear. ' Have you never read? ' he asks (Mark 2:25), read with your understanding as well as with your eyes? The passage is one which shows how our Lord read with his mind. If Scripture had been silent on the subject, it would have been interesting to conjecture what aspects of the career of David would have most interested our Lord. In the Gospel records the only incident in the life of David to which Jesus refers is that in which David showed his capacity for original and truly religious thinking, his realisation that the claims of humanity come before those of ceremonial.

Conventionality was the vice of the priest and the Levite in the parable, as it was also of the five thoughtless bridesmaids who would not enter the marriage procession without the conventional torch.

Jesus acted on the principle that the highest truths of all, men must find out, each for himself. In Mark's Gospel Peter's confession of the Messiahship of Jesus is the climax to which the earlier part of the story has been leading up. As Professor Bradley says of the forest of Arden, Shakespeare gives no hint of the way thither. If we are ever to find it, each must find it for himself. But there are other truths that can be imparted; and so in Mark, when the disciples have learnt that Jesus is the Christ, he immediately begins to correct their conception of the nature of Messiahship. Ascertained truth is made a stepping-stone to the acquisition of new truth.

Jesus distinguished between preaching and teaching. Some of the greatest pulpit ministries of the last generation took the form of systematic exposition of books of the Bible. In our day desultory preaching on casual themes has so largely usurped the place of regular and continuous teaching as to explain much of the prevalent ignorance of the Bible and of the nature of the Christian religion.

Jesus adapted his language to his audience. In this he stands in marked contrast to the apostle Paul, who did not fully appreciate the importance of lucidity as a Christian grace.

Dr. Denney once warned his students that the Christian preacher is apt to underestimate the capacity of a congregation to understand his thought, to overestimate their capacity to understand his language. Very few of us are likely to have thoughts which will take an average congregation out of its depth; many of us are likely to have certain words in our vocabulary which, at least to a section of our audience, will be in an unknown tongue. The thought of Jesus is of fathomless profundity, his language is simplicity itself. The points he makes are all points that are worth making. Nothing he said would be liable to the criticism one has heard of a sermon that " it is a good road, but does not lead anywhere." Our Lord made constant and effective use of the principle of contrast, the principle that a learner does not really know a thing until he knows what is excluded as well as what is included. In a significant passage he contrasts his own healthy acceptance of the world of men and things with the Baptist's ascetic fear of the world.

(Mat 18:11 ff.) At the end of Mat 25:1-46 he elaborates the contrast between those on the right hand and those on the left. The picture of the son who repented of his disobedience is supplemented by the picture of the son who repented of his obedience. The Pharisee stands out in relief against the tax-collector, the good shepherd against the thief, the faithful shepherd against the hireling, the elder brother against both the father and the younger brother. The man with the one talent is placed against the background of the man with the five and the man with the two talents. The story of the crops that failed is supplemented by the story of the abundant harvest. The folly of the five careless bridesmaids becomes all the more reprehensible when they are placed beside the five thoughtful companions who looked ahead.

Jesus' whole life was a commentary on the theme: ' Other men have said... but I say unto you." A principle of scientific teaching is to reach the unfamiliar through the familiar. Every preacher is conscious of the often astonishing impression made on an audience by a reference to a familiar even if unimportant fact or incident of their everyday life. The parables of Jesus are the classic example of the marvellous effect with which this principle may be employed in teaching. In his teaching Jesus made large use of the question method. A teacher should be * an animated question point." Jesus asked questions to stimulate thought. " What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he? ' " Who do men say that I am? ' A striking example of this method occurs in the

passage (Mat 11:7 ff.) in which Jesus asks the crowds to reflect on the drawing power of the Baptist. It illustrates not merely the pedagogical principle of teaching by asking suggestive questions, but also the method of elimination, of reaching the right answer by first discussing various possible alternatives.

Jesus led the people to the discovery that they flocked to hear John's preaching because he was a rock-like man and an ascetic; but most of all because he was a prophet with a message straight from the heart of God.

Jesus, again, asked questions to guide inquirers in answering their own questions: on the keeping of the Sabbath: You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, lead it off and water it?' (Luk 13:15); on the question of passive resistance to the foreign and heathen ruler: ' Whose are this image and superscription? ' (Mat 22:20); on the limits of the claims of neighbourliness: ' Which of these do you suppose showed himself neighbour of him who fell among the robbers? " (Luk 10:36); on the duty of his followers to pay the temple-tax: ' What do you think, Simon? From whom do earthly kings take customs or tax: from their own children or from foreigners?"

(Mat 18:25); on the source of his own authority: ' I too will put a question to you.

What about the baptism of John: was it a purely human institution, or had it divine sanction? ' (Mat 11:24 f.) Nor was this last a ' catch ' question; Jesus did not ask 'catch" questions: it was Jesus' contribution towards an answer to a question that still vexes men's minds, the seat of authority in religion.

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CHAPTER II THE TEACHING METHODS OF JESUS (continued} JESUS discouraged foolish questions. ’ Lord, are there few that be saved? “ (Luk 13:23).

Jesus’ answer is apposite to many of the futile speculations which occupy the time and energy of multitudes in our day, and have become in some parts of the world a formidable menace to the effectiveness of the Church: the possibility of communication with the dead, the date and manner of the Second Coming, the proper day of the week for the public worship of God, the whereabouts of the “ lost ten tribes.” “ We are living,” says Jesus in effect, “ in a serious world where only strenuous work and the grace of God can save anybody.” Our Lord was practising one of the great principles of pedagogy when he varied his methods to suit individual cases. He did this in all his intercourse with men, in the healing ministry for example. The ostracised leper he touches; to the despairing paralytic his words are: ’ Courage, child; ’ the prostrate daughter of Jairus he takes by the hand. His methods of dealing with potential disciples are well illustrated by the passage Luk 9:57-62. The man who has a dilettante interest in the Gospel but has never counted the cost is reminded that there is a kind of intellectual enthusiasm even for Jesus which is speedily disillusioned by the stern experiences of actual discipleship. To the man who will come by-and-by, who will follow “ when the old man dies,” Jesus urges that now, while discipleship is still a living force, is the time to preach to the living men who are dying for want of the good news; as in war, the living and the dying come before the dead. The ploughman who tries to face both ways gets the message that straight furrows are not made in that way. The Gospel records preserve traces of the way in which Jesus used the personal name, sometimes repeating it with peculiar impressiveness.

“ Simon, I have somewhat to say unto you ’ (Luk 7:40). “ Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things ’ (Luk 10:41). ’ Simon, Simon, lo! Satan’s prayer has been granted that he might sift you all like wheat” (Luk 22:31). Three verses later, as Plummer has pointed out, Jesus, for the only time in the Gospel records, addresses Simon by the name he had himself given him, Peter, the Rock, to remind him how far he was falling from his rock-like character. In the fourth Gospel, on the resurrection morning, when Mary was in despair because they had taken away her Lord and she did not know where they had placed him, it was the sound of her name, in the same accents as had pronounced it once before on a well-remembered day, that roused her to the consciousness that she was in the presence of the Master. “ Jesus saith to her * Mary ’ (John 20:16). The educational system in the public schools of Great Britain has made wide use of the educational value of personal intercourse between pupil and pupil, between pupil and teacher. In recent years the Church in her foreign work has made large and increasing use of this factor in education. Everywhere we see residential colleges, hostels, and boarding-schools being founded or developed. In this we are only rediscovering one of the teaching methods of Jesus. Mark tells us that the first object of the call of the twelve was “ that they might be with him ’ (Mark 3:14); that in daily and hourly intercourse with him they might absorb something of his spirit, something of his thought of God and of men, of the things and events of life.

Much of the impressiveness of Jesus as a teacher lay in his manner: his way of speech, his gestures, his look, his whole appearance.

We have seen the effect produced by the repetition of the name of the person he was addressing, “ Simon, Simon,” “ Martha, Martha.” His use of the repeated “ Verily ’ to introduce some memorable saying was so characteristic that apparently the early Church felt it must be reserved for him alone. When he looked on Peter after the cock-crowing, we gather that the memory of that look haunted Peter long years afterwards. His thanksgiving at the time of the feeding of the multitude was so unforgettable that, generations after the event, the scene of it was described as “ the place where they had eaten bread after the Lord had given thanks ’ (John 6:23). When he spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth, he had the congregation spell-bound before he began. Something in the occasion, his appearance and manner, the reputation he had already acquired, the passage he read, his opening sentence, the closing of the book with its halfunderstood significance, all contributed to the atmosphere of expectancy which is one of the preacher’s greatest assets.

One characteristic of educational work to-day is the extent to which, where climatic conditions permit, it is conducted in the open air. Might we not have guessed, even if we had never been told, that much of the teaching of Jesus, with its breezy freshness, its contact with reality and its sense of the divine, its big views and far horizons, w’T as given by the lake-side and in the field; that some of the most characteristic teaching was given on a hill, a hill where one breathes the pure air of God and sees things in their perspective, the big things in all their bigness, the little things in all their littleness? Our Lord made the disciples collaborate in the work. At the feeding of the five thousand it is one of the disciples who discovers a possible source of supplies. The disciples count and arrange the people, distribute the food and gather up the fragments. They are expected to carry on their Master’s work (Luke x. i6ff.) and even to rise to achievements impossible within the limitations of his earthly life (John 14:12). The teacher crowns his work by handing on the torch to his disciples. From Jesus, again, we learn the place of the common table in education. In India the common meal is one of the bonds of the caste, and this is only an extreme example of the sacred relations which so many people have understood to exist among those who have eaten together.

Until lately one of the difficulties of establishing friendly social relations between Indians and Europeans was that caste regulations forbade the Hindu to eat with the foreigner. In many cases he would take from the hands of the “ unclean ’ European only those kinds of fruit which have a thick rind, as in that case the defilement was confined to the rind, which is thrown away. To partake of a common meal is to establish an intimacy not easily reached by any other means. Some of Jesus’ most memorable teaching was given at feasts, and the last meal which he shared with his disciples obtained a significance for all time.

Jesus did not regard his work as finished till his pupils understood (Matt, 18:51). ’ Have you understood all these things? ’ ’ They say to him ’ Yes.’ “

One of the tests of a successful educational institution is the extent to which esprit decorps is established among the pupils. ’ The twelve ’ was something more than a title. Whatever jealousies and rivalries there may have been among them, “ the twelve “ were a brotherhood with a common spirit. The camaraderie of the pupils had its source and life in their common devotion to the teacher. “.Lord, to whom else shall we go? Thou hast words of eternal life.” Their enthusiasm was

for the teacher even more than for the teaching; or rather the two were inseparable. Every record we have of the ministry shows us Jesus not only leading men to God, but leading them to God through him. In one important point the attitude of Jesus to study was poles apart from that of the modern educationalist. No maxim is now more persistently inculcated on the student than that he must approach every subject in a scientific spirit, which is understood to mean, among other things, without bias or presuppositions of any kind. With regard to the biggest things in life, it seems clear that Jesus would hardly have understood what this demand meant. To him the whole world is God's world; men are God's children.

One does not approach without presuppositions the question of his father's existence or of his mother's character. Nor does one reach judgments on such questions by conscious reasoning.

We cannot even imagine Jesus facing theological questions in what is now known as the scientific spirit. To Jesus all study has but one end and aim, what it can tell us about God. The birds, the flowers, the rain, the sunshine, what we call accidents and disasters, the physical constitution and needs of man: there are many points of view from which we can study them; but to Jesus they all tell the same story of the love and the care and the large-heartedness of God.

It is a reasonable inference from the records of his ministry that Jesus would have attached high importance to the training of the emotions. His indignation is repeatedly recorded, excited by official misrepresentation of God's love and goodness and God's desire for the welfare and happiness of his children: in the matter of the Sabbath for example. In the story of the ten lepers he gives a lesson on gratitude. Our Lord knew that generous emotion which does not issue in generous action is not only negatively valueless, but is positively hurtful.

One has read of Russian ladies in the theatres of St. Petersburg weeping over the fictitious sorrows of a stage heroine while their own coachmen were freezing to death outside. After leading the lawyer to sympathize with the Samaritan's treatment of the wounded traveller, Jesus added the admonition: " Go, and do you likewise." The last of Jesus' teaching methods to which it seems necessary to refer is his habitual use of figurative language. 1 The Western mind has a 1 This is discussed in the author's Jesus and Luk 6:1-49. conviction which seems ineradicable that metaphorical language is less " true ' than the language of prose; but abstract language is ' abstracted " from the truth of things. Figurative language is at least suggestive of the truth, presents the truth not merely more vividly but more fully and therefore more accurately.

One of the tasks before the preacher of to-day is to convince men that the sayings of Jesus do not cease to have a meaning the moment they are understood to be figurative. The fires of Gehenna, which seemed to Jesus fit emblem of the torture of a lost soul, forfeit all their terrors for most the moment they are seen to be spiritual fires.

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CHAPTER III THE PARABLE AS SECRET TEACHING

IT is in the study of the parables that we reach the heart of the subject of the teaching methods of Jesus. There are various reasons why the parables must always occupy a large place in any study of the mind of Jesus. For one thing, they are perhaps the longest connected utterances of Jesus that we possess.

If other sections of the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels reproduce continuous discourses or parts of discourses, at least we can feel no certainty of the fact. The more we study the formal instruction of Jesus, the more doubtful we become whether we can ever, in any considerable number of cases, know the historical context.

Again, in the parables we find embodied an essential part of our Lord’s teaching. Our conception of his message would have been greatly impoverished if we had been deprived of the parables. Moreover, while the parable was no new thing among Jewish teachers, Jesus made it peculiarly his own. The early Church seems to have felt instinctively that the parable was a method of teaching sacred to Jesus, a province on which no other was to intrude.

Further, in the parables, we have the advantage, not only of the direct teaching of Jesus, but also of the indirect insight into his mind that we get by noting the themes he chose to illustrate, the spheres of life from which he drew his illustrations, the language he uses and the way in which he tells the story. As for the influence of the parables it is not too much to say that some of them are better known, and are inspiring more men and women to noble endeavour, than almost any other sayings of Jesus. The lasting and universal appeal made by the parables as a body of teaching is the best witness to the wisdom of our Lord in adopting this method of teaching, and the strongest claim on our continual study of them. In our study of the parables our generation has some advantages over our predecessors. In the last half century much work has been done on the Jewish use of the parable and on the history of the interpretation of the parables.

It is, however, from the department of New Testament criticism that our chief gain has been obtained. When there are two, or, as in some cases, three versions of the same parable, we know that that sometimes means, and sometimes does not mean, that the Gospel writers had two or more independent accounts of it. When there are divergencies between the accounts, we can sometimes explain how these arose. In our interpretation of a parable, we no longer feel bound by the literary context in which we find it, nor altogether by the explanation of it given by the Gospel writer. If there are expressions in a parable that seem repugnant to the life and the general teaching of Jesus, we consider the possibility that these may have come, not from Jesus but from the Church. In particular we feel ourselves at liberty to use our own judgment about the object of the use of the parable method which Mark ascribes to Jesus. The question why Jesus employed the parabolic method might seem hardly worth raising were it not for the curious passage, Mark 4:10-12 (and the parallels, Mat 13:10-15 and Luk 8:9-10), in which it seems to be suggested that

Jesus spoke in parables that he might conceal from the crowd the truths of the Kingdom that were revealed to the disciple circle. 1

Apparently this section of Mark early became a puzzle to the Church. Mark himself a few verses later gives the same explanation of the parable method as we should now give, namely that Jesus was adapting his teaching methods to the capacity, spiritual and intellectual, of his hearers (Mark 4:33). Matthew gives a turn to the words which makes them mean that Jesus uses figurative language because the multitude is unable to understand spiritual truth conveyed in plain prose (Mat 13:13); while he alone of the three evangelists makes it clear that the saying is taken from Isaiah.

Yet the fact that the Gospel writers represent 1 This question is discussed in the author's Jesus and Life, pp. 62 ff. the disciples as being puzzled and surprised when Jesus began to speak in parables, as inquiring why he adopted this method of teaching, suggests that when the Gospels were written there was much discussion about the meaning of at least some of the parables, and possibly that there was unwillingness in some quarters to accept the official interpretation. We note also that in the fourth Gospel, which is believed to be the latest of the four, the persistent misunderstanding of the figurative language of Jesus is one of the leading motives of the book.

' Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up " (John 2:19); ' You must be born from above" (John 3:7);; The living bread which has come down from heaven " (John 6:51); Abraham's exultation at seeing the day of Jesus (John 8:56); " Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep " (John 11:11); these are only a few examples out of many.

It seems a reasonable inference that there was an early Christian tradition that Jesus used figurative language which not only was liable to be misunderstood, but which, in its deeper and more significant application, was intended to be misunderstood by those outside the immediate circle of the disciples; and that, by the time the fourth Gospel came to be written, the idea had crystallized until we see Jesus perpetually puzzling his hearers with phrases of double significance, of which, as a penalty for their spiritual obtuseness, they fail to comprehend the true significance. Light had come into the world, but the darkness that was in them prevented them from opening their eyes to the light.

How did this curious idea arise? It is sometimes said that in the time of Christ the parable, under the influence of the scribes, had become an enigma. Buzy, however, writing in reply to hilicher and Loisy, after a somewhat thorough study of the question, denies this. There was no mystery element in the Old Testament parables; there was no mystery element in the Rabbinic parables of the end of the first Christian century; there is no good reason to suppose that in the interval the parable changed its nature; all through its course, it was a method of teaching, not of mystifying. Yet somehow the idea arose that some at least of the parables of Jesus were meant to conceal from most the truth they revealed to a chosen few.

While the subject is one of which comparatively little is known, it is reasonable to suppose that some of the leading ideas of the ' Mystery ' religions had become common property. One of these ideas was that of a circle of initiates to whom alone was revealed the inner meaning of the ceremonies of the cult, while this was concealed from the outsiders. The actual phrase, " the outsiders," is used in Mark's Gospel in the discussion about the object of the parables (John 4:11).

Further, the tradition was that Jesus, not only once, but several times, in connection with the parables used the phrase: ' He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." This would suggest that the meaning of much that he said did not lie on the surface.

Moreover, in the Synoptic tradition, the parable of the Sower occupies a position of special importance. It is round it that the discussion of the object of the parabolic method centres. But the parable of the Sower was of special interest to teachers and evangelists, since it analyses the conditions of successful propaganda and points to various causes of failure. Nor is this the only parable of which it may be said that it is of far more importance to the leaders of the movement than to the general body of hearers or even to the rank and file of the followers of Jesus. In the case of these parables Jesus would naturally take special care that those who were to be leaders should understand.

Thus the idea might seem to receive authoritative sanction that there was an inner circle of instructed " initiates," while the " outer " circles saw, and were meant to see, without perceiving; heard, and were meant to hear, without understanding.

Certain facts would help to strengthen the idea that in the teaching of Jesus there was much that was deliberately enigmatic. The tradition was that Jesus had foretold his death and resurrection, and that the disciples had failed to take in the message. Further, we have abundant evidence in the New Testament, not least in Paul's epistles, that the early Church expected the speedy return of the Master in bodily form. They must have thought they got the idea from Jesus himself, yet their expectations were disappointed. What explanation of these misunderstandings could be more natural and more satisfactory than that the words of Jesus contained a deeper meaning than appeared on the surface? Special importance would then be attached to certain parables (such as the Talents and the Ten Bridesmaids) which spoke of the departure of the central figure and his return after a long delay. These parables would then be interpreted of the Second Coming.

Yet, while the suggestion that Jesus was deliberately trying to obscure his meaning for any section of his hearers is fantastic, this need not blind us to the element of truth in Mark's theory. We to-day are familiar with the dictum that our Lord's teaching was sometimes beyond the comprehension of those who reported it for us. It may well be that even in the first two Christian generations, the idea had dawned that there was a deeper significance in some of the sayings of Jesus than was recognized by those who handed down the tradition. In this connection, there is a striking remark by Dr. Baudert in an article on Zinzendorf, ' Zinzendorf shares with other great men the fate that his ideas, which were far ahead of his age, were understood by few during his lifetime, and were completely neglected for decades after his death. Partly also they were purposely concealed because people were afraid of their boldness and shrank from drawing the logical conclusions arising out of them." 1 Our Lord must have been well aware that much of his teaching was falling on deaf ears; and it was natural that, before very long, some of his followers with a high conception of his person should believe and teach that his failure to impress, where he did fail, was not only foreseen but intended.

Further, one can hardly help noticing how many of the parables may be interpreted as teaching a practical moral lesson, while they are susceptible also of a deeper spiritual interpretation. The Barren Fig Tree has usually been regarded as typifying the spiritually dead Jewish people, or at least their leaders. Yet so recent an interpreter as Mr. J. Cyril Flower gives a more ethical, and

less distinctly religious flavour to the parable by taking the tree to represent any institution worth cherishing. ' What we need in Europe and all the world to-day is not the people who can only hew down corrupt trees.

We want gardeners who know how to cultivate good ones truly and well." 1 Very many preachers to-day would expound the Talents as inculcating the dedication to God of all one's endowments, physical, intellectual, social. Indeed it is in this sense that the word ' ' talents ' ' has passed into the English language. Yet, from the 1 International Review of Missions, July, 1932.

2 The Parables of Jesus Applied to Modern Life, p. 19. position in which Matthew places the parable, it seems clear that he believed it had a reference to the Last Judgment, probable that he interpreted the talents as spiritual gifts. The parable of the Ten Bridesmaids has on the face of it the practical lesson that the best excuse for being late is never quite the same as being in time, that the most specious explanation of a neglected duty is never so satisfactory as the performance of the duty, that the most convincing apology for absence is a poor apology for presence. Are we to say that those are wrong who find in the picture something of more consequence than a rustic wedding, in the midnight cry a more thrilling announcement than the coming of the peasant bridegroom, and in the fate of the five luckless ones something more tragic than exclusion from village festivities? The Prodigal Son would have been a story abundantly worth telling if it had been meant to illustrate nothing more than the quenchless love of a father for a wayward son and his infinite readiness to welcome the first sign of repentance; yet the Church from the beginning has believed that our Lord meant that our thoughts should be carried up to the heavenly Father. On the other hand, in the case of the Good Samaritan, while the theological interpretation long held the field, we now believe that Luke is right in saying that the parable was Jesus' answer to the question: ' Who is my neighbour? ' That need not prevent us realizing that, as an exposition of neighbourly conduct, the story owes all its force to the knowledge that he who told it was the Prince of Good Samaritans. In connection with the whole question of the interpretation of the parables there is a significant section in Luk 14:1-35. In Luk 14:12 ff. Jesus tells one of his hosts, when he gives a dinner or supper, not to invite his friends or brothers or relatives or rich neighbours. The reason is that they may invite him in return, and then the dinner, instead of an exercise in hospitality, will become a business proposition, a mere matter of give and take. The only feast God recognizes as given in his name is one at which the invited guests are " The poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind; ' those who, it is quite certain, cannot repay in kind. In Luke's account Jesus immediately proceeds to tell the parable of the Great Supper to which the host invited his rich friends and neighbours. When they refused to come, he invited " the poor, the maimed, the blind, the lame; ' exactly the same phrases, though in a slightly different order.

It is clear, then, that by the time Luke wrote, there were two versions of this saying of Jesus. In one version he gives the advice, meant to be taken quite literally, that there is far more true religion in entertaining outcasts who can never return our hospitality, than in those social junketings in which a man is alternately host and guest. In the other form, which immediately succeeds in Luke's narrative, the piece of practical advice has become a parable: the host is obviously God, the blind and the lame are invited, not on principle but because the well-to-do guests for whom the feast was intended refused to come. In view of all this, the suggestion is worth considering that, at least in the case of some parables, Jesus intentionally adopted a form of story which was capable of a double line of interpretation; of what, for want of better terms, we may call a lower and a higher

interpretation. This view, put forth in the sixteenth century by Salmeron, 1 deserves more attention than it has received, in spite of the ludicrous ways in which Salmeron himself applied it.

1 hilicher, Die Gleichnisreden Jesu, 1:171.

04 - Chapter 04

CHAPTER IV THE PARABLE AS ALLEGORY As the result of nearly nineteen hundred years of parable study, we can now say with confidence that certain popular methods of parable interpretation are definitely wrong, that they lead not to the understanding but to the misunderstanding of the mind of the Master. At one of these we have just looked: the theory, for which Mark is supposed to vouch, that the parables are hidden mysteries, intended to conceal from most the truth that they reveal to a chosen few. We have seen how such an idea could arise: as a key to the interpretation of the parables, it is worse than valueless. The method of parable exegesis which has prevailed longer than any other, and has more than any other blinded Christians to the lessons taught in the parables, is the allegorical method. By the allegorical method we mean the method according to which every person, every object and every incident mentioned in the story has its counterpart in the spiritual world. In an allegory there is no argument, no inference from one sphere to another. The story told need have no significance, even no probability, in itself. The spiritual truth is the only truth, but it is given in enigmatic or symbolic form. A very valuable section of hilicher's great book on the parables records the history of their interpretation. This section abounds in illustrations of the foolish meanings, sometimes the almost incredibly foolish meanings, found in the parables all down through the ages by distinguished teachers of the Church following the allegorical method. According to Tertullian, the father of the Prodigal represents God, the father's wealth is the knowledge of God one has by nature, the citizen to whom the prodigal attached himself is the Prince of this world, the swine are demons, the best robe is the position from which Adam by transgression fell, and the Welcome Home supper typifies the Lord's Supper. In later ages, Erasmus, who really represents the new spirit in parable interpretation, improved on this by teaching that the hired servants were the Jews who kept God's laws only through fear or through hope of reward. In the Two Debtors (Mat 18:23 ff.) Origen claimed that we must find the counterpart of the king, the slaves, the man who owed ten thousand talents, his wife, his children, his going out, and of the one hundred shillings. In the four classes of seed in the Sower, Hugo of St. Victor (twelfth century) found the angels in the empyrean who fell because they claimed to be like Christ; Adam, who went astray when the sun of the devil's temptation rose upon him; the Jews in the Holy Land who were corrupted by the infection of the thorns, that is, the heathen, and were scattered throughout the world; and lastly, the Lord himself, planted in the land of the Virgin, in the land of the Cross, and, through the teaching of the apostles, in the hearts of the faithful.

Naturally, the nobler the parable, the more terrible the devastation wrought by interpreters, and no parable has suffered more from the allegorizers than the Good Samaritan. The allegorical misinterpretation is at least as old as Augustine; it was continued by Erasmus, in spite of the fact that hilicher calls him the " morning star " of the new principle of parable interpretation. But it was left to Cardinal Wiseman boldly to make the claim that only the Catholic allegorizer can understand the latter part of the parable, which unrolls the history of the world. The oil is the emblem of all consecration or sacramental grace. The story of the wounded man represents the rescue of sinful

man from complete destruction. The Saviour, until he returns to bring home his redeemed, has entrusted them to the care of loyal representatives, who have already received part of their reward, and will receive yet higher reward hereafter. On the allegorical interpretation, the Samaritan is Christ, the inn is the Church, the two pence may be (for Protestants) the two sacraments, and the inn-keeper represents the apostles and their successors. One can hardly help paying a tribute to the perverted ecclesiastical ingenuity, one had almost said genius, which has succeeded in divesting of all its meaning the story which, with one exception, is the most beautiful and important ever told. Where numbers occur in the parables, they provide a special field for the joyous exercise of the allegorizer's talents. In the Labourers in the Vineyard (Mat 20:1-34) the number of hours mentioned (1, 3, 6, 9, 11) makes a total of 30, which, according to the schools of Valentinus and Marcus, provides a striking confirmation of the Gnostic theory of the thirty asons which separated God and his world. For the Valentinians the Five Foolish Virgins represent the five senses. In the Leaven the three measures of flour are the pneumatic, the psychic and the materialistic classes of men, the leaven being the Saviour and the woman Wisdom. In their spiritual interpretation of figures the British Israelites have a long line of predecessors.

We must not suppose that no one before our own age had a glimpse of the beauty or the true meaning of the parables. After the first age of darkness there was progress, though by no means a steady progress, towards the recovery of this priceless treasure. Tertullian, for example, saw that the story in its natural sphere must have a truth of its own before it could be transferred to the spiritual sphere; but he was too much a child of his age to make much use of his recognition of this fact.

It is from the sixteenth century that Julicher traces the new spirit in parable exegesis.

Erasmus was a classical scholar: he knew the light that could be shed on the parables of Jesus from the pages of Pliny, Plutarch and Seneca.

Like Origen he believed that there is one governing thought in every parable. Yet Erasmus is only the morning-star, not the full-orbed sun, of the new system of interpretation. For him, as for his predecessors, the parables are allegories, though he exercised more restraint than some of them in interpreting the details.

Luther was also an allegorizer: for him the woman who lost her piece of silver typified the Church or the bride of Christ; the lamp which illumined her search was the Law or the Word of God. But the new wine of the Reformation was bound to inspire students of the Bible to a new wisdom in this branch of Bible study.

Old traditions had been broken down, ancient prejudices overcome; an historical sense was being developed and languages were being studied. Calvin, for whom the way had been prepared by Butzer, is regarded by Julicher as the greatest parable exegete in the first sixteen centuries. It is true that he sometimes fell back into old allegorical errors. For example he regards the Vineyard of Mat 21:33 as typifying the Church of God; the hedge, winepress and tower as representing the adjuncts to God's Law, such as sacrifices and other ceremonies, meant to develop the faith of the people. He clearly saw, however, that the material of a parable must be grasped as a whole and the details studied in relation to this whole.

Yet the time was not ripe for this advance; and the Protestant Church speedily sank back into, and for two more centuries remained in, the allegorizing position which the Roman Church had never left. hilicher claims that, in the seventy years before he wrote, the parables had suffered more from perverse interpretation than in the previous seven centuries. This he regards as a reflex effect of the rise of the Higher Criticism of the Gospels and of a rationalising theology. In its zeal to resist the new theology and to preserve the old Gospel, the new orthodoxy felt constrained to find a deep sense in every word of Scripture. The allegorizing, and even the prophetic, method of interpretation, returned in all their old force. It was B. Weiss in Germany, and men like Bruce and Dods in our own country (and earlier, in a measure, Trench) that blazed the trail to a new and better method. (Trench grumbles against Calvin because he will not allow the oil in the vessels of the Wise Virgins to mean anything, nor the vessels themselves, nor the lamps.)

Why is it that we feel so sure that the allegorical interpretation is a complete misunderstanding of the mind of Jesus? For one thing, there is the point which hilicher makes, and with which most will agree, that though this theory has held sway for nearly two thousand years, it has given us no new insight into the meaning of one single parable. Few would now agree with the judgment of Irving and others, with which Trench sympathizes, that the more we empty a parable of allegory, the more its peculiar beauty disappears and the less interest it has for us. But there is more than that. The allegory is not intended to teach. It may give us new insight into truth which is already familiar, but it is not a vehicle for imparting new truth.

Trench, for example, while partly rejecting allegorizing methods, frankly says: ' The parables may not be made first sources and seats of doctrine. Doctrines otherwise and already established may be illustrated, or indeed confirmed by them; but it is not allowable to constitute doctrine first by their aid." Now it may be taken as certain that for Jesus the parable was not only a teaching method, but one of his most important teaching methods, for some classes of hearers perhaps the most important. He did not only speak in parables; he taught the people in parables. In the parable he sought to lead them, more effectively than he could in any other way, into the truth about God, about themselves, about the spiritual world.

If Jerusalem represents the state of primal innocence and the descent to Jericho the fall of man, if the robbers are sin, the priest and the Levite the moral and ceremonial law, the Good Samaritan Jesus, if the inn is the Church, the inn-keeper Church officials and the two pence two sacraments, then to the people who first heard the parable it meant nothing at all, and to subsequent generations, when a theology had been developed, it only put in pictorial form, a form moreover which required a key to its interpretation, teaching with which they were already familiar in abstract form. It is unthinkable that Jesus so misused a form of teaching capable of applications so much nobler.

One of the main objections to allegorical interpretations is that there can never be any finality about them. Exegesis becomes purely arbitrary and one teacher has as much right to his opinion as another, while all will find in the parables the meaning which they wish to find. The number of possible applications becomes literally infinite. Over two hundred years ago Vitringa suggested that the three loaves of Luk 11:5 represent the three parts of Scripture (Law, Prophets, Psalms) which gave a prophetic picture of the petitioner, Jesus, who therefore needed them; but he made the further suggestion that they represented the three parts of the then known world, since the

heathen of these parts (typified by the friend arriving at midnight), if they were to be converted, would need the grace of Christ as the bread of life. If the five foolish virgins are the five senses, the five wise virgins may be the five books of the Pentateuch. If the swine are demons, the fatted calf may be Mahommedanism. We are, in short, in a world in which anything may mean anything.

If we do not feel that the parables of Jesus have a significance of their own and shine in their own light, we shall never understand the teaching of Jesus at all.

If the parables are not allegories, how did the idea arise and so long prevail that they were allegories? hilicher has argued powerfully that, so long as a parable is intelligible and selfconsistent, it must in the first place be understood as meaning what it says. To ignore the obvious meaning of the stories and to transfer each character and incident to the spiritual sphere is to take a wrong path which can end only in a complete misunderstanding of the lesson of the parables. For the most part the parables of Jesus, even in the form in which we have them, are so vivid and so satisfying as stories, that it is in the highest degree unnatural to regard them as series of algebraic formulae for truths in another and higher sphere. Yet this unnatural idea not only arose, but was for centuries the conception that governed the interpretation of the parables, a conception which can hardly be said to be entirely abandoned even in our day. How did the idea arise? In part the explanation is to be found in the theory that the parables were hidden mysteries; but the main part of the answer lies in the interpretations of the Sower, the Darnel among the Wheat, and (in a less degree) the Draw-net, ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels. These interpretations are all allegorical; they suggest that the stories had no significance in themselves, that there are no lessons to be drawn from the parable regarded as a whole, and that they become intelligible only when the hearer grasps the hidden spiritual meaning behind each character and incident. In the Sower Jesus is represented as giving the key to the seed, the birds, the rock, the sun, the thorns, the good soil and the harvest. (As has been pointed out, Jesus, who loved the birds, is here supposed to make them stand for the devil. We note also that the seed which fell on the hard road would have borne no crop even if the birds had not picked it up.) Most mechanical of all is the explanation of the Darnel among the Wheat ascribed to Jesus, in which he appears as giving the counterpart of the sower, the field, the good seed, the darnel, the enemy, the harvest, the reapers, the gathering and burning of the darnel.

(We note also that the Son of Man is at once the earthly Jesus in Mat 13:37 and the exalted Son of Man who sends forth his angels at the end of the world in Mat 5:41.) In the Draw-net we are given the clue to the fishermen, the good fish, the bad fish, the separation, and the throwing away of the inedible fish. This raises the question whether Jesus ever gave these interpretations. The critical question has been discussed so often that perhaps there is little new to be said about it; and in the end the attitude of most readers will depend on the extent to which they accept the results of the literary criticism of the Gospels. One or two points are obvious. In all three Synoptists, the explanation of the Sower comes after the very difficult section in which it seems to be suggested that the object of the parable method was to puzzle the hearers, all except a favoured few. In Matthew the interpretation of the Darnel among the Wheat is separated from the parable itself by the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, and another short section about the use of the parable method. These facts may suggest that the interpretations do not belong to the same strain of Gospel tradition as the parables themselves. To say nothing of the distressingly mechanical nature of the interpretation of the Darnel parable, for all its fullness it misses what seems to be the whole point:

the suggestion of the farmer's men that they should weed out the darnel, and his reply that no separation must be effected till the harvest is ripe. With regard to the Draw-net, we note only that the interpretation given is the same as in the case of the Darnel, partly even in the same words, though in this case the furnace of fire explains nothing in the parable itself.

It was natural that great importance should be attached to the three allegorical parable interpretations ascribed to Jesus. In Mark the Sower is the first parable recorded. In Matthew the three parables allegorized are in his first great parable collection. Both in Matthew and in Mark Jesus is represented as on this occasion adopting in the parable a new kind of teaching which called for an explanation.

Almost from the beginning these considerations seem to have obscured from view the very important point that they are by no means the only parables of which interpretations are given in the Gospels; sometimes ascribed to Jesus, sometimes from the pen of the evangelist himself. So recent a writer as Mr. Balmforth says of the Sower*: " In St. Luke's Gospel it is the only parable which has appended to it an explanation of its meaning." Apparently he means it is the only parable which has an allegorical explanation appended. In fact, it is the rule rather than the exception that a parable should be accompanied by some kind of interpretation; and in no case, except the three mentioned, is that interpretation of an allegorical nature. The point is so important and has been so persistently overlooked that it is only with great reluctance that, owing to considerations of space, one omits to elaborate it. Any reader can verify for himself the fact that in the case of many parables an interpretation is given, either ascribed to Jesus, or coming frankly from the pen of the evangelist, or both; that, except in the three parables mentioned, the lesson is always confined to a single point, briefly and * Saint Luke in the Clarendon Bible p. 175. pithily expressed; and that in every case it is of the same kind as an intelligent reader would draw to-day. It is particularly noticeable that in the case of the parable of the Good Samaritan, which has suffered as much at the hands of the allegorizers as the traveller did at the hands of the robbers, the violence that has been done to the story is in direct contradiction to Luke's own account of it. He tells us that Jesus gave this parable as a reply to the question: " Who is my neighbour? " and that he himself pointed the moral: ' Go and do thou likewise ' (Luk 10:37).

We are not suggesting that all the interpretations of the parables ascribed to Jesus by the Synoptists necessarily came from his mouth; nor is it necessary to assume that in every case the lesson drawn from a parable, whether ascribed to Jesus or coming frankly from the pen of the evangelist, is the lesson that Jesus intended to be drawn. Even if the parables in Luk 15:1-32 were called forth by the mission to the taxcollectors and outcasts, the Church has rightly given them a far wider interpretation. ' The last shall be first and the first last " (Mat 20:16) is hardly a lesson one can draw from the Labourers in the Vineyard. The point of the story is not any reversal of their original position, but the equality of treatment of workers whose contribution, on a superficial view, seemed very unequal. The saying: ' To him that has shall be given," etc. (Mat 25:29) points the lesson of the fate of the man with the one talent and the man with the ten talents; and emphasizes, what may indeed have been the intention of Jesus, that the man with the one talent is the central figure of the story. Yet it is difficult to believe that this lesson exhausts, or comes anywhere near exhausting, the significance of the parable. The moral drawn from the Ten Bridesmaids: " Be on the watch " or " Remain awake ' ' (Mat 25:13) is not one that would naturally follow from the story. All the bridesmaids fell asleep, nor were they reproved for doing so. The point was that some

made their preparations before they fell asleep: others did not.

However this may be, it is now abundantly clear that the allegorical explanations of the Sower, the Darnel and the Draw-net given in the Gospels, far from being typical of the parable exegesis of the early Church, were entirely exceptional. In some cases no explanation is offered, apparently because it was felt that none was needed. Of the large number of interpretations given, only in the three just mentioned is there any hint of allegory. In every other case the parable is an illustrative argument.

Whether it is Jesus himself or the evangelist that draws the moral, the parable is treated as a story, natural and intelligible in itself, that leads up to some outstanding lesson which follows from it simply, naturally, convincingly. The point is so obvious, the evidence for it so abundant, it is amazing that for so many centuries the allegorical and the “ mystery ’ conceptions dominated the interpretation of the parable, and were supposed to represent the mind of Jesus. To the rule that the parables are not allegories there is one exception: the Wicked Vinedressers recorded by all three Synoptists (Mat 21:33-46, Mark 12:1-12, Luk 20:9-19). This parable is hardly intelligible except on the supposition that it is an allegory. We know what the vineyard was and what was the fruit expected; we know who were typified by the owner, the tenants, the messengers, the Son, the new tenants. We know the spiritual counterpart of the fate of the Son and of the doom of the vinedressers. If this is a genuine parable of Jesus, and there seems no serious reason to doubt it, it shows that our Lord had no bias against allegory when it suited his purpose. As a rule he avoided it, because he found the story, complete in itself but with a spiritual lesson involved in it, a more effective teaching method. But he treated figurative language with the same freedom with which he treated the Law of Moses.

If he spoke even one allegory, we need not be surprised if we find that we sometimes know whom he meant by a character in a parable, or what he meant by some incident in a parable.

Unless we know at whom or what the parable was aimed, it would be unintelligible; but that does not turn the parable into an allegory. In any case, what we are arguing against is the idea that allegory provides the key to the interpretation of the parables. This idea is destructive of any possibility of finding their real meaning.

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CHAPTER V PARABLE INTERPRETATION

IF we reject the theory of the parable as allegory, it does not follow that we must go to the other extreme, as Julicher does at least when he is treating the general theory of the parable, and insist that in each parable there is only one lesson.

We may grant that in each parable there is only one central message, and we have seen that all the parable interpretations given in the Gospels (except the three that are allegorized) take the form of a single message expressed briefly and pithily. Yet just as in a picture the details are significant, so it is with the picture stories of Jesus. A distinction has been drawn between the exegetical and the homiletic significance of the details; but if these details have a message for us, it is gratuitous to suppose that Jesus did not see, or did not intend, that significance. Is it not just one of the marks of great literature or great art that, the more we study it, the more does it become for us lit up with meaning; and that as the significance of the work unfolds itself to us, we feel sure that we are entering more fully into the mind of the author or the artist? Thus, in the Prodigal Son we refuse to look for any spiritual counterpart of the swine or the fatted calf; we insist on seeing the significance of every word, every act, every experience of the father, the younger son, the elder son. If the Good Samaritan is an allegory, the robbers may represent the theological concept of sin; if it is a parable, they represent the robber spirit or greed. As allegory the two pence may be two sacraments; as parable, they mean that the Samaritan was willing to give his money as well as his time and his skill. It cannot be too often repeated that a parable has a meaning in itself and the lesson is drawn from the story; an allegory is a series of symbols, of no significance in themselves except as giving the clue to the interpretation, which is the real story. No interpretation of the parables can be satisfactory which does not recognize that their message was in the first place to the people to whom they were addressed. The Church has constantly forgotten the teaching of Tertullian that the interpretation of the parables must have reference to their matter, to the conformity of things, and to the instruction of the disciples.

If these principles rule out allegorical interpretations, they equally rule out, for the most part, prophetic intepretations. Tertullian saw, as very many of his successors have not seen, that no interpretation of the Good Samaritan could be accepted which involved a knowledge of the Christian Church, which was not then in existence. The same principle rules out the exegesis which finds in the Darnel, at least as the primary reference, heresies which did not arise in the Church till long after the time of Christ. The parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard cannot, in the first place at least, have been intended to answer questions about the reward of Christian workers in the far-off ages.

Yet in the exercise of this principle it is necessary to exercise common-sense. It is often said, for example, that any reference by Jesus to the persecution of his followers (as in Mark 4:17) cannot be authentic, since he could not have foreseen such persecution; that such references must therefore be later additions, due to the experience of the early Church. But unfortunately no

supernatural knowledge was needed for the anticipation of hostility to the followers of Jesus. Jesus knew life, and he knew the history of his own people. He was well aware that any earnest man who tries to fulfil the will of God will run counterto men's greed and ambition and love of money, and to that conservatism which leads even good men to think that they are doing God service when they are destroying God's servants. In his own experience he had the bitter opposition, not only of the priests and religious leaders of Jerusalem, but of the pious folk of Nazareth, Capernaum and Bethsaida. The prophecy of persecution on account of the Word would have been a safe and simple forecast of the future, based on a knowledge of the past. The parables then, speaking generally are not allegories, not ' mystery ' utterances, and not prophecies; and while they may sometimes yield, and be intended to yield, simple morals for the guidance of practical life, that never exhausts their meaning. Speaking generally, a parable is a story, complete and significant in itself, from which may be learnt as an inference some deep spiritual truth, which in every case is related to Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God. There is, however, no point in defining the term ' parable ' too closely, for Jesus did not, in fact, adhere rigorously to any one conception of the parable; and this fact, far from being a stumbling-block in the way of the general reader, is usually not even noticed. The Rich Fool, for example, is a discussion of the relation between a man and his possessions, a discussion made practical by being conducted with reference to a particular case. The Pharisee and the Taxcollector is an analysis of Religion conceived as Law, the analysis, again, referring to a particular exponent of such religion. The Good Samaritan is a story of a kindly neighbour. In none of these cases is there any inference from one sphere to another. The Mustard Seed and the Leaven can hardly be called stories at all; they are little more than metaphors.

Even when there is an inference, in some cases it is not the likeness but the unlikeness between the illustration and the truth to be illustrated that Jesus wishes to make clear. Conduct that seems eminently reasonable in the sphere of spiritual things would be recognized by all as the height of absurdity in the ordinary affairs of life. Attention has often been called to the so-called improbabilities in the parables. Thus Buzy 1 refers to the criticism of Loisy (following Julicher) of the Darnel among the Wheat. The inference which M. Loisy draws from these incongruities is that the parable is not authentic. The farmer is obviously a wealthy man, with a retinue of servants; yet he sows his field with his own hands (but surely this is not necessarily the meaning of Mat 13:24): this is true of Jesus in the spiritual sphere, but of no earthly farmer. The devil may sow weeds among good seed; but no one does this on an earthly farm. In the parable the darnel is invisible till the grain is fully formed: in a community, heresies do not appear till the community has a certain maturity of development, but in a field grain and darnel would grow together. The farmer's men do not know how to deal with the disaster that has befallen the field: there was a time when heresy in the Church was a new problem, the method of dealing with which called for deep and earnest consideration; but surely the Palestinian farmers of Jesus' time had enough experience of weeds to know what to do with them.

All this may be very clever, if not always convincing; but it is beside the point. Many of the parables begin with the implied formula, " It is as if." The sequel to this " It is as if '

1 Introduction aux Paraboles vangeliques, p. 205. may be something which men do every day, or it may be something which, in the ordinary affairs of life, men would never dream of doing. If we wish to understand the parables, we must carefully distinguish between these two cases. The

question whether a farmer and his men ever did have such an experience and deal with it in this way, does not arise. In either case the story is perfectly intelligible and the lesson is clear. “ It is as if, after a farmer had sown wheat in his field, someone else were to sow darnel in it; and after the presence of the noxious growth were discovered, the men were to consult the farmer about the best way of dealing with the weeds.” The Wicked Vinedressers contains a double set of improbabilities. No human landlord would treat such impossible tenants with the patience and forbearance of the owner in the parable. This improbability is inherent in the parable method; for there is no human analogy to the patience and forbearance of God in his dealings with his wayward children. But the other difficulty is greater, and seems, on a superficial view, a real weakness in the story. We cannot imagine tenants anywhere treating their landlord with the hopeless folly of the vinedressers of the parable. But the incredibility of the supposition is the whole point of the story. In the oriental way, Jesus tells the story as if the thing had actually happened. We must read it with the introduction ’It is as if.” Your response to the care God has taken of you and the good gifts he has showered on you is as if cultivators were to hire a vineyard, and, when the time came for paying the rent, were to maltreat, insult or slay the landlord’s messengers, finally putting his son to death,” a ludicrous absurdity in the economic world, a tragic reality in the spiritual world.

We need the same reminder in the Great Supper. Again there is the implied introductory formula: ’ It is as if.” To allow such trivial things as we do allow to stand between us and participation in the great feast of God is as if the friends of a nobleman, invited to a feast on some joyous occasion, were not only to scorn the invitation, but were to send excuses insulting in their flippancy. In other words, sometimes the story is told for the wisdom it displays, sometimes for its unutterable folly. Some parables illustrate a religious truth; others a religious untruth.

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CHAPTER VI A GENERAL VIEW OF THE PARABLES CERTAIN general points in connection with the parables may now be regarded as more or less established.

(i) In many cases we do not know the historical context of the parable; that is, the people to whom, and the circumstances in which, the parable was spoken. It seems clear that, while collections of the sayings of Jesus were being made, the parables were also being grouped.

Thus all that Mark has to tell us about the parables (except the Wicked Vinedressers in Mark 12:1-44.) he gives in Mark 4:1-41, which partly coincides with Matthew's larger parable group in Mark 13:1-37.

Luke records five parables in Luk 15:1-32 and Luk 16:1-31, while Matthew groups two parables and three quasi-parables between Mat 24:43-51 and Mat 25:1-46. The fact that the literary context, the position in a Gospel in which a story is placed, is not necessarily the same as the historical context, the occasion on which the parable was spoken, has often been overlooked. It was natural, for example, that Luke should attach the Prodigal Son to the Lost Sheep and the Lost Piece of Silver, since all three deal with the joy of finding the lost. Yet the Prodigal begins with the phrase: ' and he said," the regular formula which introduces any remembered saying of Jesus. It need have no historical connection with the preceding parables; and we are at liberty to let the story speak for itself without being prejudiced by the neighbourhood in which we find it.

Again, the position of the Ten Bridesmaids and the Talents, towards the end of Matthew's Gospel and just before the picture of the Last Judgment, almost inevitably creates the impression that their primary significance relates to the return of Jesus, an impression which is strengthened by the presence of the Bridegroom in the former (cf. Mark 2:19). Yet the position in which we find these two parables need mean no more than that, at the time when "Matthew" wrote, the Church interpreted them with reference to the Second Coming. We are entitled to study the parables for ourselves.

We are accustomed to think of the Sower as the first parable spoken by Jesus, and this has given increased importance to the ' mystery ' theory with which Mark connects it. It is true that Mark gives a very definite historic occasion for this parable (Mark 4:1 ff.), but we shall see reason to doubt the accuracy of this. The other parabolic sayings in this chapter are introduced by " And he said," the regular phrase used in beginning a saying of Jesus of which the context was not known. In Luke's Gospel the Sower is not the first parable given (the Two Debtors is in Luk 7:1-50), and in Matthew it is preceded by many parables or quasi-parables (Luk 7:24-27; Luk 11:16 f.; Luk 12:11; Luk 12:25; Luk 12:29; Luk 12:43-45)- To recognize, then, that we seldom know the circumstances in which a parable was spoken frees us from certain limitations in our interpretations, limitations which may help to obscure the true meaning. Yet our ignorance of these circumstances is by far our most serious handicap in our study of the parables. In the case of those whose meaning has been most disputed, it seems certain that the story would be illuminated if only we knew what

called it forth. The Unjust Steward would not have been to the Church the problem it has been if only we had known what class of stewards Jesus had in mind, what precisely was the nature of their fraud, and what their method of escape from its consequences. If we knew to whom and why Jesus spoke the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, then presumably all controversy as to its meaning would cease. Could we see the audience to whom Jesus told the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus and know what led up to it, then might we know for certain whether Dives was rich in this world's goods or rich in spiritual privilege, and whether Lazarus was a social outcast or a moral and spiritual outcast. But we have not this knowledge. In all such cases we are left to interpret the parables as best we may in the light of our general knowledge of Jesus' life and teaching.

(2) The parables as we now have them are in the form they took after being used by Christian preachers for many years. That this is so is evident from a comparison of the forms taken by the same parable in different Gospels.

Perhaps the most suggestive comparison is that between Matthew's account of the Great Supper (Mat 12:1-14) and Luke's (Luk 14:16-24). The first Gospel is specially interested in the Jews and in the rejection of Jesus by the religious leaders; the first Gospel is also the ' royal ' Gospel.

Thus in Matthew the feast is given by a king, representing God according to the conventional symbolism of the Rabbinic parables. The feast is given in honour of the marriage of the King's Son, evidently Jesus. In Luke it is not a wedding feast but a " supper " and the host is not a king. After the rejection of the invitation by the guests for whom the feast was intended, in Matthew the host sends out only one Mission to procure fresh guests: in Luke he sends two (Matthew's second mission to the guests originally invited seems to indicate that a second mission had become part of the tradition). In the first Gospel the one mission in search of fresh guests is evidently to the tax-collectors and outcasts in general. In Luke's Gospel with its broader outlook the second of the two missions for new guests presumably typified the presentation of the Gospel to the Gentiles. In Matthew, before the Mission is sent out at all, there is a military interlude in which an army goes out to attack the guests who would not come and to burn down their city; all this while the Supper was getting cold! We may safely assume that the story was thus spoiled by Christian preachers after the fall of Jerusalem.

Again, Luke with his offer of a free Gospel says nothing of the wedding robe which, to the more theologically-minded " Matthew," was an essential of the story. In Matthew's parable of the Talents (Mat 25:14-30) there are three servants who receive each a number of talents differing according to their capacity: five, two, one. In Luke (Luk 19:12-27) there are ten servants each of whom receives one mina (pound). But the chief difference is that, while in Matthew no explanation is given of the master's departure and absence, Luke intimates that he went off to receive his appointment as king. This leads to a secondary story, which intermingles with the main story, of the unsuccessful plot of his subjects to refuse to acknowledge his royal authority, and of their fate. A tempting explanation is that, when telling the story of the nobleman who left his country for a time, Christian preachers, trying to make the story concrete, remembered how Archelaus, the son of Herod, went to Rome in 4 B.C. to have his royal power confirmed by the emperor, and how a deputation of Jews followed him to protest against the appointment. It was then an easy matter to connect the story with the question that so greatly interested the first generation of Christians, why

the Jews rejected Jesus. It will hardly be claimed that the complexity thus introduced into the parable is an improvement.

There are some interesting differences between Matthew's parable of the Lost Sheep and Luke's. In Luke (Luk 15:3 f.) the story is Jesus' apology for his attitude to the tax-collectors and ' sinners." In Matthew the reference is to the ' ' little ones ' whom men must not despise and every one of whom it is God's will to save. In Luke there is a more splendid optimism than in Matthew. Luke's shepherd searches for the wandering sheep ' until he finds it "; and that this feature is deliberate is clear from the other two parables in the chapter: the woman who seeks her lost drachma till she finds it and the father who waits for his errant son till he comes home. In Matthew the result of the search is no foregone conclusion: the shepherd rejoices ' if he succeeds in finding the sheep." But there is another, perhaps more important divergence. Matthew's shepherd is a lonely figure; his joy in finding the sheep that had strayed is a solitary joy, and the God who will not have his little ones perish is thought of as the One and the Alone. But Luke's shepherd invites his friends and neighbours to share his joy, and this feature is of the essence of Luk 15:1-32. The social joy on earth at the finding of the lost in each of the three parables is but the replica of the joy ' in the presence of God's angels over a repentant sinner" (Luk 15:10). In view of the fact that the parables had been repeated countless times by Christian preachers of different antecedents to widely varying audiences scattered through the world, before they were committed to writing in our Gospels, it would not have been surprising if in some versions they had been considerably transformed.

While there is no slavish adherence to any common document or common tradition, the similarity between different versions of the same story, where these occur, suggests, what we should otherwise have expected, that the parables had in themselves sufficient vitality, and the reverence for the words of Jesus was sufficiently great, to preserve them substantially intact. In comparing the different versions of the Wicked Vinedressers (Mat 21:33-46, Mark 12:1-12, Luk 20:9-19), besides some unimportant differences such as would naturally arise as the story was told and re-told, we find other differences to which more significance may be attached. Both in Matthew and in Mark, some of the rent-collectors are killed. Luke, taking these servants to represent the Old Testament prophets, silently corrects this: the servants are ill-treated, but not killed, for no actual murders of prophets are recorded in the Old Testament. 1 Perhaps also it is not too finical to see deliberate purpose in the way in which the fate of the Son is recorded. In Mark they slay him and cast him out of the vineyard. In Matthew and in Luke they cast him out of the vineyard and slay him. Clearly the vineyard was not Jerusalem, but Israel; but Israel was concentrated in and typified by Jerusalem, and we know that Christian thought found significance in the fact that Jesus was crucified " outside of the gate " (Heb 13:12).

John specifically mentions, what the other Gospels suggest, that the place where Jesus was crucified was "near," not 'in' the city, (John 19:20)

(3) The parables are an essential, and an important, part of the teaching of Jesus. The determination to find in the parables only teaching that was already familiar apart from the parables has been a fruitful source of inability to see their true meaning. Moreover, it is surely a mistake to regard the parables as just a series of pious reflections. Jesus was never just a philosopher: nor was he even, in the strictly technical sense, a theologian. Abstract speculation

about the nature of God had no interest for him, at least as a teacher. His aim was to lead men to God; he would teach men only those truths about God that made it easier for them to come to Him.

1 Unless we except Uriah (Jer 26:20-23).

Consequently the parables of Jesus are not the studies of a thinker, but the trumpet calls of a prophet, calls to rouse ourselves and take action. At the end of each, spoken or implied, is his “ Go and do thou likewise; “ “ Go and be thou likewise; ’ “Go and be thou not likewise.” Even the parables that illumine the nature of God are intended also to lighten the path of men. The father’s arms, wide open for the son, invite the prodigal to reach those encircling arms. The boundless forgiveness of God is for those who in turn forgive. If the queen pearl is worth the sum total of all our possessions, let us sell them all and buy it. The Leaven and the Mustard Seed are a call to that faith and hope that are among the abiding things of life, a call to be co-workers with God in the leavening influence of his Kingdom and in tending the plant that he has planted.

(4) Not least in the parables do we see our Lord’s attitude to the world and to life. If it would be too much to say that Jesus enjoyed life, it would not be too much to say that he was thoroughly at home in the world. To him it was always his Father’s world, and the only foreign element was the sin in the heart of man.

It is not only from the parables we learn that every sight and sound brought to him a message from his Father: the sunshine, the rain, the storm; the flowers, the birds, the beasts. He had the true shepherd’s love and pity for the sheep; he saw with a kind of envy the foxes going to their holes in the earth. To him the mother bird with outstretched wings typified his own brooding love, which was the divine love, for the sacred city of his people. The cock-crow was the herald of a new day with its possibilities of victory or tragic defeat. His heart had bled with the bullocks as they struggled along, weary and heavy-laden, under the crushing load. Without the help of his trusty horse or mule, the Good Samaritan could never have carried through his immortal work; and a humble colt shared with our Lord the glory of his entry into Jerusalem. The fact that in his parables Jesus uses the things and occupations of earth to illustrate the things of the Kingdom is his testimony to the reality, the eternal significance of our life and its concerns. Just as the resurrection is God’s testimony to the abiding significance of the personality of man, of what Paul calls his “ body,” so the parables are Jesus’ witness that the world in which man has to live is not a world of fleeting shadows. Just as the resurrection gives an eternal ’ No ’ to those who say that what we do with our bodies is a matter of indifference, so do the parables rebuke for ever any suggestion that men can be indifferent to, or contemptuous of, this life and its interests. In one group of parables Jesus teaches that the same God who watches over the farmer’s seed in the field watches over the spiritual seed in the heart of man; that the life that is in the seed is the life of God, even as is the life in the heart of the man who responds to divine teaching. In the farming parables and in the Leaven we can see how deeply Jesus was impressed with the mystery of life, with the inscrutable working of God in what we now call the natural processes. He is not illustrating a mystery by something we can all understand; he is comparing two mysteries. To Jesus every new harvest was a new mystery, and the housewife’s leaven was a mystery, even as the growth of God’s kingdom was a mystery. Particle by particle, slowly, irrevocably, the dough comes under the influence of this all-conquering power; even as man by man, sphere by sphere, the world comes under the influence of this new power of God.

Incidentally some of these parables illustrate Jesus' faith in the " energy ' of God. The life that is in the seed may find obstacles such as rock, or rivals such as thorns or darnel. Unless in these exceptional cases, the life that is in the seed will always be victorious; and when it gives fruit, it gives fruit abundantly; the little mustard seed becoming a great tree, the grain seed multiplying thirty, sixty, a hundred fold, the leaven leavening the whole lump. It is because this miracle of nature's prolific abundance is with us every day that for us, though not for Jesus, it ceases to be a miracle. Are not the farming parables, also, Jesus' tribute to the dauntless courage of man? The soil of Palestine made its demand for grit and the farmer had responded. There were rock and thorns and weeds lying in wait to choke the seed, but the farmer had persevered. These parables take us back to an earlier day when it had seemed as if a curse rested on the ground, so that only by the sweat of his brow could man earn his bread; but man had sweated and earned his bread. The earth had produced thorns and thistles, but the persevering energy of man had triumphed over the thorns and thistles. Is not the difference in the point of view between Genesis iii. and Jesus a tribute to the noble qualities of man? The sacrifice of the farmer Cain was rejected; the sacrifice of the shepherd Abel was accepted. It has been suggested 1 that that idea marks the stage when the work of a shepherd is an old and venerable occupation which seems to have the blessing of God resting upon it; while the tilling of the ground is still in the experimental stage, and is the preserve of bold adventurers. May not the belief that God's face is against the new occupation have been due in part to the ill-luck that attended the first ventures of the inexperienced farmers of that inhospitable soil? But man had conquered, and now Jesus can use the spoils of his sturdy persistence and his ingenuity as symbols of truths of the Kingdom.

(5) The aspect of the world which interests our Lord most is the world as the abode of 1 Dr. J. E. McFadyen in the Hibbert Journal. July, 1921. men and women; the aspect of men and women which he finds richest in spiritual truth is their work. The characters of Jesus' parables are working men and women: farmers, vinedressers, labourers, fishermen, traders, a shepherd, a pearl-merchant, a steward, a governor of a province, housewives. If bridesmaids are introduced to teach a lesson, it is not bridesmaids as sharing the joy of the bride, but as women on whom has been imposed a task: a joyful task, doubtless, but still a responsible duty, that of bearing the torches to welcome home the bridal couple. The idle fools of the parables, such as the Prodigal and the Rich Fool, were men who were idle by choice. There were other idlers, in the Labourers in the Vineyard; but they were idle only because no man had hired them.

Against their will they had been deprived of the joy of helping to gather in the harvest. They were not rebels against an immutable law of God, but victims of a vicious system, and as such they were treated. We are here a very long way from the conception of work as a curse imposed on man as a punishment for the sin of our first parents. We have needed unemployment on a gigantic scale to teach us the lesson we might have learned from the parables of Jesus: that the normal man is the working man, that the idler can be employed to typify only some human folly. Unemployment is in the first place an economic problem; at long last we are realising that, in an almost greater degree, it is a moral and spiritual problem, that every man who has been deprived of the normal exercise of his faculties is a man who has been artificiallv made halt or maimed.

Human nature is so constituted that the economic problem seems to demand solution far more urgently than the moral and spiritual problem. Infinitely stronger pressure is brought to bear on our statesmen to provide means of subsistence for the unemployed than to provide work for them. But

man cannot live by bread alone. When statesmen tell us that we cannot afford to provide work for them, the answer is that we cannot afford to keep them idle. To the credit of the Christian community be it said that there are many who do now realize that it is more blessed to give than to receive, that every potential worker whom we turn into a receiver when he might also be a giver is one to whom we have done a deadly wrong.

07 - Chapter 07

CHAPTER VII SOME QUESTIONS RAISED BY A STUDY OF THE PARABLES IN the general discussion of the parables, some questions remain.

(i) Have the parables that artistic perfection that is so often claimed for them? In a powerful defence of the authenticity of the parables, Buzy lays down the thesis that the imperfect is not necessarily the unauthentic. He gives examples of the ' ' gaucheries ' ' of the Rabbinic parables and insists that, even in the case of Jesus, the Semitic genius preserves its independence over against the classical ideals, refuses to be imprisoned within our intellectual trammels, and declines to conform to the laws of strictly logical thought. It is a useful warning, yet in this connection perhaps hardly called for. We have discussed the cases in which the story is supposed to make too great a demand on the imagination, and shown that the idea that these ' improbabilities ' are an artistic defect is due to a misconception of the nature of the argument. The military interlude in Matthew's Wedding Feast and the rebellion in Luke's version of the Talents detract from the beauty of the story, but there is no need to ascribe either to Jesus. The conclusion of the Ten Bridesmaids somewhat jars upon us; we shall leave that point for discussion till we come to the exposition of the parable. It is sometimes said that in the Talents " Enter thou into thy master's joy ' (perhaps ' into thy master's feast ") is more in place in the interpretation of the parable than in the story. Has anyone ever felt that that interfered with his enjoyment of the parable? The true critic of art is Time: Time riddles the dross and lets the metal remain. Some of the parables of Jesus are among the richest treasures, not only of the Christian Church, but of mankind. The Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, the Great Supper, the Ten Bridesmaids, the Talents, are the final answer to the question why Jesus taught in parables. Our Lord has his own way of telling a story; there is no " padding," no background, no description. The hearer is expected to do his part of the work, and it is a large part. In the parables, as in all the rest of the teaching of Jesus, he that hath ears to hear must use them. In the experience of nineteen hundred years, the plan has more than justified itself. In the Pharisee and the Tax-collector, perhaps more than anywhere else, the parable method is seen in the perfection of its power. There in a few unforgettable words is the teaching which others with less success have striven to give in pages or chapters or even in whole volumes.

(2) Has the Church always been wisely guided in its choice of names for the parables? In his book on the parables Mr. Lithgow in a most interesting way has called attention to this subject, and the point is one of some importance.

Just as in our search for the appropriate definition of a word, we are learning the nature of the thing indicated by the word, so our study of the meaning of a parable should be crowned by an appropriate name for it. The title given to a parable inevitably colours the popular conception of its message. Some of the names in common use seem to have been chosen simply for reference; others are in greater or less degree misleading. The names ' The Hid Treasure ' and " The Pearl of Great Price ' conceal the fact that the stories centre round the lucky peasant and the

pearl-merchant. ’ The Lost Sheep ’ and “ The Lost Coin ’ distract our attention from the point that the story is primarily concerned, not with the experiences of the sheep or the coin, but with the shepherd who lost and found the sheep, the woman who lost and found the coin. “ The Unmerciful Servant “ fails to make prominent that it was not as a servant but as a creditor that he showed mercilessness. The parables have given us a new word in the language, namely “talents,” and a new use of an old word, “ prodigal.” The fact that he was prodigal or a spendthrift, is one of the accidents of the story: the point is that he was an unfilial son, a son who recognized none of the obligations of sonship. The word “ prodigal ’ has been given a new sense to correspond with the life of the young man in the far country. The common, misleading title of this parable has done us this disservice, that in the popular mind the story has its lesson only for those guilty only of that kind of “ wildness ’ which involves some measure of public obloquy. For the Labourers in the Vineyard (Mat 20:1-16) the titles “ The Hours ’ and “ Equal Pay for Unequal Work ’ have also been suggested. The former designation suggests nothing, and the latter conveys an idea the reverse of the truth.

1 The Friend at Midnight ’ is a designation which would not have appealed to the man who was roused from his midnight slumbers. The name ’ The Ten Virgins ’ emphasizes their virginity, which is no part of the point of the story. The title ’ The Unjust Steward ’ puts the stress in the wrong place. The steward’s vice was not injustice but dishonesty; and, as commonly interpreted, the parable invites us to imitate the steward in respect not of any of his vices, but of a certain virtue he was supposed to have. ’ The Importunate Widow ’ conveys the lesson of the parable, if not accurately, at least much less inaccurately than ’ The Unjust Judge.” The name “ The Seed Growing Secretly “ involves an unfortunate mistranslation of the last word, which has displayed wonderful vitality. It should be either ’ mysteriously ’ (if we look to the end of Mark 4:27) or ’of its own accord’ (“of itself,” Weymouth) (lit. “automatically”) if we take the title from the beginning of the next verse.

(3) In connection with each of the parables, at least of the longer parables, there are five questions that might be profitably discussed:

(4) What was the parable as actually spoken by Jesus? That is a question for literary criticism. We have already given some attention to this matter and it will come up for further consideration.

(5) What did the parables mean for those who first heard them? On that subject, speaking generally, we have no information. In the Gospels Jesus is represented as giving, in response to a request, an interpretation of the Sower and of the Darnel among the Wheat, and a voluntary interpretation of the Fishing-net; while Mark tells us it was the custom of Jesus to expound his parables in private to the disciples (Mark 4:34).

Apart from these references we hear of no difficulty experienced by an audience in understanding the general bearing of a parable. In some cases, like the Unjust Steward and the Wicked Vinedressers, the evangelists tell us that the religious leaders saw the point at once.

Judging from the analogy of a modern nonChristian audience, it is reasonable to suppose that a popular audience would catch the drift of a number of the parables, like the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, the Pearl, the Fishingnet. The disciples at least would see at once the meaning of the Seed Growing Automatically, the Mustard Seed and the Leaven. It was only in later times,

when the whole meaning and purpose of the parable method became obscured, that the original and obvious interpretations were dropped. Other parables, like the Talents and the Bridesmaids, could hardly be called self-explanatory. The difficulties of expounding them and the diverse interpretations given, doubtless contributed to the spread of the conception of the parables as ' hidden mysteries."

(c) How did the evangelists who gave us the parables understand them? In many cases this question is much easier to answer. Whether the interpretations given of the Sower, the Darnel and the Fishing-net are genuine or not, the Gospel-writers must have regarded them as genuine. We have seen also of how many other parables the evangelists either give interpretations of their own or ascribe such to Jesus. In other cases the context in which they place, a parable indicates their conception of its point.

(/) How have the parables fared in the history of the Church? We have already given some account of Julicher's thorough study of this subject.

(e) What do the parables mean for us?

There is no irreverence in suggesting that we may see applications of the parables which were hidden from the Gospel writers, which were not fully within the view of our Lord himself. The modern robber, for example, knows cleaner and more scientific ways of getting at his victim's money-bags than by lying in wait for him on a lonely road and bludgeoning him. But the Church of our day has not been content with trying to bring a fresh mind to bear on the teaching of the individual parables.

It has sought to apply to the moral and spiritual problems of our day the spirit that lies behind the whole parable method, that appeal to the imagination which lies behind the conception of the parable. The Salvation Army, the Boys'

Brigade, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guides and similar movements have enlisted psychology in the service of ethics and religion. These movements are only carrying into practical effect the ideas behind the parables of Jesus, who taught us to think of ourselves as farmers contending against difficulties, as the children of the Father, as stewards to whom has been committed a trust, guests at the feast of a gracious host, bridesmaids who must uphold the honour of the bride. In the moral life an appealing pictorial representation of the issues at stake is half the battle.

08 - Chapter 08

CHAPTER VIII THE SOWER Mark 4:1-9, Mark 4:13-20; Mat 13:1-9, Mat 13:18-23; Luk 8:4-8, Luk 8:11-15.

ATTEMPTS to classify the parables do not seem to have met with much success. They were preserved, not only because they were recognized as genuine words of Jesus, but because they supplied the answer to questions which bulked largely in the minds of the early Christian teachers. Perhaps as good a way as any is to group them according to the questions to which they supplied the answer. The Sower deals with the unresponsiveness of the people to the Christian message. One of the great problems of the early Church was the rejection of Jesus by his own people, and especially by their leaders. If Jesus was indeed the King of the Jews, and it was his claim to be so that was the legal pretext for his crucifixion, why did not his natural subjects acknowledge his sovereignty? The preaching of the early chapters of Acts emphasizes that the moral responsibility for the death of Jesus rested not with the Romans but with his own countrymen (Acts 2:23; Acts 3:13). As far as their own faith was concerned, the Christians could not believe that God's purpose had gone awry (Acts 2:23; Acts 3:15); yet when they preached to Jews, these would naturally ask, " Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? "; while, when they were dealing with Gentiles, the question was pertinent, ' If you claim that Jesus was the fulfilment of the Jewish scriptures, why did the Jews have him put to death? ' So far as the Jews were concerned, the famous passage in the epistle to the Romans (Rom 9:1-33; Rom 10:1-21; Rom 11:1-36) shows how deeply Paul was moved by their rejection of Jesus. From the beginning of his second chapter Mark deals with this question, and in incident after incident shows the features in the life and teaching of Jesus which estranged from him the leaders of his people. The Sower must have made a strong appeal to the first evangelists in another way. Fresh from the experience of Pentecost they felt the powers of the unseen world pulsing within them.

Like the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, they had been crippled, by sin and doubt, by fear and diffidence; and now all that was gone, their shackles broken, their fears forgotten. For the first time, they could now stand erect on their own feet, and walk and leap and praise God. It was inconceivable, they felt, that to a message like theirs from men who had come face to face with the divine, people would not listen. The early chapters of Acts dwell far more on the successes of the Christian preachers than on their failures. Still, even from Acts it is clear that in Jerusalem there was nothing like a wholesale movement of the people into the fellowship of the followers of Jesus. It is equally clear that, so far as the leaders are concerned, the events that followed the crucifixion of Jesus made very little difference in their attitude to the movement of which Jesus was the centre. Paul and the others had the same experience when they began to preach to the Jews of the Dispersion and to the Gentiles, an enthusiastic welcome of their message from a few, and, from the many, indifference or active hostility.

It is easy to see, then, why the Sower occupies a position of such prominence in the Gospel records. (As a matter of fact there is no good reason to suppose it was the first parable spoken.

It is not the first given either by Matthew or by Luke, who tell us far more of the teaching of Jesus than does Mark.) It is round this parable in all three Synoptists that the whole question of the parable method is discussed, and it has played a prominent part in the thought of the Church. Our Lord spoke this parable out of his own distress at the careless or even hostile way in which men received his message. After his marvellous experience at his baptism and in the Temptation, believing that men would thrill with joy at his announcement that the Kingdom of God was at hand, he bade them prepare for the new era, forsake their sins, believe in the Good News. A few did accept his message, left all, and became his disciples. For a time great crowds, apparently largely under a misapprehension of what he had come to say or do, followed him, hanging on his lips and giving God thanks for his wondrous deeds. In the capital, so far as we have any record, his movement made little headway; the leaders were critical when they were not hostile. What is more surprising is his rejection in the towns of Galilee, in Bethsaida, in Nazareth, in Chorazin, in Capernaum (Luk 4:28-30, Mat 11:20-24). For a time he seems to have left Palestine altogether, presumably under some compulsion (Mark 7:24 ff.). Herod, too, was or became his bitter enemy.

What could it all mean? We can picture Jesus watching a farmer at work in the spring time. Most of the seed he sows will come to maturity, but not all of it. The seed sown is all of the same kind; clearly the fault does not lie with the seed or the farmer. Why, then, in some cases is there failure? Part of the seed never enters the ground at all; part of it does get in, but not deeply enough; another part gets in and takes deep root, but encounters the opposition of a rival and hurtful growth, which turns out to be stronger. Our Lord, then, had the same experience as the Christian preacher has had from his day till our own: his message often fell on deaf ears, and, so far as any impression was concerned, might never have been delivered at all. There was no need to bring Satan into the business; the plain fact was that the preaching fell on unreceptive ears. This might be due to prejudice, as Paul found when he preached the Gospel in Greece (1Co 1:23); prejudice created by Greek absorption in philosophical speculation, which made the Christian Gospel seem absurd, or by Jewish preconceptions which revolted against the thought of a crucified Messiah. In our day, a greater or less degree of knowledge of the supposed teaching of science closes many a mind to the message of Jesus. Again, as the Gospels show, it was often the moral demands of Jesus, or the realisation that acceptance of his claims would interfere with their power and prestige, that made it impossible for his message to penetrate beneath the surface. Perhaps most often, then as now, it was sheer worldliness, in the narrowest sense of the word, absorption in the world of sense experience, that made men Gallios in the things of the spirit.

There were others who felt attracted by the message, but their zeal was short-lived. There is no need to interpret too precisely the sun that burnt up their enthusiasm. It was natural that the preachers of the first and second Christian generations should emphasize the effect of persecution, which may have played a less important part in our Lord’s own life-time. Perhaps in many cases it was the gradual realisation of all that citizenship in the Kingdom meant that quenched their zeal, of the sacrifices it called for and the lofty demands it made. There are many, too, who cannot be enthusiastic long about anything.

There were yet other hearers whose response to the call of Jesus was intelligent, genuine and willing; men of deep natures who, if they had been whole-hearted, could have held out. But for them devotion to the ideals of Jesus was only one of the interests of their lives. In competition with these other interests, without any conscious decision on their part or perhaps any conscious

struggle, their religious zeal gradually weakened till it perished. The pleasure-seeking, the money-making and the worldly anxieties that the Gospel writers find in the thorns are doubtless included among, though they do not exhaust the list of, these dangerous and too often successful rivals of enthusiasm for God. This is all that the Gospel writers tell us about the matter: it is difficult to think that this is all that Jesus saw in it, or all that he wants us to see in it. We want more than an analysis, however skilful, of the causes of our failure.

Whatever may be said of the spiritual problem, at least the farmer's problem was capable of solution. If he wanted grain to grow on his by-path, all he had to do was to plough it. If in patches the ground was too shallow, more earth could be brought or the stones could be taken out. One has often looked with wonder and admiration at the boulders that have been, at the cost of infinite labour, dug out of an Ontario field, and now form a boundary dyke.

If thorns are choking the grain, they can be weeded out. In other words, by a course of preparation, unproductive soil can be made fertile. What is the counterpart of this in the spiritual world? The attitude of men and women to the things of the spirit depends not only on their nature and their voluntary choices, but also on their experience and their environment. Hardness of heart and blindness of mind are not necessarily congenital but can be induced. Where there is intense poverty, a state of semi-starvation may become a second nature, so that a natural hunger practically ceases to function; and, when better times come, people have to be taught to eat. A long course of insult and oppression may embitter even a gentle nature, and harden a heart that is naturally tender. Constant intercourse with people of base instincts and trivial ideals may lower the whole standard of a life. Engaged in a constant and often unsuccessful struggle for the elementary necessities of life, one may have so little time and energy for the cultivation of the nobler faculties that, if they do not perish of degeneration, at least they are so quiescent that one ceases to be conscious of their existence. Physical pain, bodily weakness, failure in cherished undertakings may, though they need not, so absorb all one's energies that there is no room for God; just as, at the opposite extreme, there are those whose lives are so full of pleasing activities that God is shut out. People whose souls have been steeped in an atmosphere of idolatry, with the moral outlook it so often connotes, cannot all at once learn to breathe the air of the Kingdom of God. Is there no means of softening hard hearts, or giving depth to superficial hearts? Cannot he who opened the eyes of the blind man prevent such people from dying? The attitude of Paul and Barnabas to the recalcitrant Jews, at Pisidian Antioch and Iconium, for example, according to the account in Acts, suggests that, when they found the ground hard, in their judgment the Christian attitude was to pass on and plant the seed in more responsive soil (though Paul's own treatment of the Jewish problem in Rom 9:1-33; Rom 10:1-21; Rom 11:1-36 suggests a far more patient and optimistic outlook, while the urgency of his mission, in view of the expected imminent return of Jesus, must have influenced his judgment). But one lesson of the Sower is that, for multitudes, preaching does not by itself provide a pathway to the Kingdom. Our Lord's healing ministry to the distressed in body and in mind, his invitations to the rich to help the poor (intended to remove spiritual obstacles from the rich even more than from the poor), his attempts to free the people from the intolerable burdens imposed on them by the religious lawyers, his efforts to open the eyes of the Pharisees to the true nature of their religious code, were all by way of preparation, of ploughing and removing stones and weeds. In the West, until lately and in a measure still, in dealing with those sections of the population that seem to feel least need of the Church and all that the Church stands for, we

have gone on mechanically offering them a Gospel which obviously means nothing to the vast majority of them; often sending to them our youngest and least experienced workers, imperfectly trained and with little equipment of any kind.

We have at last learned that souls are not to be captured with less ingenuity than any other object of the chase, and that in his work God wants the dedication of brain as well as heart. The varieties of social and educational activities that now accompany our evangelistic efforts are a recognition of the fact that the soil counts for something as well as the seed. But the Church alone can never plough up all the hard ground, can never root out all the thorns that choke the growth of all good. It needs the Church and the State and the school all working together; and perhaps God alone, through the experiences of life, can give depth to the shallow soul. On the mission field also, the crust of age-long superstition, pride, contempt and unbrotherliness has to be broken down before the seed can enter in with any hope of bearing fruit. Here too there are thorns of abject poverty, arrogant wealth, painful and often loathsome disease, ignorance, fear of all kinds, class and national conceit to be extirpated if the seed, when it does take root, is not to be stifled at its birth.

Hence the varieties of Mission work that sometimes puzzle so much the observer at home, the hospitals and dispensaries, the schools and colleges, the homes and hostels, the trainingschools, industrial institutions and printing presses, the co-operative societies and farm colonies. This preparatory stage may continue for generations before the Gospel gets an opportunity to show its real power. This parable is a piece of splendid optimism. Where there is failure, it is failure of a kind which can be traced to its sources and dealt with. But when the seed falls on suitable soil that has been carefully prepared and protected from hostile influences, God sends fruit out of all proportion to the seed that has been sown or the labour that has been expended.

09 - Chapter 09

CHAPTER IX THE DARNEL AMONG THE WHEAT Mat 13:24-30, Mat 13:36-43. IN the Sower it was assumed that the thorns got in among the crop by accident. The Darnel presents a new case in which the weeds are deliberately sown with hostile intent. Let us ask first what the parable meant to “ Matthew ’ and the circle for which he wrote. They may have had in mind cases of grave moral delinquency in the Church. Was Paul right, for example, in recommending the excommunication of the Corinthian Christian who was living with his father’s wife (1Co 5:4 f.)? It seems unlikely that any Gospel writer could ascribe to Jesus the view that no attempt should be made to root iniquity out of the Church.

More probably, the early Church regarded the parable as giving guidance on the treatment to be accorded to Christians who held and taught beliefs that differed from the received teaching of the authorities. There was, for example, the great Pauline heresy, that Gentile believers might be baptized without first being circumcised. The proper treatment for men whose beliefs were considered dangerously erroneous must have been at first a matter for serious discussion. Were they to be tolerated in the Church, or were they to be driven out? The parable seemed to answer: “ Let the heretics alone. If their teaching is really wrong and dangerous, in due time its true nature will show itself. Let God be the judge.” This was, in fact, the advice which Gamaliel had given the members of the Sanhedrin, when they wanted to root out their thorns, Peter and the other apostles who had defied them (Acts 5:38 f.) The Jerusalem Council also decided that the uncircumcised Gentile converts might remain in the Church, though some members regarded their membership as a noxious weed (Acts 15:19).

Paul gave the same answer to the same question.

If on the foundation any man builds a structure of wood or thatch, there is no need for us to burn it down; the Day, God’s Day, will show it up; the Fire will bring out its true quality (1Co 3:13). But such questions can hardly have been in the mind of Jesus. The opening scene conveys an important and memorable truth. If there are farmers who sow good seed, there are other farmers who sow darnel. In our Lord’s day, his disciples were not the only preachers; Pharisees were scouring sea and land to make proselytes. In our day, if there are missionaries of the cross, there are also missionaries of the Rationalist Press Association, and there are distinguished novelists and essayists, often with the most meagre knowledge of what they are discussing, using their influence to discredit the Christian message. While Christian preachers and writers are sowing the seed of lofty thought, pure ideals and upright conduct, multitudes in the press, in the drink saloon, on the race course, in the cheap theatre, with no thought but that of making money from the foibles of their fellow-men, are briskly advertising their wares and sowing the seeds of destruction.

It is not only in the sphere of religion that good seems to be inextricably intertwined with evil. Invention has enlarged the opportunity of the criminal as well as of the respectable citizen, and discovery has smoothed the path of vice as well as of virtue; so that many of us have a certain sympathy with Mr. Gandhi’s desire to stop the march of what we call progress, if only it were

feasible or possible. But our Lord's thought moved in the moral and spiritual sphere. With the history of his own people in view, he knew how the system of animal sacrifice had attached itself to the Jewish religion, and men at one and the same time could believe that God was righteous and that by the blood of bulls and goats God could be induced to forgive their sins. Pharisaic zeal for the purity of their race and their religion had resulted in the ugly Pharisaism depicted in the Gospels. A genuine desire to have all things clean in the sight of God had been transformed into that ceremonialism which cleansed all the appurtenances of religion except the heart of the worshipper. The Sabbath rest had become a burden and tithing a mechanical tax. The Law, whose function was to keep people walking in the ways of God, had been corrupted into a yoke beneath which many refused to bend their necks, while those who did were like overladen bullocks, struggling feebly and painfully along, unable to walk upright.

We have similar experiences in our own day.

We have only to look around to see how easily religion, however noble its development, deteriorates till it becomes a parody of its former self. The living Church becomes a dead institution, faith degenerates into a creed and worship into a repetition of formulas and ceremonies. The ecclesiastic becomes a poor substitute for the Churchman and the priest for the pastor. The sacrament turns into the mystery and the joyous reading of the Bible issues in fundamentalism.

Whether or not we have the parable in the precise form in which Jesus gave it, at all events it graphically sets before us three points of great practical importance. There are missionaries of evil as well as missionaries of good; the evil and the good are intertwined in the closest way, the evil being often, in fact, a parasite of the good; and rash attempts to destroy the evil may involve the destruction of much of the good. In uprooting the magical element in the sacramentalist's attitude to religion, may we not at the same time destroy his interest in the sacrament? Convince the fundamentalist of the intellectual unsoundness of his position, and in some cases he may never again feel the same joyful certainty in reading the old book. Who can tell us the precise point in religion at which the external ends and the internal begins? The architecture, the appurtenances, the liturgy, the music, the vestments, beautiful in themselves and rich in historic memories and spiritual significance: can those who regard these things as of the essence of their worship be deprived of them without the quality of their worship being vitally affected? It is a live issue with which this parable deals.

There was much that was revolting in the Judaism of our Lord's day; yet he conducted the whole of his ministry within its confines, and he knew that there was another side to contemporary religion. In the introduction to his Gospel Luke seems anxious to show the reverse side of the picture. There were men like Zechariah and women like Elizabeth in the priestly families as well as the priest who ignored the wounded traveller lying on the Jericho road and the priests who hounded Jesus to his death. In the country there were simple shepherds of unaffected piety with an ear for the heavenly choir. Even in Jerusalem there were pious souls like Symeon and Hanna waiting for the coming of the glory of the Lord. Even in the Temple one might see the doctors amazed at the questions and answers of the child Jesus. Our Lord did attack the corruptions of Judaism in some of the fiercest denunciations in literature; yet in all his dealings with it he kept in view his own principle that the uprooting of the evil should not endanger the good. He must have

loathed the stream of animal blood that flowed in the name of God, yet we nowhere read that he denounced animal sacrifice: he left the system to perish, and it did perish. He knew how far the priests had fallen from the priestly ideal, but he nowhere suggested the abolition of the priesthood. To the last he remained loyal to the Temple in spite of its corruptions. So far was he from proposing to break loose from the whole Judaic system that after he was taken from them his followers still thought of themselves as Jews and continued to worship in the temple. When the harvest was ripe the separation took place spontaneously. On every mission field we have learned the wisdom of the warning that, in seeking to lop off rotten branches, we may kill the tree. There are many pious souls to whom a work of destruction is very congenial, but Sodom is not the only city that is worth saving if there are even ten righteous men within it.

10 - Chapter 10

CHAPTER X THE GREAT SUPPER Luk 14:15-24; Mat 22:1-46. IN the Sower the problem was put from the point of view of the evangelist: ’ Why does our appeal so often fall on deaf ears? ’ but the Great Supper is a parable for the people. ’ The feast is spread: why will ye not come? ’ The picture, too, is different; here we have no demand for fruit of seed that has been sown, but an invitation to a joyous experience. This is one of Jesus’ favourite thoughts: the Kingdom as social joy, as the satisfaction of hunger, the fulfilment of desire. ’ They shall come from east and west and from north and south and take their places at the feast in God’s kingdom ’ (Luk 13:28). “ Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” Nor was the host content with providing the feast; he could not rest till every seat was occupied, till the guest-chamber was filled. In the Sower the explanation of fruitlessness was that the ground had not been prepared. That leaves us with the question: ’ If the ground is carefully prepared, ploughed and harrowed and weeded and given a sufficiency of soil, is the harvest certain? ’ Even in the sphere of agriculture, the result is still contingent; frost, or deficient rain, or excessive rain, or blight or birds or insects or animals, may blast the hopes of the farmer, however careful his work of preparation. In the spiritual sphere we have to reckon with free will; the invited guests are not brought into the kingdom by violence, The first guest pleads that he is engaged in the operation known to economists as extensive agriculture. Having some capital to spare he thinks he can best use it in taking in some more ground. He wants one of the healthiest and most satisfying of all joys, the joy of looking on a piece of God’s earth and saying: “ This is mine, to do with it what I will.” The second is engaged in intensive agriculture. His superfluous capital he proposes to use in cultivating more efficiently the ground he has; so he has bought five more pairs of bullocks and now wants the thrill of seeing his new teams at work. The third intimates that he has just got married: ’ That is why / cannot come.”

They were all apparently, certainly the first two, busy men, but it was not their work that kept them from the feast. The first wanted to see his new field, the second to try his new bullocks, the third to be with his new wife.

They were all prosperous men, extending the sphere of their operations and responsibilities; it was in this “ newness “ that their trouble lay. The things they were doing were all things that could wait, but they would not wait. In no case was it vice that kept them from the feast. They were all respectable men, engaged in useful work, and presumably good citizens; but they were preoccupied. Their minds were so engrossed with the things that had caught their attention at the moment that they forgot that there were other people in the world beside themselves and that life held other interests than theirs. At first sight the parable seems to suggest a depreciation of work or of family life. In so many of his parables Jesus made the worker, especially the agricultural worker, his hero, that we may be sure this first impression is wrong; yet it need not be altogether wrong. As Dr. Marshall pointed out a generation ago the farmer, especially the peasant proprietor, is under a grave temptation to allow his work to dwarf every other consideration, to lead him to forget the claims not only of culture, not only of the arts and graces of life, but even of happiness, of health and comfort, nay of common decency. But there is a much bigger question involved.

Nowadays we scorn the teaching of the third chapter of Genesis that work is a curse imposed on us as a penalty for the sin of our first parents. But the Genesis story does not suggest that the ideal for man is a state of chronic idleness. The curse it has in view is not labour, but a particular kind of labour, the unremitting toil of hard and bitter wrestling with a reluctant soil. When we think of it dispassionately, is there not a certain degradation in the fact that so much of the time, the energy, the thought of so large a proportion of the population even in the most advanced countries, should be devoted to the satisfaction of our elementary economic needs? In ancient Athens, the citizens made the intellectual life possible for themselves by handing over the drudgery to slaves, as the favoured few in our day hand it over to the wage-earners. It is true also that those forms of labour which do not turn men into robots, which are not essentially disgusting, and which leave the worker a certain amount of leisure, are consistent with lives of a lofty and even a noble quality. The fact remains that so long as the economic motive reigns supreme, so long as for multitudes life is one long, hard struggle for the means of subsistence, the human race is at an elementary stage. For the first time in history modern science is pointing to us a better way. The pains from which the world suffers to-day are “ growing “pains. We are already able to produce, not faster than the world can consume, but faster than the world can buy, and our means of production are increasing by leaps and bounds. When our statesmen and economists have found out for us how to lay hold of and enjoy the riches that the earth is ready to pour into our lap, then there is good reason to hope that we shall at last enter our inheritance. Then shall all men be able to look up, not only at the close of the day as the darkness falls, but oftentimes when the sun is yet shining, look up from their fields and their bullocks, hearken and respond to the invitation from the great Lord of all to come to the feast, the feast of intellectual and artistic and spiritual treasures to which he daily invites us, in the palace which it is his joy to see filled with guests. In both accounts of the parable the feast was in celebration of some joyous event in the life of one whom the guests should have delighted to honour. So obsessed were they with the claims of their own self-advancement that they had no sympathy with their friend’s joy. There is a time to do our own work and there is a time to think of others. There is a time to work, and there is a time to see our work in its relative unimportance, to ask ourselves whether our work is our servant or our master. The invited guests did not attend the banquet, because they had no sense of need; they were not hungry, whether for food or for fellowship.

They felt no need of anyone, and had no idea that anyone, least of all their king, could feel need of them. So the invitation went to those who would appreciate it, to the hungry and the lonely, to those who knew that they were poor and naked and had need of all things. In this parable, as elsewhere, Jesus speaks of the hunger in the heart of God, hunger for his children, for their loyalty, for their devotion and their love. It is his will, his fixed determination, that his house shall be filled. The invited guests would not come; the punishment was that they were not allowed to come; they were held to their choice. ’ This is the judgment: that the Light has come into the world and men have loved the darkness rather than the light “ (John 3:19). The door into the festal chamber was shut; thev had shut it with their own hands.

It seems clear that for Luke the guests first invited were the Jews, who tried more or less successfully to keep the Law; that the city outcasts next invited were the tax-collectors and “ sinners; ’ and that the offscourings of the country lanes invited last were the Gentiles.

(In the Wicked Vinedressers also, the Vineyard was given to others only when the first Vinedressers, the Jewish leaders, proved unworthy.) Can we believe that this conception of the Gentile mission as an after-thought, of the Gentiles as being brought into the Kingdom as poor substitutes only when the Jews declined to enter, represented the mind of Jesus?

Doubtless this was a common enough view among the first Christian preachers. It is a conception we get in the Acts. “ Since you (Jews) thrust the word of God from you... lo! we turn to the Gentiles ’ (Acts 13:46). But Jesus’ tribute to the men of Nineveh, to Naaman, the Queen of Sheba, to the Roman centurion and the Syrophenician woman, forbid us to think that in his scheme of things the whole Gentile world held this insignificant place. To the last the Temple was for him a house of prayer “ for all nations.” In his account of Peter’s vision at Joppa, Luke himself (Acts 10:1-48) gives us the true mind of Christ. The same Lord who had made all foods clean and made all peoples clean, had declared that the whole distinction between clean and unclean was a tragic misunderstanding of the mind of God.

11 - Chapter 11

CHAPTER XI THE MAN WITHOUT THE WEDDING GARMENT

Mat 22:11-14 IN Matthew's version of the Great Feast, after the great rejection the servants were instructed to invite ' everybody you happen to meet ' (Mat 22:9), and those who responded included the bad as well as the good (Mat 22:10). In view of the Christian emphasis on character, if there was not to be grave misunderstanding of the point of the parable, some explanation seemed to be called for.

It is easy to see how the story that emphasized the importance of the wedding garment came to be added: it is not so easy to feel sure that the addition was made by Jesus, at least in connection with this parable. Our Lord was not at all afraid of being misunderstood, since men had ears to hear with. The treatment of the unfortunate guest is painfully out of harmony with the gracious spirit of the parable. The story is brief to the point of obscurity. We are not told that a particular dress was obligatory on the guests. We wonder why the guest, when questioned, did not give the obvious answer that paupers have no decent clothing of any kind, much less wedding robes. If it was the custom, as some would have us believe, for royal hosts to provide suitable array, why is a fact so important left to the imagination? The doom of the rejected guest is expressed in conventional language (cf. Mat 25:30, Luk 13:27 f, and the implication of Mat 25:12). The conventional moral that Matthew draws is also misapplied (Mat 25:12) since, of all the guests to whom the later invitation was sent, only one was rejected. The figure may have been suggested by the threat in Zep 1:7 of punishment ' to all such as are clothed with strange (foreign) apparel." In any case the parable conveys the true lesson that while the invitation is to all, admission to the kingdom is for those only who are prepared to wear the uniform of the kingdom, to live in loyal obedience to the King's will. The invitation is to the poor, maimed, blind and lame.

If we enter the kingdom in that spirit which alone entitles us to citizenship, our rags are transformed, our blindness forgotten; we stand erect on our feet and join the throng that enters God's temple to give thanks.

12 - Chapter 12

CHAPTER XII THE WICKED VINEDRESSERS Mat 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luk 20:9-19 This parable deals with yet another aspect of the problem of the rejection of Jesus. If Jesus was the embodiment of Jewish ideals and the fulfilment of Jewish prophecy, then the men who were officially responsible for preserving these ideals and treasuring these prophecies should surely have recognized him when he came. On the contrary it was they who had secured his condemnation. In dealing with this disconcerting situation, the Christian evangelists had the advantage of Jesus' own verdict on it, the parable of the Vinedressers.

It is not surprising that it is one of the four told by all the Synoptists. In all three it comes near the end of the Gospel story when the Jewish leaders had made up their minds. In Matthew the "Vinedressers" comes immediately before the Great Supper, with which it has many features in common, including, in his account, the reference to the Son. Read in the light of the stories that precede, we can see what the parable meant to the Synoptists, what undoubtedly it meant to Jesus. No attempt to deny this parable to Jesus has succeeded. Are we to reject it because it is an allegory? He who gave a broader reach and a deeper depth to the Law of Moses would not have hesitated to ignore the dictates of a modern grammarian. Is it suggested that Jesus could not have foreseen his death? No divine penetration was needed to know that the storm which had long been gathering was about to break on his head. He knew whether he meant to flee that storm. As has been pointed out, if the parable had been the work of Christian preachers, there would have been a reference to the resurrection as well as to the death of the Son. Could Jesus have referred to himself as the Lord of the Vineyard's only son, the Beloved? These are the very terms used of him in the story of the Baptism and the Transfiguration. The Temptation story, which must have come from himself, is based on his unique sonship. The authenticity of this parable can be seriously questioned only by those for whom it is impossible that Jesus should have spoken of himself in the words ascribed to him in Mat 11:28. The parable gives us a most vivid glimpse into Jesus' thought of the infinite and loving patience with which God had watched over Israel, the almost incredible perversity with which Israel had scorned that patience and that love. The stern words which announce the doom of the vinedressers and the transference of their privileges to others Matthew puts into the mouth of the bystanders. If they ever suggest to us a tone of gloating revenge, let us read the lament of Jesus over Jerusalem and see there the real feelings with which Jesus saw the nation he loved, at the end of a career of glorious possibilities, voluntarily choosing the path that led to destruction. Whatever the tone in which Jesus pronounced sentence on the nation, no prophecy in history has been more abundantly fulfilled.

Unerringly Jesus put his finger on the sore spot. The vinedressers were God's agents, but they did not recognize any responsibility to God. They regarded the vineyard as their own, and Jesus was threatening to displace them from their position of authority. They claimed to sit on Moses' seat: Jesus claimed an authority above that of Moses. They expounded the Law: Jesus taught not as the Scribes. They were self-appointed guardians of the tradition: for Jesus the tradition was a yoke that crushed the life out of religion. On points to which the Pharisees attached enormous

importance Jesus strenuously attacked Pharisaic practice. The parable must be read in the context of the whole preceding section. This parable, perhaps alone of all the parables, is not a call to action, but a parable of judgment.

“ Too late! Too late! Te cannot enter now?’

Jesus depicts the vinedressers as recognizing the heir. In any case the parable graphically portrays the danger that besets a Church when it becomes an institution, with the full apparatus of creed, organisation and officials. Henceforth the institution becomes a citadel to be defended; henceforth the discovery, the preservation, the propagation of truth may be an aim; at best, it is only one aim and may cease to be an aim at all. Not truth but the creed; not the welfare of the world, but the prosperity of the Church; not the glory of God but the honour and prestige of the officials: if the Jewish Church did not escape the danger of making these aims paramount, who will claim that the Christian Churches have always escaped them? It is easy to recognize in other Churches the counterpart of the Vinedressers; it is always more profitable to find it in ourselves and our colleagues.

There must have been honest men among the Pharisees, the Scribes and the Priests. Here and there there must have been a Gamaliel, a Nicodemus, a Joseph of Arimathaea, not utterly blinded. In the early days of the Church we hear of the conversion of ’ a great crowd of priests ’ (Acts 6:7): but the machine was against them as it has so often been in the history of the Church. Institutionalize the Church, and immediately an immense weight is thrown on the side of conservatism, alike in belief and practice; a weight so immense that the institution, when it moves at all, moves with infinite leisure and with uncertain aim. We are so anxious to preserve the ark of God from falling that often we do not let it move at all. No Church with a developed organisation seems really to have solved this problem, and to be able to offer a hospitable welcome to new truth and to new claims upon us however just. Well may Jesus have spoken the parable of the Darnel.

Sometimes the greatest danger in uprooting the darnel is that the darnel may after all turn out to be wheat, its true nature revealed only at the harvest. But in this parable our Lord had something more in view than the conservatism of the institution. He clearly points to the special temptation of the Church dignitaries. Strongly entrenched as they often are in positions of power, influence and prestige, their temptation is to feel resentment against any person, plan, organisation or idea that threatens to dethrone them. It has sometimes been suggested that the interference by Jesus with a profitable monopoly of the priests in the sale of animals for sacrifice and the work of money-changing added the final touch of exasperation that made them resolve on his death. There may well be some truth in this; yet the whole impression left on our minds by the story of the opposition to Jesus is that financial considerations played a minor part if any. The degenerate Churchman has often been too fond of money, as Luke, with whatever justification, says the Pharisees were (Luk 16:14); yet the special temptation of the ecclesiastic is not greed but worldly ambition. In its coarsest form, this ambition takes shape in as a love of power, of splendour, of adulation; in a less vulgar manifestation it is a craving for leadership; in its most sublimated form it becomes the desire, not only that good should be done but that we should do it, a desire to be first in the service of men. It has been true in the Christian Church, as it was true in the Jewish Church, that infinitely more harm has been wrought by some form of worldly ambition than by any kind of

self-indulgence. He who to-day holds the allegiance of more men and women than any other, during his lifetime held no official position; had no servants and no subordinates; had no promotion to offer save more intimate fellowship with himself, especially in his sufferings, and no weapon of discipline save the loving appeal. The only one of the twelve who did not continue in the fellowship left of his own accord. In the foreign enterprise of the Church, no small part of the work of the missionary to-day is the gradual devolution on Christian nationals of duties and responsibilities formerly wielded by the missionaries from the West. The formation in all the more advanced mission fields of indigenous Churches responsible for their own administration, and the gradual transference to these Churches of the task and privilege of evangelising the country to which they belong, is an indication that in this department of our Church work the lesson of the Vinedressers has been taken to heart. Nor is it only in the sphere of the Christian Church that the temptation is present and the warning needed. For thousands of years the higher castes of India, by the exercise of much ingenuity and with wonderful pertinacity, have clung to their exalted position. Even to-day we are witnessing hardly more than the beginning of the breakdown of the system, if indeed it is to be broken down at all. In this these castes are typical of aristocracies almost everywhere, whether they be aristocracies of birth or colour of wealth or privilege. “ Noblesse oblige; “but we prefer to help our weaker neighbour from the eminence of our own exalted position; we are seldom eager to help him to climb up beside us.

13 - Chapter 13

CHAPTER XIII THE BARREN FIG-TREE

Luk 13:6-9

[N discussing the Sower, we suggested that one of the main points of the parable is that, if the seed is to yield fruit, the soil must be carefully prepared. That lesson is even more clearly brought out in the Fig-Tree. In some of the parables, like the Sower and the Fishing Net, though there are people present, the action moves forward in silence. In others, though there is speech, some of the prominent actors are significantly silent: Lazarus, for example, the tax-collector, and all the figures in the Good Samaritan except the Samaritan himself. Others, again, are conversational parables in which the conclusion is reached after different points of view have been presented. The farmer's men want to root out the darnel here and now; the farmer decides for delay. The unforgiving creditor, his debtor, his lord, his fellow-servants, all have their views on the treatment of an insolvent debtor by his creditor. The father and the elder brother present two contrasted views on the treatment appropriate for a returning prodigal. The master differs from the one-talent man about the latter's duty. The owner of the vineyard and his man are at variance in their prescriptions for a fig-tree that bears no figs. As Mr. Cyril Flower has pointed out, apparently the owner had neither planted nor tended the tree himself. He had no love for it; to him it was simply a business proposition, simply a source of income. Poets and artists have thought that there were other things about a tree besides its capacity for earning money; but this gentleman wants no nonsense of that kind.

He is one of the rationalisers of industry. ' What is a tree for anyhow? " he asks. ' If it is not producing an income, it is not only good for nothing; it is occupying valuable space on which one could plant a real tree, a money-making tree." This man is good at " cost-accounting," and " efficiency " and " scrap-heap " are two of his favourite words. The gardener had an interest in the tree of another kind. He had toiled over it, studied it, perhaps prayed over it; above all, he loved the tree: that made a difference. He quietly accepts the owner's verdict that a fig-tree should bear figs; " but," he pleads, " before we impose the death penalty on this tree, let us be quite sure that its barrenness is its own fault; it may turn out that it is our fault. Give it a chance, open up the ground all round and let the air in. Feed it; give it some manure; then let us see.'

Jesus knew that a generation trained under the scribes of his day was hardly in a condition to bear fruit. A good deal of digging and manuring was required before one could tell of what they were really capable. Even among his own followers there were many " little ones " who in spiritual things hardly knew their right hand from their left, whose tiny spark of spiritual life would be extinguished if they were not treated with infinite tenderness. Some of Paul's converts bore fruit that could hardly be described even as wild grapes or crab apples.

Instead of expelling them from the Church, he thanked God for them, prayed over them, instructed them. Have the Brahmins of India on the whole rejected the Christ who has been preached to

them for a hundred years? Before we shake off the dust of our feet against them, let us be quite sure that the Christ was presented to them in conditions that would reveal him as he is, as something more than a destroyer of Hinduism, as a non-controversial, non-denominational Christ, a Christ not associated in their minds with repellent customs, ideas or people. In the war cry of the Baptist, the axe was already at the root of the tree; the fate of the fruitless tree was already sealed. In the teaching of Jesus God in his infinite patience is always ready to give another chance, to wait another year. But the extra year is not to be a year of idleness; it is to be spent in toil, in ensuring that if the fruitlessness continues, it is because the tree is rotten at the core. As Mr. Flower has pointed out, the parable, like so many of the parables of Jesus, has a wide application. Until quite recently, it was only when we saw a young criminal standing at the bar of justice that we discovered for the first time that we had any relation to him. Now we want to know his whole history from his birth and even before his birth, and we ask: ' Has he had a chance? Has he been given any moral training, taught any useful occupation, given any rational amusement, secured from a vicious environment, taught anything about the world of unseen realities? ' Almost till our own day, children were punished, often with great cruelty, for stupidity. Now we recognize that in multitudes of cases what they need is feeding and careful training. We try to diagnose the particular nature and cause of the " stupidity " and prescribe the appropriate remedy. The parable is altogether in the spirit of our Lord's teaching and of his life. Before we condemn a person, an institution, a system, an undertaking, let us make sure it has had its chance. It may be that all it needs is careful, patient attention. But there is one stipulation, the work of digging round the tree and manuring it must be done by one who loves the tree and has a personal interest in its welfare.

14 - Chapter 14

CHAPTER XIV. THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEARL

Mat 13:44-46 THE parables we have discussed hitherto have been answers to the question: “ Why do men refuse the invitation to become citizens of the Kingdom?" The answers have been variants of the theme that they did not find such citizenship attractive, at least sufficiently attractive to induce them to enrol. In these two parables we have Jesus’ estimate of the worth of citizenship: it is a treasure against which all life’s other treasures are weighed in the balance and found wanting.

Jesus pictures two men each discovering a treasure which made all their previous possessions seem mean and petty. To borrow a simile from Miss Underbill: Suppose a man who has been blind from birth suddenly to receive the gift of sight. For the first time he beholds the marvels of sky and field and sea, the beauty of tree and flower and plant, the flight of birds, the graceful forms of the animal world, the human countenance. Suppose a man who has been deaf from birth suddenly to have his ears unstopped. For the first time he hears the songs of singing birds, the sighing of the wind among the trees, the cheerful discords of the farm-yard, the sound of the human voice. Imagine one who loves music and whose soul has been starved for years in a foreign land to hear the first strains of a symphony by a trained orchestra. Picture an intelligent youth beginning the study of astronomy. In these and all such cases what happens is not advance to a new stage in a known world; it is a thrill of a new kind, an entrance into a joyous world till now unknown. It is an experience of that kind our Lord depicts in these two parables. For the finder life is filled at once with a new significance. No longer is it enough just to get through the day’s work; the labourer must at all costs acquire the field that contains the treasure; the merchant must at all costs become the owner of the precious pearl. The stolid ploughman becomes the alert athlete; the sedate merchant is transformed into the eager schoolboy. Till the prize be won, everything else must wait, every other consideration be forgotten. In the joy of the great discovery the finder is a “ new creature.” For the most part our generation feels no such thrill at the thought of the life to which Jesus calls us. In Noel Coward’s “ Cavalcade,” nothing was more impressive than the singing of the soldiers during the Great War. There was in it a certain grim courage; but it was the courage of men resolved to go on till the death in a stern task in which they can see no meaning and to which they can see no end, music infinitely sad and weirdly pathetic, a music that seems to typify the post-war generation even more than the generation that went through the war. In the world as Jesus knew it the strong man armed held mighty sway; there were paupers and parasites, diseases of body and mind in their most repulsive forms, moral cripples and pretentious hypocrites. Yet he never despaired, never wavered in his conviction that the world was God’s world, never thought of men as a race of crawling ants. He knew that the strong man armed had met a stronger, that the blind could be made to see and the deaf to hear, that disease could be cured and leprosy cleansed, that demons could be exorcised, prostitutes turned into saints and cheats into honest men. In the Gospels, not least in the parables, life has infinite significance, the world is instinct with purpose, men are called to tasks worthy of men. Jesus and the disciple circle were often weary, sometimes perhaps despondent; but they were never bored. Men to-day may

be right in thinking that life as it is commonly lived is hardly worth living; but life in “ the Kingdom of God,” in the world as God meant it to be, and as it might become, is abundantly worth living. In our preaching do we not dwell too much on smaller themes, and forget to hold before men the splendour of the treasure, the glory of the pearl? But the farm-labourer did not simply add the treasure to his little store of goods and chattels, nor did the unique pearl just become a new item in the merchant’s collection. In both cases there was a price to be paid and the price was all their other possessions. The parable is a commentary on the story of the rich ruler, may indeed have been spoken on the occasion of that famous interview. It is in line with the teaching of Jesus, which at times seems so harsh, that the dearest of familyties, the noblest talents, the most cherished possessions, must not be allowed to stand in the way of the fulfilment of the end and aim of cur being.

We think of some of the other pearls that men prize, pearls of very varying degrees of worth, family affection, success in business, social prestige, fame or power, scholarship or art, amusement or passing the time as pleasantly as possible, good health or athletic prowess. We are allegorizing when we interpret the parable to mean that all these are to be abandoned if we are to claim our citizenship in the kingdom. On the contrary it is partly through some of these that our citizenship is manifested. The parable is a comparison of values; its lesson is that to be a citizen of the kingdom outweighs in value all other objects of pursuit, and that, when there is a clash, if we subordinate our citizenship to any other aim, we are dealing a vital blow at that which makes us men and women. On this point our Lord was adamant; it was one of his constant themes that our dearest privileges are also the source of our keenest temptations. This is the parable in its simplest form, When the peasant sold his odds and ends of furniture to buy a field that contained a box of treasure, he was no fool; and when the follower of Jesus ignores the ordinary prizes of life he is displaying the highest wisdom. The fact remains that most men do not think so. We continue to assume that the money bait is practically the only one that will call forth the higher forms of service. The man who does not make his own comfort one of the primary aims of his life is looked on as a being of another flesh and blood, as in fact he is. In the thought of Jesus sacrifice in itself has no significance. The hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, await those who for his sake have sat lightly to earth’s allurements. But the rewards that God gives are such as none can appreciate save those who are purged of all gross desires and all worldly ambitions.

15 - Chapter 15

CHAPTER XV THE MUSTARD SEED Mark 4:30-32; Mat 13:31 f.; Luk 13:18 f. THE smallness of the mustard-seed was proverbial: “ If you have faith as a grain of mustardseed.” Experts tell us that the plant Jesus has in mind is commonly planted in gardens, and grows rapidly to a height of ten or twelve feet, and that its branches attract birds to eat the seeds though not to make nests. (This last feature may have been suggested by Dan 4:12, Dan 4:21, and Eze 17:23). The cheerful optimism of this parable shows that those are right who refuse to interpret the Sower as an utterance of despair. From whatever point we trace the beginning of the Kingdom, its rise seems so insignificant as to attract practically no attention. But when the Kingdom does arise, even in germ, it is something new. The writer; To the Hebrews ’ speaks of a door between men and God that remained in some sense closed until Jesus opened it, of the road from man to God and from God to man as in some sense blocked till Jesus gave us the new and living way, of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God in this sense that our conception of God is our knowledge of Jesus. Others before him had had lofty and true thoughts of God, but it is from the birth of Jesus that we count our dates. The kingdom grows from generation to generation, ever embracing larger numbers under its sway, ever unfolding some new significance.

Almost down to our own day our creed-makers and our organisation-builders forgot that the Kingdom grows like a tree; that we cannot say of the seed, the first shoots, the earliest branches,: This is the tree; thus far and no farther.”

We must wait and see whereunto this will grow. The trees of earth in time reach their full stature, in time fade and die; but the tree of God grows while the world lasts, ever giving us new thoughts of God, ever expanding the circle of those who have claims upon us, ever deepening our conception of those claims.

Let us try as we will to limit God, to put boundaries round ourselves or our Church, to stop the flow of Christian thought, try as we will to narrow the sphere of Christian duty, to restrict the sphere of Christian influence, to stifle the urge of Christian charity, the tree will burst all bonds asunder and go on growing. The tree will bring forth nothing that was not in the seed; but it has brought forth many things, it will bring forth many things, that we never imagined were in the seed. The growth of the tree is the gradual revelation of the meaning of God’s love revealed in Jesus Christ; for revelation is not an event but a process, and God is writing still, and will go on writing, the pages of his New Testament. Here and there a branch may be lopped off, as the once flourishing Christian Church of North Africa perished under persecution and disappeared from the face of the earth. But the tree of life grows and grows for ever, because it is the tree of God, planted near by a river, the river of the water of life. Can we identify the tree with the Church?

Yes, the mustard plant is the Church, the fellowship of them that come to God through Jesus, and seek to live their lives in the strength that he gives. How far this Church coincides with those whose names are written in our communion rolls, we leave to God to decide. We can see that the work of the Church, not least its work in foreign lands, is carried on by minorities, often small

minorities. But there is the more cheerful truth that the Kingdom may be advancing, surely if imperceptibly, at times when even loyal members of the Church are beginning to question whether there is faith on the earth.

God’s knowledge is deeper than ours, his charity greater.

We wonder at the faith of Jesus, who, in a tiny corner of the world, with so little apparent prospect of success, had such insight into the future. But can we marvel sufficiently at the Christian preachers who went on their missionary journeys from country to country, realizing the immensity of the task they were undertaking, the apparently irresistible might of the forces arrayed against them, the slenderness of their own human resources, the indifference or contempt with which their message was so often met; yet had the faith to go on repeating this parable?

16 - Chapter 16

CHAPTER XVI THE SEED GROWING OF ITSELF

Mark 4:26-29. THIS parable, recorded by Mark alone, goes naturally with the Mustard Seed. It has been misinterpreted in two ways; first by the misleading title ' The Seed Growing Secretly; ' secondly, by finding the lesson in the slowness of the plant's growth: if there is any time reference at all, surely it is to the speed of the growth. But the emphasis is neither on the rapidity nor on the gradual nature nor on the certainty of the growth, though these may be all implicit. In the Sower, the farmer who planted the seed was a prominent figure. This parable reminds us that he may be too prominent. Many things the farmer can do; nay, must do: one thing he cannot do; he cannot make a single blade of corn grow. When he has done his part, the growth goes on, silently, imperceptibly, inevitably, but " automatically," whether the farmer wakes or sleepes. Revivals do not come by organisation. " Why could not we cast him out? ' Because we thought we could. The Red Indian may.count his scalps and the football player his goals; the Christian must not reckon up the number he has brought to Christ. For one thing no one can analyse the contribution of each human instrument at work in any spiritual achievement. The last agent employed by God is not necessarily the only or the main agent. In any case we are but servants, farm-labourers who plant or irrigate; it is God who gives the increase. If the parable is a rebuke to boasting, no less is it a warning against despondency. If the farmer honestly does, day by day, the work that lies before him, he is entitled to his quiet rest by night. Whether or not in the morning the corn is perceptibly higher than the day before, he can leave the future in God's hands. The responsibility is his; in due time the harvest will come. This parable has the historic importance of having been used, a generation ago, to discredit the motto of the Student Volunteer Missionary Union: " The Evangelisation of the World in This Generation." If the organizers had had any real conception, it was urged, of the nature of the task they were undertaking, the gigantic areas involved, the teeming millions of the population, the difficulties of reaching them, the varieties of creed professed, the age-long prestige behind them, the vested interests that sheltered under them, they would have seen the absurdity of their hopes. Perhaps they were wrong in fixing a time limit; our times are in God's hands; God does not count time as we do and hastes not even as he rests not. Perhaps also they thought too much in geographical areas. It is the people, not the areas, that are to be evangelized; and even if the programme had been carried out, the inhabitants of the areas would have largely changed during the generation of accomplishment.

Yet the aim itself was entirely in the spirit of the parable; and the faith that inspired it, quixotic as it seemed to common sense, is the kind of faith our Lord enjoined on his disciples. But the harvest does not come unless the husbandmen, all the husbandmen, do their part. We have seen the wonderful advance that is possible when small minorities of enthusiasts, some in the home land, some in lands afar, prepare the soil, sow the seed, and weed and irrigate. What would happen with a whole Church in earnest, with a deep sense of indebtedness to God and to Jesus Christ, prayerfully working in the confident belief that they had a message that could save mankind as to that we have no knowledge, for we have no experience.

17 - Chapter 17

CHAPTER XVII THE LEAVEN Mat 13:33; Luk 13:20 f. OUR Lord watches a woman baking the family bread; he notes how the yeast lays itself alongside the flour and, by a process of transforming influence, moulds it into a new creation. He marks how the yeast works gradually, powerfully, inevitably, passing from grain to grain of the flour, changing the nature of all it touches.

“ That,” said Jesus, “ is how the Kingdom of God grows.”

There is here the same trust in God, the same confident belief in the future of the Kingdom, that we found in the Mustard Seed. But there is a new idea, the idea of an irresistible force, subduing to its will all that it meets, bringing within its sphere of influence ever new individuals, new groups, new spheres of thought, new departments of life; giving us new creatures, a new Covenant, new heavens and a new earth. The forces of the Kingdom, then, are to work by their own inherent influence; men are to be induced, not compelled, to wear its uniform. The ideals of the Kingdom are to be gladly accepted, not thrust upon us. The communism of the early Jerusalem Church was not the fiat of an organisation but a spontaneous outburst of Christian giving. Ananias and Sapphira were at perfect liberty to retain the whole proceeds of the sale of their property had they so chosen.

Slaves were not to demand their freedom, but to wait till their masters learned a more excellent way. In all our thought of the evangelisation of the world, we have a tendency to picture as the main force at work officially appointed missionaries using the official agencies of sermons, schools, hospitals and the printing press. It may be doubted if this is how Christianity ever has spread in any large community beyond the initial stages. In any case it is not the way of the parable, which pictures the new religion as having within itself its own expansive force; or, if we may so put it, the lives of Christian people as the supreme missionary force.

History has confirmed both the justice of our Lord’s faith in the expansive power of the Kingdom and the wisdom of his method. During the last century we have seen one fortress after another of entrenched wrong crumble before the spread of Christian ideas. The British in India have sometimes been blamed by Indians for not adopting more drastic methods in dealing with the moral sores of that country; yet on the whole the leavening principle has worked effectively, if slowly. It has been recognized that legislation itself has a certain educative effect; but the general policy has been to suppress no social evil till public opinion was sufficiently advanced to see the wisdom of the move. Thus suttee, the murder of a widow on her husband’s funeral pyre, is now unknown except in sporadic cases.

If the use of images still plays a large part in the religion of the masses, idolatry has largely lost its hold over the minds of the educated. At last we see the beginning even of the recognition as human beings of those we now euphemistically call the depressed classes. The measure in which we use compulsion is the measure of our unbelief. The lesson of the parable is that truth, once it gets a grip, has sufficient vitality in itself to spread. In our own country, more perhaps than in any

other, in our social and political life, with a few terrible exceptions even in our religious life, the instrument of persuasion has been the leaven rather than the legal code or the sword. In the new India, Mr. Gandhi has told us, he will welcome our Christian hospitals and agencies for social uplift, but not our Christian propaganda. It may be that Christian charity, to exercise its full missionary power, requires an explanatory commentary; but surely Mr. Gandhi underestimates the attractive power of the Christian life as much as he overestimates the persuasive power of the Christian word. The Hindu, like the Pharisee of our Lord's time, believes that uncleanness, by which they both mean ceremonial uncleanness, is contagious, that it passes with destructive effect from man to man, from man to object, from object to man. Our Lord had no fear of such contagion, had no doctrine of untouchability. In contact with the leper, the woman of the city, the woman with the hasmorrhage, far from being defiled by their defilement he made the unclean clean.

" Till the whole has been leavened." Does this phrase simply complete the story of the baking operations, or does it point to a time when in every corner of the world, in every region of thought and life, Jesus Christ will reign?

One would like to believe it; but with the Darnel, the Great Supper and the Vinedressers among the parables, we cannot say it is the teaching of Jesus. Man has the terrible power of saying, ' I pray thee have me excused." " Lord, are there few that be saved? ' " Strive ye to enter in at the strait gate."

18 - Chapter 18

CHAPTER XVIII THE FISHING NET

Mat 13:47-50.

ONCE again, in a scene as familiar to his hearers as to himself, Jesus sees an illustration of a point he wishes to make clear. He has often noted how the fishing-net, working unintelligently, inexorably, ruthlessly, drags within its meshes all kinds of marine objects, animate and inanimate. When the net is drawn to the shore, the fishermen set to work on the motley collection; for the first time an intelligent principle is brought to bear on the seething mass. A selection is made; the fishermen are after fish that they can sell; all objects that answer this description are carefully separated and placed in baskets. The other objects in the net may have other uses; some of them certainly have: but they are of no use for the fisherman's purpose; in them he is not interested and they are tossed outside.

There is no parable to which hilicher's main principle is more applicable. There is one point, and one only: the Kingdom works as a divisive force. We are to find here no teaching of the fate in this life or in the life which is to come of those who are cast aside. God has still his relation to them; the citizens of the Kingdom have still their duty towards them. Our Lord was speaking out of his experience; as he came in contact with one after another, and delivered his message, he acted as a touchstone. Some gladly accepted; some turned against him with scorn and malice; some begged to be excused. Our Lord seems to have been deeply impressed with this selective power of the Kingdom. Many of those who are tossed aside as being useless for the Kingdom may have capacities very valuable for other purposes. They may be poets or artists, inventors or business organizers, good fellows, amusing fellows, and so forth; is all this to go for nothing? Is not life a far broader and richer thing than these narrow ethical and spiritual tests of Jesus would make it? Many would tell us that he ignores some of the most important and valuable spheres of life. Art has its kingdom and its kings, its citizens and its laws. There are realms of knowledge as well as the realm of God, princes of science and discovery as well as sons of God; there are industrial triumphs and political achievements which take their place at least alongside the spiritual victories to which the followers of Jesus attach so much importance. In the saner forms of this criticism there is a real difficulty, but our Lord would accept the challenge. The Kingdom does not exist in a vacuum; its forces can be seen at work only in life's other activities, but its place among them is always the supreme place. For Jesus the Kingdom of God is not a kingdom but the kingdom. Its aims and tests and values are the ultimate aims and tests and values, in the long run the only ones that count. Our Lord's means of locomotion were his feet, the fishing boat, and a horse or ass. There is no indication that he felt his ministry impeded by the primitive nature of his means of communication, that his work would have been more effective had he used a car, or that he would have considered the inventor of such a machine necessarily entitled to a high place in the Kingdom. He had never seen a mill or factory. If he had, his one question would have been: " Have they brought men nearer God; the men and women that work in them as well as the men and

women who consume their products? ’ There are indications, in the story of the Syro-Phoenician for example, that he appreciated ready wit, and recognized that a healthy humour gives salt to life. In all his recorded utterances there is no reference to a picture, save those which God has drawn with his own hands; or to a piece of music, save the Hosannas of the children; or any certain reference to literature save the sacred books of the Jews. But neither do we find any depreciation of these things, and in so far as they enrich and uplift life, surely our Lord would have welcomed them as allies. The subject is one on which it is easy to depart from reality and become priggish. There are whole realms of life and many spheres of pleasant activity in connection with which moral questions can hardly be said to arise. To suggest that one should not enjoy a play of Shakespeare or Aristophanes or play a game of golf except in so far as one’s character is improved by the experience would not be a sign of moral health and would find no support in the teaching of Jesus. The late Dr. Denney spoke of the welcome relief he found in Homer from the strain of the spiritual tension of the New Testament. Surely every good gift of God is to be received with thanksgiving, and we do thank God for a thousand precious gifts which at first sight seem to have very little relation to the Kingdom of God. It is not for us to assess the relative values of the intellectual and artistic triumphs which have exalted human nature and made us feel that the world is a good place to live in.

It is very possible, also, to exaggerate the extent to which Jesus ignores all spheres in life save the ethical and spiritual. His parables, like so much of the rest of his teaching, testify to his vivid interest in the varied activities of men and in the world of nature. Jesus was no aesthete in the narrow sense of the term; but he had the artist’s hatred of ugliness, and a determination, which not all artists have, to do his part in abolishing ugliness from the earth.

Many of the sights that met his eye were as offensive to the senses as to the spirit: beggars, lepers, demoniacs, epileptics, people with loathsome sores. He felt that such sights were out of place in God’s world; he pitied the victims and sought to deliver them from their repulsiveness as well as from their pain. The coming of the Kingdom of God would mean the fulfilment of the loftier dreams of the artists as well as of the moralists.

“ The love of God is broader than the measures of man’s mind; ’ there are first which shall be last and last which shall be first. We may be far astray in our judgments of men’s contribution, of our own contribution, to the welfare of the world. None of these things alter the central fact: our Lord’s mission was to seek to turn the world as it is into the world as God meant it to be, and in this work to invite the co-operation of all men of good will. There are those who gladly respond, and there are those who decide that for them other interests are supreme.

19 - Chapter 19

CHAPTER XIX THE LOST SHEEP AND THE LOST COIN Mat 18:10-14; Luk 15:3-7; Luk 15:8-10.

HITHERTO we have dealt with parables which answer the question why so many reject the invitation to the Kingdom, which picture the transcendent worth of citizenship in the Kingdom, and show that there is a searching test for candidates for citizenship. We turn now to other parables which tell us something about the King and about the qualifications for citizenship. One would naturally take these points separately, but in the parables the relation of the King to the citizens is so vitally connected with the relation of the citizens to the King and to each other that they must be studied together.

We have seen that Matthew places the Lost Sheep in a different context from Luke, and gives the parable a somewhat different turn.

Yet it may well have been that the first application of the three “ lost ’ parables was a defence of the ministry to the religious outcasts. They were included among the “ lost,” though Jesus knew that among the Pharisees there were many that were more hopelessly lost. The “ sinners ’ of the Gospel story corresponded with some degree of accuracy to the nonChurchgoers of our day. It would require more courage than most of us possess to suggest that attendance or non-attendance at Church is the hall-mark of the distinction between the sheep and the goats. The “sinners” might be bad men or women; but the designation covered all who did not choose, or who (as in the case of the tax-collectors) for reasons connected with their occupation were unable, to fulfil the requirements of the ceremonial law. Prostitutes and thieves might be “sinners,” but those who did not or could not avoid contact with “ unclean ’ persons or things, and who did not or could not attend the stated religious celebrations in the Temple, were also ’ sinners.” The stigma attached to the ’ sinners ’ of our Lord’s day would tend of itself to a feeling of moral inferiority and consequent moral deterioration. The possibilities that Jesus saw in the class are witnessed by the story of the woman of the city in Luke vii, by the call of Levi, by the story of Zacchasus and that of the repentant tax-gatherer in the parable. In the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin we usually emphasize Jesus’ thought of the worth of the individual. We know the saving virtue there is in the thought that somebody cares; in these parables Jesus taught that God cares.

God thinks not only of the flock, but of the individual sheep; and when a sheep strays from the fold, it is, for the time being, the only sheep that counts. Human thought swings backwards and forwards between emphasis on the individual and emphasis on the community. In our own day, after a long period of individualism, we are beginning again to think of ourselves as members of a social group, to realise the importance of leavening society with Christian ideals and standards.

Jesus teaches that God sees the group as a group of individuals and the individual as a member of the group. Jesus felt the passion, which the early Church inherited, for the koinonia, for the fellowship, that they might be One, an unbroken whole, all in all to each other. Our Lord’s conception of his followers as a family, brothers and sisters of each other and of himself, went to

the very root of his thought. Our Lord's mission was primarily to his own people, but he saw that they were not all Israel that were of Israel, Israel after the flesh must become Israel after the spirit. In the very forefront of his ministry he put the healing of the breach in Judaism itself. The Israel of our Lord's day was a house divided against itself: there were the clean and the unclean, the righteous and the sinners, those within the pale and those without the pale; and between the two there was a great gulf fixed. This middle wall of partition must be broken down. Jesus' longing for the restoration within the fold of those whom " the righteous ' shut out was so deep that the ministry to the publicans and sinners took a prominent place in his work.

He could even say that it was his chief work; he was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Our Lord's heart was profoundly moved at the sight of the outcasts. He thought of them as sheep who had strayed from the flock, as treasures lost to God and man, as children who had in wilfulness left their home. He reminded the Pharisees how it is the sheep on the mountains, not the sheep safe in the pasture, that is the centre of the shepherd's love and care; that though a woman has plenty of other coins in her purse, it is the coin she has dropped that occupies all her thought; that the father's heart goes out to the wayward child in the far country and is at rest about the boy hard at work on the farm. Whether men have gone astray in ignorance like the sheep, through someone's negligence like the coin, or by free choice like the prodigal, there is a gap in the circle; the number is incomplete; God's love and longing are with the wanderer while there is even one sheep away from the fold or one vacant chair in the home.

There are sayings in the Gospels ascribed to Jesus which, read by an unsympathetic reader, might almost suggest a gloomy gloating over the fate of the unrepentant. " Shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." " He will come and destroy the farmers and give the vineyard to others." Surely in this fifteenth chapter of Luke we get Jesus' true thought of God, that when men are " lost ' it is not to themselves they are lost, that their refusal to come back to the home is a wound to divine love such as we cannot know. It was the thought of Jesus himself as he wept over Jerusalem.

All through Luk 15:1-32 Jesus pictures the joy, the social joy in the unseen world, over a single wanderer who comes home.

There are multitudes in the Christian Church who feel no such joy as they hear of one after another in far-off lands professing the Christian faith, whose joy is kept for every testimony, often without foundation, that ' the native Christians are no better than the heathen." It was in that spirit that the Pharisees watched Jesus' ministry to the " sinners," regarding as a traitor to their order this preacher whose friendly approach to the outcasts challenged the established order of things that suited them so well. Thus Jesus' ploughshare became a sword; the movement that was meant to restore the broken unity of Israel's home resulted in the estrangement from Jesus of the leaders of his people, and in that long controversy with them which ended only on the Cross.

20 - Chapter 20

CHAPTER XX THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

Luk 18:9-14. ON God's plan, then, the Kingdom is all-comprehensive; it is God's will that all should come in: but some refuse to enter, and many will not have their neighbours enter, if they can shut them out: they want the Kingdom to be a close preserve, confined to their own little caste. This exclusiveness in itself marks them out as no true citizens of the Kingdom. Our Lord is not recorded as having given a Beatitude, ' Blessed are the inclusive "; but the thought runs through all his teaching, and follows directly from his conception of God. Those who want to shut others out cannot themselves be in. If one is to enter the Kingdom, he must first realize his need of a complete transformation, his need in the first place of that cancelling of the past that we call forgiveness. At first we are inclined to call this story a solitary example of the parable as caricature, to say that no man ever really prayed as this Pharisee is represented as praying, but that Jesus is frankly and bluntly making explicit the spirit that underlay this whole type of religion. Yet the Pharisee's prayer is not so very unlike the prayer which every Jewish boy was taught: " My God, I thank thee that I was born, not a Gentile, but a Jew; not a slave but a free man; not a woman, but a man." As Professor J. A. Findlay points out, it is this prayer Paul has in mind when he claims that, for those who have put on Christ the old distinctions of Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female are forgotten (Gal 3:28).

(On a strict definition of * parable ' this story would not be included; it is simply a story of two men, one held up for imitation, one for our warning.) Sometimes the Gospel writers preach a sermon by the position in which they place a passage.

Luke cunningly puts the story of Jesus blessing the children between this Pharisee and the rich ruler; it shines all the more brightly against the dark background on either side. This is one of the parables that give a final answer to the question why Jesus taught in parables.

Paul had much to say about the Law and the relation of Christians to the Law; yet many Church members have vague ideas of Paul's teaching on the subject, partly because Paul was not always very clear about it himself. Faced with the same question Jesus in a few words draws a lightning sketch of a Pharisee at prayer. There we have, unforgettably portrayed for all time, our Lord's criticism of Religion as Law. The Pharisee climbed the Temple Mount to pray; but, having reached the Temple he forgot to pray, and spent all his time telling God what a splendid fellow he was. The Pharisee's prayer consists entirely of thanksgiving. Christian prayer (Paul shines in this respect) includes the giving of thanks; thanks to God for His goodness, not for our own. Christian prayer includes petition: this man is already so perfect that he needs nothing more. Christian prayer includes the confession of sin: the sins the Pharisee confesses are other people's sins.

Christian prayer includes intercession for others.

Five times the Pharisee uses the word ' I; ' he mentions various classes of people and calls God's attention to the tax-collector outside, but he has no blessing to ask for them. They are introduced

only that their blackness may bring out in more dazzling relief his own spotless purity. The Pharisee tells God what he thinks of himself. We should like to know what his wife thought of him, his children, his servants, his neighbours, the people with whom he dealt in business. Were they all as pleased with him as he was with himself? Jesus tells us what God thought of him. The Pharisee had a list; your Pharisee always has a list. It was a list of his own virtues, and other people's vices. The virtues he claims for himself are partly of a negative nature; they are of that primitive kind the absence of which is apt to lead to the felon's dock or to social ostracism. His positive virtues concern only the ceremonial side of religion, and in this department his record is excellent. Not content with the fast on the Day of Atonement required by the Law, he was one of the specialists in piety who added the weekly Monday and Thursday Fast. In the matter of tithing, again going beyond the requirement of the Law, he added the tithing of garden vegetables. We know what Jesus thought of those ostentatious fasts that had no meaning behind them, of that mechanical tithing that sprang from no pity and no love. The Pharisee compared himself with others, especially with the tax-collector. Your Pharisee is always strong in comparisons, to his own advantage. If he was hopelessly at sea in his judgment of himself, he was still more incapable of judging others. He could not even see them as they were; much less could he take into account their heredity, their training, their environment, their temptations, their achievements. He did not even know that such things must be taken into account if our judgment is to be worth anything.

Many people find in contempt a seductive luxury; but it is not one of the Christian graces.

It is particularly out of place when the qualities on which one prides oneself happen to be moral virtues. If the Pharisee really is as much superior to the tax-collector as he thinks he is, is it not his business to raise him up to his own level? He may find the attempt illuminating. The Pharisee " took his stand," planted himself down; the tax-collector beat his breast. Evidently the Pharisee looked up to heaven. When our Lord looked up, he saw the heavens opened, when the Pharisee looked up, he saw nothing but the reflection of his own face. The taxcollector looked down: he knew that if he looked up, whether or not he would see God, God would see him; and he could not bear it. The Pharisee felt that the Temple of God was the fitting place for his prayer: the tax-collector stood afar off, afraid to defile by his presence the holy ground on which the pious Pharisee was praying. Our verdict is that the Pharisee is a thoroughly contemptible man with a thoroughly contemptible type of religion. However bad we are, at least we have not fallen as far as that; and we enjoy the story all the more because we have known people just like this Pharisee, people that one cannot help despising. When we have got thus far in our thoughts, perhaps in some moment of inspiration we begin to wonder whether we may not have prided ourselves too much on our Church-going and subscription-paying; whether we have not also our pet lists of virtues and vices, carefully selected in view of our own strong points; whether we really know as much about either ourselves or our neighbours as we think we do, and whether after all contempt is any more respectable when we feel it than when the Pharisee felt it. Pharisaism is a spirit; and there are few of us who do not fall victims to it in some shape or other. The tax-collector makes no reference to the Pharisee, apparently is hardly conscious of his presence. He has no thought of any other human being, save perhaps the men he has wronged. For the time being, his universe consists of God and his own sin. He makes no plea, offers no excuse: if God treats him as he is, if God in his mercy does not cancel his sin, he is undone.

There is no reason to doubt the truth of the account the two men give of themselves. The Pharisee was a respectable, faithful member of the Church, who paid all and more than all that was expected of him: the tax-collector was a rascal. But there was this difference between them. The Pharisee, being a legalist, had a petty moral standard; he had reached it and had no more worlds to conquer. He was facing in the wrong direction; and, unless God opened his eyes, his life would be a steady deterioration. The tax-collector, having some dim vision of the righteousness of God, knew that his life was wrong from the foundation. With even the elementary virtues still to acquire, he might yet become a good man. The whole environment in which he lived, the look he saw in all men’s eyes, helped the tax-collector to see himself as he was: the Pharisee was born blind.

21 - Chapter 21

CHAPTER XXI THE PRODIGAL SON

Luk 15:11-32.

WE gather then that citizenship in the Kingdom means not obedience to a code of laws, but living in a certain spirit; and that the first step towards the acquisition of that spirit is to realise our utter need of it. Jesus elaborates this in one of the longest of the parables, that commonly and not very happily styled ' The Prodigal Son." The young man in this parable is typical of a far wider class than the gaol-birds, drunkards and sensualists, with whom he is commonly identified. If we were asked for an analysis of the greatest disruptive force in society to-day, could we answer better than by saying that, in some shape or other, we are all, individuals, classes, nations and races, making the demand made by this youth: * Give me my share of the property." At this stage the favourite verb is ' give," in the imperative; the young man has no such

1 This section is an abridgement, made by permission of the publishers, from the authors article on " The Prodigal Son " in " The Speaker's Bible: the Gospel according to St. Luke." use for the verb " take." His favourite pronoun is that of the first person: ' Give me my share."

Material goods are the height of his ambition, property that may be turned into money and from money into pleasure. Having got what he wanted, the young man went abroad; and it is clear that his departure was his verdict on his home; life as he conceived it could not be lived in that atmosphere. The routine of his father's house meant work, discipline, and the Ten Commandments, all of which he felt to be unsuited to a man of his soaring temperament. Sometimes, for good as well as for evil, a new way of life requires a new stage. If Abraham is to become the Father of the Faithful, he must first leave his country and his kindred and his father's house. But the far country of the parable is one to reach which needs no travelling. We are all in the far country in so far as we are rebels in our Father's world, demanding that it shall minister to our wants, our pleasures or our glory, refusing to keep the terms on which alone we hold our inheritance as sons terms of work and duty and thoughtful consideration for others.

We must not assume that there was nothing to be said for the young man. The sound of music and dancing issuing from the house was sufficiently rare to attract attention and demand explanation; and the elder son told his father, if we can believe him, that no feast, on however moderate a scale, had been made for him. But that is a side-issue and Jesus goes on with the story. When he had gone through all his money with reckless prodigality, ' there was a terrible famine in that country, and he began to feel the pinch." The world was no longer a pleasure garden; the holiday was finished; getting a job as a swine-herd, hungry enough to eat the pigs' diet of carob-pods, he was at last compelled to face the realities of life.

Then the youth made an astonishing discovery; he ' came to himself," awaking as from a bad dream. He had supposed that he was the one sane member of his family, that life was a far bigger, freer, more joyous thing than his straitlaced father and sour-faced brother supposed it to be. After

some experience of life according to his own description, he felt like one awaking from a nightmare. He had fled from the dignified work of a son on his father's farm; he had to beg for the most loathsome work a Jew could be given to do, on the farm of a stranger and a foreigner. His father and his brother had shown far too much interest in his doings; in the far country no one took any interest in him, not even in his elementary bodily needs. Hunger and loneliness and shame had burned it into his mind that when he made the choice, he had made it blindfold, seeing neither of the alternatives in their true light; for, whatever course of life we decide to follow, we have to take it with all its consequences. It had seemed the choice lay between a dull routine of work and duty on the one hand, and on the other a vivacious sampling of the best that life has to give, a career of selfrealisation or self-expression as we call it to-day. But with the home life went affection and honour, self-respect and the sense that one was justifying one's existence; the undisciplined life, " having a good time " in the modern phrase, had as its sequel famine and the swine-trough. We are living in a moral world; we may disregard its laws, but they will find us out and compel us to reckon with them. It is a story of the eternal prodigal, of no race or language or age, because he is of all races and languages and ages, who leaves his home and goes abroad, lives in strange ways and finds what a fool he is; and his repentance means that he comes home. In the youth's first speech to his father, there is no note but that of demand (Mat 15:12); the speech he now rehearses is all confession and petition (Mat 15:18 f.). The word ' father ' in Mat 15:12 is but a name for one who was to him only a source of supplies; the same word in Mat 15:18 is wrung from him by the remembrance of the treasure of love he had flung away; he became a son indeed when he knew he had no longer the right to use the name. The test of the sincerity of his repentance is in Mat 15:19, " Treat me like one of your hired men." At the beginning of the story, his thought was all of his claims: what had life to give him? When he returned, humbled and with eyes opened, there was no more talk of his rights. ' Let me be a member of the home circle on any terms, even on condition of menial service; only let me be within the house." The work he had scorned as a duty he now begged as a boon; he had learned that service is the law of life. When more of us have learned this, the world will be a better place to live in. We live in perpetual strife or fear of strife because we are all fond of airing our grievances and claiming our dues, of saying: ' Give me my portion of the goods." We are not so insistent on men receiving from us our contribution of service.

We do not often hear of workmen returning part of their wages because they know they have not earned it, of merchants lying awake at night wondering if they are giving a fair equivalent for the profits they take, of professional men blushing as they charge fees whose only justification is the privileged position of those who charge them, of stockholders consulting the economists to discover just why they are entitled to make such large demands on the fruit of other men's toil. Would these experiences be quite so rare if the world had laid to heart the story of the prodigal? This father was of the noble army of runners.

There are those who run in their eagerness to do mischief; but there is a running of earnest purpose, like that of the ruler who came to ask Jesus the way of eternal life; and there is the running of affection which cannot wait to walk.

All through this part of the story there are signs of eager haste. The father interrupts his son's, penitential speech; he rejoices to see the repentant spirit; but who wants to hear apologies, especially from his child? His first word is "Quick"!' "Quick! Bring out the best robe." His hospitable

orders are short and sharp; the preparations have been completed, the household is feasting, and the musicians and dancers have been summoned and are plying their art before the elder son comes in from his work on the farm. Rags, shame, and hunger all forgotten, the petitioner for a hireling's place is welcomed with all the honour, and far more than the affection, given to a prince.

It is a simple story, perhaps drawn from the life, of a father welcoming home a wandering child; but it is more than that. It is the testimony of one who saw the truth of things as no one else has ever seen it, saw that, behind all that is, there is a great heart of love and goodness, One who waits with eager longing till his children have learned the spirit of the family and have taken their place as members of the home, asking no question but " What wilt thou have me to do? ' In words whose compelling beauty have moved the hearts of men throughout the ages as hardly any other words have done, our Lord assures us that the whole spiritual force of the universe thrills with joy as each potential son and daughter abandons the barren, selfcentred, loveless life; learns to say ' Father," and asks to be enrolled as a member of the family of those who do God's will.

We wrong ourselves if we allow this gospel to be restricted to thieves and drunkards; it is good news for all of us whose aim in life has been to make a series of as good bargains as we could for ourselves, and then have come to realize that God and our neighbour have claims on us, and that we justify our existence only as we live for the Family. There is joy in the presence of God's angels over a single sinner that repents. The son had been reconciled to the father; a more difficult problem remained, to reconcile brother to brother. Influenced by Luke's introduction to the chapter, expositors have assumed that, as the younger brother stands for the outcast, the elder brother represents the Pharisee, and have heaped on him ugly names. Certainly he is not presented in a lovable light, and it may be that he deserves many of the hard things that have been said of him. Yet if we are to find infinite significance in the father's reception of the prodigal, must we not take seriously the father's assurance to the elder son: ' Son, you are with me all the time, and all that is mine is yours "? It was not so that Jesus was wont to speak of the Pharisees. We are sometimes told that the elder son is the type of legalistic piety that reckons its services and expects its rewards. But there is no suggestion in the story that he had worked with his eye on the clock or expected recognition of his service, until he found his scapegrace brother so handsomely treated for no reason that he could see. Such men are industrious and upright, but for them religion has no redemptive mission. They believe that the idler and the scamp should be punished, not embraced, decked out and feasted. The limitations of forgiveness, even of the forgiveness of God, are apt to be forgotten, unless we contrast the new lot of the younger son, as Jesus implicitly contrasts it, with that of the elder. He comes back, indeed; but he does not begin again where he left off. The wearing of the best robe does not obliterate the fact that he came home in rags, nor does the fingerring of honour make him or others forget that he was once a swine-herd. Only after a long struggle, if ever, will he regain the esteem and self-esteem that he has lost. But the elder son's inheritance, material and spiritual, is intact.

' We had to make merry and be glad. Your brother has lost all else, but he has saved his life." Here surely, as much as anywhere, we vividly realize the contrast between the two ideals of life as they seemed to Jesus. To accept the Father-will that rules the world, to be a member of the household of love and service, though we creep in shame-faced, famine-stricken and naked, is life from the dead.

Each son was now doing the father's will, but that gave them no common bond. The ill-will, so far as the story goes, was all on the side of the elder brother. He thought the prodigal should be treated as he deserved; he would not call him brother, but " this, thy son." Is not this, also, a diagnosis of the unrest of our time? Our grievances, we feel sure, are wellfounded; we want our superiority to be recognized; we ask for simple justice; and we forget that in the course of justice, none of us would see salvation. If the strife of sects and classes and nations is ever to be stilled, we must find some motive power strong enough to produce mutual regard and mutual service. We know of none save that which our Lord teaches in this parable. We are all children of one common Father; we have to learn to feel towards each other as brothers and as sisters, to stretch out towards each other a forgiving, helping hand; so shall we all be members of the great family of God.

22 - Chapter 22

CHAPTER XXII THE TWO DEBTORS

Luk 7:36-50. IN the Pharisee and the Tax-collector Jesus taught that complacency with ourselves excludes us from citizenship in the Kingdom, especially a complacency based on the fulfilment of certain legal requirements on which we ourselves happen to have placed the emphasis: the citizen of the Kingdom does not keep laws; he shows a certain spirit. In the Prodigal Son we have learned something of what that spirit is; to qualify for citizenship one must abandon the self-centred life in which one seeks one's own happiness and fights for one's own interests; the citizen sees the world as his Father's world, makes it his home, lives as a son and a brother and asks only that he may serve the common good. In the Prodigal Son Jesus told of the joy in heaven over one sinner that returns from the far country of estrangement from God; in the Two Debtors he shows us the other side of the picture, the overwhelming sense of indebtedness of the man or woman whose past record of selfishness and wilfulness is cancelled and forgotten. This is one of the parables that help us to realize how much we have lost in being deprived of the historical context of so many of the parables. By itself the story of the Two Debtors would have been intelligible, beautiful, powerful; but with the background of the dinner in Simon's house, when we know who the two debtors were and the conduct that called forth the parable, the abstract becomes the concrete and the figures take on flesh and blood.

Simon was one of those in the parables who spoke ' within themselves." Others were the Rich Fool, the Pharisee at Prayer, and the Unjust Steward. Perhaps if they had given others the benefit of their thoughts, it would have helped them to see their folly. Jesus as usual read the man's unspoken thought. ' Whatever else this Jesus is, he is no prophet, as so many call him; a prophet is one who can see beneath the surface; evidently Jesus does not realize that this woman, who is coming into such close contact with him, is an ' untouchable.'

Jesus says to Simon in effect: You have been speaking to yourself; let me now say something to you." That something was a comparison between Simon and the outcast.

One can imagine the surprise with which Simon heard himself placed in the same category as the woman of the city, the greater surprise with which he learned that the comparison was all to his disadvantage. The apostles at Thessalonica were accused of turning the world upside-down; their Master before them had delighted to make the first last and the last first. With an outspoken courage which we do not always appreciate, Jesus reminded Simon that he had neglected those hospitable and kindly customs with which an honoured guest was received; the obvious inference was that Simon had invited him simply out of curiosity. Satisfied with himself, the message of Jesus brought to him no thrill, no welcome answer to any of life's questions, no fulfilment of any longing. The duties which Simon had neglected, the despised woman from the city had discharged, not with water from the well but with her tears, not with a towel brought by a servant but with her hair, not with the routine of the well-trained domestic but with loving gratitude. ' The Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, can separate soul and spirit and penetrate

between joints and marrow.” So could the living Word; Jesus read Simon’s unspoken thought and invited him to turn his criticism on himself; yet he answers Simon’s unspoken gibe only indirectly.

It was just because he was a prophet that he allowed, nay encouraged, this woman to touch him. Love must be allowed to express itself, and wherever there is forgiveness there is love.

There has been much unprofitable discussion about the precise relation of love and forgiveness. Hope, forgiveness, penitence, love; what does it matter, except to the theologians, which comes first or whether they all come together, whether the woman loved much because she was forgiven, or was forgiven because she loved much. Where there is forgiveness, there is love; and where there is love,; such as this woman had, there is forgiveness.!’

Simon thought that what had to be explained was Jesus’ willingness to let the woman touch him. “ No,” said Jesus; ’ what has to be explained is the woman’s love, and incidentally your want of love.” Jesus does not say: ’ He who has little need of forgiveness loves little, but he who is forgiven little loves little.” The parable is of the simplest kind, hardly more than a simile; yet it lights up the whole subject of forgiveness. Most of us would confess that in this matter we are in the position of Simon rather than of the woman. We can see how thieves and other criminals, if they repent, may feel surprised that God is willing to receive them; in their case emotional gratitude is pardonable and commendable. But the case is different with respectable people like Simon and ourselves, whose sins are just the ordinary, every-day sins that everybody takes for granted and nobody worries about. In Church we pray, often at considerable speed, for mercy on us miserable offenders; we mechanically wait for the absolution, pass on to the rest of the service, and return to our work, our social life, and our miserable offences, with no feeling farther from our minds than gratitude for forgiveness. There is no point at which we are more out of touch with the spirit of the New Testament, indeed of the Bible, than in the absence from our minds of an overmastering consciousness of sin, of the need of forgiveness, of wonder and gratitude at God’s readiness to forgive. We divide sins into little and big; our own sins are the little ones. In some externals we do not correspond to the Pharisee of our Lord’s time; but in the great central fact of our complacency with ourselves, of our utter unconsciousness that there is anything seriously amiss with us, most of us might have sat for the picture. It has taken a World War to bring home to us with terrible power the deathdealing cruelty and heinousness of what we used to regard as trivial faults or even virtues in our national life. Perhaps it will take a similar upheaval at home to show us the true nature of our individual outlook, especially of the Prodigal’s view of the world as a place in which our business is to “ get on “ and enjoy ourselves.

It was no accident that when our Lord showed us a Pharisee at prayer, he put a publican in the background. It was the Pharisee’s thought and treatment of the publican and the Gentile that showed what Pharisaism meant; and if we would see what we are, it is not enough to look inside; we must look at our neighbours, our neighbours of all kinds and classes, and ask how far our selfishness, our indifference, our contempt are responsible for making them what they are.

23 - Chapter 23

CHAPTER XXIII THE UNFORGIVING CREDITOR

Mat 18:23-35.

ATTENTION has been called to the large figure mentioned for the first debt. Ten thousand talents was, we are told, considerably more than ten times the combined annual tribute paid to the Imperial treasury by Judaea, Samaria, Idumaea, Galilee and Peraea. The second man's debt was a mere twenty pounds. But this is no reckless use of figures; again there is the implied " as if: ' ' It is as if a king had a servant who owed an impossibly large sum, which servant in turn was creditor to another for a trifle."

There are other illustrations of Jesus' parable method here. He speaks of the King changing his mind, meaning of course that his forgiveness was conditional. Also, in the previous parables, he has spoken as if forgiveness followed automatically on prayer. The fear of misunderstanding never turned Jesus aside from the point he was making at the time; for each parable its own lesson. Now there is further teaching to be given on this subject. Forgiveness is not something that can be handed over like a coin; a violin is a useless gift to one who has no ear for music; forgiveness is for those who are qualified to receive it; forgiveness is for the forgiving. The other servants rose in a body against the outrageous conduct of the forgiven debtor; we all call him an impossible person, unless he happens to be ourselves. The argument is not that of a quid fro quo, God's forgiveness of us in exchange for our forgiveness of each other.

Jesus asks his hearers to consider the nature of forgiveness; it is not a legal act but a moral and spiritual process. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy; but not as the result of a bargain, God's grace is ever flowing full and free like a river; it will enter every heart unless there is an obstacle: hardness and hatred towards a brother form such a barrier. This parable also is placed in its historical context. Peter wants to know how soon he can with decency leave off forgiving a brother.

Jesus replies that the extent to which we show the forgiving spirit is the extent to which alone God can forgive us. Forgiveness would mean nothing to the unforgiving. The past life is wiped out only when the new life begins. The first debtor offers no excuses. He promises to pay; but in his heart of hearts he knows that a life-time of service will not redeem a fraction of the debt. We too think of our excuses: our inherited temptations, our want of wise counsellors, our seductive environment. But the tax-collector's prayer was a manly prayer: one reason why he went home forgiven was that he did not plead his temptations, he begged forgiveness for his sins. Our Lord wants his hearers to reflect, not only on the scarlet of our sins against God, but on the trivial nature of the wrongs that others do to us. There are indeed times when we can understand, even if we do not sympathize with, the agonized prayer of the oppressed that the little ones of the oppressor may be dashed against a rock. But most of the injuries done to us are not of that tragic kind. If they loom large in our sight, it is only because our pride and our self-love have swollen them out of all recognition. A

bigger man would hardly notice them, and would forget them the next day. Even if the wounds are deep, and not just flesh-wounds magnified into mortal injuries, our Lord asks us to restore sanity to our judgment by reckoning up the countless ways in which we have thwarted God's plans for ourselves and others, and still prayed for forgiveness.

It is the king who sets the example of exalting mercy above justice. The first debtor received mercy; he gave only justice. When the king cancelled his servant's debt, he paid a great price for his debtor's freedom. Even for a king to cancel a debt with a stroke of the pen means that he bears the loss himself. Jesus hints here, as he does in the Prodigal Son, at the suffering our sin imposes upon God; not the resentment of wounded pride as in heathen mythology, but the pain of a Father at the indifference shown to him, the insults heaped upon him, by the waywardness of a loved child. The first debtor begged for mercy and received it, far beyond his wildest dreams. Dr. Dods raises the question: What of the very common case where he who has wronged me does not seek, or appear to want, forgiveness? We ask ourselves: ' Have we given our brother any reason to think that an attempt at reconciliation will meet with a friendly reception? Do we hug our wrath, cherish our resentment and parade it? If our wrongs are indeed anything more than wounded vanity, is our suffering altogether self-pity; or have we room in our hearts for unselfish disappointment that one whom we had looked on as a brother could be capable of conduct so unbrotherly? ' Few men like tendering apologies and most decent men dislike having apologies tendered to them; while there is a widespread and not unhealthy antipathy to ' scenes," even scenes of reconciliation; but there are unostentatious and unofficial ways of smoothing the path to a restoration of friendly relations that may be more efficacious than more elaborate methods. In the Sermon on the Mount it is not on the oppressor but on his victim that Jesus throws the onus of breaking down barriers of hatred.

God, myself, my neighbour; in the teaching of Jesus these are indissolubly bound together. To the extent to which I shut my neighbour out from myself, to that extent by inexorable law I shut myself out from God. It is not that God will not, but that God cannot, forgive the unforgiving.

24 - Chapter 24

CHAPTER XXIV THE TOWER AND THE THREATENED KING

Luk 14:28-35.

WE have seen, then, that the citizen of the Kingdom must turn his back on the kind of life that most men live by preference; either abandon, or at least give a secondary place to, life's ordinary aims and ambitions; and live a new life in a new spirit. Is he to begin this new life by a conscious resolution and after deliberate calculation? Jesus loved people who lived their lives in a spirit of daring adventure, with a reckless disregard of the cost, men who counted the world well lost if only they could win the hidden treasure or the most precious of all pearls. But there is a time to be reckless and there is a time to be deliberate; and the time to be deliberate is before one sets out at all on this career of Christian recklessness.

Matthew concludes the Sermon on the Mount with the similes of the two houses; the house built on rock and the house built on the sand.

Only the house on the rock foundation can stand the strain and stress of life, and the rock is obedience to the teaching of Jesus. In the Tower the point is that the solidest foundation is not enough. A man who proposes to build, especially if the building is to be a place of refuge in time of need, will first sit down and make certain calculations. If he finds he has money for the foundation but not for the building, he will not begin. If he lays down the foundation and then has to stop, he will become the laughing-stock of the neighbourhood. Similarly if a king finds that his enemy's forces outnumber his by two to one, he will probably find it wiser to make a treaty than to fight.

We know from other parables that Jesus knew and feared the danger of a short-lived enthusiasm, To these two parables Luke appends the moral, ascribed to Jesus, that the citizen of the Kingdom must be ready for the most heart-rending sacrifices; and that, no doubt, is part of the meaning. On the allegorical method of interpretation, the two parables would mean that, if we do not feel strong enough to go through with the stern life of hardship to which Jesus calls us, it is better not to begin. But surely Jesus did not teach that. Rather in both parables he is warning his followers that discipleship is a costly business.

If we enter on it light-heartedly, the disillusionment, when it comes, will take us at a serious disadvantage. If we have faith in God, ' the strain will bring the strength," but let us face open-eyed the certainty that the strain will come. In the Temptation our Lord exemplified these parables. He frankly faced the forces arrayed against him in his mission and met them in the strength that God supplied.

25 - Chapter 25

CHAPTER XXV THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

Luk 16:19-31.

LUKE places this parable in the near neighbourhood of the Prodigal Son, and there are one or two curious points of comparison between the stories. The word used in Luk 16:19 for the daily enjoyment of Dives (euphrainomenos] occurs three times in the Prodigal Son in connection with the banquet prepared for the reception of the prodigal. Dives' enjoyment was selfish and splendid feeding; the banquet of Luk 15:1-32 was a social expression of the loftiest kind of joy. In Hades Dives was anxious lest his brothers should share his awful fate; the elder brother felt no anxiety for his brother when he was absent, no joy when he returned. Lazarus longed for the crumbs from Dives' table as the prodigal fed on the swine's carob pods. As the story of the Syrophenician and the feeding of the five thousand remind us, our Lord's interest in the fragments was characteristic. One's sensitiveness to the waste of food in a world where millions go hungry may not be a decisive test of character; it is one test. Our Lord was vividly conscious of the moral effects of hunger and repletion. During the war, it was one of the great fears of statesmen that their nation might go hungry; hungry men are apt to develop a new code of morals, to do things and endure humiliations which in their days of plenty they would have scorned.

It was not altogether sympathy with the poor but, in part at least, fear of hungry men, that instituted what we contemptuously call the " dole." The guests who, when invited to the Great Feast, began to make excuses were all well-fed men; the hungry outcasts needed no second invitation. The prodigal had no thought of returning home till he knew the pangs of hunger. If Dives had ever known what it was to wonder where his next meal was to come from, he would not have been so unconscious of the existence of Lazarus. It was the fear of hunger and his unwillingness to face it that led the Squandering Steward to become a cheat. One of our Lord's own temptations received its force from his hunger. This parable was formerly something of a puzzle. It is the only parable in which one of the actors is given a name; it is the only parable that draws a picture of the other world (unless we call the Judgment scene in Mat 25:1-46 a parable); and it employs Jewish imagery to an unusual extent. It is now 1 believed that Jesus

1 Since the publication of Gressmann's Monograph " Vom reichem Mann und armen Lazarus" (1918); see Easton, " Gospel according to St. Luke," adloc. based the first part of the parable on a familiar story (originating in Egypt) about the future reversal of human destiny, told by a seer who had been granted a visit to the other world. The theory is that Jesus disapproved of such stories, which only gratify idle curiosity, and so added the appendix.

There is no parable which more urgently requires to be read 'with the mind also." It is generally recognized that it is not a guide to the manners and customs of life beyond the grave. No one imagines that it teaches that all rich people go to hell and all poor people to heaven. Nor is the main point that the inequalities of this life are redressed in the next, though something like that

may be suggested. We call the story the parable of Dives and Lazarus; but the fact is that Lazarus plays practically no part in the tale except as a foil to Dives. The interest of the story centres in the life and fate of the Rich Man. In the preceding parables we have seen that the relation of the citizen to the King is bound up in the most intimate way with his relation to other men. One aspect of this relation is that it is unneighbourly for a prosperous man to ignore the needs of one with whom he is brought in contact, and that, whether he is conscious of the contact or not. In the scene at the Last Judgment (Mat 25:1-6) those on the left hand were quite unconscious of having neglected their Lord in his hour of need. When it was pointed out to them that their real transgression was their neglect of the King's brethren in their hour of need, doubtless they were still unconscious of this neglect. They had never deliberately refused an opportunity of service.

They did not know that such opportunities had been put before them. In the parables thoughtlessness or carelessness is one of the major sins. Some thorns have got in among the wheat; we hardly notice them, but in the end there is no crop. Some bridesmaids, preparing for the wedding, have omitted the precaution of taking spare oil for their torches, in case of unexpected delay. They find the door of the festal chamber shut in their faces. Dives has often noticed Lazarus at his gate. It has never occurred to him that he has any relation to Lazarus. There is no suggestion that he was cruel or insulting to Lazarus, that he exploited him in any way, or took any unfair advantage of his poverty. He simply regarded Lazarus as a phenomenon outside the sphere of his existence. Yet they needed each other, the over-flow of Dives' table would have made all the difference to Lazarus; it was only after his death that Dives discovered that Lazarus might be of use to him. Our Lord claimed to fulfil the prophecy of One who was to proclaim recovery of sight to the blind. Partly by the spread of the Christian outlook, partly by forcible surgery on the part of those we sought to ignore, we are learning to see. In our own country the Lazaruses we used to keep outside the door are no longer content to feed on the crumbs that fall from the tables of the rich. They have learned that if they knock, if they knock hard enough and persistently enough and threateningly enough, the door will gradually open and admit them to some share in the daily banquet. In connection with other countries, there is still much blindness and much myopia. There are still men, and plenty of them, who think of India as the brightest jewel in the Imperial crown, of China as a possible market for our trade, of Africa as a continent whose people may be induced to drink our rum. The prodigal put a physical gulf between himself and his home; the Pharisee saw a moral gulf between himself and the tax-collector; in Dives' eyes there was a social gulf between himself and Lazarus. In each of the three cases the man who thought he was on the right side of the gulf was on the wrong side. Jesus is the bridge-builder; the people on both sides have each something to give the other. When Dives opens his eyes and sees Lazarus, whether he is of his own country or some other, he will find he is not just a beggar; find that he has a story to tell which is often pathetic but always full of interest. As his sympathies are drawn out, he will find that life has other and richer joys than wearing fine linen or its modern counterpart, and turning each meal into a banquet. The form of our temptation varies; the temptation itself remains. As in the Rich Fool, Death is presented as the great Revealer. Death taught Dives what life might have taught him had he opened his ears to hear. His punishment was that he had to abide by his own decision; what he had written, he had written. He had put Lazarus to such an immense distance from himself that when he needed him, there was no point of contact. Lazarus is one of those characters in the parables whose silence is eloquent. The father pleads with the elder son to give a gracious reception to the prodigal; the prodigal puts in no plea for himself. The Pharisee tells

God what he thinks of the tax-collector; the taxcollector seems unconscious of the Pharisee's presence. The Rich Fool expounds his plans for excluding his servants and his neighbours from any share of his prosperity; his servants and his neighbours do not appear in the story at all. The eleventh hour labourers made no claim for themselves. From beginning to end of this parable, Lazarus utters not one word.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. In the concluding part of the parable there are two striking sayings. Abraham refuses to send Lazarus to warn Dives' brothers on the ground that " they have Moses and the prophets."

There were many in Jesus' day, as there are many in our day, who did not regard Moses and the prophets as primarily teachers of social righteousness. Again, Abraham told Dives that if his brothers did not learn considerate treatment of the poor from the Old Testament, neither would they learn it though one rose from the dead. The seemingly miraculous has an extraordinary power of stirring interest and raising a momentary enthusiasm; but it is in the Bible that the Word of God is found. They who do not find God there, will not find him anywhere.

26 - Chapter 26

CHAPTER XXVI THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luk 10:25-37, THE question has been raised: Are the riches and poverty of Dives and Lazarus literal or metaphorical? Was Dives just a rich man, or does he represent the middle and upper class Jews “ rich in possession of Moses and the prophets if not in material goods “? Is Lazarus just a poor man, or does he typify the taxgatherers, “just on the threshold of the Jewish Church, yet always outside “? 2

Certainly the Prodigal Son is not intended to teach that the self-centred life always leads to literal starvation; very often it has the opposite result. Nor does anyone imagine that the teaching of the Unjust Steward or the Talents is primarily concerned with money, though both stories centre round the use of money. Yet the Rich Fool is obviously a warning against a wrong attitude to material wealth; and our Lord spoke so much on this subject that there is no reason for regarding the wealth of Dives

1 This parable is treated at much greater length in the last chapter of the author’s “ Jesus and Life “ (Jas. Clarke and Co.).

2 “ Abingdon Bible Commentary,” p. 1030. and the poverty of Lazarus as symbolic. The Good Samaritan enlarges the range of the teaching about the duty of a citizen of the Kingdom to a neighbour. When our neighbour needs our help, not only our pecuniary assistance but our help in any way, it is our business to render that help, asking no questions.

We do not know, it is part of the meaning of the story that we should not inquire as the Samaritan did not inquire, whether the wounded traveller was rich or poor, educated or uneducated, Jew, Gentile or Samaritan; we do not even know whether he was a bad man or a good man. All that the Samaritan saw was that he was a man in need of help. Paul taught that we should do good to all men, especially to those who belong to the home circle of the Faith. Perhaps we have given too much prominence to this limiting ’ especially.” The Prodigal was still a son and a brother even when he was in the far country, with no filial or brotherly thoughts. The priest was going down the road ’ by chance.” Apparently, then, we have to revise our conception of ’ chance.” Chance is our ignorance of God’s arrangement of our lives. The traveller did not know that the priest would come, and the priest did not know that he would see the half-dead traveller. But God knew; God was giving the traveller a chance of help, was giving the priest an opportunity of doing a noble act. Of all the people who came into contact with the traveller that day, the robbers alone sought contact with him. The priest, the Levite and the Samaritan met him in the ordinary course of their work; he was brought to the innkeeper; but the robbers were on the look-out for him or such as he. The Samaritan lived the guided life, accepting such opportunities as God put in his way; but the robbers guided their own lives. They knew what they wanted, and knew how to get it; for the robbers represent the commercial spirit, the spirit which sees in a neighbour only an opportunity for making money. So far as we know, these robbers would have preferred to make money

honestly, if they could have made it as easily; in any case assault and murder were only among the accidents of their profession, not its aim. The interest that the commercial spirit takes in us may be limited in its range, but it is astonishingly active. With what obsequiousness are we received, how important are we made to feel, how wise are our most foolish remarks found to be, how readily are our lightest wishes obeyed, when people are trying to persuade us to buy something from them. In our more cynical moods we think of the art of salesmanship as the art of persuading people to buy things they do not want and do not need and cannot afford.

One often thinks of the men engaged in producing the lowest type of newspapers, and especially of those who prepare their news-bills, how the grief, the anxiety, the shame of fellow-citizens mean nothing to them but the possibility of an extra circulation. At its best the commercial spirit, as our wiser merchants have found, may be hardly distinguishable from a genuine desire for service. At its worst, it is pure greed, which, as in the case of the drink-sellers, pursues its aim indefatigably, remorselessly, undeterred by any thought of the consequences in ruined homes and wasted lives, unhampered by any pity or any moral scruple, allowing no consideration to turn them for a moment from man's chief end, the making of money out of one's neighbours. When the robbers had got the traveller's money, and incidentally had nearly killed him, though that was only a by-product of their activities, ' off they went," just as, when the farmer's enemy had sown darnel among the wheat crop, " off he went." They had got what they wanted; in the true commercial spirit, they recognized no further relation to their victim.

They had created a problem; anyone who cared might take a hand at solving it; they were no longer interested. As it happened, the first men who got the opportunity to undo some of their work did not take it. Characteristically our Lord makes no excuse for the priest and the Levite. They were entitled to feel a just resentment at the traveller for being alone with moneybags on such a dangerous road. He must have been a suspicious fellow who would not trust a companion, or a secretive person who did not wa,nt anyone to know he had money, or a reckless person who took foolish risks. Why should they have to risk their lives because he had chosen to be a fool? Doubtless also there was fear of defilement in case he was dead or dying. If we are to help only those who are in no way to blame for their misfortunes, then the work of Christian charity will be immensely simplified.

There was much to be said for the priest and the Levite, but Jesus does not say it. Was there justification for singling out the Churchmen of the time for this unenviable distinction? When the stress is put on the ritual and ceremonial side of religion, the moral side is apt to be obscured. One supreme example of this is popular Hinduism, in which the priesthood is a synonym for infinite cruelty and greed. The priests played a large part, perhaps the largest part, in bringing our Lord to his death. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews found in Jewish ceremonial, especially the ritual of the Day of Atonement, symbols of eternal realities in the unseen world. But the Levitical priesthood had no counterpart in his scheme. Jesus was a priest, not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedec, the priest of an eternal order, who was a priest in his own right, whose appointment depended on nothing in his lineage, nothing extrinsic. In accordance with the best traditions of the Jewish prophets, Jesus throws all the stress on the moral. For him the Temple was a place of prayer, and that not for the Jew only but for all nations; the synagogue was a place not only for worship but for a healing ministry; the whole distinction of clean and unclean, whether as applied to people or to things, he swept away; sacrifice he hardly mentioned, and

never practised; for him the Sabbath was not a burden imposed by lawyers but a gift of God; fasting, if practised at all, was a secret self-discipline; and tithing found its truest expression in the Templeoffering of the widow whose penny that she gave was her last penny. The robbers saw in the traveller a source of gain; for them he had no other interest. The priest and the Levite recognized no relation at all to the traveller; he was outside their orbit; they passed on. The Samaritan saw in the traveller a man who needed his help. As Jesus taught that our forgiveness of those who wrong us must know no limits, the Samaritan's creed was that the help to be given to a neighbour in need must know no limits. If we ask what he did for the traveller, the answer is that he did everything that the occasion called for. He gave his time; and we can see that he was a busy man with urgent work on hand; he gave his skill and material resources, the ' first aid ' of the time; he risked his life, for he also must have been a tempting bait for the robbers; he took trouble, mounting the traveller on his own horse or ass; he gave his money, but not recklessly, all that was needed and no more; he saw the job through, never resting till the traveller was in safe and competent hands; he exercised both thought and fore-thought, and even when the traveller was safe in the inn, he continued to accept responsibility, promising to look in on his return journey. With most of us our goodness is " goodness limited; ' here is goodness unlimited, goodness that knows no rest till there is nothing more to be done. The Lord loveth a cheerful giver; the Samaritan was of the noble company of those to be helped by whom is not a humiliation but a joy.

We are often struck by the way in which in our day benevolence has been taken out of the hands of the private individual and entrusted to public bodies, especially to the State. In the complicated life of modern times, the process is inevitable; but is it not destructive of an important Christian grace? The answer we find in this parable. The officials of the time, the priest and the Levite, noticed the wounded traveller; they saw him with their eyes, they did not see him with their hearts. They found in him no call for service; it was the private individual, the despised Samaritan, who realized that here was a piece of work waiting to be done. The Samaritan gave temporary assistance, arranged for the care of the traveller and supplied the funds. Beyond that he could not go; there was a work of nursing to be done for which he had not the time, nor presumably the skill. But the innkeeper was there for the purpose of attending to travellers, sick or well; he had the time, the skill and the apparatus, only he had to be paid for it. Even in the modern State there is abundance of work for the Christian philanthropist; it is for him to find the needy men who require help, to give direction to the work of assistance, to supervise it and, in a measure, to finance it; above all, to ensure that the task of the professionals from beginning to end is carried out in a Christian spirit. The criticism has been made that Christian charity as represented in the Gospels is conceived chiefly as ambulance work, that the follower of Jesus is taught to be more interested in the hospital than in the school, more concerned for wounded travellers than for those who are going about their business; that his relation to men is conceived to arise only when these are famine-stricken or in gaol. That the criticism is superficial is evinced by this, that it is least of all applicable in those regions which are most permeated by the Christian spirit. Our Lord always put the emphasis where, at the time, it most needed to be put; on the pitifully restricted outlook of some priests, for example, or the genuine goodness of some Samaritans. The plight into which multitudes in his day had actually fallen gave them the first claim for help. But what he was inculcating was a new attitude to one's neighbour, a new conception of who our neighbour is. When this new conception of and new attitude to our neighbour have been learned, it will be as a seed that takes root and becomes a great tree with branches spreading in all directions. The

Samaritan will recognize the traveller as his neighbour before he has been attacked by robbers and left half-dead. He will have something to say to the robbers, whose need, it may turn out, is much greater than that of the traveller. He will have a message for the priest and the Levite whose plight, it may be, in God's sight is the most deplorable of all. In all the story the name of God is not mentioned, nor is there any hint of the source of the Samaritan's goodness; but Luke follows the parable with the story of Martha and Mary.

Martha too was a Good Samaritan; but the best of Good Samaritans need to have their goodness replenished at the fountain. When the Master speaks, they must needs listen.

27 - Chapter 27

CHAPTER XXVII THE RICH FOOL

Luk 12:16-21.

DIVES and Lazarus taught us that a citizen of the Kingdom cannot see a neighbour starve while he himself has plenty; from the Good Samaritan we learned that every needy person whom we encounter, or whom we ought to encounter, is a call for help that extends far beyond the region of finance. The Rich Fool is more fundamental still, and invites us to consider the relation between a man and his possessions. A number of the parables are concerned with dilemmas and their solution. In the Darnel among the Wheat, the farmer's men wondered whether they could uproot the darnel without hurting the wheat. The Midnight Petitioner was at a loss how to provide a meal for his unexpected guest; the Importunate Widow how to get justice against her oppressor. The gardener's problem was to get another chance for his Unfruitful Fig-tree. The Unjust Steward had to consider ways and means of getting a livelihood when he lost his appointment. The Rich Landlord's Dilemma was of a different kind. His trouble was an embarrassment of riches, a problem with which the scientific progress of our day has made us painfully familiar. Our fields bring forth so plentifully that some of our farmers find it profitable to use their grain as fuel. Our mills and factories bring forth so plentifully that we cannot sell our product; so we dismiss our workmen and leave them to starve or to be supported by the State. As in our own case, the rich landlord's problem was one not of production but of distribution, how to dispose of his bumper harvest. This landlord was a man with definite ideals.

Like the heroes of other parables, he held a consultation with himself, with the result that we have come to expect. One point on which he was quite clear was that the only person who was to benefit from his fine harvest was himself.

Joseph stored up the surplus of the good years to feed the people of his own country and other countries in later years. This man stored up the surplus of the good year to feed himself in later years. The first result of his prosperity was a work of destruction. The barns that had served his father, and served himself in simpler days, had to come down. Business men have sometimes to " scrap " their machinery and tools, their buildings and means of transport, as a sacrifice to the more efficient methods of a new age; but this farmer had no new methods in view. The new barns that were to replace the old were no better than their predecessors, only bigger; for this man was a believer in SIZE; he would be at home among those in our age who believe that an increase in size is a sign of progress and well-being. This farmer had other ideals even more modern. He wanted to insure his future.

' Faith in God ' ' he seems to say ' is all very well; but a well-filled barn, a large holding in gilt-edged securities, is much better." He was of those who regard work as a disagreeable necessity. He will retire at the first possible moment; not to devote himself to the pursuit of knowledge, the cultivation of those sides of his nature which the farmer is apt to neglect, or to the public welfare in any shape

or form.

He wants good meals and plenty of time to eat them, and to “have a good time.”

Throughout he proceeds on the assumption that his surplus crops are his to dispose of as he wills. He would have been helpless without his farm-labourers, the men from whom he bought and to whom he sold, the men who made his tools, the officials who guarded his property, the men who taught him his trade and ten thousand others. The law said the surplus was his and for him that was final. In the end he became generous in spite of himself; the contents of his over-flowing barns went to feed the others he had forgotten. In the rich fool’s philosophy, the centre of the universe is himself and the central reality of himself is his body. When his body is provided for, no other provision is necessary.

He had insured against every contingency in life save one, the only one that would certainly happen. He had used the goodness of God to try to dispense with God. “ Suddenly,” says Jesus, ’ God entered his life.” There are people who tell us that they are not religious, and who seem to think that their decision to dispense with God has settled some question. But the man who steps over a cliff will be killed whether he believes in the law of gravity or not; and God will have something to say to us whether we have anything to say to God or not.

We may be sure that Jesus was not using the thought of death to frighten people into a sensible way of life. As in Dives and Lazarus, Death is here the great Revealer, the Remembrancer that leads the blind to discover truths which those who have eyes can see without waiting for death. The seeing know that their big barns are no part of themselves; only when death came did the rich landlord find it out.

It needs an effort beyond that of which most of us are capable to see a man apart from the house he lives in, the money he possesses, the clothes he wears, the office he fills, the social station he occupies. How many of us would frankly confess that we cannot look on a millionaire who has lost all his money with quite the same eyes with which we regard him in the hey-day of his prosperity? A man and his possessions have a curious way of becoming almost inextricably intertwined. If this is true in our thought of other men, it is hardly less true in our thought of ourselves. The rich man did not discover, till death brought it home to him, that one’s real self is the part of one that abides, that death itself cannot destroy. The parable was given to teach us to distinguish between what we have and what we are, to show us where our anxieties and our preparations for the future should chiefly centre, to help us to concentrate on the abiding reality of the self whose needs can be met only by the abiding reality of God. This is one of the parables given in a suggestive historical context. A man wanted Jesus to interfere in a case of a disputed inheritance.

Jesus apparently made no inquiry into the justice or injustice of the man’s case; he made no suggestion that injustice should always be patiently borne. But he knew the family feuds, the heart-burnings, the hatred and malice that are so often engendered by such disputes. He recognized that the mainspring of these ugly things is the desire to increase our material possessions. It seemed therefore appropriate to tell the story of the man who did not discover till he was about to die that his wealth was one of the accidents of his life, that he could not take it with him into another world, and that in the meantime he was neglecting the cultivation of his real self.

Jesus speaks of wealth always in one of three ways. It is a burden to be got rid of, a temptation to be avoided, or a source of help for the poor. As a means of enriching the life of him who owns it, he never once speaks of it. This is one of the subjects on which it is easy to say pious things that mean nothing. Life is infinitely richer, in some respects, than it was nineteen hundred years ago. The world is full of sources of enjoyment, most of which cost money, not all of which are degrading, and some of which are ennobling. If our wealth is no part of us, this is equally true of our poverty.

Yet there is no reason to think that, if our Lord were living under modern conditions, his teaching on wealth would be greatly different from what it was. Many of the forms of wealth which provide life with most real enrichment have become public property and are within the reach of all: our parks, our art galleries and museums, and our libraries. Other sources of refined enjoyment may be, and doubtless will be, treated in the same way. In the case of music, the process has already more than begun. Apart from these it is quite certain that the enjoyment most men get from the wealth they acquire, even when it is only moderate in amount, inadequately repays the toil, the anxiety and often the. lack of moral scruple that have gone to the gathering and preserving of it. The amount of money spent by the rich on foolish display or costly social rivalry, and by the poor on luxuries which have no effect or a deleterious effect on the standard of their lives, is a forceful reminder that the world has not grown beyond the need for the teaching of the Rich Fool. The many-sidedness of his teaching is illustrated by the words of Jesus which in Luke succeed this parable as its moral, the words concerning excessive anxiety about food and clothing. In Matthew (Mat 6:25-33) they are a warning to the poor, in Luke a warning to the rich: both warnings are needed. Great wealth and great poverty, the former more than the latter, have an all but compelling power to make material interests supreme in our lives. Within these two extremes the wise man is he who realizes that a man’s life is more than his food, his body more than its raiment, that he is more than what he owns the man who is the master and not the servant of his material surroundings.

28 - Chapter 28

CHAPTER XXVIII THE TALENTS AND THE POUNDS Mat 25:14-30Luk 19:12-27. THE citizen of the Kingdom, then, carefully distinguishes between himself and his possessions; even his possessions are by no means his absolute property; when occasion calls they are to be placed freely at the disposal of those who need them. In the Talents Jesus becomes more inward still; not only our external and material possessions but even our internal wealth, our wealth that is part of us, is given to us only in trust; we are not owners but stewards; as Paul would say (1Co 12:1-31) it is to be thrown into the common stock for the common good.

We ask first what experience or what train of thought led Jesus to this parable. He must have been impressed with the amount of talent, some of it of a high order, that in his own country and his own age was lying unused. Had they never come into contact with Jesus, the men in the innermost circle of the disciples to the end of their lives would have seemed to themselves as to others commonplace fishermen, taxgathers, tradesmen or minor politicians. Yet they had within them, only wanting the magic touch to stimulate it into rapid growth, the germ of eloquence, of invincible courage, of organizing ability, of spiritual insight and power and capacity for sacrifice. Such people were not to blame for their failure to cultivate their talents; neither themselves nor their neighbours knew that they possessed them. In other cases failure to use talents was due to physical disability or social prejudice. Bartimaeus had more insight than most men of his time; and had a gift of persistence, of refusal to be put down by the crowd, that would have carried him far in a worthy cause; only, beggars have no influence. The woman of the city (Luk 7:1-50) had a depth of moral earnestness, a capacity for the fearless expression of grateful love, that might have inspired many others to a fervour of devotion; but, except in a rare society such as the Greece of Pericles, people do not look to such women for guidance.

There were others, and doubtless it was of them chiefly that Jesus was thinking, whose talents lay unused because they did not choose to cultivate them. We feel an almost personal grief as we read the refusal of the rich ruler and consider what an acquisition he would have been to the disciple circle had he chosen to dedicate his talents to the cause of Jesus. In every crowd that Jesus addressed, in every little group with which he had an interview, he must have met men and women with gifts that were meant to be used to enrich the life around them, but who were restrained from using them by prejudice or greed or fear. In this parable Jesus taught it is the teaching also of biology and psychology that used powers grow and develop; unused powers wither and perish. In parable after parable Jesus sought to make men realize that growth, expansion, is the law of the Kingdom. In the Sower, the Darnel, the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, the Unfruitful Fig-tree, he taught that the essence of the Kingdom is life, a life that spreads and dominates and subdues one region after another of men and ideals and institutions. Yet to a large number of professing Christians, this is an uncomfortable doctrine in which they do not believe and which they resent. Having reached a certain moral and spiritual level, probably in early youth, they have no ambition to go beyond this. Aids to the deepening of spiritual life, forward movements, revivals, are to them anathema. If they are tolerable at all, they are only for Church officials and

religious professionals, the five and the two talent men of the spiritual world. As they conceive it, these things have no relation to the average Church member whose business it is to keep on the wellbeaten track. The spread of the Christian religion to people of other races is the particular aversion of this type of Christian. Geographically also, to keep what we have, not to reach out for more, is the true Christian wisdom. The Christian religion has more or less found its home among the white races; why should we take the risk of spreading it beyond them, when we could keep it safe in a hole in the ground in our own country? The Palestine of Jesus' day must have had its share of people who thought that piety consisted in just going on as they were, who had never discovered that we cannot remain kind people unless we do kind things, that we cannot have or retain any of the virtues unless we practise them, and that every temptation resisted strengthens our resisting power. As Dr. Edward Caird put it: " In the moral world standing still is going back."

It is the incompetent and unenterprising men who are the grumblers, and it is characteristic that the very harsh picture of the master is drawn by the. one-talent man, a very different picture from that his colleagues would have drawn. But he had noted accurately one feature in his master's character. When he entrusted treasure to his servants, he expected it to be profitably employed and returned to him with increase. To the more competent servants this gave a zest to the enterprise into which they entered joyfully and successfully. To the incapable servant, it was a grievance to be rebelled against. Yet it is one of the laws of life; in parable after parable Jesus emphasized that God expects fruit, and that, if the labourer does his work faithfully, God gives fruit and gives it abundantly. The excuse offered by the one-talent servant was his fear of losing his talent and of the consequences from such a severe taskmaster. In his reply the master roundly accuses him of laziness. We can well imagine that the lesson of the parable is one that Jesus not merely regarded as important, but, in the circumstances of the time, saw to be of paramount importance.

He was leaving the prosecution of his mission to a tiny band of disciples who would meet with bitter opposition even in the land where the Faith had its birth. On one condition only could the enterprise prosper: that those to whom it had been entrusted should fling aside every fear, forget every consideration save loyal service of the Master, and go forth in a spirit of utter faith, devotion and confidence, dedicating to the spreading of the Good News every power with which God had endowed them. The leaders could be trusted; but the leaders alone could never accomplish the work; the average men, the one-talent disciples, must also be pressed into the service, must learn the same spirit of dedication.

Jesus saw that one particular form of letting talents rust was just want of enterprise, leaving the work to others, cherishing the idea that because one has no outstanding gifts, one has little influence and is therefore not called on to take any risks. In the Treasure and the Pearl we saw how Jesus thought of the citizen of the Kingdom as taking part in a great adventure, flinging away, with a faith that he knows is justified, precious treasures with an abandon that to the world seems reckless. Except to the eye of faith, the mission of Jesus and his followers must have seemed a forlorn hope.

He was constantly calling men to defy the cautious usages, opinions and standards established by convention. Those who took the plunge never regretted it; they counted all things but loss if only they could win Christ and lead others to know him. The men who jealously guarded their talents on

the ’ safety first ’ principle saw them shrivel before their eyes; those who spent them in the Master’s service found them grow and grow. In the apostolic Church the word ’ ’ talents ’ would come to have a more technical sense. From more than one passage in Paul’s epistles (e.g. 1Co 12:8-10) we know the endowments and qualities that came to be regarded as special gifts of the Spirit. It was the duty of the Christian to exercise the gift that was in him. By common consent the teaching of the parable for us covers a wide range. A talent was originally a sum of money. In its most literal sense the parable has an application. Our money is a trust from God; not only the pound of the rich man, but the penny of the poor man; not only the fraction that we devote to religion and charity, but all our money. But it is not in this sense that the word “ talent ’ has enriched our vocabulary as a new acquisition. When one has a special gift for art, for languages, for public speech, for organization, and we call such a person “talented,” we sometimes forget that, if we look to the origin of the word, we mean that he possesses capacities whose only appropriate function is to be used in the Master’s service. But we are not all talented in this sense, and surely the parable has its message for us all.

Frances Ridley Havergal’s consecration hymn breathes the very spirit of this parable. To use our hands in God’s service does not mean that they should be always uplifted in prayer; it means in the first place doing with our might and with our conscience the daily work we have undertaken to do, the work for which we are paid. Consecrating our feet means something more than that they should convey us to Church or to prayer meeting. It incites that they should sometimes lead us to the house of the needy or the mourner, and that they should bring us to no place to which we cannot ask God to go with us. The voice may often be uplifted in prayer or praise without being consecrated to God’s service. The consecrated voice will speak the words of truth and soberness, will avoid the untested scandal that poisons social relations, and will be more often heard in praise and encouragement than in unkindly criticism. The consecrated gift will grow from strength to strength; the task that was impossible yesterday is possible to-day and will be easy to-morrow. The Master asked from each servant only the fruit of the talents he had given that servant, not the fruit of the talents he had given his neighbour. The one-talent man was not blamed because he could not produce an additional five talents or even two. How often we sav: “ If only I had better health, a higher social position, a larger income, greater eloquence, a more thorough education, how much more I should accomplish for the community in which I live.” But the only talents for which we are responsible are the talents we have, and envy is not one of the Christian graces. It is not reading too much into this parable to believe that in some measure the foolish indolence of the one-talent man was due to resentment at the inferiority of his equipment as compared with his colleagues.

He was unenterprising because he was sulky. Our one-talent men have no cause to feel ashamed. As Paul teaches in I Cor. xii. every talent is an essential talent, even those that the world counts humble. If the preaching is altogether done by the man in the pulpit, it is not likely to carry very far. As has been said, ’ It is great hearing that makes great preaching.”

If we have not been given the talent of prophecy, at least the talent of attentive, sympathetic, responsive listening is within our reach and is well worthy of cultivation.

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CHAPTER XXIX THE UNJUST STEWARD

Luk 16:1-14.

EVEN if the disciples of Jesus, and especially the leaders, accepted this conception of themselves as stewards of the Master, there was one special temptation to which they were subject. That temptation is dealt with in the parable commonly, but somewhat unfortunately, known as the Unjust Steward. This is, by common consent, the most difficult of all the parables, the number of explanations given even before the days of Trench being described as appalling. We may dismiss at once a moral that has found much favour with commentators, viz. that the followers of Jesus must show in spiritual matters the same long-sightedness which enabled the steward to escape from his difficulties, and that wealth, even wealth dishonestly acquired, should be generously distributed with a view to a good reception of the donor in the next world. Jesus did not teach men to make an immoral use of

1 Summarized, by permission of the publishers, from an article by the author in The Expository 'Times for September, 1926. their own money, much less of other people's money.

Luke appends four or five different lessons to the parable, which looks as if, by the time he wrote, people were just as much puzzled by it as we are to-day, and so various sayings of Jesus had become attached to it as its explanation.

(Two of these have parallels in Luk 19:17 and Mat 6:24.) Luke's third and fourth lessons are: (3) A man trustworthy in a trifle will be trustworthy in a big affair; the converse is also true, and if you cannot be trusted with ' ' filthy lucre," who will commit to your keeping genuine wealth? (4) You may be a slave of God or of mammon, but not of both; you must choose. The true exegesis of the parable seems to be in the line of these morals. If people follow the ironical advice to be generous with their illgotten gains, the homes they will thereby secure for themselves in the other world will have only the eternity of tents, which are the very symbol of the temporary and evanescent. The steward is held up not as a model but as a warning, as an illustration of one to whom a trust has been committed, and who evades his difficulties by lowering his master's claims. In the early centuries the principle involved in this parable proved to be of supreme importance. 1 From the time the religion of Jesus entered the Gentile world, the Christians put

1 See Harnack's " Expansion of Christianity " and C. J. Cadoux' " The Early Church and the World." in the very fore-front of their teaching that God is spirit and that God is One. Then, as now, idolatry did not confine itself to a compartment of life that might be labelled religious; it insinuated itself into social life and into the occupations by which men earned their bread, and some felt that the only way to keep their garments clean was to hold aloof altogether from those outside the Church. Not only guild feasts and dinners held in temples, but marriages and the coming-of-age ceremony were closely associated with idolatrous rites: might a Christian accept an invitation to such? In the circus performances which were the football matches of those days, idolatry played

an essential part; could a Christian be an actor or even a spectator? A magistrate or an army officer had to conduct sacrifices, while even the private soldier became involved in the sacrificial ceremonies; did that close to the Christian political and military service? Having to read with his pupils heathen literature and to explain to them heathen mythology and idolatrous customs, the schoolmaster was placed in an ambiguous position. There were, again, many trades such as that of incense-seller, builder or engraver which might at any time involve their workmen, wittingly or unwittingly, in the service of idols, heathen temples, or sacrifices. No less strong was Christian antipathy to a living idol in the shape of the reigning emperor.

Round this point centred one of the earliest and most persistent struggles between the Church and the State. From the first it was realized in the most vital way that a spiritual worship and a life of lofty moral purity were of the essence of the Faith.

If the Master had written a hundred, then whatever pain or shame or loss might be involved, though the refusal might mean torture or death, the steward must not lower his Master's claims to eighty or fifty. Ultimately there came a time when Church leaders not only showed a Christian consideration for those who found the demands of the religion too rigorous, but actually sought to smooth the path to acceptance of the Gospel by an unworthy lowering of its claims. For such disloyal stewardship there was a heavy price to pay. As Harnack has shown, the adoption from the third century onwards of semi-divine saints and angels, of local cults and holy places, of noisy annual festivals, and of relics and bones of saints as objects of reverence and instruments of healing, was really a reversion to paganism which has permanently degraded Christianity in the theory and practice of large sections of its followers. The classic example of lowering the standard to lighten the load alike of the leaders and of the rank and file was the introduction of the system of indulgences, which instituted what has been aptly called a tariff for sin. In our own day every one who tries to take a dispassionate view of the situation must be seriously perturbed by the extent to which even in the Christian West life seems to demand one long series of compromises with the Christian standard. A passage of Dr. Herbert Gray's As Tommy Sees Us reads like a commentary on The Dishonest Steward. His soldier friends, he tells us, just said quite bluntly: " In business you can't be a Christian." " In the modern competitive scramble a man who took Christ's teaching seriously and honestly could not exist."

' They did not feel it was all so very bad, but they were quite clear it was not Christian, and therefore for them Christianity was an impossible religion." In other words they themselves, however reluctantly, were quite prepared to abate twenty or fiftypercent, of the demands of Christian morality, but they were honest enough to call what they were doing by its proper name. In Stones of Stumbling^ Mr. Tillyard, who had himself been in business, gave it as his conviction that ' no Christian has ever been engaged for long in a competitive business without doing many things he would have liked not to do. He may desire to love his neighbour as himself, but he dwells in the midst of people who are out to do the best they can for themselves, and he must do as they do or go under." In politics, the average voter is as well aware as the statesman that the statecraft even of those politicians who are enthusiasts for righteousness, consists largely in accommodating the moral progress of the State to the pace of the average citizen. As Dr. Hodgkin says in 'The Christian Revolution: " Its legislation is for men as they are, or seem to the politician to be, rather than for men as they may become, or seem to the Christ-eyes to be." Any who are inclined to think that the temptation of the Dishonest Steward is one with which the Christian in the West has no

longer seriously to reckon, should weigh the words of Dr. C. J. Cadoux: “ The spirit of the world has eaten deeply into the vitals of the Christian commonwealth, so much so that the charge can be made, not justifiably indeed, but at least without obvious absurdity, that the average moral life within the Church is little higher, if at all, than the average moral life without, that the Church is as much the home of lazy reactionism and selfishness as it is of idealism and progress.” The Church has her own peculiar problems; one of them is that of tainted money. Yet in this sphere also, ideal purity is not even possible except within strict limits. Church balances kept in a bank may be employed to finance a distillery or a firm of swindlers. The leaders of the Church, too, are stewards of God in other than financial matters. They are defenders of the faith, not onlv of the faith once delivered to the saints, but of the new truth that God makes known to each generation. There are always those who resent the idea that revelation is progressive; and the stewards of the mysteries of God know very well that they can simplify their own task by placating the conservatives, who are often the elderly and influential men, while keeping their own counsel about any new light they may have themselves received. Has it not at times been regarded even as a virtue in an ecclesiastic to be a “ safe “ rather than an honest man? On this subject as on all others, Pharisaic self-satisfaction and condemnation of others are out of place; to our own Master we stand or fall. Yet it is idle to minimize the reality of the danger or the seriousness of the temptation.

Self-respect requires that we do not rest content with any comfort secured by acquiescing in a second-best. The application of the parable to life demands earnest thought and fearless facing of the situation. In our age the difficulty has been increased by the extent to which moral responsibility has been socialized. Arrangements are made for us by our joint-stock company, our trade union, our municipality, our Church; our individual responsibility almost seems so small as to be negligible. Yet however helpless each of us may seem to be, our stewardship not only remains but can be in some measure discharged. It is always in our power to strive to retain a conscience keenly alive to the difference between what is and what ought to be, and to throw ourselves into the work of trying to Christianize the social sentiment that dictates so much of our policy. There are times we can learn to recognize them, and perhaps they come oftener than we think when it is unmanly to take refuge behind the corporate conscience and the customs of our society. It is ours, too, to guard against the insidious danger, the temptation especially of middle life, of making props of the words ’ impracticable ’ and “ impossible,” of believing that an unworthy compromise with wrong is the utmost that even the Church of God can ever hope to achieve.

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CHAPTER XXX THE WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

Mat 20:1-16. THE citizen of the Kingdom, then, is a steward, dedicating his money, his possessions, his physical, intellectual and spiritual endowments to the service of God, his neighbour, and the community to which he belongs, a steward who is never at liberty to make things more comfortable for himself by lowering his Master's claims. In Matthew's Talents, the honest servants make an equally good use of a different equipment; in Luke's Pounds, they make a different use of the same equipment; in any case differences of achievement arise. In the world these differences would be reflected in a corresponding distinction of rewards; does the same rule hold good in the Kingdom? The ' Workers in the Vineyard " supplies the answer.

Though the moral which " Matthew ' finds in the parable (Mat 20:16) does not really apply, the context in which he places the story is appropriate. People like the rich ruler refused to pay the price of discipleship. Peter reminded Jesus that he and his fellow-disciples had paid the price in full; what reward, then, were they to have? Clearly he expected that bigger sacrifices would meet with bigger reward (Mat 19:27). The sons of Zebedee (their mother on their behalf in Matthew's version) wanted to steal a march on the other disciples, to get above them (Mat 20:21). But Jesus was thinking in terms other than those of earthly glory and reward; he was thinking of his death (Mat 20:17-19). At such a time teaching like that of the Workers in the Vineyard was called for. Our Lord had watched the steward on a big farm paying the labourers at the end of the day, had noted how the wage varied according to the number of hours worked.

" Suppose," said Jesus, " the steward were to pay them ail the same rate of wage; that is how God deals with His workers." The toilers of this parable are men who accept the conditions of the world, who will labour all day if anyone will hire them; but in no other parable is the urgency of the work so great, in the later hours so feverish. Truly, the harvest is great but the labourers are few; the haste is as that in the mission of the seventy. Our Lord as usual makes straight for his goal; but, because he makes no comment on it we are not entitled to assume that he felt no pity and no indignation at the haphazard system which left willing men waiting hour after hour for the work that so often did not come, work the absence of which meant starving wives and children. For generations, with the Gospel of Christ in our hands, we have looked at those bands of eager, despairing men standing all day idle in the market-place for no better reason than that no man had hired them. Are there any other wrongs waiting to be remedied till the sufferer refuses to suffer any longer? Are there any other groups of men or women whom till now we have regarded as a feature of the landscape or at worst a disconcerting by-product of our system, waiting till at last a beam of light from the Gospels is shed upon them, revealing to us people like ourselves, victims of our injustice? In this parable, then, our Lord would have the disciples remember that all questions of reward may be safely left to God. Later on (Mat 20:25-28) he will try to give a loftier range to their whole thought of reward, which as yet is moving on a low level. Meantime he asks them to have faith that the Judge of all the earth will do right. In the parable, those who drove a bargain with the

farmer got as much as they were legally entitled to; the farmer kept his promise. All the others, those who simply trusted the farmer and made no stipulation about wages, received far more than they could legally claim. Jesus never wearied of insisting that God does not deal with us according to our sins or even according to our good deeds; that God gives good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over. The early-morning workers had no fault to find with their own pay, until they saw how generously the other workers were being treated.

If all had been paid according to the number of hours worked, they would have made no complaint. It was the good fortune of their fellow-workers that roused their ire. Employers of labour have tried various systems of assessing wages: “ time wages “ that ignore the difference between the industrious workman and the lazy, “ piecework wages ’ that fail to distinguish between men working with up-to-date appliances and those supplied only with primitive tools or machines, and “ efficiency wages ’ that try to apportion the wage to the effort. The workmen of our day have demanded, and successfully demanded, the application of another principle, the very principle of the employer in the parable, what we might call “ willingness wages,” that those who are ready to work but whom no one hires must have their share in the product with those who toil all the day. Our passion for spiritualizing may blind us to the elementary lesson that is on the surface of a parable. The annals of our treatment of the unemployed would have been less terrible than they are if followers of Jesus had been more willing to believe that the parables had a meaning as stories before they had a meaning as sermons. The denarius that those first hired received as their day’s wage was evidently the recognized day’s wage of an agricultural labourer, presumably little more than enough to supply the workman and his wife and family with the necessities of life. Half of this amount, still more one twelfth, would have been utterly inadequate. Yet the early-morning workers would have been quite satisfied to see all wages paid in proportion to the hours worked, since that would have meant that the demands of the multiplication table were being met, trade union regulations maintained, old customs kept up and justice done. As they had the legal view of the wages, so they took a purely commercial view of the work.

Otherwise they would have seen that they were the most fortunate of all the labourers, since all through the day they had the joy of exercising the talents God had given them, of helping the earth to yield her fruits, of entering into their master’s joy. In the parables it is the disagreeable people who compare themselves with others. The Pharisee looked down from his towering height upon the tax-collector; the elder brother could not understand the fuss that was being made about his younger brother; the wealthy debtor, just delivered from fear of a debtors’ gaol, thought it a favourable opportunity for putting the screw on his debtor a few rungs further down the social scale; the labourers who had earned their shilling thought themselves much finer men than those who got it without earning it.

What did the parable mean on the lips of Jesus? The great majority of those to whom the message of Jesus came were neither invited nor expected to become followers in the literal sense; they were to become disciples in their own homes. Caste feeling, then, would naturally arise, those who had forsaken all being the Brahmins. So Peter, speaking for the twelve, asked: “What shall we have?’ while James and John put in their special claim. If completely wrong relations were not to arise among the various circles of followers, teaching like this was necessary. Our Lord’s call in itself constitutes all the honour we need. When we depreciate our neighbour’s task, we are not only exhibiting a repulsive conceit; we are going beyond what we know. It may well be that our

neighbour would be only too delighted to have our opportunity. In any case, we are all needed, the ninth- and the eleventh-hour workers as well as those who join at break of day. We are taking part in an organic whole; in his own good time the Master will call for all the service that he needs. If we work for our wage and with our eye on the clock, our neighbour, coming in at the last hour and working with a will because at last he has had his chance, may make a contribution that will bear no unworthy comparison with our own. It is a foolish and vain calculation to try to apportion the praise for the successful execution of any enterprise; nor, if we have the spirit of the Kingdom, shall we wish to do so in any Christian enterprise. To be ready when the call comes, that is the finest service we can render, that is all the Master asks. The generation that gave us the Gospels must have felt in a still more acute form the temptation against which the parable warns.

We know that those who had been with Jesus from the Baptism to Gethsemane expected and received a pre-eminence in the Church over those who joined the disciple circle later. The Jewish Christians who had been followers from the beginning considered themselves the true Church in comparison with the Gentile converts whose very presence in the Church was regarded as an after-thought of God. Some of the most eloquent passages in Paul's epistles are those in which he records the sufferings he endured for the sake of the Gospel. Paul himself was too deeply imbued with the spirit of Christ to imagine that his pre-eminence in toil and suffering was due to any merit of his own, or gave him any title to rank in the Kingdom. But there were other Christians who had toiled and endured, yet who had not Paul's fine Christian intuitions, his self-suppression and willingness to look on the things of others. To them this parable must have brought the reminder that we are but servants; our service and our suffering are but the fulfilment of our stewardship; our neighbour's toil and tribulation and our neighbour's reward are in God's hands. In our own day the parable has even wider applications. From 1914 till 1918 to hundreds of thousands of young men the call came to leave all, even life itself, in the cause of honour and of country. At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will remember them; yet we do not believe, nor would they ask us to believe, that had the same call come to the youth of other generations they would not have been ready. In some communities, among the caste Hindus of India for example, in the early days of missions the call to leave all and to follow Jesus has an even more terrible meaning than it had to his followers in Palestine. All honour to the men without whose splendid courage and patient self-sacrifice the history of our religion in their community would never have been written. Yet among the ninth- and eleventh-hour Christians, among those who follow in later and easier days, we know there are many who, in the same circumstances, would have shown the same grit. Our own experience confirms the justice of the rebuke conveyed in this parable to the early-morning claimants to pre-eminence. We have known men and women who seemed to be essentially common-place, living hum-drum lives, with nothing to distinguish them from ten thousand of their fellows; and then a sudden call came: a painful task that meant the abandonment of all their ambitions, financial ruin, a disabling illness, a call for unremitting attention to a loved one continued through long years; and they patiently took up the burden. Those we had thought to be average people showed themselves heroes or heroines. They had only been waiting for their chance, and when the call came it found them ready.

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CHAPTER XXXI THE MIDNIGHT PETITIONER

Luk 11:5-10.

WE have seen the noble but heavy responsibilities laid on the citizen of the Kingdom. Is he to be left to discharge them all in his own strength? Or we may put the question in another way: what is the relation of the world in which we live to the spiritual Kingdom which Jesus invites us to enter? Some tell us we are living in an environment hostile to man's endeavour, that the forces behind the world, of whatever nature they be, delight to wreck the pet schemes of puny mortals. Others teach that the gods, whatever gods there be, are indifferent to human joys, griefs and aspirations, that the material world, if not anti-moral, is non-moral, that man is the only friend of man. In this parable Jesus states his conviction that we are living in a responsive world in which petition is answered, search is rewarded and doors are opened to them that knock.

Here again we must be on our guard against too rigorous allegorizing. As the midnight cry, the midnight thief, the midnight petition testify, our Lord was alive to the fateful significance that may attach to the solemn hour that marks that the night has run half its course. But obviously the hour of midnight here is chosen simply as an inconvenient time at which to knock at a neighbour's door; it has no spiritual significance. Some, again, have found a spiritual truth in the fact that the petitioner was borrowing not on his own behalf but for the sake of a friend; but this touch was necessary to give realism to the story. It was hardly likely that a man should wake up in the middle of the night hungry enough to pester his neighbour into giving him something to eat. The significance that has been found in the number three is allegorical folly; three is chosen as the number of " breads ' a man was most likely to ask for.

It is sometimes said that Luke has three prayer parables. As we have seen, one of these, the Pharisee and the Tax-collector, though it pictures two men at prayer, is not a parable about prayer. It is a lesson on religion conceived as Law and conveys a warning against selfrighteousness. The Midnight Petitioner does deal in a measure with prayer. When the average man discusses whether God does or does not answer prayer, he conceives prayer primarily as a request to God for some favour. But there are prayers of Thanksgiving, of Adoration, of Confession, of Intercession for others. Some Christians would deny that petition ever has any rightful place in Christian prayer, least of all petition for material favours. Our Lord does not go so far as that; he encourages petitionary prayer; but he teaches that petition must be something more than a form of words. As we saw that forgiveness is not something that can be handed over like a document, so answers to prayer cannot be bestowed like presents. This graphic and rather amusing little story by no means illustrates the whole science of prayer, but it does emphasize one important aspect of it. The petitioner knew that his neighbour, though not a paragon of kindness, was not ill-natured. He knew also that he wanted the bread and was determined to get it. So he kept hammering at the door and shouting till the door was opened and the coveted loaves handed out. A very elementary lesson in prayer, yet how little assimilated in nineteen hundred years! If we deduct from all our petitions to

God, whether uttered in public or in private, those which we do not expect, or hardly expect, God to answer, and those to which we scarcely give a passing thought, which indeed we forget completely the moment we utter them, how much of real prayer is left?

If the prayer means nothing to us, how can we expect it to mean anything to God?

Moreover, in this case the petitioner himself was taking far more trouble than he was asking his neighbour to take. When his friend arrived at an inconvenient hour, instead of sleepily telling him to lie down somewhere till morning, he bestirred himself to give him a hospitable reception. Even at that untimely hour he would prepare a meal to set before him. In the case of many of our petitions there is a price to be paid before even God can answer our prayers.

Prayer is a petition, a demand if you will, not that God will work for us, but that God will allow us to co-operate with Him in some enterprise into which we throw our whole hearts. The borrower was convinced that sooner or later he would get what he asked, and find what he sought; that the door at which he knocked so persistently would eventually open. Let us, if we will, find in this parable a lesson on prayer. But surely Luke (Luk 11:9 f.) is right in applying here words of Jesus that carry us far beyond the region of prayer as commonly conceived. The asking that receives is no mere lip petition; it is a demand of the whole being; the seeking that surely finds is a search of the whole personality; the knocking to which the door is opened is no verbal knocking, it is the insistent demand of heart and soul. Moreover, the words carry our thoughts to richer gifts than loaves, to a search for something less prosaic than a meal for a friend, to a door that gives entrance to a more wondrous store-house than a neighbour’s kitchen.

We are living in an age when we have almost ceased to wonder, when we have become blase with the miracles of knowledge that are daily revealed to us, the miracles of power that are daily performed before our eyes, nay, that we ourselves are able to perform. Yet down almost to our own age nature did not tell us these things, because we did not ask her; the world hid her secrets, because men did not search for them; the doors of earth’s treasurehouse remained closed, because we did not knock at them; at least we did not ask or seek or knock in the spirit of this parable. It has been well said that it was only natural that modern science should arise in the Christian world. The faith of modern men of science is the faith of this parable, the conviction that we are living in a responsive world in which nature will give when they ask, will reward their search, will open her doors into palaces more wonderful than Aladdin’s, provided that, forsaking all other aims, they ask and seek and knock, earnestly, persistently, expectantly. Jesus does not say that we shall get exactly what we ask, find exactly what we seek, or enter the kind of store-house we expect to find. But the things God sends us are never hurtful parodies of the things we seek (Luk 11:11-13); His answers are our prayers transfigured. The parable is our Lord’s answer to the agnostic. The quest is not in vain; the world is no insoluble riddle; our Lord was speaking out of his own experience. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. If with all our hearts we truly seek Him, we shall ever surely find Him.

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CHAPTER XXXII THE IMPORTUNATE WIDOW

Luk 18:1-8. THIS is the third of Luke's three " prayer ' parables, so-called. We have seen that one of them is not a parable about prayer, and that the second reaches far beyond the confines of prayer as commonly understood. This third parable inculcates an attitude to life, especially to the Christian mission, rather than to prayer in the narrow sense (though in his introduction Luke finds in it the teaching that ' ' men must always pray and never lose heart " (Weymouth).) In various parables Jesus described the character of the citizen of the Kingdom, and then in the Midnight Petitioner he taught that the world in which the programme of the Kingdom has to be carried out provides a friendly environment, that it has boundless resources which are freely at the disposal of the citizen of the Kingdom who approaches them in the right way.

One needs little experience of life to discover that there is much in the world that militates against this optimistic creed. In some moods and in some circumstances one is far more impressed by the unresponsiveness of the world than by its friendliness to the aims of the Kingdom. There is much in life to justify those passages in the New Testament in which the word ' world ' is used to summarize the forces in life that fight against God. It is with this fact in view that Jesus in the Unjust Judge (or the Importunate Widow) reiterates in stronger terms the teaching of the Midnight Petitioner. In the latter parable the neighbour, though not specially neighbourly, is not an absolute churl, and the petitioner has good reason to believe that by persistence he will get what he wants. In the Importunate Widow Jesus pictures a very different situation. The petitioner is among the most helpless of human beings, a poor and persecuted widow without influence. Nor could anyone seem harder to move than an unscrupulous judge, irreligious and with no regard for public opinion. ' By dogged persistence," says Jesus, ' even such a woman will get what she wants."

If the judge cannot be persuaded into giving her justice, he can be plagued into it.

Jesus, then, urges his followers to go forward on the mission entrusted to them, refusing to be dismayed or made afraid by the hostility of men or the seeming indifference of the universe; to go forward in the faith, nay, in the knowledge that in the end God will vindicate them and their cause will triumph. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. Patient endurance, invincible determination, quenchless faith, the ability to see the guiding hand of God behind the hostility of men and the perverseness of things, these were qualities that Jesus ranked high among the qualifications for the citizen of the Kingdom. They had been his rock amid the storms of his own life; he knew how desperately his followers would need them. This is the most daring, the least allegorical, of all the parables. Though persistent prayer is only one application of it, it is, as Luke discerned, one application. But the screams and shouts of the widow have the faintest resemblance to the earnest prayers of the Church, and the atheistical, cynical judge is the antipodes of the heavenly Father. There is just the one point in common: the faith that refuses to despair, that believes to the end, will be justified. A reminiscence of this application, and a recognition of the experiences that make such confidence difficult, are seen in the words of Jesus

with which Luke closes the story: ' Howbeit when the Son of Man comes, shall he find faith on the earth? " (Luk 18:8). The criticism of this parable on the ground that it teaches those " vain repetitions " in prayer which Jesus denounced in the Sermon on the Mount has no substance. In so far as the reference is to prayer at all, and this is only one of the applications, what is inculcated is not that the followers of Jesus should badger God into answering their prayers by the endless repetition of a meaningless prayer formula, but that they should continue in expectant prayer, even though Qod delays to answer them (the mistranslation of this last phrase at the end of Luk 18:7 has added to the confusion). In spite of all appearances to the contrary we must never abandon our conviction, a conviction that will be vindicated, that God's purpose for us, his purpose for the world, is a purpose of good; that he is working all things together for good to them that love Him: we must never cease to identify ourselves with that purpose, to pray to God, not with our lips only but with all that we have and all that we are, for the consummation of the Kingdom. The Christian usually thinks of his own immediate concerns; God has larger interests to consider: the Christian, especially the Christian in distress, is usually in a hurry; God can afford to wait. In Luke's account of Jesus' interpretation of this parable there is a somewhat disconcerting feature. The saints of God are not exactly represented as crying aloud to God for vengeance on their oppressors, yet the impression left on our minds is that that is what they persistently demand; and God is represented as avenging them. The difficulty is not met by the suggestion that the avenging consists in " preserving or rescuing from evil; ' it is more satisfactory to suppose that the word has its ordinary sense. As it happens, there are several parallels in the parables. In Matthew's version of the Wedding Supper, the King sends his armies to destroy the murderers and burn up their city (Mat 22:7). In all three versions of the Vinedressers, the jealous tenants are destroyed. In Luke's parable of the Pounds, the rebels who protested against the coronation of the new King are condemned to be brought and slain before him (Luk 19:27). It is of course possible, though not very convincing, to say that in these parables the vengeance section is just scenery, not to be interpreted. We cannot give the same explanation in the Importunate Widow, since the " avenging " is not part of the parable, but part of the interpretation ascribed to Jesus.

We have seen that the destructive vengeance in Matthew's Wedding Supper has no counterpart in Luke's Great Supper, and this feature in Luke's Pounds is absent from Matthew's corresponding parable of the Talents. In the Wicked Vinedressers much will depend on whether the prophecy of doom was uttered in a tone of gloating triumph or in pity. When the persecution of the Christians began, as it did within a generation after Jesus' death, Christian preachers would be tempted to find consolation by giving to certain parables a turn which Jesus never intended. Especially would they see the hand of God in the destruction of Jerusalem, and this interpretation of history would naturally influence their interpretation of the parables.

Jesus taught his followers to love their enemies and pray for their persecutors. Could the same Jesus be responsible for teaching that the elect, when oppressed, should continue instant in prayer for vengeance, and that God would avenge them? That in the fiery trial some Christians were capable of praying for vengeance on their oppressors we know from the Revelation (Rev 6:9-10); but the New Testament as a whole rises above this level. Paul's advice to the Roman Christians on behaviour under persecution is entirely in line with the Sermon on the Mount (Rom 12:14, Rom 12:17-21). The Christians to whom I Peter was addressed are called on to imitate in his infinite patience under suffering the Christ who committed himself to Him who judges

righteously, are taught that only that unmerited suffering which is borne patiently is acceptable with God. The writer “ To the Hebrews “ congratulates his readers on the joy with which they received the spoiling of their goods, not on the ground that they were certain of revenge on their oppressors, but because they realized that they had in themselves a better and enduring possession (Heb 10:34). We cannot believe that the followers of Jesus rose above their Master. In the lament of Jesus over Jerusalem, and in the cry from the Cross for forgiveness for his murderers, we see the true attitude of Jesus to those who persecuted and rejected him.

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CHAPTER XXXIII THE BRIDESMAIDS

Mat 25:1-13. No parable of Jesus has impressed itself more deeply on the imagination of the Church. The story of the simple village wedding, the sleeping bridesmaids, the midnight cry, the dismay of the unprepared, the flashing of the wedding torches in the darkness of the night as one has so often seen them in India, the shut door and the vain pleading of the laggards: these memories enhanced by many a poem, picture, hymn and sermon, have become part of the Christian consciousness. Nor is there any parable that leaves us in a more critical mood. It is not so much that when the thoughtless five reach the festal chamber they find the door closed; for that they have themselves to blame: what puzzles us is the harsh answer given by the master of the feast to their pleading: “ Verily, I tell you, I do not know you.” It is difficult to think that these words formed part of the original parable.

However true they might be in the spiritual sphere, they could hardly be true in the story.

We note also that a saying closely parallel occurs in a far more probable context in Luk 13:25-27. As we have suggested, a wrong turn is given to the parable by the epithets ’ wise ’ and ’ foolish “ commonly applied to the two parties of bridesmaids. Nor is it correct to find the fault of the thoughtless in their falling asleep.

What distinguished the two sets was that some made their preparations before they slept; others slept unprepared. (In some manuscripts in verse I the party goes out to meet “ the bridegroom and the bride,” but it was the custom of Jesus to omit all reference to the bride.)

What did Jesus have in mind when he spoke the parable? We can be fairly sure that, in the disciple circle, there was at least one who, when the time came to start, was seldom ready, though he always had an excellent excuse for delaying the others. The inconvenience to the others and the more serious consequences that might result from this failure to make one’s preparations in time, would suggest a lesson that might take the form of a parable. But Jesus was thinking of something deeper than any one single point of character, however important. In the Great Supper the invited guests had no desire to attend; they had more important engagements. The rich ruler did wish to be a citizen of the Kingdom, but he was not prepared to pay the price. The five careless bridesmaids were eager to attend the wedding feast, were thoroughly loyal to the bride and bridegroom; they did their best to remedy their mistake; to be shut out at the end was a bitter grief to them; yet, when they arrived, the door was shut. In our Lord’s parabolic teaching about the qualifications for citizenship in the Kingdom, one important lesson remained. Luke quotes another reference of Jesus to a wedding feast (Luk 12:35-38). This time it is the master of the house who has been attending a wedding.

However late in the night he may return, he expects to find his servants on the watch, their belts buckled, their lamps lighted, ready to open the door the moment he knocks. The moral is the same as that which Matthew ascribes to Jesus at the end of the Bridesmaids: ’ Be ever on the watch.” A

general sympathy with the aims of the Kingdom, a general loyalty to the King are not enough. The citizen must be prepared to take the trouble to make his citizenship effective. Good will is of no avail without good works, loyalty does not help the King without loyal support in his time of need; admiration of the Good Samaritan does not carry one far: ' Go thou and do likewise..” The citizen of the Kingdom must live his life in a state of expectant readiness. In the moral and spiritual world there are no holidays, no occasions when we can safely relax. We cannot live to-day's life on the strength of yesterday's prayer; we cannot face to-morrow's temptations on the strength of to-day's Bible study. If we allow ourselves little indulgences, occasional lapses, a lowering of the ideal in some branches of life, for a time it does not seem to matter very much; but when a crisis comes, a great and unexpected temptation, a sudden call for courage and sacrifice, we find that our lamps are going out and our oil-flasks are empty.

We cannot burn our spiritual lamps any more than our oil lamps without constant renewal. Our spiritual life is not a tank but a river; it cannot continue to flow unless every day and all day it is renewed from on high.

Spasmodic religion means a life lived dangerously. Things may go on smoothly for a time, even a long time, when nothing particular seems to happen, and the warnings about watchfulness seem to have no special point. And then, in such an hour as we think not, comes the midnight cry. If our belts are unbuckled, our spiritual muscles out of training, our strength unrenewed, our condition finds us out. The midnight crisis reveals us to ourselves; but God knows before the cry comes that when it does come it will find our lamps going out. The unready maidens took a gambler's risk; had the bridegroom arrived at the expected time, their slackness would never have been discovered, but God would still have known. The parable has its lesson for every age. In our own day, as in Jesus' day, the temptation is ever present to regard life as an easy business, to think we can stand in our own strength, to make no preparation for the coming of storm and stress. But from the position in which ' Matthew ' places it, it is clear that in the apostolic age the Bridesmaids took on a more detailed, if more restricted, significance. A number of parables seemed to point to a future day of reckoning. The Sower and the Darnel among the Wheat laid stress on the coming of the harvest; the Fishing Net spoke of a great separation; the Talents and the Pounds specifically mentioned a Day of Reckoning and a Judgment. So did the Vinedressers; so, though in a somewhat different form, did the Unfruitful Fig-tree. We know from Mat 13:1-58 that the apostolic Church regarded the Darnel and the Fishing Net as picturing the Last Judgment. These other parables, more or less definitely, would be given a similar reference. That “ Matthew “ believes both the Bridesmaids and the Talents point to the Last Things is clear from the position he gives them, just after the discourse on this subject in Mat 24:1-51, just before the picture of the Last Judgment in Mat 25:1-46.

Jesus had spoken of himself as the bridegroom (Mark 2:19). As time went on the bridegroom of this parable would inevitably be identified with Jesus, the coming of the bridegroom with the return of Jesus, for which the early Church, as we know e.g. from the Thessalonian epistles and I Corinthians, was waiting. As year passed after year and the expected return did not take place, some mocked at the whole theory and sneeringly asked: ' Where is his promised return; for since our fathers fell asleep everything goes on just as it has done since the creation ' (2Pe 3:4). Others, again, said: “ The delay, long as it seems to us, is just a moment in God's sight. One day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. Wait, and the Day of the Lord

shall come as a thief “ (2Pe 3:8-10). The fourth Gospel gave a third explanation, which has become traditional among educated Christians, The Coming of the Christ is a spiritual coming in the hearts of his followers, a coming present, gradual and continuous, not catastrophic and relegated to some future date. By those who accepted the second explanation importance would come to be attached to those features in certain parables which, in allegorizing explanations, pointed to a delay before the final consummation. In the Talents the master returns ’after a long time’ (Mat 25:19). In the Vinedressers the wicked tenants are given repeated respites. The gardener in the Unfruitful Fig-tree pleads for a year’s delay. In the Bridesmaids it was the unexpected tarrying of the Bridegroom that brought to shame the five thoughtless ones. In the little quasi-parable at the end of Matthew xxiv. it is the head-servant’s confidence that the master will not come till late that encourages him to maltreat his fellowservants. As a matter of fact in every case the delay in question is essential to the story, and need be given no significance except on extreme allegorizing methods. In the Talents the master must leave his servants a reasonable time for trading before calling them to account. The point in the Vinedressers is not the delay but the matchless patience of the owner of the vineyard; in the Unfruitful Fig-tree it is the gardener’s eagerness that the tree be given a real chance to show what it can do before it is condemned. Had not the bridegroom been delayed, the want of forethought of the thoughtless bridesmaids would never have been discovered and so the story could not have been told. We must look elsewhere than in the parables for corroboration of materialistic theories of the Second Coming of Christ.

IT seems worth while to take a retrospective glance at the parables in general. In view of the variety of subjects covered, the care with which they were composed, the accuracy with which on the whole they were preserved, and the importance attached to them, it seems reasonable to believe that the bulk, if not the whole, of what Jesus regarded as ’ ’ saving truth ’ ’ is embodied in the parables. In them Jesus pictures a new ideal as having entered the world and a new power to achieve that ideal. For those who appreciate and accept it, it becomes the supreme object of existence. All the ordinary ambitions and even affections of life must take a second place; many of them are good, but they are not the good; to reach this ideal no price is too high to pay. The new way of life is embodied in a community, whose members regard it as the object of their existence to make the way prevail in their own lives, in the community and in the world.

They are called on, not to obey certain rules, but to live in a certain spirit, to judge not others but themselves, and to judge themselves by comparison, not with others, but with the standard God has set for them (The Pharisee and the Tax-collector). They find their welfare, not in what they have but in what they are (The Rich Fool). Abandoning all self-centred demands, the thought of the world as a pleasure-resort and life as a holiday, they conceive themselves as living in their Father’s home, their one ambition to serve and to do the Father’s will. In this home there are others besides themselves, and so they have to learn the family spirit, the filial spirit, the brotherly and sisterly spirit (Luk 15:1-32). On the way they will meet with many sufferers: every sufferer they meet is an invitation to help, irrespective of the creed, race or social class of the victim, and whether or no the afflicted one is wholly or partially responsible for his plight (The Good Samaritan). No member of the community can plead that his neighbour’s troubles are no concern of his. In particular for the rich man to be indifferent to the distress of his poor neighbour is a mortal sin against the community (Dives and Lazarus). A member of the community may suffer wrong and insult: his feelings and his dignity are of no account; the one thing that matters is the

restoration of harmony in the community.

Advances towards reconciliation made by the offender must be not only welcomed but sought (The Unforgiving Creditor). No one works for glory or reward; every gift of every member is thrown into the common stock, used for the common weal (The Talents). A stern, though noble task this, to which these citizens of the Kingdom are called, a task that involves trampling on many human emotions and impulses, that demands grit and unwearied perseverance. Before enrolling one must sit down quietly and consider whether one is prepared to pay the price (The Tower and The Threatened King); but after one has enrolled, there is no more counting of the cost; all that a man has will he barter for his citizenship (The Treasure and the Pearl). When one has donned the livery (The Wedding Garment) stores of reserve strength and a state of constant alertness and of readiness which involves all needed preparations are imperative (The Bridesmaids).

Among the virile qualities required of the citizens of the Kingdom is dauntless determination; and this determination is backed by the knowledge that the world will respond to it. For the world is God's world and the work is God's work, so that the citizens of the Kingdom are co-operating with God; they are indeed the instruments through which he works. The petition for the necessary help is made to one who is more than willing to respond, and who, being in supreme command, is always able to respond (The Midnight Petitioner). However unpropitious the occasion may seem, however impossible the demand, there is no door that will not open to persistent knocking, no expectant, confident search that will not be rewarded (The Unjust Judge). For this community is God's community; he is the Father of the family, the King of the Kingdom. It is he who inspires the ideals, who guides and controls the workers and the work, who guarantees the consummation. His thought of men and women is that of the shepherd for his sheep, of the Father for his sons and daughters (Luk 15:1-32). Having thought for them, planned for them, travailed for them, he would not have one sheep absent from the fold, one child absent from the home. One wha- strays is followed with grief and longing, is welcomed home with unrestrained joy. All have sought in a hundred ways, by self-seeking or perversity, to thwart the will of the King; when they confess their folly and acknowledge their allegiance, he forgets their past. In gratitude at this unexpected forgiveness, for which he can urge no plea save that atonement is beyond his power, the citizen enters the service of the King with joyous zeal and devotion. It is indeed the King's ready forgiveness of his erring subjects that is the ground and inspiration of their forgiveness of each other (The Two Debtors). The King would have the world brought under the sway of the spirit of the Kingdom which has been established in His world. The citizens of the Kingdom, with no thought of reward but only in loyalty to the King, are to strain every nerve to mould the world after the pattern of the Kingdom. The toil is for some strenuous, painful and dangerous; others are called to lighter tasks in a pleasanter environment, all that the King asks of each is whether he is doing with a will the particular bit of work he has been given to do (The Labourers in the Vineyard). Brain as well as heart must be dedicated to the work. If it does not seem to prosper, often the reason is that we have expected to win a harvest without preparing the ground (The Sower). There are, too, enemies as energetic and enthusiastic in trying to thwart the growth of the Kingdom as its citizens are in fostering it (The Darnel). Yet the gradual growth of the Kingdom and its ultimate conquest of the world are as certain as the laws of nature.

God invites man's co-operation, needs man's co-operation; but God and God alone. gives the growth: man does his tiny part; God does the rest (The Seed Growing Automatically).

However apparently insignificant the Kingdom in its infancy, it will spread by its own expansive force, subduing one region after another, one department after another of thought and life, till it dominates the world (The Mustard Seed and The Leaven).

Yet the world and the Kingdom will never be co-terminous. One of God's self-imposed limitations is that he will compel no man to accept his will and become a citizen of the Kingdom. The presence of the Kingdom and its ideals divides men into classes as the shepherd separates his sheep from his goats, as the fisherman sorts out his catch into edible fish and inedible. Many refuse to enter the Kingdom because they will not pay the price of citizenship (The Tower); others are so much preoccupied with their own concerns, not necessarily ignoble in themselves, that they have no thought to spare for the Kingdom (The Great Supper). Some set themselves deliberately to oppose the growth of the Kingdom and its ideals, because these will rob them of prestige, power or wealth which they prize (The Vinedressers). They who ignore or oppose the very purpose for which they were sent into the world have no justification for cumbering the ground; yet God will condemn no man, and no institution, till it is certain they have had their chance, that it is internal rottenness, not want of nourishment from without, that is responsible for their failure (The Barren Fig-tree). It is to no empty life that the citizens of the Kingdom are called, but to the fulfilment of every worthy desire, to a life of light and joy and fellowship, while those who refuse the invitation are left in darkness and loneliness.

(The Great Supper).

It may not be a complete Gospel; but it is a noble Gospel, which if it were adopted throughout the earth would give us a vastly better and happier world. The creed, it is true, is of the slenderest, even the doctrine of God; but if we have not the metaphysical God, we have the ethical God. There is no doctrine of the Trinity, but the Son has his rightful place. If we miss the resurrection of Jesus, we have the continual working of God in human life. If there is no explicit doctrine of Atonement, it is the murder of the Son that flings down the barriers of the vineyard and opens the gates to the new vinedressers. There are no sacraments in the parables, but there is the sacramental view of life, that the world, and the labours and experiences of them that dwell therein, for those that have eyes to see, are messages from God. The parables tell us nothing of Church organization or of worship; yet there is revealed in them the basis of all organization and of all worship, the members of the fellowship linked to each other byties of affectionate service, because they are all linked to God byties of reverent devotion as the children he loves.

If the parables do not give us a complete Christianity, they do give us a way of life, a way of life which is making an appeal to-day far beyond the bounds of the Christian Church; and, whatever be the value of the remark, it seems safe to say that some at least of the features in metaphysical Christianity which have proved the greatest stumbling-blocks among educated non-Christians are not found in the parables. At first sight an element indispensable in any form of Christianity seems to be lacking. The life to which Jesus invited men was one of personal devotion to himself. ' Bring him to me," " Follow me," were two of his most characteristic sayings. Shorn of this sense of personal loyalty to the Lord, the Christian life would be immeasurably weakened; but, speaking generally, our Lord does not figure in the parables. We may, if we so choose, find him in the Good Samaritan; otherwise only in the Vinedressers is he certainly present. If we may reckon among the parables (though this is not justified) the picture of the Last Judgment at the end of Matthew xxv, in

it the Son of Man appears as King and Judge. In Matthew also, as we have seen, the Great Supper becomes a Wedding Feast in honour of the marriage of the King's son. Quite apart from all such references, the world will never separate the parables from him who told them. Great as they are in themselves, they are infinitely greater as utterances of him who not only spoke the Word but was the Word. Apart from all allegorizing, the story of the Good Samaritan owes the spell it has cast over men to the knowledge that he who spake the parable did for life's wounded travellers all and more than all that the Samaritan did for the half-dead trader on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

34 - Literature

LITERATURE A study of the parables should not be confined to special books on the subject, but should include the relevant sections of Commentaries on the Gospels, general Commentaries on the Bible, and Bible Dictionaries.

Among books on the Parables may be mentioned, hilicher: Die Gleichnisreden Jesu.

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